

## WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEX TRAFFICKING A TRAUMA AND RECOVERY MODEL INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY

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**ABSTRACT** — This article focuses on trauma and recovery among women survivors of sex trafficking. In seeking to understand their recovery process, it is crucial to understand the pain underlying their journey. According to Herman (1992, 1997), survivors undergo helplessness, meaninglessness, and disconnection as a result of their traumatic experiences. In her model, Herman argues that safety, remembrance/mourning and reconnection appropriately respond to survivors' experiences. The present paper will further elaborate Herman's model by expanding it to include spirituality as a part of meaning-making process. The paper will highlight how survivors may use spirituality to cope in a manner that contributes to their recovery. Finally, limitations and suggestions will be discussed.

**RÉSUMÉ** — Cet article traite des traumatismes qu'ont expérimentés les survivantes du trafic sexuel ainsi que de leur rétablissement. En cherchant à

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comprendre le processus de leur rétablissement, il est également crucial de comprendre la souffrance qu'elles éprouvent. Selon Herman (1992; 1997), à la suite de leurs expériences traumatisantes, les survivantes vivent de l'impuissance et un manque de connexion avec elles-mêmes et les autres. De plus, elles ont l'impression que leurs actions demeurent sans signification. Dans sa théorie du rétablissement, l'auteure suggère que la réponse appropriée à ces expériences doit tenir compte de la sécurité, des souvenirs nécessaires au deuil ainsi que de l'importance de recréer des liens sociaux. Compte tenu de la sévérité de ces expériences traumatiques, nous ferons appel au modèle de Herman en l'élargissant afin d'inclure la spiritualité; nous présenterons celle-ci comme source d'inspiration et de signification, en montrant comment elle pourrait les aider à favoriser un rétablissement plus complet. Une discussion portera sur la contribution de la spiritualité et de la religion ainsi que sur les limites et les implications de cette étude.



The International Labor Organization (ILO) issued a new estimate on the number of victims of forced labor worldwide. It concluded that around 20.9 million individuals are likely subjected to forced labor, including sex trafficking as well as state-imposed forms of forced labor (ILO, 2012). The majority of victims are women and girls who are trafficked for sexual exploitation (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007). According to UNODC (2012), 27% of all victims detected globally are children. For every three child victims, two are girls and one is a boy.

Scholars and organizations agree that the current increase of human trafficking is related to globalization, which has created conditions demanding a greater supply of individuals for cheap labor and the sex industry (Monzini, 2007; UNODC, 2012). Sexual slavery and exploitation constitute a tremendous violation of human rights, and typically have horrific effects on survivors (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007). Furthermore, trafficked victims often do not know if they will live or die, moment to moment (Farley & Seo, 2006). They frequently have little control over the type of clients they serve, the number of clients they are required to see, or the hours they are forced to work. In many cases, their freedom of movement is monitored, and the victims are essentially imprisoned in brothels (Dovydaitis, 2010). For example, Hennink and Simkhada (2004, p. 22) present one of a sex trafficked women's daily experience in a brothel in Nepal "*I had ten to twenty customers a day and, except for regulars, customers paid 25 rupees [50 cents] for five minutes. I also worked for four months in a bungalow which charged 100 to 300 rupees [US\$2-6] per hour.*"

On the edge between life and death, Curtis (2012) found out those women survivors adapted incredibly. Although victimized they were real survivors of violence. Their diverse responses reflected great strength, resourceful coping strategies, and amazing resilience. With regards to resilience (a concept that implicitly enhances meaning and spirituality, Wong, 1998), researchers found that 60% of women who had survived sexual assault reported becoming more spiritual. Spirituality was found to be related to increased well-being over time (Ai & Park, 2005; Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998) and a core aspect of the healing process (Wong, 2004).

Surprisingly, addressing the spiritual needs of women survivors of trafficking in the intervention and treatment plan has been missing in the literature (Chu, 1998; Clawson & Duth, 2008a; Kaufman & Crawford, 2011; Yakushko, 2009). In this article, we propose that survivors' needs for safety, remembrance/mourning and reconnection requires an interdisciplinary approach in line with spirituality. Spirituality therefore is defined and understood in a wide-angled lens that encompasses both religion in the more structured and organized senses; as well as spirituality as a broader, humanistic-existential viewpoint.

Despite the lack of research on trauma recovery of sex trafficking survivors (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007), it is crucial for professionals to understand survivors' traumatic experiences and the recovery map so that survivors may be helped to rebuild a sense of safety and connection, to reconstruct world-meaning and trust, and find meaning for life again (Herman, 1992). The goal of this article is to demonstrate how spirituality can enhance a psychological model aiming to help people to recover from a trauma experience. In order to do so, this article is divided into four parts: 1) the presentation of the context of sex trafficking, and the assessment of survivors' needs. 2) A Stage-Specific model for trauma and recovery incorporating spirituality. 3) The implications of integrating spirituality in working with women survivors of sex trafficking and 4) discussion of limitations and suggestions for further research.

### ***What is sex trafficking?***

U.S. Department of State (2007, p. 7) defines sex trafficking as:

A commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Yakushko (2009) states that the coercion and deception of individuals who are enslaved for sexual work or other forms of exploitation are typical of this trade. Yet, it is crucial to realize that at times, some victims of trafficking initially enter into such arrangements voluntarily and with free consent, although their treatment still meets other criteria for trafficking, as in the case of prostitution (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Yakushko (2009) distinguishes between trafficking and prostitution as coercion and consent; both are similar, however, in being exploitive (i.e. women may suffer sexual assault by clients). In this context, one can see how trafficking gives rise to fear and anger in terms of coercion, and of feelings that one's consent has been betrayed by the situations one has subsequently lived through.

Regarding the process of sex trafficking, researchers reveal that it often includes three stages 1) Recruitment of girls and women in the country of origin during the pre-departure stage; 2) Movement within the country of origin or across international borders; and 3) Exploitation mainly at the point of destination, referred to as the country of destination. Sex trafficked women are forced to serve in prostitution in a foreign culture and language, that is without the support of family members, friends, or other loyal social support networks. Consequently, victims are mostly dependent on the traffickers for their psychological and physical survival (Bezpalkha, 2003; Dovydaitis, 2010). For instance, Miller, Decker, Silverman, and Raj (2007, p. 494) found that:

Trafficked women engaging in sex work tend to have far fewer resources, limited options, and increased vulnerability to violence and abuse compared to women who have not been trafficked. These vulnerabilities are evident even before they leave their countries of origin where poverty, limited education, and lack of viable options for work and survival may lead them into trafficking networks, all contributing to heightened experiences of control and isolation and severe forms of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

In addition to feeling trapped, women's trust in others has been further damaged since often they are sold by spouses, relatives, friends, or bosses (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008). Some are sold by their own families because of the wages that could be earned and sent back to their impoverished villages (Datta, 2005). In fact, it is difficult for survivors to escape from the trafficking trap. Nevertheless, researchers found three ways that trafficked women could escape the trafficking ring: 1) to become unprofitable due to trauma, emotional breakdown or advanced pregnancy; 2), to be helped by a client; or 3), to die. In this context, the survivors' trust and mental and physical conditions have been set at risk (Gajic-Veljanosk & Stewart, 2007).

## **Women survivors of sex trafficking and its long-term after-effects**

Victims of trafficking have been found to be subjected to poor nutrition, dangerous working conditions, and increased exposure to infectious disease (Cole, 2009). It was reported that victims experienced traumatic events repeatedly that escalated over the duration of the trafficking (Monzini, 2007; Yakushko, 2009). In this paper, we briefly present two common symptoms which women survivors of sex trafficking often experience: trauma, and PTSD.

### **Trauma**

According to Carlson & Dalenberg (2000), a traumatizing event often includes three elements: it must be experienced as extremely negative, uncontrollable and sudden. In fact, Dovydaitis (2010) explains that victims of trafficking were often trapped by force, by fraud, and by coercion. On one hand, Bezpalcha (2003) reports a range of reactions among trafficked persons, such as: fear, guilt, rage, sense of betrayal, distrust, helplessness, shock, suspicion and feeling lost that often lead them to be submissive to traffickers to avoid violence, to medicate themselves, or to suicide. On the other hand, researchers found six themes that are common among women involved in sex trafficking: 1) sex-trafficked women and girls lack autonomy; 2) rape as a tool for initiation into sex work; 3) chronic sexual violence and inability to refuse sex; 4) chronic sexual violence and inability to negotiate condom use; 5) Substance use and 6) inability to access health care (Gupta, Raj, Decker, Reed & Silverman, 2009). Women who have been able to run away from the trafficking ring have been enormously affected by the trafficking tragedy and have exhibited PTSD symptoms. A brief overview of these symptoms is discussed in the following section.

### **Post traumatic distress disorders (PTSD)**

Researchers found that trafficking survivors tend to suffer from PTSD (Macy & Johns, 2011). PTSD is categorized under four clusters of symptoms, such as: 1) intrusion, 2) avoidance, 3) negative alterations in cognitions and mood; 4) and alterations in arousal and reactivity (APA, 2013). Raymond and Hughes (2001) found that more than 85% women survivors of international sex trafficking reported that they continued to experience feelings of sadness and depression several years after liberation. Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley (2003) proposed that PTSD screening needs to take into consideration the backgrounds of survivors of sex trafficking, since symptoms of the PTSD diagnosis may not apply equally to all survivors of trauma (Curtis, 2012). For instance,

Jenkins (1999) found that Salvadoran women commonly reported intrusive re-experiencing of the events, especially in the form of nightmares, and increased arousal as marked by irritability and difficulty concentrating. Yet, numbness and avoidance were rarely observed in these women. In this sense, knowing survivors cultural and spiritual/religious backgrounds in relation to their needs is definitely crucial for developing an appropriate treatment plan.

### **Assessing survivors' needs**

Macy and Johns (2011) report that survivors of sex trafficking initially need series of services to address immediate and crisis needs (e.g., shelter, medical care); secondly, survivors' require ongoing support to meet the needs for physical health, mental health and recovery from trauma in order to establish stability in their lives. Finally, life skills, education, job training, and family reunification are also crucial for survivors for a long term recovery journey (Bezpalcha, 2003). Furthermore, Miller et al. (2007, p. 494) point out the importance of: " Meeting women's multidimensional service needs, providing access for women in safe and appropriate ways, addressing language and cultural barriers, gaining trust and offering support, and developing strategies for addressing the lack of security and frequent mobility for many of these women".

Although knowing survivors' primary needs and utilizing tools for assessing their past and present traumatic experience is important in the context of treatment, in this article, we argue that spiritual dimensions play an important role in supporting meaning making and resilience (i.e., reclaiming and rebuilding one's own narrative).

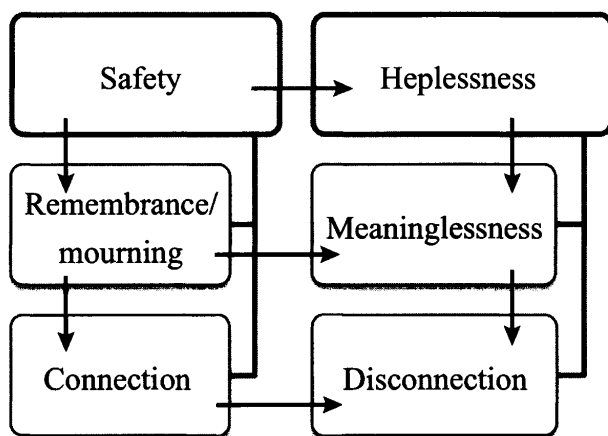
The essence of spirituality itself is about the connection (i.e., with self, others/community and Higher Power/God); about sources of hope and strength (Gall, Malette, Guirguis-Younger, 2011), it is also about the awareness of the present moment where survivors extraordinarily surpassed the brutal force in the vicious circle of trafficking. This awareness encourages survivors to trust in what could not kill them and/or what have kept them alive. Spirituality especially will be further introduced in the second step of trauma recovery where remembrance/mourning takes place. We now briefly discuss Herman's model (Herman, 1992 & 1997) on survivors' prior needs for safety.

### **Herman's stage - specific model for trauma recovery**

A definition of recovery from trauma has been offered by Harvey (1996) who proposed seven criteria that research and treatment can consider to judge whether trauma recovery has been successfully achieved: 1) memory

(e.g., survivors' choice whether or not to recall traumatic events and have a meaningful and coherent story that can be integrated in their continuing narratives); 2) affect range and tolerance (e.g., emotions can be felt, named, and endured); 3) memory and affect are linked (e.g., being able to experience present feelings about what happened in the past); 4) symptom mastery (e.g., being able to manage symptoms related to past experiences); 5) self-esteem; 6) attachment (e.g., increasing ability to feel connected to other people; and 7) meaning (e.g., able to hope and be optimistic about present and future).

Harvey's model (1996) sheds light on diverse research. For instance, Herman (1997) based her model on an ecological perspective developed by Harvey (1996) who sees trauma as a complex interaction between the person, the event, and the environment. In her treatment model, Herman (1997) views the process of trauma recovery gradually unfolding in three stages: 1) safety, 2) remembrance/mourning and 3) reconnection. These three stages correspond to the survivors' central traumatic experiences of helplessness, meaninglessness and disconnection.



**Figure 1:** Trauma recovery model (Herman, 1997)

This model has been adopted in the empirical research to evaluate how the legal, medical, and mental health systems respond to victims' needs and how those system experiences affect victims' psychological, physical, and sexual health outcomes (Campbell, Sefl, & Ahrens, 2004). This model is relevant for: coping strategies regarding depression, and PTSD; in 2) positive social reactions and support; in 3) community mental health programs and mental health distress post-assault; in 4) a rape-prone culture. Note that

cultural differences in responding to rape and acceptance of rape myths create a difficult socio-cultural context for recovery in sexual assault survivors (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Konradi, 1996). Though models for trauma recovery may vary by culture and religion, researchers proposed that any adequate treatments or interventions for trauma and recovery need to take the survivor's ecological perspectives into consideration (Lebowitz et al., 1993). The advantage of an ecological model is that it can suggest multiple strategies for intervention depending on survivors' needs (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009).

### *The role of safety in dissipating the helplessness of survivors*

Herman (1997) insists that the creation of a safe environment is absolutely crucial to the recovery process and no other therapeutic work should be undertaken until this secure milieu has been established. For instance, seeking survivors' permission to speak with them, asking them about the amount of privacy that they might want for the first conversation and following their lead on disclosure. The same researchers noted that safety may also include working with a clinician who is respectful, non-judgmental, and allows survivors to explore their history in a safe and containing way; safety also include safe housing, life skills, health care, legal services, and vocational supports. Regarding environmental safety, Armstrong (2008) further proposed that a strategy for self-protection and a safe domestic surrounding need to be taken into consideration. Particularly, Herman (1997) offers several therapeutic strategies for survivors. For instance, necessary medication and stress-management activities, cognitive therapy in the form of daily journal writing, assignment of tasks and development of a mutually agreed upon plan for security are introduced. Effective therapy shifts unpredictable danger to reliable safety, dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and stigmatized isolation to restore social connection. Carlson and Dalenberg (2000) found that when trauma survivors feel safe, they believe that they will have control over similar upcoming events, be able to overcome fearing for their lives, recognize that they are victims, build relationships and then open up to case managers, counselors, therapists, and others trying to help them. Safety thus results in their having fewer and lesser psychological symptoms and survivors' full recognition that they deserved better treatment. At this point, it is possible to proceed to the second stage of recovery (i.e., the mourning and remembrance with reference to spirituality) where survivors will be helped to recall the complete narrative of trauma and to make sense for their stories (Harvey, 1996).



### ***Remembrance and mourning: integrating spirituality***

Remembrance/mourning permits the survivor to realize how sex traffickers turned human beings into objects simply through threats and also turned humans into slaves who had to keep silent to please a master; slaves whose silence was a painful denial of identity and of the right to speak; forgetfulness could then seem to be the best choice (Kazin, 1996). Through remembrance and mourning, survivors realize that they can formulate their life stories as they choose; they can then find ways to change the meaning of the past, to shed light on the present, and take ownership of a different life course (Anderson & Hiersteine, 2008). On one hand, researchers found that the self-narrative provides a sense of continuity and personal identity by giving form and meaning to a person's life as a whole (Herman, 1997). On the other hand, spirituality is also defined as the search for meaning, a sense of belonging to, a harmonious connection with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality (Wong, 2004). In this very intersection where mourning/remembrance plays an important role to make sense for one's story, spirituality (i.e., a source of strength, hope and transcendence) lifts up the person's narrative and transforms it. Scholars further emphasize that spirituality encompasses implicitly four components: (a) meaning and way of being in life, (b) transcendence, (c) connection and wholeness, and (d) the presence of a unifying force or energy (Gall, Malette, Guirguis-Younger, 2011).

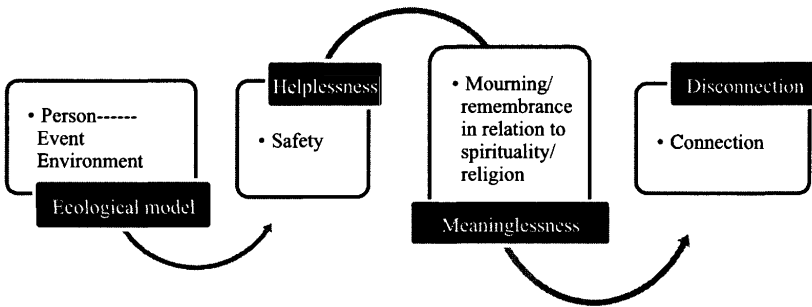
Particularly, for Wong (1998), spirituality is considered as an essential part of people's ultimate concern and quest for meaning, purpose and vision. Wong (2004) explains that "positive vision can lift our spirits, embolden our hearts, and enable us to transcend boundary situations." (p. 12) since "without vision, the people perish" (p. 3). Furthermore, Moberg (1971) offers a more inclusive definition of spirituality which he considers to pertain to an individual's inner resources, ultimate concerns, and central philosophy of life regardless of whether it is religious or nonreligious; the same author believes that all people are spiritual. Especially, according to Brown (1987), a form of spirituality can be almost anything such as gardening, ecology, music, or humanism. Notably, Viktor Frankl (1969) introduced the bold human spirit; for instance, the quest for meaning, self-transcendence, and taking a heroic stand in the face of adversity. Frankl (1969) states that will to meaning is essential for resilience and well-being to the extent that one would surpass pain and suffering.

While the concept spirituality is multidimensional and complex which involves ultimate and personal truths that individuals hold as firm in their lives, religion means "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individuals in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to

whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 1902, p. 81). For Allport (1950), religion enables people to understand a universe that is basically incomprehensible and gain a glimpse of the design of seemingly unrelated fragments. Baumeister (1991) states that religion is based on beliefs that allow people to make sense of the world around them and their experiences. These beliefs also shape goals, expectations, and behaviors. Religion can also fulfill the basic needs of meaning and one classification of these needs have been purpose, self-worth, efficacy, and value. Furthermore, Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) argue that the definition of spirituality should be “broad enough to incorporate religious, existential, and unstructured orientations, as well as concepts such as God, Higher Power, and spiritual source.” (p. 253).

In the book “Trauma Counselling”, Levers (2012) writes that the purpose of approaching the client’s spirituality is to “counteract the hopelessness associated with both trauma and addiction” (p. 224). It should be noted that woman survivors’ views of spirituality can be highly personal and emotionally charged, ranging from seeing spirituality as unimportant to it being a central focus of their life; discussion of such sensitive and delicate issues must allow for wide ranging differences in attitudes and beliefs. Thus maintaining a tone of interest in and mutual respect for the views of the survivor is a necessity.

Spirituality is therefore used interchangeably with religion in this article and is redefined regarding the field of survivors of sex trafficking as follows: 1) embracing transcendent dimensions of the survivor whose meanings for life and longing for a meaningful connection are essential (Frankl, 2006; Sheridan, 2004); 2) participating in a community to get in touch with a sense of belonging to (i.e., doing rituals for healing, praying and supporting the victims, raising one’s voice against injustice), and the Sacred Texts where the survivor can find consolation, light and strength to grieve her tragedy, to forgive herself, to love and to start her life over again (i.e., there is a God or/and Higher Power who is in solidarity with them, cf. Gal 2:20; Griffith, 2010). For the above reasons, spirituality would be used, at this second stage of Herman’s model, as one of the tools to reclaim and rebuild oneself in relation with others and with God/Higher Power. We also argue that it is more appropriate to create opportunities to explore the role of spirituality at this second stage, once a reasonable base of security has been established or restored in the person’s life. Introducing this topic too prematurely with a traumatized person may not suit its purpose and the person’s freedom to discuss about it, as she finds herself to be highly vulnerable. This point will be discussed further in this paper.



**Figure 2:** A proposed model for integrating spirituality in trauma and recovery

Taking into consideration survivors' spiritual/religious needs, Wong (1998) proposes a holistic approach to spiritual care. For instance, pertain to ultimate meaning and purpose, discover a sense of meaning, involve certain spiritual practices (e.g., Yoga, meditation, Qi Gong, gardening, music and therapeutic dance, psycho-spiritual drama etc..) or a set of religious beliefs and rituals, believe in a Higher Being and a spiritual reality, experience sacred moments, cultivate a transcendental connection and seek spiritual direction and formation. In fact, Allen and Wozniak (2011) found that spiritually based approaches help a group of women survivors of domestic violence find joy and hope for the future. These include establishing a safe place of one's own, developing a sense of personal freedom and autonomy, feeling a sense of inner peace, building confidence in one's ability to achieve goals, reclaiming self and identity and restoring life's trajectory, accepting and taking responsibility for the past without blaming one's self; and finally, reconnecting with community. It also means recovering the ability to play, pray, plan, laugh, create, and hope (Bassett, 2006). In fact, spirituality is considered to be a resource that can protect trauma survivors from adverse outcomes. It has been found to have a positive impact on people experiencing crises and traumas such as sexual assault (Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998).

While Yakushko (2009) qualifies the injustice and suffering caused by sex trafficking as beyond human comprehension, Motus (2004) reported that some trafficked persons refer to spirituality/religion as the source of their strength to overcome desperation and to get through the trial; some persons are able to sustain their self-esteem and tolerate overwhelming feelings of guilt, shame, unworthiness, fear of becoming targets of gossip, hostility, blame, stigmatization, ignorance and intolerance. The same researcher found out that, as with all categories of persons exposed to trauma, trafficked

persons may present amazing resiliency in the face of adversity. Coping mechanisms rely on a variety of internal resources, including a spiritual belief system.

Particularly, Emmons (2005) found that prayer is the survivor's way of connecting to a Higher Power to find meaning in difficult situations. Religious acts (i.e. praying, doing rituals for healing) helped survivors in opening up and sharing accounts of trauma, instead of keeping them secret. Fostering self-disclosure also encouraged emotional expression, emotional control and emotional comfort (Pennebaker, 1997). Another study found that religious commitments protected against developing PTSD (Astin, Lawrence & Eoy, 1993); meditation and mindfulness activities reduced arousal; acceptance and forgiveness activities had the potential to control negative emotions like anger, guilt and shame, as well as nurture empathy. These have been found to help individuals cope with trauma (Watts, 2007). The Salvation Army, (2006, p. 6) discovered the following:

With appropriate timing, spiritual needs of trafficked/exploited persons need to be addressed. Connecting/re-connecting with a person's chosen faith may be a great source of healing, grace and forgiveness. There is a significant role for pastoral care personnel to assist in the healing journey of trafficked individuals. It is possible that trafficked persons will trust pastors and pastoral care counsellors with their situation, rather than enforcement or authority figures. Pastors, chaplains, or connections with a local church could be excellent spiritual resources for trafficked persons.

In a safe environment, remembrance/mourning interwoven with spirituality allows us to create a sacred space that would enhance a sense of purpose and empowerment (Griffith, 2010), that could build trust and acknowledge the hurt and wounded, enable openness to reach out for help (Harvey & Narra, 2007).

Incorporating spirituality/religion into a treatment plan can be a valuable approach for welcoming self-reflection, hope and positive change (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Using spirituality into recovery from trauma would be either explicit integration or implicit integration (Tan, 1996) depending on where survivors come from. The first method deals directly and systematically with spiritual/religious issues. If survivors were familiar with spiritual/religious context, then connection with the Divine for strength, hope and meaning would support them through the difficult moments (Kersting, 2003). Spiritual resources such as prayer, sacred texts, religious teaching and practices would be helpful (Tan, 1996). Though it is hard to discuss forgiveness in a trafficking environment, self-forgiveness would be survivors' choice to work on and explicit method would provide tools (sacred texts, lived examples of forgiveness, religious teaching and practices) to process this work

since the essential doctrine of spirituality/religions is forgiveness (Balmer, 2001; Tipping, 2013). Explicit method would be started by establishing trust and encouraging survivors to share stories, allowing them to feel the feelings where stories may bring, providing different ways to process that past so that survivors would choose what is most meaningful to them; supporting them to reformulate their stories by reflecting, writing, dancing, painting (Bassett, 2006; Lev-Wiesel, 1998).

The second method to incorporate spirituality is to use implicit integration which is more subtle and does not initiate the discussion of religious/spiritual issues (Tan, 1996). In this context, Frankl's logotherapy (2006) which invites one to discover meaning in three different ways, as meaningful creating a work/doing a good deed, by experiencing something or someone else, and finally, choosing positive attitudes towards existential suffering. Both explicit and implicit methods appear relevant in the framework of storytelling and allow survivors to imagine a new lived narrative (Harvey, Mischler, Koenen & Harney, 2001). In line with Herman's model (1997) for remembrance/mourning, Ricoeur (1985) also encourages the sexual abuse survivor to grieve; only then can she find meaning in it. For Ricoeur (1985), the primary stage of the mourning task is to acknowledge whatever feelings or rebellious thinking arise in the painful moment. The second stage is to allow the survivors to grieve, to complain against God, a Higher Power (e.g., "Why me? If God, You are there, why does evil exist?"). The final stage is to relieve emotions and let out the lament through certain kinds of art or music, dancing etc. If spirituality is about the search for meaning and connection with self and others, then a survivor's remembrance and mourning in relation to Jesus Christ, the One who has endured tragic injustice (Nouwen, 1970) can become a source of consolation since she is no longer alone. Martinez (2011) asserts that the process of remembering/mourning opens the door to healing and it is the work of Grace. Religion/spirituality therefore has been found to foster positive ways of coping (Cashwell & Young, 2011). The following section explores the final stage of trauma recovery.

### ***Reconnecting in the context of disconnecting experiences of trauma***

Herman (1997) defines survivors' reconnection as the ability to create new selves (e.g. through art therapy - van der Kolk, 2002), reconcile with the past, and repudiate those aspects of the self that may have been imposed by the trauma. It is also the survivors' choice to reach out to society. This movement permits the survivor to both assert herself and to deepen

relationships with those whom she trusts. For instance, she may take steps to protect herself from further harm. She may also choose to share her story, join a survivor group, or even engage in social activism to create awareness of the evil of trafficking. In fact, research on posttraumatic growth has suggested that the immediate reaction to trauma is a challenge to an individual's world view and accepted meanings. It also provides an opportunity through which old and new world views can integrate, offering hope and possibility for growth and well-being (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Herman (1992) reported that some survivors often engage in social action and boldly speak their unspeakable experiences. For instance, *"I want to complete my education and be an example showing that trafficked women can do everything. I also want to work with trafficking survivors."* a 26 years old trafficking survivor said (Buet, Bashford, Basnyat, 2012, p. 46).

Lebowitz, Harvey, and Herman (1993) express the caution that not all survivors pass through all three stages. Some may begin at stage two and those whose aim is only to resolve PTSD symptoms may not see a value in the work of stage three. Treatment therefore is to be adapted to the specific needs of the survivors. Park (2004) reports that although trauma can interrupt survivors' relationships and valued life roles as well as their core values and beliefs, the processes involved in confronting these disruptions may also promote broadened perspectives, new coping skills, and the development of personal and social resources. These positive changes in the aftermath of stressful life experiences are often referred to as post-traumatic growth. Here, the increased attention to spiritual issues may be considered a great resource to enrich research and practice in interpersonal violence and trauma (Park, 2004).

### ***Conclusive reflections on integrating spirituality in Herman's model for trauma recovery***

This review examines how sex trafficking experiences seriously affect women survivors physically, emotionally, psychologically (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008) resulting in trauma and/or PTSD (Dovydaitis, 2010). An "ecological perspective" model (Harvey, 1996) combining with Herman's trauma and recovery model (Herman, 1997) has been applied broadly and has proven effective in terms of treatment plans or/and crisis interventions for interpersonal trauma survivors (Campbell et al., 2009). However, according to our current critical analysis, it appears that spirituality has been neglected in literature concerning work with sex trafficking survivors (Macy & Johns, 2011; Yakushko, 2009). Although Harvey's ecological model (1996) and Herman's stage- specific model for trauma recovery (1997) do not

incorporate spiritual resources to cope with tragic events, they both suggest that research and healthcare providers need to take into account the ecological perspective of the survivor (i.e. the event, the environment and the survivor herself). In fact, survivors' spiritual and/or religious resources are considered one of the significant sources of meaning, hope, strength, healing, and connection (Gall et al, 2011; Pennebaker, 1997). Vis and Boynton (2008, p. 73) found that "prayer, meditation, or reading spiritual material can offer outlets for emotion and provide comfort and this exchange helps to manage anxiety and other emotions, provides feelings of support, and may assist with problem-solving and self-care".

Taking survivors' different spiritual/religious and cultural backgrounds into consideration, Saleem and Tummala-Narra (2012) and Wong (1998, 2004) propose different therapeutic approaches that might be helpful for survivors of trafficking. For instance, engaging in spiritual/religious activities (e.g. church, prayer, meditation); emotional expression (e.g. sadness, anger); seeking/giving support from/to friends, family, or community members; seeking assistance from traditional healers; engaging in cultural physical activities (e.g. Chi-Gong); using herbal remedies; and social activism such as taking on roles to help other victims. Saleem and Tummala-Narra (2012) further explain that therapy for victims of trafficking with trauma exposure may include art therapy, journaling, poetry and song writing, yoga, body work, drama, outdoor physical activities and organized spiritual/religious activities such as regular meditation or prayer (p. 31). Yakushko (2009) further proposes that a supplement to traditional therapy that focused on anger management with an adolescent Vietnamese male refugee who was a practicing Buddhist, a referral to a Buddhist monk was an effective collaborative approach that honored community values and worldviews. Furthermore, working within the different cultural contexts should be also emphasized. For instance, in the contexts of a culture concerning values of virginity versus non-virgins, family reunification might provide understanding, empathy and support towards survivors (Yakushko, 2009).

Spirituality has been defined as searching for meaning and connection. Calhoun and Tedeschi (1999) found that finding meaning in trauma involves two tasks: 1) seeing meaning in the occurrence 2) maintaining a meaningful view of life despite the event. For Vis and Boynton (2008, p. 74), survivors who "accomplish the task of weaving this meaning into their daily lives are able to create a narrative about the traumatic event that goes beyond loss and hopelessness, inviting possibilities for emotional growth". Other researchers reported that for many, if not most, when disaster or trauma strikes, it is religion, ritual and faith/spirituality that are embraced as a central means of coping (Decker, 1993). Furthermore, Pennebaker (1997) asserted that

survivors who turn to religious and spiritual coping efforts demonstrate greater physical and emotional well-being.

Additionally, spirituality is seen as the conservatory of post-traumatic growth; although survivors may not have had any control over being exposed to a traumatic event, they actually have control over how they make sense of the event and how they use this insight to determine their future (Basset, 2006). Researchers also found that spiritual and religious rituals in particular can provide opportunities for public expressions of shared grief, mutual support and reassurance for survivors (Cacioppo, Hawkey, Rickett, & Masi, 2005). Such activities allow one to share one's narrative with others who face a similar situation. Gradually, one's coherent narrative will be developed. Participation in a faith community can also help foster one's social connectedness and a sense of communion (Cacioppo et al., 2005). Snyder (2002) states that spiritual /religious rituals can offer a degree of closure of a painful period and encourage transitional behaviors that help survivors move towards engagement in new adaptive activities and nurture hope. In fact, working with survivors of trafficking, Motus (2004, p. 38) found that:

Trafficked persons may present amazing resiliency in the face of adversity. Coping mechanisms rely on a variety of internal resources, including a spiritual belief system. Some trafficked persons refer to religion/ spirituality as the source of their strength to overcome desperation and to get through the ordeal. Some persons are able shore up their self-esteem and withstand overwhelming feelings of guilt, shame, unworthiness, fear of becoming targets of gossip, hostility, blame, stigmatisation, ignorance and intolerance. Resilience, coping mechanisms, beliefs and the presence of other protective personality-related factors are important factors in facilitating the process of "breaking out" from hardship and exploitation.

Finally, if spirituality is about meaning making, then integration of resources that would help survivors keep going in desperation is needed to take into consideration. For instance, Gabrielle, one of sex trafficking survivors revealed that *"I used to lock myself in the room, turn on the music and listen and dance and after I felt bit better I would come out of the room. That was my way of dealing with the pain from inside and loneliness."* (Djuranovic, 2009, p. 68). Gray (2012) on "hearing the voices of trafficking survivors and their helpers" would become a voice of hope and encouragement for those who work in the field.

While they showed some emotional dissociation and intrusive memories after their rescues from exploitation, the young women in the shelter environment remained diligent, determined, and resourceful in their pursuits. According to their yoga instructor, they were continuing to "show agency, awareness, strength." Their treatment involved cultivating a "belief that no matter who they are – they are given the space to do that." "These kids are



making their own way... it doesn't matter who it is, give them a chance and encouragement and resources, they will rise to the occasion," she reported. Their mentor is "personally very motivated to seek this, peace, joy, and love, as they reportedly have "some outstanding characteristics, diligence, work ethic, influences others. (Gray, 2012, p. 15).

### *Limitations and suggestions*

The primary aim of this review is to give voice to social awareness regarding the sex trafficking trade. We agree with Monzini (2004) that it is difficult to report the exact incidence of trafficking because of its illegal existence. In this sense, survivors of sex trafficking may remain invisible and therefore getting help from society is far more difficult to achieve. The limit of this paper is that we ground spirituality mainly in the context of Christianity that may be not familiar to those survivors who come from a different background. Additionally, because of the complex nature of trafficking activities and the lack of data in many countries, it may be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of follow-up programs to aid sex trafficking survivors. Particularly, addressing the stigma of trafficking survivors who attempt to return to their communities and who long for acceptance is still not easy regarding cultural setting toward survivors (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008). In this article, we propose that counsellors, psychotherapists, social workers, researchers, religious leaders, health care providers etc., need to be a voice for sex trafficking survivors in the hope of creating social awareness of this population historically invisible to literature (Singh, Hays, Chung, Watson, 2010). Furthermore, there is a need to build a safe community where survivors learn to trust, to reach out, to share personal stories, to acknowledge the good and not so good parts of culture and events in public (Herman, 1997). Also, psycho-educational programs have to be provided for the survivor in terms of caring for her body, mind and spirit and also of learning to set boundaries for herself. Finally, trauma and PTSD screening need to take into consideration survivors' religious/spiritual and cultural backgrounds so that an appropriate treatment plan will be reached (Curtis, 2013).

We suggest that integrating spirituality in the second stage (i.e. remembrance/mourning) or/and third stage (i.e. reconnection) is possible in work with sex trafficking survivors who welcome spirituality/religion. The second stage encourages survivors to be aware of what happened to them, to grieve over those painful experiences, to be aware of situations of helplessness, and then find the strength to seek help. We further incorporate Ricoeur's three stages of grief (Ricoeur, 1985) to walk with survivors in their painful, unjust

experiences. Concerning the stage-specific model for trauma recovery (Herman, 1997), we agree with both Herman (1997) and Harvey (1996) that establishing safety (i.e. personal, relational, and environmental) is a prior step for each sex trafficking survivor. Safety is extremely crucial for survivors and it may take time for them to feel safe and trustful again in any relationships (Aron et al., 2006; Courtois, 2008). In this context, introducing spiritual/religious interventions in the second stage may be appropriate. As Fraser et al. (1999, p. 136) state: "If we can understand what helps some people to function well in the context of high adversity, we may be able to incorporate this knowledge into new practice strategies". Spirituality has been found to be a core aspect of the healing process (Wong, 2004) and a key factor of increased well-being over time (Ai & Park, 2005). These findings offer hope for the journey of women survivors of trafficking in their search for meaning and healing from their trauma.

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