

Eyes and Ears Chattanooga: Promoting Mental Health Services for Victims of Human Trafficking

Introduction

Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar industry which affects 40.3 million people around the world. It is estimated that of the millions of individuals being trafficked, 81% are trapped in forced labor, 25% are children, and 75% are women and girls (Polaris 2019). Survivors of trafficking are likely to fall back into the cycle of abuse without appropriate mental health interventions; in order to work with this population, the therapist must establish physical and psychological safety for the client. After establishing trust, the therapist may utilize evidence supported interventions for treating PTSD, such as Cognitive Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Exposure Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, and Stress Inoculation Training (Altun 2017)(Williamson 2009).

Bill H.R. 507

- Victims of human trafficking are afforded a wide variety of long-term services to assist in the healing process
- Victims are given the opportunity to receive assistance upon identification as a victim; no longer treated as criminals, but as individuals in need of crisis intervention
- A coalition will be formed to combat human trafficking; team will be made up of human trafficking survivors, law enforcement officers, academic professionals, and organizational representatives from research bodies.

THE PROBLEM

There are many challenges in place that stop victims of human trafficking from receiving much needed mental health services. Barriers include having a history of polyvictimization, substance abuse or addiction, cultural and linguistic differences, and little access to appropriate mental health interventions. Currently, there is no federally recognized standard of service delivery for victims of human trafficking. States are able to determine the length of services for each client seen. This creates an incongruent method of service delivery across the United States.

THE SOLUTION

Develop a consistent model for State and Federal government to allow for prolonged mental health services to be offered exclusively to human trafficking victims. Use evidence based intervention methods to engage with client until therapeutic objectives have been met to the satisfaction of the client and therapist. By addressing the mental health needs of the client, the bill aims to reduce the risk of polyvictimization among survivors and promote the wellbeing of the individual.

Impact on Chattanooga

- Chattanooga straddles two cities that are hotbeds of human trafficking: Atlanta and Nashville. Approximately 94 minors are trafficked through Tennessee each month. Nashville is the primary

city in which trafficked individuals pass because of its three major highway systems and its large tourism and sporting industries (Free for Life 2019).

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