

THE INTERSECTION OF SHAME AND TRAUMA IN SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING



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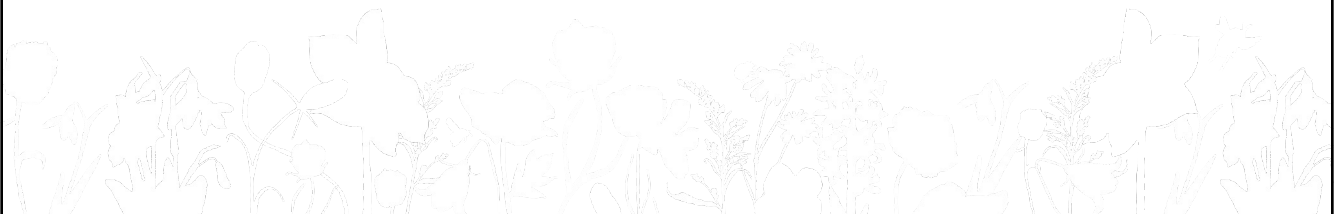
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Dedication

This is dedicated to my wildflowers at THRIVE. Past, Present and Future. You have all changed my life forever, and I can only hope I have done the same for you.

This is also dedicated to the survivors who bravely participated in this research. Thank you for trusting me with your vulnerability, your strength and most importantly your voice. I hope others that need it, find strength in your words

Lastly, this is dedicated to Kayla for whom THRIVE would never have existed without.



2

Key Concepts

Human Trafficking

- Trafficking Victims in Persons Act (TVPA) states HT is the exploitation of a person for personal gain through force, fraud or coercion (Okech, et al., 2018)

Complex Trauma

- Chronic, prolonged, and often developmental adverse experiences compared to other forms of traumatic experiences individuals can survive. Often interpersonal in nature (Bloom, 2013; Herman, 1992/2015)

Shame

- A “painful emotion” in which the person has negatively perceived not just their behavior but their entire perception of self and identity (Grau et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2006)

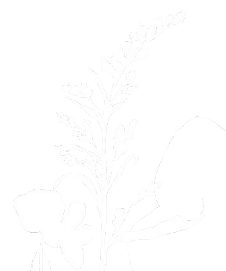


3

Complex Trauma

Complex Trauma (Bloom, 2013; Herman 1992/2015)

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (Felitti, 1998)**
 - “Betrayal Trauma”, when caregivers become the abusers, children attempt to preserve their relationships by blaming themselves for the abuse (McCormack & Thomson, 2017).
 - Foundation for mistrust of others, diminished sense of emotional safety and shame (Bloom, 2013)
 - Formation of distorted perception that typical adult relationships instill abuse and violence (Bloom, 2013; McCormack & Thomson, 2017).
- **Interpersonal Trauma**
 - Interpersonal trauma is defined as surviving physical or sexual violence (Tipsword et al., 2021).
- **Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD)**
 - Judith Herman “new diagnosis” (1992/2015)
 - PTSD: Avoidance, Intrusion, Changes in mood/cognition, Hypervigilance (Perry et al., 2022)
 - C-PTSD: Interpersonal challenges, Negative Self-Concept, Emotion Dysregulation (Herman, 1992/2015)



4

Shame

Shame

- Internal Shame (Grau et al., 2022)
- External Shame (Grau et al., 2022)
- C-PTSD as “Shame Based” (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022; Herman, 2011; Walker & Reid, 2024)

Causalities of Shame

- Relationship
 - Capacity for healthy relationships is a casualty of shame and trafficking due to past experiences with exploited trust (Ashfield et al., 2020; Brown, 2006; Powell et al., 2018; Sukach et al., 2018).
- Identity
 - Formative milestones in identity formation (Maree 2021)
 - In attempts to cope from this constant violation of their bodies. survivors’ create an inevitable alteration in identity, labeled “identity disturbance” (Usacheva et al., 2022 p. 259).

5

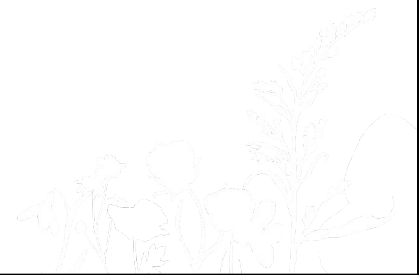
Shame

- **Post Traumatic Shame (Wilson et al., 2006)**
 - 8 dimensions
 - Self attribution
 - Changes to emotional states
 - Capacity for self-regulation
 - Impact on identity
 - Suicidality
 - Defensive patterns
 - Higher susceptibility to PTSD
 - Changes to dimensions in ”self-structure”

6

Shame

- **How does shame present in survivors?**
 - Shame Avoidance
 - Attack others
 - Attack self
 - Withdrawal
 - Avoidance



7

Shame Based Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

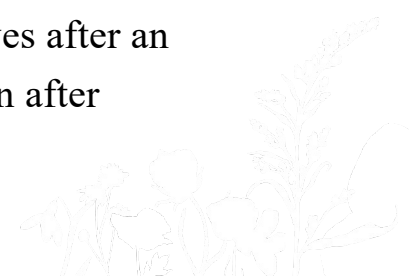
- *Trauma Related Shame (Forkus et al., 2022; Oktedalen et al., 2014)*
 - Negative perception of self to be directly related to a trauma and their perceived role in both the trauma and the aftermath
 - Critical judgments towards overall sense of self, self-efficacy and self-worth
 - Challenges to identity formation



8

Shame Based Frameworks

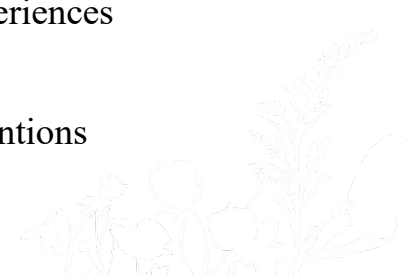
Theoretical Framework

- *Mental Contamination (McCann et al., 2023)*
 - Feeling dirty while lacking the presence of a physical contaminant or dirt
 - Connected to sexual traumas in which survivors
 - Feeling an immediate need to wash themselves after an assault and continuing to feel dirty or unclean after
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9

Shame Based Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

- *Shame Resilience (Brown, 2006; Brown, 2015)*
 - Need for connection & empathy
 - Opportunity to deconstruct distorted evaluations of self
 - Ability to define shame diminished impact of shame
 - Being equipped with capacity to name shame experiences diminished its power and control
 - Builds foundation for compassion focused interventions
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10

Survivors Experiences with Shame

- *How is trauma related shame defined by survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST)?*

Theme 1

Survivors Lived Experiences with Shame

- *Shame Becomes Identity*
- *Self Worth is Influenced by Shame*
- *Shame Becomes Internalized*

Participant	Number of Times Shame is Referenced by Participant
Participant 1	25
Participant 2	17
Participant 3	24
Participant 4	20
Participant 5	21
Participant 6	43
Participant 7	31
Participant 8	21
Participant 9	30

Participant 7: "I'm learning something new, this is further helping me to again accept what it is. I didn't have the verbiage

11

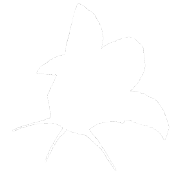
SHAME BECOMES IDENTITY

Participant 7:

"For so long I was just kind of like existing, but I wasn't I wasn't really living. I was just kind of like, oh, this is what happened to me. And I'm not going to make any changes because I am this trauma. **I am this shame.** I felt like I had to wear it."

12

SHAME BECOMES IDENTITY

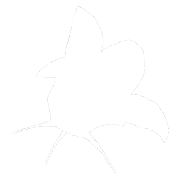


Participant 6:

“Oh, it is my identity... all of these things you are, like bone and joint and marrow and sinew. And like the things that knit you together as a person have also been intricately woven with these shame narratives. To experience it hurts physically. To take it out of you, to me doesn't start with cognitive behavioral therapy, like it's not a head issue. It's something wrong with how I've been put together.”

13

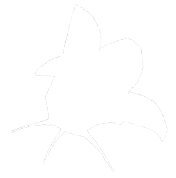
SHAME BECOMES IDENTITY



Participant 2: “It was hard because I was younger and I feel like I was just molded into somebody that I wasn’t. So, as I got older it clicked in my head that I don’t have to be shameful or question myself...I didn’t really know what I was. I was just lost. I knew I wasn’t a bad person...I knew that wasn’t me, but I was just confused. I didn’t know who I really was.”

14

SELF WORTH

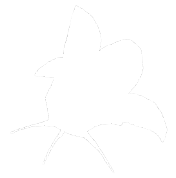


Participant 6: *“If your self-concept was nurtured in shame, if that's the thing that kind of glued you together along the way, if you don't have these narratives about yourself, you then don't exist.”*

Participant 4: *“It comes back, you know, the shame comes back. So you know its always a struggle to live with yourself for what you did or had to do....you know self-blame...even though you might be okay and you've been out for a while, it's a reminder of the dirty feeling of that life if I can say it that way”.*

15

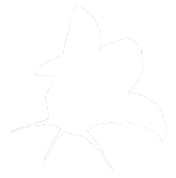
SELF WORTH



Participant 8: *“My self-esteem gets in the way. I don't love myself. I feel dirty, used up, diseased, a plague.”*

16

SELF BLAME



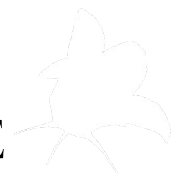
Participant 3: “Definitely the shame with the involvement, like my body responding right?

Being like oh you enjoyed it. Like I enjoyed that happening? But finally getting to a point where I could see it from over here, and being like no my body did what I needed to do to survive. The rape felt better than being tortured, its that simple.”

Participant 6: “So it doesn't matter what I would make with my hands or produce with my words. It's not good enough. Anything I would produce is never ever right. It's not about good enough, it's more about the thing is wrong because I am wrong... I always get it wrong. I mean, I feel this so viscerally, I'd rather be dead”.

17

INTERNALIZED SHAME

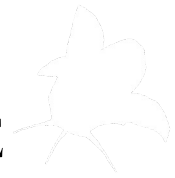


Participant 1: “Because I would just keep it all, hoard it, I could go to the grave with this. And that was torturing me. That was like my like prison cell. I was like, I have the key.”

Participant 6: “It's more about the kind of trauma I've experienced. You're depersonalized. You're dehumanized. And so, if you don't even feel like a human being, it's hard to then even talk about shame, which is a deeply personal, a deeply human experience. Shame is so vulnerable and, you know, it's not something that we want to show people.”

18

INTERNALIZED SHAME



Participant 9: “There’s a difference between numbness and shame...the level of grief that goes with the level of understanding that this isn't my fault. And it goes together with shame, but I also think that it goes along with how feeling this way versus living a certain way. As survivors, we tend to mask, we tend to put on a brave face...the whole fact that numbness is not just a feeling, it's a defense mechanism and a coping skill, it is not healthy. But it is the only thing you can do in the meantime to fill the gap of the wound.”

19

- *How do survivors of DMST believe trauma related shame influences their experiences with C-PTSD?*

Theme 2

Shame Intersects with Symptoms of PTSD

- *Impact of Childhood Trauma*
- *Challenges to Interpersonal Relationships*
- *Perceived Judgment Perpetuates Avoidance*

Participant 8: “I know we say trauma to generalize everything, but I believe its trauma, then torture trauma, and emotional trauma, mental and physical traumas. And then this dehumanizing trauma.”



20

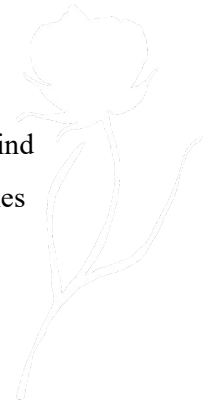
CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Participant 4: “There was already shame prior to, it’s almost like it was a precursor to what was to come you know?”

Childhood Poverty

Participant 5: “I grew up in poverty. Definitely, that was a big you know, that's kind of set the tone for self-worth, how I felt about myself, being ashamed of my clothes and being bullied.”



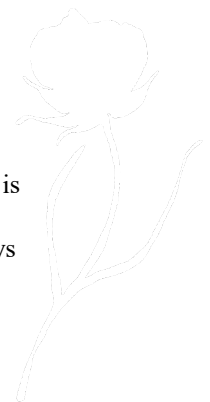
21

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Generational Cycles of Trafficking

Participant 4: “My mom was in the life as well. Unbeknownst to me. I found out later, but it was always due to addiction and what she was doing to take care of her substance use and undiagnosed mental health.”

Participant 9: “My family abused me, they did this to me. Not intentionally, but they have their own traumas so they abused me because of it, which is not fair...another shameful part is that I came to the conclusion that I’m not going to have a kid, where in my entire life I always wanted to be a mom...I don’t want to feel shame thinking that I would be just like my parents.”



22

INTERPERSONAL CHALLENGES

- **Participant 2:** *"I wasn't worth being in a relationship with somebody. I just felt embarrassed and disgusted with myself and didn't trust the other person because of what I went through."*
- **Participant 3:** *"I thought all people were good. Like I could see good and everybody, you know, like, like so many of us survivors have probably said that. Like, oh it's all good than everybody. Like, I don't anymore"*
- **Participant 8:** *"I trust no one, I'll give myself at the same level to everyone and they see the same person. No one gets more. No one gets more trust."*
- **Participant 9:** *"No one is going to love me. I'm a too broken".*



23

PERCEIVED STIGMA & AVOIDANCE

Participant 3: *"There was a video made, I was drugged...and I was completely naked...and it made me look like a willing participant. And my nephew saw it...so I stayed away from my nephew and family because he saw me naked in that state. And it wasn't like it looks. It looks like I wanted to be doing it, but that's called survival."*

Participant 4: *"It impacted me when I wanted to go to church...I was taking them to go across and sing in front of everybody and it was such an amazing moment. And someone said 'here comes her with her whore shoes'. It just set me back...where I thought I was safe I wasn't.... Sometimes in places where you think you're safe people will take shame and hold it over your head."*



24

HEALING SHAME

- *What do survivors identify as the most important intervention strategies to healing trauma related shame?*

Theme 3

Healing through Belonging

- *Survivorship*
- *Power of Community*
- *Compassion Focused Service Provision*

Participant 6: "You're broken, you are traumatized in relationship, and you heal in relationship."



25

SURVIVORSHIP



Participant 2: "I'm not a victim. I'm a survivor. I made it out."



26

POWER OF COMMUNITY

Participant 1: “To know when I share and I’m helping another woman be able to have the courage to connect or share herself. That is that’s where we are stronger here.”

Participant 5: “It was it was a lot easier for me because the circle that surrounded me already were aware of my experience of trafficking and then it just kind of became a point where it’s like, you know what I am now going to live my life as an acknowledgment that I have trauma.”

Participant 7: “The presence of people or, you know, anything? Being seen and heard and understood ooh, yeah. That makes me that makes me pretty emotional because I just never felt understood.”



27

COMPASSIONATE SERVICES

Participant 3: “Even that team of people, the probation officer and even the judge, they all just kind of like wrapped themselves around me and made sure they did what they could. I got my license back, they helped me do that. They helped me get my apartment and just really put things in place and help me succeed, you know? Yeah. I wouldn’t be here without them. Every single person played a role.”

Participant 5: “They were just so gentle, and I don’t know they kind of planted that like loving seed in me....I felt loved. I didn’t feel judged.”



28

COMPASSIONATE SERVICES

Participant 2: “When you sit there and you talk about it and they don't really have much to say because they don't understand what I'm trying to talk to them about. It's like just being understanding and not feeling uncomfortable talking about it.”

Participant 3: “when I first disclosed...she didn't believe me. She told my mom and children's fathers that I was lying and that it was purposeful lying or because of Borderline Personality Disorder...It led to like another, like two or three years of subjugation and trafficking...Because she didn't believe me. She told them that there was something wrong, it was me.”



29

SHAME COMPETENCE

ADDING SHAME COMPETENCE TO PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

- ***Acknowledgement of the inevitability of shame***
- ***Understand it is deeply painful and survivors will do anything to avoid it***
- ***Practitioners have a duty to avoid re-shaming while also naming the experience***



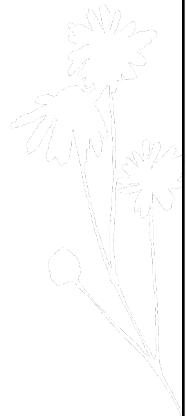
30

SHAME COMPETENCE

Discussion

Where can our services perpetuate shame?

How can our services become more shame competent?



31

Conclusion

THANK YOU



32

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33

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34

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35

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36

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37

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38