

**Young Urban Female Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking: Complex Trauma and An Integrated Model of the Path to Recovery**

JOAN KEARNEY PHD PMHCNS APRN  
ASST. PROFESSOR  
YALE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF NURSING AND  
YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER  
FELLOW ,NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE  
FOUNDING FACULTY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY CENTER  
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

DISCLOSURE

This presentation is based on findings from the following funded grant award:  
Columbia University CTSA                      Kearney, Trudeau & Byrne (PIs)                      2/1/14-11/30/15  
Columbia University Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, CBPR Program  
Title : *“Trauma Recovery within Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking in Young Urban Females”*  
Award amt: \$40,000  
No other disclosures.

Learning Objectives for this Presentation:

- 1. To identify the characteristics of, risk factors for, and outcomes related to commercial sexual exploitation and domestic sex trafficking in young urban females
- 2. To examine the significance of complex trauma with respect to this population.
- 3. To understand the complex nature of trauma recovery in this group of young women and how this informs both clinical and non-clinical intervention

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

DEFINITION AND FACTS ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

Background –

- *International-*The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, the US Dept of State defined “severe forms of Trafficking in Persons: TIP” as:
  - 1. Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age;Or
  - 2. 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 subjecting to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.
- The term “human trafficking” is not necessarily movement or transportation of a victim from one location to another, but rather the buying and selling of persons under these definitions.
- 5/29/2015- The Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking Act signed into law better permits law enforcement agencies to prosecute and punish human traffickers.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

BACKGROUND FACTS

- 200,000 American children are at high risk of being lured into the sex industry annually.
- Currently – victims of commercial sex exploitation in NYC are predominantly female, (85%) with 67% identified as Black /African American
- More than 50% have juvenile justice placement and 75% have child welfare involvement

Girls and women who survive commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking have very high rates of early abuse and risk status for:

- Further trauma- physical, emotional
- Violent death
- A higher incidence of general medical illness
- AIDS and sexually transmitted disease
- Continuing poverty
- Struggle in having and raising their children

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

General Research Problem

*We don't know much about recovery in young urban female survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking as it articulates with what we currently know of complex trauma*

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

COMPLEX TRAUMA-

Core features

- 
- Escape not possible
- Examples-Childhood sexual abuse and physical abuse

Early trauma underpinnings.....a key to understanding the problem



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The Survival Focused Brain**

Brain changes are thought to underlie a **proposed alternate developmental pathway as an adaptation to a high-stress environment in which :**

Alterations in brain structure and function– can be conceptualized as

**DYSREGULATION SYNDROME.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHANGES IN BRAIN  
DEVELOPMENT IN COMPLEX TRAUMA : THE STRESS  
RESPONSE SYSTEM AND **THE SURVIVAL FOCUSED BRAIN**

Neuroendocrine dysregulation – stress cascade;

Hippocampus, Amygdala, Prefrontal cortex, Corpus callosum. In addition – autonomic nervous system arousal and lack of balance

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

SPECIFIC FINDINGS OF INTEREST –DEVELOPMENTAL  
TRAUMATOLOGY- NEUROSCIENCE, STRESS BIOLOGY ,  
GENOMICS

- Neuropeptide systems, Serotonin, Opioid systems
- Amygdala and hippocampal changes
- Lower orbitofrontal cortex (oFC) volumes
- Epigenetic changes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS OF COMPLEX TRAUMA-

- Alteration in relational life.
- Unstable relational patterns.
- Repetitive dysfunctional relationships.
- Such relationships often lead to additional psychological damage.
- Other difficulties include:
  - Aberration in the sense of self
  - Difficulty in emotion identification
  - Abnormalities self-awareness
  - Personal safety issues
  - Medical issues
  - Major cognitive distortions

Most of these girls have COMPLEX TRAUMA HISTORIES-

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS  
SPECIFIC TO THIS GROUP OF GIRLS AND WOMEN LINKED TO HX. OF  
COMPLEX TRAUMA (HERMAN)

- Early failure of caregiver
- Sense of self as "bad"
- Inner world includes presence of pimp
- Victims' contempt is for those who say nothing

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

HARVEY'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF  
TRAUMA RECOVERY

Harvey's ecological model understands TRAUMA RECOVERY as a multidimensional phenomenon, characterized by the following:

- (1) Authority
- (2) Integration
- (3) Affect tolerance
- (4) Symptom mastery
- (5) Self-esteem and self-cohesion
- (6) Trust
- (7) Meaning-making

Characteristics of complex trauma

*Problems in emotion regulation; relationships, attention and consciousness, belief systems, somatic organization*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

APPROACH

→

Qualitative descriptive design used focus group and individual interviews for data collection.

31 young women using GEMS services, (aged 18 and over, who were enrolled in GEMS at differing points in their trajectory through the program), 7 GEMS staff members, 4 persons in GEMS leadership roles and 2 from another leading agency were interviewed.

A semi-structured interview guide

Data was analyzed using emergent content analysis

- 

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Background on the survivor participants

- GEMS provides services and programming for girls and young women – who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking (ages 12- 24)
- Over 90% of GEMS girls have been sexually or physically abused as children with child welfare involvement; 80% have a family member who has been or is currently incarcerated; more than 70% have spent time removed from primary caregivers,
- 99% have been or are under the control of their pimp
- Many are young mothers; some of their children are fathered by their pimps
- They commonly refer to their experience of commercial sex exploitation as “the life”
- From what we know in the scant literature- girls move along a dynamic continuum regarding “the life”–coming “into”, moving within, and coming “out of the life”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Findings:

- Recovery is long term and depends on 3 major interacting domains:
- Internal Process
  - Proximal Holding Environment
  - Societal Forces

---

---

---

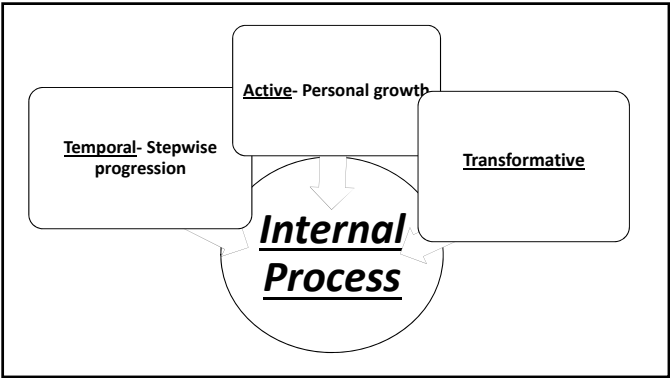
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

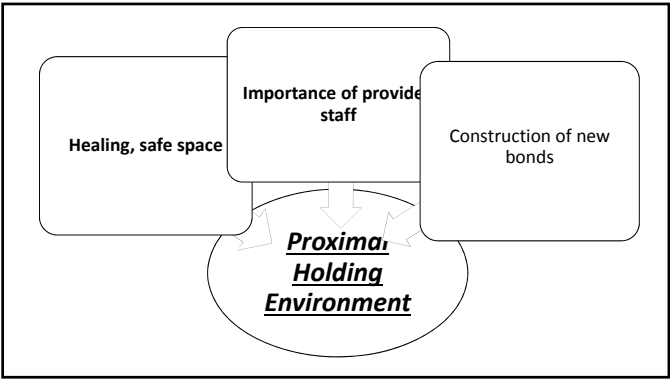
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

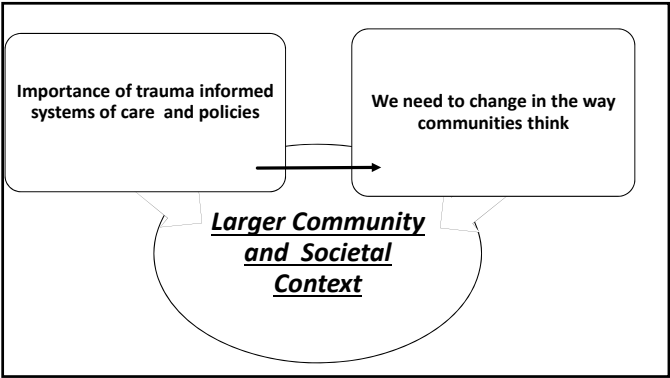
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*Community and Society*

**Staff member:**  
*Sexual trauma in young women has almost been normalized in popular culture-*

**Girl:** *Get rid of easy access -*

***The Process and the Challenge and the System:***

**Staff member talking about the painstaking process of recovery:**  
*Small steps of undoing the trauma- slow, personal investment, tiny moves*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**THE LIVING RELATIONSHIP-**  
Family, clan, bonds

The Girls:

Staff represent mothers and sisters to them

Staff is like a family

Staff accepts them – holds them – cares, goes through the journey with them – guiding them

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*How do we begin to conceptualize and integrate these findings into a coherent broad based model of recovery?*

**Relational Model**

While they build and integrate the new self – CANNOT DO THIS WITHOUT THE RELATIONSHIP – IT DRIVES RECOVERY

Recovery requires a holistic approach to care on multiple levels:

Peer survivorship staff critical

Trauma informed therapeutic intervention

Instrumental help

Community and societal change is very important

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

For clinicians

From a clinical intervention perspective –

Models to review- attachment theory, general trauma models, constructivist self development theory

Evidence based treatments/techniques

---

---

---

---

---

---

---