A guide for Professionals

Trauma Informed Approaches to Support Gender Violence Against Women Within the Asylum Process

This factsheet must be read and followed through by attending the recommended webinar that will focus on a case study, outline the barriers faced by women experiencing sexual exploitation and marginalisation and look at ideas for good practice

Migrant women experience a range of burdens and encounter barriers to trauma-informed care. Professionals and stakeholders providing trauma-informed care need to ensure that their services are accessible and culturally sensitive towards the unique needs of women.

Globally, forced displacement affects the health and wellbeing of millions each year. Persons with experience of armed conflicts, torture, and forced migration are at risk of developing severe health-related consequences, including major depressive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. A large proportion of forced migrants are women, who are at risk of being exposed to significant gender-based risks and violence before and during their migration journey.

Compared to non-migrant populations, refugee women have a higher risk of worse perinatal health outcomes, including postnatal depression, maternal mortality, sexual assault, and unwanted pregnancy.

In 2022, research into the support needs of those involved in the UK sex industry found that mental health issues had been disclosed by 78% of women, more than any other as a key area of concern.

Support-needs-of-those-involved-in-the-UK-sex-industry-FINAL-for-publication.pdf

Specialist support services working with women affected by the sex industry in the Portsmouth area encounter high levels of trauma and disclosures of violence and abuse amongst their client groups. This is trauma linked to violence and abuse experienced in the industry and to complex childhood trauma affecting women's ability to:

- protect themselves from further harm
- access support where they feel understood and safe

Awareness and implementation of trauma-informed support across services is vital to enabling women to

- Disclose exploitation and abuse
- Leave the sex industry when they wish to
- Access ongoing support to stay safe and to heal from trauma

The purpose of trauma-informed practice is not to treat trauma-related difficulties, which is the role of trauma-specialist services and practitioners. Instead, **it seeks to address the barriers that people affected by trauma can experience when accessing health and care services.'**

(Govt Guidance – Working Definition of trauma-informed Practice – Office for Health Improvement and Disparities)

Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

A well embedded trauma informed approach to work with all service users could make all the difference to a woman facing undisclosed sexual exploitation and abuse.

What does trauma-informed practice and safeguarding the wellbeing of refugees mean in participation?

- Being aware of the past struggles and trauma
- Recognition of the behaviours and symptoms that result from traumatic experiences
- Being mindful of current struggles (and the risk of re-traumatisation)
- Culturally sensitive behaviours and communication
- Supporting choice, autonomy, and empowerment
- Developing trust and collaborative relationships
- Focusing on strengths, resilience, and hope
- Valuing respect and dignity
- Allowing and protecting confidentiality in cases where refugees prefer not to share their views with others
- Equality and fairness
- Challenging myths and misconceptions.

Developing trauma-informed practice needs to consider external factors that can impact on the wellbeing of refugees:

- Precarious immigration status,
- Housing issues
- Health and mental health issues
- Unemployment and financial problems
- Exploitation or unsafe conditions at work
- Destitution and homelessness in many cases

- Hate crime and wider experience of discrimination
- Social isolation and digital exclusion
- Family issues such as breakdown and domestic abuse

Trauma Informed Approaches to support women facing sexual exploitation and barriers to thriving within the sex industry

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We all know the benefits of a well embedded trauma informed approach to work with all service users, could make all the difference to a woman facing undisclosed sexual exploitation and abuse.

As professionals we need to:

- Take time to listen - provide space and time for survivors to self-regulate before entering in depth conversations
- Approach client conversations with an open mind
- Design spaces and systems around what it is like for someone experiencing trauma to enter and engage, to minimise the danger of triggering

A trauma-informed approach asks the questions:

What are we doing to address unconscious bias and stigma?

- Individually as professionals approaching conversations with service users (am I 'across the desk' or 'alongside the person?)

- Within teams and workforces, do our team members feel safe and listened to?
- Across our organisations, are we growing in cultural and structural competency?

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https://modernslavery.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/downloads/MSPEC_Cultural_Competency_.summary_final.pdf?dm=1723557098

Am I 'across the desk' or 'alongside the person?'

- Within teams and workforces

Do our team members feel safe and listened to?

- Across our organisations

Are we adhering to the 5 foundations of Trauma Informed Working?

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

(Fallot and Harris 2009)

Further reading on trauma-informed practice please go to:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272167009_Creating_Cultures_of_Trauma-Informed_Care_A_Self-Assessment_and_Planning_Protocol

Portsmouth City Council in partnership with:

VISTA

Portsmouth City of Sanctuary