

Meaningfulness of life between sex trafficking female survivors and females from the general public in India

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Abstract

Sex trafficking is commercial sex induced by fraud, force, or coercion, which is a form of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Women in any country of the world usually have less power, lower status, and lesser economic opportunities, and are not treated equally as men in their workforces and communities. These factors place females in a vulnerable position making them easy prey for sex traffickers. This study aimed to compare the meaning in life between survivors of sex trafficking and females from the general public. A total of 100 samples comprised this study, of which, 50 were female survivors of sex trafficking and 50 were females from the general public. The results show that for the current level of meaning in life, the p-value is .00, which is less than .05, hence there is a significant difference in the current level of meaning in life between the two groups. For the degree of searching for meaning in life, the p-value is .02, which is also less than .05, hence there is a significant difference in the degree of searching for meaning in life between the two groups. The mean for the current level of meaning in life is 67.09 for females from the general public, which is higher than the mean of 33.91 for female survivors of sex trafficking. For searching for meaning in life, the mean is 43.86 for females from the general public, which is lower than the mean of 57.14 for females rescued from sex trafficking.

Keywords: sex trafficking, survivor, trafficker, meaning in life.

1. Introduction

"Ultimately, a man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life, he can only respond by being responsible."

(Viktor E. Frankl, 1905-1997)

Sex trafficking is commercial sex induced by fraud, force, or coercion, which is a form of human trafficking for sexual exploitation (Department of State U.S, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2017). This kind of human trafficking involves males and females but it affects more women and girls (UNODC, 2000). Women in any country of the world usually have

less power, lower status, and lesser economic opportunities, and are not treated equally as men in their workforces and communities, which place them in a vulnerable position making them easy prey for sex traffickers (Farr, 2005).

Sex trafficking is the biggest subtype of human trafficking and is a rapidly-growing type of human trafficking, in which human rights are violated, such as the most basic one - the right to life (Hodge, 2008; United Nations, 2002). The victims are also exposed to injuries, illness, infection, and transmission of life-threatening diseases (Zimmerman et al., 2008).

Sex trafficking operates based on two elements, which are slavery and slave marketing, being the first one representing the demand, and the latter, the supply side of this illegal business (Kara, 2010). Forms of

acquiring a sex slave mostly happen through abduction, deceit, romance or seduction, recruitment by former sex slaves, and sale by a family member (Kara, 2010; Williamson et al. 2012).

1.1 Sex trafficking in India

Sex trafficking business in India profits a billion dollars every year and the number of victims that are sexually exploited is unknown but it is estimated that 27 million females are sex-trafficked in the country (Gupta, 2012; "For India's sex trafficking victims, family members often bear part of the blame," 2017). Approximately 200 females enter the sex business every day and 80 percent of them are coerced to do so, and every eight-minute, one girl goes missing in the country, almost all of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation (Hughes, Sporcic, Mendelsohn & Chirgwin, 999). Poverty is the main factor contributing to women's vulnerability to trafficking for sexual exploitation in the country (Ray, 2015). Traffickers lure girls and women with false job opportunities in big cities and hoping for a better life, these women are willing to go with the traffickers who in turn sell them to pimps or brothel owners (Matusek, 2016; Ray, 2015).

1.2. Survivorship and positive psychology

Subjective experience is of great importance in positive psychology, which is well-being, signifying contentment, and satisfaction with life associated with the past, present, and future. Hope and optimism are related to the future, and related to the present life is happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This is grounded in the fact that individuals strive to live a meaningful and fulfilling life cultivating and pursuing the best they possess within themselves to improve their overall quality of life (Seligman, 2013).

Meaning in life is a personal engagement and expressiveness with activities that connect the individual to a transcending view of life (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2010). It may derive from self-improvement effort, individual goals, interpersonal relationships, religion, satisfying activities, or transcendent philosophical view proportion a deep sense of life's purpose and a better understanding of this journey of life (King, Hicks, Krull & Del Gaiso, 2006). Research has reported that meaning in life and well-being can be increased by post-traumatic

growth (Triplett et al., 2012), showing that post-traumatic growth can improve well-being and increase the meaningfulness of life among survivors of sex trafficking (Evans, 2019).

1.3. Rationale of the Study

Meaning in life is of great importance for an individual's "good life" (King & Napa, 1998). Human beings strive to live a meaningful life (Seligman, 2013), hence studying this topic is essential to understand survivors and to help them to cultivate the best they have within themselves to enhance their overall quality of life and well-being.

1.4. Aim

To compare meaningfulness of life between female survivors of sex trafficking and females from the general public.

1.5. Research questions

1. Are the scores of the current level of meaning in life lower for survivors of sex trafficking?
2. Are the scores for search for meaning in life higher for survivors of sex trafficking?

1.6. Hypotheses

Null hypothesis. There is no significant difference in the current level of meaning in life (Presence) and in the degree of the search for meaning in life (Search) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public.

Alternative hypothesis. There is a significant difference in the current level of meaning in life (presence) and in the degree of the search for meaning in life (Search) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public.

2. Method

The data collection for this study started in May 2021 and finished in the last week of November 2021. It was done in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Nagaland, and Tamil Nadu.

2.1. Operational definitions

Sex trafficking. Human trafficking in which involves girls and women for sexual

exploitation compelled by fraud, force, or coercion (George, 2012).

Survivor. Female victims of sex trafficking who have been into prostitution against their will (Baldwin, Fehrenbacher & Eisenma, 2015).

Trafficker. Criminals who are involved in recruiting women into prostitution by fraud, coercion, or force (United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2014).

Meaning in life. It's a process of discovery within a world that is inherently meaningful (Frankl, 1985). The search for meaning in life is a primary individual's motive, and when it is not found, a person might experience an existential emptiness (Frankl, 1985).

2.2. Ethical considerations

Subjects voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, they were also informed about the purpose of the research and that they would not face any consequences in case they decide to withdraw participation from the study in the future. Furthermore, the researcher got approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Christ (Deemed to be University) to conduct the study because it involved the participation of a vulnerable population - survivors of sex trafficking.

Potential harm. The researcher informed the subjects that the present study does not imply any psychological or physical harm or distress.

2.3. Tool

The meaning in life questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ was conducted to measure the current level of meaning in life (presence) and the degree of searching for meaning in life (searching). The questionnaire is free to use for research purposes. A copy of the English version of the test was downloaded free of cost from the link provided by the author. The questionnaire contains 10 items to assess two dimensions of meaning in life, which are, (1) presence of current meaning which measures how much the respondent feels his or her life have meaning, and (2) the degree of the search for meaning which measures how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their life. It is a seven-point scale, which ranges from

'Absolute True' to 'Absolute Untrue' (Steger, 2012). The author also provided the scoring of the test. To score the presence of meaning, "subtract the rating for item 9 from 8, then add to the ratings for items 1, 4, 5, and 6" (Steger, 2010). To score the search of the meaning subscale, "add together the ratings for items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. Scores range between 5 and 35" (Steger, 2010).

2.4. Data collection process

Snowball and purposive sampling techniques were used to select samples for this study. First, a telephone call was made to directors of aftercare homes explaining the purpose of the study, and permission was asked to conduct the questionnaires with girls and women residents. Before conducting the meaning of life questionnaire (MLQ), the purpose of the study was explained to the women and girls and they were also informed that they could withdraw their participation in the study without any consequence at any time. The questionnaires were administered in English because they knew English as their second language.

2.5. Statistical analysis

The meaning in life questionnaire (MLQ) was scored and the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 23 (IBM SPSS 23).

First, a test of normality was conducted and the Shapiro-Wilk Test P-value was .00 for presence (current level of meaning), which is lower than 0.05. For searching (the degree of the search for meaning), the Shapiro-Wilk Test P-value was also .00, which is also lower than 0.05. The data for both variables (presence and search) are not normally distributed. Since the data were not normally distributed, an independent sample t-test could not be conducted. The Mann-Whitney U test, which is a non-parametric test, was used to analyze the data.

Table 1 shows the results of the normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) for the current level of meaning (Presence) in life and the degree of searching for meaning in life (Searching)

| Variables | Statistic | df | Sig. (P-value) |
|-----------|-----------|-----|----------------|
| Presence | .944 | 100 | .00 |

| | | | |
|--------|------|-----|-----|
| Search | .920 | 100 | .00 |
|--------|------|-----|-----|

Mann-Whitney U test. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the scores of the two groups, (1) females from the general public (50 samples) and (2) female survivors of sex trafficking (50 samples).

3. Results

A number of 100 samples composed this study, including 50 females from the general public and 50 female sex trafficking survivors. The aim was to compare the meaning in life between survivors of sex trafficking and females from the general public. The researcher proposed two research questions (1) 'are the scores of the current level of meaning in life lower for survivors of sex trafficking?' (2) 'are the scores for search for meaning in life higher for survivors of sex trafficking?' The findings show that female sex trafficking survivors scored lower in the current level of meaning in life, and higher for the degree of the search for meaning compared to females from the general public.

The Null hypothesis proposed that there is no significant difference in the current level of

meaning in life (Presence) and the degree of the search for meaning in life (Searching) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public, and the alternative hypothesis was that there is a significant difference in the current level of meaning in life (presence) and the degree of the search for meaning in life (Searching) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public.

Table 2 shows the result of the Mann-Whitney U test for the two groups comparing the current level of meaning in life (presence). The mean for group 1 (females from the general public) is 67.09, and for group 2, (survivors) mean is 33.91. The P-value was found to be .00. Table 3 shows the result of the Mann-Whitney U test for the two groups comparing the degree of the search for meaning in life (searching). The mean for group 1 (females from the general public) is 43.86, and for group 2, (survivors) mean is 57.14. The P-value was found to be .02.

The mean for the current level of meaning in life is 67.09 for females from the general public, which is higher than the mean of 33.91 for female survivors of sex trafficking. For searching for meaning in life, the mean is 43.86 for females from the general public, which is lower than the mean of 57.14 for females rescued from sex trafficking.

Table 2. *Mann-Whitney U test comparing the current level of meaning in life (presence) between females from the general population (group 1) and female survivors of sex trafficking (group 2)*

| Variable | Group | N | Mean | U | Z | P-value |
|----------|-------|----|-------|---------|--------|---------|
| Presence | 1 | 50 | 67.09 | 420.500 | -5.730 | .00 |
| | 2 | 50 | 33.91 | | | |

Table 3. *Mann-Whitney U test comparing the degree of searching for meaning in life (Search) between females from the general population (group 1) and female survivors of sex trafficking (group 2)*

| Variable | Group | N | Mean | U | Z | P-value |
|----------|-------|----|-------|---------|--------|---------|
| Search | 1 | 50 | 43.86 | 918.000 | -2.293 | .02 |
| | 2 | 50 | 57.14 | | | |

The results show that for the current level of meaning in life, the p-value is .00, which is lower than .05, hence there is a significant difference in the current level of meaning in life between the two groups. For the degree of the search for meaning in life, the p-value is .02, which is also lower than .05, therefore there is a significant difference in the degree of the search for meaning in life between the two groups. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

4. Conclusion

The Null hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the current level of meaning in life (Presence) and the degree of the search for meaning in life (Search) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis which stated that there is a significant difference in the current level of meaning in life (presence) and the degree of the search for meaning in life (Search) between female survivors of sex trafficking and women from the general public was accepted.

The results show those female survivors of sex trafficking are searching for something that makes their life meaningful. The sex trafficking experience had affected the way those women and girls see life and its meaning. That is probably because their life in slavery was marked by physical and psychological abuse, rape, torture to name a few of what they have been through (Da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019).

4.1. Limitations of the study

One of the limitations was the incapacity of the researcher to communicate in the local languages such as Kanada, Hindi, and other languages. Because of this limitation, only women and girls who knew English as a second language participated in this study.

4.2. Implications of the study

There are limited research studies with this population. So, the present research gives insights on how survivors feel about life, related to its meaning as they embark on the journey of recovery.

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