



WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

A Global Mental Health Education Program of the
WORLD FEDERATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH



EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS OF CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Understanding and Responding to The Psychological Needs of Trafficked Children

The Extent of the Problem

There are between 1 and 2 million women and children trafficked worldwide each year, constituting the third largest source of funding for organized crime. Specialized psychological services for trafficked children are minimal, though traumas experienced by trafficked children are many and include:

- Separation from loved ones/support systems
- Physical abuse or threats of abuse
- Threats against loved ones for noncompliance
- Sexual exploitation
- Psychological humiliation
- Being restrained/confined to a locked space
- Being transported without knowledge of destination
- Witnessing violence and sexual activity

Other negative experiences include:

- Deprived of opportunities for education
- Deprived of critical childhood play experiences
- Being forced to change names
- Being forced to lie, steal or commit other illegal acts
- Inadequate nutrition and medical care

Consequences of the Trafficking Experiences on Children

- Negative perception of self-worth
- Sense of vulnerability and helplessness
- Distorted value system/Involvement in illegal activities
- Physical illness
- Brain changes
- Low educational achievement
- Sexual promiscuity
- Difficulty in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships
- Loss of ability to trust
- Negative expectations about the future
- Hypervigilance/heightened anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Sleep and eating problems
- Profound sadness

- Irritability
- Self-destructive behavior
- Inappropriate attachment behaviors
- Developmental delays or regressions

Healing children who are victims of trafficking requires the following:

- Teach children to trust again
- Support strong, nurturing families, able to rebuild their lives
- Help children and families feel connected to others in their community
- Help children who feel like outsiders gain a sense of belonging
- Remove emotional and cultural barriers that prevent children from learning
- Help children whose childhoods were stolen learn to play again
- Rekindle hope in the hearts of children
- Help children believe in their future and dream of the good things to come

For local information, contact:

Source: Reprinted from “Understanding and Responding to The Psychological Needs of Trafficked Children,” the Center for Multicultural Human Services.

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