

Exploring Promising Practices for Collaborative Service Delivery to Survivors of Human Trafficking

Executive Summary

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Introduction

Victim Services of Peel (VSOP) is implementing a collaborative service delivery model that provides immediate response to victims/survivors of human trafficking called This Way Out→. This model embeds VSOP's Anti-Human Trafficking Counsellors with the Vice Unit (Human Trafficking Unit) of Peel Regional Police. To inform the development of this collaborative model, the current literature review seeks to determine the best or promising practices for collaborative service delivery to survivors of human trafficking.

Methods

The following databases were searched for published scholarly articles: PsychInfo, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The database searches identified 138 hits. After reviewing titles and abstracts for relevance, 68 full-text studies were reviewed. Including the articles provided by VSOP, a total of 20 studies were included in the current review. Many of the articles selected were reviews of data across multiple human trafficking interventions.

The published literature on collaborative approaches between police units and social services mainly included qualitative data from engagement with law enforcement and service providers through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. These field experts were solicited for their opinions and experiences with respect to what they believe works well and what should be avoided in such collaborative models.

Promising Practices

Much of the evidence for collaborative service delivery models for human trafficking survivors relies on qualitative data gathered from practitioners working with these collaborative service delivery models. There is limited evidence from more rigorous outcome evaluation studies (e.g., randomized control trials, quasi-experimental) to draw on for this review, and, as a result, the recommendations are considered promising practices rather than best practices. The promising practices were identified based on their consistency across multiple studies and were categorized into 10 themes.

1 Involvement of Survivors in Direct Response and Program Development

The meaningful involvement of human trafficking survivors in direct response has been identified as a promising practice for collaborative service delivery (Contreras, 2022; Nagy et al., 2023; Preble et al., 2023; Roe-Sepowitz, 2014; Victim Services of Durham Region/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023). In successful collaborative models, survivors often serve the role of the counsellor on the human trafficking team. Survivors are effective team members because they are able to more easily build trust with other survivors leading to increased disclosures and a willingness to seek support (Victim Services of Durham Region/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021). It also has been reported to decrease distress levels for survivors and increase readiness to leave (Preble, et al., 2023). Survivors receiving support also find it affirming to see a human trafficking counsellor who was able to leave their trafficking situation. It is important that counsellors have a combination of lived experience and relevant clinical education. In situations where a survivor cannot be hired for this role, it is important that they receive appropriate training and education including receiving training directly from survivors (Victim Services of Durham Region/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021).

In addition, the literature emphasizes the importance of involving survivors in the ongoing development and implementation of the collaborative model (Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). Those with lived experience can offer victim-centred and trauma-informed insight to task force practices, including investigation practices and the development of response protocols and coordination around cases of human trafficking (Thompson et al., 2022).

2 Single Point of Contact & Warm Transfers

The importance of having a consistent single support person for the human trafficking survivor is strongly supported in the literature (Dandurand et al., 2023; Nagy et al., 2023; Nswonwu et al., 2018; Preble et al., 2023; Timonshkina, 2019; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023). This consistency builds trust and an improved continuum of services for the survivor. It allows survivors to feel safe and avoid having to repeat their stories to new workers throughout the process (Nagy et al., 2023; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023).

Evidence also suggests that warm transfers are important for successfully connecting survivors to other service providers (Dandurand et al., 2023; Nagy et al., 2023). Warm transfers support survivors by guiding them through the systems and connecting them directly to service providers, rather than expecting them to seek support on their own (Dandurand et al., 2023).

3 Co-location

Co-location of human trafficking task force team members under one roof is another promising practice for collaborative service delivery models discussed in the literature (Gibbs et al., 2015; Koegler et al., 2021; McCoy et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2022; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023). Co-location has been shown to facilitate collaboration and cooperation, promote relationship-building, allow timely resolution of problems, and facilitates investigations and prosecutions (McCoy et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2022; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023).



4 Client-Centred & Trauma-Informed Services

Client-centred care is considered essential to the success of the collaborative service delivery model for human trafficking. Client-centred care should be trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and allow survivors to have autonomy over decision-making regarding their own care and treatment. Additional principles of client-centred care include non-judgment, inclusivity, informed consent, empowerment, safety, transparency, privacy, and confidentiality (Timonshkina, 2019). Client-centred care is not just important for social services but also for law enforcement partners including interviews, investigations, and prosecutions (Thompson et. al., 2022). Client-centred care reduces the risk of re-traumatization for survivors (Nagy et al., 2023; Victim Services of Durham/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021) and some evidence suggests that survivors who felt listened to, believed, and given time to heal at their own pace were more likely to engage with services (Dadurand et al., 2022).

5 Meeting Essential Needs of Survivors

Meeting essential needs is a critical element required for victims to exit their trafficking situation. The care needs include emergency shelter and food, financial assistance, medical care, and substance use treatment (Dandurand et al., 2023; Preble et. al, 2023; Roe-Sepowitz, 2014; Victim Services of Durham/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021). One comprehensive review of the literature describes the importance of meeting these needs during a critical response period of 72 hours to 1 week after contact (Timonshkina, 2019). It is during this period when survivors are most vulnerable to ending up back in their previous trafficking situation (Timonshkina, 2019).



6 Referral Network & Community Asset Mapping

The development of vetted referral networks and community asset mapping are also mentioned in the literature, consistent with the importance of providing a seamless continuum of care to support survivors. The research highlights the significance of creating protocols, collaborative response tools, and resource guides to streamline services (Koegler et al., 2021; Preble et al., 2023; Timonshkina, 2019; Victim Services of Toronto, 2021). These tools aim to involve multiple local services, such as shelters, social services, and food services, and support the coordination of services to support survivors. The development of these protocols typically requires extensive consultations with stakeholders, community asset-mapping, formalized interagency partnerships, and collaboration agreements (Preble et al., 2023; Timonskina, 2019). The goal of these resources is to provide survivors with multiple points of entry for assistance and a quick and coordinated response for survivors (Preble et al., 2023; Timonskina, 2019).

7 Formalized Structure & Direct Channels of Communication

The literature highlights the importance of a formal team structure, clear roles and responsibilities, and consistent communication channels to discuss clients, in order for the collaborative service delivery model to succeed (Kim et al, 2018; Preble et al., 2023; Thompson et. al., 2020; Victim Services of Durham/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021; Victim Services of Toronto, 2023). Role confusion among the human trafficking response team might result in feelings of confusion or distrust among survivors and a slower response from the collaborative team. There is strong support in the research for developing formal agreements and standardized protocols that establish goals and objectives, delineate roles and responsibilities, and create processes for communication and conflict resolution (Jones, 2023; Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2020; Winterdyk 2017).

8 Specialized Training

The research emphasizes the importance of providing the team with human trafficking specific training and an understanding of best practices for interagency collaboration. As an example, the HALT model incorporates survivor-led training for police, focusing on understanding survivor's experiences, avoiding traumatization, and addressing potential harms caused by pressuring survivors for information (Victim Services of Durham/Durham Regional Police Services, 2021). Alternatively, training for counsellors focuses on identification methods used by law enforcement, safety protocols, as well as the limitations and legal responsibilities of investigators. Timonkshina's (2019) review of the literature highlights the importance of training in interagency collaborative best practice to counteract obstacles, such as turfism, agency dominance, and ineffective leadership.

9 Proactive Approach to Identify Survivors

A proactive approach to identifying human trafficking survivors has been cited as an important component of a comprehensive human trafficking response model (Durham, 2021; Olson-Piatwanakat and Baskin, 2020; Roe-Septwiz, 2014; Thompson et al., 2022). Various methods are used to proactively identify survivors, including undercover operations or "stings" (Durham, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). To support this approach, it is recommended to develop a clear procedure for victim identification, select relevant human trafficking indicators (also known as "red flags" or "warning signs", and develop appropriate tools and methods for collecting information (Timonshkina et al., 2019). The literature also highlights the importance of immediately connecting survivors to services once they have been identified (Miller et al., 2020; Roe-Sepotwitz, 2014).

10 Coordinating Body/Advisory Board

The review of the literature underscores the importance of having a coordinating body or advisory group to ensure that there is an effective intersectoral and interagency collaboration when responding to human trafficking (Carpenter, 2019; Gerassi et al., 2017; Kenny et al., 2022; Richi-Zavaleta et al., 2021; Timonshkina, 2019). The group is typically composed of law enforcement, social service organizations, health care providers, researchers, and survivors. The role of the coordinating body varies. In some cases, the purpose of the group is to provide overall coordination of the human trafficking response in a select catchment area (Timonshkina, 2019). For others, the goal is to share and learn from others' experiences and provide opportunities for coordination and connection between different service providers (Gerassi et al., 2017). In other instances, the inter-agency group would discuss and problem solve specific cases (Kenny et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Despite a lack of empirical evidence to guide best practice recommendations in this area, the published literature yielded many consistent themes that service providers deem as effective in their work to support survivors of human trafficking. It is recommended that VSOP consider the promising practices from this review in the development of their collaborative service delivery model, wherever possible.

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