Reviewer’s report

Title: The recovery experience of people who were sex trafficked: the thwarted journey towards goal pursuit

Version: 0 Date: 06 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Hanni Stoklosa

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this article. Overall it is excellent and provides a unique perspective.

Some suggestions, in no particular order

I agree with some of the concerns cited by the previous journal reviewers:

- update citations: In particular, there is an updated systematic review of health & mental health consequences of trafficking from 2016 which could probably replace citations #1,2:


- use of the term "service users" - I would prefer "participants" just as the prior reviewers suggested

-Prior reviewer stated

You identified employees recommended participants. Did the employees identify reasons for their selections?

You responded: Participants were suggested in discussion between the researcher and the employees of the shelter. This is necessary for this type of research, for several reasons: safety (to make sure we did not interview service users who were not ready for an interview) and diversity (to make sure we interviewed a diverse sample of service users). The employees were asked to list adult, foreign victims of sexual exploitation. They often mentioned service users with emphasis who would be able to voice their views about the service provision provided (the main goal of this study). We then selected participants against the inclusion criteria of the study and in order to generate a diverse sample of participants

Please include some of this level of detail in your methods section (about how employees selected participants)
typo: "Service users were exclusively adults; >95% was of foreign nationality" should be "Service users were exclusively adults; >95% WERE of foreign nationality"

Consider changing this sentence

"The research applied a broadly grounded theory approach, with some aspects of narrative research."

to:

"The research applied a grounded theory approach combined with some aspects of narrative analysis."

In the same way consider changing

"Data analysis took a broadly grounded theory approach, following the stage of familiarization, open coding, axial coding and selective coding" to "Data analysis took a grounded theory approach, following the stage of familiarization, open coding, axial coding and selective coding."

The "broadly" is confusingly placed.

Title: as this is a study of sex trafficking survivors, I would make that explicit in the title

Methods:

-what were the inclusion & exclusion criteria?

-could you include rationale as why the sample was limited to sexual exploitation?

Overall the results section has a colloquial tone to it, which contrasts starkly with the discussion section.

Here is one example "They seemed almost like runners in the starting blocks, waiting for the gun to go off to allow them to take off and to start building their futures." I understand some of the terminology used derives from "in vivo" codes, but even taking that into account the manuscript reads as if there are two different authors for the two sections (results vs discussion).

Also, there are times where the results section turns into discussion or interpretation of the results, rather than the pure presentation of the results.

Here is an example:
"People who experience rapid change, particularly when the affective quality of the present is negative, are more likely to draw temporal comparisons, potentially explaining why this theme was so dominant in service users' narratives.[12]"

Here is another example:

This section is discussion and should not be under "results": A note about differences between men and women (discussion, not results)

The first half of this sentence is true, however the second half may or may not be true- males may have unique needs, which is why we should engage survivors to learn from them:

"This makes clear that male victims must be included in debates about service provision after human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and should be viewed to have similar needs as female victims."

This sentence is not needed:

Answering these questions has given rise to this article.

This phrase seems unrelated to the rest of the sentence it is connected to:

"asylum seekers centres are frequently reported to be intolerant environments with regards to men who have sex with men.[14]"

typo:

As participant explained:

Should probably be

"As one participant explained"

In the policy brief appendix there is a call for trauma-informed approaches, which I agree with, but it is not supported explicitly by the data—encourage the authors to limit their policy recommendations to those explicitly supported by the data/mentioned in the discussion section explicitly

Appreciate figure 1, would love to have other visual conceptual frameworks to further illustrate the authors' rich discussion section

Topic guide—appendix 3—for confidentiality/safety reasons is it ok to name the shelters?
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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