

WORKING WITH HT SURVIVORS WHO STRUGGLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDER

Overview

Many trafficking survivors struggle with substance abuse, and “opioid addiction in and of itself may be a red flag for clinicians to screen for trafficking.”¹ Traffickers may use substance abuse as a means of control over their victim,² or substance abuse may increase someone’s risk for being trafficked.³ Victims or survivors may start using substances during or after being trafficked to numb physical or emotional pain.⁴ By one estimate, half of human trafficking survivors struggle with opioid addiction.⁵

Best Practices

Address Basic Needs of Survivors with Substance Abuse Disorder

- In addition to trafficking-related and trauma-related needs, provide access to “high-quality and long-term” substance abuse treatment.⁶
- Consider mental health support or medical treatment (e.g. needs relating to detox), when necessary.⁷

Consider and Address Obstacles Resulting from Substance Abuse Disorder

- Substance use may create barriers to finding residential facilities since many prohibit substance use or do not allow those with substance abuse disorder.⁸

¹ Stoklosa, H., MacGibbon, M., and Stoklosa, J. (2017, Jan.) Human Trafficking, Mental Illness, and Addiction: Avoiding Diagnostic Overshadowing, American Medical Association Journal of Ethics

² Victims and Traffickers, The Polaris Project
<https://polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers>

³ Stoklosa, H. (2017)

⁴ Stoklosa, H. (2017)

⁵ Chon, K. (n.d.) Human Trafficking and Opioid Abuse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
<https://www.traffickingmatters.com/addicted-to-you-drug-addiction-as-a-means-of-coercion/>

⁶ Chon, K. (n.d.)

⁷ Substance Abuse Needs, Office for Victims of Crime. Office of Justice Programs
<https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/44-comprehensive-victim-services/mental-health-needs/substance-abuse-needs>

⁸ Eastwood-Paticchio, E. Addicted to You: Drug Addiction as a Means of Coercion. Trafficking Matters
<https://www.traffickingmatters.com/addicted-to-you-drug-addiction-as-a-means-of-coercion/>



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- Trafficking survivors who struggle with substance abuse disorder likely have criminal records from drug use. A criminal record can lead to “collateral consequences, including job restrictions, the loss of the right to vote, and potential deportation for non-citizens.”⁹ Consider vacatur of the criminal conviction. See [cite to vacatur section of toolkit].

Include Substance Use Disorder Specialists as Part of a Broader Multidisciplinary Team

- Multiple resources suggest a trauma-informed approach for survivors with substance abuse issues.¹⁰

Resources

Online Training: Victims with Substance Abuse Issues, Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs.

https://www.ovctac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline_VATOnline.cfm

Substance Abuse Needs, Office for Victims of Crime. Office of Justice Programs

<https://www.ovctac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/44-comprehensive-victim-services/mental-health-needs/substance-abuse-needs/>

⁹ Eastwood-Paticchio (n.d.)

¹⁰ Eastwood-Paticchio (n.d.)

