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

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2 Victims and Traffickers, The Polaris Project
https://polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers
5 Chon, K. (n.d.) Human Trafficking and Opioid Abuse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
6 Chon, K. (n.d.)
7 Substance Abuse Needs, Office for Victims of Crime. Office of Justice Programs
https://www.ovttac.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
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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.” 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.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline_VATOnline.cfm

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

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9 Eastwood-Paticchio (n.d.)
10 Eastwood-Paticchio (n.d.)