

JOURNAL of MODERN SLAVERY

A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Human Trafficking Solutions

Volume 6, Issue 4, 2021

CHILD LABOUR Special Edition

“I’m literally here to hear your story... let them know that”: Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery

Dr. Romana Farooq

Principal Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Lead at The Kolvin Service (Community Adolescent Forensic Service), Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust & Academic Tutor at Newcastle University

Chelsea Addy

Assistant Psychologist at The Kolvin Service (Community Adolescent Forensic Service), Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Gavin Smyth

Primary Care Network & Place Based Team Lead at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Afua Appiah

Clinical Psychologist in Training at Newcastle University

“I’m literally here to hear your story... let them know that”: **Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery**

Dr. Romana Farooq

Principal Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Lead at The Kolvin Service (Community Adolescent Forensic Service), Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust & Academic Tutor at Newcastle University

Chelsea Addy

Assistant Psychologist at The Kolvin Service (Community Adolescent Forensic Service), Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Gavin Smyth

Primary Care Network & Place Based Team Lead at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Afua Appiah

Clinical Psychologist in Training at Newcastle University

Abstract

Child trafficking is when “*children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold*” (NSPCC, 2021). Child exploitation is “*when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain... including sexual exploitation or forcing the child to commit crime*” (Cambridgeshire Constabulary, 2021). Modern day slavery is “*defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation*” (Public Health England, 2017).

There are a high number of cases of child trafficking, exploitation, and slavery in the UK and at present, ‘best practice fit’ routine therapeutic interventions are used with children and young people who have been subjected to, or are at risk of been subjected to, trafficking, exploitation and slavery. Although these can be effective at reducing harm in the short-term, few

interventions have been developed which begin to promote long-term and sustainable positive change in the lives of children and young people (Countryman-Roswurm & DiLollo, 2017).

Here in this practice paper, we outline the use of narrative therapy techniques with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery, in particular the Tree of Life Approach (Ncube, 2006). The Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006) is presented as an approach for supporting children and young people to reconstruct personal narratives focussed on resilience and hope.

Keywords: Child Trafficking, Child Exploitation, Child Slavery, Narrative Therapy, Tree of Life

Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery: A UK Context

Child trafficking is when “*children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold*”.¹

Child exploitation is “*when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain... including sexual exploitation or forcing the child to commit crime*”.²

Modern day slavery is “*defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation*”.³

It is important to note that these definitions are both complex and contested. They are not discrete phenomenon which occur but are those which both overlap and interplay and are all forms of child abuse. Whether a child or young person has been exploited, trafficked, or subjected to modern day slavery, they will have experienced a range of abuse and neglect, which includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse as forms of control. Children and young people are also likely to be physically and emotionally neglected and may be sexually exploited. In essence they have experienced significant and complex trauma(s).

In the UK, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.⁴ Within the UK, 10,613 potential victims of human trafficking were identified within the year 2020, with 4946 (47%) of these victims being those which were exploited as children, which is a

¹ NSPCC. (2021). *Child Trafficking*. Retrieved from <https://nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abus/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>

² Cambridgeshire Constabulary. (2021). *Child exploitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambs.police.uk/information-and-services/Child-protection/CSE>

³ Public Health England. (2017). *Research and Analysis: Modern slavery and public health*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-and-public-health/modern-slavery-and-public-health>

⁴ NSPCC Learning. (2021). *Children and the law*. Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/children-the-law#heading-top>

10% increase from the previous year.⁵ Additionally, in the year ending March 2019, in England alone, 2230 children were subjected to a child protection plan for the experience of or risk of sexual abuse which includes sexual exploitation and trafficking for sexual purposes.⁶

Specifically, there have been major investigative and national inquiries in the UK into instances of child exploitation, such as the Alexis Jay Inquiry where approximately 1400 children were found to have been sexually exploited and subjected to sexual violence from 1997 to 2013.⁷

Despite the large numbers of recognised cases of child trafficking, exploitation and slavery, definitions of these phenomenon can often remain unclear, inconsistent and vague. In 2017 the UK Government announced changes to their definition of child exploitation due to the previous being ‘unclear and out of date’.⁸ However, along with the UK Government’s definition of child exploitation, trafficking and slavery, it is important to consider what this term means to children and young people who themselves have been subjected to or are at risk of being subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. In the UK, many practitioners and services often abbreviate child sexual exploitation to ‘CSE’ and although practitioners may shorthand their discourse for ease of use, it can perhaps inadvertently sanitise the issue or take away from the child or young person’s difficult and traumatic experiences. Farooq and Colleagues (2018) undertook collaborative conversations with children and young people who had been subjected to sexual exploitation on their experience of language and definitions of child sexual exploitation in the UK, one young person reflected:

“What is CSE? Personally when I see stuff like that, ‘CSE’... by shortening ‘Child Sexual Exploitation’ to that it kind of takes the importance away from those words... When you actually say Child Sexual Exploitation it’s more impactful isn’t it? I can imagine for a young person... you’re sitting there and someone says ‘you’re CSE’, you’d be like ‘what?’... You’d find that all of a sudden that trauma that you’ve been through all of a sudden wasn’t as traumatic to the psychologist because they’re calling it CSE they’re not calling it what it actually is”⁹

⁵ Home Office. (2021). Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, UK, End of Year Summary, 2020. Retrieved from [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2020 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019*. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/caddy/Downloads/Child%20sexual%20abuse%20in%20England%20and%20Wales%20year%20ending%20March%202019.pdf>

⁷ Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/279/independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham>

⁸ Community Care (2017). Government changes statutory definition of child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/02/16/government-changes-statutory-definition-child-sexual-exploitation/>

⁹ Voice of a child quoted in Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 55.

Narratives of children and young people evidenced the importance of attending to language and deconstructing dominant understandings of child exploitation.¹⁰ Their narratives also highlighted the need to scrutinise interventions and treatments and whether the needs of children who were subjected to exploitation were being met. These ideas are important to consider for child trafficking, forced labour and slavery too.¹¹

Mental Health Needs of Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery

Children who are victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery have often been victims of extreme physical and psychological violence and as a result, have experienced significant psychological distress and multiple traumas, often within their early years of development.¹²

The psychological effects of exposure to multiple traumas for child survivors of trafficking, exploitation and slavery frequently results in the presence of complex trauma symptomology and various mental health needs and disorders, to include, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), affective disorders such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder and severe stress.¹³ As well as this, child survivors may also experience other associated health risks, such as sleep difficulties, nightmares, flashbacks, collapse, trauma-memory-associated body pain, dissociation, palpitations and physical difficulties, which contributes to these complex presentations.¹⁴

Soroptimist International of the Americas (2008) found that 79% of trafficked women and girls were trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation.¹⁵ Research has also shown that sexual exploitation can result in serious mental health consequences, particularly anxiety, depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.¹⁶

¹⁰ Appiah, A., Baguley, S., SPACE & Farooq, R. (2021). *Making Words Matter. Attending to Language when working with children subject to or at risk of Exploitation: A Practice & Knowledge Briefing*. The National Working Group for Exploited Children, Derby, UK.

¹¹ Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 52 - 57.

¹² Helen Bamber Foundation. (2015). *Addressing mental health needs in survivors of modern day slavery. A critical review and research agenda*. London: The Freedom Fund.

¹³ Wood, L. C. N. (2020). Child modern slavery, trafficking and health: a practical review of factors contributing to children’s vulnerability and the potential impacts of severe exploitation on health. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 4, 1 – 11.

¹⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵ Soroptimist International of the Americas. (2008). Slavery’s new face: Sex trafficking of women and girls. Retrieved from www.soroptimist.org/stoptrafficking.html

¹⁶ Helen Bamber Foundation. (2015). *Addressing mental health needs in survivors of modern day slavery. A critical review and research agenda*. London: The Freedom Fund.

Mental Health & Therapeutic Interventions - What Works?

Within the UK, child trafficking, exploitation and slavery continues to pose systemic challenges in effectively engaging children and young people in therapeutic interventions to reduce risk and harm.¹⁷ Currently in the UK, therapeutic mental health interventions to address child trafficking, exploitation and slavery are primarily focussed on physical safety, stable housing, financial stability, location, relocation, rescue and rehabilitation.¹⁸ For example, in child welfare services, the removal of children and young people from their family homes and communities to often far away residential care homes or secure facilities is a common intervention. Although these interventions provide physical safety by disrupting exploitative relationships and removing the child or young person from immediate risk and harm, it does not address self-esteem, trauma or identity difficulties, as well as psychological and relational dynamics. Shuker (2013) emphasises that children and young people who have experienced trafficking, exploitation and slavery need physical safety alongside both relational and psychological security to work effectively and to ameliorate the effects of their experiences.¹⁹

When physical safety is prioritised without the consideration of relational and psychological security, these interventions will only ever be effective in the short-term and instead of supporting meaningful change in the lives of at-risk children and young people, they promote as some have suggested, a rather enforced compliance.²⁰ Therefore, inhibiting the exit from exploitative relationships in the long-term and potentially inadvertently promoting children and young people’s disengagement from services.²¹

However, there are others who have proposed alternatives to interventions focused solely on physical safety. For example, Scott and Colleagues (2019)²² outline six stages to conducting

¹⁷ Lefevre, M., Hickie, K., Luckock, B., & Ruch, G. (2017). Building trust with children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation: the professional challenge. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47, 2456-2473.

¹⁸ Soderlund, G. (2005). Running from the rescuers: New U.S. crusades against sex trafficking and the rhetoric of abolition. *National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Journal*, 17(3), 64–87; Fong, R., & Cardoso, J. B. (2010). Child human trafficking victims: Challenges for the child welfare system. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 33, 311–316

¹⁹ Shuker, L. (2013). Constructs of Safety for Children in Care Affected by Sexual Exploitation. In Melrose, M., & Pearce, J. (Ed). *Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

²⁰ Beckett, H. (2011). *Not a Work Away: The Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Barnardo’s NI.

²¹ Shuker, L. (2013). Constructs of Safety for Children in Care Affected by Sexual Exploitation. In Melrose, M., & Pearce, J. (Ed). *Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

²² Scott, S., McNeish, D., Bovarnick, S., & Pearce, J. (2019). What works in responding to child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from <https://www.beds.ac.uk/media/268527/what-works-in-cse-july2019.pdf>

direct therapeutic interventions with children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of being subjected to exploitation which includes:

- 1) engagement and relationship building
- 2) support and stability
- 3) providing advocacy
- 4) reducing risks and building resilience
- 5) addressing underlying issues
- 6) enabling growth and moving on

Furthermore, in recent years in the UK, context informed models have been developed with the aim of taking a holistic approach to understanding the therapeutic needs of children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of trafficking, exploitation, and slavery. In the UK, Contextual Safeguarding has been developed as “an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families”.²³ This framework explores the different relationships in a child or young person’s life beyond the family home and recognises the importance of these individuals, communities, and systems as integral in safeguarding children. In addition to this, Hickle and Hallett (2016) have drawn on harm reduction work principles, which are typically used in substance misuse services, and explored their feasibility with children who were subjected to exploitation in the UK to promote child-centred long-term change.²⁴ The key theme emerging in these more novel and innovative interventions has been that interventions which utilise co-production and co-design principles seem to be most effective with children who have been subjected to exploitation. This is further evidenced by the work of Bovarnick and Colleagues (2018) who conducted a UK scoping review as part of the ‘Being Heard’ project that explored the involvement of children and young people in participatory research on sexual violence.²⁵ The key findings from this review were that there was evidence of multiple benefits to collaboratively involving children and young people in participatory interventions addressing sexual violence against children.²⁶

Although some of the models outlined above were informed by research and evaluation, there remains a paucity of evidence base which explores alternative therapeutic interventions with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. In particular, at

²³ University of Bedfordshire & Contextual Safeguarding Network. (2017). Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>

²⁴ Hickle, K., & Hallett, S. (2016). Mitigating Harm: Considering Harm Reduction Principles in Work with Sexually Exploited Young People. *Children and Society*, 30, 302-313.

²⁵ Bovarnick, S., Peace, D., Warrington, C., & Pearce, J. (2018). Being Heard: Promoting Children and Young People’s Involvement in Participatory Research on Sexual Violence. Findings from an International Scoping Review. Retrieved from https://www.our-voices.org.uk/assets/documents/UoB_BeingHeard-report.pdf

²⁶ Ibid.

present in the UK, there remain few evidence-based interventions, which are effective, replicable and grounded in theory.²⁷ It is evident that there is scope for further development of effective interventions and innovative methods in engaging children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of trafficking, exploitation and slavery. Narrative Therapy techniques are explored here as a means of adding to the ‘what works’ UK and international evidence base in engaging and working therapeutically with child victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery.

What is Narrative Therapy?

Narrative therapy focuses on the idea that an individual’s difficulties are not problems which are located within them, but are those which are external to their identity.²⁸ An individual’s life consists of various narratives, influenced and shaped by cultural discourses about identity and power, which help them make sense of who they are. Narrative therapy aims to diminish ‘problem-saturated’ conversations held around an individual and instead, uses various techniques to support these individuals to analyse and reflect upon their narratives in order to help them make sense of their lived experiences and difficulties.²⁹

Narrative Therapy has a lot to offer our understanding of how powerful discourses influence the way in which we listen and respond to children and young people. It focuses on the importance of narratives that are told and untold, as well as narratives that are dominant or subjugated in society and systems.³⁰

Key Narrative Therapists such as White & Epston (1990) have discussed the importance of recognising that our lives and the lives of others are multi-storied and that power influences what stories are heard and what remains unheard.³¹ White (2000) has also related how the stories that are told about us can be so powerful as to shape our identity, highlighting the importance of attending to the language and stories we construct, reconstruct and distribute, as well as deconstructing language and cultural discourses.³²

At its core, Narrative Therapy recognises the harmful psychological effects of dominant stories that disqualify, oppress, limit, or disempower people. It then offers alternatives which

²⁷ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

²⁸ Johnstone, L., & Dallos, R. (2014). *Formulation in Psychology and Psychotherapy: Making sense of people’s problems*. Routledge: London and New York.

²⁹ Madigan, S. (2011). *Narrative Therapy*. American Psychological Association.

³⁰ White, M. (2011). *Narrative practice: Continuing the conversations*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

³¹ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: WW Norton & Company; Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 777-90.

³² White, M. (2000). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

address and make visible the effects of cultural stories about gender, race, class, religion and sexuality on people’s understandings of themselves and the world.³³

The externalisation technique is one of the core processes in Narrative Therapy as it works to separate the individual from their problems and difficulties in the initial stages of therapy.³⁴ This technique involves the problem being defined in a way which is separate from the individual’s experiences and to facilitate this, the problem can be given a different name. For example, the development of the character ‘Sneaky Poo’ has been used as a tool for facilitating discussion and shared understanding of faecal soiling with young children.³⁵

As well as externalising the problem from the individual, Narrative Therapy also serves to help the individual make sense of their story and lived experiences. The deconstruction technique does this by helping the individual break down parts of their story which seem large, overwhelming, and chaotic. The assumptions and implicit meanings behind these broken-down stories are then explored and challenged with the individual and alternative endings can be considered.³⁶

The effectiveness of narrative therapy with the child population has been well documented. In a population of 353 children age 8 to 10 years, it was found that a Narrative Therapy intervention showed significant improvements in the children’s self-awareness, self-management, social awareness/empathy, and responsible decision making.³⁷ This research also showed that Narrative Therapy practices such as externalising and re-authoring, significantly contribute to the development of social and emotional skills in children.

The use of Narrative Therapy with children and young people who have been subject to trafficking, exploitation and slavery in the UK

Within the UK at present, interventions that are routinely used with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery are often a ‘best practice fit’ which consist of ‘rescuing efforts’ to reduce immediate risk and harm.³⁸ As discussed,

³³ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: WW Norton & Company; Russell, S., & Carey, M. (2003). Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas: Exploring some not so commonly asked questions. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2, 67–91.

³⁴ Ryan, F., O’Dwyer, M., & Leaby, M. M. (2015). Separating the Problem and the Person. Insights from Narrative Therapy with People who Stutter. *Top Lang Disorders*, 35(3), 267-274.

³⁵ Heins, T., & Ritchie, K. (1985). *Beating Sneaky Poo: Ideas for faecal soiling*. Canberra, Australia: Child and Adolescent Unit, Mental. Health Branch, ACT Health Authority

³⁶ Ibid, 9.

³⁷ Beaudoin, M., Moersch, M., & Evare, B. S. (2016). The effectiveness of narrative therapy with children’s social and emotional skill development: an empirical study of 813 problem-solving stories. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 35(3), 42-59.

³⁸ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

although these interventions can be effective in reducing risk and harm in the short-term, they are not equally as effective at reducing risk and harm in the long-term and supporting children and young people to lead positive and fulfilling lives.

Additionally, these ‘best practice fit’ interventions can often alienate and invalidate the child or young person’s subjective experiences of exploitation, trafficking and slavery, rather than supporting them to understand their lived experiences and empowering them to lead different, positive and fulfilling lives. The use of Narrative Therapy as a tool to effectively engage children and young people who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking and slavery will be explored and examined.

Although there is limited research exploring the use of Narrative Therapy for Child labour and slavery, there is a growing evidence base around using these techniques with survivors of sex trafficking, sexual violence, child sexual abuse and those exiting sexual exploitation.³⁹ There is also a significant evidence-base that Narrative Therapy is effective when working with the effects of significant and complex trauma. STAIR Narrative Therapy was developed as both a skills-focused and Narrative Therapy intervention for trauma which consists of interventions around emotion-regulation and social impairment which are then used to support the individuals engaging in Narrative Therapy techniques.⁴⁰ Empirical evidence indicated that the STAR Narrative Therapy intervention may be an effective treatment for alleviating post-traumatic distress and improving the emotional and social impairments of these individuals.⁴¹

Countryman-Roswurm and DiLollo (2017) present a method for helping survivors reconstruct personal narratives that reflect resilience, recovery, and prosperity drawing on narrative therapy ideas.⁴² They highlighted how particular Narrative Therapy techniques, such as externalising the problem, focussing on unique outcomes, and contextualising the experiences of survivors of sex trafficking, allowed empowering and subjugated narratives to emerge. The Narrative Therapy practices presented by Countryman-Roswurm & DiLollo (2017) are offered as a component of a larger survivor-centred and survivor-led human trafficking response model in an urban Midwestern city in the United States as well as across Central America.⁴³ They state

³⁹ Harker, T. (1997). Therapy with male sexual abuse survivors: Contesting oppressive life stories. In G. Monk, J. Winslade, K. Crocket, & D. Epston (Eds.), *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope* (Ch. 7, pp. 193–214). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Denborough, D. (2006). *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experiences*. Adelaide, SA: Dulwich Centre Publications; Kress, V. E., Hoffman, R., & Thomas, A. M. (2008). Letters from the future: The use of therapeutic letter writing in counselling sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 3, 105–118; Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

⁴⁰ Hassija, C. M., & Cloitre, M. (2015). STAIR Narrative Therapy: A skills focused approach to trauma-related distress. *Current Psychiatry Reviews*, 11, 172-179.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

⁴³ Ibid.

that the use of these practices has demonstrated promising results in these settings, which is consistent with wider literature on the application of Narrative Therapy with victims of sexual abuse and trauma.⁴⁴

Similarly, Sahin and McVicker (2009) explored the usefulness of optimism and narrative therapy with survivors of sexual abuse. They found that Narrative Therapy and the focus on optimism was significant in helping clients gain a sense of power and influence over their lives. They highlighted that optimism and narrative therapy was helpful in focusing on client’s strengths and competency, as well as encouraging personal growth.⁴⁵

The available evidence base points to the most effective interventions for children and young people who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking and slavery are those, which include the active participation of children and young people themselves, acknowledge the role of systems, families and communities on the lives of children and young people, as well as those that are anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory.⁴⁶ In order for these approaches to be embedded and implemented in services offering therapeutic support, it is vital that clinicians, management, service providers and commissioners recognise the value of innovative and systemic therapeutic approaches to tackling child trafficking, exploitation and slavery and that it is also acknowledged at strategic and policy level. It is proposed that the Narrative Therapy approach termed Tree of Life offers this and enables collaborative and reflexive conversations to take place.⁴⁷ The following section will outline the Tree of Life approach and the authors will examine its applicability to children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery.

⁴⁴ Harker, T. (1997). Therapy with male sexual abuse survivors: Contesting oppressive life stories. In G. Monk, J. Winslade, K. Crocket, & D. Epston (Eds.), *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope* (Ch. 7, pp. 193–214). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Denborough, D. (2006). *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experiences*. Adelaide, SA: Dulwich Centre Publications; Kress, V. E., Hoffman, R., & Thomas, A. M. (2008). Letters from the future: The use of therapeutic letter writing in counselling sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 3, 105–118.

⁴⁵ Sahin, S., & Mcvicker, M. (2009). The use of optimism in narrative therapy with sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of European Psychology Students*, 1(1), 7.

⁴⁶ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72; Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 52 – 57; Lefevre, M., Hickle, K., & Luckock, B. (2019). ‘Both/And’ Not ‘Either/Or’: Reconciling Rights to Protection and Participation in Working with Child Sexual Exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 49, 1837-1855.

⁴⁷ Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16.

The Tree of Life⁴⁸

The Tree of Life approach was originally developed to support vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. This approach utilises the metaphor of a tree derived from Zimbabwean folklore and collective narrative practice to support individuals and communities to overcome difficult life experiences.⁴⁹ The Tree of Life enables people to speak about their lives in ways that are not re-traumatising, but instead strengthens their relationships with their own history, their culture, and significant people in their lives. In the Tree of Life the different aspects of the tree represent the following:

- **The Roots** – This is a prompt for the child to speak about where they have come from, their family, their origins etc
- **The Ground** – This represents where the child lives at present and their daily life
- **The Trunk** – This is an opportunity for the child to speak about or represent visually their skills. It also includes special and precious memories that the child holds
- **The Branches** – These represent the hopes, dreams and wishes of the child
- **The Leaves** – These represent people who are significant and important to the child
- **The Fruits** – These represent gifts that the child has been given, these do not have to be material gifts but can also be acts of kindness, love, care etc.

The Tree of Life Approach has since been used in a number of different settings with a range of individuals including with refugee children, young people and families⁵⁰; parents of children with physical health conditions⁵¹; adults in mental health inpatient settings⁵² and individuals with anorexia nervosa.⁵³ In addition, Parham, Ibrahim and Foxwell (2019) conducted

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Lock, S. (2016). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice*, 2(1), 2-20.

⁵⁰ Hughes, G. (2014). Finding a voice through “the tree of life”: A strength-based approach to mental health for refugee children and families in schools. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 19(1), 139–153; Jacobs, S. F. (2018). Collective narrative practice with unaccompanied refugee minors: “The tree of life” as a response to hardship. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(2), 279–293.

⁵¹ Haselhurst, J., Moss, K., Rust, S., Oliver, J., Hughes, R., McGrath, C., Reed, D., Ferguson, L., & Murray, J. (2021). A narrative-informed evaluation of tree of life for parents of children with physical health conditions. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 26:1.

⁵² Wellman, J., Lepori, F., & Szlachcic, R. (2016). Exploring the utility of a pilot TOL group in an inpatient setting. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 11(3), 172–181; Fraser, J., Williams, L., Hayes, M., Akpan, U., & Bowerman, U. (2018) Humanising the inpatient experience through service user-led tree of life workshops. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 312.

⁵³ Ibrahim, J., & Tchanturia, K. (2017). Patients’ experience of a narrative group therapy approach informed by the “tree of life” model for individuals with anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 68(1), 80–91.

a literature review of the applicability and utility of the Tree of Life approach in Mental Health Settings and found key themes across all studies that explored its practice and utility.⁵⁴ They found that the Tree of Life approach was helpful in promoting recovery through its focus on alternative stories, offering hope and empowerment and by allowing people to connect to others. They also highlighted themes around the inclusivity of the model which highlighted that it allowed individuals to overcome barriers to traditional psychological support and that it was highly culturally applicable.⁵⁵

In the following section we outline the applicability of the Tree of Life approach with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery.

The Tree of Life & children who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking & slavery

Therapeutic interventions with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery typically start with the child’s description of their “problem saturated story”.⁵⁶ However Payne (2006) has suggested that this leads to development of “thin descriptions” rather than making visible the diverse and multi-storied identities that the individual has including their strengths, resilience, hopes and wishes.⁵⁷ The Tree of Life approach would enable a child victim of trafficking, exploitation and slavery to amplify the seldom heard narratives of their life including strengthen their self-esteem, capabilities and relationships.⁵⁸ Developing their Tree of Life enables them to enhance the important parts of themselves which may otherwise remain subjugated, for example the process of discussing and exploring the Trunk of the tree enables children to recognise their skills, strengths and capabilities which have allowed them to survive the multiple traumas they have experienced. The Tree of Life approach is participatory, validating and privileges the voice of the child. This is vital for child victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery because the process of hearing and respecting a child or young person’s voice is recognised as a core component of building their resilience.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Parham, S., Ibrahim, J. & Foxwell, K. (2019). Could the Tree of Life Model Be a Useful Approach for UK Mental Health Contexts? A Review of the Literature. *Narrative Works*, 9(2), 44–70.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ White, M. (1989). Selected papers. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Center.

⁵⁷ Payne, M. (2006). Narrative therapy: An introduction for counselors (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

⁵⁸ Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16.

⁵⁹ Department for Education. (2017). Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf

Farooq and Colleagues (2021) recently highlighted the applicability of the Tree of Life approach for children who were subjected to exploitation and trafficking using a case study methodology. They highlighted how this approach was both participatory and enabling to children who were subjected to exploitation and trafficking, as well as how it could be adapted to meet the needs of these complex and diverse cohort of children.⁶⁰

Summary & Discussion

The narrative-informed Tree of Life approach outlined in this paper is a unique, innovative, and novel therapeutic approach and has potential for use with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. There is some evidence of feasibility and acceptability of the Tree of Life narrative approach with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation and trafficking.⁶¹ Furthermore, wider reflections from children and young people, in respect of what intervention works, has highlighted the importance of taking a narrative approach and offering a safe space for them to tell their story, in their own words. Young people who have been consulted on these narrative techniques have stated:

“It’s their story so give them that control about how they tell their story, when they tell their story. And even if like they don’t want to talk about it, is there an option they can paint it, can they write a song about it and go off to a hill somewhere and scream as loud as they possibly want cause that’s how they want to get it out... It’s a hard thing because you can’t force a child to talk about their story but I think just having the tools and being open and willing to listen. Just saying to a child, I’m literally here to hear your story to hear your emotions, to feel your emotions – let them know that.”⁶²

The UK government has highlighted that there is a need to consider innovative therapeutic approaches when working with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery as the current models and approaches do not meet the needs of this cohort of children.⁶³ Furthermore, research has identified principles that underpin the provision of good support to children and young people who are sexually abused or

⁶⁰ Farooq, R., Addy, C, Smyth, G., Appiah, A., & Kennedy, P. J. (2021). “No one’s gonna tell your story better than you are”: The use of a Narrative Therapy Approach informed by the Tree of Life with Children and Young People subject to Sexual Exploitation. *Clinical Psychology Forum*

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Voice of a child quoted in: Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 55

⁶³ Ofsted (2014b) *The Sexual Exploitation of children: It couldn’t happen here, could it?*. London: Ofsted

exploited⁶⁴, which includes practitioners understanding and working with dynamics of power and inequality, an emphasis on a strengths-based approach and the active involvement and participation of children and young people in the focus and pace of the work. The Tree of Life narrative approach actively deconstructs the operation of power, focuses on the strengths, resilience and assets that children and young people bring whilst actively encouraging their participation in the work. It is emphasised that the Tree of Life narrative approach could be one innovative therapeutic approach to utilise with vulnerable children and young people.

Although there is a growing evidence base around the use of narrative therapy approaches with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery, there remains a need for further research and exploration of this approach with this population of children and young people including exploring the long-term efficacy of this approach.

Bibliography

- Appiah, A., Baguley, S., SPACE & Farooq, R. (2021). *Making Words Matter. Attending to Language when working with children subject to or at risk of Exploitation: A Practice & Knowledge Briefing*. The National Working Group for Exploited Children, Derby, UK.
- Beaudoin, M., Moersch, M., & Evare, B. S. (2016). The effectiveness of narrative therapy with children’s social and emotional skill development: an empirical study of 813 problem-solving stories. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 35(3), 42-59.
- Beckett, H. (2011). *Not a Work Away: The Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Barnardo’s NI.
- Berelowitz, S., Clifton, J., Firmin, C., Gulyurtlu, S. and Edwards, G. (2013) *If only someone had listened: Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (final report)*. London: OCC.
- Bovarnick, S., Peace, D., Warrington, C., & Pearce, J. (2018). Being Heard: Promoting Children and Young People’s Involvement in Participatory Research on Sexual Violence. Findings from an International Scoping Review. Retrieved from https://www.our-voices.org.uk/assets/documents/UoB_BeingHeard-report.pdf

⁶⁴ Taylor-Browne, J. (2002) *More than one chance! young people involved in prostitution speak out*. London: ECPAT; Berelowitz, S., Clifton, J., Firmin, C., Gulyurtlu, S. and Edwards, G. (2013) *If only someone had listened: Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (final report)*. London: OCC; Warrington, C. with Beckett, H., Ackerley, E., Walker, M. and Allnock, D. (2016) *Making noise: children’s voices for positive change after sexual abuse*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire/ Office of Children’s Commissioner; Smeaton E. (2016) *Going the extra mile: learning from SECOS’ child sexual exploitation service*. Ilford: Barnardo’s;

“I’m literally here to hear your story... let them know that”: Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery. Farooq. Addy. Smyth. Appiah.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary. (2021). *Child exploitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambs.police.uk/information-and-services/Child-protection/CSE>

Community Care (2017). Government changes statutory definition of child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/02/16/government-changes-statutory-definition-child-sexual-exploitation/>

Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

Denborough, D. (2006). *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experiences*. Adelaide, SA: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Department for Education. (2017). Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf

Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 52-57

Farooq, R., Addy, C, Smyth, G., Appiah, A., & Kennedy, P. J. (2021). “No one’s gonna tell your story better than you are”: The use of a Narrative Therapy Approach informed by the Tree of Life with Children and Young People subject to Sexual Exploitation. *Clinical Psychology Forum*

Fong, R., & Cardoso, J. B. (2010). Child human trafficking victims: Challenges for the child welfare system. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 33, 311–316

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 777-90.

Fraser, J., Williams, L., Hayes, M., Akpan, U., & Bowerman, U. (2018) Humanising the inpatient experience through service user-led tree of life workshops. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 312.

Harker, T. (1997). Therapy with male sexual abuse survivors: Contesting oppressive life stories. In G. Monk, J. Winslade, K. Crocket, & D. Epston (Eds.), *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope* (Ch. 7, pp. 193–214). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Haselhurst, J., Moss, K., Rust, S., Oliver, J., Hughes, R., McGrath, C., Reed, D., Ferguson, L., & Murray, J. (2021). A narrative-informed evaluation of tree of life for parents of children with physical health conditions. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 26:1.
- Hassija, C. M., & Cloitre, M. (2015). STAIR Narrative Therapy: A skills focused approach to trauma-related distress. *Current Psychiatry Reviews*, 11, 172-179.
- Helen Bamber Foundation. (2015). *Addressing mental health needs in survivors of modern day slavery. A critical review and research agenda*. London: The Freedom Fund.
- Heins, T., & Ritchie, K. (1985). *Beating Sneaky Poo: Ideas for faecal soiling*. Canberra, Australia: Child and Adolescent Unit, Mental. Health Branch, ACT Health Authority.
- Hickle, K., & Hallett, S. (2016). Mitigating Harm: Considering Hard Reduction Principles in Work with Sexually Exploited Young People. *Children and Society*, 30, 302-313.
- Home Office. (2021). Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, UK, End of Year Summary, 2020. Retrieved from [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2020 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- Hughes, G. (2014). Finding a voice through “the tree of life”: A strength-based approach to mental health for refugee children and families in schools. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 19(1), 139–153.
- Ibrahim, J., & Tchanturia, K. (2017). Patients’ experience of a narrative group therapy approach informed by the “tree of life” model for individuals with anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 68(1), 80–91.
- Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/279/independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham>
- Jacobs, S. F. (2018). Collective narrative practice with unaccompanied refugee minors: “The tree of life” as a response to hardship. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(2), 279–293.
- Johnstone, L., & Dallos, R. (2014). *Formulation in Psychology and Psychotherapy: Making sense of people’s problems*. Routledge: London and New York.

- Kress, V. E., Hoffman, R., & Thomas, A. M. (2008). Letters from the future: The use of therapeutic letter writing in counselling sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 3, 105–118.
- Lefevre, M., Hickie, K., & Luckock, B. (2019). ‘Both/And’ Not ‘Either/Or’: Reconciling Rights to Protection and Participation in Working with Child Sexual Exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 49, 1837-1855.
- Lefevre, M., Hickie, K., Luckock, B., & Ruch, G. (2017). Building trust with children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation: the professional challenge. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47, 2456-2473.
- Lock, S. (2016). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice*, 2(1), 2-20.
- Madigan, S. (2011). *Narrative Therapy*. American Psychological Association.
- Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16.
- NSPCC. (2021). *Child Trafficking*. Retrieved from <https://nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abus/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>
- NSPCC Learning. (2021). *Children and the law*. Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/children-the-law#heading-top>
- Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019*. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/caddy/Downloads/Child%20sexual%20abuse%20in%20England%20and%20Wales%20year%20ending%20March%202019.pdf>
- Ofsted (2014b) *The Sexual Exploitation of children: It couldn't happen here, could it?*. London: Ofsted
- Parham, S., Ibrahim, J. & Foxwell, K. (2019). Could the Tree of Life Model Be a Useful Approach for UK Mental Health Contexts? A Review of the Literature. *Narrative Works*, 9(2), 44–70.

- Payne, M. (2006). *Narrative therapy: An introduction for counselors* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Public Health England. (2017). *Research and Analysis: Modern slavery and public health*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-and-public-health/modern-slavery-and-public-health>
- Ryan, F., O’Dwyer, M., & Leaby, M. M. (2015). Separating the Problem and the Person. Insights from Narrative Therapy with People who Stutter. *Top Lang Disorders, 35*(3), 267-274.
- Russell, S., & Carey, M. (2003). Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas: Exploring some not so commonly asked questions. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, 2*, 67–91.
- Sahin, S., & Mcvicker, M. (2009). The use of optimism in narrative therapy with sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of European Psychology Students, 1*(1), 7.
- Scott, S., McNeish, D., Bovarnick, S., & Pearce, J. (2019). What works in responding to child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from <https://www.beds.ac.uk/media/268527/what-works-in-cse-july2019.pdf>
- Shuker, L. (2013). Constructs of Safety for Children in Care Affected by Sexual Exploitation. In Melrose, M., & Pearce, J. (Ed). *Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Smeaton E. (2016) *Going the extra mile: learning from SECOS’ child sexual exploitation service*. Ilford: Barnardo’s.
- Soderlund, G. (2005). Running from the rescuers: New U.S. crusades against sex trafficking and the rhetoric of abolition. *National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Journal, 17*(3), 64–87.
- Soroptimist International of the Americas. (2008). Slavery’s new face: Sex trafficking of women and girls. Retrieved from www.soroptimist.org/stoptrafficking.html
- Taylor-Browne, J. (2002) *More than one chance! young people involved in prostitution speak out*. London: ECPAT.

- University of Bedfordshire & Contextual Safeguarding Network. (2017). Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>
- Warrington, C. with Beckett, H., Ackerley, E., Walker, M. and Allnock, D. (2016) *Making noise: children’s voices for positive change after sexual abuse*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire/ Office of Children’s Commissioner.
- Wellman, J., Lepori, F., & Szlachcic, R. (2016). Exploring the utility of a pilot TOL group in an inpatient setting. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 11(3), 172–181.
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- White, M. (1989). Selected papers. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Center.
- White, M. (2000). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2011). *Narrative practice: Continuing the conversations*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Wood, L. C. N. (2020). Child modern slavery, trafficking and health: a practical review of factors contributing to children’s vulnerability and the potential impacts of severe exploitation on health. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 4, 1 – 11.