



# Multi-Disciplinary Initiatives to Rendering Services to Women Survivors of Human Trafficking in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The women survivors of human trafficking suffer diverse consequences that require service providers to be creative, well-coordinated, and to render services in a multi-disciplinary manner. For social services to be relevant to the needs of women, they should be conducted from an ecological systems approach. Based on a qualitative study conducted at five organizations in South Africa, this paper highlights the multi-disciplinary initiatives to rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking. Employing a phenomenological research design, data was collected from 14 social service providers through one-on-one interviews and analyzed using a thematic analysis. The findings indicate that social service providers make use of a multi-disciplinary approach in rendering services and that this has contributed toward building the resilience of the women, who now seem to have a hope to heal and restart a new life. However, there are challenges in working from a multi-disciplinary approach due to some stakeholders not delivering on their mandates. The conclusion is that social service providers are fully aware of the opportunities presented by the multi-disciplinary approach to rendering services. Future research should be conducted on designing programmes and interventions aimed at addressing the needs of women survivors of human trafficking.

## KEYWORDS

Women survivors; human trafficking; multi-disciplinary approach; ecological-systems perspective; social service providers

## Introduction

The needs of women survivors of human trafficking (WSHT) are numerous and require long-term services, depending on the challenges experienced through their ordeal. Accessing services is a nightmare due to the uncoordinated nature of social service providers. The needed services include counseling, advocacy, shelter, housing, food, medical care, skills development, substance abuse treatment, interpretation or translation services, immigration and other legal assistance. Women survivors of human trafficking are generally not able to obtain these resources by themselves; they need social service providers to assist them in accessing services so that they can achieve self-sufficiency and rebuild their lives. Social service providers play an important role in helping survivors of human trafficking restore hope, dignity, and social justice. The needs of trafficking

survivors tend to be complex; often requiring interactions with multi-jurisdictional law enforcement personnel, lawyers, and an array of service providers.

Effective support services could empower women to shift from being victims into being survivors of human trafficking. The presence of adequate multi-disciplinary initiatives has a potential to contribute toward the realization of human rights and social justice of women survivors of human trafficking. The process of empowerment and healing should be unique for each survivor.

Women survivors of human trafficking experience language problems which affect service rendering to them. Ricard-Guay and Hanley (2014) state that interpretation and translation services should be provided on both short and long-term interventions to understand the real needs of the survivors. Furthermore, it is important that women survivors of human trafficking be

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provided with legal and other assistance in relation to any court or administrative proceedings in a language they understand. It is preferable to obtain the help of social service providers who speak the survivor's language and understand her culture (Ricard-Guay & Hanley, 2014)).

This article answers the following main research question: What are the multi-disciplinary initiatives used by social service providers in rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking in South Africa? The sub-questions were asked as follows: 1. What multi-disciplinary initiatives are evident in rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking? 2. What are the challenges faced by social service providers in initiating multi-disciplinary initiatives for rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking? 3. What is the contribution of multi-disciplinary initiatives in building the resilience of women survivors of human trafficking? 4. How do social service providers ensure collaboration between all stakeholders involved in rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking?

### **Background**

Human trafficking is the exploitation of human beings for profit, it is an immense problem in both developed and developing nations. However, trafficking of women for domestic and sexual exploitation is prominent in the African region, specifically, in Southern Africa (US Department of State, 2014). This is due to harsh living conditions mostly characterized by poverty, unemployment, and a lack of prospects or alternatives in the countries or areas of origin. Furthermore, the challenge is that trafficked women know too little about their rights and appropriate measures to take in protecting themselves (Reda, 2012).

Trafficked women are vulnerable and require a wide range of social work services. These services should take into consideration not only the physical consequences of human trafficking but also the traumatic psycho-social health experiences of women survivors of human trafficking. Trafficking affects the women in the areas of self-esteem, social stress, social support, psycho-emotional support, physical fitness, and coping mechanisms

(Wei et al., 2016). As such, it is imperative for social service providers to fully understand the needs of women survivors of human trafficking. When women survivors of trafficking are rescued from their ordeal, they are still vulnerable. Therefore, the reintegration process and recovery should be handled amicably in order not to re-victimise them.

### ***Vulnerability of Women Survivors of Human Trafficking***

Women survivors of human trafficking are grossly vulnerable, they have to diverse challenges and needs. Vulnerability is defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2008) as an exposure to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. It is a condition resulting from how the survivors negatively experience the complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors that create the context for their communities (UNODC, 2008). Elliot (2015) concurs with the above notion when he narrates that social vulnerability is arguably the principal root cause of trafficking in human beings. Vulnerability derives from economic and social factors such as poverty, gender discrimination, armed conflicts, domestic violence, and dysfunctional families (Elliot, 2015). Such vulnerability is used by international organized crime networks to facilitate migration and subsequently severely exploit people by use of force, threat, coercion, or various forms of abuse such as debt bondage.

The response to vulnerability needs to consider the external conditions of the trafficked women, as well as the coping mechanisms that enable a n individual to protect herself against the negative impacts of external conditions (UNODC, 2008). Banović and Bjelajac (2012) highlight that the diversified needs of human trafficking survivors may be satisfied through coordinated actions of state institutions, NGOs, and international organizations. Survivors of human trafficking often need housing, medical assistance for acute health issues, sexually transmitted diseases, and drug addiction, and resources to meet other basic needs such as food and clothing. Banović and Bjelajac (2012) further state that legal aid through regulating the civil status of the survivor,

provision of all relevant documents, and adequate security measures needed to access healthcare and social support, as well as administrative and court proceedings, where survivors may appear as witnesses. Some survivors have specific personal needs to reestablish contact with family, as well as to strengthen interpersonal and intimate relationships.

### ***Reintegration of Women Survivors of Human Trafficking***

Reintegration is targeted to restore the women survivors' rights, rehabilitate their social status, and help them gain capacities or skills that will benefit both the survivors and society. Even though reintegration is not an easy task, its success requires a fulfillment of a series of specific tasks that are targeted at meeting the needs of women survivors of human trafficking by service providers [International Centre for Women Rights Protection & Promotion (ICWRPP), 2008]. Return and reintegration for the survivors is a long-term and complex process with no guarantee of recovery due to stigma, trauma, and psychological damage caused by the ordeal of human trafficking (Dixon, 2008). It is therefore imperative to create multi-disciplinary initiatives to respond fully to the needs of survivors.

The intensity and duration of the reintegration process should be selected depending on survivors' needs and psychosocial profile. The totality of interventions performed by social workers to answer everyone's needs is different, depending on the survivor's actual stage. Thus, intervention by the social worker starts as early as when the survivor is being prepared for repatriation. Besides rendering temporary shelter, social service providers should ensure that survivors receive all types of services like medical, psychological, and humanitarian aid, as well as access to authorities and public services (Wickham, 2009). Social service providers should maintain a permanent connection with all survivors participating in court proceedings with a view of identifying their current and future needs and facilitating their reintegration into the community. Wickham (2009) states that for social service providers to successfully reintegrate the survivors into society, there is a need to develop an Individual

Reintegration Plan (IRP). The International Centre for Women Rights Protection and Promotion (ICWRPP) (2008) states that the IRP should indicate the development requirements or economic stance of the survivor; focus on rebuilding social relations, skills, and values, and should restore legal rights or the execution thereof.

### ***Recovery of Women Survivors of Human Trafficking***

Warpinski (2013) illuminates that the four principle needs of recovery for women survivors trafficking are: safety; social support; choice of agency and feeling human or equal. In general, all survivors of trafficking have basic needs for them to recover from trauma, they need empathy and understanding, not sympathy and blame. Warpinski (2013) further states that they need an opportunity to tell their story to empathetic and nonjudgmental listeners.

Dixon (2008) extrapolates that the response of family members and community has an impact on the recovery process of trafficked women. Trafficked women may face social disapproval if they return home without promised wealth, regardless of the harm they suffered (Dixon, 2008). Cultural attitudes to prostitution could prevent some survivors from being accepted by their families and communities. In some cultures, the entire family could be ostracized because of the survivor's past (Dixon, 2008). Therefore, recovery efforts must include service coordination by governments, international and local organizations, surrounding communities, and families (Wickham, 2009). The recovery process should not end once reintegration into society has been achieved, women recovering from the human trafficking need consistent and reliable access to counseling, medical care, and training (Wickham, 2009).

### ***Theoretical Frameworks for Rendering Multi-Disciplinary Services to WSHT***

Although there are many frameworks applicable to rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking, the most applicable to establishing multi-disciplinary initiatives are the model of interdisciplinary collaboration and the ecological systems theory.

### ***Model of Interdisciplinary Collaboration***

Interdisciplinary collaboration simply means collaboration for a common cause from various disciplinary backgrounds, or “an interpersonal process through which members of different disciplines contribute to a common product or goal” (Bronstein, 2003). To this end, the interdisciplinary collaboration model is entrenched on the view that resolution of social problems should be based on collaboration from different role players because they “are compounded by limitations of some disciplines, limited understanding of roles and expertise of other professionals, increased requirements for accountability and documentation, and complex diagnoses and treatment methods” (Bronstein, 2003).

The model for interdisciplinary collaboration is based on five components namely, interdependent, newly created professional activities; flexibility; collaborative ownership of goals, and reflection on process (Bronstein, 2003). For collaboration to occur, there must be some level of interdependence between role players and such interdependence depends on a deliberate act among role players, to deviate from their boundaries, which is some level of flexibility. From this deliberate deviation of boundaries and its resultant flexibility, newly created professional activities will begin to emerge, which then expand the specific job responsibilities. The needs of women survivors of human trafficking suggest that the implementation of services be inter-disciplinary, inter-sectoral, inter-departmental, inter-organisational, inter-governmental, and inter-country.

### ***Ecological-Systems Theory***

The ecological-systems perspective provides a unique and holistic framework for addressing the needs of the women survivors of human trafficking through its emphasis on an interactional view of any system within the context of its environment, a positive interplay of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects is critical. From an ecological systems model, to prevent human trafficking, it is necessary to act across multiple levels and to sustain prevention efforts over time.

Prevention strategies at an individual level should be designed to promote attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that ultimately prevent human

trafficking. Specific approaches may include education, awareness, and life skills training [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019]. Prevention strategies at a relationship level may include family-focused prevention programmes and mentoring, as well as peer programmes designed to reduce vulnerability, and foster problem-solving skills [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019]. Prevention strategies at a community level are typically designed to influence the social and physical environment such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur and should seek to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming victims [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019]. At a societal level, focus should be on addressing broad societal factors that help create a climate in which women trafficking occurs.

### ***Methods***

The study was conducted from a qualitative approach, using the phenomenological research design. This design enabled the researchers to explore and describe the multi-disciplinary collaborations initiated by social service providers, and on how helpful these have been on addressing the needs of women survivors of human trafficking. The phenomenology research design also allowed the researchers to describe the real-life experiences of social service providers, which led to an in-depth understanding of the initiated multi-disciplinary initiatives (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

The population of the research study was social service providers (social workers, social auxiliary workers, housemothers, and outreach workers) working in five organizations that are rendering services to women survivors of trafficking in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It was not feasible to include the entire population in the study. As such, the researchers used non-probability sampling techniques, specifically, purposive sampling methods to select participants for the study. This sampling criteria relied on the researchers' judgment of which participants possessed information pertaining to the study (Strydom, 2011b). This approach allowed an in-depth investigation that was based on the saturation point of qualitative information.

The selected participants possessed the following characteristics that were of interest to the study: 1. Working for an organization rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. 2. Belonging to the following group of social service providers: social workers, social auxiliary workers, housemothers, and outreach workers. 3. Being conversant in English. 4. Being in the employment of the selected organization for at least 12 months. 5. Being willing and available to participate in the study.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews, using an interview schedule were used as data collection method. The semi-structured interview schedule was divided into two sections. The first section addressed the demographical information of the participants, and the second section explored the multi-disciplinary initiatives in rendering services of women survivors of human trafficking in Gauteng Province, South Africa. One-on-one interviews were held until the point of data saturation. Data got saturated after 14 interviews with social service providers (social workers, social auxiliary workers, housemothers, and outreach workers).

Data was analyzed using Creswell's (2014) spiral model of qualitative data analysis which entailed, planning for recording, data collection and preliminary analysis, managing or organizing the data, reading, and writing memos, generating categories, themes, and patterns, coding the data, testing emergent understandings, and searching for patterns. These steps followed in the analysis data are discussed below.

(1) Planning for recording – in this step, the researchers did a systematic transcribing and recording of the data collected during one-on-one interviews with participants. The researchers utilized both audio recorders and hand-written notes. (2) Data collection and preliminary analysis—the researchers did ongoing data analysis by scanning the transcribed data, typing up the field notes, sorting the data, and arranging it into different categories and themes. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, which helped to build a coherent interpretation of the data. (3) Managing or organizing the data—in this step, the data was managed and organized

into a narrative format. Thereafter, the researchers converted the files into appropriate text units like words and sentences for analysis.

(4) Reading and writing memos—the researchers read each transcript in its entirety several times and immersed themselves in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview, and then broke it into different parts. (5) Generating categories, themes, and patterns—the researchers intellectually identified salient themes and recurring ideas that linked the participants together. Winnowing of the collected data was done and it was reduced to smaller and manageable sets of themes that were written into a final narrative. (6) Coding the data—The researchers developed themes and provided an interpretation considering the perspectives from the literature study.

(7) Testing the emergent understandings—the researchers determined how useful the data was in illuminating the issues being explored and how central the data was to the stories that were unfolding about the multi-disciplinary initiatives in rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking. (8) Searching for alternative explanations—during this step the researchers analyzed the discovered categories and themes in the collected data. During the analysis process, the researchers focused on identifying, describing, and demonstrating why the explanation offered was the most feasible of all.

The researchers also focused on issues of trustworthiness, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. Data verification helps researchers to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and establish trust or confidence in the findings of the study. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers focused on clarifying the bias of the researchers (Creswell, 2014). The semi-structured interview schedule was developed and tested during the pilot study before utilizing it. Constructs were carefully conceptualized and were clear and unambiguous.

The researchers ensured the confirmability of data by doing member checking, this entailed soliciting information from participants about their perceptions on how the researchers analyzed and interpreted data and whether it was in line with what they had shared during the interviews. The researchers understood the importance of a

secondary confirmation of the findings of the research study. Therefore, as a way of doing a peer review, the researchers interacted with post-graduate colleagues who were familiar with the research field and area.

To ensure transferability of the findings to other settings and contexts, the researchers provided comprehensive and thorough information regarding the description of the research context. This entailed in-depth descriptions of observed transactions and processes, and a clear presentation and discussion of the findings of the study. The researchers enhanced data credibility of the study through repeated interviews until data saturation occurred (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the researchers read and re-read the interview transcripts to capture accurate descriptions from the participants.

The researchers received ethical clearance from an Institutional Review Board of a University in South Africa. The researchers adhered to all ethical considerations and created an opportunity for potential individuals to make informed decisions to participate voluntarily in the study by presenting the goal of the study, including possible advantages and disadvantages. Emphasis was placed on giving accurate and complete information on the demands the research project would make upon participants in terms of time, activities, and disclosure of confidential information. Adequate opportunity was given to participants to ask questions before the commencement of the study, as well as during the investigation.

Furthermore, research participants were required to sign a letter of informed consent, which stated exactly what the study was all about, what was expected from them and what potential harm existed (Strydom, 2011a). In asking for consent, the researchers did not use deceit, pressure, or threats. The written consent obtained from the participants was an indication that all participants understood what the research would entail.

The researchers maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by not disclosing their names and identity throughout the research process and in the research report. Strydom (2011a) refers to confidentiality as agreements between persons that limit others' access

to private information. The researchers were aware that all people have the right to privacy, therefore, it was imperative for the researchers to safeguard the privacy and identity of respondents and act with the necessary sensitivity.

To prevent any harm to the participants, the researchers ensured that the environment where the interviews were conducted was safe, conducive, and relaxed. Furthermore, the participants were informed in advance about the potential impact of the investigation, that it might cause fatigue, and that it would consume some quality time from their jobs. In addition, the participants were informed that they had a right to withdraw from the investigation at any stage if they so wished. The respondents were allowed to take breaks when they needed to do so in the process of the interview. Lastly, the researchers provided a platform for participants to debrief by conducting debriefing sessions with participants during and after data collection.

## Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. It starts off with a presentation of demographic details, followed by a presentation of themes that emerged from the study.

### *Demographical Information on Participants*

A brief description of the social service providers (SSP) that participated in the study will be provided in Table 1, with reference to their positions and years of service in the field of working with women survivors of human trafficking. The names of participants and names of organizations have been removed to ensure confidentiality.

### *Qualitative Findings*

The social service providers (SSP) stated that in a bid to address the needs of women survivors of human trafficking they work with several multi-disciplinary stakeholders, this assists them to address some of the complex needs of women survivors of human trafficking. The multi-disciplinary initiatives have contributed toward building the resilience of the women, who now

**Table 1.** Details of social service providers as participants.

SSP no	Position	Years of service
SSP 1	Social Worker	1 year and 4 months
SSP 2	Social Worker	4 years
SSP 3	Social Auxiliary Worker	9 years
SSP 4	Housemother	2 years
SSP 5	Social Auxiliary Worker	1 year and 6 months
SSP 6	Social Worker	3 years
SSP 7	Social Worker	5 years
SSP 8	Social Worker	1 year
SSP 9	Social Worker	1 year and 6 months
SSP 10	Social Worker	15 years
SSP 11	Social Worker	2 years
SSP 12	Housemother	2 years
SSP 13	Social Worker	11 years
SSP 14	Outreach worker	7 years

seem to have a hope to heal and restart a new life. However, it is at times challenging to work from a multi-disciplinary approach due to other stakeholders not delivering on their mandates.

### **Multi-Disciplinary Initiatives by Social Service Providers**

Participants stated that they have initiated several multi-disciplinary initiatives to address the needs of women survivors of human trafficking. The views of participants on this matter were reported as follows.

We work hand-in-hand with the Department of Social Development, and we are happy with our partnership, they fund transport for the survivor. We are also happy with our partnership with the Department of Health, at the hospital the women survivors of human trafficking do not queue, they just go straight for treatment. We have good communication channels, and all stakeholders are fully committed to helping the women. (SSP 2)

The Hawks [special crimes police] are playing the major role in taking the victims to court. The courts are playing the major role in prosecuting, though the cases take for ever. The embassies play a major role, especially those from Asia; they help us with interpretations. However, not all embassies assist us, therefore, there is need for other embassies to come on board in assisting their citizens. (SSP 3)

The police open dockets and look for the perpetrator/trafficker. The courts give the trafficker a sentence, this is where the magistrate gets involved. Health is also very important, so we take the woman to be medically assessed at the hospitals. Mostly, what we need is the financial assistance, as those survivors have diverse needs, including food. Municipalities assist in the provision of accommodation for survivors and homeless women. (SSP 8)

### **Challenges in Initiating Multi-Disciplinary Initiatives**

Some participants stated that although they have initiated several multi-disciplinary initiatives to address the needs of women survivors of human trafficking, some of these initiatives are not synchronized and women survivors of human trafficking end up being pushed from pillar to post. The views of participants on this matter were reported as follows.

The Department of Home Affairs is supposed to help with documentation. However, the process of getting documents take too long, this becomes a challenge in facilitating growth and healing of the survivor. The Department of Social Development's role is to support the shelters with financial subsidy; however, the finances do not come on time as agreed, this affects the quality of services rendered to the survivors. (SSP 1)

The Department of Justice sees to it that perpetrators go to jail. However, not many are being prosecuted. The courts have a lot of backlogs, as such most perpetrators are free while the survivors suffer. We need courts that specialise in human trafficking. (SSP 2)

The challenge is that other departments work in isolation and this result in duplication of services. (SSP 4)

Sometimes you can do your part, but other stakeholders fail to deliver, so at the end you fail, whatever that you will have done will have been in vain, it will be as if you did nothing. And you cannot push people to do their job. (SSP 7)

### **Contribution of Multi-Disciplinary Initiatives in Building Resilience**

Most participants stated that the use of multi-disciplinary initiatives in their work has contributed significantly toward the building of resilience in women, as demonstrated by their willingness to heal, bounce back, and move on with their lives despite the traumatic experiences they were exposed to. Their views on this matter were recorded as follows.

There is a determination to heal, they really want to heal and go back to their countries to start a new life. The survivors often say, 'I need to go back to start new life, I have been through a lot...'. (SSP 5)

Some of survivors are positive, they have hope after what happened to them. After counselling, they can accept the situation and develop an ability to win back their lives. (SSP 7)

The women, after counselling display a lot of hope; they want to be given a second chance. [...]. They know that they can still get a proper job after being rescued, they still want to pick up the pieces and support themselves. (SSP 8)

Some of them (WSHT) are thankful that they have been rescued from the situation, [...]. There is this one girl, the first day I sat with her in an interview, she said “tell my family that I am safe now, I do not want to use drugs again.” She was very focused wanted to go back to school. (SSP 10)

### ***Ensuring Collaboration Between All Stakeholders Involved in Rendering Services***

Most participants stated that a best practice in rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking is working in collaboration with other stakeholders, namely, service providers, organizations and institutions that render services to women survivors of human trafficking. Participants stated that they could not work in isolation to support the healing process of the women survivors of trafficking since their needs are complex and often require a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach, as reflected below.

Networking is very important; one cannot work alone. As a service provider, know your limits. There is need to refer the women for specialised services depending on the need. We work in collaboration with SAPS [South African Police Services], but they need to be educated on trafficking in women issues as they often send the survivors back to the trafficker. There is need to collaborate with Training Colleges to bridge the gaps by training the ladies and absorb them in the employment sector. (SSP 3)

We work with the Department of Education, Department of Health, we also work with the Department of Justice, as it deals with courts. We also work with Women in Touch, they take care of the women and girls; they teach them drama, dance, poems. We also work with the police, doctors, and other organisations. (SSP 7)

We do have forums and a rapid response team. We have a provincial task team for victims of human trafficking, it has all government departments in it, including the Department of Labour, Department of Education, and Department of Correctional Services. We meet quarterly, in these forums we discuss plans on joint awareness campaigns, we discuss the challenges that we experience, the cases that each organisation have accommodated or rendered services to. Furthermore, we discuss the programmes that we have. (SSP 10)

## **Discussion**

The complexity of human trafficking investigations, which include investigating a variety of criminal activities such as drug trafficking, organized crime, and sexual assault, makes collaboration and coordination initiatives among a variety of entities and jurisdictions necessary. However, role players must be aware of each other’s respective roles, responsibilities, and work closely together to complement each other’s efforts (American Psychological Association, 2014).

The findings are aligned to literature which indicates that a successful response to human trafficking requires a collaborative approach. Law enforcement, medical and mental health providers, and immigration attorneys are some of the possible partners to work with in addressing trafficking. Social service providers should draw on collaborative partnerships and networks that should be built before a crisis arises (National Sexual Violence Resource Centre and Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, 2012). There-after, the focus needs to be on supporting a multidisciplinary approach to the problem of human trafficking and on how to effectively serve survivors in a way that would encourage a focused partnership between the government, NGOs, and other social service providers (Turner et al., 2014). Engaging with the relevant target populations and strengthening coordination among essential stakeholders should be elevated.

The empirical results correspond with several studies which state that to ensure effective assistance to women survivors of human trafficking, the legal community, law enforcement, and social services providers must work interdependently to provide survivors with recovery resources (Solis, 2015). The diversified needs of women survivors of human trafficking can only be met through coordinated actions of all role players (Banović & Bjelajac, 2012).

The most critical factor with respect to assistance and support programmes for WSHT is to ensure that the services are comprehensive, appropriate, and integrated. Social service providers must work closely together in coordinated and participative ways, in the best interests of the victims they are assisting [United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC), 2008]. Other studies

have revealed that the best way to assist women survivors of human trafficking is through the committed involvement of NGOs, corporations or the private sector, media, and faith-based organizations (Banović & Bjelajac, 2012). The needs of women survivors of human trafficking can only be fulfilled through all-inclusive programmes that target their bio-psycho-social, economic, legal, and material needs (Banović & Bjelajac, 2012).

Previous publications are in line with the findings of this study that the survivors of human trafficking have hope and potential to be resilient (Sari & Khairunnisa, 2014). Resilience is articulated as both the capacity of women survivors of human trafficking to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources after experiencing trauma, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, support, and empowerment (Morrison et al., 2014). Resilience from deep trauma of trafficking entails the ability of the woman survivor to integrate her experience of being trafficked into her life narrative, without experiencing severe dissociative symptoms. The five building blocks for reinforcing resilience in the survivors consist of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity stages (Sari & Khairunnisa, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social service providers make use of a multi-disciplinary approach in rendering services and that this has contributed toward building the resilience of the women, who now seem to have a hope to heal and restart a new life. However, there are challenges in working from a multi-disciplinary approach. It is imperative to address the challenges so that the women survivors of human trafficking can fully benefit from the multi-disciplinary initiatives. The ecological systems approach could be used by all stakeholders in formulating programmes aimed at addressing the needs of women survivors of human trafficking.

## **Implications and Significance of the Study**

The study has confirmed that issues of trafficking in women should be addressed in all professional capacities, such as research, education and training, advocacy and public policy, and practice.

This means that aspects that affect women survivors of human trafficking must be addressed at multiple levels of the ecological systems model, from individual protective and risk factors to societal and policy factors. Furthermore, social work as a discipline that explores the depth and breadth of human behavior in relation to social aspects must critically understand and address the multiple intrapsychic, developmental, interpersonal, relational, social, cultural, institutional, and economic issues that intersect and contribute to the phenomenon of trafficking in women.

## **Limitations of the Study**

A few limitations pertaining to the study are worth mentioning. Firstly, the study was undertaken in a period when there were strong movements toward strengthening services to Survivors of human trafficking in South Africa. As such, the participants might have been influenced by these open debates, which in turn, could have influenced the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

Secondly, the sample was too small to produce valid results that warrant generalization to all service providers in South Africa. Such small samples do not represent a diverse and broad range of views, which could have been obtained if the samples had been larger. Furthermore, most participants were social workers, and this led to an overrepresentation of social workers in the team of social service providers. As a result, this calls for a replication of this study with a larger sample drawn from across the entire country that would involve more social service providers. Future research could include a broader geographic scope, particularly in rural regions, as well as a combination of research methods (mixed methods study). Notwithstanding these limitations, the study has produced much insight into the multi-disciplinary approach to rendering services to women survivors of human trafficking.

## **Recommendations**

Addressing the challenges faced by social service providers in initiating multi-disciplinary services for WSHT requires that high level multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral forums on human

trafficking be established, such forums should be empowered to hold stakeholders accountable, there should be consequence management. Future research could be conducted on designing multi-disciplinary programmes and interventions aimed at addressing the needs of women survivors of human trafficking.

### Consent

The participants gave informed consent to participate in the study.

### Ethical Approval

The study received ethical clearance (Reference number: 27622275) from the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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