

Understanding the Coping Experience of Mothers with Childhood Trauma Histories: A Qualitative Study

Authors : Chan Yan Nok

Abstract : The present study is a qualitative study based on the coping experiences of six Hong Kong Chinese mothers who had childhood trauma from their first-person perspective. Expanding the perspective beyond the dominant discourse of “inter-generation transmission of trauma”, this study explores the experiences and meanings of child trauma embedded in their narratives through the process of thematic analysis and narrative analysis. The interviewees painted a nuanced picture of their process of coping and trauma resolution. First, acknowledgement; second, feel safe and start to tell the story of trauma; third, feel the feelings and expression of emotions; fourth, clarifying and coping with the impacts of trauma; fifth, integration and transformation; and sixth, using their new understanding of experience to have a better life. It was seen that there was no “end” within the process of trauma resolution. Instead, this is an ongoing process with positive healing trajectory. Analysis of the stories of the mothers revealed recurrent themes around continuous self-reflective awareness in the process of trauma coping. Rather than being necessarily negative and detrimental, childhood trauma could highlight the meanings of being a mother and reveal opportunities for continuous personal growth and self-enhancement. Utilizing the sense of inadequacy as a core driver in the trauma recovery process while developing a heightened awareness of the unfinished business embedded in their “automatic pattern” of behaviors, emotions, and thoughts can help these mothers become more flexible to formulate new methods in facing future predicaments. Future social work and parent education practices should help mothers deal with unresolved trauma, make sense of their impacts of childhood trauma and discover the growth embedded in the past traumatic experience. They should be facilitated in “acknowledging the reality of the trauma”, including understanding their complicated emotions arising from the traumatic experiences and voicing their struggles. In addition, helping these mothers to be aware of short-term and long-term trauma impacts (i.e., secondary responses to the trauma) and explore their effective coping strategies in “overcoming secondary responses to the trauma” are crucial for their future positive adjustment and transformation. Through affirming their coping abilities and lessons learnt from past experiences, mothers can reduce feelings of shame and powerlessness and enhance their parental capacity.

Keywords : childhood trauma, coping, mothers, self-awareness, self-reflection, trauma resolution

Conference Title : ICSW 2023 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : May 11-12, 2023