

## **Posttraumatic Distress, Hope and Growth in Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking in Nepal**

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**Abstract :** Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and sex trafficking affect between 5000-7000 girls and women in Nepal each year and can have devastating physical and psychological consequences. Much research has documented these effects, however, there is no published longitudinal research that focuses on whether healing and growth outcomes are possible for survivors of CSE and sex trafficking. The narratives of 27 girls and women (13-22 years) were taken at two-time points during participation in a six-week group psychoeducation and art therapy program which was delivered across three NGO's in Kathmandu, Nepal. These narratives form part of a larger ethnographic project. Thematic analysis of the data was undertaken. Themes emerging from time point 1 were: psychological distress in the form of anxiety and grief over loss of family, psychosomatic symptoms, empathy and compassion, and posttraumatic growth (PTG) in the form of new possibilities, relating to others and personal strength. Posttraumatic growth refers to positive changes in the aftermath of trauma. The themes emerging from time point 2, were: empathy and compassion and PTG (cognitive restructuring, new possibilities, relating to others and personal strength). Alongside the distress that these participants experienced, they also experienced positive outcomes such as empathy and compassion and psychological growth. Future research would advance knowledge by further examining the process of PTG in this population, if the changes observed were lasting, and if so, ways in which PTG can be facilitated or promoted.

**Keywords :** commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, posttraumatic growth, sexual trauma

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