

## **Liberty University Graduate Research Symposium Proposal**

**Title** – Evidence-Based Therapeutic Treatment for Sex Trafficking Survivors: A Preliminary Comparison of Trauma-Informed Approaches

**Program of Study** – M.A., Clinical Mental Health Counseling

**Presentation Type** – Presentation (Residential)

**Mentors** - Dr. Anita Knight / Dr. Joy Mwendwa

**Student name** – Brittannie Moroz

Human trafficking is a rapidly growing criminal enterprise that is notorious for its widespread reach and range of human rights violations. Sex trafficking is a particularly severe form of human trafficking that involves the coercion of an individual to commit commercial sex acts and is often accompanied by physical, psychological, and sexual violence. As a result of the extreme abuse endured, sex trafficking survivors (STS) often present a myriad of complex psychological symptoms and mental health diagnoses. Despite the prevalence of sex trafficking and the intense mental health needs of its victims, the field of professional counseling has only recently begun to engage this population at a clinical level. Many aftercare services have become available to meet the basic and urgent rehabilitative needs of STS, but service providers recognize a need for more effective counseling treatments that can address the long-term mental health needs of this population. There are currently no evidence-based therapeutic treatments that have been evaluated for effectiveness with STS. Thus, the following presentation proposes a preliminary efficacy study of two trauma-informed therapeutic treatments (Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy [CBT] and Narrative Exposure Therapy [NET]) that have demonstrated effectiveness for similar populations. The proposed study seeks to examine the efficacy of each treatment in improving the overall mental wellbeing of adult female sex trafficking survivors receiving services in U.S. shelters and agencies. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of three conditions (two

clinical conditions and one control condition) and will receive an assessment battery both prior to and following treatment to assess positive and negative aspects of mental health. It is hypothesized that survivors will experience a significant improvement in mental wellbeing and reduction of negative psychological symptoms following treatment of CBT or NET from a trauma-informed framework, as compared to STS in the control condition. Further analysis will seek to compare the efficacy of both treatments to determine whether one treatment is more effective than the other. Recommendations for future studies and best practices in clinical work with this population will be discussed. Finally, the presenter will apply and discuss principles of ethical and multicultural competence in evaluating counseling interventions with sex trafficking survivors.