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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED WOMEN

Descriptive literature review



ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a descriptive literature review aiming to investigate the psychological well-being of women who have been sexually exploited. The Literature searches were administered using the following databases: DIAK Finna, Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities Online Library, Ebsco E-book Academic Collection and eBookCollection.

The literature search was aimed for material having been published between 2000-2020. Eventually four different research articles focused on specifically to the research topic were chosen for further analysis. Content analysis was carried out to further investigate the data presented by the articles.

Analysis of the data produced three concepts as results of how the psychological well-being of women in sexual exploitation can present: *Dealing with trauma*, *Self-destructive behavior* and *Mental health problems*. It appeared that mental health, in particular, can be widely affected by various issues around the experiences of sexual exploitation. Much more specifically targeted research and clinical research together with training is needed to further establish the most effective service delivery for the individual needs of this people group.

Keywords: Sex trafficking, Sexual exploitation, Psychological well-being

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1 INTRODUCTION

How broadly can slavery be understood? Are we willing to look beyond history and the Europeans settling into America in the 16th century importing enslaved Africans for their use? The demand grew and was satisfied - in the next 300 years 11 million people were transported into slavery (UK National Archives, 2019). In the modern world, where much development in overall human rights have taken place, this kind of slave trade is not recognized as common, or perhaps as justified, as it might have been. Historically, a change started with a campaign to abolish slavery to change this kind of a mindset in Britain in the 1760's (UK National Archives, 2019). Yet, in September 2017 according to a report from the International Labor Organization (ILO), as cited in Human Rights First fact sheet, an estimation of 24.9 million people were being victims of what is called modern-day slavery (Human Rights First fact sheet, 2017). Of these victims 16 million were exploited for labor, 4.8 million for sex trafficking and 4.1 million were exploited in state-imposed forced labor. The UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2014) states this number to be in global increase.

Due to globalization and economic liberalisation in the past few decades, the demand for paid sexual services has been in a rapid rise (Jana, Dey, Reza-Paul & Steen, 2014). Especially in areas of high poverty, the demand is met. In these areas sex work may be seen profitable which drives some women directly in it. Others may want to find some other type of work but end up selling sex, either voluntary or after being deceived. However, the concept of "voluntary" is questionable as many of sex workers come from poverty, may have experienced different kinds of abuse, have problems with substances or are in vulnerable situations in some other ways. If voluntary action rises from psychological trauma and vulnerability can it be categorised as voluntary, remains a question.

In my thesis, I will look into data concerning the sexual exploitation of women as a form of this modern-day slavery and define what this may look like in today's world through examples seen in literature. This thesis will be aimed at anyone in the field of social work,

NGO's or general public who may be interested in the topic. In the era of social media and fast information spread, anyone can become more aware of the issue and therefore more thorough knowledge may help understand the variety of impacts of the phenomenon. Also, due to globalization, it is more common in the modern days to encounter a person in a risk of exploitation or someone previously involved in it.

My personal interest in this topic has grown over the past almost a decade, as I have come across women and girls selling sex on the streets of big Brazilian cities, the US, eastern Europe, and after meeting a young woman here in Finland telling her story of surviving sexual exploitation. For me, the picture of all of those encountered has been a picture of a broken person, not much to do with a healthy choice or free will. Therefore, it is a personal passion to widen the awareness of this topic and its' likely implications to the life and wellbeing of the woman involved. In the thesis plan process, it was agreed that no working life partner was required as the thesis is a literature review type of thesis.

the aim of this thesis is to bring awareness of the potential realities of sexual exploitation by examining the identified psychological impacts it has on a woman's psychological wellbeing. The formulated research question stems from this specific area of interest as well:

“What are the common impacts of sexual exploitation to a woman's psychological wellbeing?”

2 KEY CONCEPTS

In my thesis I am specifically interested in researching data regarding adult women who have been sexually exploited for other factors than what could be seen as their own autonomous choice. The terminology regarding sexual exploitation in literature often includes a variety of terms. Human trafficking, sex trafficking, sexual exploitation and prostitution are all seen when investigating sexual exploitation of women. How these terms are understood, appears to vary to a certain. Examples of these different views can especially be seen in how prostitution is understood, is the act of voluntary choice seen as a part of it or not. Examples of these perspectives will be explained more as follows. In this thesis, the term “Sexual exploitation” will be used as a common term when referring to women who are involved in prostitution or sex trafficking or other type of sexual exploitation. On a global scale these are highly linked together, and it is often very challenging to discern among vulnerability factors and freedom of choice with women in these situations.

The key concepts chosen for the thesis are sex trafficking, sexual exploitation and psychological well-being. These concepts were found to be central for the main ideas and content of the thesis work. Definition and discussion on the chosen key concepts aim to link them on this specific context and clarify the understanding of the scale of sexual exploitation as considered in this thesis.

2.1 Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking as a form of human trafficking refers to trafficking a person for the purpose of them being sexually exploited. Human trafficking in general, as an umbrella term, is divided into seven forms (Hachey & Phillippi, 2017) as cited by Lesley (2018): Commercial sexual exploitation of children and sex trafficking of minors, Adult sex trafficking, Forced labour trafficking, Forced child labour, Child soldiering, Debt bondage/bonded labour, and Organ trafficking. According to The European Institute for Crime

Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (2020), the process of human trafficking can occur through fraud, abduction, deception, threat or use of force, abuse of power or vulnerability or other type of control. The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (2020) describes human trafficking as a serious crime and violation against fundamental human rights. It is a phenomenon which in its' complexity is impacted by cultural, economic, social and other factors. Lack of opportunities and dangers from conflicts are causing increasing amounts of populations wanting to migrate in hopes of more possibilities and better conditions. This creates vulnerabilities for these people being trafficked and exploited (HEUNI, 2020). As for sex trafficking, an adult person over 18 years of age who is induced by force, fraud, or experience psychological coercion leading into commercial sex industry, is considered a victim of sex trafficking (Gerassi & Nichols, 2018).

2.2 Sexual exploitation

The terminology around sexual exploitation is somewhat overlapping. Sexual exploitation or commercial sexual exploitation is used when describing people who trade sex for the survival of their basic needs, or in cases where their vulnerability is being exploited by a trafficker or a pimp, or someone buying sex services from them (Gerassi & Nichols, 2018). The vulnerability may be caused by a number of reasons: poor home environment (abuse, neglect, conflicts), homelessness or low socioeconomic status, poverty, substance abuse, cognitive disabilities, mental health issues, unemployment, lack of education, marginalized sexual identity or racial identity, undocumented status and other reasons (Curtis, Terry, & Dank, 2008; Dank, Yahner, *et al.*, 2015; Heil & Nichols, 2015, 2016; Oselin, 2014; Raphael, Reichert, & Powers, 2010; Reid, 2010, 2014, 2016 cited in Gerassi & Nichols, 2018). Prostitution as a part of sexual exploitation can be approached from two different views. In literature it can be considered from the perspective of free will and one's personal choice, or in contrast, from the exploitative perspective where different vulnerability factors are considered as part of the act of prostitution.

2.3 Psychological well-being

Wells (2010) distinguishes the differences between the more subjective hedonic approach of psychological well-being, where the concept is related more into “happiness”, and the eudaemonic approach where psychological well-being is linked to development of human potential. She continues stating, that psychological well-being is positively linked to satisfaction with life and self-esteem or internal control. In contrast, it is negatively correlated to depression or the powerful others (Wells, 2010). In Wells (2010) is cited a Multidimensional Model of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989a) which is also interesting to consider from the perspective of effects of sexual exploitation. In this model there are six different dimensions to psychological well-being: 1. *Self-acceptance*, referring to the positive view a person has of themselves. 2. *Positive relations* with others, which means different type of pleasure we get from human relationships, love and intimacy. 3. *Autonomy* by which is meant the ability to pursue our own beliefs and convictions regardless of the common, accepted way of our culture. 4. *Environmental mastery* which means the ability of a person to create and sustain environments that benefit the person themselves. 5. *Purpose in life* concerns our ability to find purpose and direction in our personal experiences and to set goals for our future. The last dimension of the model is 6. *Personal growth* meaning a person’s awareness of their own potential and talents, as well as the ability to develop new resources and recognize one’s inner strength. Wells (2010) reports of studies investigating life experiences and events as factors in psychological well-being. It appears that how a person interprets those events and experiences is significant in their experience of their psychological well-being.

2.4 Different faces of sexual exploitation

Examples of sexual exploitation are found across the world. Incidents can look very different. When aiming to understand the depth of psychological impacts of sexual exploitation, it is important to consider the different realities of women experiencing this. Heil (2012) shares a story in her book, *Sex Slaves and Serfs: The Dynamics of Human Trafficking in a Small Florida Town*, of a young girl brought from Guatemala to the US. An

influential Guatemalan man, part of the elite in his country had made the decision to move to the US with his wife and children. The man also wanted to bring a young girl from Guatemala to the US with them to work as a indentured servant for the family. She would also work as his personal sex slave. In the US, for the next few years the girl was forced to work as a housekeeper for the wife and take care of the children of the family. In addition, she was continuously being sexually assaulted by the man.

As another example, Chin and Finckenauer (2012) explain how Chinese women are immigrating in large numbers to many different countries around the world. This is one reason prostitution of Chinese women can be found almost everywhere. According to them, Chinese women in prostitution are seen in wealthy countries, like Japan and the US but also in less developed countries, such as Cambodia and Burma.

The most recent numbers of sexual exploitation related to trafficking of women in Finland are found from the statistics held by Assistance system for victims of human trafficking (2020). While the numbers of victims of human trafficking in general have steadily risen in Finland since at least 2016, the recognized cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation looked different. In 2019, 11 survivors of sexual exploitation came through the assistance system (Assistance system for victims of human trafficking Tilannekatsaus, 2020). In 2018 the number had been significantly higher. There are no official statistics for the victims or survivors, but this data is based on the number of people who are being recognized and enter the assistance system. Therefore, the actual number of women in sexual exploitation is not known.

In 2018, there were several people who were identified as victims through the crime identification work of the police. (Assistance system for victims of human trafficking Tilannekatsaus, 2020). This is how these people entered the assistance system. In 2019 none of this re-occurred. The situation of a person trafficked for sexual exploitation is commonly very challenging, as the abuse they face is often comprehensive. They are controlled and manipulated through, for instance, violence and shaming leading to the

feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. For a person in this kind of a situation, it is very difficult to find escape. Due to the complex nature of identifying victims of sexual exploitation, the numbers of cases can only be seen as directive. (Assistance system for victims of human trafficking Tilannekatsaus, 2020). Stated also by Heil (2012), when considering the global numbers of women in sexual exploitation, the estimates of numbers we see tend to be inaccurate and low.

These different examples of sexual exploitation describe different kinds of ways to control and restrict the freedom of these women. Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light and Watts, (2010) describe many ways used to control comparable with what is described as torture in literature. Similarly to torture victims, women trafficked for sexual exploitation, for instance, have very low chances to predict or manage the events impacting their own safety and health. Often, they are not able to, for example, determine when they work or sleep, how many clients they accept -and which ones they accept. They are usually not able to choose if they can use condoms to protect themselves, and a high number of these women are subjected to sudden physical punishment. This type of unpredictability and uncontrollability are associated to predicting more intense and prolonged psychological responses to abuse (Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, and Watts, 2010).

The evidence of an increase for paid sexual services highly suggests an increase in sexual exploitation as well (Jana, Dey, Reza-Paul & Steen, 2014). In addition to physical practices, is the use of technology in modern day sexual exploitation. This is one of many reasons why wider knowledge and understanding of the consequences of sexual exploitation to an individual is vital to be outspoken. How common is it to travel to some holiday destination and use the services of young women, or even children, selling sex? Yet, how many of using those services can actually tell if the person's vulnerability is being used, if they are being exploited by someone, if they have been forced or if any of the other defining factors for sexual exploitation is present? This question then leads to other concerns about the awareness of the variety of impacts of being sexually exploited can have to a person.

Similarly, as different forms of sexual exploitation can be almost too common, normalized and made available to all, i.e. sex tourism, online sex etc., there is the other side which involves open abuse, manipulation, violence and many other forms of crime. It can easily come across as sensationalizing the experiences of these women when horror stories of exploitation are published. Yet, forced sex labour exists and there is no place that would be immune to the reality of abuse and rapes that marginalized vulnerable women can face. Somehow this kind of an industry continues to exist (Heil, 2012). Hossain, *et al.*, (2010) states, that not all girls and women who are trafficked, suffer from significant levels of abuse. However, the likelihood for damage to themselves or their family, assaults and coercion and exceedingly restricted freedom appear common.

3 METHODOLOGY

The chosen method for the thesis was to produce a descriptive literature review by analyzing the chosen data material through content analysis (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019). Grant and Booth (2009) define literature review as “Published materials that provide examination of recent or current literature”. A literature review is typically narrative, and it may cover an extensive scope of different subjects. The levels of completeness and comprehensiveness to these subjects may vary (Grant and Booth 2009).

3.1 Research process

The research process for a qualitative study can simply start with an idea the researcher would like to further study. The research question(s) do not include a hypothesis but are based on the starting point of research (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019).

Figure 1. shows the research process of a typical qualitative study, which was also modified for this thesis project. The starting point for the thesis was to identify the area of research and from that formulate the research question. It is possible for the research question to change during the research process of a qualitative study (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019). In this thesis the question itself has remained the same, however the terminology was specified along the way. Unstructured data collection can include interviews, observation, any written documents as data material. In this thesis a thorough data collection was carried out as the nature of this thesis is to present a review of current literature on the chosen topic. Conclusions were made based on the analyzed results found through the literature search, followed by a discussion of the presented and further discussed findings.

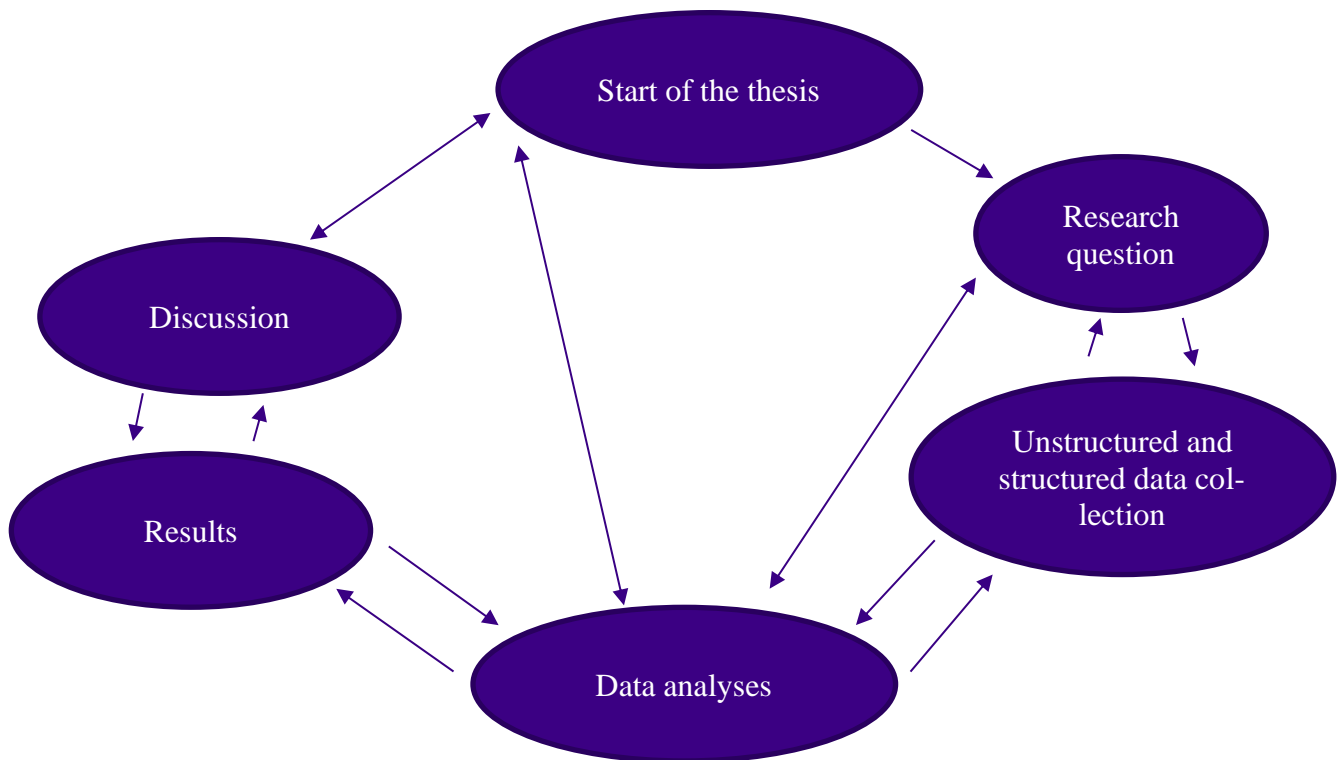


Fig. 1 modified from Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019)

The results of the literature search are reported through words and explanation yet including some numerical values. Throughout the literature search it appeared significant to present some seemingly high percentages of reoccurring psychological issues the target groups were observed with. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, some visible numerical raw data appeared important. The method section of this thesis is used to explain in more specific terms, how this descriptive literature review was carried out.

The research question suggests there is already background knowledge of the fact that sexual exploitation has impacts on women's psychological well-being. At the same time, the starting point is open to investigate what that might typically include and what are the complexities behind psychological well-being of the target group. This type of inductive approach is commonly used with for example examining a social phenomenon where the starting point is open and left for further investigation of data collection and examination (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019).

3.2 Descriptive literature review

A descriptive literature review is typically bringing out patterns of existing literature for interpretation (Yang, H., 2012). Yang (2012) continues, that the procedure of this type of method is often systematic and includes searching, filtering and classifying processes. A descriptive study aims to understand and describe a specific phenomenon (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019) which for this thesis is the psychological impacts of sexual exploitation on women. Figure 2. presents the frame of a descriptive study and what it could look like when further investigating our topic.

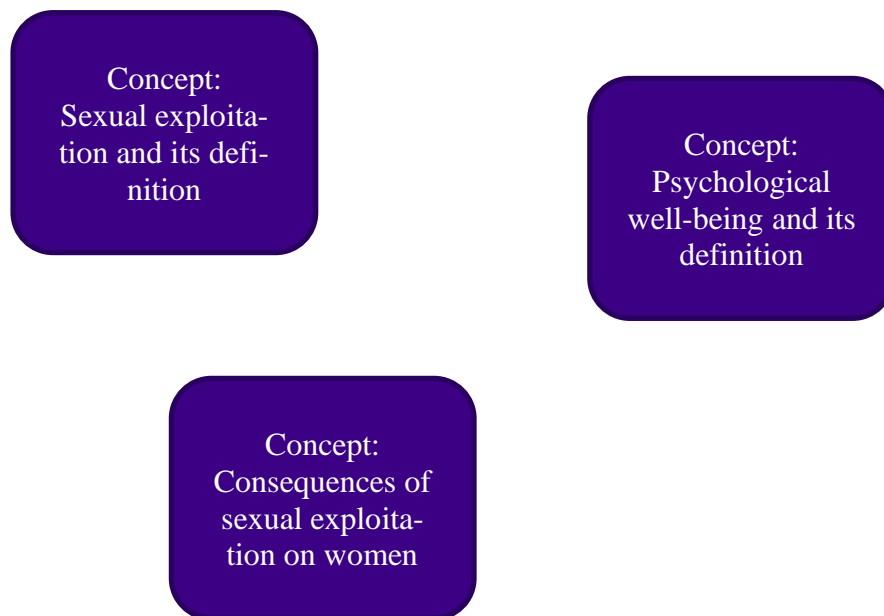


Fig. 2.

For qualitative research it is common to seek to answer a question with collected evidence. It also attempts to understand the research problem from the perspective of the population it is involved with (Northeastern University, 2020).

3.3 Data collection and inclusion criteria

The search for material was aimed to be, what was considered relatively timely, from the past 20 years (between 2000-2020). This timeline was set for the data that was analyzed for the results. The chosen language was English, as it is the language most often used and commonly understood in the academic world. However, an exception was made for searching out for some individual data of the Finnish situation in sexual exploitation.

Majority of the data was collected using the following electronic databases that have a large selection of academic and multidisciplinary subject matters: DIAK Finna, Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities Online Library, Ebsco E-book Academic Collection and eBookCollection. The chosen keywords were used as search terms. The search generated 54168 hits. To make the article search more specific, the search terms were later expanded by using keywords found from other material used for the literature review (sex trafficking and health outcomes).

Saver (2017) describes three different types of sources when choosing data for your publication – primary, secondary and tertiary. The criteria for data selection for my thesis was to attempt to use primary and secondary sources. Primary source means an original written report like a research report published in a journal or a book. Secondary source refers to citations quoted in the primary source – these could be other literature reviews or textbooks. Tables 1 and 2 clarify the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied for the data search.

The inclusion criteria for this descriptive literature review were:
Some of the key words (or similar meaning words) must be found in the topic or abstract
Literature focused on sexual exploitation as described in this thesis instead of human trafficking in general
The content must be partially answering the research question
The target group of the study must be adult women by majority
Reliable information from a reliable source
Free literature
Preferably English language
Published between 2000 and 2020

Table 1.

The exclusion criteria were:
The content of the data is not answering the research question
None of the key words can be found from the topic or abstract
The target group of the study is something other than adult women
Lack of quality and evaluation before being published
Literature with cost involved

Table 2.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) mentions in their Guidelines for collection of data on trafficking in human beings (2007) one of their challenge in gathering adequate data on the topic being the lack of consistent or comparable data. They also say the ways of crime behind trafficking in human beings change at a fast phase which is one factor hindering the production of accurate, timely and comparable statistics and recognition of trends. Sexual exploitation of women being under the umbrella of human trafficking, the same data collection challenges are likely to apply. However, for the purpose

of the thesis, the information available on the chosen databases served its' purpose adequately.

Eventually, four articles were chosen as data for analysis (Appendix 1.): Farley et al., (2004), Hossain *et al.*, (2010), Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, (2004) and Muftić and Finn, (2013). These articles published by reputable scientific journals - the Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Journal of Trauma Practice and the American Public Health Association – which indicates them having undergone a quality evaluation prior being published. The selections were made by the author of the thesis based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.4 Data analysis

This thesis is using data from both, quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative data presents fixed and measurable facts with one truth and one reality (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019). As an example, it can be measured by numbers how many women in a rescue house for sexual exploitation survivors in the US experience depression. This simple quantitative study could give us a figure however, it could leave out the possible different understanding of depression as a concept, among the participants. It could also rule out various other past experiences these participants may have prior to being exploited that may lead into depression. In contrast, qualitative study relies more on the assumption that reality is changing, and it is understood through indirect interpretations of people. Opposite to quantitative research It is aiming not to make generalization based on its' findings (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019).

Qualitative studies can bring significant comprehension of people's experiences and perspectives in the context of their individual life events and settings. This thesis is focused in presenting data results through analyzing peoples' perspectives and experiences - partially through their interpretations - yet acknowledging the numeral, quantitative facts brought from the research field.

According to Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019), content analysis is typically used in research for a description of human experiences and perspectives. It is a method that allows research phenomenon to be described systematically and objectively at the theoretical level. This method is suited for analyzing a topic where there might be previous research data but it appears fragmented. The following process was used when conducting the method for the purpose of this thesis.



Fig. 3 modified from Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019)

Figure 3 shows the typical process of a content analysis after the identification of open codes from the chosen data material. This process was applied to this thesis as well. The first step was to search out for open codes by thoroughly going through the research data (See Appendix 1.) Open codes are words identified from the data being analyzed (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019). They are found through reading the data sentence by sentence. Any sentence in the data relating to the research question is seen as an open code. In Appendix 2, all the identified open codes are presented and initially color coded based on similarity (i.e. something directly affecting mental health, identified traumatic experience caused by others, a destructive behavior etc). After identifying the open codes, the data abstraction process was continued with color coding words with similar content and bringing them together as one where possible (i.e PTSD, depression, dissociative symptoms and psychiatric disorders were all grouped as *psychiatric disorders*) and through that creating sub-concepts. Following that, sub-concepts were further combined based on their content and eventually similar sub-concepts were grouped into three main concepts that are in their own part answering the research question (i.e. *trauma*, *flash-backs of child abuse* and *terror regarding relationships with pimps* were initially all grouped together under the same sub-concept with color purple and later put together

under the main concept *Dealing with trauma*). There were some open codes (i.e. mental health problem) that appeared already like a sub-concept or a main concept by themselves. These items were still treated like an open code and taken through the reduction process and eventually grouped with other similar open codes/sub concepts. Finally, the main concepts answering the research question were determined through bringing together the sub-concepts and grouping them based on their content (Appendix 2.)

4 RESULTS

Through conducting a content analysis for the chosen four articles, three concepts were identified and formed. It was found that this group of women's psychological well-being is affected by various *mental health problems*. They are also reportedly *dealing with* different *trauma* experiences generating memories, flash backs and fears by threats they have experienced outside of their own control. This includes previous child abuse, experiences with pimps and other reported trauma. This group of women were also reported to present with issues like suicidality and substance abuse, which created the concept of *Self-destructive behavior*.

4.1 Mental health problems

The group of mental health problems were by far the most comprehensive in variety and complexity. Mental health issues were also reported in all data that was analyzed. It was seen that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation symptoms, stress and anxiety were among the most reported mental health issues with this group of women. For a more thorough understanding of possible individual experiences of the target group, a more detailed summary of these mental health issues is presented:

4.1.1 Post-traumatic stress disorder

Farley *et al.* (2004) investigated current and past experiences of physical and sexual violence among people in prostitution in nine different countries around the world. They found prostitution being multi-traumatic with 68% of the people interviewed meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). 71% of the interviewees had been physically assaulted and 68% reported being raped. PTSD can vary in severity. With this group of people, the severity was significantly associated with the amount of different ways of

lifelong sexual and physical violence. In another study Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, and Watts (2010) found that sexual violence during trafficking for sexual exploitation experiences was linked with an increased risk of developing PTSD.

According to Farley et al., (2004)., different types of violence is a norm for prostitution. They say that actually prostitution itself is a form of sexual violence - it leads to economic profit for those who are exploiting women, men and children for sexual purposes. Due to sexual domination position, it is impossible to differentiate between consensual and forced prostitution (Roth, 2012). Roth also states that in predicting the appearance of PTSD, as an experience, prostitution has been found to be a stronger variable than gender, race or home country. Therefore, it has been found that the harms of prostitution are not bound to culture. All sexual exploitation, whether prostitution or trafficking of humans for sexual purposes is seen as harmful.

American Psychiatric Association categorizes PTSD as an Anxiety Disorder that results from a life-threatening or in other ways tormenting experience together with: four clusters of symptoms including intrusive and recurrent memories of the trauma, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, numbing and/or negative changes in mood or cognitions pertaining to the trauma, and changes in reactivity and arousal. (APA, 2017).

PTSD also results in significant functional impairment. (Fuller & Foreman, 2013). Extreme traumatic stressors are in a significant role with PTSD. PTSD is predicted to be especially severe or long-lasting when the stressor is directed and implemented by humans (such as incest, rape, war etc.) in comparison to for instance a natural disaster. Many of these types of stressors are present in sexual exploitation most of the time (Farley *et al.*, 2004). In their study of prevalence of PTSD among people in prostitution in nine different countries Farley *et al.*, (2004) found that 68% of 827 people interviewed met the criteria for PTSD. In some of those countries their study included men, women and transgendered people in prostitution, however no significant difference in their experience was found due to gender or gender-identity. Similarly, in some countries, the severity of PTSD was significantly corresponding with the amount of types of violence the interviewees had experienced during their lifetime.

4.1.2 Dissociation symptoms

Ross, Farley, and Schwartz (2004) investigated dissociation among women in prostitution. According to them, dissociation symptoms are common in women who are in different types of prostitution (street, brothel, massage, escort, strip clubs). Dissociation is commonly linked to post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and depression. Subsequently, those three are then linked to physical and sexual abuse during childhood, as well as experiences of violence while in prostitution. In neuropsychology dissociation is described as a mental process where a person is presenting with close to a hypnotic suggestibility type of capacity to remain distant from reality (van der Kruijs, Bodde, Carrette, et al, 2014). According to Ross (1997, 1999, 2000 cited in Ross, Farley & Schwartz, 2004), pathological dissociation is a common factor in a result of long lasting and severe childhood trauma. It occurs to allow a person a psychological survival, regardless of the type of the repeated trauma (Ross, Farley & Schwartz, 2004).

Ross, Farley & Schwartz (2004) suggest, that since childhood trauma is commonly seen with women being sexually exploited, in addition to violence while in prostitution, it would also likely result in seeing pathological dissociation and other forms of disorders among them at high levels. Their study (2004) among women in prostitution in four geographically different locations indicates this to be true. Clinically it has been shown pathological dissociation commonly being only one of many possible disorders as a response to trauma. It is often identified as being accompanied by substance abuse, mood -and psychotic disorders, anxiety, eating -and personality disorders. Therefore, it could be predicted that those disorders are being experienced by this group of women as well.

4.1.3 Depression and anxiety

Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts, (2010) investigated the mental health impacts of women being trafficked for sexual exploitation in seven different European countries. The participants of their interviews reported significant levels of both, sexual and physical violence before and during the exploitation experience. They found that violence

and abuse experienced before being sexually exploited did not significantly correlate with trafficking related exposures to trauma. 55% of the women interviewed for the study met the criteria for high levels of depression symptoms. High levels of anxiety symptoms were found from 48% of the participants. Especially experiences of physical violence during exploitation appeared to be linked to high anxiety levels. Also restricted freedom during the exploitation period was found to be linked to increased anxiety. It was shown that the interviewees who had been in the sexual exploitation situation for at least a six-month period, had about two times more chances of having higher levels of depression and anxiety.

4.2 Dealing with trauma

The results found especially two specific causes of trauma for this group of women: previous child abuse and terror experiences with pimps (Farley et al., 2004). In addition to this, a more general category of trauma was identified (Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, 2004).

4.3 Self-destructive behavior

The self-destructive behavior was identified as one of the main concepts as the content analysis brought up reoccurring incidents of suicidality and alcohol and drug abuse among this group of women (Farley et al., (2004); Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, (2004); Muftić and Finn, 2013).

Muftić and Finn (2013) reported there being a large descriptive sample data collected internationally from women in brothels, detention and treatment centers which has helped in identifying the mental health needs of women in sexual exploitation. The data collected for their report indicates post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders, anxiety and mood disorders and disorders related to substance abuse (Williamson, Dutch, & Clawson, 2009 cited in Muftić and Finn, 2013). Muftić and Finn (2013) cited Raymond and Hughes (2001) who interviewed 40 women being sexually exploited and found these women being affected by a number of physical injuries following exploitation (broken bones, stab

wounds, vaginal bleeding, oral bleeding, bruises, head injuries). It is likely that this severe physical injuries will affect a person's psychological well-being as well. These 40 women also reported suicidal thoughts/attempts, feelings of anger and rage, depression and sadness, inability to feel, difficulties to sleep, guilt and blaming self.

Ross, Farley, and Schwartz (2004) found in their Canadian study of 60 women major depressive disorder from 60-85% of the women interviewed. Borderline personality disorder was reported by 35-60% of interviewed women and substance abuse by 40-80. The same study (Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, 2004) investigated 50 women in prostitution in a legalized brothel in Turkey (comparing the results to 50 women not in prostitution) and reported trauma and psychiatric disorders being significantly higher among those in prostitution.

5 DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis of the chosen data were reduced to main concepts that were identified through the process. At the same time those concepts could be chopped down to a number of individual points that are found affecting the psychological well-being of the chosen group of people as seen in Appendices 1 and 2. In this chapter the results, as presented, are discussed through key findings and their interpretation and through reflecting limitations of the work.

5.1 Implications of the key findings

The key findings of the analysis were that women who have been sexually exploited can present with different types of issues affecting their psychological well-being. Looking at the open codes and categories (Appendix 1. And 2.) identified from the chosen studies imply these women being traumatized in many different kinds of ways. It even appears that in many cases, women in sexual exploitation go through violence and abuse before the actual exploitation experience, and therefore individual consideration of each case and further support is necessary. This is important to be realized, as we are seeing the industry of sexual exploitation continuing to exist (Heil, 2012) and therefore will likely be facing this group of people everywhere in the world needing the help of social services as well.

5.2 Limitations

As a method, content analysis lacks systematic and fully accurate rules in how to analyze qualitative data (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019). This can present challenges especially when one is performing their first content analysis. This lack of systematic set of guidelines is present when phrasing open codes and creating groups for concepts. There has to be a connection between each open code and the data, otherwise the analysis can start taking the wrong direction. With this, there is a risk the researcher will

interpret the data subjectively and the open codes or concepts are not representing the raw data anymore. A high level of sensitivity is regarded when wanting to avoid being subjective in interpreting the data. Subjectivity can lead into creation of codes that are not strongly related to the original data (Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen, 2019). At the same time, content analysis, in all of its' flexibility, allows a discussion between the researcher and the data, through which indications of potential theoretical relationships can be provided. This is the value of using content analysis the author saw as well. Identification of open codes bring another challenge. If an author describes an open code with a longer phrase or a sentence, Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019) say the author has then missed the main content of that open code. Therefore, there is an option that the author does not grasp the content as meant in the raw data and therefore the analysis can take an incorrect direction.

It also must be considered how cultural backgrounds may affect the results when using questionnaires, even though the question forms in the chosen studies were adapted to interviewees from different cultures. Farley *et al.* (2004) state that people going through trauma often minimize or deny their experiences. This can also be a limiting factor when collecting data from a group of people who may partially be in the midst of their trauma process or an ongoing trauma. Farley *et al.* (2004) also describe complex PTSD (CPTSD) as a psychological result of long-term prostitution. CPTSD results from chronic traumatic stress and can affect regulating emotions and altered self-perception (Herman, 1992; Van der Kolk, Pelcovitz, Roth, Mandel, McFarlane, & Herman 1996 cited in Farley *et al.*, 2004). Potentially such complex psychological issues could be predicted to possibly impact the results the interviewees present with. The interview forms may be thus limited in recognising all the underlying factors affecting the responses given by the interviewees.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this descriptive literature review was to investigate what the consequences of sexual exploitation can be to a woman's psychological well-being. The three identified concepts answering the research question were very closely linked and can be seen as a part of the concept of mental health in general. They are often reported to act as a consequence of one another. For instance, what is categorized as self-destructive behavior, was seen to follow mental health problems. Similarly, dealing with trauma experiences can be seen to lead into mental health problems. However, the aim of this this thesis was to identify different possible factors linked to psychological well-being of the target group, therefore all three concepts of *Mental health problems*, *Dealing with trauma* and *Self-destructive behavior* are seen as individual psychological consequences of sexual exploitation in their own right.

6.1 Reflection on the results

In this thesis, the concept of prostitution as a significant part of the discussion, is seen as sexual exploitation among other ways. However, it is important to consider different views of the matter when making a broader statement. At the same time, when looking at sexual exploitation from a global perspective, in which forced prostitution is one of the forms of trafficking which is best recognized (Hossain *et al.*, 2010), it is almost impossible to determine the background factors and reasons for prostitution of individuals – are all of these women doing this by force, manipulation, for the lack of other options etc.? If not, then who has been abused as a child? Could that be a factor in their choice? Is it still a free choice if it is influenced by a trauma? Eventually, it becomes a difficult task to determine whether a person is making a clear choice and when they are not. Childhood sexual abuse is often mentioned as one influential path ways into prostitution (Ross, Farley & Schwartz, 2004). At the same time, the authors state that in some cultures sexual exploitation can be seen as something so normal, it works as a channel into prostitution together with poverty.

Women who have been sexually exploited were found to be multi-traumatized: experienced high numbers of childhood trauma, substance misuse, psychiatric disorders and violent victimization during prostitution (Ross, Farley & Schwartz, 2004). This would automatically lead to a question of how can we differentiate between different causes for mental health issues when a high number of these women are significantly traumatized even before being sexually exploited. Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts (2010) found in their study of mental health needs of women trafficked for sexual exploitation, that the physical and sexual abuse that was experienced prior to the trafficking events appeared to have less influence on their mental health, compared to the trafficking-related violence. They explained their finding with the timing of their research: their study had taken place at the early stages of the “post-trafficking care” the participants received. It is likely that the proximal effects of their experiences were more dominant at the time. This would then leave a space for further study of a longer follow-up of how more distal effects of violence and abuse may impact the mental well-being of women with a history of sexual exploitation.

6.2 Ethics and reliability

McMillan and Lombard (2013) point out the possibility of stereotyping and making assumption when dealing with his type of a sensitive topic. The reliability of a descriptive literature review and the content analysis can be affected by the subjectivity of the author. It is easy to focus more on the types of literature or results of research one is expecting to see and believing in. Lack of experience can affect the credibility of this type of thesis work. It can be seen in making generalizations with your findings and also lack in the ability to make as extensive literature review right at the beginning when at the planning stage of the work. However, making limitations visible will eventually leave the judgement of the reliability to the audience.

In qualitative study reports, according to Kyngäs, Mikkonen and Kääriäinen (2019), it is important for the writer to describe their prior knowledge of the research topic. This is

important as the preconceptions they have can affect the results they present or the collection process of the data. If these preconceptions are discussed openly, it is left for the reader to decide if they have affected the results. In this thesis process, I have briefly shared about my personal experiences with the brokenness of the women seen in sexual exploitation, and also the view of what is regarded as sexual exploitation in this thesis.

In the data that was used, the interview materials had been collected from various different places across the world, such as service settings, street prostitution, massage places, drop-in shelter for women with drug addictions, brothel and strip club (Ross, Farley & Schwartz, 2004; Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts, 2010). The researchers were highly educated and familiar with the topic they were investigating, which points to their high ethical awareness as well. There were a high number of referencing to previous studies and hypothesis, which brings out a wider view on the content of the data. However, with the topic being very sensitive and the participants being potentially in a psychologically vulnerable place, a question of their after-care – if required - can be asked as it was not mentioned in all of the data that was used. Were the issues of these women were found to present with addressed in any way was not mentioned? All interview data was anonymous and no names of city places, streets, buildings, services etc. were mentioned.

As for the data being used, All the research material for the findings of the research questions were taken from reliable and known sources which adds to the reliability value. There can be cultural and linguistic differences in understanding the questions in the questionnaires different studies have used. Potential different way of understanding the content of a specific word can bring a different answer. This was noted in Farley *et al.*, (2004) after interviewing women in prostitution in different countries about them being raped or not (Farley *et al.*, 2004). Some answered they have not been raped but following that statement in the next question, they identified a person who had raped them. This may be a factor especially in cross-cultural interviewing and data collection, where the interviewer and the interviewee differentiate in nationality, native language and culture. It is

also possible that people have a different understanding of such a thing as rape while in prostitution, which may affect their response in such a question.

As mentioned, in this thesis prostitution is seen as part of sexual exploitation, which was also the view of the studies being analysed. The research data included a wide selection of women being interviewed in different parts of the world with a diversity of backgrounds. However, it is still not necessarily completely certain how accurately the responses of the chosen interviewees represent the state of all women in different kind of sexual exploitation across the world. For example, even though prostitution in chosen studies is seen as a big part of sexual exploitation, yet there are groups who would not consider all prostitution as sexual exploitation. Would the results be different if the interviews would have been carried out among women who do not experience being exploited while in prostitution?

6.3 Reflection on personal development

The process of conducting this thesis has been most definitely, a challenging, yet a deepening experience in my own professional development. As for the results of the studies I analyzed, I cannot say I would be surprised of the level of psychological impacts of sexual exploitation. At the same time, I can see how easy it is to be subjective to the data when you already have a mindset of what you are expecting to see. I feel my personal challenges with this piece of literature review has been to conduct the analysis of the data material in a way that is presentable in all of its' extent and yet not present assumptions stamped on the actual results. All in all, I feel I have grown in my capacity for critical thinking and at the same time seen how much our existing world views, and other internal factors, can affect the findings we make. Do I see prostitution mostly as sexual exploitation or is it primarily one's own choice? This question on its' own can impact which type of studies I look for and secondly how do these studies set up their research questions. Lastly, these differentiating views can be seen in how the results are presented and finally discussed. It has been interesting to me to see my own thought process to develop in this.

I have also found the topic of my thesis grow into more new questions and tangents in my mind. The concept of sexual exploitation and the various possible events leading to that are so extremely complicated, it seems, that it is difficult to keep the common thread running. However, I would see that as a challenge with any type of research question one is professionally deeply fascinated by.

6.4 Recommendations

Several sources (Malloch & Rigby, 2016; De Chesnay, 2012; Muftić & Finn, 2013; Hossain *et al.*, 2010) bring out the need for more studies examining specific mental health implications of sexual exploitation. It is noted that work is done to identify these implications through looking into sexual exploitation but without systematic primary data collection Muftić & Finn (2013). De Chesnay (2012) states that as far as best practices for survivors of sexual exploitation, there is none. She confirms the limited research on the topic, the same being true for clinical research (De Chesnay, 2012). It appears clear that sexual exploitation causes trauma and mental health issues. Based on predictions in Ross, Farley & Schwartz (2004), more future research on entry into prostitution as a child, and long-term exploitation in prostitution, could help to formulate policies to aid these women and could help in forming intervention programs for them. At the same time, as mentioned by McMillan and Lombard (2013), the importance of acknowledging the risk of any women, regardless of their culture or nationality, for exploitation is needed to be able to identify risk factors and vulnerabilities. In fact, according to Roth (2012) in cases of predicting the appearance of post-traumatic stress disorder as an example, the experience of sexual exploitation has been seen as a more powerful variable than home country, gender or race.

Gerassi and Nichols (2018) noted the increasing attention and development of work around sexual exploitation, but yet they say that in social work practice surprisingly little attention has been given to this people group. This would be an area where more

development would be recommended. People involved and victimized in sexual exploitation have a multitude of different needs as they come from a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds. As sexual exploitation can present in many different forms, it is important to recognize the complexities behind different experiences. As professionals, it is vital to acknowledge the variety of different forms of aftercare and practices this people group may call out for. Also, as the studies show a high number of abuse among these people prior to being sexually exploited, it requires understanding of the possible effects of that to the treatment and after care offered by practitioners. McMillan and Lombard (2013) discuss the after care of survivors of sexual exploitation, together with other abuse and violence victims, and point out the differences in experiencing these issues which evidently needs to impact the outlook of the service delivery as well. As practitioners we need to be highly sensitive to those experiences and yet avoid making assumptions and stereotypes. They continue saying, how operational change and development of practice can be accomplished through training and understanding more of the issue. Re-framing the issue, McMillan and Lombard (2013) continue, is to acknowledge that the service user is not to be fixed, but rather a person to work with.

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APPENDIX 1. Identification of open codes

Farley et al., (2004) interviewed 854 people from 9 different countries being currently or previously sexually exploited. Their interviewees included mainly women and girls, but in some countries, also men and some transgendered people, who represent a minority in sexual exploitation. For the purpose of the study, it does not appear to make a significant difference even if a minority part of the result material is based on different gender. For raw data collection, this study used partially different measurements in different countries with their native language: The prostitution Questionnaire and the PTSD Checklist (PCL) (Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska & Keane, 1993; Blanchard, Jones-Alexander, Buckley, & Forneris, 1996 as cited in Farley et al., 2004), The Chronic Health Problem Questionnaire.

List of open codes (Results):

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Anxiety
Drug use	Extreme tension
Alcohol use	Terror regarding relationships with pimps
Overwhelming stress	Extremely low self-esteem
Emotional problems	Mood swings
Depression	Memory loss
Suicidality	Mental distress
Flashbacks of child abuse	
Serious emotional problems	
Distress	

Additional open codes (Discussion & conclusion):

Other anxiety disorders	Chronic physical discomfort
Dissociative Disorders	Altered self-perception
Complex PTSD	Difficulty regulating emotions
Chronic traumatic stress	Substance abuse
Distrust	Personality disorders
Irritability	Depression

Hossain *et al.*, (2010) interviewed 204 trafficked girls and women (aged 15-45) in seven countries in seven different post-trafficking service locations. They used the Brief Symptom Inventory and the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire together with various regression models based on their interview data to determine the impacts of trafficking-related trauma from possible pre-trafficking experiences of abuse.

List of open codes (Results):

PTSD

Depression

Anxiety

High levels of mental health symptoms

Additional open codes (Discussion & conclusion):

Sustained feelings of entrapment	Disability (mental)
Alienation	Stressors
Loss of control	Concerns
Humiliation	Impaired ability to integrate
Hopelessness	Additional life stress

Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, (2004) conducted a summary of four different studies in four different locations (Winnipeg and Vancouver in Canada, Istanbul in Turkey and the US) investigating dissociative disorders in relation to trauma and sexual exploitation. Research data had been gathered through interviewing 180 women currently or previously in sexual exploitation. The interviewees completed the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), (Bernstein & Putman, 1986; Waller, Putman & Carlson, 1996 as cited in Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, 2004) and/or the Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS), (Ross, 1997 as cited in Ross, Farley, and Schwartz, 2004). Some participants were also asked additional questions about trauma.

List of open codes (Results):

Major depressive disorder	Drug or alcohol dependence
Borderline personality disorder	Other substance abuse
Substance abuse	Dissociative fugue
Dissociative disorder	Dissociative identity disorder
Psychogenic amnesia	Dissociative disorder otherwise not specified
Depersonalization	Trauma
Multiple personality disorder	Psychiatric disorders

Additional open codes (Clinical observations):

Overwhelming fear and pain	Internal Fragmentation
Encounter with systematic cruelty	Experiences of leaving one's body
Denial	Numbing of feelings
Hopelessness	Emotional dryness
Despair	"Empty shell"
Demoralization	Gradual depersonalization
Disconnection	Process of dissociating body parts

Anger

Powerlessness

Degradation

Failure of protective behavior

Humiliation

Battered self-esteem

Muftić and Finn, (2013) investigated data collected by Raymond and Hughes (2002) of originally 41 semi-structured, qualitative interviews of women in sexual exploitation in the United States.

List of open codes (Results):

Suicidal ideation

Mental health problem

Addiction to alcohol and/or drugs

Additional open codes (Discussion):

Depression

APPENDIX 2. Process of data reduction

List of identified open codes (Results):

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Drug use

Alcohol use

Overwhelming stress

Emotional problems

Depression

Suicidality

Flashbacks of child abuse

Anxiety

Extreme tension

Terror regarding relationships with pimps

Extremely low self-esteem

Mood swings

Memory loss

Mental distress

Serious emotional problems

Distress

High levels of mental health symptoms

Major depressive disorder

Borderline personality disorder

Substance abuse

Dissociative disorder

Psychogenic amnesia

Depersonalization

Multiple personality disorder

Drug or alcohol dependence

Other substance abuse

Dissociative fugue

Dissociative identity disorder

Dissociative disorder otherwise not specified

Trauma

Psychiatric disorders

Suicidal ideation

Mental health problem

Addiction to alcohol and/or drugs

Creation of sub-concepts through combining the open codes -> data reduction:

PTSD

Depression

Suicidality

Substance abuse

Trauma

Dissociative symptoms

Psychiatric disorders

Anxiety

Distress

Stress

Mood swings

Memory loss

Emotional problems

Flashbacks of child abuse

Extreme tension

Terror regarding relationships with pimps

Extremely low self-esteem

Mental health problem

Further abstraction through combination of sub-concepts:

Mental health problem

Trauma

Psychiatric disorders (Oldham, Skodol & Bender, 2014)

Flashbacks of child abuse

Terror regarding relationships with pimps

Suicidality

Substance abuse

Main concepts:

Mental health

Dealing with trauma

Self-destructive behavior