Transformative Travel An Enjoyable Way to Foster Radical Change

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The Therapeutic Effects of an Adventure Challenge Program on the Personal Empowerment of Women Survivors of Sexual Trauma

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The number of women known to have experienced sexual trauma is more than one in three. Critical to surviving and healing from the atrocity of such terror is the process of reconnection and claiming one’s personal power. In order to meet these needs, health care must begin to offer comprehensive, therapeutic approaches for connection and empowerment.

Despite the congruence between identified trauma work goals and attributes of adventure challenge intervention, there are only three known studies that specifically explore adventure therapy as a treatment modality for survivors of sexual trauma (Isreal, 1989; Oliver, 1988; Pfirman, 1988). Clearly, there is an enormous need for rigorous investigation concerning the validity, process, and outcomes of adventure challenge intervention in therapeutic recreation. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of an adventure challenge program upon the personal empowerment of women survivors of sexual trauma.

This study examined the effects of a three-day adventure therapy program, Survivors of Abuse Growing Experientially through Therapeutic Recreation and Experiential Education or SAGE TREE, on the personal empowerment of woman survivors of sexual trauma. Due to limitations of the study, there were only seven participants. There were two female facilitators of the program.

The program goals and content were designed and based upon a group process model of empowerment designed by Goodwill and Hulbert (1992) intended for women surviving trauma. The model is theory-based drawing upon current theories of women’s psychological development and social interaction theory, and offers a quantitative program evaluation instrument.

The methodology of this study utilized qualitative phenomenological inductive approach utilizing pre and post structured in-depth interviews, and a post experience short-answer evaluation. The quantitative evaluation tool designed by Goodwill and Hulbert (1992) was also used.

Results were determined through analytic induction where themes emerged and were refined. The themes that developed from the testimony of the women revealed that those who participated in the program displayed acts of personal power during and following SAGE TREE. These themes attested that the women developed increased capacities of self-value, self-care/self-empathy, self-in relation, and personal competence. Future study could focus upon the effectiveness of adventure challenge intervention during various stages of healing, validation of the process model of empowerment, or the effects that a specifically facilitated context of connection has upon outcomes.


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