

Echoes of Support: Stories of Mental Health Professionals in Facilitating Healing of Sexually Abused Children

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Mental health professionals (MHPs) working with sexually abused children (SAC) in the Philippines navigate a complex landscape of emotional exhaustion and professional transformation. This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences, systemic challenges, and transformative growth of 11 licensed psychologists. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic and narrative approaches. The findings reveal that MHPs experience significant "emotional residue" and vicarious trauma, often carrying the weight of survivors' narratives into their personal lives. However, a critical professional shift was identified from rigid, textbook-based interventions toward child-paced, collaborative, and creative healing (e.g., utilizing play therapy and digital tools). Participants identified severe systemic barriers, including a "slow and retraumatizing" legal system, resource scarcity in local government units, and sociocultural obstacles such as *hiya* (shame) and family denial. Despite these challenges, the work is perceived as a "mission," where witnessing child resilience and achieving legal justice serve as pivotal rewards. Grounded in Vicarious Resilience Theory, the study concludes that practitioner well-being is a professional necessity rather than an individual responsibility. Recommendations include the institutionalization of clinical supervision, culturally adaptive trauma training, and policy reforms to streamline judicial processes and provide trauma-informed support for both survivors and the professionals who care for them.

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