

12-2018

Experiences Following Previous Sexual Trauma of Female SKMC Students

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Recommended Citation

Reddy, Haritha and Brawer, Rickie, "Experiences Following Previous Sexual Trauma of Female SKMC Students" (2018). SKMC JeffMD Scholarly Inquiry, Phase 1, Project 1.

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SKMC Class of 2021
SI PHR Abstract
11/30/18

Experiences Following Previous Sexual Trauma of Female SKMC Students

Introduction:

Sexual trauma is one of the greatest contributors to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and women are more likely to develop PTSD than men. In focusing on these long-lasting negative mental health outcomes, many study populations involving sexual trauma consist of college-educated females since this demographic is vulnerable to various stressors. However, information regarding methods of resilience employed by these individuals is lacking.

Objective:

The purpose of this project is to identify key elements of resilience in female Sidney Kimmel Medical College (SKMC) students who have experienced sexual trauma prior to entering medical school.

Methods:

Given the perseverance necessary for medical school acceptance, self-identified female SKMC students were selected to be the study population. Following social media advertisements, seven students scheduled anonymous 1-hour individual phone interviews online: one cancelled, two did not call, and four were interviewed to completion from September to October 2018.

Results:

All four students had similarities in trauma characteristics, impact, and coping mechanisms. With respect to the traumas, perpetrators were known and substance use was involved. In terms of impact, their personalities palpably changed, medical career trajectories solidified, and standards for medical professionals emphasized empathy. Additionally, effective coping mechanisms

included talk therapy and social support, while a less effective one was withholding of trauma information from loved ones.

Conclusion:

The knowledge of perpetrators and substance use observed in these high-achieving survivors are also prevalent in the general population inflicted by sexual trauma. However, their ability to move forward as medical students is rooted in 1) seeking help and 2) transforming their energy into something positive: career direction, self-awareness, and empathy.