

Towards Recognition of Abuse, Understanding, and Mutuality through Arts: T.R.A.U.M.A.

Project report

Principal Academics: Angela Sweeney

Principal Artist: Laura Fischer

Project background

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on artistic and public engagement around violence, abuse and mental health.

The project ran for a total of 11 months

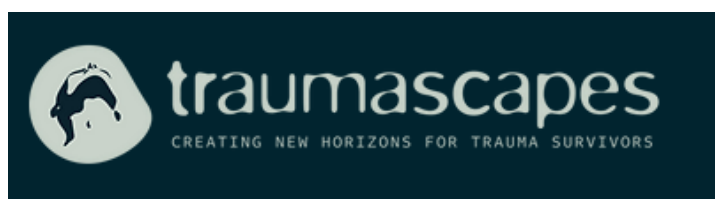


Project team:

- Angela Sweeney, King's College London
- Laura Fischer, Traumascapes
- Jane Chevous, Survivors Voices

Project partners:

- Survivors' Voices
- Traumascapes



Project summary

Background

It is estimated that over half of all children worldwide experience emotional, physical, or sexual abuse every year, although the true figures are likely to be much higher. Experiencing child abuse affects people's health and wellbeing throughout their lives. The World Health Organization (2016) states that this is very costly. Although child abuse is common and harmful, it is not fully understood or addressed. It can be hard to prevent child abuse because it is difficult to understand and recognise the signs that it is happening.

VAMHN's Survivor's Priority Themes and Questions for Research (2019) found that it is important that survivors can understand that what happened to them was abuse, and that professionals can also recognise abuse. This was confirmed in our Safe, Seen, Supported (SSS) project on reaching and helping children and young people experiencing abuse in their homes. Almost all our participants (94%, n=71) thought that a better understanding of abuse – how to recognise it, talk about it, and respond to it – is vital. The current project used art to build on SSS. Art allowed us to develop rich and creative communication without being limited by words/language. Using art in this way can help people engage with the topic and help build awareness of the issues.

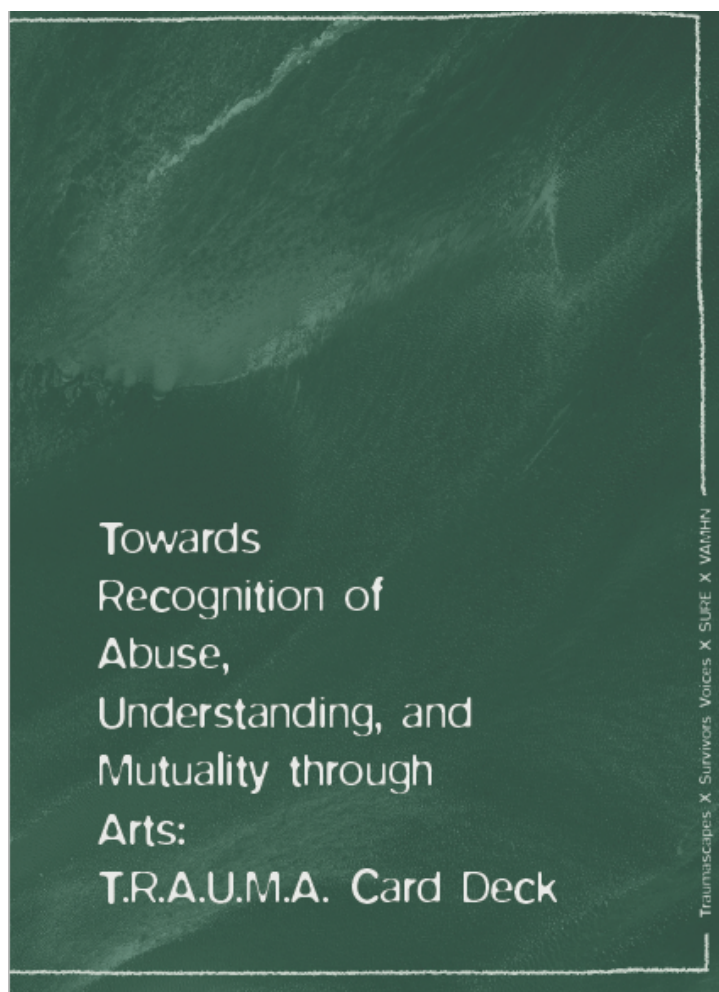
The aim of this project was to create an arts-based card-deck that supports abuse recognition and facilitates conversations.

Methods

To create an arts-based card-deck that supports abuse recognition and facilitates conversations. This survivor-led project was guided by our survivor ethos. We formed a survivor Arts Collective (AC) with the project leads and four artists. We came together across several workshops and used different artforms - including drawing, collage, textile, clay, film, and spoken word - to explore how to support different aspects of abuse recognition through imagery. AC members used sketchbooks for idea generation, development and reflection. We photographed the final artworks and designed a card-deck with these. The cards explored different themes around abuse recognition. We piloted the card-deck with a group of practitioners and made some changes based on feedback. We created a supporting booklet and webpage to help people use the cards. We organised an exhibition of the original artworks at King's College London and launched the card-deck at an opening reception.

Results

The final card-deck contained 78 cards, including images and reflective prompts, and a 16-page booklet with essential information on safety and support. Cards explore many themes including safety, belonging, memory, consent, boundaries, help, home, self-blame, fragmentation, doubt, voicelessness, threats, flashbacks, and more. Artworks were displayed at a three-month long exhibition. 122 people booked to attend the reception and card-deck launch. We sold 34 sets of the card deck and continue to receive orders. We will hold a final meeting with the AC to reflect on the project and celebrate our achievements. We are also planning further dissemination.



Conclusions

The pilot, exhibition and ongoing feedback suggest that the card-deck sensitively and effectively supports conversations around abuse recognition. Further evaluation is now needed.

Public impact

One-hundred and twenty-two people booked to attend the public launch of our exhibition. The exhibition remained open to the public Monday to Friday (in working hours) for three months. We received excellent feedback on the event, including in the previously mentioned review in the Psychologist, and in the link to feedback. Many attendees contacted us after the event to say that attending, and witnessing the artworks, had had a deep impact on them and that they will be using the card-deck.

We are embarking on a series of activities to promote the card-deck and the project, including the Impact Blog, conference workshop and planned podcast. As the project is still at an early stage it is difficult to predict impact. However, we have received feedback from people who are already using the card-deck in their practice and in survivor groups to facilitate conversations about abuse. We believe that these conversations are the beginnings of the awareness-raising that we hope this project will continue to contribute to.

"I am so glad I came to the TRAUMA exhibition. It was lovely to meet people and reflect on the art works and writings. Yesterday I used the TRAUMA card deck with friends and it went very well. I might also use it in a writing group I go to."

Colleagues working with clients in therapeutic settings have already sent feedback that the cards have enabled them to open conversations about clients' experiences that have supported disclosure of abuse and therapeutic narrative work on abusive experiences.

"I have used the TRAUMA deck 3 times in my therapy practice - its works so well! I have also recommended it to my clinical supervisor to purchase...and one of my clients has purchased one too."

Project lead Fischer will be using the cards in her teaching on the MSc in Creative Arts and Mental Health at Queen Mary University of London this month and aims to introduce these to her teaching on the MSc Creative Health at UCL as well. Project lead Chevous will be collecting evaluation and feedback from survivors in Changemakers, and will be showcasing the card deck with other survivor activists, theologians and church ministers. She and colleagues will also be using them in survivor peer support settings. Project lead Sweeney hopes to include – sensitively and carefully - examples from the cards in teaching to BSc Psychology undergraduates on Lived Experience in Research.

Survivor involvement

This project was entirely conceptualised and run by survivors. We developed a survivor ethos in our project entitled Safe, Seen, Supported, and continued to apply and develop that ethos in our work on this project. This ethos includes:

- The inclusion of all, in all our diversity - including gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, culture, faith, experience, and ability.
- Creating safe spaces based on mutuality, respect and co-operation.
- Removing the barriers that divide people and encouraging everyone to participate as they want or feel able to.
- Centring epistemic justice that values the wisdom of lived experience equally with other forms of knowledge.

We also centred survivor knowledge and engagement in the following ways:

- The Changemakers survivor network was involved in writing the project brief and participated in the Exhibition reception.
- Some of the practitioners who attended the pilot workshop were also survivors.
- A peer support worker from Survivors Voices attended the practitioner discussion group (given that many practitioners have lived experience) and the Exhibition reception.
- Survivor designers from Traumascapes designed all outward-facing project materials.
- Members of the Service User Research Enterprise attended the Exhibition reception.

Key messages

Top 3 key messages from the project



There is a clear need to increase awareness around abuse recognition, yet there are scant tools to do this; our arts-based card-deck meets this need.



Arts-based card-deck appears to be an important way of facilitating conversations with friends, family, and clients (in therapeutic contexts).

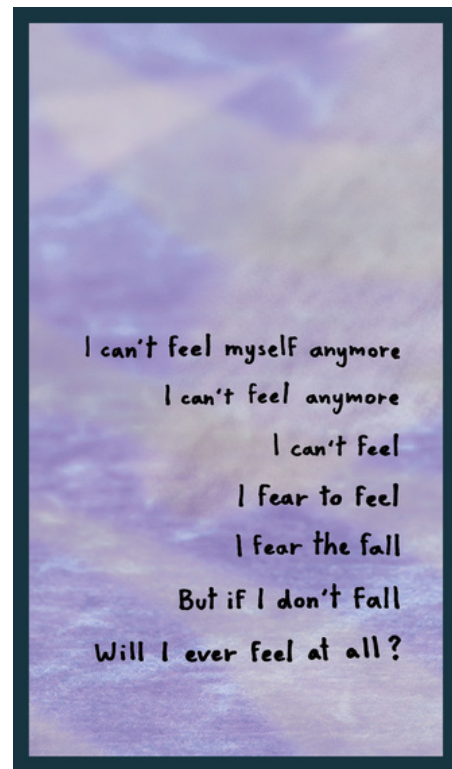


This project demonstrates the power of art to communicate non-verbal experiences such as trauma, and to reach people in new and meaningful ways.

Final Outputs

Card deck

To view the card deck website click [here](#). You can also view a sample of some of the cards below.



The Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network

We will be sure to keep our members updated on any outputs linked to this project in the future. To keep updated you can sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter. You can also follow us on our socials . All links can be found at the bottom of this page.

About the VAMHN

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

Measurement	Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement
Understanding	Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems
Intervention	Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems

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