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Sim's "Survivor care: What religious professionals need to know about healing trauma" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Sim, C. G. (2019). *Survivor care: What religious professionals need to know about healing trauma*. Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundery Books. 214 pp. \$34.99. ISBN 9781945935350

Oftentimes, the church is not equipped to handle the physiology of trauma, so informed care is needed, especially to prevent any secondary trauma that can be caused by any ignorance within faith communities. This book is recommended for any aspiring or practicing religious professionals who interact with those who have experienced traumatic incidences, namely, domestic violence or sexual assault. People might be surprised how often trauma occurs within faith communities. This work informs people on what to expect and how to respond appropriately. According to the author, it helps “translate civic and social responsibilities to the language of faith space” (p. 5). While it does not appeal to theology or Scripture, it does aid others in understanding the neurobiological experiences of victims/survivors, and how church staff can work alongside community partners, so people affected can find the best path towards healing.

Content includes definitions and basic concepts relating to trauma, as well as normal victim responses to it. In overwhelming experiences like these, one can lose their sense of agency since meaning or purpose is violated after being objectified. Thus, one becomes isolated through this loss of control and abuse. Abuse occurs through any word or act that dehumanizes someone, dismissing someone's autonomy and consent. One's brain and body are changed into a hyperactive alert system, which often causes shame, self-doubt, and confusion. This explains the various emotions and behaviors victims/survivors may exhibit. The section on how the brain and body are affected is particularly useful in helping people understand how certain manifestations are biologically based, often revealing how cognitive therapy is not enough.

After learning more about the various tactics' abusers use, healing methods are covered, including ceremonies, stories, contemplation, and integration. The impact of art, play, and body movement is explored. As a care provider, you can learn how to care for yourself and understand secondary trauma in order to limit compassion fatigue, recognizing the power and privilege that comes with being in a position of authority when working with those who are more vulnerable. In order to help people thrive, safe and positive relationships are necessary. Discover more about civic agencies' roles, necessary confidentiality, legislation, church responsibilities, and potential policies and tools to use in a potential church crisis.

Written for religious professionals by a religious professional with a PhD who has experienced trauma and works with those affected by trauma, this work is published by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for the United Methodist Church. While it is helpful for those in seminary or currently in ministry, keep in mind its primary focus is on women and domestic violence. While this practical guide covers much related to this topic and fills a unique niche in this field of study, it is not meant to be a comprehensive resource on the subject, rather it serves as a good introduction. Case studies, reference guides, and top 10s are provided which focus on particular issues. It is well documented with footnotes and appendices listing helpful resources.

Reviewer

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