

# Evaluation of a Suicide Prevention Training Program in the Anti-Human Trafficking Sector

Suicidal ideation and behavior are common among human trafficking survivors. Rates of suicidality are higher among survivors than in the general population. However, anti-trafficking staff often lack training on suicide prevention. Prior research has found that this lack of training can lead staff to experience anxiety and fear about working with suicidal clients. Training anti-trafficking staff in suicide prevention is important to minimize emotional burdens for staff and ensure high-quality support for survivors. In this study, a suicide prevention training program for anti-trafficking staff, the Suicide Learning Sessions (SLS) series, was evaluated to understand the training program's impact on staff.

## SLS Series

The SLS is a **14-week multi-modal suicide prevention training program** for anti-trafficking staff in the Philippines. The SLS was comprised of weekly mini-sessions implemented over 4 months, as follows:

- **Training modalities:** Asynchronous didactic learning videos, role plays, interactive group discussions, modeling of assessment and intervention tools, and case consultations;
- **Curriculum content:** The training program covered managing emotions and expectations, defining suicide and common misconceptions, risk assessment, implementation of the Suicide Safety Plan Intervention (SPI), as well as monitoring and follow-up.



## Research Methods

This study followed three phases:

- 1) **Three focus group discussions (FGDs)** were conducted with anti-trafficking staff in the Philippines to explore their experiences responding to suicidal ideation among Filipino survivors. The results were used to develop a culturally-adapted suicide intervention protocol for staff.
- 2) Staff at the partner NGO, Paglaum Training International (PTI), joined the SLS training program. **Pre-post training assessments** measured suicide knowledge, attitudes, and intention to use SPI. Open-ended surveys were conducted to get training feedback.
- 3) The newly developed suicide protocol was piloted for its feasibility, after which four FGDs were conducted to get feedback from staff. To evaluate the impact of the SLS, a **mixed inductive-deductive thematic analysis** was conducted using these FGDs, and the aforementioned open-ended surveys.

# Findings

The evaluation showed the following impacts of the suicide prevention training program:

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## Decreasing stigma and misconceptions

Service providers' mindsets changed toward suicide. Many discussed an increased willingness to talk directly about suicide and expressed how they shifted away from misconceptions of suicidal ideation and behavior as "manipulative" or "attention-seeking."

## Practical skill development

Many participants noted that prior training focused on increasing knowledge rather than building skills. However, participation in the SLS training program enabled practitioners to gain clinical skills to work with suicidal clients and increase their knowledge.

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## Grounding and structure

Staff reported that the process of suicide risk assessment and intervention was simplified and clearly outlined in the SLS. The suicide prevention protocol covered in the SLS provided clear, structured guidance for staff. The step-by-step processes covered in the SLS helped staff have more confidence in working with clients who are suicidal.

## Benefits of multi-modal training

The didactic videos, roleplays, discussion groups, modeling, and case consultations helped practitioners integrate their learning and improve their skills. The range of training modalities accommodated different learning styles. The asynchronous nature also provided greater flexibility for staff.

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## Reduced fear and dread

The training provided a safe space for staff to discuss suicide and the challenges in their work openly. This helped reduce staff's discomfort, fear, and anxiety when responding to suicidal behavior and ideation, which enhanced their capacity to support clients.

## Lessening emotional burdens

Staff felt that their previous feelings of self-blame, guilt, and feeling overwhelmed were reduced following the training. Many noted an increased ability to navigate their emotions, ultimately enhancing their psychological well-being and openness to responding to suicide ideation.

*"[The training] really allowed me to stay calm and more focused when talking to clients going through a crisis. It was overwhelming getting disclosures one after another when the pandemic started, and I felt my anxiety level increased. These training sessions really helped me in managing my thoughts and emotions. I feel that I am now better able to provide support to our clients and conduct crisis intervention in general." - Training Participant*

# Summary of Recommendations



Our findings reinforce the importance of training anti-trafficking staff in suicide prevention, especially in contexts lacking mental health training and services.

- Though many trainings target technical content, it is important to **address stigma and attitudes toward suicide**. Through the training, practitioners were able to overcome misconceptions regarding suicide, giving them clarity on how to support clients better.
- Findings underscore the **importance of multi-modal learning**, such as case scenarios, feedback, videos, and roleplaying to accommodate different learning styles.
- This study reinforces the importance of **practice-based training, which gives staff ongoing learning opportunities**. The 14-week SLS training allowed practitioners to process the content, put their knowledge into practice in real-time, and gain feedback from clinicians.
- Especially in contexts where there is a lack of mental health services, suicide prevention training programs should **prioritize accessibility for non-mental health professionals**. Training programs should be accessible to the community and case workers.
- Findings demonstrate the **importance of emotional support for staff**, such as clinical supervision and debriefing opportunities in discussion groups. Staff noted a reduction in emotional burdens, anxiety, fear, and stress when handling clients' suicidal ideation through having access to training, organizational structures, and an emotional support system.

## Why it matters

- Lack of training and support can create emotional burdens for anti-trafficking staff involved in providing services to clients who are suicidal.
- To address this, it is important to provide staff with practice-based, multi-modal training which helps them strengthen their suicide intervention skills and also provides emotional support.
- The provision of high-quality training for staff can not only improve staff well-being, but also enhance their capacity to support survivors.