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Overcoming the Difficulties of Travel for Individuals with PTSD in Sri Lanka.

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PTSD, Travel Challenges, Cultural Sensitivity, Social Support Networks, Mental Health Awareness, Sri Lanka, Trauma Theory.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative investigation delves into the intricate challenges faced by individuals dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while traveling in Sri Lanka. Situated within the framework of trauma theory, the study uncovers the profound influence of cultural subtleties, societal attitudes, social support systems, and infrastructural obstacles on the travel experiences of PTSD survivors. Cultural norms perpetuate a pervasive stigma around mental health, creating a culture of silence and exacerbating the difficulties encountered during travel. The research advocates for interventions that are culturally sensitive and community-based awareness campaigns to destigmatize mental health and cultivate an environment conducive to disclosure.

Family and community bonds are identified as influential factors in shaping PTSD disclosure, where robust family networks provide support, while societal challenges contribute to hesitancy. The study emphasizes the importance of broader societal awareness and education to reduce stigma and promote understanding within communities, fostering inclusivity for PTSD survivors during travel. Additionally, infrastructural challenges, such as limited accessibility and awareness, hinder smooth movement, intensifying reluctance to disclose.

The research underscores the necessity of informed and accessible support systems, enhanced accessibility to mental health resources, and societal awareness initiatives to alleviate challenges in travel experiences. Managerial implications include the adoption of trauma-informed approaches, customization of services, promotion of mental health awareness, development of inclusive policies, collaboration with mental health professionals, and advocacy for sustainable tourism practices within the travel industry. In summary, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on mental health, travel, and societal inclusion, providing recommendations and insights to foster empathy, understanding, and support for individuals navigating PTSD within diverse societal landscapes in Sri Lanka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) remains a significant global mental health concern affecting individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences. The journey toward recovery for PTSD survivors involves a range of challenges, spanning psychological, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of their lives. Travel, often associated with exploration, adventure, and personal development, introduces distinct complexities for those dealing with the aftermath of trauma. This research concentrates on the Sri Lankan context, acknowledging the varied cultural, social, and infrastructural factors that influence the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in the country.

1.1 Context and Rationale

Sri Lanka, a country celebrated for its cultural variety, historical importance, and scenic landscapes, has grappled with significant traumatic events, including an extended civil conflict and natural calamities. The post-conflict recovery and socio-economic development in Sri Lanka introduce additional layers of complexity to the experiences of those dealing with PTSD. The interconnection of trauma with the broader context of Sri Lankan society emphasizes the necessity for a detailed analysis of the difficulties encountered by individuals with PTSD during their travels.

While travel is commonly seen as a therapeutic and revitalizing pursuit, for those dealing with PTSD, it can be fraught with challenges. This study aims to thoroughly investigate the diverse factors that impact the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka. Through an in-depth examination of cultural subtleties, social interactions, and infrastructural considerations, the research seeks to recognize both impediments and supportive elements that significantly influence the path toward healing and well-being for individuals with PTSD.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

i. To examine Cultural Influences: Investigate how cultural factors, including societal attitudes towards mental health, traditional beliefs, and stigma, impact the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka.

ii. To explore Social Dynamics: Analyze the role of social support networks, community understanding, and interpersonal relationships in shaping the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD.

iii. To evaluate Infrastructural Considerations: Assess the accessibility and suitability of transportation, accommodation, and public spaces for PTSD survivors, considering the physical and sensory aspects that may pose challenges.

1.3 Research Questions

i. How do cultural influences impact the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka?

ii. What role do social dynamics play in shaping the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD in Sri Lanka? iii. How does infrastructural consideration contribute to the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka?

1.4 Significance of the Study

– Inform Trauma-Informed Practices: The study aims to provide insights into the development of traumainformed practices within the travel industry in Sri Lanka. Understanding the specific challenges faced by PTSD survivors during their journeys can contribute to the creation of guidelines and training programs for travel professionals. This, in turn, can lead to a more empathetic and supportive travel environment, ensuring that services are designed with the well-being of PTSD survivors in mind.

– Enhance Mental Health Awareness: By shedding light on the intersection of travel and mental health, particularly in the Sri Lankan context, the research contributes to the broader discourse on mental health awareness. Raising awareness about the challenges faced by PTSD survivors during travel can foster a more compassionate and understanding society. It may also encourage public discourse on mental health issues, reducing stigma and promoting a supportive societal framework.

– Facilitate Policy Development: The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for developing policies aimed at addressing the unique needs of PTSD survivors in the travel context. Recommendations derived from the research may guide policymakers in crafting inclusive measures, such as improved accessibility, awareness campaigns, and targeted support services, fostering a travel environment that is accommodating for individuals with PTSD.

– Contribute to Sustainable Tourism: Recognizing the importance of mental well-being in travel experiences contributes to the larger discourse on sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism involves not only environmental considerations but also the social and cultural impacts of tourism. Addressing the challenges faced by PTSD

survivors aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism by fostering a more equitable and supportive tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

— Global Relevance and Knowledge Transfer: While focused on the Sri Lankan context, the research findings can have broader implications for understanding the challenges PTSD survivors face during travel globally. The knowledge generated from this study can be applied to similar contexts, facilitating cross-cultural insights and contributing to a growing body of literature on the intersection of mental health and travel.

In summary, this research not only delves into the specific challenges faced by PTSD survivors during travel in Sri Lanka but also holds implications for broader societal, policy, and industry considerations. By addressing these complexities, the study aims to contribute to a more inclusive, understanding, and supportive environment for individuals with PTSD, both within the unique context of Sri Lanka and as part of a global dialogue on mental health and travel.

2. Literature review

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a profound psychological condition arising from exposure to traumatic events. Despite extensive research on trauma's mental health implications, the intersection of PTSD and travel, particularly within Sri Lanka, remains an underexplored domain. This literature review aims to offer a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on PTSD, travel-related challenges, and the unique socio-cultural landscape of Sri Lanka. The study is grounded in trauma theory, which posits that individuals' responses to trauma are shaped by the sociocultural context, thus influencing their lived experiences. By weaving together these strands, the review sets the stage for understanding the intricacies of travel for individuals with PTSD in Sri Lanka through the lens of trauma theory.

2.1 PTSD and Travel

Research on the intersection of PTSD and travel underscores the distinctive challenges individuals face in unfamiliar environments. The dissonance between PTSD symptoms (hyperarousal, avoidance, intrusive memories) and the unpredictability of travel scenarios intensifies psychological distress (Taylor et al., 2021). This literature review delves into the dynamics of how PTSD symptoms manifest during travel, aiming to tailor interventions and support mechanisms that align with the principles of trauma theory.

2.2 Cultural Influences on Mental Health

Sri Lanka's rich cultural tapestry influences societal attitudes toward mental health, deeply embedded in cultural norms and traditions. Beiser et al. (2015) stated that stigma related to mental health issues may impede help-seeking behaviors. Examining cultural influences becomes pivotal within the framework of trauma theory, offering insights into designing culturally sensitive interventions that integrate local perspectives and foster mental health awareness and acceptance (Banks, 2020; Derksen et al., 2023; Rahimi et al., 2022).

2.3 Social Dynamics and Support Networks

Social support is integral to the recovery journey of individuals with PTSD, extending to their travel experiences. In Sri Lanka, where communal bonds are significant, exploring how social dynamics can be leveraged within the trauma theory framework becomes crucial (Bolici et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023). Recognizing the importance of community engagement and destigmatizing mental health within social circles contributes to a more supportive environment aligned with trauma theory.

2.4 Infrastructural Considerations

The accessibility and suitability of transportation, accommodation, and public spaces are pivotal factors influencing the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD. Sri Lanka's post-conflict development may not have fully considered the needs of those with mental health conditions. Vardopoulos et al. (2023) Investigated infrastructural gaps within the trauma theory framework is vital for advocating inclusive design principles, ensuring travel environments are accommodating for individuals with PTSD Rahman et al. (2021).

2.5 Post-Conflict Context of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's post-conflict context introduces additional layers to the experiences of PTSD survivors, aligning with trauma theory principles. The legacy of conflict may contribute to heightened anxiety and triggers during travel, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how historical trauma intersects with the act of moving through different spaces (Samarathunga, 2020; Teare et al., 2013). Tailored interventions, considering the unique challenges faced by individuals and communities in the process of healing and rebuilding, are explored within the trauma theory framework.

In synthesizing these stages, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges PTSD survivors encounter during travel in Sri Lanka, grounded in the foundational principles of trauma theory.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a phenomenological research philosophy grounded in trauma theory to explore the lived experiences of PTSD survivors during travel in Sri Lanka. Trauma theory posits that individuals' responses to trauma are shaped by sociocultural factors, emphasizing the importance of context. This approach aligns with the study's aim to understand the essence and depth of participants' experiences, offering insights into the subjective reality of navigating travel challenges with PTSD.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the primary method, allowing flexibility in exploring the diverse and sensitive experiences of PTSD survivors during travel. Framed within the trauma theory perspective, the interviews delve into participants' unique narratives, considering the socio-cultural context that shapes their responses to trauma and travel challenges (Day, 2021).

3.2.2 Focus Group Discussions

Complementing individual insights, focus group discussions provide a platform for participants to share collective experiences within the trauma theory framework. Facilitated by a skilled moderator, these discussions explore shared societal attitudes, coping strategies, and communal dynamics, contributing to a holistic understanding of how trauma influences the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD (King, 2022).

3.3 Sampling Strategies

3.3.1 Purposeful Sampling

Participants are purposefully selected based on their ability to provide in-depth insights into travel challenges for PTSD survivors within the sociocultural context of Sri Lanka. Trauma theory guides the selection process, ensuring diverse demographics, trauma histories, and travel experiences are represented to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives.

3.3.2 Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is employed to identify additional participants through recommendations, aligning with the principles of trauma theory. This iterative process uncovers hidden perspectives and experiences within the community, enriching the study's depth and cultural context.

In accordance to Rhama (2023) the combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling forms a robust data collection strategy grounded in trauma theory, emphasizing participant voices and cultural context in exploring travel challenges for individuals with PTSD.

3.4 Population and Sample

The population comprises individuals in Sri Lanka diagnosed with PTSD according to DSM-5 criteria. Trauma theory guides participant inclusion, focusing on individuals aged 18-65 with diverse trauma and travel experiences. This ensures a coherent and relevant study within the trauma theory framework. The sample size, initially estimated at 15-20 participants, is adjusted based on data saturation to capture the depth and variability of experiences related to travel challenges for PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka.
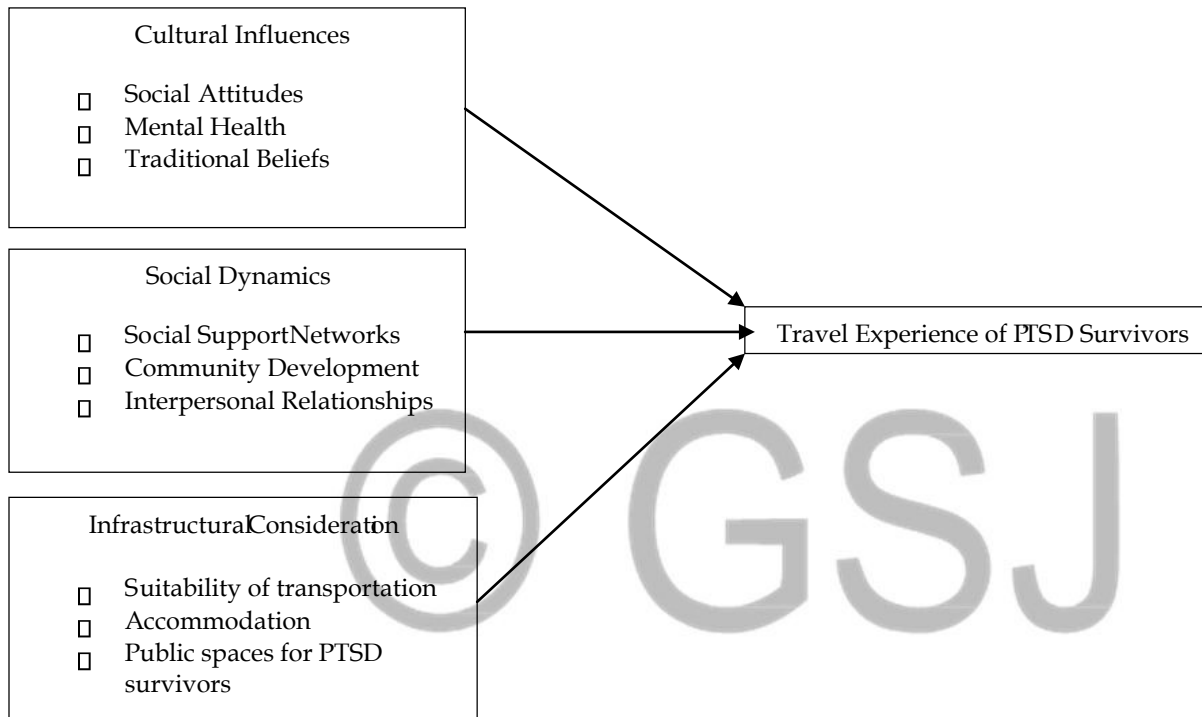
3.5 Concept Indicator Model

Figure 1: Concept Indicator Model

Source: Author

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

To carry out the interviews, an interview guide was developed based on the theoretical underpinning and review of prior literature. All interviews were voice recorded, transcribed verbatim, and saved as a supporting device for data management. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was employed as the data analysis method. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data, guided by the principles of trauma theory. Coding systematically develops themes related to cultural influences, social dynamics, infrastructural considerations, and emergent categories. A reflexive approach is employed to ensure depth and accuracy in interpretation, aligning with the trauma theory perspective.

The process of finding features in the data that pertain to the study's research questions (i.e., i. how do cultural influences impact the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka? what role do social dynamics play in shaping the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD in Sri Lanka? and how does infrastructural consideration contribute to the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka?) is known as "coding." A set of latent codes was constructed for the first step of coding, and these codes were then utilized to categorize financial literacy under three (03) dimensions. Latent codes used

the conceptual and theoretical frameworks utilized by the researcher to find latent meanings in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2014), and after the coding process, 31 codes were generated as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Latent Codes

Latent Codes	Themes
Social attitudes, norms, rituals, mental health, familial perceptions, cultural sigma, international transmission, traditional beliefs	Resilient Threads of Silence
Communal bonds, Interpersonal connection, support network, family roles, responsibilities, community engagement, interpersonal relationship	Interconnected and supportive nature of communities
Transportation, public health, public space, health awareness, inadequate infrastructure, accommodation	Navigating the Built Landscape of Empathy

Source: Survey Data

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Cultural Nuances and Societal Attitudes: "Resilient Threads of Silence"

4.1.1 Stigma Surrounding Mental Health

In the exploration of travel challenges for individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka, a striking revelation emerged—the pervasive stigma surrounding mental health significantly impacts disclosure and coping mechanisms. Participants vividly described how cultural norms and societal attitudes contribute to an environment where discussing mental health is often met with silence, perpetuating a profound sense of isolation.

The fear of judgment and social repercussions associated with mental health disclosure leads individuals with PTSD to hesitate in sharing their diagnosis. Chen et al. (2022) stated that the stigma attached to mental health conditions fosters a culture of silence, wherein individuals internalize their experiences, exacerbating their challenges during travel.

Cultural norms in Sri Lanka contribute to a reluctance in openly address mental health concerns. Participants noted that mental health issues are often viewed through the lens of shame and weakness, fostering societal expectations of maintaining silence about personal struggles (Sharifi-Tehrani, 2022; Hu et al., 2023). This cultural backdrop intensifies feelings of isolation among PTSD survivors.

The study underscores the critical need for culturally sensitive interventions that respect local norms. Kim et al. (2021) revealed that community-based awareness campaigns challenging stigmas and educational programs that integrate traditional beliefs were proposed. Creating safe spaces for disclosure, peer support networks, and the integration of cultural sensitivity into trauma-informed practices were identified as essential steps toward destigmatizing mental health.

Participants emphasized the importance of continued advocacy, dialogue, and policy development to destigmatize mental health in Sri Lanka. Safe spaces for disclosure, educational programs, and collaborations between the travel industry and mental health organizations were recommended to create an environment where PTSD survivors feel understood, supported, and empowered to navigate their journeys without fear of judgment or discrimination.

4.1.2 Traditional Beliefs and Cultural Norms

In the exploration of travel challenges for individuals grappling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka, the data analysis uncovered a profound interplay between traditional beliefs, cultural norms, and the intricate mental health narratives of participants. This theme sheds light on the pivotal role that traditional cultural elements play in shaping both the disclosure of PTSD and the coping mechanisms adopted by individuals within the rich tapestry of Sri Lankan society (Porananond, 2015; Z. Chen & Yang, 2021).

Traditional beliefs emerged as influential factors in participants' decisions to disclose their PTSD. The prevailing cultural norms, often framed through a spiritual lens, created a complex backdrop where individuals hesitated to share their experiences due to concerns about how their conditions would be interpreted within these cultural frameworks (Wen et al., 2021). The interweaving of traditional beliefs with mental health disclosure reflects a nuanced landscape that significantly impacts individuals' willingness to open up about their struggles.

Cultural norms were identified as significant influences on coping mechanisms adopted by individuals with PTSD. Samaddar and Mondal (2023) study illuminated a dynamic web where traditional rituals, familial expectations, and community perceptions played pivotal roles in shaping how participants navigated their mental health journeys. The diverse ways in which individuals leaned on traditional practices for comfort or grappled with societal expectations highlighted the complexity of these cultural dynamics in the coping process.

4.2 Social Support Networks: "Interconnected and Supportive Nature of Communities"

4.2.1 Role of Family and Community Bonds

In the exploration of the travel challenges faced by individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka, the data analysis underscored the pivotal significance of family and community bonds in shaping both the disclosure of PTSD and the overall mental health experiences of participants. This theme illuminates the intricate dynamics within familial and communal settings, revealing how these bonds can serve as both anchors and sources of challenges for individuals navigating the aftermath of trauma (Pahlevansharif et al., 2019).

Family and community bonds emerged as foundational elements influencing the disclosure of PTSD. Participants highlighted the profound impact of familial relationships and community ties on their decision to share their mental health struggles. Strong family bonds were often cited as sources of support, providing emotional understanding and a sense of safety. However, Intason (2023) analyzed also unveiled challenges within these structures, with some participants expressing fear of judgment and stigma within their communities, leading to hesitancy in disclosing their conditions.

The study delved into the multifaceted role of family and community bonds in shaping coping mechanisms for individuals with PTSD. Strong family support networks were identified as crucial pillars, offering emotional solace and understanding. Communal bonds played a significant role in the coping process, with community engagement and interpersonal relationships contributing to a supportive environment (Quang et al., 2023). However, challenges emerged as well, with societal expectations and the potential for stigma influencing coping strategies, emphasizing the need for broader societal awareness and education.

4.2.2 Need for Broader Societal Awareness

Within the data analysis of travel challenges for individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka, a prominent theme emerged—the imperative need for broader societal awareness. This aspect encapsulates the pervasive lack of understanding and the prevailing stigma surrounding mental health,

influencing the disclosure of PTSD and shaping the overall experiences of individuals within the societal framework (Leon et al., 2018).

The data analysis revealed a stark reality—widespread societal unawareness and stigma act as significant barriers to the disclosure of PTSD. Participants vividly described the challenges they faced when considering sharing their mental health struggles, primarily rooted in the fear of judgment and societal misconceptions (Barrett et al., 2020).

The prevailing lack of awareness contributes to an environment where discussions about mental health are often met with silence, perpetuating a sense of isolation for individuals grappling with PTSD.

Societal unawareness also plays a detrimental role in shaping coping mechanisms for individuals with PTSD. The data highlighted instances where societal expectations and judgments intensified the challenges faced by participants (Samarathunga, 2020; Teare et al., 2013). The study underlined the crucial role of broader societal attitudes in either alleviating or exacerbating the struggles of individuals, emphasizing the need for education and awareness to destigmatize mental health issues.

4.3 Infrastructural Challenges: "Navigating the Built Landscape of Empathy"

4.3.1 Lack of Accessibility and Awareness

The data analysis of travel challenges for individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka uncovered a significant theme—the pervasive lack of accessibility and awareness. This dual challenge encompasses the physical and informational barriers that impede the seamless movement of individuals with PTSD, shedding light on the critical need for inclusive design and heightened awareness within both societal and travel contexts (Abbas et al., 2024).

A substantial aspect of the data analysis revealed the profound impact of the lack of accessibility and awareness on the disclosure of PTSD. Participants recounted instances where physical barriers and the absence of understanding within society intensified their reluctance to disclose their mental health struggles. Isaac and Dodeen (2023) stated the intersection of limited accessibility and societal unawareness created an environment where individuals with PTSD felt marginalized, further contributing to the challenges they faced in sharing their experiences.

The lack of accessibility and awareness also played a detrimental role in shaping coping mechanisms for individuals with PTSD. The study highlighted instances where participants encountered difficulties in accessing mental health resources, exacerbating their struggles (Nishii et al., 2021) . The analysis underscored the importance of a more informed and accessible support system to enhance coping strategies for individuals grappling with the aftermath of trauma.

4.3.2 Urgent Need for Inclusive Design

The data analysis of travel challenges for individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sri Lanka revealed a compelling theme—the urgent need for inclusive design. This critical aspect encapsulates the physical and sensory dimensions that significantly impact the travel experiences of individuals with PTSD, emphasizing the imperative of creating environments that are accommodating and responsive to diverse needs(Mondal & Samaddar, 2021).

The data analysis illuminated the profound impact of the lack of inclusive design on the disclosure of PTSD. Participants detailed instances where the absence of accommodating environments heightened their apprehension in sharing their mental health struggles. The intersection of limited inclusivity and societal unawareness created barriers, intensifying the challenges individuals faced in opening up about their experiences.

The lack of inclusive design also played a pivotal role in shaping coping mechanisms for individuals with PTSD. Mackay and Spencer (2017) highlighted instances where participants encountered difficulties in navigating public spaces and transportation, exacerbating their struggles. The study underscored the importance of inclusive design principles to create environments that foster resilience and support for individuals grappling with the aftermath of trauma.

5 RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this study offer actionable insights for interventions, policies, and awareness campaigns aimed at enhancing the travel experiences of PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka. Recommendations include the development of culturally sensitive mental health programs, community-based support initiatives, and infrastructural improvements to ensure inclusive travel environments. This study advocates for a holistic approach that addresses not only the individual experiences of PTSD survivors but also engages communities, service providers, and policymakers in fostering a more compassionate and understanding society.

5.1 Theoretical Implications of the Study

The study contributes to the enrichment of trauma theory by applying it to the specific context of travel experiences for PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka. It explores how sociocultural factors, inherent in trauma theory, influence and shape the lived experiences of individuals during travel, offering nuanced insights into the intersectionality of trauma and journeying through different spaces.

☐   Contextualization of Trauma Responses

By grounding the study in trauma theory, it provides a platform for understanding how trauma responses manifest in the travel context. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted ways in which trauma interacts with cultural, social, and infrastructural elements, potentially expanding the theoretical understanding of trauma within the field.

☐   Cultural Sensitivity in Trauma Research

The research underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity within trauma research. It highlights how cultural norms, traditions, and societal attitudes play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of PTSD survivors. This emphasis on cultural nuances contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on how cultural factors influence the manifestation and management of trauma-related conditions.

☐   Social Ecology of Trauma

The study delves into the social dynamics and support networks surrounding individuals with PTSD during travel. This exploration adds depth to the social ecology perspective within trauma theory, illustrating how community understanding, interpersonal relationships, and social support networks are integral components influencing the journey of PTSD survivors.

☐   Trauma-informed approaches in Different Contexts

The research findings provide insights into how trauma-informed approaches can be tailored to the travel context. This theoretical development can extend beyond Sri Lanka, offering a framework for implementing traumainformed practices within the travel industry globally. It sets a precedent for considering mental health within broader industries beyond traditional therapeutic settings.

☐   Post-Conflict Trauma Considerations

The study acknowledges the post-conflict context in Sri Lanka, contributing to the theoretical understanding of trauma in societies recovering from conflict. It explores how historical trauma influences individual

and collective mental health, emphasizing the need for trauma-informed policies and practices in post-conflict settings.

☐ Intersectionality of Travel Experiences and Mental Health

The study adds to the theoretical discourse on the intersectionality of travel experiences and mental health, particularly for individuals with PTSD. It acknowledges the unique challenges posed by travel and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how different factors converge to shape the mental well-being of individuals navigating traumatic experiences during journeys.

☐ Holistic Framework for Mental Health in Travel

The research contributes to the development of a holistic framework for understanding mental health in the context of travel. By incorporating cultural, social, infrastructural, and post-conflict considerations, it offers a comprehensive theoretical foundation for addressing the needs of PTSD survivors in travel settings.

5.2 Managerial Implications

☐ Incorporating Trauma-Informed Practices in the Travel Industry

The findings suggest the need for the travel industry in Sri Lanka to adopt trauma-informed practices. Managers can develop guidelines and training programs to educate staff on recognizing and responding to the unique needs of PTSD survivors. This includes creating a supportive and empathetic environment, training staff to handle sensitive situations, and implementing policies that prioritize the mental well-being of travelers.

☐ Customizing Services for PTSD Survivors

Managers in the travel sector can use the insights from this study to customize services and facilities to better cater to the needs of PTSD survivors. This may involve designing trauma-informed spaces in accommodations, providing sensory-friendly options in transportation, and offering resources for emotional support. Such tailored services can enhance the overall travel experience for individuals with PTSD.

☐ Promoting Mental Health Awareness in the Industry

The study emphasizes the intersection of mental health and travel. Managers can play a crucial role in promoting mental health awareness within the industry. This includes initiatives such as awareness campaigns, workshops, and collaborations with mental health professionals. By fostering a culture of understanding, the travel industry can contribute to reducing stigma and creating a more supportive environment for travelers with PTSD.

☐ Developing Inclusive Policies and Facilities

Managers are encouraged to develop inclusive policies that address the infrastructural considerations identified in the study. This may involve improving accessibility in transportation, ensuring accommodations are equipped to handle sensory sensitivities, and creating public spaces that are accommodating for individuals with PTSD. Proactive measures can enhance the inclusivity of travel services.

☐ Collaboration with Mental Health Professionals

Establishing collaborations with mental health professionals can be beneficial for the travel industry. Managers can work with psychologists, counselors, and mental health organizations to develop comprehensive support services. This may include on-site counseling services, helplines, and partnerships with mental health professionals to provide guidance and resources for both staff and travelers.

☐ Employee Training and Sensitization

Managers should prioritize training programs for employees to increase their awareness and sensitivity to mental health issues. This training can help staff better understand the needs of PTSD survivors, respond

appropriately to challenging situations, and contribute to a more empathetic and supportive travel environment.

☐   Community Engagement and Social Responsibility

Engaging with local communities and promoting social responsibility initiatives can enhance the industry's impact. Managers can collaborate with local organizations to raise awareness about mental health, organize community events, and contribute to destigmatizing mental health issues within the broader community.

☐   Policy Advocacy and Industry Leadership

Managers in the travel industry can take a leadership role in advocating for policies that address the unique needs of PTSD survivors. This may involve collaborating with government agencies, industry associations, and non-profit organizations to influence and shape policies that promote mental health inclusivity in the travel sector.

☐   Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Practices

Recognizing the importance of mental well-being in travel experiences aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism. Managers can integrate mental health considerations into their sustainability initiatives, contributing to a more responsible and equitable tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

☐   Global Best Practices and Knowledge Transfer

Managers can stay informed about global best practices in the intersection of mental health and travel. By continuously updating their knowledge and practices, they can ensure that the travel industry in Sri Lanka remains at the forefront of providing inclusive and supportive services for individuals with PTSD.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The qualitative nature of the research may limit generalizability, and the cross-cultural analysis may not capture the full spectrum of diversity within Sri Lanka. Future research could delve deeper into the specific needs of different demographic groups and explore the efficacy of proposed interventions. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide a dynamic understanding of the evolving challenges and coping mechanisms of PTSD survivors over time.

In conclusion, this research serves as a stepping stone in the broader conversation about mental health, travel, and societal inclusion in the Sri Lankan context. By amplifying the voices of PTSD survivors, the study contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to create a more empathetic and supportive environment for individuals living with trauma. The journey does not end here; rather, it paves the way for further exploration, collaboration, and transformative initiatives that prioritize the well-being and dignity of all members of society, irrespective of their mental health journeys.

6 CONCLUSION

This research embarked on a journey to unravel the intricate tapestry of challenges faced by individuals living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during travel within the rich cultural, social, and infrastructural landscape of Sri Lanka. Through the lens of qualitative exploration and thematic analysis, this study sought to amplify the voices of PTSD survivors, bringing their experiences to the forefront and shedding light on the nuanced interplay of trauma and travel.

The thematic analysis revealed a mosaic of themes that encapsulate the multifaceted nature of travel challenges for PTSD survivors in Sri Lanka. Cultural influences emerged as profound determinants, shaping both the perceptions of PTSD within society and the coping mechanisms employed by individuals. Social dynamics played a pivotal role, with the significance of community support and understanding standing

out as essential elements in navigating the complexities of travel. Infrastructural considerations, often overlooked in the broader discourse, unveiled substantial barriers that impede the seamless movement of PTSD survivors, necessitating a closer examination of accessibility and inclusivity.

Cultural Nuances and Societal Attitudes: Participants illuminated the impact of cultural nuances and societal attitudes on their travel experiences. The study brought forth the stigma surrounding mental health issues in Sri Lanka, influencing not only the willingness to disclose PTSD but also shaping the way individuals are perceived within their communities. Traditional beliefs and cultural norms further colored the narratives, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive interventions and awareness campaigns to foster an environment that destigmatizes mental health.

Social Support Networks: The pivotal role of social support networks in the journey of PTSD survivors during travel emerged as a recurring theme. Family, friends, and community connections were identified as pillars of strength, providing emotional support and understanding. However, the study also highlighted the need for broader societal awareness and education to cultivate empathy and reduce the burden of stigma. Building a network of understanding within communities was identified as crucial in promoting an inclusive environment for PTSD survivors as they engage in travel.

Infrastructural Challenges: Infrastructural challenges, including issues related to transportation, accommodation, and public spaces, surfaced as significant obstacles in the travel experiences of PTSD survivors. The lack of accommodations for sensory sensitivities, limited accessibility in public spaces, and gaps in awareness among service providers were identified as areas demanding urgent attention. The study emphasized the imperative of inclusive design principles to create a travel environment that caters to the diverse needs of individuals with PTSD.

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