CASE REPORT

Case Report: The resiliency journey of a Vietnamese female sexual abuse survivor: an exploration in life history [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

Thien-Vu Giang¹, Duy-Hung Le¹, Thanh-Huan Nguyen¹, Van-Son Huynh², Diem-My Nguyen-Thi¹

¹Psychology Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, 700000, Vietnam
²Rector, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, 700000, Vietnam

Abstract
Currently, the studies on sexual abuse trauma, and resilience in Confucian survivors are still limited. The purpose of this study is to explore the resilience of Confucian women after sexual abuse trauma to provide evidence to support in counseling and psychotherapy practices. The article describes the resiliency story of a Vietnamese Confucian female survivor who was abused by her brother from the age of 8 to 16. The life history approach used in qualitative narrative research was applied in this study. The researcher identified two factors that strongly influence the survivor's resilience: (1) the effectiveness of passive education in the general education curriculum is oriented to both competence and quality development; and (2) an authentic understanding of the core Confucian philosophical doctrine: the neutrality and the self-nurture. Based on the findings, we propose a 7-stage flow diagram of a Confucian women's resilience following sexual abuse. These findings provide important evidence-based practice for counselors and clinicians in supporting and intervening for sexually abused Confucian women and contribute to the impact of studies on religious and spiritual factors affecting the resilience of sexual abuse survivors.

Keywords
Child sexual abuse, sexual abuse trauma, resilience, Confucian female survivor, life history, narrative research.
Corresponding author: Thien-Vu Giang (thienvust0708@gmail.com)

Author roles: Giang TV: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation; Le DH: Conceptualization, Funding Acquisition, Project Administration, Supervision; Nguyen TH: Data Curation, Investigation, Resources, Software, Visualization; Huynh VS: Conceptualization, Funding Acquisition, Methodology, Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing; Nguyen-Thi DM: Data Curation, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft Preparation

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This study belongs to the research project ‘Counseling for sexually abused children with artist playtherapy’ funded by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, code B2020-SPS-19. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

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How to cite this article: Giang TV, Le DH, Nguyen TH et al. Case Report: The resiliency journey of a Vietnamese female sexual abuse survivor: an exploration in life history [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]
F1000Research 2021, 10:1071 https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.55227.1
Introduction

An overview of childhood sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a crime that happens across countries, races, religions, classes, and cultures and has lifelong effects. CSA includes any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer (Bolen & Gergely, 2014). CSA leaves serious consequences on the victim’s mental health, which can have long-term effects without appropriate support and intervention strategies. There have been a lot of previous studies done to understand, support, and heal the sexual abuse trauma (SAT) experienced by survivors. These studies can be divided into three groups: (1) studies on the current situation surrounding CSA (Blakemore et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2014; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011); (2) studies on CSA prevention (Barron & Topping, 2013; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2018); and (3) studies on support, intervention and healing the SAT (Adams et al., 2018; Sanjeevi et al., 2018). This research is the result of the efforts of various countries, communities, and societies working together to protect children’s rights.

When studying the survivors’ life experiences, it is essential to learn about the development of their social relationships after the abuse. Some of the negative long-term effects that CSA has on a child is the consequences and precariousness of the victim’s communication abilities, interaction, and social connections when they become adults (O’Leary et al., 2010), go to work (Colarusso, 2010), get married (Fergusson et al., 2013) and even after having children (Mrazek & Kempe, 2014). It is also important when studying the essence of relationships to consider the cultural, religious, and social factors that influence the survivor’s life. This is a research direction that has garnered focus and is carried out in many countries in order to provide the most effective and appropriate solutions for survivors through consideration of religion and spirituality as a means of healing.

In Vietnam, research on CSA has been limited to presenting the situation (Linh, 2021; Tran, 2020), proposing solutions (Nguyen, 2018), practicing some manipulations of counseling, psychotherapy (Nguyen et al., 2016), and providing social support for victims (Dinh Vinh, 2020). There have been no longitudinal study addressing the long-term effects of CSA, or in-depth research on the psychological development, the essence of psychological phenomena in adults who were abused as children. Therefore, conducting a longitudinal study to understand the psychological transformation of CSA survivors in adulthood is urgent and a prerequisite for providing practical clinical evidence focusing on the post-intervention period in the group of survivors.

This article presents the resiliency journey of an adult female survivor of CSA that occurred from the age of eight as a typical case of trauma recovery involving religious and educational factors. The study’s findings demonstrate women’s ability to overcome adversity, as well as their emotional resilience, within a modern understanding of Confucian philosophical doctrine and of education as a preventive factor.

The long-term effects of sexual abuse and mental support

Previous global studies all show that victims of CSA suffer long-term effects of psychiatric, psychological, and physical symptoms. CSA has been correlated with higher levels of depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problems, and relationship problems (Bentovim et al., 2018). In some cases, survivors experienced sexual dysfunction when they came into adolescence. A study done on the prevalence and predictors of sexual dysfunction in the US revealed that victims of CSA experience sexual problems more than the general population. They found that male victims of CSA were more likely to experience erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, and low sexual desire, and they found that women were more likely to have arousal disorders (Laumann, Piel, & Rosen, 1999). These health issues are explored by psychologists and clinicians through empirical evidence. Also drawing on these long-term effects of CSA, many intervention strategies have been implemented, corresponding to different problems and different individuals. Therefore, it is important to point out that each victim’s responses and experiences in CSA will not be the same. Although it is often viewed as a traumatic experience, there is no single symptom among all survivors, and clinicians need to focus on the individual needs.

In addition to psychotherapy and medical interventions, religion and spirituality are commonly regarded as important coping strategies by victims of CSA. Religion may contribute to greater resilience, attribution of meaning, and guidance
as well as providing a social support network (Durà-Vilà et al., 2013). Although the spiritual impact of abuse can be devastating, some studies also document that spirituality can be a source of resiliency for many children and that those who can cope spiritually, also do a better job of coping emotionally and physically (Crisp, 2007). Religious and spiritual activities that are often performed by victims/survivors to recover from the SAT are: increasing the spiritual knowledge (e.g., religious education, Bible study), practicing spiritually (e.g., ritual, virtuous actions), consolidating the spiritual relationships (e.g., church involvement, holy marriage), and experiencing spirituality and religion (e.g., meditation, prayer; see Pargament, 2013). Each of these activities is designed to sustain and strengthen the individual’s relationship with the Gods, Saints, Buddha or other supernatural forces. Therefore, religion and spirituality are confirmed as being supportive factors in recovering from sexual abuse. However, when reviewing studies on the application of religion and spirituality as a form of mental support to sexual abuse survivors, there were only studies on Catholicism (Durà-Vilà et al., 2013), Christianity (Yan, 2001), Islam (Bhutto & Rind, 2019), and Buddhism (Sasson, 2014). The impact of other religions and belief systems has rarely been studied and deployed only at the level of common sense and indigenous knowledge.

The long-term effects of CSA analyzed above were confirmed to exist in Vietnamese adult survivors (Tran, 2020). Intervention strategies from psychologists, clinicians as well as support from social organizations have contributed to a positive effect in helping this group of survivors recover. At the same time, the application of spiritual and religious support strategies with the group of survivors was also carried out, focusing on Buddhism and Christianity – the two religions with the largest number of followers in Vietnam (Phan, 2010). However, a study on the psychological trauma of children and adolescents living in incomplete families by Nguyen (2019) reported that Confucianism and Confucian educational ideology in the family were the factors that aggravated the trauma of children being abused by their family members and were even a cause of suicide in children and adolescents. When studying the psychological trauma of sexually abused children, Nguyen et al. (2016) also found that Confucian philosophical ideas of gender and the prejudice that stems from within the family is the main reason female victims are not protected and have no voice in the family.

Confucianism has had a profound impact on the culture and spiritual life of Vietnamese people (Vuong et al., 2018). The doctrine of Confucianism is divided into two parts: Lower (studying the social relationships) and upper (studying the operation of the universe and human beings). This doctrine is preached through forms of education, family activities, and social relationships (Vuong et al., 2018). In particular, over the past 1000 years, Confucian philosophy has become an educational viewpoint, a cultural feature, and an educational tradition of many Vietnamese families (Smith, 2021). From these analyses, combined with practical evidence on SAT in Vietnam, it can be seen that the Confucian perspective is associated with the long-term effects of CSA as well as the resilience of this group of victims. Research on the resiliency process in survivors living in Confucian families, as well as the relationship between Confucianism and CSA, is urgently needed to serve as practical evidence to contribute to the case study or to consider as a model case in clinical psychotherapy and counseling.

**Methodology**

**Study purpose**

This study is part of a longitudinal research project on mental support and intervention measures for female sexual abuse victims since 2016 in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2016). The purpose of the present study is to understand the lived experiences of a Confucian woman who had been sexually abused as a child by her brother and to understand her resiliency process throughout her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

With this goal, the researchers posed two research questions to explore:

1. How did she survive in the family that caused her trauma?
2. How did she recover from the SAT?

**Research team and reflexivity**

The five researchers involved in this study with different tasks are presented in Table 1 (see Table 1).

The participant is currently a student studying at the research team’s university. There was no prior relationship between the research team and the participants. When the recruitment information for research volunteers was announced to the classes through the lecturers, the participant actively contacted the research team with the desire to better understand her trauma and help disseminate the project’s values to other survivors. Before participating, the participant was given full information about this project, including the objectives, vision and ethical issues in personal information security and scientific publication.
Study design
As Creswell and Poth (2016) noted, qualitative research strategies are particularly appropriate to address the experience and perspectives of the participant. The method of investigating those realities and experiences is referred to as narrative research, a qualitative research method designed to capture the detailed stories or life experiences of an individual. With narrative research, we can learn about the survival and resiliency process of CSA victims throughout their psychological development. Through time-lapse narrative interviews, the researchers documented the participant’s key milestones, thereby identifying key events and drivers that create, or promote the resilience.

The wider longitudinal research study, of which this study is a part, was conducted through 25 in-depth interviews between two researchers and the participant, each lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. The interview location was a psychological counseling office belonging to a key university in the south of Vietnam, which guaranteed a comfortable space and the confidentiality of the interviewee information.

This study belongs to the research project ‘Counseling for sexually abused children with artist playtherapy’ (Nguyen et al., 2016), which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, project number B2020.SPS.19 and supervised by the Department of Science and Technology Ethics committee of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (under the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam). This project aims to design and test the psychological interventions and support for sexually abused children. The data extraction used to conduct this study was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research team</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Credential</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience and training</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 1st author</td>
<td>Interviewer, data coding and analysis</td>
<td>PhD Student in Psychology</td>
<td>Counselor, researcher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Participated in training courses on mental health counseling, depression intervention, counseling for children with SAT, and school counseling. 5 years of research experience in counseling psychology, school psychology, trauma and mental health in children and adolescents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 2nd author</td>
<td>Data coding and analysis</td>
<td>PhD in Psychology</td>
<td>Counselor, lecturer, researcher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Participated in training courses on counseling psychology, school counseling and currently in charge of training modules on counseling at the university. 10 years of research experience in counseling psychology, school psychology and educational psychology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 3rd author</td>
<td>Data coding and analysis</td>
<td>Master in Psychology</td>
<td>Lecturer, researcher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Participated in training courses on school counseling and qualitative research. 5 years of research experience in school psychology and educational psychology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 4th author</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Professor in Psychology</td>
<td>Researcher, Principal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Participated in training courses on counseling psychology, school counseling, qualitative and quantitative research design, and currently is the head of the university’s research ethics committee. Over 25 years of research experience in counseling psychology, educational psychology, development psychology, mental health in children and adolescents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 5th author</td>
<td>Interviewer, Facilitator</td>
<td>PhD Student in Psychology</td>
<td>Lecturer, researcher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Participated in training courses on counseling psychology. 8 years of research experience in school counseling and educational psychology.</td>
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Table 1. Research team’s information.
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ask for help from society. At this point, with the support of her homeroom teacher, L realized that she had been abused for

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via social media such as Facebook to confide in L. He often told L about his broken relationships to gain her trust

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of 14, L started to feel uncomfortable when her brother kept texting her and sending her explicit pictures. L once told

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aggressive in stroking L, touching her sexually, making her feel very uncomfortable and “dirty”. When L was 16 years

old, the abuse reached its climax. She was lured by her brother to drink alcohol and perform sexual acts, and was eventually raped by her brother. L fell into despair and depression and shared that she once attempted suicide but was discovered by her father, so it was not successful. By this time, the parents believed that what L shared was true and took

action to intervene with her brother. Although they did not report to the police, L’s parents took L to live with her aunt in

another city and she continued to attend high school. L had managed to cut off the source of her abuse from here. However, the period that followed was the most challenging as she tried her best to balance her emotions, resilience, and reintegration into daily life. Details of her resilience and how she coped with the SAT are presented in the findings and key events sections which follow.

Data collection and analysis
Given the scope of the current article, data collection was based on L’s SAT-related events since the age of 8. This life-
history method, according to Goodson (2001), generates not only deeper knowledge about the individual but also about

the social reality and family relationship that she has to act out and operate within. Data collected from the accounts

approved by the Department of Science and Technology Ethics committee of the Ho Chi Minh City University of

Education (Permit number: 1815/QD-BGDĐT) and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The

participant was fully informed about the study process of the project, as well as the study conducted in this article prior to

the interview.

Consent
Consent for participation in the research project was given by the participant in the interview recording and signed

consent form. The name and personal information of the participant in this study were anonymized. The data used for

publication was approved by the participant. The written informed consent from the participant is confirmed by her

signature and the research team, under the supervision and guarantee of the Department of Science and Technology

Ethics committee of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. Written informed consent for publication of the

participant’s case details was obtained from the participant.

Participant
Once participants contacted the researchers to take part in the larger research project, a single participant from the group

was purposively sampled for this case study based on the following criteria: 1. The participant must have experience of

SAT. 2. Must be currently undergoing recovery. 3. Must follow the Confucian religion.

The criteria were assessed during the recruitment process through classroom discussions, where the participants

voluntarily shared their experiences. CSA is a traumatic experience and not every survivor can overcome it and recover. Therefore, the researchers requested a private and confidential meeting with the selected participant to double-check that the participant was indeed willing to share the story. Screening criteria were discussed again privately with the participant, and further information on the research project was given. After the participant agreed to take part, the contact details were shared with the fifth researcher who contacted the participant officially. Confidentiality of the participant information was maintained through all stages of the recruitment and research phases.

In this section, the participant’s information is presented in the form of biographical summaries, as well as key events in

her life history. The participant was a Confucian woman (anonymous name L), who was 20 years old at the time the study

took place, studying at university. L has a history of being sexually abused by her biological brother (older than L 12 years

old) between the ages of 8 and 16 years old. The types of abuse changed over time. For the first three years L was

completely unaware that she was being abused. The brother would occasionally use erotic statements when talking with L

and show L pictures of adult women wearing underwear or nude. L thought this was just normal communication and

was amused when her brother introduced her to the development of the female body as an adult. From 12 to 15 years old, when L entered puberty with many drastic changes in the body, the brother approached L more, often sending messages

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reported by L are collectively known as ‘socially read biography’, which provides insight into her resilience process, and the socio-cultural context, and offers a significant source of information and knowledge about Confucian female CSA survivors. From the perspective of social transformation, the employment of the life history method in this study is in line with the social approach to narrative research which enables the survivor to express her voice and attitudes towards the CSA.

Further, in line with the life-history method, data were collected by in-depth, unstructured interviews (Goodson, 2001). Because CSA is a sensitive topic to discuss as well as to research, the interviews were face-to-face with just two people present in addition to the interviewee. During the first two sessions, the researchers established a relationship with L through open and friendly exchanges to create a safe, positive and comfortable atmosphere for L. When L felt ready to share her story, the researcher conducted 25 interviews. Parallel to each interview, the researcher observed in detail L’s views, feelings, and behaviors, especially unconscious behaviors and body language expressions when retelling her story. L was interviewed with open-ended questions and was encouraged to answer and share her experiences as a victim and survivor of CSA. Interview questions focused on exploring life experiences, the resiliency process following SAT, and the impact of religion and education on the participant’s resiliency ability. Specifically:

1. How do you understand your resiliency ability after these bad things happen to you?

2. For you, how did Confucianism and your belief in Confucianism affect your resilience? (see all questions in Giang, 2021)

The 25 interviews were conducted in Vietnamese for convenience and so that the participant felt most comfortable when sharing her experience. All the details in L’s story quoted in this article were translated from Vietnamese into English by the author, who is fluent in both languages. Interview data was recorded (under the restricted conditions with the consent of the participant) and the research team confirmed not to use these for any personal interest. These recordings, after being processed, were stored in a secure data system set up by the Computer Science Center of the university where the participants are studying. During the interview process, the researcher systematized the events that occurred in the participant’s story in chronological order, noting important events as well as keywords and sentences serving the data analysis. As data collection was underpinned by the method of life history, deliberate strategies were employed for data analysis of the participant’s narratives (Goodson, 2001). In other words, the stories told by L during the interview were interpreted to highlight the foci of the study.

The data analysis was based on transcriptions of in-depth life history interviews with detailed observations of the participant’s behaviors, emotions, and perspectives. The story told by L was considered and analyzed in the broader context of mental health and social life in Vietnam rather than examined in isolation. The analysis process was interpreted independently by three researchers (the 1st, 2nd and 3rd authors). After that, the three results are discussed in a group and supervised by the 4th researcher to ensure reliability and semantic consistency. After the group discussion, the result was returned to a participant for comment and approved to be used in the findings section.

Findings
The main findings are presented in this section and they are illustrated with quotations extracted from the transcripts (Giang, 2021). After briefly describing L’s experiences, we propose a resiliency journey that involves learning Confucian philosophies and preventive education programs at school.

L’s sexual abuse traumatic experiences
L described various types of sexual abuse trauma (SAT), involving violence, harassment (in person and online), coercion, intimidation, and mental/physical stress. The acts of sexual abuse mainly took place at L’s family home, during periods of parental absence, or when L used online social networks. During the period of abuse before developing more resilience, L experienced a range of emotions and thoughts. The emotions and thoughts verbalized during L’s interview were summarized in Table 2 by the research team (see Table 2).

It can be seen that the feelings, thoughts, and responses (behavior), as well as the psychological trauma and forms of abuse, experienced by L during the period of abuse, are similar to those found in other victims of SAT. However, when considering the long-term effects, there is a significant difference between L and other published cases. The next findings section presents L’s recovery process of struggle and resilience from the age of 16, when completely separated from the perpetrator and she is no longer being abused.
L’s struggle and resilience journey

Since moving to her aunt’s house, L has not seen her brother. She also blocked him on Facebook and other social networking sites in order to completely cut contact. She only keeps in touch with her parents. However, the days following this transition were a challenging time for her. During one interview L recounted the first day of entering a new school:

In my religion, if a woman is not a virgin before marriage, it is a sin to my family and my future husband. I’m embarrassed. (Session 3, March 14th, 2020)

In the first three months following the move, it was difficult for L to adjust to the new learning environment and make new friends. Her trust in society seemed to be falling apart. L withdraws and limits communication with friends:

My 16-year-old [self] was in a crisis! I couldn’t trust anyone and myself! I do not want anyone to know this ugly thing! (Session 3, March 14th, 2020)

Not only that, but L’s trust in her parents also broke down:

Why did not they denounce him? Why are they defending him before the law? Instead, they moved me to live somewhere else. Is the role and face of the eldest son in the family so important? Parents are willing to let their daughters suffer because they do not want to hurt their sons! It is not fair! (Session 6, April 25th, 2020)

It can be seen that L suffered fierce internal struggle and torment related to her role in the family, her outlook on life, and the way she interacts and integrates socially. L commented:

I know I have been abused. That is a crime. I am a victim of this incident and I must move on … That is what I learned and [was] advised from my 9th grade homeroom teacher. However, I cannot forgive my family (including father, mother, and brother). I want to be recognized in my family! (Session 4, March 28th, 2020)

In addition, L suffered a period of depression as a result of feeling trapped and unsupported:

Every night, feelings of emptiness and despair rise within me. Even in my dreams, I see myself being rejected by my parents. If my father had not stopped me that day, I would be dead by now. Death might be better in this case. It took me a long time to get over that emptiness and despair. (Session 5, April 11th, 2020)

L recalled the day she was most desperate, the day she attempted suicide, her father was able to intervene and tell L:

When he dissuaded me from committing suicide, my father told me a philosophy of life. What makes me reflect and overcome the trauma later: [a] good person needs to learn all the time to know and correct himself. If you want to correct yourself, you must first keep your heart and mind for success, and then bring happiness to yourself and society. For the time being, please temporarily live away from family to observe and study the root of the problem, including your wishes. From there, train your own will, purify your soul from the pollution of CSA. Finally, correct your mistakes to be happy. (Session 7, May 9th, 2020)
L’s father’s words were from the Confucian philosophies. The training of will and knowledge is the way to help people overcome suffering. Her father’s teachings act as a resource to help L continue to live and explore this life. Her parents do not hate L but show their love skillfully. The parent separate L from the place that causes her suffering. Even so, they still protect L’s brother to a certain extent. As for her brother, L cut off contact. Since then, L has always showed resistance and kept her distance from her brother, so he could not do anything to her:

When describing how she overcame the fear, humiliation, torment, and pain caused by the SAT, L reports that she never forgets her father’s statement [a] and considers it as her life philosophy, helping herself to be motivated to learn and overcome her dark past. L said:

Everything that happens in the world has a cause. The fact that I was taken advantage of by my brother, as well as the way my parents treated me, was for a reason. Recalling at the age of 17, a year after that terrible day, I’m a different person! I was able to make friends and continue my education. (Session 8. May 23rd, 2020)

It is not easy for a survivor to make it through the SAT and related past experiences on their own. The case of L is different. L recovered significantly in just one year. So, what happened during that period? L recalled and recounted that:

I met my old homeroom teacher again. I told her about moving to another place. She was glad that I was no longer abused. She asked me what I plan to do and how to live in the future. This made me think a lot. I recall a lesson in secondary school. It was a famous short story from Vietnam in 1986, about the awakening of a son just because he was so focused on searching for faraway things that he forgot about the small and simple happy things next to him. I realized I was missing out on my friends in class. They always ask and encourage me. Why did I leave them and live a closed life? Am I being too selfish and indulging my feelings? I have to change! (Session 9, June 8th, 2020)

The influence of educational factors, mostly passive education (integrated across subjects, taught throughout lessons and different blocks in the educational program) had created a solid psychological foundation for L. Thanks to her father’s advice, combined with her reflection on life, L realized her resources and understood how to recover from the SAT.

L did not deny that CSA was a traumatic event, and faced it step by step:

It was very painful. There are times when I want to give up. Those memories still appear, in waves, not as many and fast as before. Gradually, I realized that I had lived with the SAT for almost 10 years and that I was still alive. I acknowledge the existence of this pain in my life. I never forget, and I do not allow myself to forget. The perpetrator will have to pay the penalty. I learned this in Civic Education. I know more about the legal and social support of CSA. I will fight to free myself! (Session 17, September 14th, 2020)

Thus, one year after the end of the abuse, although the pain and trauma still affect her, L has learned to adapt and change herself to overcome that pain. L continued to reflect on her father’s words, her former homeroom teacher’s questions, and what she learned in the educational program she went through. This was her coping strategy: The last year of high school, when the pressure of studying and exams hit, was also the time when L was enlightened with many philosophies to overcome the painful past and work towards a good future. L stated:

I did not expect the pressure of college entrance exams to be the driving force pushing myself to overcome my SAT. (Session 11, July 7th, 2020)

L has determined her academic goals and future, thereby overcoming the darkness of her past. For L, the memory of being abused becomes a driving force that makes her constantly learn and strive to improve herself, protect herself, and help those around her to change their perception of the CSA. The following quotes from L clearly describes how she overcame darkness and became enlightened:

The noble moral values of the Vietnamese people, as well as the practical value of life skills, give me the courage to overcome these bad things. (Session 12, July 21st, 2020)

My father's statement and my family's Confucian upbringing are the things that have influenced me to this day … Whoever you are, you will have these relationships and you have the things you need to do to achieve balance, or so-called neutrality. By the time my parents found out I was raped, my father taught me about the cycle of life. It is a lesson about self-nurture (lessons of being and relationships) in the lower part of Confucian philosophy. It took me three years to think, reflect, and learn about this lesson. (Session 12, July 21st, 2020)
When we properly understand Confucianism and behave correctly with the core views on human life, social relationships, and neutrality, it will help us to have a better and broader understanding of the problems, thereby creating internal strength to overcome the SAT. (Session 12, July 21st, 2020)

By studying Confucian philosophy, L strengthened her beliefs in herself. This philosophical contemplation created a tremendous change in her resilience. With this, L has accepted her past and overcome the darkness of her life. She was enlightened and had gained valuable religious experiences. Besides, there is also the participation of education as passive, long-term support. All form a solid and enlightening spiritual resource, leading L to find her rights and her ego. Following high school, L’s life was able to develop as she entered university. This was also the time when L realized her dreams and sublimated negative emotions into positive, meaningful experiences. L recounted how she felt on the first day she entered the university lecturing hall:

It was a great day at 18 when I was no longer a schoolgirl, but a student. This is the first step for me to achieve my goal of regaining equality for women in Confucian families with antiquated, outdated views. I want parents to properly understand the spirit of Confucianism and give equal love to both sons and daughters. At the same time, I want female survivors like me to be brave, to fight against prejudice to gain happiness. (Session 20, October 5th, 2020)

At this stage, when reiterating the issue of CSA as well as her SAT, L was able to share very comfortably. With L, those experiences are valuable life experiences and a driving force for her development. L never forgot, nor let it affect her negatively. L commented:

It is part of my life. I cannot deny it. The Confucian philosophy, especially the neutrality and unconditioned lifestyle, has guided me to the right, to the fight for the equal rights and safety of women and girls.

Initially, I joined a non-governmental organization for the protection of children’s rights. During my studies, I will participate more in projects to protect children, as well as provide psychological support to victims of sexual abuse. I will help them overcome the SAT themselves. (Session 15, August 30th, 2020)

L’s academic and life goals went quite smoothly, she achieved what she set out to do and became an advocate and volunteer to provide mental support for sexually abused children in remote areas – an area that is still heavily prejudiced in Vietnam. The researcher met L again in the next interview session, where L shared that:

Step into the university, I shine and spread positive existential values! I hope my story will be an inspiration or a living testimony to other survivors … (Session 23, October 26th, 2020)

Now my brother has been held accountable for his behavior. He contracted STDs and lost the ability to have children. This is retribution, a proper punishment of Heaven for him. Truly to the Confucian philosophy of ‘What you sow, you reap what you reap!’… I am not happy, not sad, and not despise him … (Session 24, November 3rd, 2020)

After a long time, I have continuously struggled and provided knowledge about CSA, corrected Confucian ideology and gender equality, my parents have changed their minds. They acknowledged the truth about my brother and expressed their regret for treating me unequally in the past. Everything happens for a reason! My father used to say so! (Session 24, November 3rd, 2020)

In the last conversation between the researcher and L, L shared a message that she wants to send to female survivors who are stuck, repressed, and resigned in Confucian prejudiced families:

If I use a symbol to describe my life, I will be a lotus. The lotus is the Vietnamese national flower, symbolizing purity, being close to the mud without the foul smell of mud. I used to live in the mud, in the painful darkness of the SAT. I was miserable, ugly, and despised myself. But I was enlightened, I shined and showed my beauty – a beautiful lotus rose in the dirty mud! I want to send a message to the other survivors: ‘Live like a lotus, beautiful and radiant in your way!’ (Session 25, November 10th, 2020)

Discussion
L’s story provides insight into the journey of resilience of a Vietnamese Confucian female CSA survivor. L experienced the long-term effects of CSA that previous studies have reported: depression, suicide, low self-image, low self-esteem, social isolation, etc. (Hailes et al., 2019). She overcame the SAT to find spiritual balance, reintegrate into daily life and
have been promoted in Vietnam since the 2015-2016 academic year (Nguyen, 2018). CSA prevention skills that have 
consider her participation in the preventive educational program on life skills, especially the CSA prevention skills that 
roots and moral values as resources for them to cope effectively with adversity. In L 
subjects. Thus, with foundations in Confucian doctrine, the Vietnamese curriculum equips students with solid spiritual 
comprehensive personality development. The five basic qualities of Confucianism, and other valuable aspects derived 
these are still the leading educational maxims in Vietnam, especially in moral education (self-nurture) and students 
morally), Wisdom (showing understanding and good judgement), and Trustworthiness (being reliable and honest). 
Benevolence (loving others), Propriety (showing respect and order in words and deeds), Righteousness (behaving 
formalities, religious rituals, prayers, or participation in religious activities to balance emotions, or talk and repent with 
God. It is paramount that you read, understand, and reflect on the teachings of Confucianism. To properly understand the 
authentic perception of Confucian philosophy 
L, you will have these relationships and you have the things you need to achieve balance' (Session 12, July 21st, 2020). 
When survivors maintain a neutral attitude toward the perpetrator and CSA-related issues by being non-judgmental, non-
retaliatory, and accepting that the trauma that has happened in their life; they will be strengthened in will and inner 
strength. When a survivor’s will and inner strength is strong enough that they can live independently they can transform the SAT into value. This is also a philosophy within the lower part of Confucianism. In Confucianism, there is no need for 
formalities, religious rituals, prayers, or participation in religious activities to balance emotions, or talk and repent with 
God. It is paramount that you read, understand, and reflect on the teachings of Confucianism. To properly understand the 
authentic perception and successfully apply Confucian philosophy to life, one must learn the lower part first, then the 
upper part (O'Harrow, 2021). In the lower part, you have to learn from self-nurture (get to know yourself, isolate things to 
observe, find out the roots, train your will, get rid of sins, correct your mistakes, and find happiness), behave in accordance with 
the norms of the family and the country (appropriate social behavior) and with the world (contribute to society, find happiness in yourself and those around you). L had studied the Confucian doctrine from the beginning to enlighten and 
better understand the philosophy, as a foundation to overcoming SAT.

In terms of the impact of education, Tho (2016) states that Vietnamese education is heavily influenced by Confucianism. 
Confucianism attaches great importance to learning and considers it to be the foundation of human development in society. According to Yao and Yao (2000), in Confucianism, the five minimum moral qualities of a person are 
Benevolence (loving others), Propriety (showing respect and order in words and deeds), Righteousness (behaving 
morally), Wisdom (showing understanding and good judgement), and Trustworthiness (being reliable and honest). 
These are still the leading educational maxims in Vietnam, especially in moral education (self-nurture) and students’ 
comprehensive personality development. The five basic qualities of Confucianism, and other valuable aspects derived from 
Vietnamese traditions are considered indispensable content in moral education and are integrated into all school 
subjects. Thus, with foundations in Confucian doctrine, the Vietnamese curriculum equips students with solid spiritual 
roots and moral values as resources for them to cope effectively with adversity. In L’s story, it is impossible not to 
consider her participation in the preventive educational program on life skills, especially the CSA prevention skills that 
have been promoted in Vietnam since the 2015-2016 academic year (Nguyen, 2018). CSA prevention skills that have 
developed in educational activities for Vietnamese students include: safe and unsafe touches, privacy protection, 
supportive relationships, safe social media usage, safe dating, and refusal skills (Nguyen, 2018; Linh, 2021; Tran, 2020). 
These are also the skills that L had learned since the 9th grade. Along with the skills education, the subject of Civic 
Education and Literature equipped L with core beliefs and values. In Civic Education, L was taught the five moral values 
of Confucianism), but also equipped with legal knowledge on women’s and children’s rights. This knowledge system 
has similarities with Confucian doctrine when it comes to moral cultivation, law enforcement and social stabilization. 
Because of her interest in Confucianism, L instilled these values. In Literature, L was taught to love herself in the past, 
present and future. The life values that this subject brings to L are love, tolerance and forgiveness. L forgives her past, her 
brother’s crime, and resolves to live a fulfilling life. The comprehensive prevention skills, and education on moral values 
underpinning human potential, particularly the five basic qualities of Confucianism, have supported the formation of 
positive mental resources and supported abused victims to overcome SAT through the concept of neutrality.
**L’ resiliency journey: The process of spiritual nurture towards the neutrality**

The findings show that L’s resiliency journey had stages, with the learning and improvement of life values learned in school and an authentic understanding of Confucian philosophy through different timelines. Her story started with curiosity around sex; to guilt and self-loathing; then acceptance and seeking out resources; finally, contemplation, enlightenment, and overcoming pain. In terms of long-term effects, L experienced torment, loss of faith in herself and her family, social isolation, depression, and even attempted suicide. This SAT experience, as well as expressions of long-term effects, is quite similar to that of survivors in other cultures (Hailes et al., 2019). According to Durà-Vilà et al. (2013), the psychological process that abused victims, specifically Catholic nuns go through to achieve recovery includes 8 stages: (1) Shock and distress; (2) Self-doubt; (3) Anger and mistrust; (4) Withdrawal and mediation; (5) Secrecy or disclosure; (6) Community acceptance; (7) Spiritual integration; (8) Posttraumatic growth. The nuns’ understanding of their abuse in the light of their religious beliefs enabled the trauma to be transformed into a potential catalyst for growth. Therefore, considering religious and spiritual aspects when supporting religious people with SAT may allow religious narratives that incorporate the trauma to unfold. It is important for the believers to have an authentic perception of the religious philosophy and how to apply these philosophies in daily life.

Throughout her story, L discusses self-nurture and neutrality - two core principles of Confucian philosophy that any believer must understand and live by. These are also two factors that motivated L to learn about her trauma and overcome it. Initially, she could not accept the fact, but her interest in the authentic perception in Confucian philosophy prompted her to search for explanations. L learned how to analyze problems neutrally and applied this to her SAT. She was successful in transforming her crisis into a motivation for learning and was able to practice self-nurture with the core philosophical values of Confucianism. Some contents of the current Vietnamese educational program still maintain the Confucian philosophy, taking the cultivation of qualities as the main focus in the development of student's personality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1 – Suffering and Depression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Feelings of torment, pain, guilt, and self-loathing</td>
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<td>- Depression - may develop suicidal behavior</td>
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<th>Stage 2 – Anger and Mistrust</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Anger around allowing the abuse to happen</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Anger at the perpetrator and loved ones for protecting the victim</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Loss of trust for family members and other social relationships</td>
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<td>- Anger and distrust towards societal prejudice of women</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 3 – Contemplation and understanding</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Learning and in-depth study about the injustice and prejudice of society towards Confucian women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Investigate and reflect on the core values of Confucianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reflect the Confucian view of life and the universe (two parts - lower and upper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understand and be properly enlightened about the origin and meaning of Confucianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Deal with your negative emotions with the Confucian philosophy: Neutrality</td>
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<th>Stage 4 – Cultivation of mentality</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Discover your needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Isolate the abuser/perpetrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Think to get the root of the abusive behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Train your willpower</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Get rid of sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct your mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Make a plan to find happiness</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 5 – Managing family relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide information and teaching to help family members to properly understand Confucianism and CSA</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Enlist the consent of loved ones so that they can understand your feelings and SAT experiences</td>
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<th>Stage 6 – Social connection</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Interact, make friends and expand social relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Spread the positive values of a survivor’s winning experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mobilize society to stand up and fight for women’s equality and values</td>
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<th>Stage 7 – Dedication and Happiness</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Participate in social activities, continue to advocate for women’s equality and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Forgive the mistakes of the abuser/perpetrator, accept that everything in life happens for a reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accept the past, strengthen present resources, and invest in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Find happiness with your capacity</td>
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**Figure 1. Flow diagram showing the stages of SAT resilience in a Confucian woman.**
This is an inheritance of Confucian philosophy in education and has created a powerful inner resource to help L overcome her SAT. L was able to turn SAT into a resource for her self-development, so that she could serve the community and help prevent future cases like hers.

From L’s story, we have proposed a model of SAT resiliency detailed in seven stages (see Figure 1).

**Conclusion**

L’s narrative highlights the importance of early prevention of CSA through educational programs, as well as using religious-spiritual factors as a resource rather than a perpetuation of the problem. The passive effect of the educational curriculum and the authentic perception of Confucian doctrine are the two factors helped L overcame the SAT. It is the core values of Confucianism - nurture and the neutrality - that have changed L’s perception of CSA and SAT in a positive light. L’s resiliency journey went through seven stages with different psychological developments, starting with suffering and depression, through the process of contemplation and understanding of the Confucian philosophy of life to move on to dedication and happiness. This resiliency journey reflects the Confucian point of view of education and human development: Self-nurture. Clinicians or mental health counselors working with religious trauma victims, especially Confucian victims, should be mindful of the importance of considering their spiritual beliefs and their acknowledgment of the Confucian philosophy. It is necessary and highly feasible to help this group of clients understand the authentic perception of Confucianism, as well as elicit hidden values passively created from the educational program.

However, this study has some limitations. Although in the case presented here, L’s religious beliefs seems to have had a positive impact on her well-being, it would be naive to think that this is always the case. Confucian beliefs can be a source of meaning and resilience but also have the potential to be damaging and present barriers to women’s equality. Clinicians and mental health counselors need to be alert to maladaptive cognitions and coping reactions in traumatized religious patients. With these findings, we have only approached it from the perspective of a typical case in Vietnam, and more descriptive studies as well as large-scale interviews are needed to fully understand Confucian CSA. In addition, as part of our long-term study on CSA, these results are of great significance in preparing an experimental model according to the stages of SAT resilience in a Confucian woman. This is the basis for us to continue studying this research question using an ethnographic approach on CSA and SAT in Confucian survivors. Accordingly, the study supports the notion that greater attention needs to be paid to religiosity in the lives of adults who have been sexually abused as children.

**Data availability**

**Underlying data**


This project contains the following underlying data:

- Anonymised transcripts (in English)

**Extended data**

This project contains the following extended data:

- Interview guide (in English)

Data are available under the terms of the Creative Commons Zero “No rights reserved” data waiver (CC0 1.0 Public domain dedication).

**References**


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