

‘Helping Male Survivors of Sexual Violation to Recover: An integrative approach – stories from therapy’ by Sarah Van Gogh, published by Jessica Kingsley.

Review by Dr John Barry

Women who are using statutory mental health services are far more likely than men to be asked if they have ever experienced [childhood abuse](#). This adds to the general lack of knowledge of male victims of child sexual abuse (CSA), and makes Sarah Van Gogh’s book on the topic all the more important.

The book describes in an engaging way Van Gogh’s approach to helping men to overcome the impact of CSA. The storytelling style covers a range of different clients and types of violation, and describes how, using an [integrative approach](#), she has helped male clients for almost 20 years.

The book begins with a description of her therapeutic approach, and an illustration of how to understand and work with the rage often seen in male CSA clients.

Subsequent chapters describe the use of music in therapy, dismantling defence mechanisms, using childhood toys therapeutically, overcoming the narrative that the abuse was love, helping survivors of organised abuse, and [PTSD](#).

Clients of a variety of demographics are described, including a trans client.

The fictionalised accounts of her cases are written engagingly and with sensitivity. To someone with a background purely in [CBT](#) or [IAPT](#) the range of techniques used and the duration of therapy (hard to tell, but seemed to be around two years) will seem like a different world. Also the storytelling approach might seem less thorough to someone used to learning techniques from a manual.

However this only means that the book might be especially appealing to those who find a more systematic style of learning to be something of a straightjacket, and this more intuitive approach a breath of fresh air.

Although eclectic, the book is always coherent and moves skilfully between neurobiology, classic psychodynamic techniques, and innovative approaches.

It is worth noting that this approach, while being successful with male clients, are likely to work with women too, but those who know about [male psychology](#) will recognise sometimes techniques that don’t overtly focus on the sharing of feelings appeal particularly to men.

Also it is clear that there Van Gogh makes room for the client's maleness to be part of the therapy, for example, in respecting the male-typical defence mechanism of suppressing emotions.

Sarah Van Gogh has worked as a counsellor in private practice for many years and is on the training staff at the Re.Vision Centre for Integrative Transpersonal Counselling and Psychotherapy in North London. She also worked for seven years as a counsellor and trainer for Survivors UK, a London charity that provides support to men who have experienced sexual violation.

She studied English at Cambridge University, worked in the fields of theatre, community health and adult education, and has written about the vital connection between the expressive arts and therapy for a number of journals.

She also writes a regular column in the BACP Private Practice Journal.

Her book *'Helping Male Survivors of Sexual Violation to Recover'*, can be considered a valuable asset to therapists of any school who want to learn effective approaches to help men to overcome the trauma of child sexual abuse.

'Helping Male Survivors of Sexual Violation to Recover: An integrative approach – stories from therapy' by Sarah Van Gogh is published by Jessica Kingsley.

The book is available at a 20% discount from the regular price of £22.99 for readers of the Male Psychology Network blog from www.jkp.com/uk/products using the code '9956400012'.

About the reviewer

Dr John A. Barry is a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, Honorary Lecturer in Psychology at University College London, clinical hypnotherapist, and author of over 60 peer-reviewed publications on a variety of topics in psychology and medicine. John is a professional researcher and has taken an interest in improving the teaching of research methods and statistics. He has practiced clinical hypnosis for several years and is a member of the British Association of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis. His Ph.D. was awarded by City University London, on the topic of the Psychological Aspects of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, which is also the topic of his [forthcoming book](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). He is co-founder of both the [Male Psychology Network](#) and the [Male Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society](#) (BPS), lead organiser of the [Male Psychology Conference](#), and co-editor of [The Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health](#) (London: Palgrave Macmillan IBSN 978-3-030-04384-1 DOI 10.1007/978-3-030-04384-1).