

EVEN HEROES NEED TO TALK:
PSYCHOLEGAL SOFT-SPOTS IN POLITICAL ASYLUM LAWYERING

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Abstract

This research identifies emotional pressure points pertaining to the asylum seeking client's narration of her traumatic past persecution in the process of preparing the asylum claim. A typology of psycholegal soft-spots was offered, which includes the potential impact of the work done by the asylum seeking client and her lawyer on both parties. Interviews with Bay Area lawyers who represented asylum seekers were conducted in order to assess the level of asylum lawyer's awareness to special needs dictated by the psycho-legal soft spots during asylum representation. Lawyers were asked about how they handle those issues and about training and support provided for them in order to handle emotional pressure points.

The conclusions from the interviews are that lawyers are neither trained to handle the identified psycholegal soft-spots nor supported in any way while attempting to handle them. In view of the psychological challenges embodied in asylum work, these deficiencies need to be addressed. Lawyers should receive training with respect to PTSD in general and three psycholegal soft spots I mentioned in particular. In addition, there is a need to establish support system for lawyers who engage in asylum work.

This paper also suggests that improving lawyer's awareness to salutogenic elements of the preparation of asylum claim can improve the emotional well being of both asylum seeking clients and their lawyers. Too, it was suggested that many therapeutic elements are inherent to the process of preparing asylum claims, hence lawyers need not become psychologist in order to help their clients heal. Such work will also help the lawyer experience herself as a compassionate witness to her client's narration and will enable her to re-connect to her humanity.

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