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Sexual Violence

Issues in Prevention, Treatment, and Policy

Edited by Kathleen Monahan



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Meet the editor



Kathleen Monahan, DSW, LCSW, LMFT, received her MSc in Social Work from Columbia University, New York in 1982 and her doctorate from Adelphi University, New York in 1994. In 1994–1996, Dr. Monahan was a post-doctoral fellow in the Psychology Department, Stony Brook University, New York, in a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) program, studying the effects of family violence. She is an associate professor in the School of Social Welfare, Stony Brook University. Dr. Monahan is also in private practice specializing in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), sexual violence, and trauma. Her research focus includes acquired brain injury as a result of IPV, sexual violence, and the use of humor with traumatized populations. Dr. Monahan also writes works of fiction and memoir. Her most recent work is the article “Nile” published in *Awakenings*.

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Preface

Sexual violence remains a global public health problem that continues to evade eradication. The negative sequelae from sexual violence have long been established from individual symptomatology, family difficulty, the drain on community stakeholders, and the financial costs to societies. This book addresses the most prominent issues facing clinicians, researchers, and community stakeholders today.

The first section of this book presents the short- and long-term negative sequelae emanating from sexual violence as well as the myths and belief systems that perpetuate its existence. Inherent in sexual violence are the issues of power and control, consent, stigma, and societal views. This section also addresses how newspapers advance a negative public discourse regarding the sexual victimization of sex workers. The second section of this book examines the use and role of social media in carrying out the sex trafficking of minors. The third and final section of this book discusses treatment issues, the provision of support and resources in care centers, trauma-responsive care, and post-traumatic growth.

This book highlights the work of researchers and clinicians from all over the world who seek to improve the quality of life for survivors of sexual violence.

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Section 1

Beliefs, Consent and Societal Views

Chapter 1

Introductory Chapter: Addressing Sexual Violence Issues

Kathleen Monahan

1. Introduction

Sexual violence, typically referred to as sexual abuse, has been recognized as a health and social issue globally. Yet the incidence and prevalence of this devastating crime have yet to decrease in significant numbers [1] and this public health crisis remains in epidemic proportions worldwide.

Sexual violence is defined as the violation of an individual's physical and sexual boundary without their consent. This violation occurs at any age throughout the lifespan.

Sexual violence can create acute and long-term psychological, physical, and interpersonal negative outcomes. Health difficulties are common, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [2]. Revictimization of this population is also common [3, 4].

Historically, children have always been vulnerable to the risk of sexual violence. For children, sexual violence changes the developmental pathway and challenges resilience structures. The child's worldview is also altered, creating negative perspectives of power imbalances and sexualized aggression. Acknowledgement of sexual violence, supportive and protective environments, and enhancing resilience skills can assist in dealing with sexual violence.

These issues are well documented across the lifespan as witnessed by over 30 years of research utilizing the adverse childhood experiences survey [5].

Less than 50 years ago, some states in the United States still had laws on the books that maintained that having sex with your wife against her will was not rape, because the woman had to bend to the will of the man. Indeed, over the past 40 years we have seen a proliferation of different forms of sexual violence. Crimes such as campus sexual assault, sex trafficking, revenge pornography, live-streaming sexual violence on the Internet, child pornography and murders of children that are associated with child pornography have entered the mainstream conversation drawing attention to the increase in the numbers of criminal activity.

Coinciding with the outright criminal activity of sexual violence is the well documented sexual violence that is enculturated in organizational systems. From military to religious organizations, sexual violence is part of "organizational culture" and while attempts to address these issues are publicly celebrated, more needs to be done in terms of prevention, criminal liability, and restitution. For instance, the United States military was slow to acknowledge the occurrence of sexual assault within its ranks. When overwhelming evidence of this culture of sexual violence was presented, a "closed ranks" response, was standard. Closed ranks refer to the group, institution, or organization protecting the accused member—no matter the cost—because the member actually represents the group. Another commonly known example of

this type of “closed ranks” approach to sexual violence occurred within the Catholic church. Until recently, when sexual violence perpetrated by a priest was detected, he was moved from one diocese to another, generally without criminal liability attached.

The “Me Too” Movement began to change the culture of silence and shame that many victims experienced with many landmark cases entering the public limelight. One case in point is the USA Gymnastics Olympic team doctor, Larry Nadler, arrested in 2016 for sexual abuse of hundreds of team members. While many of these young women reported the abuse, it nonetheless remained uninvestigated for years. More alarming is that Nadler and other perpetrators continued their abuse for years despite complaints from Olympic team members. The common practice at that time was to move predatory coaches from gym to gym.

Prevention should be the first approach in addressing the issue of sexual violence. Despite many good programs that demonstrated the ability of prevention to diminish the numbers of victims for children, not enough funding is provided to institutionalize prevention efforts [6]. Prevention advocates are now calling for programs not only addressed at children, e.g., Good Touch/Bad Touch, but also for prevention programs targeted at perpetrators of sexual violence [5, 7].

Treatment approaches to address the issues of sexual violence are now prominently recognized particularly since trauma informed and responsive care have been universally established as the standard of care for those who have been sexually victimized. The ways in which individuals cope with sexual violence across the lifespan and how society views this traumatization is increasingly a focus of attention.

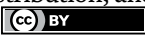
Getting societies to understand the concept “A hurt against one, is a hurt against all” may be a Herculean task. However, the need to eradicate gender-based violence is long overdue. Policies addressing prevention, treatment for both victims and perpetrators, and clear standards and policies for eradicating sexual violence are still seriously lacking. However, this book addresses the strides that many across the globe have taken to tackle the serious on-going issue of sexual violence. Future directions include changing existing policies to improve prevention programs and policies, responsiveness to victims including treatment efforts, and the long-overdue change in how society views this public health issue and therefore, the eradication of sexual violence.

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Chapter 2

Key Elements in the Representation of Sexual Violence in Spain: Consent, Myths and Stigma

*Irantzu Recalde-Esnoz, Héctor del Castillo
and Gemma Montalvo*

Abstract

This chapter presents the deepening knowledge of consent, myths and stigma in the social representation of sexual violence. A critical, empathic and sensitive scientific framework that allows redesigning better political and social actions for victims is presented. This also improves educational programs that seek the eradication of rape. An exhaustive bibliographic search was conducted utilising different databases. Recommendations include the need to construct counter-representations of current hegemonic stories that provide victims of sexual violence with elements and narratives that influence healthy, recovery-based outcomes.

Keywords: sexual violence, rape, consent, rape myths, stigma, representations

1. Introduction

International society currently lives in a context of global feminist protests related to sexual violence. As Rosa Cobo said, the current feminist movement is in its 4th stage of its historic movement, and its more strong vindicative statements consist of visualising, reporting and eradicating of any sexual violence against women [1]. Different International Organisations and governments also assumed this goal, aligned with the Agenda for Sustainable Development for the year 2030 around the globe [2]. According to Castells and Subirats [3], people in Western society have the freedom to decide with whom they want to have sex, as well as the freedom to recognise their own personal sexual desire and enjoy it. Nevertheless, these assumed freedoms of behaviour—especially in women—are constantly thwarted [4–6]. On the one hand, the way the mass media treat sexual violence cases does not favour its eradication from the source. In the mass media, it does not take long to disembowel cases of sexual violence and recount the most lurid details, all from the point of view of sensationalism, without any critical reading of the facts [7].

Regarding the visualisation and reports of abuse and sexual aggression, a turning point for the Spanish feminist movement, as well as for Spanish society, was when the national media received a case of multiple-sex aggression against a young girl

during the Feast of Sanfermines¹ (a nine days worldwide known festival) in 2016 [10–14]. This particular case of sexual assault led to an unprecedented mobilisation in the days after the media became aware of the incident. The same happened when the Provincial Court of Navarra published the judicial sentence almost two years later. In this judgement, the judges state that what happened to this girl was a crime of sexual abuse rather than aggression, a relevant nuance in the Spanish criminal justice system. Besides that, one of the judges in charge of this case declared that despite finding no signs of physical abuse on [the woman], he realised that there was a sign of joy and fun amongst the participants involved in this act of violence, including the woman [10, 15]. A huge number of citizens reacted with indignation to this situation online (social media) and offline (protests). The indignation was due to both the conceptualisation of the crime as abuse rather than aggression and because of the opinion of one of the judges responsible for sentencing. Popular proclamations in the Spanish context were shouted, such as *¡Sola, borracha, quiero llegar a casa!* (“Alone and drunk, I want to get back home!”). By this, women were trying to let people know that they deserve to be safe whilst coming back home from any place at any time during the night. They were also proclaiming that women have the right to be wherever and whenever they want, don’t matter if it is dark or if they are alone: by shouting in Spanish *¡La calle, la noche, también son nuestras!* (“the street and the night are ours too!”). They were also demonstrating support for the woman involved in the “wolf pack” crime by shouting *¡Tranquila, hermana, aquí está tu manada!* (“Do not worry, sister, here is your pack!”) [16, 17].

Without a shadow of a doubt, this case of violence visualised the ideological debate about consent in the current Spanish society. The existing myths about rape, alcohol consumption, the truth behind the testimony of this woman, the assumptions about her promiscuity and more, caused this debate to last, with a high impact on the political agenda and in the social media sphere [10, 18–20]. Since that time, the concept of consent has become a fundamental discourse for the Feminist Movement in Spain. In fact, it went from saying *No es No* (“No means no”) to *Solo sí es sí* (“Only yes means yes”), thus pointing out that the lack of consent due to various other situations also means no. In this way, another point made visible by the Sanfermines gang rape case was the discrepancy in the conceptualisation of sexual violence between the majority of public opinion and the legislative and judicial powers. For Sanyal, the visibility of this particular discrepancy was a key point to understand this event as the beginning of the Spanish #MeToo movement that put the Spanish legislation in check and sent the Penal Code “for exam”, specifically, in relation to crimes against sexual freedom [17, 21].

Most drug-facilitated sexual assault cases, those in which the victims are in a vulnerable state after taking drugs voluntarily or involuntarily, have not being reported for two main reasons. Firstly, because women apparently have too many doubts about themselves, they do not remember what happened or they partially do. Apparently, after the abuse, women have a notion of being sexually assaulted, but they are still not quite sure about what really happened. They feel full of blame and shame [22, 23]. Secondly, in many cases, the person that abuses these women is usually someone who knows them personally. This is something that causes them (women) to feel inadequate at the time of reporting these issues to the authorities,

¹ Every year, during nine days of July, the city of Pamplona (Navarra, Spain) is transformed into a giant festival. This worldwide feast invades the squares and streets of the city [8]. Unfortunately, cases of sexual violence are frequent in this kind of festival [9].

therefore, making them doubt and not willing to report at all [23–25]. As Abdulali states: “7 out of 10 cases of sex crime are committed by people that the victim already knows, and this increases the feeling of self-blaming and unwillingness from the victim to report the crime” [26]. According to Samara Velte [12], “the decision of reporting these sort of cases responds to many factors, such as trust in institutions, social support, personal perception that it is worth reporting these violence, assessment of personal safety if reported, etc.”. Also, Barreto supports the idea of giving testimony of the sexual assault is not only useful at the judicial sphere level (specially for the victims of such crimes), but that it is also useful for the healing of the feelings of justice that the victim perceives at a symbolic and a social level as well. In the same way—the author continues—breaking the silence eases the fact for other people who have suffered similar situations to make contacts and networks in order to stop feeling isolated. On the other side, reporting obliges our society to define its political inclinations and take part in moral discuss. In this way, victims have political power [27]. Another important point is that as the majority of rape is not reported, a considerable number of rapists are not caught by justice, which results in the impossibility to study and get deeper scientific knowledge of sexual violence and its perpetrators [28, 29].

Sexual violence is a social scourge that requires in-depth research and some degree of reflection that allows us to understand the nuances surrounding this topic. It is necessary to compose a solid theoretical framework from which to start to design educational programs and prevention policies that aim to eradicate this type of violence [30, 31]. This review aims to provide clarity in the identification and description of some keys to sexual violence as fundamental as consent, myths about rape and stigmatisation from a sociological, anthropological and feminist perspective. It will facilitate and promote treatment from a scientific approach, as well as more empathy, from listening and having tenderness towards female victims of sexual violence.

2. Sexual violence and rape

The concept of “Sexual violence” was introduced into the European and North American political-feminist discourse in the 70s and 80s of the twentieth century. At that time, the private sphere begins to be analysed as a place where the political happens and materialises, as the famous proclamation by Kate Millet points out, “the personal is political” [32, 33]. Authors such as Kate Millet [34] and Susan Brownmiller [35] are the ones who sow the seeds and take the first steps when analysing rape as sexual and sexist violence, protected by an unequal distribution of power. From this moment on, two lines of interpretation of rape and sexual violence will be opened. The first one emphasises the question of power, pointing out that sexual abuse and aggression are part of control mechanisms [36] to maintain a *status quo* of power, transcending the sexual, a position of analysis that Susan Brownmiller maintains [33], as well as other authors [37, 38]. This continues to this day through researchers such as Rita Segato [39, 40]. In the second line, the attention will be paid to the sexual question. From this perspective, it will be understood as sexualised violence, where the hierarchy of power is eroticised and sexualised. This position has been defended from the 90s by authors such as Catherine MacKinnon [41].

The World Health Organization (WHO) sets out a very complete definition of sexual violence, which includes both the facts and the intentions, by classifying “sexual violence” as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual

comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of the relationship to the victim, in any setting, including—but not limited—to home and work” [4]. For González-López from a sociological and feminist perspective, it is important to define sexual violence from the position and subjectivity of those who have experienced it. This author points out the importance of the person being attacked or abused feeling a certain way, in order to be classified as violence. As she expresses it, sexual violence encompasses those “attitudes and behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) that one or more people exercise towards other human beings and can invade and/or damage their sense of integrity, security and erotic-sexual well-being”, from the most subtle practices to the most visible and well-known, such as sexual exploitation, rape or genital mutilation [42]. Canseco follows the line of this author when speaking of the recognisability of the violent character. According to Canseco, in order to name it as sexual violence, an act or intention must be recognised as such and this will depend on the person who receives the damage or threat [43]. There are other perspectives on the definition of sexual violence. The Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato focuses on the mandate of masculinity as the origin of this type of violence, based on her exhaustive study in the prisons of Brasilia with inmates convicted of rape. According to her, the main motivation for sexual assaults has an origin linked to power and “the mandate of male peers or brothers that requires proof of belonging to the group” [40].

Regarding the concept of rape, for Segato [39] it is understood as all use and abuse, all access to the body of the other, when that person is not participating in the act at the same level or with a similar intention. Another current study focuses on the aggressor-victim relationship, which places rape as a demonstration of power, dominance and contempt for another person, as well as a demonstration of men's fear of being humiliated and undervalued [13, 44]. In fact, amongst the motivations for committing a rape, Segato defends the existence of three main reasons [39]. The first consists of the manly demonstration of strength and virility before equals, to maintain or achieve a position of power, something very common, according to the author, in gang rapes, especially by young people. A second reason is its value as a punishment against the generic woman, as a disciplinary mechanism through which it is intended to remind her which is her rightful place as a woman and what happens when she transgresses the norms, be it a real or imagined transgression [45]. A third and final motive is rape as an assault or insult to the generic man, as a challenge of power. This is the case of rapes in territories at war, where the body of women is another space to be conquered, an action that weakens and humiliates the male enemy [46]. As Kate Millet pointed out, “rape as an offense by one man to another, by using, abusing and desecrating the other's woman” [34].

In a novel way, Segato offers a compelling interpretation of the phenomenon of rape that focuses its gaze on the horizontal axis (the rapist's relationship with his peers, the aggressor with other men), instead of analysing the vertical axis (rapist-victim) [39, 40]. According to Segato, due to their status as equals, men form alliances and compete amongst themselves in order to see who is the most capable of dominating other people. For the author, rape establishes a dialogue between the perpetrator and his peers, a dialogue in which virility and personal prestige come into play. From this logic, rape is an expressive and instrumental violence that seeks the repair or acquire prestige and communicates a status. In the words of the author: “the raped woman behaves as a sacrificial victim immolated in an initiatory ritual; [the aggressor] competes with them, showing that he deserves, due to his aggressiveness and power of death, to occupy a place in the virile brotherhood and even to acquire

a prominent position in a phratry that only recognises hierarchical language and a pyramid organisation” [40]. This interpretation of rape coincides with the ethnographic research carried out by Philippe Bourgois in which the author establishes a relationship with young people linked to the black-market economy and drug sales, who become his key informants. At a certain point during the fieldwork, these youths claimed to have gang raped as teenagers as a training and strengthening for group membership. In fact, one of them relates the complications to get excited and says: “At that time I was the youngest. The bug would not stop me. It kind of disgusted me, you know; I didn’t like that [...] I didn’t like it, but I still helped to prepare the mess because the girl had to go through that mess. Sometimes I had to stand guard with a bat to force her to stay in the room with whoever was there with her” [47].

In analysing the victim-offender axis, but focusing especially on the offender, the work of David Lisak stands out. According to Lisak, it is common for perpetrators to practice sex more frequently than other men of the same age and social group. In terms of their attitudes, they often share a belief system in which women are sexual objects to be used for one’s own pleasure. In addition, this author argues that perpetrators have feelings of anger towards women [48]. He also indicates that most rapes are committed by men who sexually assault on a recurrent basis (serial offenders) [49]. Lisak focuses on the predatory nature of sexual violence, highlighting the seriality of perpetrators, as well as their multifacetedness. Amongst other characteristics, rapists were defined as hostile, angry, dominant, hyper-masculine, impulsive and antisocial. But, the most powerful predictor of committing sexual assault in early adulthood (18–24 years) was having committed sexual assault during high school years [50].

3. Sexual consent

When studying sexual violence and rape, one of the centres of gravity for both phenomena is the idea of sexual consent, since it is used to discern between sex and rape [51]. Sexual consent is taken for granted in its conceptualisation, alluding to what is commonly understood: an agreement between two or more people to carry out a certain sexual practice [52, 53]; an agreement between equal individuals, with the agency to accept or reject sex [51]. However, it is a concept that quickly generates debate, since its practice is immersed in a social context, in which different systems of oppression and discrimination mediate, such as racism, chauvinism or colonialism, amongst others [51], which lead to a first breach of the “agreement between equals”. It is obvious that sexual consent is an important and complex concept of which there is currently no unanimity in its definition or consensus amongst public opinion, legislation or institutions [24, 31].

Consent and will are related but are also different phenomenon [51, 53]. You can consent and simultaneously not wish; not have the will for various reasons such as fear or desire to please. Thus, an unwanted sexual relationship is accepted, something very feminine. And it is that, as Castells and Subirats point out, “abnegation is the attitude traditionally demanded of women as their most precious virtue and implies the capacity to deny themselves, the capacity to give without limits, the capacity to show submission” [3]. Is there real consent in this situation? At the very least, the proposal fits to reflect and rethink what sexual relations take place within the heterosexual couple. As Tardón points out, not even when there is an explicit *yes* can it be assured that there was no sexual assault since “victims cannot always say no, since in

sexual violence there are other aspects such as coercion, manipulation, blackmail, the social, political, cultural context, the age of the victims, etc.” [33]. According to Velte [12], for consent to be real, “a positive response is necessary, it takes desire, will, and freedom of action”. This inevitably leads to the recognition that “the consent debate entails a much deeper questioning. It also implies thinking about what one’s own desire is and how it is constructed: sometimes what exists is a consent that has to do with accepting the desire of the other, but not taking one’s own desire into account” [12]. Along these lines, Cuenca raises the term “consensual rape” to precisely emphasise those sexual relationships that women agree to have without any desire or sexual appetite. For this author, it is about a “sexual self-micro-violence produced, basically, as a result of the construction of the gender and sexual identity of women” [54]. In addition, different studies show that consent is vitiated as the relationship is more stable and there is a greater commitment: the longer the couple’s history, the lower the importance of obtaining explicit consent [24, 55, 56].

As was mentioned, the anal, oral and vaginal aggression carried out by a group of men during the Sanfermines of the summer of 2016 was only considered abuse and not aggression in the sentence of First Instance due to the absence of force or intimidation. The Spanish Penal Code established that sexual abuse is carried out on people who are deprived of meaning or whose mental disorder is abused (for example, due to the effects of alcohol consumption/other drug intakes), people on whom it is not necessary to use violence or intimidation to obtain their consent [57]. This case, shows, as in many others, the absence of verbal and explicit consent was used in the defence of the perpetrators [58]. Their argument appealed to ignorance: they denounced not knowing that there had been no consent—because they thought it had been granted implicitly. In this way, they transformed themselves into victims due to the lack of communication, misunderstandings or subsequent regrets [24, 51]. Judicial failure generated a wave of popular indignation that led to the questioning of the enunciation of crimes against sexual freedom, whilst it became another matter on the political agenda.² This popular questioning is relevant in symbolic struggles, for the conceptualisation and visibility of the phenomenon of sexual violence, since, as Segato points out “the struggle for the Law, both in the sense of formulation of laws as in the sense of making effective the status of existence of those already formulated [...] is, on the one hand, the fight for the nomination, for the legal consecration of the names of human suffering” [40]. In turn, it is a way of transforming society, since the Penal Code produces and reflects the current morality of this [39].

Another controversy related to the presence or absence of the use of force by the aggressor is that, opposing the aggression with greater or lesser force as a means of resistance, can lead to the aggressor also acting violently [61]. Faced with this

² In July 2018, a few months after the demonstrations following the sentencing of “La Manada”, the political parties Unidas Podemos, En Comú Podem and En Marea presented the Proposed Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Sexual Freedom and for the eradication of sexual violence. This proposal aimed to eliminate the distinction between aggression and sexual abuse, but also “all those aspects of prevention, care, healing, specialisation or reparation that, even if they were in force for other forms of violence, did not have specific measures to adequately and transversally address sexual violence” [59]. In addition, in 2022, the new law on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom has been put into effect. In this law, the distinction between sexual abuse and sexual assault has finally been eliminated. On the other hand, it puts the focus on consent, stating: “Consent shall only be understood to exist when it has been freely manifested, through acts that, in view of the circumstances of the case, clearly express the will of the person”. In fact, this law has been known as the “only yes is yes” law [60].

situation, many victims “let themselves be done” in order to survive [12]. Then, it will be questioned whether or not there was consent (“because she allowed herself”) and, furthermore, in the Spanish case, it will be taken for granted that it was not a rape or an aggression, but an abuse, since it was not necessary to use violence or intimidation. For Barjola, the absence of violence allows us to open the way to the myth—that maintains that—“women seduce their aggressors” or “they do not resist enough, because deep down they want to make it happen” [62]. Those thoughts and beliefs make it difficult to discern between consent and non-consent. Therefore, to demonstrate the veracity of the woman’s testimony, “physical evidence and violence were a requirement, otherwise it meant that there had been no resistance” [61]. In addition, a “resistance assessment” of the victim is carried out, with which a quasi-mathematical relationship seems to be established: the greater the resistance, the greater the credibility. In this way, a perverse game is entered where not only the aggressor is judged, but also the victim [63]. According to Velte, the credibility of the victim is one of the main testimonies to evaluate to consider what is true. Instead of questioning the testimony of the aggressors, that of the victims is called into question. Amongst the different mechanisms used to judge women, this author highlights the use of psychological reports on the “trauma” that the event has left on the victim (the greater the trauma, the greater the credibility, which is also perverse at the same time rather than deterministic), the measurement of the coherence between the totality of statements made by the victim, as well as beliefs and topics related to “socially punishable” female behaviour, such as the manner of dressing, appearance or attitude [12]. For all the above, Kessel [51] speaks of the “cruel optimism of sexual consent” because, as it is currently conceptualised, instead of helping to distinguish rape from sex, consent serves to exchange narratives: victims become responsible for not having showed consent or lack thereof more vigorously or fiercely and in turn, the perpetrators become victims of misunderstandings or manipulations. In short, instead of simplifying, the current notion of consent makes it possible to reinforce inequalities of power and the inversion of the categories of agency and victimhood.

4. Sexual violence myths

In a case of sexual violence, aspects such as the way of dressing, appearance or attitude are also judged, elements that are part of the “sexual violence myths” or better known as “rape myths”. Those were named for the first time in the 70s [32, 33, 64]. Bohner defines the rape myths as “descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (its causes, context, side effects, the aggressors, the victims and their interactions with one another) that are used to deny, minimise or even justify sexual violence that men impose over women” [65]. For Tardón the functionality of these myths—supporting the arguments according to the research done by Barthes [66]—is based on the depoliticisation and simplification of reality, replacing complexity (of these particular issues) with essentialisms without any scientific basis [33]. Believing these myths means evaluating in a distorted way and from stereotypes an assault or sexual abuse, with the aim of blaming the victim, doubting what happened, exonerating the aggressor or categorising women as “more likely to be raped” [7, 32, 33, 67, 68]. Myths serve as a social surveillance tool. They are part of a punitive system since, through them, behaviours are corrected, spaces are vetoed, schedules are controlled and movements and gestures are limited. Their operation is assured because “they are schemas of meanings that most people recognise or have internalised” [62]. However, the importance of these

myths as guides or orientations of sexual behaviour should be emphasised in the face of the educational void that exists around sexuality [69], which favours the normalisation and assumption of sexual violence as a way one relates [15]. Myths are deeply rooted in culture and can be found in religious doctrines and cultural prescriptions, commonly encompassed in “tradition” [67].

Since the 1970s, there has been a composition of what a “real rape” looks like: a young, virgin woman, who is violently attacked at night by a stranger; she resists, but is dominated and ends up being injured and raped [68, 70]. This stereotype of rape is pernicious insofar as it disqualifies, discredits and ridicules the most frequent rapes: the aggressors are people known to the victim—friends, family members, colleagues or acquaintances—without obvious signs of violence, in which the victim responds in a distinctive way: from doing nothing (which is also a reaction) to being friendly and trying to dialogue with the aggressor [23, 25, 26, 40, 50, 71]. Due to this widespread myth, many of the personal experiences of the victims do not fit with the pre-established ideas about what and how rape should be, which makes it difficult to recognise the experience as sexual violence, resulting in high levels of impunity [67]. By focusing on “real rape” beyond stereotypes, the focus shifted from talking about rapes that happened with acquaintances and friends to talking about “acquaintances rape” and “date rape”. However, these categories were not without new myths. Ideas such as that date rapes are lighter—less traumatic, less violent, less “rape”—and therefore the perpetrators in a date rape are less culpable [50].

Another series of well-established myths are those that are based on the eighteenth-century pseudo-argument of “male sexual incontinence” to justify rape [21]. In this speech, not only was rape justified, but it was preferable to the act of masturbation. Sanyal also argues that other myths that survive to this day arise from the myth of the steam boiler—referring to a man’s sexuality functions like a steam boiler—when the pressure gets too high, he has to “let off steam”. Going on with these myths, the woman who “as a guardian of the divine order (Hegel) or the moral order (Rousseau), is also hers, the responsibility of controlling male sexuality by modifying the way she dresses and her behaviour so as not to set his libido on fire [...]. Warning women not to drink too much alcohol when they go out and not to send the wrong signals to men is a holdover from the widely criticised steam boiler model”. Phrases like “she asked for it”, “she provoked it”, “she shouldn’t have dressed like that”, “she shouldn’t have been there”, “it only happens to bad women”, etc. are part of the meaning schemas that emerge from the arguments about male sexual incontinence and that are part of the myths that circulate around sexual violence [7, 68].

Likewise, two opposing representations circulate around the figure of women, but they precisely feed off each other and participate in the myths of rape. On the one hand, a weak female subject is made up of a predisposition to be the victim that requires the strength of a man to be saved and, at the same time, the image of the woman is conjugated as a master of manipulation that uses feminine tricks to achieve their goals and deceive and use the male [51]. Faced with this duality, the presence of one or another representation will prevail as appropriate to justify and reinforce beliefs, which ultimately blame the woman and exonerate the aggressor. These myths, in turn, allow the circulation of speeches and narratives that rank women according to their public behaviour and determine the seriousness or socially punishable measures for these situations. In short, you get an assessment of “how much she deserved it”. As Samara Velte has reported, in the social (and shared) imaginary, the rape of a girl drugged without her consent versus a rape of a girl who has voluntarily drugged herself is not equally valued, although the act of rape is the same. In the second case, the

woman (who has voluntarily taken drugs) will be held liable for the rape to a greater degree [12]. What is in the background is a mechanism to control female behaviour: “if you become uninhibited” (by taking drugs); “if you dress in a certain way” (and not as the social rule says); “if you walk alone”, etc., you are increasing the risk that someone hurts you, you are exposing yourself and therefore it is your responsibility [12, 33, 62, 71].

5. Stigmatisation: a derived problem

Erving Goffman points out that in Ancient Greece: “the term stigma was used to refer to bodily signs with which it was tried to display something bad and unusual in the moral status of those who represented them”. Today, this term is used practically the same, with the nuance that it does not refer only to bodily signs, but to a discrediting quality or attribute. According to Goffman, when we know the stigmatising attribute of a person, we stop seeing them “as a total and ordinary person”, they “become someone less desirable” [72]. The notes that Goffman makes are of great interest in this current study because, this social and dynamic process is what a victim of sexual violence usually suffers after confessing to being a victim, a process inserted in re-victimisation or double victimisation [73]. Although this process is usually associated with the effects of the actions of professionals who deal with the victim (such as the police, judges or lawyers), society as a whole, in interpersonal relationships, participates in the construction of the stigma of raped women [74, 75]. Sexual violence occurs at a specific time and place, in a social context that shapes how victims judge themselves and how they are evaluated and treated by others [75]. Amongst the different aspects in which a socially reviled stigma influences, damage to self-esteem, loss of (social) status, isolation and adaptation problems stand out amongst others [73, 76]. In certain times and countries, the stigma of a woman who is a victim of sexual violence not only affects her but also her family, so that, in the most severe cases, the woman must leave her home, be abandoned by her family or community or even commit suicide or be punished with the death penalty in order to prevent her social stigma as a tainted woman from reaching the rest of the family or community [22]. This is exemplified by Virginie Despentes when she recounted the case of the rape of a friend: “Through her story, I understand that rape is something that a person can get caught by and that you cannot later undo”. Contaminated. Until then, I thought I’d coped well, that I had thick skin and better things to do than let three rednecks traumatise me. But I saw the rape of my friend as an event from which nothing would ever be as before”. In fact, when reflecting on her own rape, the French author expresses how she avoided naming the word rape to refer to her experience, using other expressions that unloaded the meaning (of stigma) of what happened: “whilst it does not bear the name, the (sexual) aggression loses its specificity, it can be confused with other aggressions, such as being robbed caught by the police, arrested or beaten up. Because, from the moment a rape is called rape, the entire surveillance device for women is set in motion [77].

At the same time, the stigma of the raped woman draws attention to the importance of presenting herself as the “perfect victim” in cases of sexual abuse or assault. We are talking about the social construction of the woman who is the victim of sexual violence, a construction that when it is not complied with is further evidence against the testimony of the victimised woman. This happened in the trial of the multiple aggression of the *Sanfermines* in 2016. One of the lawyers of the five

aggressors hired a private detective to demonstrate that the victim had consented to the aggression since she was “leading a normal life” after the sexual assault. The private detective’s report was presented as evidence for the defence, although it was ultimately dismissed [10]. “The perfect rape victim” is one who has received physical violence, one who has resisted, but also the “perfect victim” is one who is traumatised after the assault, paralysed, unable to go out on the street, to interact with men, to have fun, etc. [18, 77]. According to Segato, in cases of sexual violence, there is in turn a moral violence, with which the most emotional aspect of the victim is harmed through resources such as “ridicule, moral coercion, suspicion, intimidation, condemnation of sexuality, the daily devaluation of women as a person, their personality and their psychological traits, their body, their intellectual capacities, their work, their moral value”. These attitudes and behaviours towards the victim can “occur without any verbal aggression, manifesting exclusively with gestures, attitudes, looks...” [39]. This situation generates intense discomfort in the victim and an increase in guilt, which in turn decreases the probability of reporting the abuse or sexual assault. The social suspicion that the victim’s testimony is misleading, the irony contained in the collective judgement that is issued in the face of this type of crime, together with shame and fear of reprisals, are factors that contribute to silence [73, 78, 79].

6. Reflections and moving forward

According to different authors [39, 40, 62, 69, 77], representations and narratives of sexual violence have direct implications and impact on the experience of this kind of violence, both for the victims, their closest counterparts and society as a whole. These representations of a social phenomenon or fact are an amalgam of socially shared knowledge, notions, beliefs, attitudes and values that are associated with the event itself and guide the action that follows. In fact, the capacity of said representation to “challenge individual subjectivity and to impact and influence” will depend on the presence—acceptance, reception—of such representation in the dominant or hegemonic discourses [62]. The impact of sexual violence on a considerable percentage of victims includes physical consequences, from superficial injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies to even death. However, in most cases, the most present and at the same time the most lasting damages are the psychological ones (related to the mental health of the victim), but also to their social relationships and life opportunities, which are reflected in a poor performance in education, difficulties finding/keeping a job and the misuse of alcohol and drugs [80, 81].

So far, the dominant discourse around sexual violence is the sexist one, a discourse that, according to Barjola [62], serves to make docile bodies and limit women’s sexual freedom, that is, as a control mechanism. For this reason, and based on Despentès, it encourages women to re-signify sexual violence, and specifically the story about sexual danger, so that a violation does not have the implications or impact that it currently has (or seems to have) on the life of the victim and breaks with the control mechanism that this story supposes [77]. In this way, Barjola defends the elaboration of counter-narratives to sexual danger, the resignification of sexual violence, “providing a new schema”. Part of the Feminist Movement is already immersed in this task. These exercises, feminist counter-representations, “have the ability to modify behaviours by proposing other meanings, from which to understand and position themselves in the face of sexual violence. The representations strengthen, show and

establish systems of behaviour. Thus, they are the best antidote against the victimising, blaming, aggressive and violent universe of a patriarchal rhetoric” [62]. From this position, the need to work for the construction of counter-representations that grant new schemas of meaning to sexual violence is defended, leaving behind the expressions “what a horror” or “poor girl”, so that women have more tools and a greater ability to react and overcome these experiences. That they also have the right not to be the perfect victim. For a representation to become dominant, all possible socialisation agents come into play, so that all, individuals, collectives, institutions and organisations, have the responsibility to break with the discourse that disables and infantilises women, without minimising the importance or respecting the recovery times of each victim.

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Chapter 3

Victimized Female Sex Worker Representation in the UK News Media

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Abstract

Sex workers face a high level of violence as well as discrimination and stigma in regard to their profession. This chapter examines how British news media portray female sex workers when they are victims of violent and sexual crimes. The authors used discourse analysis to better understand how the victim's status is perceived, created, or changed through the reporting of media. Four news organizations were chosen for data collection: Independent, The Guardian, Daily Mail and The Sun. Using an inductive approach, six discourses were found *Victim blaming*, *Labelling*, *Media sensationalism*, *Vulnerability*, *Legitimation*, and *Any woman*. Nils Christie's *Ideal victim* theory provided a framework to discuss the results. While *Victim blaming*, *Labelling* and *Media sensationalism* question the victim's motive to be in the place of the crime, the activity the victim engaged in, and their responsibility in regard to the victimisation they suffered, *Vulnerability* and *Legitimation* portray the victim as weak, according to the theory. Implications for victims and society are discussed.

Keywords: victims, homicide, sexual violence, sex workers, news media

1. Introduction

Sex work and the rights of its workers have been regarded as an important debate with the aims of either abolishing the sex trade completely or protecting its workers at all costs [1]. A topic for discussion throughout history, it has been often described as one of the world's oldest professions, although also considered by some as the world's oldest oppression [2]. Are the women trading sexual favours for money oppressed and in need of rescue or are they instead empowered and using their bodies and sexuality for their own monetary gain? Sex work and the discussion surrounding it, it was found to be heteronormative and often fortified existing stereotypes regarding gender [3]. Sex work is sometimes considered as sexual relations between consenting adults, but how much consent there is when sex workers' bodies are sold and consumed as a commodity? According to Moran and Farley, "cash is the coercive force" [4].

Prostitution in the UK is not illegal, with the exception of Northern Ireland. It is not unlawful to sell or buy sexual services, but the activity is regulated. For example, brothels are illegal, as well as the exploitation of individuals for gain (i.e., controlling prostitutes). Buying and selling sex in public spaces are considered acts that can cause

public disturbances and are also illegal. These regulations were introduced to minimize the exploitation of people working in the sex trade. In the UK, the term prostitution, includes both street and different forms of indoor sex work covering brothel workers, escorts and workers in massage institutions, where sexual acts are offered. In a report by the House of Commons in association with the Home Affairs Committee, it was revealed that around 11%, or 2.3 million, of British men had previously paid for sex on one or more occasions [5]. The most common way of initial contact between sex workers and clients was online as opposed to contact made on public streets. Although the average age for initiating sex trade activities was found to be 20–24 years, it was a common practice for sex workers to advertise themselves as younger than their real age so that they were able to attract a larger number of customers. The report noted that many sex workers started selling sexual services with the goal of earning more money, and some women described themselves as single mothers trying to support their families.

In 2016, it was estimated that around 72,800 individuals were involved in prostitution throughout the UK [5]. In 2021, that number had raised to 105,000 individuals [6]. The large difference between the two statistics could be the result of an effective growth in the number of sex workers. Changes in the work market's structure due to the COVID19 pandemic, with increased job loss in some sectors, might partially explain the variation. However, since there is no need for anyone working in the sex trade in the UK to register, it is very likely that those numbers are only the tip of a much larger hidden population in the country and therefore explaining any variation is only speculative.

Prostitution was described by the House of Commons and the Home Affairs Committee as the most dangerous profession in the world where many workers recounted being victims of violence from sex buyers [5]. A survey included in the report of this governmental organisation found that 49% of workers in the sex trade reported having daily concerns about their own safety [5]. The report also informed about 152 sex workers' victims of murder between 1990 and 2015. On the other hand, the report informed of 456 sex workers prosecuted for loitering and soliciting in 2014–15, but it did not show any statistics about the number of men prosecuted for violence, rape or sexual exploitation of a sex worker.

Prostitution is a complex issue interwoven with social problems, such as homelessness, violence and alcohol and drug abuse that increases the vulnerability of workers to victimisation during sex trades and places them at high risk for homicide [7]. Furthermore, sex workers often face discrimination and stigma potentiated by mainstream discourses in part reproduced and maintained by news media [8]. The stigma actively hinders sex work victims from openly speaking out and being seen as non-participants in their victimisation [9]. In order to provide a safer environment for the people engaged in sex work, stigma and discrimination need to be fought. To aid sex workers who have been the victims of violence, we first must recognise them as victims. Nuanced media representation could help fight against existing stigma and open the door for better support of sex workers [10].

2. Media's rhetoric

Media coverage has a direct effect on both the general public opinion and on the minorities described in the news. Analysing the rhetoric displayed in the news articles can help us understand the laypersons' views on sex work and expose stigmatization biases [11]. In this regard, several scientific investigations are noteworthy.

A study by McCracken pointed out important differences in the media's discourse when reporting on men who purchase sexual services versus when reporting on female prostitutes [11]. The men were portrayed as responsible for their own actions, while, at the same time, characterized as 'confused' and 'pathetic'. On the other hand, the news depicted an image of female sex workers as lost, desperate women entrenched in drug use, and homelessness. In general, the women were seen as sellers of sexual services in order to be able to survive or escape violent relationships or sustain their drug use habits. McCracken's study showed how media, through its emphasis on the sex workers' personal choices, portrayed the women as the source of the problem. The narrative presented the women as having the choice to leave prostitution and drug use. The media's discourse tended to focus on the individual level, which easily leads the public to view the sex trade as a problem of the participating individuals and not a societal problem to be dealt with on a larger scale [11].

In a different study, Wallinger discussed how victims are affected by the media's representation of human trafficking [10]. The author found that a story had to be considered newsworthy by the editor in order to be published, and survivors of human trafficking whose stories were not deemed newsworthy were given limited space in the news. Wallinger hypothesised that the public would be unlikely to gain an accurate perspective and form opinions on the issue of human trafficking when the media did not bring forth an adequate representation of the victims or varied the representations in such a way that confused the public [10]. The author suggested that a lack of or distorted public awareness might be related to the little opportunity trafficked women have to change their living conditions.

Dawthorne analysed the discourses presented in articles from the London Free Press and found that the majority of the news portrayed sex work as harmful and exploitative, either as a direct result of the nature of the profession or the associated conditions [12]. The author found the discourse to convey the notion that women involved in sex work were unable to easily leave the occupation. The prostitutes were portrayed as in need of being rescued. Sex workers were often stigmatised as drug addicts, while sex buyers with drug use problems were never characterized as such. Sex workers' profile was often depicted as girls under the age of 18, abusing drugs and in need of help. Moreover, sex workers were described based on class affiliation, often in terms of poverty and homelessness where the women were in need of protection and money. This picture was in accordance with the mainstream discourse that prostitution is harmful to young and vulnerable women that are victimised by older and powerful men [12].

In the same line of work, Read analysed the impact of the discourse surrounding sex work, generated within the dominant public sphere, and concluded that it had a strong effect on maintaining the stigma surrounding the industry [13]. In addition, the identities of both the sex worker group and the individuals in it were negatively affected by this stigma. Stigma has an impact on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the individuals affected by it and lowers the chances for life improvement, while, at the same time, contributing to portraying sex workers as deserving of mistreatment [13]. Interestingly, escorts, whose clients had higher social and cultural status, tended to experience less stigma than those working as street prostitutes, who were using drugs and meeting a greater number of clients. Read further pointed out that criminalisation reinforces stigma, and in this regard, decriminalising groups of sex workers like street prostitutes would positively impact the risks they take and possibly the resources available for them [13].

In a different study, Farvid and Glass analysed the media representation of prostitutes in New Zealand [14]. As in previous studies, sex workers in street prostitution

received the most negative media coverage, while in-house prostitution was not seen as a problem to the same extent as far as they were kept away from residential areas. Street prostitution was represented as dirty, dangerous, associated with crime and drugs, exploitative, socially disturbing and capable of inciting moral panic. The women were seen as disposable. Conversely, in-house prostitution was represented as more enjoyable, profitable and, in a certain way, a legitimate form of work. The visibility of prostitution was identified as the biggest concern in the media's reporting. The authors considered that such media coverage creates a structural stigma against street prostitutes and justifies the regulation of this type of sex trade. The fact that the media was reporting more on the sex sellers than the sex buyers signaled double standards. Even as the selling of sex was legal, the sex workers were socially and morally condemned, more so if they work on the streets, while the men buying sex were not [14].

3. Analyzing contemporaneous news media discourse in the UK

After reviewing the scientific literature for general media's rhetoric about sex work, we were curious to know how British news media represent cases of female sex workers when victims of violent or sexual crimes. Our research intends to shed light on aspects of crime victim identity and understand how the victim's status is perceived, created or changed through the reporting in the news media. We purposefully chose four news organisations as sources of data, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, and *The Sun* since they are well known and reach a large readership both online and in print. These news organisations differ ideologically, with the Daily Mail and The Sun being supporters of the conservative party, and Independent and The Guardian leaning towards socialist political ideology [15, 16]. With this choice, we intended to capture a wider spectrum of discourses and focus on more than one corner of the news media. In order to cover the contemporaneous narrative, the articles included in the study were all published between 2016 and 2021. We specifically focused on female sex workers because women made up the majority of prostitutes [5], and there were very few news articles that reported on male sex workers' victims of violent or sexual crimes.

In the group of violent crimes, we included murder, gun and knife attacks and physical assault. Sexual crimes, included rape, sexual assault, sexual grooming and molestation. Often, sexual crimes were reported to have been perpetrated with severe violence and to have left behind physical and psychological injury. The two types of crime were chosen because sex workers are at an elevated risk to become sexually and violently victimised [7, 8]. Crimes, such as robbery or theft were not considered and included in the data material if they were not also accompanied by the commission of a violent or sexual crime. Sex trafficking victims were excluded as in itself involves a certain type of victimisation that produces a different discourse surrounding its reporting. The articles in the data material used sex worker, prostitute and escort synonymously and these terms all referred to women selling sexual favours. The term sex worker did not here encompass all other related work, for example, web-camming, nude dancing and pornography. There was no exclusion of material depending on the age or nationality of the victim.

The compiled articles were found using the news organisations' own search engines on their websites using the keywords "prostitution", "prostitute", "sex work", and "sex worker". The search produced an index of articles that were read through to find all written in regard to violent or sexual crime against a person involved in sex

trade. All reporting on crimes of a violent and sexual nature were added to the dataset. Articles that mentioned crimes against a sex worker with no violence or sexual aspects were excluded. In total, the data material consisted of 50 news articles.

We used critical discourse analysis (CDA), a method that conceptualizes language as a tool to convey ideology and that allows the discovery of power dynamics hiding behind the language choices [17]. Language exists within social context and language and society affect one another [17]. By using this framework, we conceptualise that the news media report on sex work uses ideologies and perceptions existing in a society, but, at the same time, when media reports on sex work victims, they influence the reader's perspective.

We proceeded to analyse the data following the CDA three levels [17]. In the first level, we interpreted the text regarding choices of words and sentence structure. In the second level, the objective was to understand the discourses behind the text and why the news authors made certain choices. In the third level, the analysis aimed to understand the social context that framed the discourse and the social and cultural practices that it included. We proceeded as follows: first, we read the data several times to get familiarized with the material. All portions of the articles mentioning the victims were compiled and coded for language use. Examples of this were terms, such as prostitute, mother and victim. All of the material was then screened for ideologies and implications. Pictures present in the articles were also part of the analysis because they are considered a part of the discourse since they can humanise or further victimise the individuals. The emerging themes led us to divide the material into different discourses. For example, the implication that the victim was a participant in their victimisation was frequently found. These portions of the text were compared in the different articles, searching for similarities and differences. The theme of victim participation was then examined to reflect on the hidden ideologies, as proposed by Fairclough [17]. Worth noting is most articles reflected more than one discourse, and some discourses were more prone to overlapping than others. This was determined by reading through the data material again after all discourses had been identified and defined.

All names in the data material were redacted alongside any identifying information, such as cities or road names, either disclosing about victims or perpetrators. All data collected is public information, and we made no attempt to contact the individuals mentioned. Excerpts from the articles in the data material are referenced to the newspaper that published them, but no year is referenced so that we comply with research ethical principles.

During the analysis we found six discourses and named them as follows: *Victim blaming*, *Labelling*, *Media sensationalism*, *Vulnerability*, *Legitimation* and *Any woman*. These discourses often overlap, such as the discourses of *Legitimation* and *Vulnerability*, or *Victim blaming* and *Labelling*. The discourses of *Victim blaming* and *Labelling* was rooted in ideologies that reinforce the existing stigma regarding sex work. The media's sensationalistic way of reporting, found in many articles, may also contribute to reinforcing stigma. On the other hand, discourses of *Legitimation*, *Vulnerability* and *Any woman* negate the stigma and paint a more humanising and relatable portrait of the victims.

The results are discussed in the frame of Nils Christie's *Ideal victim* theory [18]. Christie identified five attributes that build up the perception of the *Ideal victim*. Firstly, the victim is weak, sick individuals, elders and children are particularly well suited to fulfill this criterion. Secondly, at the time of the crime, the victim is engaged in a legitimate and respectable activity, for example, eating in a restaurant, buying in a shop or helping an elderly lady cross the road. Thirdly, the victim is in a place where

they have the right to be. If, for example, a person who is trying to buy drugs is then the victim of a crime, they could not claim a legitimate reason to have been in the place where the crime was committed and therefore they would move away from the status of *Ideal victim*. Christie argues that the *Ideal victim* must be free from guilt in relation to the crime, which depends on the perception of said guilt and whether the victim might have taken better precautions. In short, the *Ideal victim* is an individual that after victimisation more easily gains full and legitimate victim status from the public eye. The perpetrators' characteristics and role in the crime are also important to build the victim's status. For there to be an *Ideal victim*, there must also exist an ideal perpetrator as they are mutually dependent on each other. Accordingly, Christie's fourth attribute conceives the perpetrator as strong in contrast to the victim's weakness. Moreover, the perpetrator must be unknown to the victim (fifth attribute). When a case possesses all or most of these qualities, it is much easier for the victim to be perceived as an (ideal) victim. Victims who do not meet these criteria have difficulty gaining legitimacy in society, as well as in the legal system. Finally, for Christie, the victim must have enough power to make their case known and successfully claim the status of (ideal) victim. They must be strong enough to talk about their experience and be listened to, but, at the same time, they must still be perceived as weak. Victims who are perceived as "too strong" risk losing the status of (ideal) victim [18].

3.1 Victim blaming

Victim blaming was found in a great part of the data material. This discourse discredits the sex workers' victim status and portrayed the women as responsible for the victimisation, either because of their choice of work or because of their risk-taking behaviour. A *Victim blaming* narrative moves the victims' status away from Christie's conceptualization of the *Ideal victim* since the women are not seen as innocent and non-partaking in the crime. The discourse challenges the idea of engaging in legitimate or respectable actions at the time of the crime, as well as the legitimate reason for being in the place where the crime was committed. Instead, the victims are seen as engaged in illegitimate, and sometimes criminal activities in a high-risk place they chose to be. Since the victims have chosen to work in the sex industry and chosen to meet up with a client that subsequently harmed them, they are seen as participants in the criminal act itself.

While the *Ideal victim* is seen as free of any guilt, the victims described with a victim-blaming mentality are seen as culpable in relation to the crime, even if not as guilty as the perpetrator. Even though the women are portrayed as working in a dangerous profession, they are not seen as in need of being rescued or as non-participating individuals. One example of this narrative was found in the following excerpt from an article about a murdered woman:

"... prior to her death, [the victim] checked into [a hotel] on August 4 for a planned one-night stay in Room 804. A hotel worker said they found a nearly empty bottle of booze, crack pipes and a joint in her hotel room. [...] Also found in the room were a pair of pink panties, a pair of black 'booty shorts,' cosmetic bags and a single, sling-back stiletto heel shoe. Days after her apparent wild hotel stay, the mother-of-three's body was found in a barrel" (Daily Mail).

The focus on the drugs and alcohol on the scene indirectly points to the victim's use of these substances. The use of the expression '*apparent wild hotel stay*' transmits a picture of the victim's behaviour as reckless and careless. The implication of her

behaviour being reckless relayed an ideology of her participation in the victimisation. The article further mentioned how the victim was seen entering a building in the company of a 'gang member'. This communicates that she willingly walked into a building with a potential predator most likely previously known to her, contrary to the unknown perpetrator attribute of the *Ideal victim* status.

The reference to 'pink panties' and 'booty shorts' creates a sexualised and objectifying picture of the victim, which is strengthened by the photograph used to illustrate the article. In the picture, the victim is posing in a mirror wearing a revealing swimsuit. Five days earlier, the same newspaper had published initial news about the case in which five other fully clothed pictures of the victim were included. This means that the body-revealing picture was chosen specifically as the only one to be included in the latter article, as other pictures were available. The excluded pictures were not of a sexually implicit nature and instead tied the woman's identity to something other than sex work. The initial article showing the six pictures also twice mentioned the fact the victim had a prior conviction of prostitution and drug-related crimes. In one of these instances, the information was used to caption the swimsuit picture. This reinforces the negation of the woman's victimisation status as it again contradicted the victim's legitimate activity and legitimate reason to be in the location of the crime. It is also noteworthy that the finding of her underwear in the hotel room was included in the article. Was this an abnormality or report-worthy finding, and would this information have been included in an article about a murdered woman who did not work in the sex trade? Most likely not.

In a different article, covering the murder of a female sex worker, we read:

"Her father [name], who lives in [location], said he was 'never fully aware' of what she did for a living, but she had "very posh friends" and traveled a lot... [...] In a statement read to the court, he said: 'She drank a lot and took cocaine most days. I think she was addicted. I don't think she liked the thought of getting older'. [...] 'I thought she was quite reckless towards her work. I don't think she carried out many checks on her clients'" (Independent).

The fact that the murdered woman was using cocaine and partied, and was not open about her economic source, is relevant to be brought up only because it increases the woman's risk of being a victim. The victim's partying behaviour and drug use, and the fact that she kept her work a secret suggest the image of a carefree or careless individual who did little to protect herself against danger. This is elevated again by the suggestion of her recklessness towards her work when not checking up on her clients before meeting them. This information transmits the idea that the victim should have done more to minimise the hazards she exposed herself to. If she had done so she might have then not become a victim.

The following excerpt is from an article where a murder victim's earlier convictions of prostitution were mentioned without relating it to the crime they were reporting about:

"It has also emerged that [the victim] was known to police, having clocked up more than 120 convictions for prostitution offences between 1996 and 2006. Originally from [location], she was one of two prostitutes handed an Asbo in 2006, banning her from setting foot in nearby [location]" (Daily Mail).

The choice of reporting previous convictions, an anti-social behaviour order sentence (Asbo), and referring to the woman as a '*convicted prostitute*' brings forth the

same victim-blaming mentality found in the former examples. The previous convictions were not related to the crime that was being reported and their inclusion seems to have the purpose of signaling a history of anti-social behaviour and questioning the victim's legitimate and respectable activity. Some articles were not as apparent in their remarks on previous convictions. Instead, they wrote about how the victims were "*known prostitutes*", subtly implying they might have previously been arrested.

In the data material, some sex workers are seen as more vulnerable than others, not because of risk factors, such as drug use or location of sex trading, but as a result of the workers' actions and attitudes. Highlighting reckless behaviour to signal a victim who had not done her due diligence to make sure the client she was meeting was not going to harm her was a narrative that emerged in many articles. The *Victim blaming* discourse can be linked to the idea that sex workers are disposable [14], especially if the victim has a drug addiction problem and works on the street, compared to non-addicted in-house sex workers. The disposable sex work victim is seen as deserving to be victimised and at least partially responsible for the victimisation [14]. The *Victim blaming* narrative brings forth aspects of the victim leading to the victimisation, deviating the focus of the reporting news from the perpetrator.

3.2 Labelling

Labelling refers to the discourse found in the data material that highlights the victims' activity in the sex trade without it having significant relevance to the reporting of the crime incident. The *Labelling* discourse is closely related to that of *Victim blaming* as it often uses the victim's activity in order to negate her victim status. Moreover, the *Victim blaming* discourse often reports on the victim's previous convictions and drug use, contributing to labelling her as a criminal or as having a criminal past. Both *Labelling* and *Victim blaming* narratives work similarly to discredit the status of the *Ideal victim*. The focus on the profession in the sex trade delegitimises the reason for the victim to be in the place where the crime is committed, as well as the engaging activity. For instance:

"[The victim], who had moved to the UK from [a country] 10 months previously, was found lying face down and lifeless by her housemate [name], who was also a sex worker" (*The Guardian*).

In this excerpt, the occupation of the victim's housemate was wholly irrelevant to the crime being reported and was not found where else in the article. The only purpose of its inclusion seems to be to indicate that the victim was a sex worker.

In the next example, the woman was murdered by her partner so her profession was irrelevant to the crime report.

"Police believe [the victim], a transgender escort, was murdered and maimed by [the perpetrator] at their [location] apartment before he fled the scene and took his life in a nearby industrial bin soon after police arrived to investigate reports of a foul smell coming from the flat" (*The Guardian*).

It is noteworthy that the article did not identify or highlight the risks associated with transgender sex work. In fact, the article misgendered the victim by referring to her with the "he" pronoun in one instance when explaining that the victim and the offender had met while the victim was working in the sex trade.

In the next example, the article's author chose to report the case as follows:

“[Nationality] prostitute [name] disappeared after moving in with [the perpetrator] and was last seen alive with him in the summer of 2016” (Daily Mail).

The relationship between the victim and perpetrator was portrayed as of a romantic nature but with severe violent and abusive aspects. In this excerpt, the woman is identified by her nationality and profession although it is clear the perpetrator was a man with whom she was in a relationship with.

3.3 Media sensationalism

Media sensationalism was found in news focused on provoking a response in the reader. This discourse refers to articles' content that uses extravagant language and excessive detail more in line with entertainment than reporting actual facts. It seems to be aimed at producing a reaction and leaving an impression on the audience. For example, one of the Daily Mail news articles that we previously referenced described how the woman's pink underwear and “*booty shorts*” were found in her hotel room. This sexualisation has the potential to create a startling response in the reader. *Media sensationalism* is found in articles that bring forth information not necessary to accurately report the incident being covered. Sensationalism may be directed to gain the editor's attention and consideration as newsworthy as Wallinger indicated [10]. For example, another article published by the Daily Mail included explicit descriptions of the intimate details of a crime committed by a serial rapist. The victim's injuries and the violent sexual acts were reported in much more detail than in other similar articles, entailing the risk of causing further harm to the victim. The article was very unrestrained in its wording and might have left readers feeling uncomfortable.

An article in the Independent quotes a sex worker who described the violence, she had been submitted to in an online forum for sex workers. The victim mentioned a term relating to an unusual and abusive sexual act using an everyday object, followed by a detailed description of the act. The newspaper chose to include many explicit details, and it is unclear if the victim had given permission for it to be published by the media outlet. To inform about such details seems to have the purpose to gain a certain part of the audience more than informing the public. We chose not to include the quotation here since we consider it would violate the victim's integrity.

The use of theatrical and emotional language also contributes to sensationalise the news. For example, in one article the author chose to report the incident as follows:

“A FEARED killer with a love of ‘blood and pain’ who slaughtered two women 21 years apart has today been caged for life. [...] In 2018, the twisted predator killed mother-of-four [victim name] and later dumped her naked body in a stream...” (The Sun).

The use of the word “slaughtered” implied an animalistic act not reserved for humans. Instead of “murdered”, the author chose a more disrespectful act. In the same article, another victim is mentioned to have been killed by a predator and also dumped naked in the stream. This creates an image of the victim as more exposed to the animalistic and predatory perpetrator, and the little she could have done to escape her faith. In this case, the victim status is closer to the *Ideal victim* since the news gives the idea that she did not participate in the victimisation. It also makes the story more embellished raising the level of newsworthiness [10]. The choice

of the word “dumped”, which was also seen in other instances in the data, signaled how the victim had been treated in ways one might discard waste, and the fact she was naked further showed her as defenceless and subordinate to the offender. The perpetrator was portrayed as not possessing any respect for the victim and disposed of her as if she was expendable. The news was powerful to imprint a picture of the scene in the reader’s mind.

In the material, we can see how sex work itself is often sensationalised in the news. We found similarities to the *Labelling* discourse, where the victim’s profession in the sex trade is mentioned without much relevance to the information being reported. The sex work itself is mentioned, not because it relates to the crime, but because it labels the victims and has the capability to produce a reaction in the reader. The sensationalistic mentions of the victims’ profession evoke emotions and responses that increase the newsworthiness. At the same time, it further stigmatises the victims. If the work itself is perceived by many as the most noteworthy part of the news, many women in the sex trade might choose to conceal it, and in this way internalise the stigma [13], which will inevitably and negatively affect them.

3.4 Vulnerability

Some articles efficiently pointed to the victim’s vulnerability, avoiding any blaming and offering a picture closer of the *Ideal victim*. For instance, one article discussed the repercussions of the Brexit referendum leading to higher levels of xenophobic hate crimes against sex workers since many of them were immigrants. The article highlighted the elevated level of vulnerability beyond their profession with an already high risk of violent and sexual crime victimisation. The article cites the words of a sex worker who said,

“I have been threatened by men on the street who said they would attack me. When I went to the police, they said ‘are you telling me you’re a prostitute because if you are, I am going to arrest you.’ I have experienced increasing racism and sexism from the police since the referendum was announced” (Independent).

In this example, it is visible the victims’ experiences with law enforcement when reporting a crime and their perception of the treatment they receive by the authorities. The same article discusses different aspects of institutionalised misogyny towards women selling sexual services, how it produces further stigma and, as a consequence, they are not believed when reporting a crime. The sex workers also indicated that male clients sometimes threaten to report the victims for prostitution to the police or to the home office in order to get them deported out of the UK. They feel vulnerable not only because of the men who purchase sex from them but also from the justice system. In this case, the article mentioned the profession of the victims since it was relevant to criticise the police officer’s response, but it does not accomplish characteristics of the *Labelling* discourse.

In a different article, by the Independent, the victim’s profession is mentioned only once at the end of the news to explain how her work made her more vulnerable to victimisation. She was not seen as partaking in the criminal incident or blamed for the crime committed. Beyond this, she was also described as vulnerable as a result of her work, fulfilling the *Ideal victim*’s weakness attribute. The elevated vulnerability of female sex workers was implicit in other articles that for example, report characteristics of the perpetrator or perpetrators. For instances:

“[The perpetrators], and the unidentified security guard raped the terrified victims on their beds before demanding more money from them” (Daily Mail).

In this case, the location of the crime was the victims' home where they also worked. Therefore, they had a legitimate reason for being at that location. The article inquired the victims about their experiences and how the crimes had affected them, highlighting the victimisation and effectively avoiding any narrative of their participation in the criminal act because of their profession. The perpetrators were described as having degraded the women, demonstrating how their actions were much below the level of treatment the women deserved. The victims were in this instance not only portrayed as vulnerable at the time of the crime but also afterwards. The psychological trauma caused by the event was described and showcased how the victims continue to be vulnerable after the offence occurred. The victims were characterised as being afraid of men and of being alone. The same article cites the court judge assigned to the case who declared that sex workers were as protected by the law as any other person and there was no possible justification for the criminal acts performed against them. This narrative by a representative of the law implies a dismissal of the *Victim blaming* discourse and the view that sex workers are partially responsible for their victimisation as a result of their profession.

In another article, by the Daily Mail, the victims were described as “*defenceless*” and “*shaking violently*” while the attackers were described as going after “*lone vulnerable women [working] in their own homes*”. A detective sergeant indicated that the victims were targeted because the perpetrators did not expect the women to report the incidents since they consider it an occupational hazard. Through this quote, the opposite was being communicated, as the women did report the crimes, and the perpetrators were brought to justice. The article also brings forth the notion that many of the victims had “*lasting psychologically damaging effects*” to show the aftermath and consequences of the victimisation and how damaging it is, in the long term, no matter the victim's profession.

The *Vulnerability* discourse is also generated by describing how sex workers warn and look after each other. For example, one article reported about a website where information about customers was shared and warnings about some specific individuals, who were considered dangerous, were issued. The women used the website to tell their stories from their perspective and were not portrayed in the news as participants in their victimisation. In the article, we read:

“An escort has described how a client turned violent and gave her a skin infection - one of the thousands of accounts of blacklisted men on a make-shift web forum set up to protect sex workers. [...] One woman who recognised the man's number on the forum added: Also had a very bad experience with this man. He attempted to blackmail me for a free booking by threatening to tell the hotel and got VERY nasty when I refused. Be careful of this one girls” (Independent).

This article had a subtle educational purpose aiming at displaying a part of the sex traders' work life. It portrayed sex workers as someone with an elevated risk of being the victim of violent or sexual crimes. By showcasing this in a respectful manner, the news has the ability to counteract the victim-blaming mentality and create empathy in people unfamiliar with the sex trade.

3.5 Legitimisation

A discourse found in several articles was intended to legitimise the sex workers' victim status, as well as the sex trade itself. This was found in news commenting on the right intervention of the justice system when sex workers are victims of crime and articles that highlight their right to a safe work environment. When sex work is seen as legitimate, and its workers as deserving of rights, the stigma is negated because it is no longer shameful for the women to participate and be associated with it. Read found that the discourse surrounding sex work is created by people outside the trade [13]. In this regard, a legitimising narrative about sex work and sex workers when media reports about crimes committed against them would greatly benefit them. A shift in the discourse surrounding sex work would most likely facilitate that the voices of sex workers would be heard more often.

Some articles defend that sex workers deserve the same rights in the workplace as any other professional and are not to be expected to be sexually harassed. Some go further to defend that even in professions where sexual services are sold, consent is important. In these articles, women in the sex trade are considered as valid to consent or not consent to various types of sexual contact as any other woman. It is argued that their safety and comfort should be at the forefront and be respected to the same extent as in other professions. For example, in one article by the Independent, we read:

“[Name], the director of the country’s human rights commission, said the case was an ‘important reminder to businesses across the country’, not just to sex workers, that everyone has the right to freedom from sexual harassment. ‘All workers, regardless of the type of work they do, have the right to freedom from sexual harassment in the workplace. We encourage all business owners and employers to ensure that they understand and respect those rights,’ [name], who represented the sex worker in the case, said in a statement.”

Legitimisation contradicts victim-blaming. Instead of communicating that sex workers contribute to their victimisation, should be the ones to take precautions, and not act in a reckless manner, the *Legitimisation* discourse showcase empathy towards the women and does not distinguish them from women in other professions. It is instead up to clients to treat them with the respect they deserve.

In another article, two victims were described not as prostitutes but as women who “*offered sexual services at the basement flat via [website] and had only worked at the property for three days before the raid took place*” (Daily Mail). In this case, the women were characterised as offering a service and therefore their profession gained more credibility. They were further described as having only been working there for a short time, which again characterised the work in a manner one might describe other types of work of a non-sexual nature.

Some articles chose to define the victims as survivors, overcoming hardships following exploitation and victimisation and depicting a strong image of the women. Besides, survivors are not participants in the criminal act, which legitimises the victim's status and relates it to the *Vulnerability* discourse. Women who are seen as vulnerable and not contributing to their victimisation have a more legitimate victim status and are closer to the *Ideal victim* compared to those portrayed in articles with a victim-blaming mentality.

Moreover, we found a legitimising narrative on the characterization of violent crimes committed against sex workers as hate crimes. In such case, the victims are

considered as a part of a marginalized group, especially vulnerable, and are not to blame for the crimes committed against them by perpetrators expressing hate words.

Some articles emphasize potential positive aspects of working in the sex trade, such as the amount of money earned and break the stereotype of clients as “dirty old men”. For instance,

“Most people expect them to be dirty old men, but actually the peak age is roughly about 27 to 45. Peak career is IT, and we’ve also had professional footballers, GPs - you name it. A prostitute - also a mum - who can earn £3,000 in a week, also reveals how she gets around the issue of not being sexually attracted to a client” (The Sun).

Elevating the positive aspects may help to destigmatise the work, in opposition to the narrative mentioned by Dawthorne that sex workers are perceived as in need of saving [12]. However, this might also relate to the idea that in-house sex work, more often than street prostitution, is enjoyable and a free choice [14].

3.6 Any woman

This discourse is encapsulated in articles that portray victims as average women from the perspective of the public eye, giving the idea that the crime committed against them could have happened to anyone. It could have been the readers’ mothers, daughters, sisters or friends. Some articles describe victims’ families, backgrounds, and dreams for the future, avoiding a characterization solely as sex workers or prostitutes, and in this way bring them closer to any of us. One article published in The Sun mentioned briefly the nickname of a murdered woman, which humanised her and offered a sense of her person-ality. Victims’ portrayal as any woman, through relating to the reader, has the power to inspire empathy and negate the stigma of sex work because it does not invoke victim-blaming. On the contrary, it characterises the victims as individuals who are greatly missed and who leave a huge positive impact on the people in their lives. For instance:

“She said: ‘For those who knew my mum, she was a million beautiful things. She imprinted on everyone’s heart who met her. Because of [the perpetrator], my mum violently and brutally lost her whole life and our lives were turned upside down. [...] The detective said: ‘[one of the victims] was a mother with four children, she was a daughter, she was a sister. She was wanting to go back to [her country] and to start her life and get back to the person she was’” (Daily Mail).

In a different article, the victim was said to be “*always happy*”, “*always trying to look after her friends*”, a “*really, really lovely person*” and someone who “*was willing to give anybody a chance*”. This choice of words to describe the woman humanises her by bringing forth characteristics that most people value. It makes her relatable and shows how she is not only a sex worker but also a valued friend and a helpful person. Most readers would be able to relate these characteristics to people in their lives, which showcases the discourse of how the victim could have been any woman.

In another example, portraying a similar narrative, a friend of a murdered woman reported:

“I really miss her. We used to go clubbing together, we were good friends. She used to love to go shopping. She was lovely, really friendly but also a quiet person. It was a shock for all that knew her, you never think something like this will happen” (The Sun).

The *Any woman* discourse was also identified in a news article reporting on the search for a missing woman who was suspected of being murdered. The author chose to refer to the woman by her name and to describe her in terms of her age. Only once, at the end of the article is her profession in the sex trade mentioned, accompanied by the explanation that this made her particularly exposed to crime. When commenting on her appearance the author wrote the following:

“She is described as white, 5ft 5in and slim, with fair skin and straight brown hair” (Independent).

She is further described to have hazel eyes and two tattoos, which likens her to many women, and offers the picture of an average individual.

Many articles, instead of providing a description of the victim, included photographs of them in their daily lives, frequently accompanied by family and loved ones, contributing also to humanising them. In contrast to the publication of a picture displaying a victim in a swimsuit, these pictures did not sexualise the women but instead placed them in the context of their own lives. Often the pictures were taken in a setting that would look familiar to the reader. Some of the articles described the victim as a mother, for example as “the mother-of-three”. In this case, the woman’s identity was broadened to more than a sex worker. Instead, she had a family and was responsible for supporting her children, which, to a certain extent, gave the readers an insight into the motives for her to choose the profession.

In an article published by The Sun, it was written: “*The victim was just 42 years old*”, implying that the victim was deserving of life, and did not deserve to be murdered.

We also found articles that reported the victims as coming “*from various walks of life*” suggesting that any woman could become a victim. In this case, there was no distinction made between the different professions and those who were working in the sex trade were described in the same way as the others. This conveyed that there was no difference in the value of the victim status between the different professions mentioned:

“They were teenage girls, shop assistants, prostitutes, clerks. They were mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. And the broad spectrum of victims from various walks of life meant that no woman was safe with [the predator] at large” (Daily Mail).

4. Discussion: media discourse and stigmatization.

In this study, we found six discourses used to report on female sex workers when victims of violent or sexual crimes: *Victim blaming*, *Labelling*, *Media sensationalism*, *Vulnerability*, *Legitimation* and *Any woman*.

Most articles in the analysed data did not only use one of these discourses but several. Articles using the *Victim blaming* discourse also often use *Labelling* to disclose the victim’s profession, drug use and prior criminal charges. *Media sensationalism* can be seen alongside other discourses but has the strongest overlap with *Labelling*. *Vulnerability*, *Legitimation* and *Any woman* are often seen together as they all focus on portraying the victim in a more respectful light without painting her as a participant in the criminal act.

Victim blaming considers the victim as a participant in her victimisation and at least partially responsible for it. The victim should have done more to protect herself

and would have then become closer to the status of the *Ideal victim*. Readers of articles using this discourse are presented with a victim who is to blame for the crime committed against her. In contrast to *Victim blaming*, *Vulnerability* presents the victim as defenseless and not as a participant in the criminal act.

Labelling centres the identity of the victim in her profession among other characteristics. Conversely, *Legitimation* displays both the work and the victim status as legitimate. The discourse of *Any woman* also contradicts *Labelling* by portraying a relatable woman that is someone's sister, mother, daughter and friend.

Media sensationalism aims to trigger the reader and to create entertainment rather than having a specific informative or eventually educational purpose. *Media sensationalism* is produced through the use of embellished and theatrical language or the inclusion of explicit details and photographs.

Wallinger found that varying representations may have a serious effect in confusing the public's perception of the victims [10]. The use of the six different discourses in our study, although overlapping, might cause the same confusing effect on the public's perception of sex workers. To prevent this from happening, it is necessary consistently portray sex worker victimisation in a respectful and destigmatising manner. Wallinger argued that the public will not change their perception of sex workers if the media does not bring forth adequate representation [10]. When the media chooses certain words and hide relevant aspects or informs about irrelevant ones the readers are not presented with a nuanced picture of prostitution [11]. For people holding a victim-blaming mentality towards sex work, a legitimising narrative could have the ability to change their view if such discourse is written and seen.

The media affects both the group of people being reported and the public [11], but it is noteworthy that discourses surrounding sex work are not constructed by sex workers themselves. On the contrary, they are built within the dominant public sphere [13] that news media makes a part of. Even though sex workers are not participants in building discourses surrounding their work, they are negatively affected by the stigma they impose [13]. It is, therefore, essential that news articles promote inclusiveness by carefully choosing what they report and how they do it in order to call out the harmfulness of *Victim blaming* and *Labelling*.

Victim blaming contradicts three of the attributes of the *Ideal victim* status: being engaged in a legitimate activity, having a legitimate reason to be in the place of the crime and most relevant being guilt-free of any participation in the criminal act. On the contrary, *Victim blaming* considers the victims as participants in their own process of victimisation because of their professional choices and risk-taking behaviours. Although it recognises that sex work is a dangerous activity and women are at risk, it does not consider them to need rescue.

The *Victim blaming* narrative found in our study characterises the women as carefree and reckless, addicted to drugs and alcohol, who voluntarily meet with potentially dangerous clients. In addition, they are considered responsible for their own safety and should take all possible precautions to avoid victimisation. If a victim has failed to evaluate the potential risks that the meeting with a client implies, she is the one to blame and should have done more to protect herself.

We also found that some representations sexualise and objectify the victims. When the information that a murdered woman's underwear was found in the hotel room she was staying in is reported, it is because the news author purposefully chooses to highlight the fact that the victim was a sex worker since most women bring underwear when staying at a hotel. This type of narrative fortifies the existing stigma surrounding sex work, which, according to Read, is easily internalised by sex workers [13].

Labelling refers to a narrative that brings up the victim's profession, drug use or prior convictions without it having significant relevance to the reporting of the crime. The woman's profession labels her as a prostitute, her drug use labels her an addict and her past convictions label her a criminal, alongside being a victim. It questions the reason that led the victim to be in the place of the crime, as well as her activity when the crime was committed, which places her far away from the *Ideal victim* although not as straightforward as the *Victim blaming* discourse. Being labelled as a prostitute, drug user or criminal implies that the victim had nefarious reasons to have been on the scene of the crime, suggesting that she was selling sex, buying or using drugs or committing a criminal offence. The use of such labels surreptitiously leads the reader to question what the victim was doing and where she was doing it. Questioning these *Ideal victim* attributes can only contribute to negating the women's victimisation. As McCracken found in many articles that painted female sex workers as lost and desperate with issues of drug use and homelessness [11], the *Labelling* discourse also reinforces the existing stigma surrounding sex work.

Media sensationalism uses extravagant wording when reporting on the criminal victimisation of sex workers and sometimes uses excessive details and information that have no other purpose than provoke a reaction from the reader, leave an impression and increase what has become known as "clickbait" in the digital era. Some articles relay sensitive information and details of the crime that has the potential to cause further harm to the victim. *Media sensationalism* strengthens stigma and prejudice. The objective is not to inform but to entertain. It is disrespectful in every aspect and uses the victims' stories for a clear profit, disregarding the victim's status. Unfortunately, in our study, *Media sensationalism* was found on different levels, in many articles.

Vulnerability can be likened to the *Ideal victim's* attribute of weakness [18] because it considers that the woman does not participate in the action that victimizes her. In this case, the victim's weakness, strengthens and legitimates her status as a victim. This discourse involves explanations of how minority groups of sex workers have an increased risk of becoming victims since the motive of the crime can contain xenophobic taints. In addition, the *Vulnerability* discourse identifies the increased risk that victimised sex workers have of being arrested and prosecuted when reporting the crime, highlighting processes of secondary victimisation by the legal system. We found the word "vulnerable" in many articles when describing the victims. Some focus on how they were terrified during the attack or explain the physical and emotional harm caused by the violent act. The *Vulnerability* narrative often uses the victims' own words to tell their stories. However, it involves the risk of reinforcing the stigma, when the women are portrayed as needing rescue [12]. Therefore, the news should avoid portraying the women as they often do, lost, desperate, entrenched in drug use and homeless [11]. The narrative of news media should educate about vulnerability without fortifying stigma. By using respectful and empathetic communication and not labelling the sex worker by her profession, media organisations may advance in a more ethical way of constructing and reporting the news.

Legitimation aims to validate the women's victim status and their work in the sex trade. This is sometimes achieved through showcasing interventions made by the justice system and relaying an ideology that sex workers have the right to a safe work environment. This discourse does not blame the victim. Instead, it portrays the perpetrators as fully responsible for the criminal acts. In this case, the narrative shows empathy for the women who are not distinguished from workers in other fields or

trades. Sex work is legitimised by considering it as work, meaning that it is not a part of the victim's identity. *Legitimation* counteracts the effect of *Labelling*. Victims are described as survivors, which paints a picture of a strong character, a feature included in Christie's *Ideal victim*; someone with the ability to claim the victim status and make their case heard, but not strong enough that can fight the perpetrator and avoid the victimisation [18]. The *Legitimation* discourse has the potential to reduce the existing stigma surrounding sex work and prevent it to spread through the media.

When the victim is portrayed in a very relatable light, it offers the idea that she could have been *Any woman*. In our study, we found this portrayal to be respectful and it does not deprive victims of their individuality. They are likened to mothers, daughters and friends and described as having aspirations and dreams. They are normal women who are not defined by their profession. Many of the articles using this discourse quote family members and friends who have been impacted by the loss of a loved one. The *Any woman* narrative can work to inspire empathy in the reader and create an understanding of the reasons behind the women's choice of profession. The women are painted as complex individuals and not labelled by their work's choice, an important feature that can help reduce stigma.

Nothing about a specific woman or the crimes that victimized her seems to determine whether she will be reported using *Victim blaming*, *Labelling*, *Media sensationalism*, *Legitimation*, or be described as vulnerable or as any woman. The use of discourses in news reporting stems instead to originate from the authors and the news organisations opinions. We found very little pointing towards discourses arising from the sex workers themselves, which shows an important unexplored line of research and a direction for future studies.

5. Conclusion

Sex workers do not live up to the *Ideal victim* standard because *Victim blaming*, *Labelling* and *Media sensationalism* discourses question their reason to be on the scene of the crime, the activity they are engaged in when the crime is committed and blame them for the victimisation they suffer. When these discourses are used, sex workers are not considered legitimate victims. On the other hand, *Vulnerability* and *Legitimation* highlight their weaknesses and bring them closer to the *Ideal victim* status. *Victim blaming* and *Labelling* utilise stigmatising concepts, such as "prostitution" and "drug and alcohol addiction" to create a picture of reckless women who share responsibility with the perpetrators victimizing them. *Vulnerability* and *Legitimation* utilise the same concepts to conclude instead that they make the victims weaker and more vulnerable. As a result, they are not seen as active participants in the criminal act. In this regard, guilt is not a consequence of the women's actions but of the ideology of the individual conveying the discourse. Positive, respectful, destigmatising discourses should be given more room in news media in order to protect sex workers from the harm that stigmatisation implies, as explained by Read [13]. *Victim blaming* and *Labelling* should be more actively called out as narratives that have harmful impact on women working in the sex trade. Discourses in the media are affected by the public's views on prostitution but at the same time, they also have an impact on the public's perception [11]. Oftentimes, victims are used to relay societal ideology. The aim of news media should be to inform the public about news events, while publishing articles written with the respect, dignity and empathy that every victim deserves.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Section 2

Sexual Violence and Social Media

Perspective Chapter: Online Sex Trafficking of Minors – Exploring Effective Interventions and Prevention

Sara Spowart

Abstract

Sex trafficking of minors has been increasing in many countries worldwide and for those victims that survive, they are left with significant trauma and mental health concerns due to the abuse they have lived through. Trafficking inordinately impacts vulnerable populations worldwide, with an estimated 80% of trafficking victims being women. The commercial sexual exploitation of minors creates almost irreparable negative outcomes for victims. One of the best prevention tools is the ability to identify child risk factors before any degree of sex trafficking even occurs. Education on sexual abuse awareness and the potential approaches abusers take, while addressing low self-esteem, unmet needs and psychosocial support, are significant considerations in a prevention intervention. This chapter reveals that identifying children who are at risk for online commercial sexual exploitation is critical for preventing its occurrence. Interventions such as screenings through the school system, self-esteem and self-compassion promotion, animal-assisted interventions, physical exercise programs to improve self-esteem, and psychoeducation programs for minors and parents are some suggestions that may have a strong prevention impact. Taking a multi-pronged, holistic approach while addressing the most significant elements is likely most impactful for prevention.

Keywords: sex trafficking, children, trauma, prevention, intervention

1. Introduction

The exploitation of children through the use of the internet is a form of sexual violence and is directly connected to the issue of online sex trafficking of minors. The work of Yakushko [1, 2] provides a review of relevant research on human trafficking as the international community has become much more aware and concerned about increases in trafficking and the enslavement of children, women and men worldwide since the early 1990s. The United Nations, the International Organization of Migration, the International Labor Organization and UNICEF have extensively increased their level of concern and interest in this issue. In 2000, the United States

sanctioned the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, marking a new area of awareness and significance regarding the sex trafficking of minors as a significant societal issue and concern. The prevention of sex trafficking of minors is increasingly at the forefront of important topics in the international community [1, 2].

2. Background

Sex trafficking of minors has been increasing in many countries worldwide and for those victims that survive, they are left with significant trauma and mental health concerns due to the abuse they have lived through [1, 2]. The United Nations defines human trafficking as, “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of exploitation” (Article 3, paragraph (a), [1, 2]). Trafficking for forced labor is more prevalent worldwide, however sex trafficking is a horrendous violation of human rights with extreme long-lasting negative impacts on victims and it produces a majority of global trafficking profits. As of 2007, the United Nations stated that human trafficking now impacts every country on the globe and the number of victims is now at epidemic levels, and continues to increase and take on new forms that had not previously existed [1, 2].

Globalization is believed to be behind the rise in the rate of sex trafficking of minors and the increased demand for cheap labor. Trafficking inordinately impacts vulnerable populations worldwide, with an estimated 80% of trafficking victims being women. Trafficking victims can be lured through things such as ‘modeling’ schools, tourist agencies, false promises of paying jobs, coercion through believing they are loved or in a romantic relationship with the trafficker. A high level of mental health services is needed for survivors due to the severe psychological and physical abuse and life-threatening situations they regularly experience. Survivors are at high risk of suicide, self-harm and substance abuse. The extreme abuse survivors experience is so great that it is important to address prevention efforts so that individuals never have to face the seemingly impossible challenge of recovery [1, 2].

There are numerous factors creating increased levels of online sex trafficking of minors. Some of these include increasing demand for commercial sex with minors, the rise of individuals who are addicted to pornography, patriarchal cultural beliefs that protect buyers and traffickers and create demand, as well as mainstream organizations such as Facebook, Uber, Lyft, Instagram, texting and communication from cell phone providers that facilitate these transactions in plain sight. Mainstream social media apps, rather than the dark web, are a significant part of this growing issue and demand. Most online sex trafficking of minors is ‘hidden in plain sight’ through mainstream applications such as Instagram and Snapchat [3].

Aside from child trafficking being hidden in plain view, it is also an issue because society does not understand the extent of the problem or the reality of what prostitution and pornography really looks like. There are many stereotypes and incorrect societal beliefs that contribute greatly to the continuation and growth of this issue [3–5]. Traffickers benefit from the naivety, needs, vulnerabilities and ignorance of victims.

3. Sex trafficking of minors

The general acceptance of violence against women globally as well as the vulnerable status of children and disabled groups puts these individuals at heightened risk of sex trafficking [6]. In the United States and most of the world, any individual who sells sexual acts and is under the age of 18 years old is considered a sex trafficking victim. The elements of force, fraud and coercion do not need to be present for minors for it to be considered trafficking. Child sex trafficking is associated with numerous symptoms and specifically with the symptoms of complex trauma. Many victims of child sex trafficking experienced sexual abuse or other forms of abuse before being trafficked. Therefore, identifying at-risk children and implementing interventions is important for addressing and preventing this issue [3, 7].

4. Pornography and sex trafficking

An underlying problem that is vastly under-recognized is the rise in internet pornography addiction and the impact this is having on the rise of child trafficking demand. The statistics are not clear but there are estimates that at least 25–40% of individuals in pornography are trafficking victims. However, because pornography is legal, general assumptions that trafficking does not exist within a legal, accessible entity prevail. Yet this is a misconception as a trafficker will sell their ‘product’ however they can. They can sell children through both pornography and in-person as demand and opportunity allow [3, 8]. The rise in internet pornography addiction has also created an increase in market demand for more violent sex and sex with minors. However, violent sex and sex with minors is not easily accessible or legal and this has created an increased market demand for hidden, underground, illegal commercial sexual exploitation of children [3].

5. Negative outcomes for minors experiencing sex trafficking

The commercial sexual exploitation of minors creates exceptionally negative outcomes for victims. According to Ottisova [9], at least 53% of trafficked children experience significant physical violence and 49% experience sexual violence. This trafficking can include both general labor trafficking as well as sex trafficking of children [9]. Iglesias-Rios [10], conducted a qualitative analysis that survivors of trafficking experience much higher levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD than average rates and long-term mental health services are an essential component to addressing survivor needs. Hemmings conducted a systematic review and qualitative analysis revealing that human trafficking survivors require significant amounts of trauma-informed healthcare [11]. Many of the victims that are rescued are diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, Psychosis, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Complex Trauma, Bipolar disorder, different forms of severe depression, suicidal ideation, self-harming tendencies, substance abuse, severe anxiety and panic attacks, paranoia and attachment traumas [2, 3, 12, 13]. The abuse and repercussions are so severe to victims that preventing sex trafficking is a critical concern and the most logical way to effect a change so these issues do not even occur [11].

6. Risk factors

One of the best prevention tools is the ability to identify child risk factors before any degree of sex trafficking even occurs. Healthcare practitioners have a unique position to identify and help support children that are at-risk for commercial sexual exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is defined by the U.S. Department of Justice as sexual abuse of a minor for economic gain. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 was a landmark bill that established commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of children as organized sexual abuse of children and adolescents. The work of Jaeckl and Laughon [14], provides a comprehensive overview of the most significant risk factors for girls ages 12–18 for commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Girls aged 12–18 years old are the largest CSES population in the United States. Their work found that childhood maltreatment trauma was the most important risk factor for children. This means that female children that have experienced or are currently experiencing childhood maltreatment trauma are at greatest risk for CSEC [14].

The work of Choi [15] also highlights some of the most important risk factors for youth to be groomed and recruited into sex trafficking as well as the prevalence and importance of recognition [15]. A literature review conducted by Choi [15] addresses this significant gap and area of concern. Choi [15] integrates risk factors of domestic sex trafficking of minors using PRISMA criteria and three databases for investigation, CINAHL, PsychInfo and PubMed. This study demonstrated that the most important risk factors were childhood maltreatment trauma and running away from home. Other research has also supported this finding that childhood maltreatment trauma is the most significant risk factor. Within this category, there are significant types of maltreatment trauma such as dysfunctional family environments, neglect and childhood sexual abuse [15]. Within child maltreatment trauma, childhood sexual abuse was the most significant risk factor overall and within the category of trauma for CSEC. This has also been supported by many other reviews and experts. Even within CSA, the degree of severity is a significant factor. Factors that created worse CSA impacts were the experience of things such as rape or very young age of victimization. Childhood rape and sexual abuse at age 5 or younger were particularly concerning risk factors for later risk of online sex trafficking as a minor. CSA also largely occurred with other forms of abuse such as neglect, emotional and physical abuse [14].

Reid and colleagues [16] also found that emotional neglect greatly increased the vulnerability of girls to experience CSEC. Emotionally neglected girls are at a higher risk of looking for love, affection and support from others outside the family and home environment when these are not provided at home. The unmet needs for love, care and belonging put these girls at high risk of risky influences. Landers et al. [17] found that the child's history of sexual abuse helps to normalize abuse for these children so that they often do not view a trafficker as exploitative, but as someone who loves and cares for them in exchange for selling sex. This traumatized worldview further compounds the issue.

Landers et al. [17] found that close to 90% of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) victims had experienced childhood sexual abuse and close to 60% had experienced moderate to severe levels of childhood neglect. In addition, approximately 70% of victims displayed signs of Stockholm Syndrome or trauma bonding with their traffickers. CSA is the strongest risk factor for CSEC, coupled with additional abuse, particularly neglect. Other significant factors included running away, homelessness, poverty, hunger, survival sex, being part of a minority group, being female, substance

abuse, mental illness, frequent encounters with CPS, and foster care were also important factors of consideration for putting children at risk of CSEC. Given the knowledge of these risk factors, it is important to create prevention programs around CSEC using these factors. It is possible to prevent much of CSEC by addressing the most significant factors, particularly the impact of child sexual abuse [14].

7. Debunking myths

Contrary to popular sentiment, much sex trafficking is targeted to domestic minor females in the United States through the internet, social networking sites, and through individuals connected to traffickers that target schools, malls and other areas children frequent. A common approach is to target minors by pretending to engage in a romantic relationship with them online and/or by pretending to address unmet needs they may have for validation, attention, material items, acceptance and love. Minors that participate in risky online conduct like meeting 'online' people in person, providing personal information and sending or receiving photos are at higher risk of becoming victims of human sex trafficking. Children that need love, acceptance, validation and attention are at greater risk for seeking out this high risk, external attention and affirmation [18].

In general, children that live in dysfunctional, toxic home environments are at greater risk for online sex trafficking due to unmet needs for love, validation, acceptance and security. Individuals from higher-functioning home environments with a greater number of met needs, tend to engage in less risky behaviors and attitudes and are more safety conscious. Individuals with lower self-esteem are at greater threat of engaging in risky attitudes and becoming an online victim of human sex trafficking. The understanding of risk factors is significant in prevention here. Black et al. [18] also found that prevention efforts through increasing individuals' awareness and watchfulness online directly reduces the risk of becoming a victim of online crime. Therefore, prevention interventions with youth that educate minors about human sex trafficking, online risks, and psychoeducational approaches and address issues of self-esteem and unmet emotional and physical needs have merit [18].

8. Theoretical framework

The humanistic theory approach is particularly useful and important when addressing the needs and concerns of children at risk for sexual abuse. A humanistic perspective is particularly important and powerful as it incorporates compassion and sensitivity to the circumstances an individual is experiencing. This is significant when addressing the vulnerability factors for children that are more at risk for sexual abuse [19]. Under the humanistic theory perspective, it is useful to apply Maslow's hierarchy of needs to clients. At-risk children must have their basic needs such as food, water, shelter, safety, stability, and human connection met in order to positively respond to therapeutic treatment. If their needs are not met regarding the first three levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there is a significant possibility the at-risk child will be exposed to potentially harmful individuals [3–5, 20, 21]. In addition to this, it is important to apply the humanistic approach and Socioecological Model to address the perspective of the at-risk child. Service providers also need to demonstrate a person-centered approach with unconditional positive regard so children feel safe

to seek help and speak up about their vulnerabilities and concerns [3–5, 20, 21]. The work of Warria [22] looks at not only the importance of prevention in regards to sex trafficking, but also prevention in fragile environments through the adaptation of the Socioecological Model approach. This framework posits that both protective factors and risks should be addressed in situations such as parents and schools as well as areas with greater societal fragility and conflict [22]. Education, addressing needs and vulnerabilities and positive mental health are all helpful for prevention to avoid the horrendous experience of sex trafficking to begin with [1, 2]. Models that reflect this need are relevant in prevention.

9. Effective interventions with minors at risk for sex trafficking

9.1 Education

Education on sexual abuse awareness and the potential approaches abusers take, while addressing low self-esteem, unmet needs and psychosocial support, are significant considerations in a prevention intervention. Children need to be educated about the dangers of the internet and places outside the home such as the school or mall where they could be targeted. They also need to be educated on sexual abuse that can occur through grooming and cell phone use. Children and adolescents can be manipulated and coerced to provide sexually explicit photos and videos and groomed on what content to send through applications such as Snap Chat and Instagram. It is important for minors to have preventative education on the risks of social media before they are targeted [3–5, 20, 21].

Essential components for sex trafficking prevention of minors include education on mental health, self-esteem, well-being and education on risk factors for online grooming, recruitment and trafficking. It cannot be assumed this education and mental health wellness and support can be provided at home by family or friends. If it is not someone from online, many child abusers are known to the child. Also, oftentimes family and friends have misinformation and misunderstanding of the risk factors and true realities of sex trafficking today. Resources and efforts to help children feel loved, secure, accepted and educated are needed to prevent issues before they even occur. Also, educating children on the spectrum of abuse and what is entailed in the grooming process is critical. Children may not realize and understand how they are being groomed and the inappropriateness of adults talking to them online in sexual ways. Oftentimes when minors have low self-esteem, are in need or love, validation, attention and affirmation and are online, they are at risk for slowly engaging in risky behaviors they would not otherwise participate in [3–5, 20, 21].

Additional support for education can include policies that provide general education in the school system on how to help children manage their emotions, feel loved, validated and have positive self-esteem while also being aware of dynamics and risks with adults. On average, children are generally recruited for trafficking at age 11 or 12 years old. Both boys and girls are targeted but the majority are female. Therefore, interventions with education on mental health, wellness and sexual abuse prevention need to be enacted before minors reach the age of recruitment and grooming. Nine to ten years of age is likely an optimal time where minors are old enough to understand certain concepts and warning signs of risky people online, but young enough that they have probably not yet experienced grooming or recruitment [3–5, 20, 21].

9.2 Network alliance and framework approach

To implement successful prevention efforts, it may also be important to incorporate task force alliance work for a more holistic, impactful strategy. The Human Trafficking Task Force of the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice developed a primary prevention framework to assist in the creation of a comprehensive way to apply community strengths and resources for the prevention of child trafficking in every form. This framework has elements of human rights, public health and the Socioecological Model (SEM). It views children as having human rights that need to be honored and protected, and looks at issues of inequality and discrimination. It addresses society's responsibility to children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The public health aspect is concerned about preventing harm before it occurs. The public health perspective looks to address an issue by understanding its determinants [23].

In the case of prevention, it would mean understanding the factors that put children at risk and addressing those factors in a prevention approach. It means addressing the problem of trafficking before it even occurs. The Socioecological Model (SEM) approach looks at individual, relationship, community and societal influences at various socioecological levels. This framework emphasizes a culture of prevention. Primary prevention is not often discussed but it is the central way to improve the human condition. Key components with this framework for prevention are the elements of 1) belonging and identity, 2) social relations, 3) love and care, 4) respect for bodily integrity, 5) physical health, 6) participation, 7) self-expression and well-being, 8) sense of safety, 9) feeling respected, 10) feeling provided for, 11) adequate standard of living, 12) enjoying learning, 13) age appropriate development and 14) access to information. According to the Socioecological Model, these elements collectively comprise categories for overall well-being of children and important needs for CSEC prevention interventions. When these needs of a child are met, their risk of CSEC significantly decreases. Knowledge of these components is power over the incidence of CSEC [23].

9.3 Mandated large scale school-based interventions

In 2017, in ground breaking legislature, California became the first state in the United States to mandate anti-trafficking education for 7th–12th grade education in public school curriculum. This legislature was founded in relation to Congress' Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. Before the establishment of this law, numerous California schools in 'high intensity child prostitution' areas created and implemented anti-trafficking curriculum. These early experiences helped establish the necessity of this prevention education. There has also been movement and breakthroughs for school officials to address problematic behaviors as potentially reflective of symptoms of abuse and victimization. Children are trafficked in every state of the union and other jurisdictions need to consider creating and implementing curriculum for this purpose as well [24].

9.4 Higher risk areas

For education intervention and prevention, certain cities in the United States have been labeled as more at risk than others. These are considered "high intensity child prostitution (HICP)" zones. In California alone, Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco/Oakland are high intensity child prostitution regions. The HTPETA

reaffirms that educating 7th–12th graders on anti-trafficking is a positively impactful anti-trafficking strategy. All school personnel can potentially have a positive role in prevention and therefore this education needs to be applied to school personnel as well as students. The ten other cities in the United States that are high intensity child prostitution areas includes Minneapolis, Minnesota; Dallas, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Tampa, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; Miami, Florida; New York City, New York; Washington, DC; Las Vegas, Nevada; and St. Louis, Missouri. The success and strong initiative of the California curriculum is a groundbreaking initiative. It is worthwhile for other states to follow this initiative and normalize the efficacy and importance of trafficking prevention work [24].

9.5 Risk factor reduction and interventions

Sex trafficking prevention and education curriculum for minors is especially important because child trafficking is empowered and growing in part due to lack of awareness, stigma and denial. It is necessary to confront this issue to overpower and defeat it. Child trafficking is not largely a foreign or ‘third world’ issue. In the United States alone, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a great majority of the victims are domestic U.S. citizens. Prevention training for educators needs to occur in collaboration with law enforcement personnel and social service providers that have greater understanding and experience with prevention training. Anti-trafficking prevention work is most effective with a multi-disciplinary approach. The groups most at risk for trafficking and most in need for prevention efforts are African American females, transgender youth, girls and homeless boys. The FBI data shows that the average age a girl is trafficked in the United States in 12 years but children as young as nine years old are now at risk according to the most recent data. The business of trafficking children is increasing and schools are vulnerable areas to recruit new victims. Girls in foster care situations are also particularly at risk [24].

Aside from this, general education components need to be included in prevention curriculum. This includes more awareness of social media such as Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, chat rooms and apps such as Lyft and Uber. It also includes posting and providing general information and resources in elevators, hotel rooms, stores like 7–11 and gas stations, sporting events, busses and bathrooms. Like the issue of smoking, there needs to be a general public awareness campaign of the issue. This awareness will shift the general consciousness of society and change the way online sex trafficking of minors is viewed and understood. It also increases awareness and education to at-risk children who are otherwise unreachable [3–5, 20].

9.6 Physical exercise

Liu et al. [25] conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on the impact of physical activity interventions on self-esteem and self-concept in children and adolescents. This study assessed the role of a supervised physical activity on participants ages 3–20 years and looked at 25 randomized controlled trials and 13 non-randomized controlled trials for a total of 2991 cases. The authors identified that physical activity is associated with increased self-concept and self-worth in children and adolescents. Stronger effects were found with school-based and gymnasium-based intervention physical activities. Prevention interventions that consider the significance of physical activity for self-esteem improvement may be relevant for curriculum development and therefore the prevention of sex trafficking [25].

10. Self-compassion as prevention

Self-esteem is an important protective factor against online sex trafficking risk. With the high prevalence of trauma, dysfunctional families and relationships, influx of toxic social media and bullying, it is arguably harder now than ever before for children and adolescents to have healthy self-esteem. Cultivating self-compassion may be a positive reinforcement and intervention to self-esteem and one that has a strong positive effect on reducing negative symptoms associated with trauma, dysfunctional families, unmet needs, social media and bullying. A study with 2809 adolescents and a close to 50% equal male–female ratio examined self-esteem and self-compassion over the course of 4 years. It was found that self-esteem consistently predicted positive changes in self-compassion over the four years. Therefore, self-esteem seems to be a significant component of developing self-compassion. Self-compassion has important implications for recovery from trauma, abuse and mental health issues that can also put one at risk for online sex trafficking. Therefore, prevention interventions that incorporate self-compassion training and education are worthwhile in psychosocial education programs and sex trafficking risk reduction [26].

11. Animal assisted interventions, psychoeducation and parental training as prevention

Animal assisted interventions are another approach that could be potentially effective in prevention efforts to reduce the risk of online sex trafficking of minors. A study conducted by Schuck, et al. [27] with a group of children with vulnerable mental health conditions assessed whether Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) were an effective approach to improving self-esteem in children. A group of 80 children ages 7–9 years old was assessed. It was found that interventions that included the participation of certified therapy dogs for a period of 12 weeks, 1 weekday evening for 2 hours and on Saturdays for 2.5 hours for a total of 4.5 hours a week had a positive impact. This was also accompanied by 2 hours of parental group-based behavioral parent training (BPT) once a week and *Positive Assertive Cooperative Kids* (P.A.C.K) social skills training for the children [26, 27].

This study found that the psychosocial intervention of the social skills curriculum P.A.C.K. along with parent behavioral training and the assistance of therapy dogs improved levels of self-reported self-competence, behavioral conduct and academic competence among the vulnerable children participating in the study. Animal assisted interventions are an increasingly recognized form of complementary therapy for self-competence, self-worth and self-esteem with children. The combination of psychosocial intervention, parental behavior training and animal assistance intervention created a powerful, holistic approach with improved self-esteem outcomes for children [26, 27].

12. Conclusion

This perspective chapter explored the importance of effective prevention interventions for the growing global concern of online sex trafficking of minors. Major topics of concern that were addressed include background information on the issue; specifics concerning sex trafficking of minors, myths and misunderstandings; the

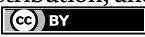
humanistic theory as a theoretical framework to address this issue; and effective interventions such as education, network alliance and large-scale mandated school-based interventions as well as specific prevention measures. This chapter reveals that identifying children who are at risk for online commercial sexual exploitation is critical for preventing its occurrence. Interventions such as screenings through the school system, self-esteem and self-compassion promotion, animal-assisted interventions, physical exercise programs to improve self-esteem, and psychoeducation programs for minors and parents are some suggestions that may have a strong prevention impact. Prevention is significant because many children are at risk and naïve to the prevalence of online sex trafficking. Naivety and ignorance coupled with unmet needs and prior trauma history lead to risky behaviors online. Addressing the risk factors, family system elements, and creating awareness are all important. Taking a multi-pronged, holistic approach while addressing the most significant elements is likely most impactful [3, 18, 28].

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Section 3

Trauma Responsive Care



Chapter 5

A Case Study on Transdisciplinary Approach to Eradicating Sexual Violence: Thuthuzela Care Centres

Judy Dlamini

Abstract

In 2010, South Africa had the highest rate of rape in the world at 132.4 incidents per 100,000 people; this decreased to 72.1 in 2019–2020. This could be an actual decline, or it could be due to other factors such as a sign of decrease in reporting and lack of trust in the criminal justice system. Executing its mandate to develop best practices and policies in the reduction of gender-based violence, the Sexual Offences and Community Unit (under the National Prosecuting Authority) introduced Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs) in 2006, one-stop facilities whose aim is to turn gender-based violence (GBV) victims to survivors through psychosocial, medical and legal support. A transdisciplinary approach is utilised in solving national challenges, including Departments of Justice, Health, Social Development, Treasury, and Non-Governmental Organisations who work with social workers to offer counselling. TCCs are the most cohesive intervention to date that seeks to prevent and eradicate GBVF. Accountability by each stakeholder from the opening of the case to its conclusion has improved conviction rates tenfold. The country requires more partnerships and transdisciplinary approaches to tackle national challenges, including SGBVF. It will take leadership and accountability by all parties to achieve success.

Keywords: gender-based violence and femicide, toxic masculinity, transdisciplinary approach, Thuthuzela Care Centres, social cohesion, accountable leadership

1. Introduction

World Health Organisation ([1]:2) defines sexual violence as: ‘Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work’.

Coercion can encompass varying degrees of force; psychological intimidation; blackmail or threats (of physical harm or of not obtaining a job/grade, etc.).

In addition, sexual violence may also take place when someone is not able to give consent—for instance, while drugged, intoxicated, asleep or mentally incapacitated.

Sexual violence includes but is not limited to: rape within marriage or dating relationships (intimate partner); rape by strangers or acquaintances (non-partner); unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment (at school, work, etc.); systematic rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of violence, which are particularly common in armed conflicts (e.g. forced impregnation); sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people; rape and sexual abuse of children; and 'customary' forms of sexual violence, such as forced marriage or cohabitation and wife inheritance.

There are numerous sources of data on the prevalence of sexual violence, including police reports, studies from clinical settings and non-governmental organisations and population-based surveys [2]. The latter is reported to have the best quality of data, with general underreporting of sexual violence. Reasons vary from lack of trust in the criminal justice system, shame, inadequate support systems, fear or risk of retaliation, fear or risk of being blamed, fear or risk of not being believed to fear or risk of being mistreated and/or socially ostracised [1]. The prevalence varies according to the type of violence and geography. In a cross-sectional survey amongst a randomly selected sample of men in South Africa, 14.3% of men reported having raped their current or former wife or girlfriend [3], while in a WHO multi-country study, lifetime prevalence of sexual partner violence reported by women, aged 15 to 49 years, ranged from 6% in Japan to 59% in Ethiopia, with rates in most settings falling between 10% and 50% [4]. Most available data on sexual violence by a non-partner are from crime surveys, police and justice records, rape crisis centres and retrospective studies of child sexual abuse [5]. In 80% of rape cases in the USA, the aggressor is known to the woman (victim) [6, 7]. Meanwhile in South Africa, the most recent survey of the prevalence of rape found that more than one in five men reported raping a woman who was not a partner (i.e. a stranger, acquaintance or family member), while one in seven reported raping a current or former partner [3]. Sexual violence is prevalent in all societies across geographies and social classes.

2. Underlying factors to sexual violence

Sexual and gender-based violence and femicide (SGBVF) is about gendered power inequality, which is rooted in patriarchy [8]. Culture and social beliefs play an important role in sexual violence; a culture of violence and male superiority tends to normalise violence against women and children, all forms of violence. This culture extends to safety and security officers who are supposed to protect women. When women report sexual violation and are subjected to secondary victimisation by police, where their account is not believed, this causes more emotional harm and delayed healing and discourages women from reporting crimes [9]. The culture of victim blaming, stereotyping and secondary victimisation of victims of SGBV by police is rife globally [10–12]. This is despite several studies that confirm the low rate of false reporting on sexual assault. A meta-analysis of seven studies found that the actual rate of false reporting (e.g. lying) about sexual assaults was low, approximately 5% [9].

In South Africa, different forms of violence date back to the violent apartheid system, which legislated for and institutionalised different forms of violence to control and repress the majority [13]. South Africa was listed in the 2018 Global Peace Index as one of the most violent and dangerous places on Earth which is not abating [13]. Galtung [14] described three types of violence, direct, structural and cultural. Direct or personal violence includes sexual violence and is enabled by easy access to weapons, a general climate of lawlessness and corruption within the criminal justice system [13]. Underlying

direct violence is structural violence, defined as personal and social violence, entrenched in unequal power relations embedded within society. The unequal power relations are gendered and racial and determine access to quality health and education [13]. Structural violence arises from unjust, repressive and oppressive political, economic and social structures that affect people's chances in life, while cultural violence is based on attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination, racism, prejudice and sexism. Systemic institutionalised patriarchy legitimises violence against women.

3. Role of men

Violence by men is associated with a patriarchal system and toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity, a term coined by Shepherd Bliss (in [15]), is toxic behaviours by men as a reaction to perceived threats to the masculinity of a subset of men with poor self-esteem. Scholars posit that being a man is valued by most societies, while being a woman is devalued; therefore, when men who lack self-esteem do not receive external validation, it triggers toxic behaviour to 'regain' their masculinity. Many studies describe how young men have identified violence as an important way to display power and to prove their masculinity in their communities, including exerting control in intimate relationships with women. According to October [16], toxic masculinity is when the norms of masculinity that are defined as violent, unemotional and sexually aggressive have a harmful impact on society and the individual. However, toxic masculinity goes beyond that; male rape is severely underreported because vulnerability is constructed within gendered notions of femininity; negating the victim's masculinity, the violence affirms the masculinity of the perpetrator [16]. While most programmes designed to prevent GBV focus on women and how they should protect themselves, interventions to end gender-based violence need to involve men and boys to help them change their attitudes and behaviours, and even renegotiate their social position and identity [17]. Positive masculinity requires deliberate and consistent effort by all stakeholders to achieve social cohesion and a culture that celebrates equality across all social identities. In South Africa, a few intervention programmes have shown positive behaviour change amongst men and boys, such as One Man Can, Men as Partners and Steppingstones; however, a national roll-out is required to have sustainable change [18].

Most sexual violence is committed by male perpetrators; therefore, involving men and boys in prevention efforts requires holding them accountable for the ways that they contribute to sexual violence; they must be a major part of the solution of creating a culture free from gender-based violence [19]. It starts by raising responsible, sensitive young boys and girls who see all human beings as equals. Men and women need to unlearn the gendered socialisation, gendered roles and prejudice. More programmes are needed that are designed to teach boys and men acceptable behaviour towards women and people who are different from them. One such programme is Futures Without Violence's Coaching Boys Into Men (CBIM) programme, by Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which teaches high-school athletes healthy and respectful behaviour to prevent GBV. CBIM teaches young athlete men that violence does not equal strength. Another area that does not receive enough attention, research and resources is the rehabilitation of sex offenders. There is not enough research on the different sex offender intervention programmes and their effectiveness on young and/or adult offenders; the 'Good Lives Model' and/or Standard Relapse Prevention Programme, amongst other models, especially amongst young offenders [20]. Investment in research in the effectiveness of each model per age group will ensure that research informs evidence-based solutions.

4. Response to sexual and gender-based violence and femicide: Thuthuzela Care Centres case study

‘Violence against women (in South Africa) is a social problem produced by choices made by corporations, governments, politicians, faith-based organisations, and individuals... It is not a crisis out of our control but a social condition that can be interrupted through deliberate efforts’ [21].

According to the World Population Review [22], in 2010, South Africa had the highest rate of rape in the world at 132.4 incidents per 100,000 people; this decreased to 72.1 in 2019–2020. While this is still in the top 3 in the world, it is going in the right direction. This could be a real decline, but it could also be a sign of decrease in reporting due to various factors, including lack of trust in the criminal justice system [23]. The South African government has promulgated progressive laws to address gender equity in general and gender and domestic violence specifically; however, the numbers remain very high. Civil society has been instrumental in driving the progressive laws and initiatives to combat SGVBF. One of these coalitions is the Shukumisa Coalition (Shukumisa means shake up in Nguni language), which has over 60 organisations whose focus is fighting sexual violence against women and children. In 2018, during the month of August, thousands of women and gender non-conforming people (GNC) took to the streets of South Africa under the banner of the Total Shutdown Movement (TTS), demanding intervention by the government and businesses to end the high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) against women and GNC people. This led to a National Summit on Gender Based Violence and Femicide which brought together the government, the Total Shutdown Movement and various civil society organisations; the summit concluded with the signing of a declaration that the government, businesses, labour and civil society would collaborate to conceptualise, drive and implement concrete measures to eradicate gender-based violence and femicide [24]. The National Strategic Plan (NSP) for GBVF was a product of this collaboration; see **Figure 1** below.

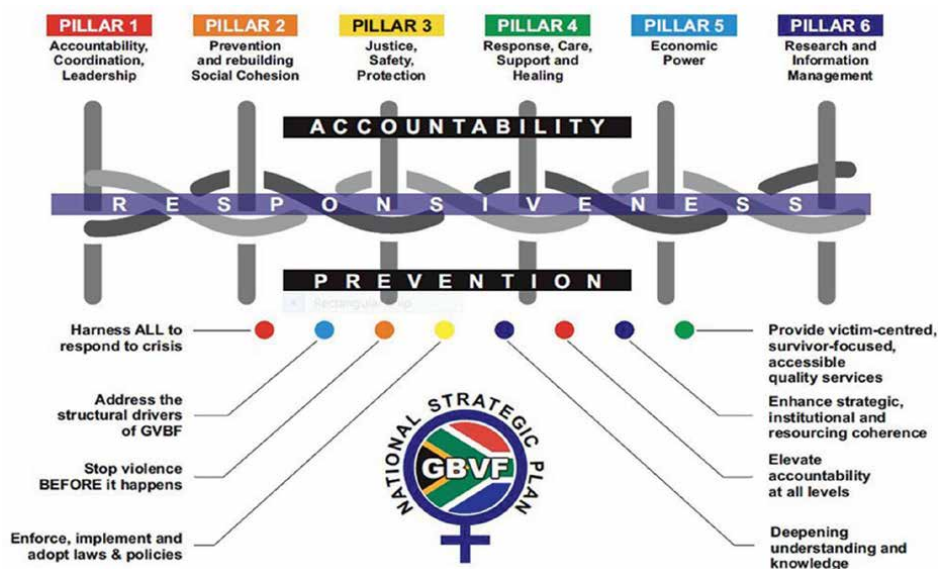


Figure 1. National Strategic Plan for GBVF. Source: www.dsd.gov.za.

The NSP is a multi-sectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework developed to strengthen a coordinated national response to the crisis of GBVF by the Government of South Africa and the country. The six pillars require a multi-sectoral and transdisciplinary coordination of effort to eradicate SGBVF. The NSP follows many different initiatives by the government to curb the scourge of GBVF. One of these was the establishment of a special unit, the Sexual Offences and Community Unit, in 1999 under the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) within the SA government's Department of Justice. Thuthuzela Care Centres are an initiative under SOCA.

4.1 Sexual Offences and Community Unit (SOCA): Thuthuzela Care Centres

The Sexual Offences and Community Unit (SOCA) is responsible for the SGBVF mandate of the NPA. SOCA is led by a special director. The responsibilities of the directorate, as shared in the South African government official website, include¹:

1. The **formulation of policy** regarding capacity building, sensitization and scientific functional training in respect of the prosecution of sexual offences.
2. The coordination of the establishment of **Special Courts** for the adjudication of sexual offences.
3. The facilitation and/or **formulation of research techniques** for the prosecution of sexual offences.
4. The development and implementation of **community awareness programmes** and of plans for the participation of non-governmental organisations in processes and procedures aimed at the prevention or containment of sexual offences.
5. The **development of training** and plans and mechanisms regarding the prosecution of sexual offences.
6. To **establish a specialised unit** against violence on women and children and perform all these functions in respect of Gender Based Violence, Domestic Violence, Maintenance, Child Offender Management and Human Trafficking.

Executing its mandate to develop best practices and policies in the reduction of gender-based violence, the SOCA unit introduced Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs) in 2006. Thuthuzela means to comfort in one of the South African languages, isiXhosa. TCCs are one-stop facilities whose initial aim was to address rape victims. The mandate has since expanded to include all victims of GBV. This initiative is one example of a transdisciplinary approach in solving national challenges. Each centre is hosted within a health institution, hospital or clinic and is linked to one or more police stations. It is a collaboration between the NPA (Department of Justice), Department of Health, Department of Social Development, Treasury Department and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who work with social workers to offer counselling.

¹ National Strategic Plan On Gender-Based Violence & Femicide Accessed on 18 September 2022 from <https://www.justice.gov.za/vg/gbv/NSP-GBVF-FINAL-DOC-04-05.pdf>

4.2 Sexual Offences Courts (SOCs)

The Sexual Offences Courts are dedicated to sexual violence cases; they are victim centred through provision of a victim-friendly place, CCTV equipment (for victims to testify in camera), a special victim testimony room and a private waiting room. Regarding human resources, each court should have a presiding officer, two prosecutors, an intermediary, an interpreter, a designated court clerk, a designated social worker, a legal aid practitioner and an official to help with court preparation, including provision of counselling services by social workers [25]. The first sexual offences court was opened in Wynberg, Cape Town (SA), in 1993. The conviction rate was up to 80%, which was very high compared to ‘general’ courts (4–6% at the time for similar crimes). Around 2005, there were about 74 SOC in the country. Due to various reasons, including funding, there was a moratorium on the SOC. ‘In 2020, section 55A of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act was signed into operation meaning that for the first time Sexual Offences Courts are being established in accordance with a statute’, explained Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice, [26]. He continued to explain that the regulations relating to section 55A stipulate support that should be given in section 55A SOC, namely, court support, court preparation, emotional containment, trauma debriefing, counselling, private testifying service, intermediary services and information services. Sexual Offences Courts work closely with TCCs to ensure that a victim-centred and holistic integrated service is being provided to victims.

4.3 The stepwise approach at TCCs

The one-stop shops are well coordinated through collaboration across disciplines. The layout design enables a stepwise approach, which ensures efficiency and protection of the victim from the time she walks into the centre. Below are the different steps that victims go through and the department responsible for each step:

1. Victim assistance by the victim assistant officer and/or site coordinator—NPA (Department of Justice).
2. Medical examination and forensic extraction of evidence—Department of Health (DOH)—by a doctor or nurse or both.
3. After the medical examination, there are bath or shower facilities for victims’ use, restoring the survivor’s dignity.
4. An investigation officer will interview the survivor and take his/her statement—South African Police Services (SAPS).
5. A social worker or counsellor will offer counselling—Department of Social Development (DSD)—assisted by NGO workers.
6. Arrangement for follow-up visits, treatment and preventative medication for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS—DOH.
7. A referral letter or appointment will be made for long-term counselling—DSD/NGO.

8. The victim (survivor) is offered transportation home by an ambulance or the investigating officer—DOH/SAPS
9. Referral to a shelter or place of safety, if necessary—DSD/NGO
10. Consultations with a specialist prosecutor before the case goes to court—NPA.
11. Court preparation by a victim assistant officer—NPA
12. Explanation of the outcome and update of the trial process by a **case manager—NPA.**

This holistic approach helps to increase the conviction rate by building a case ready for successful prosecution, offering psychosocial support to victims/survivors and reducing the cycle times of these cases from reporting to finalisation. The current sites for TCCs were identified based on various criteria, including the volume of sexual offence cases reported at the local SAPS (police stations); the number of sexual offence cases dealt with at the local court/s; availability of space at the local hospital; presence of SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) unit; availability of non-governmental services for victims and stakeholder buy-in (Figure 2).

According to the South African government website, as at September 2022, the number of TCCs was 58¹. Though the funding of the TCCs is from the government,

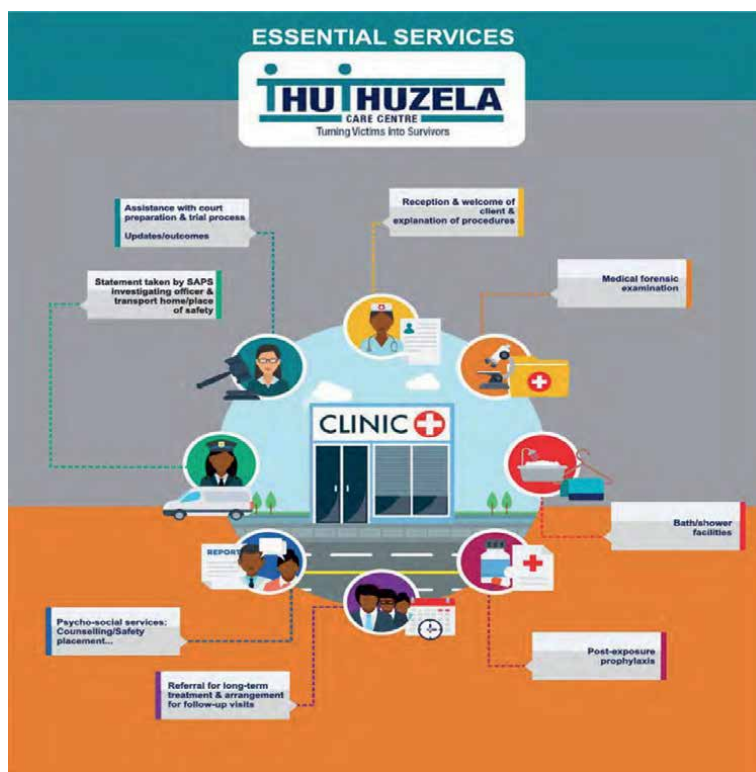


Figure 2.
The Thuthuzela Care Centre model. Source: www.npa.gov.za

the private sector is encouraged and is starting to assist in the building of more TCCs, including using private hospital sites, provided the site is linked to a police station. Support from the private sector includes donations of equipment. Working with the Gender Based Violence & Femicide Response Fund, the Minerals Council of South Africa and the custodian of TCCs, the NPA, signed a memorandum of agreement to work together to support the Thuthuzela Care Centres for victims of gender-based violence, with a particular focus on mining communities and/or labour-sending areas.²

4.4 Roles and responsibilities of different departments

The roles and responsibilities of the different departments in the TCC collaboration are as follows [28]:

4.4.1 National prosecuting authority under department of justice

- Overall TCC coordination
- Appointment of site coordinators, victim assistant officers and case managers
- Case management of criminal case
- Court preparation of victims
- Sexual offences courts
- Operational costs related to the TCC

4.4.2 Department of health

- Provide healthcare workers emergency medical services
- Medical treatment
- Forensic investigation
- Provision of PEP, vaccinations, STI prophylaxis, emergency contraception
- Cleaning services
- Security
- Maintenance

4.4.3 South African police services

- Charge office that is victim-friendly and trauma-informed
- Charge officers who are sensitised to the victim's needs and issues of sexual victimisation

² Ref. [27].

- Obtain the victim's statement
- Sexual assault evidence collection kits (SAECK)
- Transport for services

4.4.4 NGOs

- Counselling
- Comfort kits—hygiene products for victims of violence, including toys for victimised children. Food and clothing when possible
- Follow-up psychosocial support
- Assist with 24/7 service delivery

4.4.5 Department of social development

- Victim support
- Counselling services
- Emergency shelter services

Appointment of social workers and counsellors (**Figure 3**).

4.5 Success factors of the Thuthuzela Care Centres

The success of the TCC model lies on at least five pillars: victim-centred, court-directed, multidisciplinary approach, policies that empower different service providers in tackling SGBV and successful coordination of all services amongst different departments.

4.5.1 Victim/survivor-centred

Services are tailored to the victim's needs, and secondary victimisation is reduced by creating a victim-friendly environment, safe and conducive to reporting and retention. Trained professional personnel empower the victim through psychosocial support and legal preparation for the court cases. Trust is built due to clear and accurate feedback at all stages of the journey for the victim.

4.5.2 Court-directed

Offender accountability is ensured by using a systematic approach through trained specialised personnel. This includes securing physical and forensic evidence by trained personnel from the victim/survivor and focused, prosecutor-guided investigation. Having specialised courts linked to the TCCs ensures speedy and seamless



Figure 3. TCC sites in South Africa as of February 2022. Source: www.justice.gov.za.

prosecution process. There are NGOs that specialise in training victims on how the legal system works in preparation for the court case.

4.5.3 Multidisciplinary approach

No one department can solve the complex challenge of SGBV. Cooperation amongst role players, from health and forensic workers, police, treasury, correctional services, designated civil society organisations, social workers and counsellors to prosecutors, is key for successful prosecution and empowerment of the survivors. Ensuring accountability of each stakeholder with shared objectives and effective leadership is required for the multidisciplinary approach to be effective.

The direct link between the TCC, the SAPS FCS, the hospital and sexual offence court, where the matter will be heard, is a seamless transdisciplinary approach. Linking TCCs to GBVF hotspots ensures easy access for victims where the need is the highest.

Policies and Regulatory Framework that empower stakeholders together with **leadership** in coordinating a seamless service provision play an important role in the attempt to prevent and eradicate SGBVF.

4.6 Impact of Thuthuzela Care Centres

Data from the past 5 years show that cases from the TCCs have attracted more severe gaol sentences on the offence of rape specifically in courts, with 15 to 18% of cases getting life imprisonment for perpetrators. Public awareness campaigns are run by TCCs (designed by SOCA) to empower surrounding communities. The raised awareness has increased reporting levels, though there is still a long way to go. South Africa has one of the highest HIV/AIDS cases in the world. Provision of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) by TCCs forms a critical component of reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS; thus, TCCs are a crucial component in the fight to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS. This service attracts victims even if they have no intention of opening a case against a perpetrator.

4.7 Challenges

The location of TCCs is partly determined by rape hotspots as reported by the police stations. The way the hotspots are selected is challenged by scholars. Between April 2008 and March 2009, 12,093 women in Gauteng, or 0.3% of the province's adult female population, reported an assault by an intimate partner to the police; by contrast, during the same period, 18.1% of women in the province reported an experience of violence at the hands of intimate male partners to researchers [23]. Lack of trust in the criminal justice system maybe one of the reasons for underreporting at the police station. The second challenge with the accuracy of the identification of hotspots is the system used by the police of ranking informed only by the total number of cases reported, which produces lists with a predominance of stations serving densely populated areas, as opposed to looking at the number of crimes relative to the size of the population. The inaccuracy of reporting leads to misallocation of resources, including the TCCs. The 'misreporting' leads to loss of resource allocation where the need is high.

The ideal design for TCCs has a separate entrance for perpetrators, to ensure protection of victims. However, a compliance audit and gap analysis report showed that only 52% of TCCs have a separate entrance for perpetrators [28]. This could have improved over the past 5 years. The same report acknowledges that the majority of TCCs operate according to the TCC Blueprint; half the TCCs offered more services than those prescribed, like age estimation, shelter offering and DNA testing of suspects. The structure of the facilities is key to ensure a seamless service delivery. Lack of adequate fund allocation to the TCCs programme is critical in ensuring that the facilities, the equipment used and the personnel are fit for the purpose. Funding cannot be overemphasised for the success of this programme.

Having adequate number of trained personnel in the different steps of the TCC Blueprint determines the success of the programme. However, not all personnel are available 24/7, which requires victims to come back for part of the service during office hours. Transport is another issue; transport by the SAPS and/or by the victim is another challenge that needs to be addressed. This has a major impact on visits to court and follow-up psychosocial-support visits by victims, especially low-income/unemployed victims who do not have their own transport, who happen to be in the majority.

There is a need for a sustainable, consistent and stable funding environment to ensure that the necessary services can be delivered at all TCCs [28]. Funding, especially of NGOs, is one of the main challenges to service delivery.

Coordination amongst departments is not always at the correct level to ensure that the service is efficient. Enforcement of the progressive laws in the country is lacking in a few areas of the criminal justice system, which hinders successful and timeous conclusion of cases.

There are not enough TCCs to address the challenge of GBV. The country has 155 Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Violence SAPS units, with only 57 TCCs. Ideally, there should be one TCC for each unit.

5. Conclusion

South Africa has a history, during apartheid days, of condoning violence against most of the population along racial and gender lines. The past apartheid laws were dehumanising to the majority and broke family units. These challenges were not

adequately acknowledged nor addressed when the new dispensation was ushered. Patriarchy and masculine toxicity normalise all forms of violence against women and children. Achieving social cohesion, one of the ingredients to SGBVF prevention (Pillar 2 of the NSP-GBVF), is an important and common thread that needs to override and bind all interventions. Progressive laws need to be well implemented by the responsible stakeholders to achieve what they are set for. Lack of accountability and leadership (Pillar 1 of the NSP-GBVF) underpins all success in tackling big and small challenges. Justice (Pillar 3 of the NSP-GBVF) brings back trust in the criminal justice system and plays a role in preventing repeat offences. Research (Pillar 6 of the NSP-GBVF) to understand root causes and understand what works and what does not helps in the design of evidence-based solutions. Lastly, achieving economic equality across genders (Pillar 5 of the NSP-GBVF) empowers women to leave toxic relationships and helps them to value their worth in society. All the above are ingredients of a progressive and cohesive nation that has the potential to prosper. Leadership and accountability of each citizen and leaders across all sectors of society cannot be underestimated. The transdisciplinary approach that delivered the comprehensive NSP for GBVF was a good start to find solutions. However, like any plan, effective implementation is what determines success.

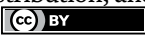
Thuthuzela Care Centres are the most cohesive and transdisciplinary intervention to date that seek to prevent and eradicate sexual and gender-based violence & femicide. Accountability by each stakeholder from the opening of the case to its conclusion will improve the results and edge the country closer to gender-based violence and femicide eradication. The country requires more partnerships and transdisciplinary approaches to tackle national challenges. The transdisciplinary approach of the TCC model can be that required solution to the sexual and gender-based violence and femicide crisis in the country. It will take leadership and accountability by all parties to achieve success.

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Chapter 6

If I Didn't Laugh, I'd Cry: Humor as a Coping Strategy for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Kathleen Monahan

Abstract

This paper examines the coping strategy of humor presented by eight adult women aged 26 through 61 in a small clinical practice setting. Each woman had been sexually abused by a variety of family members during childhood. They were seeking therapy for life-phase issues (e.g., divorce, retirement, marital problems, parent/child issues). The reemergence of sexual violence memories and the ways in which these women used humor as a coping strategy to alleviate the effects of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) are presented.

Keywords: childhood sexual abuse, trauma, coping, recovery, humor

1. Introduction

The search for meaning and adaptive coping strategies regarding traumatic events [1, 2] extends to survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) [3–8]. CSA can create psychological and health difficulties that span the life course, disrupting a positive worldview, coping abilities, and adaptive strategies [3, 5–7, 9, 10]. A significant task for survivors is assigning meaning to the traumatic event and developing a philosophy that assists in developing coping strategies that promote healing and recovery [4].

Types of adaptive coping strategies have been a focus of research and treatment for CSA survivors [3–5, 11–14]. Additionally, posttraumatic growth (PTG), assisting the survivor in healing and creating a sense of agency, has been an important area of focus [15].

Studies examining the search for meaning and reframing thinking and coping have furthered our understanding of the recovery process. Yet, the critical survival strategy of humor has been absent in the CSA literature for adult survivors. Do CSA survivors use humor as a method of coping with this traumatic event, and if so, in what ways do they use humor? This chapter presents the treatment issues presented in a small clinical sample of sexual abuse survivors utilizing humor as a coping strategy.

This coping strategy was reported to be foundational as part of their positive recovery. The coping styles of adult CSA survivors employed playfulness and humor

and thus assisted in helping them to grow and flourish. Humor as a coping strategy is underrated and not commonly presented as a viable intervention in treatment and recovery. To that end, women who have experienced CSA and their views about humor and its usage to reframe and assuage traumatic events are presented.

2. Incidence and prevalence of childhood sexual abuse

One in five women and one in 13 men report sexual abuse as a child. However, the numbers for male victimization are vastly underreported [16]. Worldwide rates indicate that forced sexual contact occurs for 120 million girls and women under 20 [17]. While our knowledge regarding this crime has grown over the past three decades, childhood sexual abuse remains at epidemic proportions in the United States [5, 18, 19].

The deleterious effects of childhood sexual violence include low self-esteem, difficulty with interpersonal relationships, sleep difficulties and disorders, substance abuse, self-injury, sexual dysfunction, and depression [5, 18, 20–22]. Teenage pregnancy [23] and eating disorders [24] are also adverse outcomes of CSA. More complex disorders such as dissociative disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [6, 13, 25–29] are significant in this population. Physical and oral health issues are also reported health outcomes of CSA for adult survivors [6, 25–27, 30]. It is significant to note that many of these women will be at risk for sexual revictimization [31, 32].

Disclosure by CSA survivors has been difficult for a variety of reasons such as shame, fear of disbelief, and lack of support [33]. Recent communication changes such as digital platforms, social media, and online communities have increased disclosure in a public forum while increasing social support [34]. This public dialog by CSA survivors also creates a pathway to increase our knowledge regarding the prevalence and experiences of individuals who have been sexually abused during childhood [35].

3. Coping with CSA

Coping strategies, derived from belief systems about the event, and views about how the world works have been an area of research interest for quite some time [7, 14, 36]. Making sense of sexual abuse victimization can be a life-long quest that embodies constant questioning and anxiety without resolution [7].

The ability to cope with traumatic events has focused on managing the demands of stressful and traumatic events while categorizing the event itself and reactions to it [13, 37, 38]. Walsh et al. [8] define coping as “...a range of diverse cognitions and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful or threatening situation” (p. 3).

Several authors have addressed the attributions of sexual abuse survivors and their attempts to make sense of the event [7, 14, 36] and their attempts to cope [39]. For instance, CSA survivors can employ a range of coping strategies such as self-blame, avoidance, and cognitive restructuring. Characterological self-blame (I am the reason this happened) and behavioral self-blame (my behavior – which I can change – is the reason this happened) have been studied with a variety of populations [40, 41]. Behavioral self-blame has been viewed as a better strategy because behavior is changeable (“I won’t walk in that neighborhood again”). However, several authors have challenged this notion, positing that all kinds of self-blame, despite its use as an adaptive strategy, have negative consequences [42–45].

Other coping strategies such as avoidance, cognitive restructuring, or the way one thinks about events that are happening, have happened, or will happen, can also have adverse outcomes. Avoidant strategies, for instance, attempt to avoid any interaction with the abuser and may impact normal attachment development [14, 18, 20, 31, 46].

Several models postulate why some victims will experience negative sequelae while others develop coping skills that help them organize positive rationales and philosophies about the experience and life in general [12, 47–49]. Mediation models have examined coping strategies, cognitions, attribution style, interpersonal conflict, and psychological distress that mediate poor outcomes for sexual abuse survivors. Barker-Collo and Read [39] state.

The findings of both Barker-Collo et al. [50] and Shapiro and Levendosky [48] point toward the ability of complex mediational models to account for significant proportions of individual variations in symptom presentation among abuse survivors (p 104).

The author's go on to cite Draucker's [12] findings.

At an initial level, traumatic sexualization, stigmatization, and feelings of powerlessness and betrayal develop during childhood as a result of abuse. Two of these factors, feelings of powerlessness and stigmatization, significantly affected the three outcome variables: social introversion, interpersonal victimization, and guilt. These were further affected by two mediating tasks: the search for meaning/ understanding of the abuse and its outcomes and attaining a sense of mastery (p. 106).

Mediating (intervening) and moderating (tempering) variables influence coping ability [8]. These include the type of abuse that occurred and by whom, the severity of the abuse, the frequency and duration of the abuse, and support systems that could and did not intervene [8]. In addition, temperament, familial environments, and organizational responses such as schools, Family courts, and the legal system influence coping styles [4].

Until recently, the CSA field has focused on debilitating and harmful outcomes for survivors [51–54] and how to ameliorate them. Understanding this aspect for the CSA survivor is critical to healing and recovery. Newer models, however, focus on resilience, posttraumatic growth, and positive cognitions and coping strategies employed by trauma survivors [15, 51, 53, 55, 56]. More recent research has identified that CSA survivors can develop coping strategies that assist them in leading productive lives [4]. Graham et al. [4] identified several critical factors in coping strategies that promote successful outcomes: reframing the event/s, taking control of the traumatic memories, and thinking about it differently.

4. Humor and trauma

Humor has been viewed as a way of coping since time immemorial [57, 58]. Humor increases the quality of life and is an effective tool in dealing with stress and health issues [57, 59–62]. The benefits of laughter – direct physical benefits – and humor, which indirectly improves physical status and mediates mood and cognition [63, 64] are now widely recognized by a variety of mental health disciplines [15, 65–70]. Positive humor and playfulness improve positive self-concept [71] and overall happiness [60, 72].

Humor has been studied with a diverse set of trauma populations, including veterans, individuals who experience severe medical conditions, and older adults [73, 74]. As a result, different humor interventions have been developed, such as Laugh Yoga and Medical clowning [75].

The idea or notion that humor can be introduced or utilized in the throes of trauma presents an oxymoron. On the one hand, the person is cognitively and emotionally challenged in dealing with a traumatic event and suffering; at the same time, they are cognitively and emotionally challenged with a visual or auditory depiction of something playful or humorous [61].

Yet, humor and playfulness serve dual primary purposes: to distract and provide a sense of hope. The first aspect, distraction from painful affect and cognition, creates cognitive dissonance, the premise that an individual cannot hold two competing thoughts simultaneously [21, 64, 76]. On the other hand, laughter creates a sense of relief – usually from stress – both mentally and physically, thus giving way to a sense of hope.

Several authors have addressed the benefits of incorporating humor and playfulness within psychotherapeutic treatment and how to do so [21, 61, 68, 77, 78]. An individual's sense of humor is an important aspect of coping, and the clinician needs to be mindful of both the client's and their own "Humor Quotient" [79].

While the field has been slow to adopt the importance of humor in the treating room the use of humor either by the client or the clinician is now viewed as beneficial [4, 80, 81]. Several issues such as timing, the purpose of humor within the session, the type of humor, cultural differences, gender, language, and client diagnosis [60] should be considered when incorporating humor as part of the treatment process, either by the clinician or the client.

5. The clinical sample

This chapter examines how humor is utilized as a coping strategy in a small, clinical practice setting by eight women aged 22 through 61. These women had been sexually abused during childhood and adolescence by various family members (father, grandfather, stepfather, brother, uncle, and mother's boyfriend). It should be noted that none of these women presented with diagnoses that consisted of personality disorders or the range of dissociative disorders. Initial treatment centered on significant life-phase issues, including marital issues, remarriage, divorce, parent/child issues, and children going to college and retirement. During treatment, previous memories of sexual abuse were triggered and emerged as a focus of attention. The CSA consisted of rape, sodomy, and fondling. Four women reported that the abuse was further traumatizing by the abuser's constant statements that the cause of the abuse rested with her ("You always tempt me to behave this way"). All of these women had previously been in treatment for their sexual abuse issues before entering treatment with this author. The women's current developmental crises had triggered previous abuse memories and therefore cases for examination were selected for their use of humor and playfulness as coping strategies in a) dealing with the sexual abuse and b) recovery responses were part of their treatment discussion. The themes regarding their use of humor as a coping strategy are included here. While the following comments and data are anecdotal, they nonetheless represent a previously unexamined area of coping for this population. Women whose comments are utilized in this paper gave permission for their use.

6. Different ways CSA survivors utilize humor

6.1 Vulnerability and powerlessness

Several CSA survivors reported feeling vulnerable and powerless during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood due to the abuse, and humor was utilized as a tool. They reported that being funny – comedic- served to keep the abuser at bay – even for a little while. Additionally, their sense of humor assuaged their sense of powerlessness.

I believe that you have a choice: you can sit and cry about what happened or you can make up your mind that you are going to have a good life and not let the bastard win. I make sure I laugh all the time. It's like that old saying: If I did not laugh, I'd cry.

I had the uncanny ability - and I still do - of delivering very funny one-liners. I was very young when I realized that I could go up or down. I could make my funniness sharp, almost sarcastic, or tone it down. For me, it was a powerful tool, and it reduced my feeling of being isolated and fearful, even in school. Sometimes, not always, it worked to keep him away because he never wanted to be a target of my humor.

I was known as the funny kid. Now I'm known as the funny adult. But as a kid my stepfather, at first, thought it was great that I was so funny. Except when he abused me, the next day I was so angry that I would be super funny - at his expense - whenever I could. Of course, I paid the price but hey, I felt that I won. I got my punches in.

The clinician should note, however, that utilizing humor to point out vulnerability or powerlessness should be a focus of attention, drawing light on the fact that while the client is presenting situations or feelings about vulnerability in a funny way, it also highlights the pain and sorrow of victimhood.

6.2 Distracting in playful ways

Humor can be described as a distraction from painful events or memories has always been recognized as an important foundational aspect in the use of humor. Several women identified the use of funny movies, television series or jokes as a useful coping mechanism that distracts from painful memories or emotions.

No matter how I tried to avoid him, my father used to get me alone and sexually assault me. He would always try to isolate me. This went on for years. The only relief I got were two things. I would take my dog outside and we would run and wrestle and play for hours and I would feel like I did not have to worry about anything when we played. The other was watching The Three Stooges which would make me laugh. When I was laughing, I felt like I could forget everything. I have kept this idea my whole life...laughing has always helped me.

I think I'm an optimistic person. Sometimes I get down, but I usually just make up my mind that I'm gonna laugh things off. The laughing helps me not think about how bad things were.

Somehow when I laughed, I always felt that I would survive this. As bad as it would get, laughing made me feel that someday I would be alright, that there was hope. It still does.

When I think of the abuse, I tell myself that at least I'm not a sick person like he is. I decide that I'm going to be happy and then I'll make sure that I find some way to laugh or have fun.

6.3 Life is absurd

Thinking differently about the CSA has been identified as one way to develop a coping strategy that minimizes negative emotions and thought processes [4]. Several women reported their use of humor to be more reserved, i.e., in their “head,” using humor or absurdity as an approach to thinking differently about the abuse itself, the offender, or life in general. Part of this humor approach involves the notion that if something is ridiculous, how can it be threatening [21, 82].

The only way I could survive the attacks was to make up a picture in my head of my stepfather standing there, in a Speedo with his fat stomach hanging out, in his white crew socks and sandals. It was so ridiculous, so stupid, that it helped me to see him as an absurd person and I would burst out laughing. It ultimately belittled his power over me. I have used this type of visualization, ones that would make me laugh at the absurd, in difficult situations.

7. Humor, jesting, and playfulness in the treating room with CSA survivors

Clinical work addressing trauma is generally phase-based, tailored to symptom presentation [83], and incorporates practice elements that create an environment for healing. A host of symptom reduction interventions such as emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, stress management, and improving interpersonal skills are employed to create safety and set the stage for change [61, 83]. “Second line” strategies are mindfulness and meditation strategies [64, 83]. Additionally, understanding the support system available and the cultural context are vital to successful treatment [61, 84].

Humor, jesting and playfulness, although not stand-alone interventions, are generally not considered within the context of trauma treatment despite the potential to increase the therapeutic alliance while bolstering a sense of safety [61, 73, 85]. Garrick [73] reminds us, “...our neurological responses to laughter and general happiness, as well as the nature of humor, represents an asset to therapy” (p. 171). The therapists’ style and sense of humor are also significant factors in determining the employment and usefulness of playfulness and humor in the treating room [78]. It should be noted however, that humor should be a well-thought-out consideration and not just a random, tongue-in-cheek intervention utilized with trauma survivors.

Important considerations appear below.

8. Cautions and considerations on the use of humor with CSA survivors

8.1 The clients use of humor

While safety and the development of rapport are essential to establish the foundation of conducting trauma-responsive work, attunement between the clinician and the client should also be established in terms of sense of humor. For example, a clinician who has a strong sense of humor matched with a client who has a low sense

of humor should use caution in employing humor in the treating room, in general, but when trauma is the topic, in particular.

Some authors have identified clients' use of humor in the treatment process as undermining the serious nature of therapy [86, 87], while others have stated that it is a defense that deflects from issues at hand [88, 89].

Timing and phase of treatment are also important considerations when employing humor and playfulness in the treatment process. The clinician must assess if the use of humor by the client is utilized to deflect painful and difficult conversations, delay trauma processing, minimize negative sequelae, or keep the therapeutic alliance in a static condition so that further work cannot commence. These are important variables that need to be applied when considering the use of humor in the treating room. These aspects need to be evaluated and addressed with the client so that the use of humor and playfulness is clearly understood.

8.2 Humor as a defense mechanism

Sexual violence such as CSA “represents profound violations of an individual's body and emotions” ([68], p. 1). Given this fact, a survivor may have been likely to employ defense mechanisms that assisted in adapting to daily life, especially if the abuse is ongoing; humor may have been part of the equation. Additionally, humor may be “employed” as a defense mechanism to thwart discussions that address serious or traumatic material. Approaching this content with empathy is fundamental, with the additional caveat of understanding how and why this defense is being utilized. The clinician may need to adapt their use of humor to the changing treatment issues and explore with the client how their use of humor may be changing. Several questions should be employed such as is humor part of denial regarding the abuse or significant impact? Is humor utilized as a coping strategy in particular situations that “benefit” the client? Is it a way to delay discussions about the abuse? Is humor used in a self-denigrating manner?

Trauma-responsive work entails the foundational approach of strength-based interventions [90]. While clients may employ a coping strategy that veils anger and low self-esteem behind self-demeaning, denigrating humor, it's the clinician's task to address how that may impede positive self-worth, posttraumatic growth, and the recovery process overall. The overarching component is how and why a client is using humor, the timing of its use, and the rationale for how the clinician responds to this humor usage. Assisting the client in understanding how the use of humor helps or hurts processing the sexual violence is just one aspect in the arsenal of healing and recovery.

Although not the topic of this chapter, the clinician will want to pay close attention to those individuals who present with personality disorders and/or the range of dissociative disorders and the use of humor and playfulness. As mentioned, the women in this chapter are from a general group of CSA survivors separate from those individuals who experience personality disorders and/or the range of dissociative disorders. Dissociative CSA clients may rely on separate personalities who use humor to deflect painful memories at the expense of the whole personality. Caution should be exercised by the clinician, who needs to be attuned to the client's use of and response to humor throughout the course of treatment.

8.3 The clinician's use of humor

Working with individuals who have been sexually violated, particularly during childhood, is difficult work at best. This type of clinical work has the potential to

stir strong emotions and reactions within the clinician, and some even suggest that trauma work can be considered an “occupational hazard” [91, 92].

The clinicians’ prior experiences, countertransferential reactions, and reasoning for the use of humor needs to be examined, particularly how it will enhance treatment and assist the client in the recovery process. How the clinician’s “agenda” may enhance and impede treatment needs to be examined regarding humor, just as any intervention in the therapeutic context. An example of both the client’s use of humor and the clinician’s countertransferential reactions appears below.

Susan, twenty-six, had been sexually abused as a child by her stepfather for over 5 years before disclosure. Viewed as an optimistic child, she was outgoing and funny. She entered treatment to address her grief over a failed marriage and her inability to maintain employment. She viewed her comedic persona as a gift and fancied becoming a comedy writer and stand-up comic.

However, her constant comic presentation in session thwarted addressing her presenting issues, yet she would infer a great deal of anger toward men and her previous traumatic sexual abuse.

Sessions centered on how her deflection through “entertaining” the therapist through laughter did not assist her recovery but rather kept us from addressing her issues. This author shared with S. that the author’s love of laughter made her hilarious presentations attractive but kept us from the serious discussions that were essential to her recovery. In one of these discussions we addressed her use of humor as “the shield” that not only protected her from serious discussions but kept people at a distance through the laughter. We also addressed that while she was a naturally funny person, her constant humorous presentation may not have served her well in other situations such as employment and previous treatment. The painful discussions that humor masked her trauma and anguish were indeed difficult, but she was able to reflect on her use of humor, her timing, and the humor’s goal. While the intent was not to extinguish her use of humor it was more to understand its purpose.

As for the clinician’s part, this author found S. very funny and loved the laughter that she created but recognized that we were not getting “work” done. The realization that the therapeutic work at hand was difficult, accompanied by “why can’t I have a chance to laugh?” was part of the hard task of trauma work. Supervision assisted in analyzing this quagmire and provided this author with the opportunity to resolve the issues that then helped to move S.’s treatment forward.

These cautions notwithstanding, the client’s use of humor can create a sense of control and empowerment while also distracting from obsessive thoughts and negative self-talk [59, 61, 73]. When people play, they are not scanning for danger and, thus, not feeling vulnerable [21]. Creating enough safety that assists a person to feel open and free enough to play, e.g., vulnerable, creates an environment where growth is possible. While one may have a good or strong sense of humor, it is important to understand the timing and the employment of empathy while using humor in a therapeutic context.

9. Discussion

Using humor in therapy is beneficial to the therapeutic encounter [21, 68, 77, 78]. However, it is not clear how often and in what ways CSA survivors utilize humor and playfulness as a coping strategy that promotes their recovery process. Anecdotal, clinical information, and information emerging from social media suggests that the

old adage: "If I didn't laugh, I'd cry," is valid for this population. Utilizing humor deflects the tragic and traumatizing aspects of a childhood filled with violent, sexualized brutalization. These women discussed the issues of vulnerability, powerlessness, and fear that were moderated through humor and playfulness. Several CSA survivors reported feeling powerful when viewing the abuser and/or situation differently, such as absurd situations.

As demonstrated with this small cohort, a sense of hope and resilience is imbued with the use of humor and playfulness [60]. The clinician needs to understand the importance of this coping strategy in the therapeutic context, particularly the issues of sensitivity and timing. Other important issues are to address the client's use of sarcastic or demeaning humor and gently challenge when they do [60].

Humor and playfulness can assist in continually building the therapeutic alliance [21, 61, 68, 77, 78]. Clinicians should carefully monitor countertransference issues and contraindications of humor in the therapeutic context [60].

Assessing if humor is a thought-out strategy, part of the individual's temperament or resilience skills, or a combination of variables will assist in understanding humor as a coping strategy. Moreover, how humor enhances or impedes – or both – positive outcomes furthers our understanding. Further research will assist in developing therapeutic techniques and approaches for this population, just as the medical clowning field and other humor researchers have developed approaches that have increased our awareness of humor as a vital tool in recovery.

This small clinical sample is an exploration of how humor and playfulness are utilized as a coping strategy by CSA survivors; while it cannot be extrapolated to the general population of CSA survivors, it warrants further investigation. Exploration and enhancement of humor in the therapeutic encounter add to the repertoire of positive coping strategies of CSA survivors. Further investigation of this coping strategy will increase clinical awareness and the arsenal to improve the recovery processes of CSA survivors.

Future research will also need to investigate how humor is utilized by CSA survivors with personality disorders and/or the range of dissociative disorders. How humor is addressed for CSA survivors by the clinician, humor utilization at different stages of treatment (both clinician and client) and contraindications on the use of humor still need to be researched.

10. Conclusion


This chapter presented the use of humor and playfulness as a coping strategy by a small group of CSA survivors in therapy. While humor is seen as a productive and helpful way to reduce stress and improve mood, it has not been widely viewed as a coping strategy in the recovery process of childhood sexual abuse. Clinicians' attention to how humor is being utilized within the treatment setting and as a coping strategy for CSA recovery will assist in understanding the utility of this approach. Clinicians will need to understand the timing of humor utilization, self-denigrating humor, humor as a defense, and countertransference reactions when using humor with this population. Research is needed to understand how humor is utilized by both CSA clients and clinicians, particularly with populations with personality disorders and a range of dissociative disorders. Understanding the use of humor as a coping strategy in trauma treatment has the potential to improve the therapeutic alliance and recovery processes for CSA survivors.

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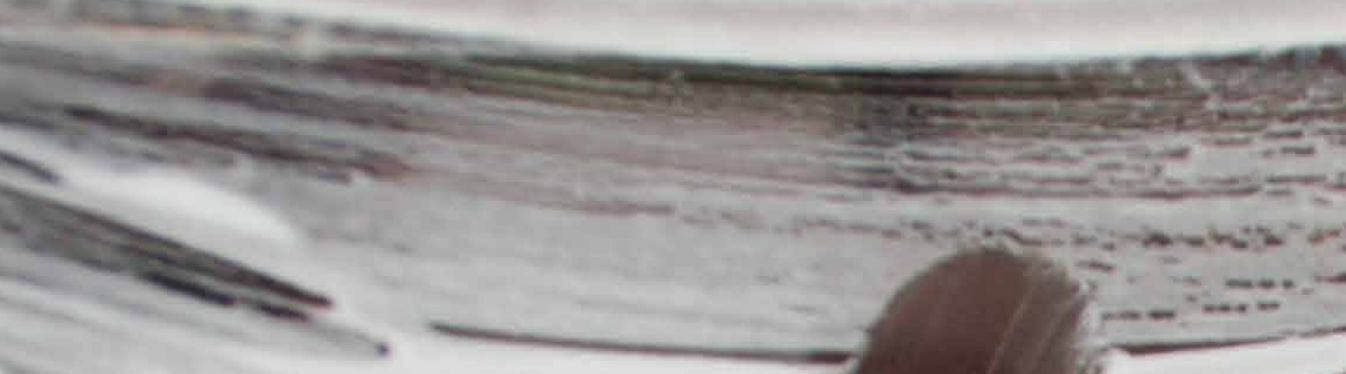
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Sexual violence is a multifaceted crime and a global health problem. It is a crime that can happen to anyone, including young and old, male and female, rich and poor. Sexual violence persists due to several variables, including abuse history and a society's tolerance of the crime. Additionally, belief systems, cultural norms, and legal systems create environments that allow abusers to escape detection. This book addresses sexual violence myths, belief systems, and the media's role in perpetuating sexual violence.

It also examines the role of social media in facilitating sexual crimes, particularly sex trafficking. Finally, this book examines the work of community stakeholders in addressing and treating individuals who have been sexually victimized and the coping mechanisms of sexually traumatized adult women.

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