

A case of convicted rapists



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I read in this journal that research mainly by interviews with convicted sexual offenders and contrast groups is important in order to understand why and how sexual violence against women occurred (1).

Because masculinity has been assumed to be superior, and knowledge reflects on male dominated universe reflecting the views of patriarchal beliefs, feminists need to study and understand the reality of sexually violent men (2, 3).

I noted that there are numerous hindrances in determining number and characteristics of rapists because only the 'classic' and violent cases are reported. To counter this, research would require interviews with the group of unreported rapists but this would again place the researcher as an accomplice because of protecting the rapist's identity (6, 7).

Information acquired in therapy is unreliable due to prisoner's mistrust of prison officials as they feel it might be used against them in a parole hearing (10-11). Traditional masculinity behaviour suggested the men would respond positively to a female interviewer and despite security risks, professional self took priority before the personal self in order to collect relevant data (12, 13).

I understood that to get good data, a good working relationship, the use of non-threatening background information and long interviews was crucial (15).

Rapport was necessary in creating trust, confidentiality and mutual respect and this appealed to even the hardcore felons who were ready to talk to a non-judgmental outsider if just to break prison monotony. While

neutrality should not be portrayed as approval, disagreements can result in destruction of rapport and jeopardize future interviews. Opinion should be put forth candidly but carefully to leave the participant feeling positive about the interview (16-18).

I learned that many prisoners present unique problems in regard to obtaining voluntary informed consent and mentioning that they were rapists would cause the men shame and embarrassment (19-21). Explanations on risks, safeguards and the prisoners' rights were given as well as permission to confirm the validity of the interview data (23-25).

Research showed that prisoners are prone to lying, fabrication and manipulation in order to better their chances of parole because their approval depends on staff researchers' assessment. While some rapists admitted to raping, they played down their use of force, others did not believe their actions constituted rape and the rest completely denied any sexual contact with the victims and pleaded mistaken identity (27-28).

I also noted that while cooperation from the State Department of Corrections and the prison staff was excellent, riots and lockups, scheduling mishaps, inmate transfers and absenteeism, electricity blackouts and the occasional lack of an interview room were some of the obstacles encountered while at times unfavourable weather and lack of air conditioning made the longer interviews almost unbearable (29-30).

References

Diana, s. (1990). *A glimpse inside. Understanding sexual harassment: a study of convicted rapists.* Rout ledge, New York.