

Week 4 discussion

[Psychology](#)



Psychological reactions after sexual assault are affected by many factors and vary greatly between individuals. In the weeks following an assault, symptomatology is more apparent and most women experience distress and disruption in many areas of their lives. This is recognized as a manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a disabling condition accompanied by intrusive symptoms like flashbacks and nightmares. PTSD must last for more than a month to be formally diagnosed. Long-term difficulties include generalized and phobic anxiety, depression, social adjustment and sexual functioning difficulties. If the prosecution can determine that these new victims are suffering from these long-term effects of assault, then that will aid in the perceived veracity of their claims (Mason & Lodrick, 2013).

The fact that these victims waited until later to report their assault is not at all surprising. In a study of sexual assault reporting, roughly one-quarter of victims did not file a police report. Complainants know that in reporting a rape or assault, they face the risk of not being believed, being blamed, and being scrutinized – which can cause shame, shock, and denial. Others need time to consider the experience and to define it, as some victims may fail to recognize immediately that their experience was that of a rape (even though it is clearly rape as it is defined under the law) (Jones, Alexander, Wynn, Rossman, & Dunnuck, 2009).

The advantage of putting the new victims on the witness stand is that the jurors see the faces of additional victims, which lends support to the prosecution's case that the accused rapist has repeated the crime numerous times. The drawback, however, is if the long delay between the crime and its reporting leads to forgetting. Terrifying experiences may be lost and then victims may be unable to recall the experience – leading to inconsistencies

when challenged. Unless dealt with, such inconsistencies may create a false impression and the view that the victim is lying in all aspects of the account may be shared by jurors (Mason & Lodrick, 2013).

References

- Jones, J., Alexander, C., Wynn, B., Rossman, L., & Dunnuck, C. (2009). Why women dont report sexual assault to the police: The influence of psychosocial variables and traumatic injury. *The journal of emergency medicine*, 36, 417-424. doi: 10. 1016/j. jemermed. 2007. 10. 077
- Mason, F., & Lodrick, Z. (2013). Psychological consequences of sexual assault. *Best practice & research clinical obstetrics and gynaecology* 27, 27-37. doi: 10. 1016/j. bpobgyn. 2012. 08. 015