

The psychological impact of rape prior to marriage essay sample

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Abstract

This study will explore the impact of rape to the quality of married life of victims of stranger and acquaintance rapes, comparing their marriage and divorce rates, their psychological difficulties and their perception of the counseling process as a tool for recovery. Literature suggests that there is no difference in the psychological effects of rape to acquaintance and stranger rapes and that this may cause the difficulty in relating to men in later life. The study will employ the use of a survey questionnaire in a one on one interview of rape victims. The gathered data will be analyzed using situational analysis, means and standard deviations and chi square values. The study aims to fill the gap of knowledge on the long term effects of rape to the subsequent relationships of the victims.

Rape is one of the most painful and shattering event a child or a woman could ever experience. When a child or woman is forced to engage in a sexual act without consent is defined as rape. Rape is prevalent in our society, the actual numbers are not known because children and women who have been raped rarely go to the proper authorities and report it (Koss, 1992). The effects of rape progress into three stages- trauma, denial and resolution, and may differ from each victim (Campell-Ruggard, & Nelson, 2000). Trauma may take the form of fear of being alone, fear of men, sexual problems and depression, feelings of anger, guilt, anxiety and despair. Then the victim may go into a period of denial as an attempt to cope with the emotional pain the victim is experiencing, after this is the resolution phase which characterizes the victim's effort to deal with her fears, to take back

her life and to gain a sense of normalcy after the incident. Majority of rape victims undergo immediate acute psychological reactions after the rape. These reactions may be in the form of shock, uncontrollable crying, social withdrawal, numbness, disbelief of what had happened, detachment, depression, cannot concentrate, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, self-blame, anger and difficulty maintaining a sexual relationship. (Campbell-Ruggard & Nelson, 2000).

A number of rape victims develop acute stress disorder after rape, the disorder may be characterized by the following; dissociative symptoms, like a subjective sense of numbing, detachment, or absence of emotional responsiveness, a reduction in awareness of his or her surroundings, derealization, depersonalization, and dissociative amnesia. While the traumatic event is persistently reexperienced by having recurrent images, thoughts, dreams, illusions, flashback episodes or a sense of reliving the experience; or distress on exposure to reminders of the traumatic event, or the marked avoidance of stimuli that arose recollections of the trauma and most importantly; the clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning or impairs of individual's ability to pursue life tasks (DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

What is more of concern to researchers are the long-term effects of rape. A study by Santiago, et. al. (1985) found that rape victims were more anxious, depressed and fearful than the control group even after years of the occurrence. Over the years, research has shown that rape is violent and had

lasting effects on the rape victim's lives. A study found that women who have been raped in the past eight years showed long-term effects in lifestyle and psychological functioning which may include nightmares, memories, fear, anxiety, anger, depression and sexual dysfunction and life restrictions (Esper & Runge, 1988).

The increasing interest in the consequences of rape have also brought into focus the different types of rape, from reviewed articles it was found that predominantly rape occurs in two forms, stranger rape wherein the sexual assault happened only once in their lifetime; and acquaintance rape where the assault could occur repeatedly over a period of time, this is also referred to as revictimization (Classen, et. al., 2005). It has been said that acquaintance rape or revictimization has more long lasting effects than stranger rape, but the results have been inconclusive. A survey of college women were conducted to compare the experiences of stranger and acquaintance rape, the study found that that stranger rapes involved the use of physical force, threats and weapons, while acquaintance rape was less likely to be reported to the police, but there showed no difference in the psychological effects of the rape (Dinero, Koss & Seibel, 1988). In a similar study, Gidycz and Koss (1991) found that victims of acquaintance rape were less likely to identify their experience as rape, and are less likely to seek professional help, thus indicating that recovery and psychological effects are more prevalent and serious, although the initial effects of the experience for stranger and acquaintance rape were similar.

A study that examined the experiences of stranger rape and non-stranger rape, it was found that victims of non-stranger rape blamed themselves more for the incidence and had higher distress than stranger rapes and had slower recovery (Katz, 1991). The process of recovery for rape victims is slow and deliberate and counseling has played a major part in it. It has been acknowledged that rape victims need counseling but very few of them seek professional help (Lynch, 1985). Although counseling has been stressed as a path to recovery but some research reported that there is no difference between stress inoculation, psychotherapy and assertion training (Resick & Schnicke, 1992) and Frank, et. al. (1988) found that cognitive behavior therapy and systematic desensitization was not better than the other in the recovery of rape victims. But it could be deduced that any form of therapy is better than no therapy at all.

From the reviewed material, it could be assumed that rape has long-term effects that may incapacitate the victim to lead a normal life after the assault. Psychological effects are numerous and often long-lasting, when a woman feels anxious and distrustful of men, it can be assumed that rape victims would have difficulty in maintaining a fulfilling marriage hence the possibility of divorce. Moreover, victims of acquaintance rape have slower rates of recovery than stranger rapes, so that they may be predisposed to have difficulty in trusting men. However, the impact of the experience of rape to the quality of marriage has largely been understudied.

Thus, this study is an exploration of the far reaching consequences of rape to marriage. This study seeks to explore the effects of rape to a woman's

quality of married life and whether the experience of rape before marriage would most likely lead to divorce. Specifically, this study would like to determine whether rape victims marry after the incidence, and to test whether most of those marriages end up in divorce and to identify the difference in divorce rates between those who had been raped only once (stranger rape) and those who had been raped continuously over time (revictimization). Moreover, this study would determine the rape victim's perception of counseling in their healing process and to suggest interventions to help rape victims resume their lives after the trauma of rape.

Methods

Participants

The sample of this study will be taken from a local crisis center where identified rape victims will be contacted through mail. The sample will be divided into two groups, those who were victims of stranger rapes and those who were victims of acquaintance rape. The mean age of the participants will be determined on the number of participants in the study considering that victims may be reluctant to participate in the study.

Materials

This study will make use of a researcher made survey interview instrument that would ask participants to indicate whether they were victims of stranger rape or acquaintance rape. It would also ask participants to describe their recovery process through a checklist and whether they are married or not

and whether they have been divorced or not, as well as the reasons for the divorce and the possible psychological effects that they have experienced after the rape.

Procedure

The participants will be identified through the help of a community crisis center since the objective of the study is to explore the life of rape victims and their marriages. After identifying the participants, they will be contacted and letters will be sent to them to inform them of the study and to ask their consent to become part of the study. They will be contacted after a week to determine their answers. When the participant agrees to volunteer in the research, an interview schedule will be drawn up and the researcher will interview each participant separately, stressing the confidentiality of the information gathered. Considering that this study would probably be opening old wounds and may pose psychological difficulties for the participants, they will be provided with debriefing services to be arranged in the community crisis center. The responses will then be collated through situational analysis wherein the common themes of reasons for the divorce and difficulty in married life will be analyzed.

Results

The data gathered from this research will be analyzed through factor loadings of participant responses in terms of their psychological difficulties after the rape in order to identify the various difficulties that they encountered. The mean and standard deviation of the rates of marriage and

divorce will be compared to test the difference between stranger rape and acquaintance rape. Then perceptions of victims of counseling and other recovery interventions will be analyzed through chi square in order to determine whether they feel that counseling was helpful or not.

Discussion

It is the assumption of this researcher that the results of this study would support the earlier findings of the related literature that there is no significant difference in the psychological impact of rape, then based on the hypothesis that acquaintance rape victims are less likely to seek professional help, they may be unmarried as compared to those victims of stranger rape, and most likely that if they are married they would be divorced although it could also be assume that victims of rape would be psychologically incapacitated to maintain the demands of marriage. It could also be assumed that counseling is a good intervention method to help victims recover from rape trauma.

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