

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the process of recovery for women who have experienced sexual violence during some point of their life span. The study was interested in exploring the existing literature on trauma based models of survival from sexual violence. The prevalent rationale of impact presented by current trauma literature predicts a downward trajectory of distressing trauma related symptomology. The aim of this research was to expand contemporary trauma literature and elucidate the role of self-protective factors and how they might ameliorate the risks of adversities associated with surviving sexual violence and explore their role in the process of recovery.

The study encompassed examination of the naturally occurring antidotes to the trauma model exploring self-protective concepts such as resilience and post traumatic growth. This was contrasted and expanded by the less explored stories of women's active fight for survival through employing tactics aligned with resistance strategies aimed at mitigating the impact of sexual violence to secure recovery.

The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology to explore the narratives of six survivors of sexual violence using semi structured interviews to discover their routes to healing and recovery. The findings revealed four major themes as follows: The Traumatized Self – "Worlds falling apart", Resistance and Survival Strategies, Recovery "The view from the other side" and finally, Rebellion and Transformations.

The findings illustrated a multiplicity of pathways to recovery from sexual violence and illuminated key stages to the process, from the ensuing devastation, resulting from the impact of the assault, through to a sense of recovery, culminating in acts of altruism and social activism. However, it was evident from the research, there was not a linear trajectory to the recovery process but rather, presented as a complex interrelated pattern of an array of actions and strategies, created almost entirely from the efforts of the survivors. An additional point of interest emerging from the findings was the potential for the recovery paradigm to consider the co-existence of vulnerabilities and self-protective strategies as part of a continuum of recovery. This

will be of particular significance in the future design of services for women surviving sexual violence.