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### The Multiple Victims of Rape

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Mourin Azar

The Multiple Victims of Rape

LSFY 101

Dr. Varallo

Fall 2014-2015

Short Analytical Essay

## The Multiple Victims of Rape

“I am so sick of being a ‘rape victim’. I want to be me again” (qtd. in Allison and Wrightsman 155). This is how one woman described her experience of being raped a month afterwards. Rape inflicts permanent damage on its victims and is an increasing issue in our society. In fact, “Rape of young women is the single most occurring violent crime in America” (Feinauer). Moreover, according to the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization, an American is assaulted every two minutes, “60% of sexual assaults are not reported to police,” and “97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail” (Gaiman). Since rape is so widely occurring and greatly under-reported, its effects on the victim and, by extension, the victim’s family are tremendously underestimated. Even though rape damages victims primarily, the victim’s family and home environment are also negatively impacted by this trauma.

Rape is nothing new in this country. In early America, when there was little legislation regarding sexual abuse, rape of Native Americans became especially popular. Why were Native women targets of this form of assault? It was solely because of the way they were regarded by white men at that time. In one of the letters from Camp McClellan during the Civil War, Seth J. Temple talks about the daughter of a Sioux Chief. He uses words unusual in today’s language to describe her:

She is a splendid specimen of an Indian princess-- is very agreeable in appearance, probably a decided belle among the Indian damsels. She dresses better, has finer blankets and ornaments than the rest of the

females and has a really distinguished air-- an interpreter told us that she was the wife of a field officer of one of the Minnesota regiments. (Temple 30)

Evaluating women exclusively on their physical appearance is, in any case, degrading and trivializes their humanity; to talk that way about a married woman especially demonstrates Temple's racist superiority. Such remarks about a married white woman would have been totally unacceptable.

Rape leaves behind scars that only victims can see; therefore, they suffer more than people around them could ever understand. The trauma damages an individual's physical strength, harms psychological health, alters every single detail of the victim's life routine, and crushes self-confidence. The consequences are uncountable. The main reason rape victims endlessly suffer is that they constantly relive the trauma. They have a hard time going to sleep, and when they do, nightmares strike and reinforce the terror effect (Allison and Wrightsman 153). Sleep is not the only thing that is affected after the trauma; it is, rather, one of many things. Like the character Geraldine in Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House*, victims of sexual assault often lose their appetite. Joe, Geraldine's 13-year-old son, had a hard time accepting that his family would no longer gather around the table for dinner. He never gave up trying to get his mother to eat; he would take the food up to her room, and go back up the next day in the hopes that at least a part of it was eaten, but instead, he found it untouched. Living on minimal food portions is a common trend among rape victims. Victims may go through variations of appetite, loss of weight, and several disorders related to eating habits, such as bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa (Crome and McCabe). As noted by Sarah Crome and

Marita McCabe, rape victims in the sample chosen by Coons et al. (1989) showed “5 to 10% of survivors were suffering from these disorders.” Along with losing their appetites, rape victims start drifting away from healthy lifestyles and isolating themselves, as self-punishment in some cases. As a result, their health deteriorates.

Different victims cope with their trauma in different ways, but in the end, they all suffer greatly, and it is not only one’s sexual life that is affected by being sexually violated. Because the suffering is boundless, the pain seeps through victims’ bodies to reach to their deepest insecurities. Being so intense, this pain is difficult to overcome. In their book, *Rape: The Misunderstood Crime*, Allison and Wrightsman note: “Because Burgess and Holmstrom found 25% of the rape victims they studied had not significantly recovered several years after the rape, we can question whether they ever will” (159). One can’t predict just how a victim will be affected by the trauma of sexual violence. Some women value their old pure bodies so much that they start blaming themselves constantly, feeling guilty about the situation. Others live in a state of denial, refusing to accept the reality; hence, they never try to get help. Still others prefer to hide their secret, finding it disgraceful, which makes their suffering greater, since they choose to deal with it by not dealing with it, by keeping it all bottled up inside.

Sometimes rape victims explode. No matter what the approach to the outburst is, the main outcome will in turn jeopardize the sufferer’s psychological well-being. According to Sarah Crome and Marita McCabe, psychological episodes include “paranoia, anger, and hostility through depression, somatic dysfunction, self-esteem issues, and debilitating fear” (Crome and McCabe 59). Recognizing these psychological disorders is crucial to understanding the behavior and social attitudes of

female victims. When victims' personality health deteriorates, their actions in turn are at stake, since the psychological well-being is what dictates behavior. According to Teresa Evans-Campbell, Taryn Lindhorst, Bu Huang, and Karina Walters, psychological disorders found in females who have been sexually abused are "mania, somatisation, obsessive-compulsive disorders, psychoticism, schizophrenia, and personality disorder." Moreover, the article explained that of all abuse types, trauma levels linked to assault are the highest; victims need to seek help, which shows how integral to everyday life the damage can be.

When the rape victim is herself a mother, the entire family suffers. A healthy mother is essentially the one who maintains a healthy family. When the mother knows her family is afflicted by her new situation, she feels additional guilt, anger, and helplessness. The victim feels disabled to make any changes because of her lack of life and desire for social gatherings. She starts perceiving everyone else around her as entirely and irrationally different; as a consequence, they don't comprehend her situation anymore (Allison and Wrightsman 151). Clearly this means the family bonds weaken, as family members become emotionally distanced from each other. The victim expects her spouse and children to understand, while family members are still overwhelmed with the new situation, as every day is an uprising challenge. The victim starts becoming a new person, and the family soon becomes frustrated with the idea that they lost the same person they used to know; consequently, these changes and inability to cope from both sides leads to further disappointment of both the victim and those closest to her.

When the mother is sexually assaulted, destruction hits the family and weakens its foundations. The apprehension is that the serious effects are reflected on the home environment as women, especially Natives, “hold two-thirds” of the family together especially when the father is gone, as claimed by LaPointe (39). Victims feel a burden from the added responsibility of having to fix everything the way it was by picking up the broken pieces and putting their lives back together (Allison and Wrightsman 155). Accordingly, the child, spouse, and whole family, in general, are distressed. The extent to which each of the spouse or children suffers may vary, but in the end, a rape case is a heavy burden that is shared by all the members of a family, regardless of their tolerance capacity.

With different expectations from both parties, a lack of balance starts forming. Like acid, this lack of balance slowly decays and eats up bonds that were once stronger. Due to the victim’s desire to be isolated, a lack of communication between family members becomes a common trend. The victim interprets her suffering as one of her own. As a consequence, she doesn’t feel secure anymore; nothing is predictable and no one is trustworthy because it was another person who demolished her and caused her pain (Allilson and Wrightsman 150). Interpersonal and family issues in the lives of adult sexual assault victims are recognized, according to Crome and McCabe, which illustrates that the familiarity of family members’ suffering in the case of rape is growing. Rape is an atrocious and daunting experience in a female’s life; similarly, it is an aggressive invasion into the lives of the victim’s family members, according to Leslie Feinauer. Rape is an unpleasant experience to the family, since rape is like a virus; once it enters a family system, it is contagious. If the mother is suffering constantly, the

rest of the family will; her suffering will be reflected on them, and the home environment will have a factor of depression and negative energy to it.

A tremendous segment of the suffering is shared by the spouse, if he chooses to stay and support his wife through her misery. Many partners feel guilty about not having been there when the assault happened to defend and keep safe their mate (Allison and Wrightsman 221). At other times, the spouse and intimate or marital relationship are so seriously impaired that the couple ends up going separate ways. A significant number of rape victims undergo a bitter experience when their relationships suffer while pulling back from the outside world. Moreover, "between 50 and 80% of victim's relationships will end as a consequence of the rape" (Allison and Wrightsman 155, 221). The relationship may turn into a cold, dry one. Unless the spouse is able to be there for his wife and share her agony, he will feel as if the new situation is not what he had agreed on when committing to the victim. Unfortunately, this results in the spouse simply walking away from the situation, which is a common reaction in post-rape situations.

Significant others are strained with a lot of responsibility because they should remember that the sufferer may have a number of varied feelings, and it is necessary that the household take in those feelings. Regrettably, being a part of the family does not insure that the person will be able to equip the sufferer with the reassurance that she or he needs (Allison and Wrightsman 220-222). For female victims, especially, men are avoided since they represent the perpetrator, the enemy, and the cause for the state that the woman, perhaps a mother, is in. All men in turn are perceived in the same way, which adds to their responsibility of keeping the family together by taking care of any kids and, most importantly, by winning the trust of their loved one back. Every action



they take is evaluated and used to predict their future behavior; as a result, men – and the whole relationship – are under a lot of pressure.

The hardship of the trauma is doubled when children are a part of the family. They are directly and indirectly inevitably affected by the mother's situation. Whether toddlers, children, or teens, they all suffer beyond a doubt; every age is crucial to a child's build up and shaping of their physical, emotional, and cognitive makeup. In the same way that mothers are traumatized, children are. At times it is the reflection of the devastation and at other times it is what kids witness with their own eyes – devastating scenes that are engraved in their memories forever. For instance, a victim testified that she was pressed down, threatened she would be murdered, and was raped as two men took turns getting on top of her in front of her four-year-old daughter (Block 126)! Added to the heinous crime of rape should logically be felony charges of child endangerment and abuse: "Woman abuse is child abuse" (qtd. in Hill 205) would certainly apply in this situation.

Indirect consequences experienced by the children further imperil their overall health. When the mother stops taking care of her family due to her sickness, be it physical or psychological, once again her children are endangered. As long as she suffers, she will search for a way out to forget about her torment and deep wounds; consequently, she may start having suicidal thoughts and consuming alcohol or taking drugs to cope with her situation (Stoner 250). As a matter of fact, "as many as three or four family members seek psychological services for every victim who receives counseling" (qtd. in Allison and Wrightsman 220); this ratio is not surprising, since the effect on children is sometimes doubled because of their lower tolerance level of

suffering than their mother. The little ones of a victim lose their chance at a happy childhood that every child deserves to have. Had they been a target of the rape or not, they end up inevitably being its victims.

After the horrific act of rape is committed, victims are left with the frustration of no longer knowing who they are. They don't feel the same way about themselves.

Moreover, the way they are looked at by family members, whether it is with rejection, disappointment, or even with compassion, adds to their loss of identity. As seen on tribal reservations, where rape is not treated seriously by the legal system, acts of sexual terrorism will continue to devastate not only the victims but also the children and spouses. When will the perpetrators be held accountable for all the damage they do to the multiple victims of each rape?

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