

What Are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims

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Statement of the problem

I remember the face of my childhood best friend as she walked in with the scariest sight I had seen as a child. Her hands were shaking as she had a blank look to her face. Her face became pale and she shook as she said the words, "Help me." I will never forget those words. At the time, I was unsure what she meant by that. I was with her right then and there and there was no one in the room. She started to stutter and cry uncontrollably. I did not know what was going on. I continued to ask her what was wrong and what happened. She proceeded to shake her head and said, "I cannot tell you." At that age, I was so confused and the most I could do was be there for my friend. Later on, she ended up telling me what had happened and all the trauma she had as aftermath. These situations happen to people every day all over the world. Rape is a serious thing and sometimes is not taken very serious. Many young girls are taken advantage of this and often think it is their fault and did something wrong. This thinking is wrong and should never be like this, and that is the reason why I decided to research the long-term effects of rape victims. It affects people we know everywhere and around us. The research question that I would like to answer is what are the long-term effects to rape victims? Often times, I think that this topic is specifically hard to consider and hard to talk about. Often times rape is something that is very uncomfortable and many do not want to talk about. They would rather just push it aside and not touch the subject. However, this is the reason why we need to research the topic and speak up about it. It is important to be aware so we can help others. The limitations chosen for this research was within the U.S. population and amongst females across the United States. I believe that this is also an important topic to consider because it is an increasing problem all over the world and not only in the United States. It is also an important subject because rape can have all

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

these long-term effects that do affect a lot of people all over the world. These long-term effects can cause a lot of damage on a person. Researching this topic can educate us in how to develop ways to prevent and intervene, while someone is going through this or to prevent someone from going through this. The issue at hand has effected all of us one way or another. Growing up as a girl I hear stories of many different scenarios happening to girls if they are not careful. I heard a lot about what and what not to do around guys and to not give the wrong impression. I was told how to dress and if I dressed a certain way I would give guys the impression that I wanted to have sex with them. I do not think that should have been a problem. I have had friends that have gone and faced many scenarios close to rape or have been raped. I also feel like it has been normalized. It is sad that little girls have gone through this and I want to do something about it. Sometimes we do not think how it may affect a victim and that is what I am going to answer in this paper.

Often times the blame can be put on the girls, when they are not even at fault, but victims in these cases. Growing up, I was told what to wear and how to act to not give the wrong impression. I was told that I could not do this and that, because I could be in danger. Why should that have even been a problem? I think that this is a bigger issue than many make it out to believe. No one should ever have to go through that. Also, no one should have to ever go through that alone. Not only is this an increasing problem in my own world, but in the whole world as well. It was founded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey in 2015 that on average there are 321,500 victims age 12 or older of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States. The Bureau of Justice Statistics also says that every 98 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted. As it is stated, rape is a serious and increasing problem. The

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

long-term effects of rape victims can be ongoing for a lifetime and very traumatic. It is important to explore these effects and see what can be done to educate, prevent, and intervene.

Problem Exploration

Rape has been a problem in most of human history since early Bible times. Although there are different aspects to consider at hand, for the sake of categorizing, we will divide it under the following three subheadings: psychological, physical, and social behavioral. These three categories are the main categories where all the long-term effects fall under. These long-term effects can be life long and very traumatic. Since then, there has been a lot of research on the effects of rape and one of the main outcomes is emotional trauma. The first category finding that I am going to describe is the psychological effects. A lot of different emotions and feelings fall under this category. First, it was founded in an article that participants were diagnosed with PTSD specifically related to trauma of the rape incident. It was also said that 31 of these participants were diagnosed with major depressive disorder at first and also still had the same symptoms later on. It was concluded that all rape victims experienced some type of psychological effect long after the event. (Malan, Hemmings, Kidd, Martin, Seedate, 2011). These symptoms can lead to other emotions that could last a life-long. It is important to watch out for all of these symptoms. There are also other types of psychological effects like fear, which can be associated under Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Which is why it is said that, PTSD can have a variety of symptoms a person may exhibit after a traumatic event (Glosser, 2016).

However, none of these psychological factors should be dealt with lightly. There was another study done accord to the National Women's study, that about one in every three rape victims develop PTSD. This study done was two weeks following the rape, that concluded that 94 out of 100 women reported having those symptoms (Glosser, 2016). Like I had said before

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

maybe things may fall under PTSD. A person can become negative and have a lot of changes in their own thoughts, feelings, and increase restlessness (Glosser, 2016) This was similar to what one of my close friends had experienced. She developed feared of the other gender and sometimes was not able to fall asleep. I did not know this right after it had happened, because she had been ashamed for long of what had happened. Sometimes not telling right away can be the case. She ended up telling me all these overwhelming emotions she was feeling a while after. She choose to say it much later rather than earlier, because she was trying to hide it from people at first. She had thought, the feelings and thoughts might have gone away with time, but she had been experiencing PTSD, much like in these studies. Sexual intimacy also became an issue, which was another problem that resulted after the rape. The most common type off long term effects are psychological effects. Mental Health concerns is a huge factor to the aftermath. It also is proven that it is the most common and lasting effects of rape. (Chabra, Smirthi, Rai, Devdas &Chacko, 2014). Which concludes most of the main findings under the subheading psychological effects.

The next main category is the physical long-term effects of rape victims. There are also different effects under the physical section. One of the main physical long-term effects that one can obtain from rape is STDS, HIV, or genital bleeding. These sexual transmitted diseases can be very dangerous and vary from case to case. In an article, it states that health consequences related to rape are significant. It says that sexually transmitted infections are among the common of more acute and delayed complications (Holmes, 2008). The study also suggested that it was important to get tested for these sexually transmitted diseases for prevention. The article talks about the different treatments that should take place short after rape occurs. Some which include HIV testing, counseling, and prevention for rape victims. (Holmes, 2008) Although PTSD has

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

been stated to be a psychological effect of rape, PTSD can also cause physical damage. Lang, et al. (2008) concluded that the more sexual trauma a women experiences in her past indicates higher levels of PTSD and decreased physical functioning. In result, research has shown that PTSD can increase the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease (Kibler, Joshi, &Ma, 2009). As it is stated some of these effects of rape can correlate with one another. It starts becoming a cause and effect and hard to recover with no help.

The next category is social-behavioral. This category is not as researched, as much as the other psychological aspects of rape. Sometimes it is characterized under the psychological category and often lost in the midst. Under this category it is said to believe that it is hard to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. Sometimes even making new relationships is hard, because of that psychological and physical damage. In a cross-sectional study with 31 adolescents, that had been raped 1-9 months previously, had reported to have the behavior problems associated with emotional trauma. The most common problems were a tendency to feel insecure, anxious, and interpersonal relationship problems (Titis, Hartono, Bambang, &Rosdiana, 2016). These problems made it hard to develop the new healthy relationships that can help one overcome a traumatic event. It was also founded that because of other psychological effects developed after rape, like PTSD, a person can develop other social behavioral problems. Sometimes both effects correlate together. It was shown that in order to process the trauma and symptoms of Post-traumatic stress syndrome, individuals will often resort to negative coping behaviors, such as substance abuse (Raghaven et al., 2006). In result, the correlation between PTSD and social behavioral are a cause and effect. Overall all three categories relate to one another and sometimes are a cause and effect of one another.

Limitations

Most of the studies I researched and looked at were limited to the fact that the population or sample population was not big enough to conclude and gather a lot of data from. As an example, you can use Malan, Hemmings, Kidd, Martin, Seedate, (2011) sample size which included 31 participants, which were all women. Going into further detail, the research was also limited to populations of women as a whole. In one research study that I found, had timing as a limiting factor as. For this study, it was hard to do a longitudinal study because they did not have a way of being able to track people five years down the road. Studies like Lange et al. (2008) used data from self-reports, which could have skewed the data, because it was coming from a biased stand point. It was a high possibility that the outcomes could have been biased.

Theoretical Perspectives

The long-term effects of rape and why there are rapists has more than one answer. It is viewed in three different ways that Zastrow describes. Zastrow talks about three theoretical perspectives as to the reasoning on why rape occurs. The three perspectives include victim precipitation of rape, the psychopathology of rapists, and the feminist perspective. Through these three theories rape can be presented differently. The first theory is victim-precipitated rape, this means that the survivor is blamed for the rape. In this perspective, men are animalistic and cannot control their own impulses. Which is an insult to them. (Zastrow, Kirst-Ashman, 2007).

The second approach is about the rapists' psychopathology. This theory suggests that the rapist may be mentally unbalanced or unstable. This view is based on the idea that the rapist is sick.

The last approach is the feminist perspective. This perspective focuses on the idea that men are socialized to dominate women. The feminist view holds that society is wrong for

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

socializing people to assume that male sexual aggression is natural. The feminist approach also states that this should be changed and that is when rape can disappear (Zastrow, Kirst-Ashman, 2007).

These approaches are helpful in this topic because it helps us understand the different viewpoints that people have and where they come from. These views shows how we are to understand different types of viewpoints and people. For example, I described my friend being ashamed and not wanting to say anything because she thought this was her fault. This approach was the victim-precipitated rape. Many blamed her and said it was because of the way she looked and dressed. These theories unfortunately are taught and believed by many.

Gaps in the literature

Most of the research done focuses on rape victims that are women and how they are affected. I think that there needs to be more studies done on rape victims that are male. Men are given the notion that they cannot be raped and that men are always the ones raping women, however this is not true at all. Men and women can both get raped.

I also would have liked to see more studies done on men and women that are older and what has happened after they are 65 and older. I think it is important to follow up and see how much of these long-term effects are still being struggled with.

I saw different types of treatments that were explored for women specifically. I feel like more research needs to be done in how to help men and boys be able to voice being a rape victims. Often times they are the ones that struggle with admitting it themselves, since they may think they may not be viewed as masculine anymore.

Lastly, I would suggest more research being done on boy rape victims under the age of 16 and compare those results with girls that are rape victims and under the age of 16. A study

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

showing the different ways boys and girls cope with these situations would be a good addition to all the research already provided. Also, I think there should be more studies and research on the social-behavioral effects of rape victims. It was hard to find specific details in this section. Other factors can also be taken into account like environment and other demographics.

Conclusions and Position

The findings on the long-term effects were based off of three categories which were labeled: psychological, physical, and social-behavioral. The literature review focused mostly on how PTSD can be a psychological, physical, and social-behavioral effect. There are other effects that were mentioned, but this was the major one discussed.

I would suggest anyone who is a social worker to become aware of the different effects of rape. It is important to be aware of these long-term effects to be able to prevent, intervene, and educate not only ourselves, but those around us. Learning this can be helpful to rape victims and those that are needing help with these situations. By acquiring this knowledge, we are able to understand what else can be done in order to fulfill and meet the needs of those seeking help. The main goal of anyone should be to find ways to treat and find ways for people to learn how to cope with the trauma that comes after the rape. It is important to find ways for an individual to cope with PTSD in a healthy way (Raghavan et al.,2008). There can be different ways to cope through group therapy, medically, and even counseling.

There was no tension that I could recall between my own personal opinion and the research that was found. My personal viewpoint lines up with the fact that we need to gain more knowledge on this subject and learn how to deal with these problems to prevent from this becoming a bigger problem than it already is. I agree with my research and do believe that all

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

these effects are outcomes of rape. I think that we need to get out there and do something about it. It is important to advocate for the voices that are not being heard.

From a micro perspective, social workers should realize that PTSD is a huge long-term effect because of rape or sexual abuse. Social workers need to make sure not to minimize the trauma of the client because each client has had a different experience. Social workers need to understand and address that this long-term effect of PTSD can often correlate with other symptoms like pathological disassociation, sexual ambivalence, and sexual dysfunction later in life (Noll et al., 2003)

From a mezzo level, social workers can analyze the research that has been done and implement the research into treatments and group therapies that meets the needs of the group or population they are working with. Studies have been done that state that group therapy is successful in lowering depression and other PTSD symptoms. The social workers can link the clients to many resources in order to meet the needs of the population. Often times, social workers can refer clients to professionals as desired by the client. (Bryant, et al., 2008; Resick et al., 2008). Another way that social workers help in the mezzo community, is by educating the clients and community about the different long-term effects of rape and what rape is. It is important to be aware and raise awareness.

Social workers can also help through a macro level. This can be done through creating and developing policies that benefit rape victims. Social workers can also be a part of movements that support and advocate for prevention and education to rape victims and their families. Social workers can also advocate to support the creation of financial possibility to those that want help, but cannot financially afford it.

RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

Rape and its long-term effects is growing and can be destructive to a person inside and out. Ignoring it is not the solution. Social workers need to be aware and educate themselves to be prepared for any type of situation that comes their way. As social workers' we need to network with the community, friends, families, co-workers, to help build a way for more opportunities and to be the voice of those that are not heard.

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RUNNING HEAD: What are the Long-Term Effects of Rape Victims?

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