

Effective sexual assault treatment as viewed jointly by survivors and expert therapists

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Rape and sexual assault have been widely linked to severe psychological sequelae, the recovery from which often requires professional help. Thanks to the current shift in societal attitudes towards sexual violence, the victim's perspective is increasingly being heard. The present study is yet another step in that direction. Through the investigation of what recovered survivors of sexual assault identify as the therapeutic interventions that most assisted them in overcoming their trauma, guidelines for optimal sexual assault treatment are established. These receive further support from a comparison with expert therapists as to what they view as being most conducive to recovery from rape. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 survivors who have experienced a successful course of therapy, and 15 therapists with extensive expertise in the field. The results document considerable agreement between the two perspective, which share much in common. First, irrespective of the specific techniques involved, both survivors and therapists placed the greatest importance on a respectful and validating therapeutic relationship, that operates to counter the dehumanization and degradation entailed in the assault. In addition, specific interventions were identified, which include the reprocessing of all rape-specific peri-traumatic reactions coupled with the intentional countering of their consequences within the therapeutic relationship. Together, these reports provide a detailed account of post-rape treatment needs and the interventions required for their effective resolution.