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Heterosexual Male Sexual Assault Victims Experience of Challenges in Reporting Their Victimization

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Jessica Rundle

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Heterosexual Male Sexual Assault Victims Experience of Challenges in Reporting Their

Victimization

by

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MS, Walden University, 2017

BA, Saint Vincent College, 2012

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify the gender specific challenges male sexual assault victims face when they report their victimization. Researchers can use their knowledge of these challenges reduce the stigmatization that is correlated with being a male sexual assault victim. The theoretical basis for this study was Joseph Pleck's sex role strain paradigm, also known as the gender role strain paradigm. The research questions pertained to the psychological challenges that male sexual assault victims encounter when they begin seeking out services. The sample for this study consisted of eight heterosexual male participants who are sexual assault survivors. The participants were interviewed via Zoom by using semi structured interviews. The data from the interviews were analyzed and coded using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Three themes emerged from the analysis: feeling of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feeling of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. The results of this study can be used to develop literature regarding the negative effects encountered by heterosexual male sexual assault survivors. The findings may be used for positive social change by helping professionals create resources aimed at male sexual assault survivors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Male sexual assault victims and the challenges they face when seeking help is an understudied subject (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Patterson et al., 2022). The challenges that are gender specific include questioning their sexuality, being viewed as weak, a lack of services targeted toward male sexual assault victims, and feeling inferior (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a; University of Texas at Austin, 2022). The gender role strain paradigm (Pleck, 1981) suggests how men need to achieve a masculine role identity and if they fail to do so, there will be negative consequences. Pleck's (1981) theory stated that heterosexual men fear being viewed as homosexual and being vulnerable is highly forbidden. Currently, most studies conducted on sexual assault involve female victims, with little to no mention about male victims (Javaid, 2016a).

In this research, I focused specifically on heterosexual male victims of sexual assault and the challenges that they had to overcome to seek help for their victimization. Researchers and victim advocates can use the results from this research for a better understanding of the challenges that heterosexual male victims face. Along with a better understanding, the results can help create specific resources and treatment aimed at male victims of sexual assault. In this chapter, I will review the background to this issue which includes societal expectations of the male gender and the purpose of my research study. This chapter also includes an examination of the purpose of this study and the theoretical foundation that I chose.

Background

Delle Donne et al. (2018) argued that societal expectations and gender norms influence how men respond to their sexual assault victimizations. Whenever it comes to male victims of sexual assault, a lot of questions and issues arise such as whether they are still heterosexual. Some male victims question their heterosexuality due to having an erection and even ejaculating during their assault (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). This may be one of the challenges whenever it comes to reporting their assault (University of Texas at Austin, 2022). Porta et al. (2018) lists a variety of reasons male victims may not come forward from embarrassment to feeling emasculated to the victim believing that people will view them as homosexual. Challenges include fear of being viewed as weak, being viewed as homosexual, a lack of services aimed at male victims, being viewed as inferior compared to other men, and not being believed (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a; University of Texas, 2022). Turchik et al.(2016) mention that although the United States and many other countries adopted gender inclusive laws, there are numerous ways male victims are not protected. Turchik et al. (2016) argues that the rape of men is not defined by the same law as the rape of women. In turn, the consequences the perpetrator might face in the justice system may not be the same for male victims as it is for female victims (Turchik et al., 2016).

Emergency room personnel and police may not consider a man who is severely injured as a sexual assault victim if he is unable or unwilling to disclose the incident (Zilkens et al., 2018). However, Ioannou et al. (2017) discovered that most sexual assaults involving male victims tend to be violent, taking place in either the victim or

perpetrator's home. Almost half of the male sexual assault victims that participated in the Ioannou et al.'s (2017) study stated that they were forced to give the perpetrator oral intercourse, followed by fondling and anal. One out of 71 men will be assaulted within their lifetime (Porta et al., 2018; Young & Pruett, 2018). Male victims tend to be between the ages of 20 to 30 years of age and identify as heterosexual (Ioannou et al., 2017). Zilkens et al.'s (2018) study revealed that 88% of male sexual assault victims had at least one vulnerable trait which includes mental illness, intellectual or physical disabilities, intoxication, and homelessness (Zilkens et al., 2018). Male airmen stated that high-risk situations that can lead to sexual victimization include alcohol, specific physical settings, and certain work assignments (Ashley et al., 2019). According to the respondents, male Airmen stated that temporary duty (TDY) and deployment are risky situations (Ashley et al., 2019).

Many male victims admitted to consuming alcohol and being intoxicated prior to being sexually assaulted (Zilkens et al., 2018). If the male victim does seek help, it is usually 6 months to 1 year after the assault which delays the emotional and psychosocial support that the victim needs (Porta et al., 2018). Some of the known challenges that male sexual assault victims encounter is questioning their masculinity and not being believed (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Although researchers know about some of the various challenges that male sexual assault victims face, there is still a lot that we do not know, and my research will address the gender specific barriers male victims face. The gender specific barriers for heterosexual male sexual assault victims face are the gap I chose to examine.

Stemple and Meyer (2014) discovered with two surveys that male sexual victimization is widespread, some forms of victimization in men were equal to women. Regardless of the findings, Stemple and Meyer (2014) argued that the stereotypical sexual victimization paradigm is often depicted by society, where the male is there perpetrator, and the female is the victim. Claiming that there are three factors that lead to the misconceptions on male sexual assault victimizations which includes the male perpetrator and female victim paradigm, agencies definitions and categories of sexual assault are outdated, and widely reported data is derived from household sampling (Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

The negligence of voluntary agencies is evident in how the organizations deal with male sexual assault survivors (Javaid, 2016b). The researchers in Javaid (2016b) and Stemple and Meyer's (2014) study stated that the negligence of male sexual assault survivors reinforces gender roles instead of addressing them. Javaid (2016b) stated that due to societal ideals, male sexual assault victims are judged by others, judged by themselves, and feel as if they failed as a man for not fighting off the perpetrator. Javaid (2016b) argued that the rape crisis centers do not reach out to male survivors, only to female survivors. The lack of support, the segregation of sexual assault victims is problematic because it isolates male survivors (Javaid, 2016b). One of the main significant challenges for male victims of sexual assault is their social expectation which is being self-reliant and masculine which leads to most victims to refuse help (Javaid, 2016b).

Young et al. (2018) examined written documentation during a 5-year period from regional sexual assault hotlines. The researchers found that male callers used sexual assault hotlines because they have limited or no support (Young et al., 2018). The results revealed that male victims are more comfortable sharing their victimizations anonymously or in a one-on-one setting (Young et al., 2018). Male victims were hesitant to disclose their sexual assault victimizations and would commonly hang up on the hotline workers (Young et al., 2018). The researchers stated that the distrust of others is a significant challenge when it comes to male victims seeking help (Young et al., 2018). This study is crucial for heterosexual male sexual assault victims to overcome gender specific barriers in reporting their victimizations.

Problem Statement

Sexual violence is more than rape. Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN; 2019), stated that sexual violence includes rape, fondling or unwanted sexual contact, forcing a victim to do sexual acts, and attempted rape. Most research on sexual assault and the challenges that the victims face is primarily based on female victims, with hardly any mention of male victims (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Male victims go to specialized sexual assault services in far fewer numbers than women, which could be due to the numerous challenges that male victims face such as their masculinity and questioning their sexuality (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; University of Texas at Austin, 2022). Stemple and Meyer (2014) argued that it is time to move past the male perpetrator and female victim paradigm, that the overreliance on this paradigm encourages the stigmatization against male victims.

According to RAINN (2019), 230 out of 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to the police. Hockett et al. (2015), argued that many victims are blamed for their victimization and are victims of other negative attitudes, especially whenever it comes to rape. Hockett et al. (2015) revealed perceptions that both female and male respondents believe that rape is a consequence of one not fulfilling one's sex role. The idea of rape being a consequence of someone not fulfilling one's sex role contradicted American society's expectations of what a male should be which is strong, tough, powerful, and self-sufficient (Javaid, 2016a). However, male sexual assault victims face a challenge that female victims do not, their masculinity (Fredonia State University of New York, 2022). Javaid (2016a) found that the expectations that are required of men such as masculinity, challenges perceptions of being any type of victim since the word may make the individual seem vulnerable and less masculine. Masculinity is a challenge because male victims are the embodiment of a subordinate form of masculinity, male rape victims are oppressed and made subordinate for not achieving hegemonic masculinity (Javaid, 2017). Jewkes et al. (2015) argued that hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a gender position that involves heterosexual men and excludes homosexuals and women.

RAINN (2019) and Fredonia State University of New York (2022) supported what Javaid (2016a) said about how male victims tend to question their masculinity and feel a strong sense of shame. Male victims are left feeling the same emotions as women, but they are also left questioning their sexual orientation, feeling less masculine, and worrying about being judged (Javaid, 2016a; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; RAINN, 2019). There are many studies that show what female victims of sexual

assault go through; there needs to be more research on the experience of male victims (Javaid, 2016a).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study was to explore and understand the experiences and the challenges that male victims of sexual violence, and who sought help for their assault, face in reporting the crime that was committed against them. The exploration of the phenomenon that specifically focused on the challenges that male victims face, gives researchers a better understanding of the differences in male and female victims. Delle Donne et al. (2018) stated how their study of male sexual assault victims in New York City contributed to the understanding of men's experience of sexual violence; however, more research needs to be conducted on heterosexual men specifically; as their study included homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual men. Furthermore, my goal was also to promote awareness of the male sexual assault victim and the prevalence male sexual assault is in the United States. More importantly, I sought to provide knowledge about the specific challenges male sexual assault victims face whenever it comes to reporting their assault and may lead to understanding on how to handle those challenges. By having more knowledge of the challenges that exist, researchers can find ways to break the stigmatization against male victims. I used interviews to collect information from the male participants.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the certain challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault victims face whenever it comes to reporting their victimization.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the challenges that male sexual assault victims who sought help for their assault experience when it comes to reporting the assault?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault describe their experience whenever it comes to seeking help?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault overcome their fears and seek help?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical base for this study was Joseph Pleck's sex role strain paradigm, later termed gender role strain paradigm in 1995 (Levant & Wong, 2017; Pleck, 1981). According to this theory, failure for men to achieve a masculine role identity would result in negative consequences such as hypermasculinity (Pleck, 1981). Pleck's (1981) theory is used to examine how men are expected to show greater control over their emotions than women; however, men show anger and violence more easily (Pleck, 1981). Pleck (1981) argued that men tend to have stronger social bonds with other men, however they have greater fears of being a homosexual. Pleck (1981) identifies two types of male roles, traditional and modern. The traditional male role has underdeveloped interpersonal and social skills, where vulnerability is prohibited (Pleck, 1981). The modern male role

encourages emotional intimacy, but it is restricted to heterosexual relations only (Pleck, 1981). Because this theory addresses stereotypical gender roles in men, Pleck's theory has been extensively used whenever it comes to conflict with masculinity.

The gender role strain paradigm addresses how masculinity tends to be an issue for male victims (Pleck, 1981). The gender role strain paradigm is placed upon male victims by society, it is not biologically determined (Pleck, 1981). According to this theory, there are rewards to conforming to society's view of how a certain gender is supposed to act and consequences if they do not (Pleck, 1981). Pleck's gender role strain paradigm is suitable for my study because it focuses on how society's expectations of men can impact their decisions, in this case, to seek help after being sexually victimized. If masculinity does play a significant role as a challenge for male victims of sexual assault, the gender role strain paradigm would address how masculinity tends to be an issue for the male sex. I will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Conceptual Framework

My goal for this study was to gain a better understanding of what issues arise whenever a male sexual assault victim reports their victimization. One of the most crucial points in this research was being able to recognize sexual assault and identify the perpetrator, who is not always male. Sexual assault is defined as the violent penetration of another, including forced vaginal, oral, and anal penetration (American Psychological Association, 2018). Another important term to remember is sexual offense. A sexual offense is identified as rape, molestation, incest, sodomy, sex murder, and forcible sexual assault without penetration (American Psychological Association, 2018).

I identified formal theories to bring together and contextualize on the topic of heterosexual male sexual assault victims and the issues they encounter when reporting (Ravich & Carl, 2016). I reviewed the literature and had an awareness of any assumptions concerning my research question and my study goals, the conceptual framework recognized my role as the researcher that could influence all aspects of the research process (Cowl-Witherspoon, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I used Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological theory to study of lived experience to approach my research question, instrument development, and data analysis from a position of candidness (Cowl-Witherspoon, 2020; University of New England, 2021). This contextual lens aligned with both Pleck's (1981) gender role strain paradigm and with interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding the challenges that male sexual assault victims face. The key constructs in this study were male victims, sexual assault, and gender roles. I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in this study. IPA is used to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and their social world (Alase, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2008). I used IPA to understand the participants expressions about their experiences without distortion (Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) argued that the main purpose of using IPA is to explore participants' experiences and produce research findings. I used this qualitative analysis to pinpoint specific challenges that male sexual assault victims face when seeking help. I collected data using face-to-face or Skype interviews

depending on the comfortability of the participant. Data analysis also included deductive coding, which I elaborate on more in the methodology section.

Definitions

Challenge: Something that restricts, impedes, or blocks the achievement of an ultimate objective, which includes mental, emotional, and behavioral limitations in individuals (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Heterosexuality: sexual attraction or activity between members of the opposite sex (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Homosexuality: sexual attraction or activity between members of the same sex, commonly referred to as same-sex sexual orientation (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Masculinity: possession of social role behaviors that are the presumed characteristics of a male (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Male: an individual that is capable of producing small, usually motile gametes (i.e., sperm) which is utilized to fertilize the eggs of a female (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Paradigm: A set of assumptions, attitudes, concepts, and values that is generally accepted theoretical framework within a discipline (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Whenever an individual lives through or witnesses an event in which the individual believes their life is being threatened and experiences fear, terror, or helplessness. This disorder includes reexperiencing the

traumatic event including recollections, flashbacks, and/or reoccurring dreams and nightmares (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Sexual assault: The violent penetration of another, including forced vaginal, oral, and anal penetration (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Sex offense: Include rape, molestation, incest, sodomy, sex murder, and forcible sexual assault without penetration (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Sex-role stereotype: An oversimplified concept of how each gender is supposed to act according to society (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Victimization: The act or the process of targeting someone out for cruel or unfair treatment, usually by physical or emotional abuse (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Assumptions

For this research study, I assumed that there are multiple challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault victims face when seeking help. Due to researching Pleck's (1981) Gender role strain paradigm, I believed that how a victim views their masculinity impacts whether they seek help or not. Young et al. (2018) mentioned the male callers wanted to remain anonymous and abruptly ended the calls. I assumed that the participants would have the insight to identify the challenges that they encountered while in the process of seeking assistance. I assumed that this sample of male victims would be willing and able to understand and answer the questions honestly. I hoped that the questions were clear and precise, so I repeated the questions if necessary.

I assumed that the participants would be comfortable enough to be honest whenever it comes to discussing the specific challenges that they faced whenever they decided to seek help. Despite being honest about being a survivor of sexual assault, I assumed that they were honest and able to handle the challenges that come with admitting that fact. I let them know that the interview was confidential and if they were uncomfortable about anything, they did not have to answer.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I specifically focused on heterosexual male sexual assault victims. Prior researchers either focused on female victims or male victims of every sexual orientation, and I looked at the challenges through the perspective of a heterosexual men. Therefore, the experience of anyone but heterosexual male sexual assault victims would be out of scope of this study. To participate in this study, the participant had to be a man who identified as heterosexual, experienced sexual assault, and was at least 18 years of age. I did not focus on any specific type of sexual assault. The participants also had to have sought help for their victimization. A limitation of this study was generalizability because male victims may face different challenges, even compared to one another. The research and data do not include anyone who was not a heterosexual man. I did not focus on male sexual assault victims that have yet to seek help, male victims who do not identify as heterosexual, or female victims.

Limitations

A limitation was that I focused solely on the challenges that male sexual assault victims face whenever they seek help, it does not include those who have yet to seek help

and the knowledge of the challenges that they are currently facing is unknown. The second limitation was that I focused solely on heterosexual men, it does not include men who are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. Another limitation to mention is that the participants had to be at least 18 years of age, which excluded any male individual under that age. Generalizability was a significant limitation since the study focused on a specific population and age group. An ethical issue that could have arisen is that some of the questions could have triggered a trauma reaction in some participants. The recruitment strategy and procedures addressed this potential issue.

Significance

This research filled the gap in understanding the current challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault victims, who sought help for their assault, reported experiencing whenever it comes to reporting their victimization in America. This project is unique because I addressed an under-researched area of sexual assault victims and the challenges that they face (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022). The results of this study showed much-needed insights into the challenges faced by male sexual assault victims in America. Insights from this study could aid victim advocacy agencies in addressing the challenges that male sexual assault victims face, such as a lack of confidence in their masculinity. Male sexual assault victims face challenges that female victims do not when reporting their victimization (Javaid, 2016a; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; RAINN, 2019). Being aware of the challenges faced by men who are victims of sexual assault was a drive for sexual assault advocates to encourage social change by addressing the inequities in society. In addition,

this research contributes to the current, but limited data on male sexual assault victims and the challenges they face before they can gain enough courage to seek help. As I focused solely on heterosexual male victims of sexual assault, it is probable that researchers expand the study, to bring a better insight to this under researched topic.

Summary

Current research has not thoroughly or adequately examined the challenges that heterosexual men face whenever they seek help such as their masculinity and questioning their sexual orientation. Research has been primarily based on female sexual assault victims and the challenges that they face. There has yet to be a study specifically focused on heterosexual men and the challenges that they face whenever it comes to seeking assistance. Male victims of sexual assault are usually left questioning their masculinity and their sexual orientation (Javaid, 2016a; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; RAINN, 2019).

Implications for social change include adequately addressing the needs of male sexual assault victims and understanding the challenges that they have faced in coming forward with their victimization. In this study, I developed insight into a topic that is not very well known and is understudied. Relevant research will allow victim advocates to support and offer services aimed at male victims. Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of literature relevant to male sexual assault victims. Additionally, I discussed the framework and its implications for the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The definition of rape includes victims and perpetrators of any gender, forcible penetration with objects, and victims who are unable to consent (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). Although the United States changed the definition of rape to include male victims and female perpetrators, there is still a stigma surrounding male victims. Male survivors face gender-specific challenges such as psychological issues doubting their masculinity and societal views when reporting their assault. Most services are targeted for female victims (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a). Male sexual assault survivors often refuse to report their victimization due to lack of services, being viewed as weak, fear of being considered as homosexual, or a lack of understanding of what sexual assault is (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a; Porta et al., 2018).

RAINN (2019) defined sexual assault. The site lists attempted rape, unwanted sexual contact, and fondling, forcing someone to perform sexual acts or penetrating the perpetrator, and penetration of the victim (RAINN, 2019). Furthermore, RAINN (2019) defined the specifics of rape and force, which are significant for male survivors. RAINN (2019) describes force as not just a physical pressure but also includes emotional coercion, psychological force, or manipulation to force the victim into non-consensual sex or sex acts.

Current studies involving sexual assault survivors and resources focus primarily on female victims or male victims who are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. There is

currently a gap in literature where studies concentrated mainly on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors and the challenges they encounter when reporting their victimization. Therefore, the purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to understand the gender-specific challenges that male sexual assault victims face whenever it comes to reporting their victimization. This current chapter includes insight into literature review search strategies and an overview of studies involving challenges faced specifically by heterosexual male sexual assault survivors. This chapter includes Pleck's (1981) gender role strain paradigm theory and how it relates to male sexual assault survivors whenever it comes to coping and reporting their assault.

Literature Search Strategy

I obtained articles and books relevant to this study from various Walden University research databases. The databases that I used were Criminal Justice, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, and websites related to male sexual assault victims. The keywords used included *male sexual assault victims*, *sexual assault*, *male victims*, *male sexual assault survivors*, *sexual assault survivors*, *sexual assault in America*, *male victimization*, and *male sexual assault in America*. The publication dates for the literature reviewed were between 1981 and 2023 with the older work focusing on the theoretical foundation. The articles used were selected by relevance and dated within the last 5 years.

Theoretical Foundation

Joseph Pleck's (1981) gender role strain paradigm, previously known as the sex-role strain paradigm, stated that rewards such as social acceptance and having the

psychological needs met for men who conformed to traditional sexual roles. Pleck (1981) stated that men are expected to show more control over their emotions than women. men are known to have greater homosociality, which is defined as social bonds between the same sex. Most researchers on masculinity have argued that there are prevailing links between homosociality and masculinity, although most men are apprehensive when viewed as homosexual (Pleck, 1981). Hammarén and Johansson (2014) mentioned that the association between homosociality and masculinity, such as intimate but friendly bonds and fraternities, helped maintain the gender order and uphold male privileges.

According to role strain paradigm, men who were unsuccessful in conforming to the traditional sexual role were believed to have adverse outcomes, including having negative attitudes toward women and defensive hypermasculinity (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Pleck, 1981). The gender role strain paradigm was derived from earlier theories based on drive and ego, which stated that individuals have a psychological need to conform to their specific role identity (Levant & Powell, 2017). Levant and Powell (2017) mentioned that the new subjective view of the male gender observes gender roles as psychological and socially constructed entities, which are not biologically attained. The authors stated that there was no single standard for masculinity and that it fluctuated across each of the social classes, within the various ethnic groups, and even sexual orientation (Levant & Powell, 2017).

Pleck (1981) declared that if an individual infringed upon their gender role, they would be socially condemned, which ultimately lead to adverse psychological effects. Physical strength was an essential standard for the male gender whenever it comes to

masculine worth (Pleck, 1981). Pleck (1981) mentioned two types of male roles: the traditional male role, and the modern male role. Whenever it came to the traditional male role, masculinity was validated by one's strength and aggressive behaviors (Pleck, 1981). Traditional men are expected not to be emotionally expressive or self-revealing, especially when they are vulnerable and show weakness (Pleck, 1981). In the modern male role, masculinity was often validated by economic achievement and bureaucratic power (Pleck, 1981). Within the contemporary male role, emotional sensitivity and self-expression are encouraged only in romantic relationships with women (Pleck, 1981). Besides sharing emotions with their romantic partner, the modern male role discouraged any emotional behavior, including anger and impulsiveness.

Violation of sex roles have negative psychological consequences and not just from social disapproval, but self-devaluation (Pleck, 1981). Men who failed to live up to their gender role or believe that they failed to do so tend to overconform by being overly aggressive and would have negative attitudes toward women (Pleck, 1981). According to the gender role strain paradigm, there are different types of gender strain that men encounter. Pleck (1981) identified three types of strain: discrepancy-strain, dysfunction-strain, and trauma-strain. Discrepancy-strain is the consequence when a male failed to live up to their internalized manhood ideal (Pleck, 1981). Discrepancy-strain is the variation between what men believe is the "deal man" versus how they view themselves (Levant & Powell, 2017; Pleck, 1981). Dysfunction-strain results whenever the male lives up to the masculine norms since most of the characteristics have negative side-effects on the men and those close to them (Levant & Powell, 2017; Pleck, 1981).

Dysfunction-strain is associated with the darker side of masculinity and comprises violence, sexual dysfunctions, and irresponsible behaviors (Levant & Powell, 2017). The last strain is the trauma-strain, which was the male role socialization process (Pleck, 1981). Trauma-strain is comprised of specific groups of men who experienced relatively severe gender role strains such as professional athletes, Vietnam veterans, survivors of child abuse, and bisexual and homosexual men (Levant & Powell, 2017). Levant and Powell (2017) mentioned that the specific groups listed above struggled with role socialization due to the shame that coincide with trauma.

Guvensel et al. (2018) conducted a study that consisted of a convenience sample and examined the triadic relationship of gender role conflict, normative male alexithymia, and male friendships with other men. Guvensel et al. (2018) discovered that higher levels of gender role conflict were associated with lower psychological well-being levels. It was noted that the traditional gender socialization of men, the acrimonious friendships they have with one another, and their emotions' restriction negatively impact their psychological functioning (Guvensel et al., 2018).

Male sexual assault survivors tend to be overlooked regarding victimization, either due to their reluctance in reporting their assault or the lack of services aimed specifically at them (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a). The use of the gender role strain paradigm acknowledges that society places significant pressure on men to conform to their gender roles than females (Pleck, 1981). This pressure to conform becomes an issue whenever men are sexually assaulted because the survivor fears being viewed as

vulnerable or homosexual, which does not fit in with their stereotypical gender role as being strong and heterosexual (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

The added stressor to conform to society's view on how a male should conduct themselves would be considered a significant challenge to reporting victimization. Delle Donne et al. (2018) mentioned that traditional male norms encourage men to be emotionless and robust, making them unable to communicate their victimization due to the fear of appearing vulnerable. Men face interpersonal, medical, and psychological stressors whenever they become sexual assault victims (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2017; Lowe, 2018). The amount of strain that gender conformity has on a male survivor can influence whether the victim seeks assistance when reporting their victimization. This strain to conform can impact the survivor more than just one way since the victimization and gender role pressure can create physical and psychological difficulties (Delle Donne et al., 2018). The gender role strain paradigm can be used to understand a male survivor's internal and external belief system and their reluctance to report their assault.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Extensive research has been conducted on female sexual assault victims; however, there is little information on the challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault victims encounter. The fundamental sections of this chapter will highlight societal views on male victimizations. The impact that the societal views have on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors and the specific challenges that men contend with, such as the lack of services offered exclusively for male sexual assault victims. The chapter also highlights how the definition of sexual assault needs to be rectified so that individuals are

clear on what is considered sexual assault, after conducting a thorough search of the literature in Walden University's library and on Google Scholar regarding male victimization in sexual assault and the challenges that men exclusively encounter. Although there is not much research on male sexual assault victims, fewer research articles focus on the obstacles that male sexual assault victims encounter whenever it comes to reporting their assault. The referenced studies listed in this section can offer valuable information to the topic of male sexual assault victims. Still, because little is known about the challenges that male sexual assault survivors must tackle, the articles should be interpreted with vigilance. Key concepts such as the lack of protection regarding male survivors, the lack of services exclusively for male sexual assault survivors, and the stigma associated with male victimization are noted in this literature review.

An Overview of Male Sexual Assault

It is believed that one in six men have been sexually assaulted within their lifetime (1in6, 2021). The one in six statistic is a rough estimate due to the belief that there are more male sexual assault victims who fail to step forward and admit their victimization (1in6, 2021). RAINN (2021) emphasizes that sexual assault can happen to anyone no matter their age, ethnicity, or gender. Men who have been sexually assaulted by women suffer the same reactions as female victims, but they also encounter negative social attitudes and gender stereotypes (RAINN, 2021). 1in6 (2021) stated that men who have been sexually assaulted have a higher risk of mental health issues than those who are not victims.

Men who are victims of sexual assault may suffer from PTSD, depression, substance abuse disorders, suicidal ideation, problems with relationships, and start underachieving at work (Lin6, 2021; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022). Not only do victims encounter mental health issues associated with their victimization but most victims deny that they are victims (Lin6, 2021; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; RAINN, 2021). This leads to a lot of male sexual assault victims refusing to acknowledge their assault or seek services related to their assault (Lin6, 2021; RAINN, 2021).

Limited Social Support

According to the American Psychological Association or APA (2020) the first, social support is defined as the provision of assistance or well-being of others to help them cope with the biological, social, and psychological stressors. The support can come from any interpersonal relationship within an individual's social network, such as friends, family members, neighbors, religious institutions, coworkers, or support groups (APA, 2020). The type of social support varies from effective forms of helping, such as chores and monetary assistance, to the emotional support that allows the survivor to feel accepted and valued (APA, 2020).

Male sexual assault survivors often encounter limited social support from family, friends, and coworkers whenever they seek assistance, which then becomes a significant challenge for them. For instance, a male sexual assault survivor who received limited social support was mentioned in Curry's (2018) article about the actor Terry Crews. Whenever Terry Crews, the embodiment of masculinity, stated that he was sexually

assaulted, he received limited social support (Curry, 2018). Terry Crews is not alone in relation to inadequate social support (Curry, 2018). A sexual assault survivor named Jonathon disclosed his victimization to a friend, who responded as if the disclosure was a significant inconvenience (RAINN, 2019). According to Jonathon, his friend's adverse reaction made him unwilling to tell others his story (RAINN, 2019). Another male sexual assault victim stated that their friends' thought of the assault as a "score" (Bruggeman, 2019). Regarding sexual activity, a score is a success in obtaining something occasionally by irregular means, in this case, sex (Merriam-Webster, 2020). If a victim sees their assault as a "score," they will be less likely to report their victimization to the proper authorities (Bruggeman, 2019). However, in this case, the victim knew what happened to him was wrong, even while his friends were praising him about the encounter (Bruggeman, 2019).

Delle Donne et al. (2018) stated that out of 19 interviewees, only two male sexual assault victims sought support services due to lack of social support. A strong social support network can encourage male sexual assault victims to seek professional services for the trauma and crime committed against them (Cherry, 2020). Sadler et al. (2018) mentioned limited social supports that heterosexual male sexual assault victims have in the armed forces. Sadler et al.'s (2018) research consisted of 34 service members that took part in eleven focus groups. According to the 34 participants, sexual assault is not discussed in the armed forces, and there are no friends or colleagues to offer support to a male sexual assault victim (Sadler et al., 2018). Sadler et al. (2018) stated that the participants mentioned that if a male sexual assault survivor did not conform to the rigid

hierarchy, the survivor encounters social and career ramifications. The participants stated the survivor would be “blackballed” (Sadler et al., 2018). Blackball is defined as being excluded socially or being ostracized (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Male sexual assault survivors are amongst the most disenfranchised populations, and the survivors are often left to deal with their unrecognized and ignored emotions (Sharp et al., 2017). Sexual assault survivors are often left to deal with the loss of trust and the failure of physical and emotional safety (Sharp et al., 2017). The losses created by the assault is why social support is essential for a male sexual assault survivor. Due to their limited social support, male survivors are often left to deal with the emotional aftermath by themselves (Sharp et al., 2017). The limited social support increases their emotional and psychological distress, affecting male sexual assault survivors' well-being and quality of life (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Muller (2017) stated that if a male were to confide in his friends that an unwanted sexual act happened to him by a female perpetrator, he would be praised. Meaning, instead of being empathetic for their friend who was assaulted, the victim would be congratulated for the victimization (Muller, 2017). According to Muller (2017), who also states the presence of rape myths among society, the prevailing sentiment whenever it comes to men is that men are always open to sexual advances and automatically consent to anyone who offers it. Thus, male friends congratulate other men for any type of sexual act even if it involves being a victim of female perpetrated sexual assault, and it is seen as a “score” (Muller, 2017).

Lowe and Rogers (2017) stated that some male sexual assault victims turn to social media to disclose and seek support for their victimizations. Kulze (2013) says that

a male sexual assault victim received nonempathic comments from his friends but received the much-needed support he needed from social media. Social media offers male victims a place where they can share their stories and connect without feeling vulnerable. In Kulze's (2013) article, many of the participants stated that their friends' response was the same, congratulatory or a compliment about their masculinity. However, the participants said that utilizing social media and anonymity has led to finding survivors who have been through similar situations. It is comparable to group therapy, but it is anonymous.

Andalibi et al. (2016) state that online disclosure is often therapeutic for victims of assaults that are considered taboo or stigmatized, such as male sexual assault. Andalibi et al. (2016) state that survivors often delay the disclosure of their attack or do not disclose their offense at all, which leads to adverse health outcomes. However, the victims who can reveal their sexual assault to their support groups have better results whenever it pertains to psychological effects (Andalibi et al., 2016). They were given emotional support to seek services for the psychological impact of sexual assault (Andalibi et al., 2016). Or in other words, men who seek assistance anonymously online and receive the support they need will find professional services for the psychological effects that the sexual assault created (Andalibi et al., 2016).

Andalibi et al. (2016) state that whenever a sexual assault survivor discloses, the individual needs to be direct with their support group, including friends, relatives, and colleagues. However, most male sexual assault victims reveal indirectly, which is often misunderstood or ignored (Andalibi et al., 2016). To differentiate between indirect and

direct support seeking is that direction is to request help for their specific victimization and indirectly hint that there may be a problem (Andalibi et al., 2016). Maestre et al. (2018) state that direct support is explicit; the victim goes into detail and produces a clear request for assistance. Victims who seek immediate help are more likely to be met with approaches than with avoidance (Maestre et al., 2018). Meaning that if the sexual assault victim is direct about the incident and what they need, the supporters are more likely to address the survivor (Maestre et al., 2018). The pro of direct support is that the victim states what he needs and how he goes about obtaining the assistance (Andalibi et al., 2016; Maestre et al., 2018). According to Maestre et al. (2018), the supporters of a sexual assault survivor who directly has been seen to give better support than survivors who are indirect. The disadvantage to direct support is that the survivor is making himself vulnerable and possibly opening himself to secondary victimization (Andalibi et al., 2016).

Indirect support seeking is less explicit; individuals may complain or hint at issues, minimize the problem, or change the topic (Maestre et al., 2018). The response to indirect support seeking may be harmful because the supporter is unsure how to provide support, possibly because of the ambiguity involved (Maestre et al., 2018). The negative characteristics of an indirect support seeker are that their needs are unmet by their sources of support due to the confusion the indirectness creates (Maestre et al., 2018). The benefit of indirect support-seeking is that the survivor does not have to detail his victimization (Andalibi et al., 2016; Maestre et al., 2018). The limitation of indirect support-seeking is that the victim may not receive the support that they need or might be ignored (Andalibi

et al., 2016; Maestre et al., 2018). Individuals need sympathetic others, who can understand the victim and make them feel normal, despite their self-doubt (Andalibi et al., 2016). According to Andalibi et al. (2016), male sexual assault victims prefer anonymity with an online environment, which also facilitates more intimate disclosures.

Furthering the point, Young et al. (2018) conducted a content analysis over five years on sexual assault hotline and had a total of 58 participants. Young et al. (2018) explained that the urge to tell one's story of their victimization but remain anonymous is a collective experience for male sexual assault victims due to a lack of social support. The researchers documented that many of the callers mentioned that they wanted to talk about their assault and that they could not tell their family (Young et al., 2018). The increase in professional support, such as the sexual assault hotline, highlights the limited social support available to male sexual assault victims.

Due to the lack of social support and services dedicated to male sexual assault victims, they often seek assistance by utilizing the sexual assault hotlines (Young et al., 2018). Young et al. (2018) states that male sexual assault victims have the urge to share their stories but want to remain anonymous at the same time due to a lack of support. Although most rape centers refuse to turn away any victim, a male victim's emotional and physical needs are often unmet in both social and professional support (Muller, 2017). In most cases, limited social support coincides with traditional social views on how men are supposed to act.

Traditional Societal Views

Tradition is defined as a set of social customs, ethnic, or family practices passed down from generation to generation (APA, 2020). The American culture has a set of unspoken but well-known traditional social views that govern how each gender conducts itself. There are consequences for those who fail to conform to those guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2018; Delle Donne et al., 2018). The characteristics correlated with masculinity include physical strength, impassiveness, being heterosexual, being self-sufficient, and lacking emotional sensitivity or hegemonic masculinity (APA, 2018; Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2017). The idea of men being any type of victim, especially that of sexual assault, does not fit the definition of masculinity (Javaid, 2016a; Javaid, 2017).

Hegemonic masculinity is the epitome of how men should behave within the social context and describe later in more detail (Javaid, 2018). Javaid (2016b) mentions that even if the male sexual assault survivor seeks assistance from a voluntary agency, they may not receive any help. Due to societal views, voluntary agencies are often standoffish when providing and even listening to male sexual assault survivors (Javaid, 2016b). Lowe (2018) agreed that employees who work closely with male sexual assault victims agree that there are a limited number of places that can help support and assist them. According to research, voluntary agencies involved with helping sexual assault victims tend to create secondary victimization, which will be discussed later in this chapter (Javaid, 2016b). Lowe and Rogers (2017) conducted qualitative research where male rape victims were to write down any advice they would give to police and therapists

about male rape. The male rape victims commented on the homophobic views that many rape support professionals held (Lowe & Rogers, 2017). Male sexual assault victims are reluctant to report their assault due to not being believed by voluntary agencies, emergency personnel, and professionals (Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Ioannou et al., 2017; Porta et al., 2018;).

The societal myths on sexual victimization eclipse that each gender can become a victim or a perpetrator; however, society emphasizes the female victim and the male perpetrator paradigm (Stemple & Meyer, 2017). The paradigm being that only women can be raped, and single men can be rapists (Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Stemple & Meyer, 2017). In Delle Donne et al.'s (2018) research, the participants revealed the societal views on the male gender and how men are not supposed to shed tears; they are expected to be emotionless shells. According to Turchik et al. (2016), society expects sexual assault to involve gender-inclusive violence where the gender roles are not interchangeable. In other words, men can only be perpetrators, and women can only be victims (Turchik et al., 2016). Society counts on the dependence on conventional gender stereotypes (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Rape myths are another significant challenge encountered by male sexual assault victims regarding societal views (Bateman & Wathen, 2015).

Rape myths are described as prejudicial and false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and the perpetrators of rape (Bateman & Wathen, 2015). One example of a male rape myth states that 'men cannot be raped' (Walfield, 2018). Other examples of rape myths are "real men" can defend themselves against their perpetrators, and only homosexual

men are the only ones who can be raped (Walfield, 2018). Male rape only happens in prisons; sexual assault causes homosexuality; women cannot be perpetrators of rape or sexual assault (Javaid, 2017; Walfield, 2018). If a victim gets an erection during the crime, the victim wanted it (Javaid, 2017; Walfield, 2018). Those are just a few examples of the male rape myths that create a challenge for male sexual assault victims.

Rape myths encourage society to defend male sexual assault (Bateman & Wathen, 2015). Bateman and Wathen (2015) stated that the continuance of rape myths could retraumatize male sexual assault survivors and discourage them from reporting their assaults. In their study, Bateman and Wathen (2015) mention interviews conducted with employees at sexual assault crisis centers and how some employees supported male rape myths. For example, some believed that rape myth that men cannot be raped. Another theme that kept appearing is that the men deserved to be assaulted, that their victimization is not essential (Bateman & Wathen, 2015). Due to the male rape myths, a few sexual assault crisis centers offered nonresponsive or insensitive services to male survivors (Bateman & Wathen, 2015). Worst yet, some sexual assault crisis centers declined to assist any male sexual assault survivor (Bateman & Wathen, 2015). In Curry's (2019) and Walfield's (2018) articles, both researchers mention how numerous male sexual assault victims are forced to penetrate their perpetrators. The number is comparable to that of female rape victims. However, due to ingrained stereotypes, the statistics are largely ignored.

Seibold-Simpson et al. (2018) conducted a research study where 916 participants read vignettes and rated the perpetrator and victim's blameworthiness. In Seibold-

Simpson et al.'s (2018) study, the participants held negative attitudes toward male victims of female-perpetrated rape. Furthering the point about traditional societal views, Douglass and Aguanno (2020) state that research supports egalitarian relationships with the men being active and female being passive. Douglass and Aguanno (2020) reported that the participants mentioned that societal attitudes toward male victims with a female perpetrator are among the reasons there is nondisclosure. Due to the traditional societal view of women only being victims of sexual assault, it is often claimed that the female perpetrator is engaging in misguided attempts at intimacy, is often disturbed, or abnormal (Douglass & Aguanno, 2020). With the claims of being mistaken, distressed, or strange, the female perpetrator is now seen as a victim (Douglass & Aguanno, 2020).

Traditional societal views are problematic since they imply that women cannot be sexually aggressive (Douglass & Aguanno, 2020). Indeed, participants perceived male-perpetrated abuse differently from female perpetrated sexual violence (Douglass & Aguanno, 2020). The participants deemed that female-perpetrated sexual abuse is not as harmful to the victim as male-perpetrated abuse due to the variation in muscle mass and strength, leading to worse outcomes for male-perpetrated abuse (Douglass & Aguanno, 2020). Traditional societal views can lead to societal influence, which has positive and negative consequences for male sexual assault victims.

Societal Impact

There are five elements of stigma due to societal influence involved with male victimization: labeling, stereotyping, the loss of status, discrimination, and the need for power (Campbell-Hawkins, 2019; Link & Phelan, 2001). Whenever a male sexual assault

victim contemplates reporting their victimization, the five elements of stigma from societal influences impact their decision (Campbell-Hawkins, 2019; Link & Phelan, 2001). According to the labeling theory, the first element in stigma is labeling, including homosexuals, victims, and survivors. Campbell-Hawkins (2019) stated that once a label has been established, the next step is to connect the individual to a certain stereotype. The third step differentiates the individual who has been labeled from the rest of society (Campbell-Hawkins, 2019; Link & Phelan, 2001). The fourth step is that once the individual is labeled, then stereotyped, they start being discriminated against and losing status and income. The last step in the stigma sums up how an individual labeled and then discriminated against will lose economic, political, and social power. Ioannou et al. (2017) stated that whenever a male sexual assault victim reports their assault, they are often not believed. Besides, they may not report their victimization because they may feel apprehensive about being labeled as homosexual (Ioannou et al., 2017). Due to society's unrealistic expectations, male sexual assault survivors often are reluctant to seek assistance from voluntary agencies, establish a way to recover from their victimization, or take advantage of what aid is available (Javaid, 2016b).

Lowe (2018) stated that employees who work closely with male sexual assault victims agree that a limited number of places can help support and assist them. According to research, voluntary agencies involved with helping sexual assault victims tend to create secondary victimization (Javaid, 2016b). One significant societal influence on a male sexual assault survivor is that rape of a male is not defined by the same law that female rape is under and may have different consequences, if any, at all (Turchik et al.,

2016). Turchik and Edwards (2012) stated that, in most cases, forced oral sex is not considered “rape” and has entirely different consequences. Turchik et al. (2016) discussed how societal beliefs in rape myths, such as the concept that men cannot be sexually assaulted and that rape could only occur between men and women, negatively impact male sexual assault victims.

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One significant societal influence on a male sexual assault survivor is that rape of a male is not defined by the same law that female rape is under, and may have different consequences, if any at all (Turchik et al., 2016). Although there have been changes to laws to include language that is more gender neutral, there were little to no changes in how the cases are investigated, charged, and prosecuted (Turchik et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). The Honorable Jack Panella (2015) wrote a bench book for

Pennsylvania sexual offenses, mainly focusing on the male offender and female victim paradigm. Turchik et al. (2016) continue by stating that female perpetrated sexual coercion is not seen as a prosecuted type of sexual aggression. Turchik et al. (2016) discussed how societal beliefs in rape myths, such as the concept that men cannot be sexually assaulted and that rape could only occur between men and women, negatively impact male sexual assault victims. Due to societal beliefs in rape myths and being overlooked, male sexual assault victims, sexual assault agencies do not reach out to male victims and thus isolate, disregard, and segregate male rape survivors (Javaid, 2016b).

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemony is defined as the dominance of one individual, group, or state over others (APA, 2020). Meanwhile, the definition of masculinity is the possession of social role behaviors that are presumed characteristics of a male (APA, 2020). Whenever the two terms are combined, the words are then defined as idealized heterosexual masculinity dominant over women and inferior men (Javaid, 2018; Morettini, 2016). The concept of hegemonic masculinity acknowledges the presence of multiple masculinities, which generates hierarchical domination with the idealized heterosexual male reigning over everyone else (Morettini, 2016). According to Morettini (2016), all men position themselves into the hierarchy and internalize their behavior. The internalization of the hierarchy of dominance is pertinent in understanding male sexual assault survivors and the internal struggle whenever it comes to seeking assistance (Javaid, 2018).

Javaid (2018) states that male sexual assault survivors are placed at the bottom of the dominance hierarchy due to power and social relations. This is because of their

identity as a victim, being perceived as emasculated, and the stigmatization surrounding the survivors of sexual assault (Javaid, 2018). Being labeled as a sexual assault victim refutes the gender expectations of being a male (Javaid, 2018; Walfield, 2018). The men who exemplify hegemonic masculinity and thus are dominant over women, and inferior men follow the social expectations of how a male should behave (Javaid, 2018).

Hegemonic masculinity needs to be acknowledged by all those who work with male sexual assault survivors so that the professionals can combat the irrational beliefs that are instilled in men (Javaid, 2018).

Javaid (2017) conducted a qualitative research study with 33 male participants and 37 female participants regarding hegemonic masculinity. Javaid (2017) specifically sought responses to how male rape hinders the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, male rape is strictly a homosexual issue, and women cannot be perpetrators of sexual assault and rape. Javaid's (2017) research study found that most of the respondents agreed with the specific responses such as women cannot rape and that men cannot be victims of sexual assault. Hegemonic masculinity is one of the various gender-specific challenges whenever it comes to seeking help for a sexual assault survivor (Javaid, 2017).

Male-Specific Challenges to Seeking Help

Challenges are mental, emotional, or behavioral limitations in individuals that restrict, impede, or block progress or achieve an objective (APA, 2018). A gender-specific challenge is that men tend to issue labeling an unwanted sexual experience as either rape or sexual assault (Delle Donne et al., 2018). According to Delle Donne et al. (2018), many male sexual assault survivors may not realize that what they experienced

was coerced or unwanted until well after their assault. The Department of Health and Human Services (2019) defines sexual coercion as an unwanted sexual activity when the victim is pressured, tricked, threatened, or forced in a nonphysical way. A few examples of sexual coercion are wearing the victim down by frequently asking for sex, making the victim feel bad or obligated, and lying or threatening to spread rumors, amongst other things (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Wilson and Miller (2016) conducted a meta-analysis to estimate the mean prevalence of unacknowledged rape. The researchers stated that many sexual assault victims do not label their victimization as rape but as a miscommunication or as bad sex (Wilson & Miller, 2016). Wilson and Miller's (2016) findings revealed that more than half of the sexual assault survivors did not label their victimization as rape. Victims not being aware that sexual coercion lies within the realm of rape is a significant challenge to reporting because many victims do not classify it as such (Wilson & Miller, 2016).

Male sexual assault survivors encounter negative feelings involved with being a victim, such as intense feelings of embarrassment (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a). Embarrassment plays a role in reporting sexual victimization due to thoughts that men should have been able to fend off their perpetrators (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a). The victimization may leave some male sexual assault survivors feeling inferior to other men. The fear of being judged for not fending off their attacker and embarrassment intertwined are two main reasons why male sexual assault survivors refuse to report their victimizations (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a).

Societal and gender norms play a significant role in men seeking justice for their sexual assault, leading to one of the significant challenges for survivors (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

Male sexual assault survivors also create a challenge for reporting their victimization by internalizing gender norms (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Ioannou et al., 2017). Internalizing gender norms, especially male gender norms, reinforces the notion that only weak men are raped or sexually assaulted and report their victimizations (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Ioannou et al., 2017). Male sexual assault victims are usually ashamed of their victimization, which is made more significant whenever they are laughed at whenever they seek services for their assault (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Ioannou et al., 2017). Delle Donne et al. (2018) stated that one male survivor was informed that he was supposed to enjoy being assaulted. The survivors who do muster the courage to report their victimization fear of being viewed as homosexual (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a; Porta et al., 2018).

However, Young et al. (2018) mentioned that male sexual assault survivors deal with a lot of mistrust of others, which becomes a significant challenge to reporting their assault. The distrust that male sexual assault survivors have toward others; leads to most male participants ending the calls at the crisis center (Young et al., 2018). Lonsway and Archambault (2019) mention that sexual assault victims distrust others due to their traumatization and may seem as if the victim is letting their guard down. Participants revealed distrust of personal and professional networks by what some of the respondents mentioned during their short calls. Most of the participants stated that they had no social

support and needed to discuss their assault after the crisis worker offered professional services to the victim. They immediately ended the call (Young et al., 2018). Abrupt hang-ups associated with male sexual assault victims were documented at being 25.9% or, in other words, 15 callers out of 58 (Young et al., 2018).

Bordere (2017) mentioned that sexual assault survivors deal with angst, loss, and social injustice. Due to the traumatic nature of the sexual assault, a significant portion or 65% of male sexual assault survivors met the criteria for PTSD, thus dealing with the angst of being a survivor (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019). Bordere (2017) states several social injustices such as loss of self and others, the belief that others are good, and loss of self-identity. Bordere's (2017) article assesses the inequity found in therapeutic settings for sexual assault survivors, which do not account for the loss or grief that each sexual assault survivor experiences.

If a male sexual assault survivor does choose to seek assistance for their victimization, finding the right professional becomes a problem (Delle Donne et al., 2018). The professional should be someone who can understand the male survivor's perspectives and support them in a nonjudgmental way (Delle Donne et al., 2018). It is difficult for a male survivor to find a professional to trust and feel comfortable with (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Delle Donne et al. (2018) stated that the participants indicated heterogeneity of needs. To overcome the challenge of finding the right professional, noted an emphasis on a trusting therapeutic relationship (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

Delle Donne et al. (2018) conducted a study involving 118 participants regarding challenges that may arise that prevent male sexual assault survivors from disclosing their

victimization and seeking support services. Out of 114 participants who responded to the question of seeking services after their victimization, only 11% ($N = 13$) ever sought services (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Out of the in-depth interviews with 19 participants, several of the participants noted that the societal stigma surrounding male victims and being labeled “weak” and “not masculine enough” was a challenge that was encountered (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Being labeled “weak” or “not masculine enough” leads to the next obstacle that both male and female sexual assault victims encounter, which is victim-blaming (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

Victim-blaming can come in many forms, sometimes it is intentional, and other times it is not (Roberts, 2016). Roberts (2016) states that whenever an individual begins to question the victim on what they could have done to prevent the assault from occurring, that individual is participating in victim-blaming. Victim-blaming is not just explicitly accusing someone of failing to protect themselves from the assault. Still, it is more understated forms such as contemplating how the victim should have conducted themselves to avoid the situation (Roberts, 2016).

Several factors influence victim-blaming such as not knowing the victim personally, race/ethnicity, sexual history, and socioeconomic status of the victim and perpetrator (Gravelin et al., 2019). Another factor in victim blaming is the gender of the perpetrator and that of the victim (Gravelin et al., 2019). Intentional and unintentional victim-blaming attitudes toward sexual assault survivors, denial or omitting services that would benefit the survivor, and the provider’s overall demeanor have been associated with secondary victimization (Gravelin et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2017). Victim-blaming

or the fear of being victim-blamed is one potential challenge that male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever reporting their victimization (Gravelin et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2017). Men who are victims of sexual assault encounter challenges before reporting and continue to encounter challenges after they report; this is a part of the impact of their victimization (Porta et al., 2018).

Psychological and Physiological Impact of Victimization

The psychological impact on heterosexual male sexual assault victims is essential to understand as both a challenge and a consequence. Walfield (2018) states that the struggle in being labeled a victim and identifying as a male can lead to dissociation with severe impacts on the male survivor's emotional and psychiatric well-being. Bateman and Wathen (2015) mention that male sexual assault survivors tend to have complications in their romantic and family relationships, sexual intimacy, and work satisfaction.

According to Bordere (2017) states that society refuses to acknowledge sexual assault survivor's loss experiences have been described as disenfranchised grief. Bordere (2017) further explains that disenfranchised grief occurs whenever it is not openly acknowledged or publicly supported. Delle Donne et al. (2018) stated that male sexual assault survivors often have PTSD, psychological distress, sexual dysfunction, risky sexual behavior, self-harming behaviors, self-medicating by utilizing alcohol and illicit substances. According to Delle Donne (2018), even though the victimization has dire consequences, male survivors usually go untreated.

According to Bateman and Wathen (2015), due to the reluctance to report their victimization, male sexual assault survivors can develop eating disorders, develop

substance abuse issues, and have suicidal ideation. Batman and Wathen (2015) mention that men sexually assaulted by women are in dire need of mental health treatment. It is also important to note that even if a male has an erection or ejaculates during the assault, that it is an involuntary physiological response, it is not due to being aroused (Perkins, 2017).

The long-term impact on male sexual assault victims can be damaging and may worsen due to their reluctance to report their victimization (Perkins, 2017). According to Perkins (2017), research has shown that male sexual assault victims have a higher rate of sexually transmitted diseases and human immunodeficiency virus, also known as HIV. Numerous studies have revealed male sexual assault survivors are more at risk for sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and HIV; male survivors also have a higher rate of having sexual encounters that end in pregnancy (Perkins, 2017). Male sexual assault survivors also tend to turn self-medicating by utilizing alcohol and illicit substances such as methamphetamines and opioids. Survivors who did seek assistance, who had issues that they had been dealing with for a while, were dealt with quickly by the professional instead of taking the necessary time to heal (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

Along with the higher rate of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, Perkins (2017) stated that male survivors also have more extended hospital stays than those who have not been sexually assaulted. Perkins (2017) similarly mentioned that male sexual assault survivors have more prevalence of headaches, chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, and limitations on activities. Understanding the psychological and physiological signs of assault can help identify male sexual assault victims so that they may be provided

services and information to help them adjust. Psychological and physiological distress are not the types of difficulty that sexual assault survivors face; survivors also face financial stress (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

Due to all of the physiological and psychological issues associated with male sexual assault survivors, the term “complex trauma” is now being utilized to describe the symptoms not covered by PTSD (Lowe, 2018). Leonard (2018) mentions how the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, also known as the *DSM-5*, does not recognize complex PTSD or “complex trauma” as a separate disorder. A person diagnosed with “complex trauma” or complex PTSD has the symptoms of PTSD; however, they also suffer from additional symptoms (Leonard, 2018). Leonard (2018) defines “complex trauma” as a series of events or a prolonged event. Leonard (2018) continues by stating that “complex trauma” symptoms can be more persistent and more extreme than PTSD. According to ICD-11 (World Health Organization, 2019) in “complex trauma” the PTSD criteria is met and is often characterized by severe and persistent issues with affect regulation, diminished beliefs in oneself, and difficulties in sustaining relationships with friends, family, and significant others.

Due to the difficulties in sustaining relationships; individuals with “complex trauma” tend to avoid people and feel a lack of connection to others (Leonard, 2018). Male sexual assault survivors may end up self-medicating by using illicit substances and alcohol to deal with their trauma (Leonard, 2018; Lowe, 2018). The survivors may try avoiding unpleasant situations by becoming “people pleasers” (Leonard, 2018). Male survivors may also start self-harming to deal with the trauma they have endured and the

psychological distress they are in (Leonard, 2018). Along with the psychological and physiological cost of rape, there is another significant impact: the financial cost of the victimization.

Secondary Victimization

Secondary victimization occurs whenever the victim perceives that the individual or professional, they disclosed their assault to react as victim-blaming or discriminatory, leading to being retraumatized (Jackson et al., 2017). Behaviors leading to secondary victimization include dismissing the victim's assault, victim-blaming, and attributing the assault to the use of alcohol or other substances (Jackson et al., 2017). The response of the individuals who are informed of the assault impact whether a male sexual assault survivor discloses victimizations in the future (Jackson et al., 2017). Jackson et al. (2017) stated that another way of creating secondary victimization has the male sexual assault survivor extensively recount their assault or repeating the incident numerous times. They are noting that retelling of the victimization can lead to refusing to disclose sexual assaults in the future (Jackson et al., 2017).

Whenever a male sexual assault survivor does report their victimization with medical and legal professionals, there is a slim chance that the professional will follow-up on the disclosure and the responsibility rested on the survivors (Jackson et al., 2017). After the male survivor disclosed their assault, the professionals dismissed further discussion about the victimization, which creates secondary victimization (Jackson et al., 2017). Secondary victimization behaviors include dismissal, blaming, and attributing the assault to alcohol use or sexual orientation. Jackson et al. (2017) noted that sexual assault

victims feel violated, depressed, anxious whenever they perceive that the medical and legal professionals are omitting services, denying the incident, or have conscious or unconscious victim-blaming attitudes. Male victims of sexual assault that the most hurtful result of disclosure experienced apparent consequences, which included both social and professional outcomes (Jackson et al., 2017).

Donohue (2019) wrote explicitly about the process and the challenges faced by sexual assault survivors. Donohue (2019) included a questionnaire within a handbook for sexual assault survivors to answer so that there can be a better understanding of how survivors feel and what they experience whenever it comes to reporting their sexual assault. Examples of secondary victimization include not being believed by the judicial system, fear of the actual trial, or reuniting with their perpetrator (Donohue, 2019). Jackson et al. (2017) mention that a significant impact regarding secondary victimization is whenever the male sexual assault victim discloses their assault to law enforcement. Male sexual assault survivors frequently mentioned how their past behaviors, poor decision-making, or use of illicit substances were brought up to explain the incident (Jackson et al., 2017). For some male survivors, the disclosure recipients outright dismissed the event by denying that the incident is not considered sexual assault or by stating that the male survivor is lying (Jackson et al., 2017).

Male sexual assault victims fear that their claims will be dismissed during the trial or that they will not be believed (Donohue, 2019; Jackson et al., 2017). Another issue that male sexual assault victims fear is repeatedly going into excessive details about their assault (Jackson et al., 2017). Male survivors also face tangible consequences such as loss

of social status and possibly losing their job (Jackson et al., 2017). RAINN (2020) informs survivors of what to expect from a trial and being reunited with their perpetrator. Acknowledging how a survivor may feel overwhelmed and even intimidated, RAINN (2020) provides an overview of the process and services available to alleviate some uncomfortableness and services that will help the survivor feel prepared.

Donohue (2019) mentions that sexual assault survivors fear prosecution does not appropriately handle the case. Being a witness in a criminal case is very intimidating, and the victims are thrust into the spotlight; it takes a lot of courage, and the survivor needs a lot of support (RAINN, 2020). Freeman (2018) mentioned the judicial system's daunting process and how unfavorable the statistics which are out of 1,000 rapes, only six rapists will ever spend time behind bars. Freeman (2018) who uses RAINN's statistics, states that most rapists will walk free. Along with the challenges sexual assault survivors face, Donohue (2019) also includes ways to prevent secondary victimization and resources available to the survivors.

The Cost of Victimization

Delle Donne et al. (2018) ascertained that the male sexual assault survivors felt that the cost of services is a significant challenge in seeking resources. The participants stated that the copayments for support services are too expensive for them to afford (Delle Donne et al., 2018). Crist (2018) noted that sexual assault survivors with private insurance usually pay 14% of their medical bills. In other words, the survivor pays \$950 out of an approximate \$6,739 bill within the first 30 days after the assault.

In 1994 and then again in 2013, the Violence Against Women Act was passed, which stated that states are to pay for sexual assault forensic exams, which are also known as “rape kits” (Crist, 2018). A “rape kit” is a container that includes a checklist, materials, and instructions, along with envelopes and containers that can store DNA samples (RAINN, 2019). However, other medical procedures are done during the “rape kit” that the state is not covered (Crist, 2018). Crist (2018) mentioned that the cost of prescriptions for pain, antibiotics, and HIV prevention medications are another cost that sexual assault survivors endure. This list only includes medical expenses for after the rape; it does not include the psychological cost to assist victims with their trauma. According to Crist (2018), the financial burden for sexual assault survivors' medical expenses adds to the emotional burden.

Andrews' (2019) article mentioned a sexual assault survivor who underwent the “rape kit” and how miserable it is to partake in. The survivor had received multiple hospital bills for the “rape kit,” and after refusing to pay, the hospital bill was sent to collections. Andrews (2019) stated that many sexual assault survivors receive hospital bills that eventually go into collection, thus impacting the survivor's emotional well-being. Andrews (2019) noted that the survivor tried to move on with their life, but anytime they had received a bill or a phone call from a debt collector, it brought back the raw emotions connected to the incident.

Fantz (2015) mentioned the costs of rape, focusing primarily on the financial aspect that rape survivors encounter. One of the interviewees stated that she received a bill from the hospital for emergency services for \$1,427.96. The following day, another

bill arrived in the amount of \$522. Shortly after that, she received another bill for \$231 (Fantz, 2015). The survivor stated she was barely keeping it together after her victimization, but now after the medical bills have arrived, she could not keep it together any longer (Fantz, 2015).

The participants in Delle Donne's et al. (2018) research study mentioned that it is challenging to find professionals that can accept their insurance. The respondents in Delle Donne's (2018) research indicated that even if the professional services accepted their insurance, they would still need to pay \$400 or so a month to seek the treatment that they needed for trauma. Alongside medical bills for physiological and psychological services, survivors may also incur financial losses from breaking their lease, taking time off from their job, and possibly losing their job (Fantz, 2015). After all of the costs, physiological, psychological, and financial charges of rape, it is not surprising that rape takes a toll on a survivor's relationships.

Relationships After Sexual Assault

After a sexual assault, survivors face many internal and external challenges, especially whenever it comes to relationships, even those that are already established before the victimization. Perkins (2017) created an article that informed healthcare professionals of male sexual assault survivors' characteristics. One of the characteristics that Perkins (2017) references is that male sexual assault survivors may withdraw and distance themselves from their friends and loved ones. Male sexual assault survivors may avoid certain people and places (Perkins, 2017). Lowe (2018) mentions that male sexual assault survivors may have trust and attachment difficulties; they are likely to become

emotionally withdrawn; they may begin having issues with parenting their children. The survivor may either begin having sexual dysfunction or become promiscuous. RAINN (2020) states that a significant impact on male sexual assault victims' relationships relies on the stereotype revolving around masculinity and being seen as a victim.

Review of Research Methodology

A similar study was conducted by Tracy Hollingworth (2019), whose dissertation was based on female sexual assault survivors and the therapeutic relationship while utilizing interpretative phenomenological (IPA) methodology. Hollingworth (2019) used IPA since it helped her understand therapists who work with women who were sexually abused as children. The study correlates with my research by relating to the specific challenges that sexual assault victims face when talking about their victimizations.

Marjorie Yvonne Campbell-Hawkins (2019) conducted her dissertation on African American male IPV survivors and help-seeking; she utilized IPA as well. Campbell-Hawkins' study is similar to mine because we emphasize the challenges faced by male survivors whenever it comes to seeking help for their victimization (Campbell-Hawkins, 2019). Campbell-Hawkins (2019) research also focused on female perpetrators of male IPV, whereas I intend to focus on female perpetrators in male sexual assault.

Another similar study that correlates to my own was conducted by Arielle Chieko Woodyard (2019), who focused her research on male victims of IPV experiences. Woodyard (2019) mentions how society stigmatizes any type of victimization, especially whenever the victim is a male. The study indicates numerous studies on IPV victims, but the studies focus primarily on female victims (Woodyard, 2019). Woodyard's (2019)

dissertation explicitly focused on male victims of female perpetrated IPV, the survivors seeking supportive and psychological help, and the survivor's experiences of receiving the services.

Woodyard (2019) discovered that male IPV victimization was seen as less severe than female IPV victimization. The participants in Woodyard's (2019) study stated that discussing their victimization with their family was not an easy task and that law enforcement was biased. One of Woodyard's (2019) findings is that the services for IPV survivors are not the same across genders; there are fewer services aimed at male IPV survivors than there are for female survivors.

Summary

Research has revealed numerous challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter when reporting their victimization. Explaining that male sexual assault survivors meet adverse treatment once they say their victimizations. Male sexual assault survivors face psychological challenges in voicing their assault due to fear of being viewed as a homosexual and the possibility of not being believed. Unreported sexual assault can result in severe psychological and behavior issues that can be detrimental to survivors or their friends and loved ones. Sexual assault, whether it is reported or not, is problematic to the victim's interpersonal relationships and internal thought processes. Along with the psychological issues, men face physiological problems as well, which usually goes unchecked.

Male sexual assault survivors do not have many resources or services aimed at their specific gender or victimization. Men have similar needs to that of their female

counterparts, but they also have gender-specific needs, such as reassuring them of their masculinity. Whenever one is to think of a sexual assault survivor, most, if not all, would think about a female. There are a variety of challenges that a male sexual assault survivor must face. The challenges need to be noticed and addressed so that society and even the victims themselves can decrease the stigma surrounding male sexual assault survivors.

Often the cost of medical and professional services hinders male sexual assault survivors from seeking the assistance that they need. States are obligated to pay for “rape kits” but no further medical or psychological services, leaving the survivor to pay for the services out of pocket. The cost is problematic due to victims not receiving the services that they need to treat their trauma. Another hindrance is that male sexual assault victims who seek medical and psychological treatment are often left to pay for the bill out of pocket, even if federal requirements state that the state has to pay for them (Andrews, 2019).

The present study filled that gap in the specific challenges that male sexual assault survivors encountered and overcame whenever it came to reporting their victimization that are different from female sexual assault survivors. Being knowledgeable about the particular obstacles will help researchers know how to rid the stigma surrounding male sexual assault victims. Thus, extended the knowledge of how to direct male sexual assault survivors toward the services they need for their physical and psychological health. The following chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct this study. The methodology section three includes the specifics used for this study, such as the analysis, the sample population, and the instruments utilized.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Methodology

There have been numerous studies that focus on female sexual assault victims and the challenges that they encounter whenever they seek assistance (Fedina et al., 2020; Maiuro, 2015; O'Neal & Hayes, 2020). However, their male counterparts and the challenges that they encounter is an understudied subject. According to the Center for Disease Control (2019), one in four men will face sexual violence within their lifespan. A majority of male sexual assault victims never come forward (CDC, 2019). Researchers have revealed the significance in identifying challenges that sexual assault victims encounter due to the negative impact on a victim's psychological, physiological, and mental state. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of male sexual assault survivors. To better understand the gender-specific challenges that male survivors face, an IPA was employed as a methodology.

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of the study. First, I explain the research design and my rationale, followed by my role as the researcher. I then describe the study methodology, followed by the issues of trustworthiness and the plan used for addressing them within the study. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations pertinent to the study.

Research Design and Rationale

There are three research questions within this study, as follows:

RQ1: What are the challenges that male sexual assault victims who sought help for their assault experience when it comes to reporting the assault?

RQ2: How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault describe their experience whenever it comes to seeking help?

RQ3: How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault overcome their fears and seek help?

Central Phenomenon of the Study

Phenomenology is a movement in European philosophy that was initiated by a German philosopher named Edmund Husserl (APA, 2020). Husserl stated that mental events should be studied and described in their terms (APA, 2020). In this study, I focused only on heterosexual male sexual assault victims and the challenges that they encounter when reporting their victimization. The nature of this qualitative study was an IPA in which I examined what obstacles male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever it came to reporting their victimizations. One of the central phenomena that is discussed in this research is sexual assault. Sexual assault is defined as the violent sexual penetration of an individual, which includes forced vaginal, oral, and anal penetration (APA, 2020). Meanwhile, the scholarly definition of a challenge is something that restricts, impedes, or blocks progress or achievement of an ultimate objective (APA, 2020). Challenges are mental, emotional, or behavioral limitations in individuals and groups (APA, 2020). The next section discusses the research tradition that I used during my research study.

Research Tradition

Qualitative methodology is a method of research that produces non-numerical, descriptive data, such as observations of behavior and personal accounts or experiences

(APA, 2020). Different types of qualitative research include content analysis of narratives, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and case studies (APA, 2020). I chose in-depth interviews for my research study to understand the male sexual assault survivor's view regarding seeking services and the challenges that they had encountered. The narrative is not appropriate for this study since I did not focus on all of the events of the assault, but how the participant felt and what occurred after the assault. The participant observation was not appropriate because the event has already occurred. Choosing the case study would not be appropriate because I was not able to get in-depth information regarding the challenges involved. Choosing a qualitative study allowed me to get in-depth, lived experiences of the male sexual assault victims. Along with the qualitative analysis, I used IPA to focus on the meaning, structure, and essence of the individuals who chose to participate.

I used the IPA to gain insight into the phenomena of the gender-specific challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever it comes to reporting their victimizations. The goal of IPA is to explore in detail how the study's participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The primary of aspect IPA research studies is the meanings of particular experiences and events (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA is concerned with lived experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Smith and Shinebourne (2012) continue stating that IPA recognizes that experiences cannot be extracted for the participant's head. Instead, it involves a process of engagement and interpretation on the part of the researcher.

There are three primary theoretical aspects of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographic (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Phenomenology is primarily concerned with human lived experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA is also influenced by hermeneutics, which is a theory of interpretation (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA is an idiographic approach due to being concerned with the particular experience of the individual (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The psychological process of examining experiences is described as double hermeneutics (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I used double hermeneutics during the interviews with the participants. The present study was aimed at exploring the personal life experiences of heterosexual male sexual assault victims. The study examined male victims reporting their victimization and their perceptions of the challenges that they encountered. Therefore, it was paramount that I, as the researcher, was aware of any biases or attitudes that could have influenced my interpretation process.

I used IPA in this study to gain insight into the experiences of male sexual assault survivors and how those thinking patterns impacted the reporting of their victimization. IPA was the best choice for this research topic due to focusing on experiences, especially experiences participants deem as important (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I focused on important and tragic challenges that male victim's face whenever it comes to reporting their victimizations to the proper authorities.

Rationale

Qualitative research analysis involves fewer research participants than quantitative research. A researcher that uses qualitative research can assist researchers in

accessing the thoughts and emotions of research participants, which encourages the development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). A researcher who uses qualitative research can inform other researchers how and why a particular behavior occurs (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Researchers who use qualitative research can use the collection of data in a setting that is sensitive to the participants and places that are being studied while observing how the interviews are affecting the participants (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The data analysis in qualitative research establishes themes or patterns (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The outcome of qualitative research involves the voices of the research participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, along with an elaborate description and interpretation of the problem that was being researched and extended to literature or signaled a call for action (Creswell, 2012).

According to Alase (2017), researchers who use IPA have the best opportunity to understand the innermost thoughts of lived experiences of each of the research participants. The main objective of an IPA research study is to explore the lived experiences and allow the participants to narrate the research findings within their own words (Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) stated that the role and responsibility of a researcher who conducts qualitative (phenomenology) research is to investigate and interpret the impact of the research topic on the lived experiences of the research participants.

Four other qualitative methods could have been considered, and they are ethnography, grounded theory, case study, and narrative analysis (Creswell, 2013). However, these methods were not suitable for this research study. Ethnography would not

be ideal due to it focusing on observing a social group, and therefore does not fit the intent of my research study. Another reason ethnography would not fit my research study would be that I would have to do direct observation, which typically takes place over an extended period of time (APA, 2020). I had no intention of generating a theory which makes ground theory unacceptable. Case studies do not offer an in-depth description of lived experiences as IPA does, which made it unfit for my research. Finally, narrative analysis described how the experience of a research participant as it unfolds over time rather than examining the meaning of the experience, which led to IPA being the most appropriate choice for exploring the lived experiences of heterosexual male sexual assault victims and the gender-specific challenges that they encounter whenever they report their victimization.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the sole researcher in this study was to conduct phenomenological research that explores the challenges that male sexual assault victims encounter whenever they report their victimization. The goal of the researcher is to transcribe the participant's perspective accurately, so that it is understandable to the audience (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The data were obtained by interviewing the participants in person and over Skype or Zoom.

To avoid conflict of interest, I did not have any personal knowledge of the participants before the interview process. The research did not take place in an environment where I am employed or have professional obligations. The incentive for this research study was a \$10 electronic gift card. Another responsibility that I took on

during data collection as the researcher was reducing potential harm that the participants may encounter (APA, 2020). I did not hold any bias against male victims of sexual assault so there was no issue that could have risen and jeopardize my research.

One strength that I brought to this study was my professional occupation as an outpatient therapist. I have developed professional skills that assisted me in building rapport with the participants and applying therapeutic modalities whenever needed. Due to my occupation, I was capable of showing empathy and creating a supportive environment for the participants. I notated my emotions before and after the interviews. I used social support to help with any emotional distress that could have risen during the interviews, while maintaining the anonymity of the participants with people outside the study.

Methodology

Selection of Participants

Phenomenological research utilizes small sample sizes from two participants to twenty-five participants (Alase, 2017). The selection of participants also needs to reflect and represent the homogeneity of the participants to get a better understand of the lived experiences (Alase, 2017). Homogeneous sampling means having the same or relatively similar composition throughout (APA, 2020). This study focused on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors who report their victimization. This study focused on a sample size of eight participants, which was whenever saturation was reached. Saturation is a process in data collection where no new information is obtained (Saunders et al., 2018).

Participants were interviewed according to the requirements that I listed in an advertisement (Appendix A). The criteria that were used to satisfy the selection of participants were the following: (a) a heterosexual male who has been sexually assaulted, (b) reported their victimization to the police, (c) the assault had to have happened in adulthood, (d) the assault happened within the last 5 years, and (e) over the age of 18 years. Exclusion criteria include (a) having serious mental health issues either related or unrelated to the assault, (b) was domestic abuse, (c) under the age of 18 (d) being transgender, and (e) being non-heterosexual.

In obtaining participants for the research, each participant needed to meet the criteria, as mentioned earlier, along with the willingness to participate in this study. Flyers were posted in outpatient settings and on social media inquiring of interest to participate in academic research. The potential participant made first contact either by telephone or email. Once I contacted a potential participant, I made sure that they met the requirements of the research study. The participants were able to contact me through email or telephone. The participants contacted me to say that they are interested in completing the interview. After the participants reached out to say that they were interested, I sent each a copy of the informed consent. I then had the participants email me back saying if they consent to the research study. The participant and I then set up a time that worked best for them so that I could conduct the interview. The interview did not last longer than 1 hour. Depending on the comfortability of the participant and geographical distance, the interview took place on Zoom or on Skype. Upon completion

of the interview, I thanked them for their contribution to my research study, compensated them for their time, and debriefed them before they left which is located in Appendix B.

Instrumentation

Semi structured interviews were conducted on Zoom or Skype. With the participant's consent, the interviews were audio recorded so that as the researcher I focused primarily on the interview and not be distracted or distract the participant by writing the entire time. The semi structured interview questions were framed from a phenomenological perspective. The format consisted of open-ended questions that were reframed to get a thorough overview of the participants' experience.

Interview Questions

The research questions focused on the participant's definition of sexual assault and the challenges they encountered. The interview questions were chosen to see what specific challenges, if any, the male sexual assault victim encountered while they sought help. To do this, I used semi structured questions since it is an effective method for collecting data that includes qualitative, open-ended questions and to explore the participants lived experiences (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The first research question involved gender-specific challenges that the participants encountered while they sought help. The second research question involved how the participants saw their experience. While the third research question focused on how the participants overcame their fears and sought help. The interview questions were chosen to encourage the participants to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences.

The content validity was established by the interview questions being directly linked to the main research question. There are five different types of validity, which include descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalization, and evaluative (Hayashi et al., 2019). Hayashi et al. (2019) mentioned that validity should be assured by several techniques and at different stages. In this study I utilized two types of validity which are descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive validity, which refers to the research not being distorted or embellished the information received, the facts are from what the participants experienced (Hayashi et al., 2019). Secondly, I utilized interpretive validity, which refers to the researcher's sensitivity and mental process to capture the meaning of events and behaviors that are involved with the phenomenon (Hayashi et al., 2019).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This research study was approved by Walden University IRB (approval # is 03-15-22-0385653). As the researcher, I collected data through semi structured interviews in person and via Skype. Flyers were posted inside the offices of counselors and therapists at crisis centers and on social media platforms such as Facebook to assist with recruitment which is located in Appendix A. Men who are interested in participating were required to contact me by phone number or email which will be listed on the flyer in Appendix A. As soon as I received feedback from a potential participant, I made sure that the participant met the inclusion criteria and then I sent them consent forms within 24 hours and scheduled a time for the interview to be conducted. If the participant wanted a face-to-face interview, I would have met the participant at a place where they feel comfortable and where there will be privacy. The participants were given full disclosure

including the participants' rights to refuse to take part and the risks and benefits of the study. After I received the participant's acceptance by email, I began data collection. For participants who were interviewed by Skype or Zoom, I ensured privacy by conducting the interviews inside my locked office where no one has access unless they have a key. Once the data collection was finished, I debriefed each participant by reiterating member checking procedures and how I will be distributing the final research results and offer information for free counseling services for any issues that could have arisen. Whenever the interviews were finished, the participants received a \$10 gift card.

After I interviewed each of the participants, I uploaded the audio recording to my password-protected computer and then saved it to my iCloud as well. I stored all of the documentation in a locked area within my home, where I was the only one who had access. Each of the audio recordings were transcribed by myself. As soon as I finished transcribing each of the interviews, I emailed each of the participants so that they can verify plausibility and validity through a qualitative process called member checking. A member check is a qualitative process where the researcher reaches out to the participants and requests feedback on their initial responses as recorded by the researcher (APA, 2020). Conducting a member check is to ensure the accuracy and internal validity of a qualitative study (APA, 2020).

Data Analysis Plan

The sole data collection plan that I utilized are semi structured interviews to answer research questions. I used data coding to analyze the information that I obtained from the interviews. The data coding technique that I utilized is deductive coding.

Deductive coding is where the codes are theoretical concepts or themes that come from existing literature (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The first step in deductive coding is becoming familiar with the data that you as a researcher collected (Caulfield, 2020). The first step involves transcription of audio, reading through and taking notes, and reviewing the data to become familiar with it (Caulfield, 2020). During this step, I listened to the recorded interviews and read and reread the transcripts, to reach an understanding from different points of view. Reading and rereading the transcripts will reveal significant responses are identified in the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). With IPA, the researcher needs to be immersed in the data by reading the transcripts multiple times (Smith et al., 2009). Researchers state that each reading may provide some new insights into the data (Smith et al., 2009).

The second step in the coding technique involves actually coding the data (Caulfield, 2020). Coding involves highlighting sections of text such as sentences or phrases and coming up with codes to describe the content (Caulfield, 2020). At this stage, researchers need to be thorough and highlight anything that they find interesting or relevant to the research topic (Caulfield, 2020). During this step I wrote notes and comments that focused on language use and emotional responses (Smith et al., 2009).

The third step in the coding process is generating themes. At this part in the coding process, the researcher reviews the codes and identifies the patterns among them to create themes (Caulfield, 2020; Smith et al., 2009). Themes are a lot broader than codes and can consist of several codes creating a single theme (Caulfield, 2020). During this stage, the researcher may find codes that are too vague or not relevant to the topic

and they can be discarded (Caulfield, 2020; Yi, 2018). I expected that there would be multiple themes and subthemes that would emerge during the analytical process. The fourth step in the coding process is reviewing the themes (Caulfield, 2020; Smith et al., 2009). In this step, the researcher needs to make sure that the themes are useful and accurate representations of the data (Caulfield., 2020). The researcher returns to the data set and compared their themes against it to verify that nothing is missing and that the themes represent the data (Caulfield, 2020). If there is an issue with a theme, it may be discarded or combined with another theme at this point (Caulfield, 2020). In the fourth stage, I utilized quotations that support themes and remove themes that are not supported (Smith et al., 2009).

The fifth step is where the researcher defines and labels themes. In this step, the researcher defining themes involves verbalizing what the researcher means by each theme and figuring out how it helps to understand the data (Caulfield, 2020). Whenever a researcher begins this step, the names need to be easily understandable and concise (Caulfield, 2020). The sixth and final step is writing up the analysis of the data (Caulfield, 2020). To begin the sixth step, the researcher needs to write up an introduction that includes research questions, aims, and approach (Caulfield, 2020). During the written portion, the researcher should include a methodology section where they describe how they conducted the thematic analysis (Caulfield, 2020). The results are also listed in this sixth and final step including how the themes arose and what they mean (Caulfield, 2020). Lastly, the conclusion states the main takeaways from the data analysis and reveals how it answered the research question (Caulfield, 2020). During this last

step, I created a narrative that is based on the summary table along with quotes from the participants to add depth (Smith et al., 2009). I utilized only the pen and paper method to conduct the data analysis process, and I did not use any software program.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is essential, especially in qualitative research. One of the ways that researchers can persuade themselves and others that their findings are worthy of attention is to show trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish trustworthiness, researchers need to demonstrate credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I utilized prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, thick description, and an external audit to show trustworthiness in my research. The methods mentioned assisted in proving credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Establishing credibility is essential whenever it comes to confirming internal validity. Credibility can be enhanced by describing participants' experiences as a researcher, and by verifying their research findings by sharing their results with the participants of their study (Cope, 2014). There are numerous strategies that researchers can utilize for a qualitative research approach to increase the credibility of their results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this specific research study, I utilized prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and external audits to increase credibility in my research.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolong engagement means investing a significant amount of time with the research population to gain a better understanding, to build trust, and to test any bias that the researcher may have (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher, I built rapport with the research participants due to the sensitivity that is involved with my research question.

Triangulation

Triangulation is where the research utilizes more than one form of data collection, multiple sources of data, or various theories to increase the internal validity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation will be utilized in this research by having several participants that create a purposeful sample.

Member Checks

Member checks were conducted to make sure that the interpretations from the interviews are tested and checked for credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After I conducted the interviews and created themes that emerged from the transcripts, I emailed the participants what I had come up with to ensure that I had interpreted what they stated correctly.

External Audits

An external audit, also known as an inquiry audit, is where a researcher outside of the data collection process examines the processes of data collection, data analysis, and the results of the research study (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). This process is done to confirm the accuracy of the findings and certify that the findings are supported by the data that was collected (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Utilizing an external auditor can increase

dependability by examining the paper trail (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). I utilized a fellow graduate student as my external auditor.

Transferability

Transferability focuses on how the findings of the study can be applied to other similar situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the possibility that the results of the research study can be transferred to another setting, several strategies can be utilized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention that utilization of rich, thick description is most commonly mentioned. A rich, thick description is a highly detailed presentation of the setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and the findings of the research which will be done in my dissertation report.

Dependability

Dependability is another vital aspect whenever it comes to qualitative research. Nowell et al. (2017) stated that researchers could achieve dependability by ensuring that their study is logical, traceable, and documented. One way I can guarantee that my research study is dependable by utilizing an audit trail. An audit trail provides readers with sufficient evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017). Stating that if another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation should arrive at the same or at least, comparable conclusion (Nowell et al., 2017). Creating a clear audit trail means keeping records of raw data, any field notes, transcripts, and a reflexive journal (Nowell et al., 2017). Having a clear audit trail during my research will help my committee to assess my raw data and future researchers to view the analysis process.

Confirmability

Confirmability or objectivity is the degree of neutrality in which the findings are shaped by the research participants, not by the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability can be revealed by showing an audit trail in which researchers and participants will be able to assess the raw data and the analytic processes involved with the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability can also be established by triangulation and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, I intend to create a very precise audit trail and a reflexive journal to establish confirmability. I utilized my reflexive journal to state how I went about my data collection and why I chose to do what I did. Possessing a reflexive journal is important in relation to double hermeneutics due to being able to be utilized to engage some tensions presented by double hermeneutics and will contribute to a further understanding of interpretation and meaning making.

Ethical Procedures

To begin data collection, I sought approval by Walden University's Institutional Review Board or the IRB. The IRB's approval will signify that the risk of harm associated with my research is minimal in comparison to the benefits of my study. Flyers (appendix A) were placed throughout Southwest Pennsylvania community and within the waiting areas of therapists and counselors. I also posted the flyers (appendix A) on Facebook groups for sexual assault survivors and abuse and trauma groups which encouraged people they know that qualify for the study to participate. Whenever the participants got in touch with me, I went through the inclusion/exclusion criteria with

them. If the participant met the criteria, I sent them a consent form. Due to prior studies including homosexual and bisexual participants, my main focal point was heterosexual men due to the lack of information that I discovered while conducting my literature review.

While interviewing participants who have experienced trauma, it is essential to clarify that the interview can stop at any time to reduce psychological distress. Utilization of trauma-informed interviewing will assist with any psychological distress that the participants may encounter (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). After the interviews were conducted, I gave the participants several community support phone numbers in case they needed them. The community support phone numbers were also listed on the consent form prior to the participants taking part in the interview. I utilized audio-recording the interviews, whether they are face-to-face or by Skype, and identifying the interview by a number which I assigned them. The recordings and transcripts were saved on an external hard drive that is locked and only available to the researcher. Throughout the data collection process, the participants' confidentiality was the utmost priority, and no identifiable characteristics were mentioned. Any communication by the participant was associated with the number they were assigned and was saved on the external hard drive. The data will be kept for at least five years and then will be destroyed. Whenever the results are published, anything that would be identifiable will be excluded from the results and confidential material will be in a locked area where I will be the only one with a key.

Summary

Chapter 3 is used to explain the proposed study in detail and to understand the qualitative method that was used. This chapter described the research design that will be used to frame this study and was guided by IPA. Chapter 3 also included the role of the researcher as the instrument of data collection. The methodology was discussed along with how participants are selected, the instruments that are used, and the procedures that were utilized for recruitment. Lastly, issues of trustworthiness were discussed along with ethical procedures and how to address any ethical issue that emerged during the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The negative psychological and social impacts that male sexual assault survivors encounter have been an understudied subject (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022). There are long-lasting impacts on the men's emotional, psychological, and social well-being and can lead to negative behaviors such as hypermasculinity or addictions (Pleck, 1981; 1in6, 2021). Understanding the thought processes of a male victim is crucial when treating them after their assault (1in6, 2021; RAINN, 2021). Bringing attention to the struggles that male sexual assault survivors encounter will also increase social supports, which plays a vital role in sexual assault survivors seeking treatment (Cherry, 2020).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of male sexual assault victims to understand the barriers that they encountered and how they overcame those barriers to seek help. In this study, male survivors described their experience after the assault and the barriers that they encountered. The survivors included how they overcame those barriers and sought help. The research questions were as follows: What are the barriers that male sexual assault victims who sought help for their assault experience when it comes to reporting the assault? How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault describe their experience whenever it comes to seeking help? How do male victims of sexual assault who sought help for their assault overcome their fears and seek help?

This chapter presents the findings of the current study. Along with the findings, there will be a discussion regarding the setting where the study was conducted and the

demographics of each participant. The data collection process will be discussed followed by an explanation of the data analysis process. At the conclusion of the chapter, the researcher will present the results of the study.

Setting

The interviews took place over Zoom at an agreed-upon time that worked for both myself and the participants. The environment was quiet and secure from any interruption and protected the participants' privacy. The interviews did not take place in an environment where the researcher previously had an active role. A \$10 Visa gift card was used as an incentive for participation. To my knowledge, there were no known conditions that may have influenced the participants, nor were there experiences during the interview that would impact the interpretation of the study's results. Each interview was given an hour time slot; however, most of the interviews were completed within 20 to 35 minutes depending on the length of the participant's responses. The shortest time was with Participant 7 at 20 minutes and 17 seconds. Participant 7 provided short one-word answers and would not elaborate. The background was quiet, and the audio recordings were clear. No video recording took place.

Demographics

The participants were eight adult men. All participants identified as heterosexual men who are between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, with the average age being around 23 years old. All of the participants reported having been sexually assaulted by a female perpetrator within the last 5 years and reported their assault to authorities. All participants

could speak, read, and understand English. The data were collected through semi structured interviews. A manual audio recording device was used for recording purposes.

Data Collection

The data and themes appeared to reach saturation by the eighth participant. The basis of my results regarding male sexual assault survivors and the barriers they encountered was drawn from in-depth semi structured interviews of these eight men. At the conclusion of my data analysis process, three main themes and nine subthemes emerged. Prior to the interviews, I printed a copy of my research questions so that I could write statements that stuck out to me. After the interviews, I reviewed the notations and highlighted the words that stuck out more than the others. Next, I wrote down my impressions of each participant in a Word document, noting things such as whether they were reluctant or readily willing to share their experiences. None of my procedures deviated from the details in Chapter 3, and no unusual circumstances arose during data collection.

Data Analysis

I used IPA to analyze and code the data. This process is described in detail by Smith et al. (2012). To begin the analysis process, I transcribed each of the eight audio recordings. This process was time consuming as I had to pause and rewind the recordings to ensure that I accurately transcribed each of the interviews. On the typed transcripts, I identified the participant's responses by identifying them as participant and the number in which they participated in the study such as Participant 1. Each transcript was analyzed separately and then they were analyzed together to see if there were any emerging

relationships between the datasets. After the transcription process, I formulated the themes and subthemes. As previously stated, three major themes emerged with nine subthemes. The three themes are as follows: feeling of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feeling of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. Of these three themes, nine subthemes emerged.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is necessary, especially whenever it comes to qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one way that researchers can persuade themselves and others that their findings are worth attention is to show trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was verified in this study by using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In my research, I used prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, thick description, and an external audit to illustrate trustworthiness in my research.

Credibility

Credibility is essential when confirming internal validity. Credibility for my qualitative phenomenological study occurred through prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, thick description, and external audit (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure credibility, prior to the interview, I provided time to build trust and rapport with the participants. This prolonged engagement allowed me to get to know the participants a little better. Triangulation occurred by using eight participants. Using more than one participant created a homogenous sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All of the interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed. After transcribing the

interviews, the participants were emailed with the findings and to participate in member checking. Credibility was confirmed whenever each participant accepted the findings as their own lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the results can be transferred to another context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mentioned that the most common is the utilization of a rich, thick description. To enhance the transferability of my research, I used thick descriptions of the participant's lived experiences. I included the exact words used by each of the participants, which allows the participants' personality and experiences to be presented.

Dependability

Nowell et al. (2017) stated that researchers could achieve dependability by ensuring that their study is logical, traceable, and documented. An audit trail provided with sufficient evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017). Along with an audit trail, I provided great detail on my recruiting process and interview methods, which included both inclusion and exclusion criteria. The use of external audits also helps enhance dependability by allowing an external researcher to evaluate the accuracy of the findings supported by the data (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Audio recordings allow for further accuracy when interpreting the data for dependability (Cruz & Tantia, 2017).

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that confirmability or objectivity is the degree of neutrality in which the findings are shaped by the research participants, not by the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest. In my research, I used a reflexive journal and a precise audit trail to establish confirmability. I kept a record of each of the steps of the data analysis process to ensure the data provided was accurate and the results were true.

Results

The researcher used this current study to examine barriers that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever they report their victimization to authorities. There were 12 interview questions. From these questions emerged three themes and nine subthemes. Sub-questions followed within the 12 interview questions to ensure detail and precision to expand upon my participants' lived experiences. In total, there were 28 questions that assisted in creating the themes and subthemes for my research.

Research Question 1: What Are the Challenges That Male Sexual Assault Victims Experience When It Comes to Reporting the Assault?

Theme 1- Feeling of Shame for Being a Sexual Assault Victim

All participants expressed feelings of shame at being viewed as a victim. In most cases, the survivors took a long time such as weeks, if not months after their victimization to come forward. The participants spoke about the individuals that supported them in their journey to come forward. During the interview process, it became apparent those participants who had good social support were able to seek assistance in a decent amount of time while those with none took a longer time to seek help. The

following subthemes emerged from the data: judgmental feelings that only weak men and women can be sexually assaulted, feeling of inadequacy, and feelings of being seen as less of a man.

Subtheme 1.1: Judgmental Feelings That Only Weak Men and Women Can be Sexually Assaulted. All of the participants discussed in some form the judgmental feelings that they had for themselves and what they thought society thought of them. The main concern is being view as weak for being a sexual assault victim. Regarding feeling judged, Participant 1 (P1) stated “even talking about it, I felt like I was being judged and people wouldn’t believe me. People believe that male sexual assault cannot happen.” Most of the participants agreed and stated the same feeling of being judged by others and that sexual assault cannot happen to men. Participant 6 (P6) stated that after his assault “I was afraid that people would judge me and that I would lose social status if anyone knew.” The fear of being judged prevented a majority of the participants in reporting their assault immediately after the incident thus becoming a significant barrier that male survivors had to overcome.

Subtheme 1.2: Feelings of Inadequacy

Along with the fear of being judged by their loved ones and by society, another struggle male sexual assault survivors contended with were the feelings of inadequacy. P1 confirmed that “sexual assault does not happen to men and it’s a struggle to get the courage to come forward.” P1 was amongst a majority who stated that their thoughts of being seen or thought of as inadequate prevented them whenever it came to reporting

their assault. Participant 8 (P8) mentioned that “feeling inadequate impacted my self-esteem.”

Subtheme 1.3: Feelings of Being Seen as Less of a Man

Male sexual assault survivors stated that they also felt that they were being viewed as less of a man if they knew that they were victims of sexual assault. P1 stated that “I feared talking about it because I felt that people would change and view me as a lesser man.” Participant 2 (P2) stated that “male sexual assault victims are seen as weaker especially in society.” The majority of participants acknowledged to have some feelings of inadequacy whenever it comes to their identity as a heterosexual male.

Research Question 2: How Do Male Victims of Sexual Assault Who Sought Help for Their Assault Describe Their Experience Whenever It Comes to Seeking Help?

Theme 2 – Feeling of being ignored.

All eight participants stated that they felt ignored by loved ones, medical professionals, or by the police whenever they reported their victimization. A few of the participants even stated that their fear of being ignored was also a barrier in informing others that they were victimized. P8 confirmed that “my friends didn’t comfort me, I felt ignored and confronted with the negative thoughts.” Participant 7 (P7) reiterated what P8 stated about being ignored but included that “they view you in terms of money, the more money, the less they ignore you.” The frustration with being ignored is felt in all of the participants’ statements regarding their situations.

Subtheme 2.1 Feeling Disregarded by Police and Medical Professionals

Many of the participants discussed their frustrations with the police departments and medical professionals that were associated with their case. P7 stated that whenever he sought help “there were people in there and they viewed you as if you weren’t normal.” P7 continued stating that money was a factor in whether or not the police and medical professionals paid attention. P7 clarified that if the victim had money, professionals would be more inclined to listen and pay attention. Being disregarded or feeling as if one is being disregarded can lead to secondary victimization. Participant 3 (P3) stated that he is “very disappointed with law enforcement because I think I’ll never get justice for my assault. It kind of sickens me to think that someone can do that and get away with it.”

Subtheme 2.2 Feelings of not Being Believed by Friends and Loved Ones

Participant 4 (P4) mentioned that one of the challenges is finding someone to assist you in your road to justice. P4 mentioned that “one challenge is trying to find someone to help, whenever the first one is not willing to help.” P4 continues to say that “nobody is caring about you and no one is willing to listen.” P2 stated that whenever they admitted that they were assaulted “my friend treated it like a joke, like it was funny.” P8 stated in his interview “I was not going to tell my friends because I knew how they would act.”

Subtheme 2.3 Feeling That Their Life is Being Threatened by the Perpetrator

This subtheme was mentioned by a few of the participants and regarded being threatened by physical violence or by negatively impacting the male victim’s social status. P2, who was assaulted by a female superior, stated “I was ostracized by my

occupation, and it was not the first time she had committed a sexual assault.” P4 stated that after the assault, his assailant threatened to end his life if he mentioned anything about the incident. “I didn’t report immediately because my perpetrator stated that she would come into my room and slit my throat.” Out of all the participants, P4 is the only one that received a physical threat to end their life. Most of the other participants received verbal threats to ruin their social status or to begin nasty rumors.

Research Question 3: How Do Male Victims of Sexual Assault Who Sought Help for Their Assault Overcome Their Fears and Seek Help?

Theme 3- Feelings of Self-Loathing

Most of the participants stated that self-loathing was a significant barrier whenever it came to reporting their sexual assault to the proper authorities. P3 stated that “some people feel guilty, I was angry at myself, and I was in disbelief.” P4 stated that it took them seven months to inform someone about their assault. “I had a lot of pressure; I had a lot of questions for myself.” P4 stated that “eventually I gave in, if I were going to die, at least someone knew what happened.” P8 reiterated the same feelings that P3 and P4 had whenever it came to their assault, “I felt very low, it impacted my social status and my relationship.” While P1 stated that he did not seek medical assistance immediately after because “I was afraid, I was angry, and I was guilty.”

Subtheme 3.1: Feeling Repugnant for not Fighting off Perpetrator

A majority of the participants mentioned feeling negative thoughts and feelings regarding not defending themselves against their perpetrator. P1 “it is easily to self-destruct because people do not see heterosexual men as sexual assault victims, only

homosexual men.” P1 continues by stating “people were pitying me because I was unable to fend off my perpetrator, they viewed me as fragile and I’m not fragile.”

Subtheme 3.2: Feelings of Disgust and Unworthy of Justice

Most participants discussed feelings of disgust and unworthy of justice which were a few of the many negative thoughts and feelings that they encountered. P2 stated that “I was not the first one, there were a handful, but no one took me serious.” Whenever a victim is not taken seriously, it can create a secondary victimization or make the victim feel unworthy of justice. P4 mentioned that after his assault “I couldn’t eat, I needed treatment because I was questioning myself. I felt lonely and powerless.” P5 added “I reached out to my brother, and he told me to forget what happened in my life and plan my future.” P5 asked “How can I plan my future?” P5 continued that after trying to get emotional support from his brother, he isolated himself from his friends and family. P3 stated that “I’m very disappointed in law enforcement because I never received the justice that I deserved.”

Subtheme 3.3 Feeling Angry for Being Labeled a Victim

Being labeled as a victim was another significant barrier that the male sexual assault victims encountered. Whenever discussed, there are a lot of negative connotations with the word victim but there are hardly any with the term survivor. P2 stated that “being known as a sexual assault victim is insulting.” P2 continues to state that being labeled a victim makes him seem weaker than other men. P3 confirms feeling angry for being labeled a victim “I was worried about losing social status but figured that law

enforcement would keep my confidentiality.” P2 and P3 were not the only ones who discussed being angry for the victim label.

Summary

The sample for the current study consisted of eight male sexual assault victims who reported their sexual assault to the proper authorities. The participants were recruited by Walden Participant Pool and Facebook posts revealing my posters for recruitment. After the participants agreed to participate in the current study, signed and returned the consent form, each participant completed a semi structured interview by Zoom.

During the data analysis, the interviews revealed three themes and nine subthemes that answered the research questions. The themes are as follows: feeling of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feeling of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. In Chapter 5, there will be further detail about the interpretation of the results, strengths and limitations of the current study, implication for positive social change, recommendations for future research, and finally, conclusions that were drawn to help discuss how to contribute to and move current research forward.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

For this study, I used IPA to explore the lived experiences of eight heterosexual men who were sexually assaulted by female perpetrators and reported their victimizations to the proper authorities. Prior researchers examined men of all sexual orientation such as homosexual, but none strictly examined the barriers that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the barriers that male sexual assault survivors encounter through these participants' lived experiences and how they overcame those barriers to seek assistance.

During the analysis of the results, three significant themes rose: feeling of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feeling of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. Out of those three themes, nine subthemes emerged during the comparative analysis of data. Those themes will be analyzed in this chapter relation to existing literature and research regarding male sexual assault survivors. I will use this chapter to summarize the research results, discuss the limitations of the current study, provide implications of the study's results, and provide suggestions for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

In the literature review section of this study (Chapter 2), I identified multiple researchers and their studies that examined the impact that sexual assault had on male sexual assault survivors and the barriers that each encountered whenever it came to reporting their victimization (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a; Porta et al., 2018). Heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter gender specific barriers such as

being viewed as weak, homosexual, or not clearly understanding what sexual assault is (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a; Porta et al., 2018;). Numerous studies examined barriers but included all sexual assault victims which mainly consisted of female and homosexual men, but minimal research focused on heterosexual male sexual assault victims and female perpetrators (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Javaid, 2016a). The use of IPA increased the understanding and insight about heterosexual male sexual assault survivors' experience with reporting their victimization and the barriers that the victims had to overcome. The current study revealed the following three themes: feeling of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feeling of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. These themes both confirmed and extended the knowledge from previous literature.

Theme 1: Feeling of Shame for Being a Sexual Assault Victim

Previous research revealed the psychological stress that heterosexual men encounter whenever they become a heterosexual male becomes a sexual assault survivor, including feeling ashamed (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2017; Lowe, 2018). However, there is not a lot of information on male sexual assault survivors regarding their gender specific barriers and how they overcome those barriers to report their victimization.

All participants in this study expressed feeling varying amounts of shame for being considered a sexual assault victim. Shame plays a significant role in reporting sexual victimization due to thoughts that men should have been able to fend off their perpetrators (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022;

Javaid, 2016a). Most participants not only felt ashamed for being sexual assault survivors but felt judged by society and their loved ones and seen as weak. One of the reasons that shame plays a significant role is that societal expectations are required of men such as masculinity, which challenges the perception of being a sexual assault survivor (Javaid, 2016a). Guvensel et al. (2018) discovered in a study using a convenience sample, that higher levels of gender role conflict were associated with lower psychological well-being levels.

The participants suggested that loved ones of heterosexual male sexual assault survivors understand and support their loved ones while they maneuver through their current obstacle (Fredonia State University of New York, 2022). Due to little research that focused solely on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors, supportive services and the survivors physical and psychological well-being is not a well-known topic. These findings extend past research by focusing solely on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors and the impact that shame has on the reporting of their victimization.

Theme 2: Feeling of Being Ignored

In the current study, feeling ignored by their support group, medical professionals, and the judicial system was expressed by most of the participants which led to them not seeking immediate medical attention or justice. In previous research, male victims who feeling ignored, impacted whether or not a survivor sought justice for their assault, it also increases emotional and psychological distress in the survivors as well (Delle Donne et al., 2018). In the current study, participants discussed the frustrations related to feeling ignored whenever they approached loved ones and the proper authorities about their

victimization, thus confirming what was already mentioned in prior research. The participants stated that whenever they felt ignored by loved ones or authorities, it made them regret admitting their assault.

Most of the participants stated that the lack of social support and feeling as if they were being ignored by the authorities left them regretting reporting their victimization. Another barrier encountered that makes heterosexual male sexual assault survivors feel ignored is that a significant percent of society believes that only women and homosexual men can be sexually assaulted, and men are the perpetrator (Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a). When a heterosexual male is sexually assaulted by a female perpetrator, they are often congratulated due to unrealistic societal male expectations (Muller, 2017; Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Two participants reached out to women, one was a friend and the other a girlfriend, who supported that male survivor in a way that encouraged reporting their victimization. These findings extend past what research has already covered regarding heterosexual male sexual assault survivors and their lack of support. There are also no supportive services directed at heterosexual male sexual assault survivors. The significance of these findings shows a lack of support for heterosexual male sexual assault victims and the importance of implementing supportive services targeted toward heterosexual male sexual assault survivors.

Theme 3: Feelings of Self-Loathing

The participants in this current study discussed the feelings of self-loathing and how it impacted reporting their victimization to the authorities. Most male sexual assault victims fear being judged for not being able to fend off their attacker and the

embarrassment that they experience intertwine are two significant reasons why heterosexual male sexual assault survivors refuse to report their victimizations (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Fredonia State University of New York, 2022; Javaid, 2016a). The male sexual assault website lin6 (2021) mentions that men who have been sexually assaulted have higher risk of mental health issues than men who are not sexual assault survivors. lin6 (2021) continued by stating that male sexual assault victims may suffer PTSD, depression, substance abuse disorders, suicidal ideation, problems with relationships, and may start to underachieve at work.

The psychological distress of being a sexual assault victim along with the psychological aftermath can create feeling of self-loathing. These findings confirmed what was previously discovered in prior research regarding male sexual assault survivors. In the current study, participants did not seek immediate medical attention or justice because they were left questioning why they allowed the victimization to occur. A finding that is new to this research topic is the significant impact that the term victim has on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors.

Theoretical Framework

Gender role strain paradigm was the theoretical framework in this research study. The gender role strain paradigm theory helped the researcher explain the attitudes and behaviors of the research participants. Gender role strain paradigm theory is a framework for understanding men who are unsuccessful in conforming to the traditional sexual role and the adverse outcomes that will follow (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Pleck, 1981). Gender role stain paradigm was developed by Joseph Pleck and initially known as sex-

role strain paradigm (Pleck, 1981). Pleck (1981) stated that if a male infringed upon their gender role, they would be socially condemned, and the condemnation would lead to negative psychological effects. Pleck (1981) continues by stating that self-devaluation is one of the negative psychological effects that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter.

Throughout this study, all of the participants mentioned issues conforming to the traditional roles that men are to portray in society. This ultimately led to negative physical and psychological issues which were identified in various ways throughout the interviews with the participants. Most of the participants waited months before seeking assistance and support for their assault, even denying that the incident occurred. The participants stated that they feared being seen as homosexual, fear of being viewed as weak, and loss of social class were a few mentioned throughout the interview process.. In prior research, this is common due to the internalization of gender norms and how the men are no longer fitting societal view of male image (Delle Donne et al., 2018; Ioannou et al., 2017). Many participants stated that most people in their lives still do not know that they are sexual assault survivors due to their fear of being judged. Heterosexual male sexual assault survivors deal with a lot of mistrust of others, which becomes a significant challenge whenever it comes to reporting their assault to anyone, support groups and supportive services alike (Young et al., 2018).

Limitations of the Study

The current study used IPA on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors and their experience in reporting their victimization to the proper authorities. One limitation

in the study is that the researcher focused solely on the challenges that male sexual assault victims encounter whenever they seek help, it did not include survivors who have yet to seek help. Therefore, the research study is limited to heterosexual male sexual assault survivors who have already reported their victimization to the proper authorities.

Another limitation to this study is that it focused on heterosexual male sexual assault survivors who are above the age of 18 years old, it does not include men that identify as homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or any male under the age of 18. Due to these individuals being excluded, it limited further exploration on the difference between male sexual assault survivors regarding age and sexual orientation. Due to the exclusion criteria, it leaves the question whether one male sexual assault survivor is different than another or if one male sexual assault survivor is more susceptible to being victimized than another.

A third limitation to this study is that the assault must have happened within that last 5 years, which excluded any sexual assault that occurred after that timeframe. Understanding the reluctance and fear that male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever it comes to reporting, it excluded any male who took years instead of months to come forward with their victimization. This not only limited the research, but it also limited the number of survivors due to the strict timeframe.

A fourth limitation to this research study was that the perpetrator had to have been a female that is not in a relationship with the victim. This excludes any female perpetrator in a relationship with their victim or any perpetrator that identified as male. My research

was limited due to the exclusion criteria and the inclusion criteria that needed to be met for the participants.

Recommendations

Current research on the lived experiences of adult heterosexual male sexual assault victims who reported their victimization is very limited. This study's participants reported mixed feelings regarding the judicial and medical system whenever they reported their victimization. Many participants reported negative feelings about the judicial system and did not feel that their perpetrator received an appropriate punishment. Even though this study provided vital information on the lived experiences of heterosexual male sexual assault survivors, it still has a large sector of gaps that need further studies to explore.

The first recommendation includes expanding the research to include all male sexual assault survivors, including transgender men. This recommendation will give researchers an idea about the specific barriers that each group encounters whenever it comes to reporting. The second recommendation would include male sexual assault survivors whose perpetrator is their significant other. This recommendation would identify any barriers that the male survivor encounters while being in a relationship with their perpetrator. Another recommendation would include male sexual assault survivors under the age of 18 years old. This recommendation would identify whether there is a higher percentage with male youth assault survivors compared to adult male survivors. The last recommendation would be to focus on the support group and their characteristics, did gender norms impact their choice to assist the male sexual assault

victim? This recommendation would identify characteristics of individuals who are unbiased and assist the male sexual assault victim in a way that would benefit them and not create secondary victimization or victim-blaming.

Implications for Social Change

The results of the current study contribute to several implications of positive social change. This research adds to the knowledge base of qualitative research concerning the barriers encountered by heterosexual male sexual assault victims whenever they report their victimization. The results of the study detailed much-needed insights into the psychological and physical impact that heterosexual male sexual assault victims encounter whenever they seek justice for their assault. The results have shown that all participants felt negative feelings such as shame and embarrassment over their assault. Most of the participants felt ignored and dealt with feelings of self-loathing throughout their journey.

Individual

This study has shown the great need for more resources targeted toward male sexual assault survivors and the importance of support systems. All of the participants in this study reported feeling ignored during their reporting process whether it was by their support systems or the judicial systems. Most of the participants felt that if they had better support early on, they would have reported their victimization sooner. If services addressed the gender specific barriers such as the internalization of gender norms or negative feelings that heterosexual male sexual assault victims encounter, there might be more reports involving male sexual assault survivors.

Society

Additionally, the findings of the study could inform social service workers, medical workers, and judicial officials of the importance of getting male sexual assault survivor resources to deal with their trauma such as therapeutic services. In addition, having training to deal specifically with male sexual assault could positively impact the negative effects created by the assault. Bringing attention to the negative effects of heterosexual male sexual assault survivors will help educate society and assist in the treatment of men who were assaulted.

Conclusion

This study consisted of IPA with eight heterosexual male sexual assault survivors who reported their victimization to the proper authorities. These participants experienced difficulties physically and mentally due to stereotypical gender norms and lack of support systems. This research study extended the knowledge of current literature by focusing on the specific barriers heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter whenever they report their victimization. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis process is as follows: feelings of shame for being a sexual assault victim, feelings of being ignored, and feelings of self-loathing. These themes represent suggestions for additional research areas on the topic of heterosexual male sexual assault survivors.

The current study revealed that heterosexual male sexual assault survivors encounter various barriers whenever it comes to reporting their victimization, most of which are psychological. If provided with the right resources and the proper support, society can lessen the psychological distress that heterosexual male sexual assault

survivors encounter. With utilization of therapeutic services and a strong support system, heterosexual male sexual assault survivors will be more inclined to reporting their assault to the proper authorities.

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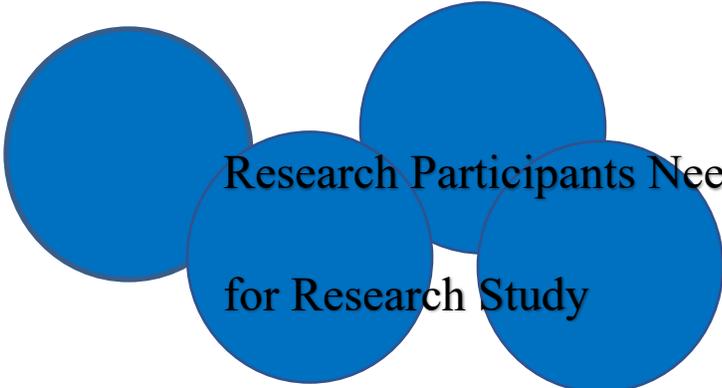
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Appendix A: Recruitment of Participants



**Research Participants Needed
for Research Study**



**Participants will
receive a \$10
gift card**



NO MORE
"THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO GUYS"

PETER HERMANN

Seeking Male Survivors of Sexual Assault

You may be eligible to participate in this study if you can answer YES to all of these questions:

I am a male at least 18 years old or older.

I am or have been a victim of sexual assault within the last 5 years.

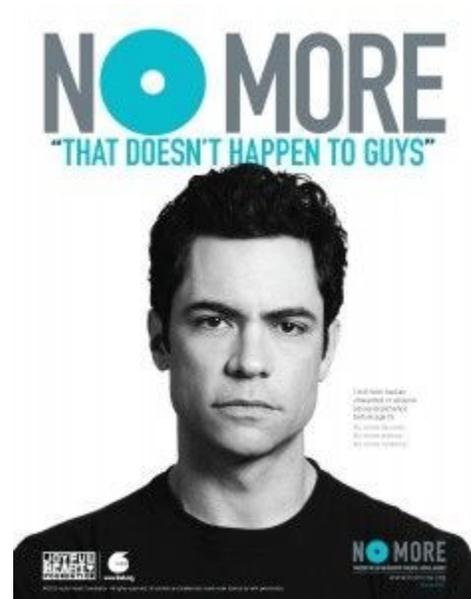
I see myself as straight.

I reported my sexual assault to law enforcement.

My attacker was not a partner.

**Research Participants Needed
for Research Study**

**Participants will
receive a \$10 gift
card**



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I am a male at least 18 years or older.

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I see myself as straight.

I reported my sexual assault to law enforcement

My assaulter was not a partner.

Appendix B: Debriefing

Debriefing Form for Participation in a Research Study
Walden University

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the Study:

We previously informed you that the purpose of the study was challenges that heterosexual male sexual assault victims encounter. The goal of our research is to understand and acknowledge gender specific challenges that male sexual assault victims face whenever they report their victimization.

If Applicable: We realize that some of the questions asked may have provoked strong emotional reactions. As researchers, we do not provide mental health services. However, we want to provide every participant in this study with a comprehensive and accurate list of free clinical resources that are available, should you decide you need assistance at any time. Please see information pertaining to local resources at the end of this form.

Confidentiality:

You may decide that you do not want your data used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study and permanently deleted please email the researcher.

Final Report:

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please feel free to contact the researcher either by telephone.

Useful Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose, or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researcher by telephone or email.

If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. If you feel you would like assistance please contact:

State and National Counseling Free Resources

Sexual Assault Hotline	1-755-221-7600
National Suicide Prevention Hotline	1-800-273-8255
Línea Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio	1-888-628-9454
Crisis Text Line	Text "PA" to 741-741
Disaster Distress Helpline	1-800-985-5990

*****Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this study!*****

Appendix C: Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the challenges that male sexual assault victims experience when it comes to reporting the assault?

Before your assault, how would you define sexual assault?

Was your original definition a challenge whenever it came to you reporting your assault?

If you believed sexual assault never happened to men, did you believe that others thought the same? Why or why not?

How has that definition changed after your assault?

What type of challenges did you experience whenever it came to reporting your assault?

What were some of the thoughts that arose due to your assault?

Did you fear people would judge you or you would lose social status?

Did you fear others' opinions of what had happened to you?

Who did you report your victimization to?

What was your perception of how law enforcement handled you divulging your assault?

If you sought medical services, how do you feel that the medical professionals handled your admission to the assault?

Research Question 2: How do male victims of sexual assault describe their experience whenever it comes to seeking help?

How long did it take for you to inform the authorities about your victimization?

What was your perception of how society/medical professionals handled your experience involving the assault?

Who did you seek help from?

What was your experience?

What would you say went well?

What didn't go as well as you thought it should?

What made it hard for you to seek help?

Research Questions 3: How do male victims of sexual assault overcome their fears and seek help?

9.) Did you experience any fear involving reporting your victimization?

10.) If so, what was the experience like? What were you afraid of?

If so, how did you overcome your fear of seeking assistance for your victimization?

Did you have a support group, or did you overcome your fear on your own?

If you did it by yourself, how did you overcome the challenges involved?

If you had a support group, who was in your support group?

How did they support you into seeking support services?

What challenges did you experience with the support network?

11.) What would you change about your experience in reporting your victimization?

What would you tell other survivors?