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Law Enforcement's Effect on Rape Victims' Initial Interview: A Victim Advocate's Perspective

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

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Abstract

Among the U.S. military community, organizations have been established to focus solely on sexual assault reporting, prevention efforts, and support for survivors. Although more victims are reporting their sexual assault, the number of perpetrators going to prison have not increased significantly. Some studies suggest victims' unwillingness to report and cooperate with the proponents of criminal justice process are the reasons for the lack of rightful justice. The intent of this study was to examine the interaction between law enforcement and the sexual assault victim via the perception of the victim advocate. The importance of this study was to understand whether law enforcement may influence the sexual assault victim and their desire to report or cooperate with any criminal case proceedings. One-on-one interviews with ten sexual assault victim advocates were transcribed manually to discover any underlying themes regarding their perceptions of the interaction with law enforcement and the sexual assault victim. The themes included (a) the primary sexual assault victim advocate role is a support system, (b) law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude, (c) law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training, (d) law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior, and (e) there was a disparity based on gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. The results of this study may enhance understanding of how law enforcement's initial interview with sexual assault victim influences the criminal justice process, which can determine whether sexual predators will face justice. This understanding may aid in minimizing sexual predators resulting in positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents, Theresa J. Knox and Marcus R. Knox, Jr.

*"For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave
enough to be it." ~Amanda Gorman*

Acknowledgments

I would like to give thanks to the Supreme, the Alpha and the Omega, the one true God. All praise is due! I AM thankful for the divine fortitude HE placed in me to complete this journey!

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To my ride-or-die, my husband-for-life, thank you, thank you, thank you! Words can never express how much I appreciate you! Thank you for being the constant silver lining in the clouds for me. Thank you for your patience and understanding when I became a recluse. Thank you for your encouragement when things got tough. And thank you for holding my hand and giving me hugs every time I needed them, all the way to the finish line. Your wife for life!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Sexual assault is prevalent in all cultures and societies. In many war-torn countries, rape is a tool used to force women to comply. Men are often targeted as well as a means to humiliate and emasculate them. Despite the prevalence of male rape, media outlets tend to ignore incidents of male victimization (Korac, 2016). Moreover, due to the stigma associated with rape, male victims are the least likely to seek help. Sexual assault is also the most underreported crime, with males reporting incidents far less often than females (Larsen & Hilden, 2016). Under the Obama administration, the Department of Justice changed the definition of sexual assault to include men (Sullivan & Rogers, 2017), previously recognizing only women as victims of sexual assault.

First responders to sexual violence include law enforcement, specially trained medical personnel, and sexual assault victim advocates. Medical personnel such as sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE) receive specialized training to collect evidence for sexual assault forensic examination (SAFE) kits. It is undetermined what level of education or experience is necessary for a law enforcement officer to perform the initial intake interview in a sexual assault case. It is reasonable to presume some level of specialized experience would be a prerequisite due to the sensitive nature of sexual assault reports.

Background

According to the Rape Abuse & Incest Network (2019), an American is sexually assaulted every 92 seconds. However, sexual assault is the most underreported crime, with three out of four incidents not reported. Victims of sexual assault may not report for

various reasons. First, reporting a sexual assault is often an arduous process. Victims tend to experience humiliation answering questions about the details surrounding their assault. Stigma is enhanced when the victim is a military man who once believed sexual assault only happened to women (Monteith et al., 2019). In some instances, male rape goes unreported due to the stigma of homosexuality (Ioannou et al., 2017). When the offender is a female, males may be reluctant to report due to societal beliefs about masculinity (Javaid, 2018b; Larsen & Hilden, 2016). Decades of research indicate victims of sexual assault typically neglect to report the attack for fear of retaliation from the offender. Victims may feel people will not believe them, but instead blame them for the assault (Best & Jun, 2017; Forde, 2018). Monteith et al. (2019) found that members of the military who were male felt betrayed by the responses and reactions they received when reporting their assault. Some men even developed a deep hatred for the military due to their disappointment (Monteith et al., 2019).

Another main barrier to reporting is that attitudes toward rape may be derogative and ascribed to gender myths. Williams, Porter, and Smith (2016) described rape myths as accusatory toward the victim, suggesting female victims must have been promiscuous. Further, myths indicate that male victims of rape must be weak, gay, or both (Hlavka, 2017). Along with rape myths, the way members of law enforcement question sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview can be abrasive. Straightforward police questioning is a normal part of the investigative process. However, when officers present a dispassionate manner in asking about the details surrounding a sexual assault, victims may perceive the police as invasive or unsympathetic. Perceptions of male rape by law

enforcement officers may stem from conscious or unconscious myths that the victim's lifestyle may have increased the likelihood of assault (Javaid, 2018a). Consequently, an initial intake interview can feel more like an interrogation to the victim. Hence, police culture can create barriers to effective care of the sexual assault victim. Victim advocates are aware of the potential for insensitivity by law enforcement officers during the initial sexual assault interview (Long, 2018). The interviewing law enforcement officer's affect can potentially create barriers to the victim's cooperation with the criminal case.

Despite the significance of the topic of male rape, there is limited research in this area, and even less exploration specific to male victims and law enforcement interaction. Long (2018) recommended the focus of future sexual assault research should include an analysis of the law enforcement interview experience. Moreover, Monteith et al. (2019) suggested that researchers explore victims' willingness to report sexual assault in a military setting. Ioannou et al. (2016) indicated the need for future research in the area of male sexual assault to encourage reporting and education, thus creating more avenues for support of male victims. This study addressed this gap by exploring how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. It is also important to understand how rape myth acceptance influences law enforcement culture, decisions, and behavior with sexual assault victims.

Problem Statement

Sexual assault is the most underreported crime. Despite access to helping agencies, victims of sexual assault are often reluctant to report their assault. There is

substantial literature indicating why victims of sexual assault do not report the crime. Kaiser et al. (2017) found that some victims who do report often decide later not to cooperate in the investigation. Often, victims are concerned with retaliation from the offender, no one believing them, and receiving blame for the sexual assault (Kaiser et al., 2017). Kaiser et al. (2017) found the sexual assault victims most likely to report were those who suffered severe injuries during the assault. The specific focus of this study is rape, defined as sexual penetration without consent.

Williams et al. (2016) suggested sexual assault victims often ascribed to self-blame and rape myths. Gravelin et al. (2019) asserted feelings of powerlessness may "enhance the endorsement of rape myths" (p. 98), thus increasing the victim's reluctance to report sexual assault. Although female victims of sexual assault rarely report, according to mandated federal screening completed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, males are even less likely to report their assault (Brownstone et al., 2018; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017; Monteith et al., 2019). The perception of powerlessness clearly applies to women, which illuminates the compounded social stigma facing male rape victims. Hlavka (2017) indicated rape myths' portrayal of males is extremely damaging to male victims of sexual assault by minimizing the severity of the crime. Further, Hlavka suggested power was definitively a male attribute, aligned with masculinity in a patriarchal society that alleges males of sexual assault must be weak or gay.

The resistance to report is problematic to society. If the sexual assault victims do not receive justice for the violent act perpetrated against them, the offender is free to

reoffend. Male victims of sexual assault may experience increased pressure to remain silent about their attack, regardless of who their attacker is. Monteith et al. (2019) remarked that little is known about military sexual trauma among men, as the focus is typically on women. Masculinity among military men serves to perpetuate the stereotype of invulnerability and dominance, which creates reluctance in reporting. Monteith et al. (2019) found that for male veterans who did disclose, the response to their admittance of a sexual assault was unfavorable, thus contributing to males' reluctance to report sexual assault due to negative reactions.

Heydon and Powell (2018) noted the importance of a sexual assault victim's initial intake statement. The statement provides critical information for law enforcement, especially if the officer has an account from the victim as well as the accused perpetrator. Cross and Schmitt (2019) suggested law enforcement's initial investigation is crucial to the criminal justice process in sexual assault cases. Therefore, it is imperative to study and understand how the initial intake interview affects male and female sexual assault victim's decision to cooperate in the criminal justice process. This understanding is paramount to potentially increasing the overall safety of U.S. communities. Additionally, a better understanding could provide crucial tips and improved training for law enforcement officers in responding to male sexual assault victims. It is not yet known how law enforcement's interaction during the initial intake interview of male military sexual assault victims impacts the men's cooperation in the criminal case. Similarly, it is important to understand how this interaction with law enforcement may differ from initial intake interviews with sexual assault victims who are female.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. It is important to understand if—and if so, how—rape myth acceptance influences law enforcement culture, decisions, and behavior with sexual assault victims. For the purposes of this study, rape was defined as sexual penetration without consent. Additionally, there is a need to ascertain whether military male sexual assault victims receive different treatment than military female sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. The initial interaction with law enforcement may unintentionally influence the military sexual assault victim's cooperation in the criminal case.

It is important to mention, though the evaluation of interaction by the victim advocate was of military members and law enforcement, when law enforcement is referenced in this study, it will include military police and investigators, as well as local law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement, in this study, includes multiple entities, such as, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI), Air Force Security Forces (SF), Department of Defense law enforcement officers, and local agencies like Bexar County Sheriff's Office (BCSO), San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), and other smaller law enforcement departments which will be determined by where the sexual assault takes place. A local law enforcement department may initially receive notification of the case. Local departments can and often will work with the military officials on cases, sharing information pertinent to the case, providing the information circumvents

compromising confidentiality. However, case management only includes Department of Defense law enforcement officials and military criminal investigators.

Evaluation of the collected data were through a feminist intersectional perspective lens to gain a thorough understanding of how law enforcement may influence the sexual assault victim's cooperation, thereby manipulating criminal case attrition. Through semi-structured interviews, victim advocates will share their perceptions of the lived experiences of the military sexual assault victim's interaction with law enforcement. The advocates' observations of the interaction between law enforcement and sexual assault victims could provide pertinent information about the positive and negative influences law enforcement may unwittingly have on these cases within the criminal justice process.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this qualitative study:

Research Question 1: How do sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview?

Law enforcement is part of the emergency response team. More often contacted by the hospital, officers meet with sexual assault victims after an assault. At this time, victims typically inform the officer whether they are interested in filing a report of sexual assault. This initial encounter can positively or negatively influence the victim's cooperation in the overall criminal justice process.

Research Question 2: How are military female sexual assault victims treated by law enforcement compared to military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview based on victim advocates' perspectives?

Within the last decade, the law changed to include males as potential victims of sexual assault. The previous definition of rape failed to include males due to gendered language such as *vaginal-penile penetration*. Although the law has changed, prejudices about males being victims in sexual assault cases remain consistent with societal perceptions of masculinity. Such preconceived bias may influence how law enforcement interacts with male versus female victims.

Theoretical Framework

The fundamental principles of feminist theory are social, institutional, and political gender discrimination, primarily affecting the lives of women (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Historically, feminism has centered on the subjugation of women and the inequality they experience within a patriarchal society; fundamentally, however, feminism is about equality for all genders. Researchers use feminist theory to examine relational differences between genders (Kerner, 2017), particularly concerning sexism. Established hierarchies were a means to maintain control within a patriarchal society. Although the driving force of feminist theory is the equality of women, gender roles affect both men's and women's lives. The inequality caused by gender roles contributes to the boundaries that make it difficult for males to report sexual assault, increasing the stigma associated with being a rape victim.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is a framework that describes oppression within multiple contexts (Carastathis, 2014; Perlman, 2018). Intersectionality theory encompasses people within multiple demographics, with individuals affected based on the groups with which they affiliate (Bright et al., 2016). Intersectionality is used to analyze "power differentials" within socially constructed "cultural categorizations," including "gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality" and other labels used to create bias (Lykke, 2010, p. 50).

Intersectionality denotes the magnitude of oppression across demographics such as social class, sexual preference, religion, race, age, lifestyle, and political affiliation (Carastathis, 2014; Perlman, 2018). Individuality is an intersection of the characteristics of a person. In an interview, Crenshaw explained intersectionality as a lens with which to view power on various levels ("Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality", 2017). Discrimination can occur on any level, thus requiring an individual evaluation for every situation.

Utilizing intersectionality as the lens by which shapes our worldview, male victims of rape have more than one defining characteristic. When filling out a sexual assault report, police officers describe the victim by gender, age, race, and even lifestyle. Not long ago, the perception was that a married woman could not be raped by her husband, with a parallel belief that men could not be victims of rape. The context of intersectional feminism in this study enabled evaluation of the stereotypical gender roles within society and the cultural perceptions of victims of sexual assault on the foundation

of patriarchal values. Although it may have begun as a way to emphasize the importance of women's equality, feminism has evolved into much more than merely an agenda for women. At the root of feminism is equality, no matter the gender. Moreover, intersectionality breaks down the constructs that encompass how individuals are viewed based on the attributes that define who they are.

The participants in this study will be victim advocates who have worked with military male and female victims of sexual assault. Society's perception of military men will serve to identify how a culture built on patriarchal values views male military victims of sexual assault compared to military females. Additionally, how victim advocates perceive reasons behind why males may feel the overwhelming need to assert their masculinity to themselves after sexual trauma will be explored (Monteith et al., 2019). Feminist intersectionality theory provides the structural basis for how individuals experience oppression independently, yet simultaneously (Bright et al., 2016; Carastathis, 2014). Intersectionality incorporates the numerous differences that may intersect in creating an individual's persona (Kerner, 2017). Feminist intersectionality theory allowed me to examine the obstructions military sexual assault victims may consider in deciding to report their sexual assault. Unlike other frameworks, feminist intersectionality theory is a foundation to explore the multifaceted issues of being a military victim of sexual assault and how males versus females in the military are perceived as victims of sexual assault. Male sexual assault victims may experience bias due to the patriarchal values in society that once provided power and protection privileges at birth. Feminist

intersectionality theory highlights how these same values now leave men vulnerable due to circumstances beyond their control.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research approach, which allowed me to explore how law enforcement influences the military sexual assault survivor's cooperativeness in their criminal case. I also explored how law enforcement officers who ascribe to rape myth acceptance subconsciously respond to cases of sexual assault involving male versus female victims. Thus, I examined how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement officers' initial intake interviews differ between male and female victims.

Edmund Husserl, father of phenomenology, proposed this theoretical framework as a stream of consciousness repeatedly reinforced to describe the essence of the phenomenon (Beyer, 2003). Scholars use phenomenological research to explore the lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A phenomenological analysis of the interaction between law enforcement and military sexual assault victims will provide an understanding of the initial intake experience. The sexual assault victim advocates will draw upon their experiences in sharing how they perceive law enforcement response may affect male versus female military sexual assault victims' cooperativeness during the criminal case. Analysis of participants' responses will indicate themes relevant to law enforcement's unwitting effect on their respective criminal cases, providing a foundation for law enforcement which demonstrates their influence via inductive reasoning.

Definitions

Military sexual trauma: As defined by federal law, military sexual trauma is a direct psychological result of the physical assault of a sexual nature or sexual harassment that occurred while the individual served on active- or inactive-duty status (Contrada, 2016).

Rape: Rape is an unlawful sexual activity that involves sexual penetration of the anus, mouth, and/or vagina. The penetrating object may be the penis, other body parts, or a foreign object. This unlawful act takes place without the consent of the victim due to power, coercion, mental incapacity, intoxication or impairment, or unconsciousness.

Rape myth acceptance: Rape myth acceptance comes from biased beliefs that attribute blame for the rape to the victim, thus removing liability from the suspect. Rape myths influence perceptions held by law enforcement, family, friends, and others. (Dawtry et al., 2019; Delisle et al., 2019; Venema, 2019).

Revictimization: Victims of sexual assault are more susceptible to repeat acts known as revictimization, sometimes caused by their risk-taking behavior after a previous assault.

Secondary victimization: Secondary victimization stems from acts that cause the victim further trauma due to victim-blaming attitudes or comments by those in positions of support (e.g., law enforcement, medical staff, family, friends, etc.; Long, 2018; Venema, 2019).

Sexual assault: Sexual assault is any nonconsensual contact of a sexual nature; contact can be by force, the threat of force, or coercion.

Victim: In the context of this study, an individual who has suffered injury, whether physical or emotional, is a victim.

Victim advocate: A victim advocate receives specialized training to provide emotional support and assistance for a person who has experienced a traumatic event. Victim advocates regularly interact with first responders and victims; they can also be present during a criminal proceeding.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to examine how victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. Also examined will be whether the initial intake interview interaction by law enforcement may inadvertently affect the outcome of the criminal case by either increasing or decreasing the cooperativeness of a sexual assault victim. This study entailed exploring how victim advocates perceive that law enforcement's education and experience levels may affect their interactions with military sexual assault victims, and if there is a noticeable difference between law enforcement interaction with female versus male victims of sexual violence. Additionally, this study can also improve understanding of what role rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers plays in military sexual assault victims' willingness to report their assault.

This study was delimited to the perceptions of the victim advocates. Therefore, the description of the interaction between law enforcement and sexual assault victims focused on how the victim advocate perceived the initial intake interview and not how the

victim experienced it. As such, there is no risk of retraumatizing or revictimizing the sexual assault victim.

Limitations

Limitations included recruiting volunteers to participate who do not meet the inclusion criteria of my study. The information collected for this study involved the perceived experiences of victim advocates regarding the encounters between law enforcement and sexual assault victims; therefore, unless the sexual assault victim has expressed specific feelings about the initial encounter to the victim advocate, the perspective of the victim advocate may be only informed speculation. Another potential limitation could be having participants who have observed interactions between law enforcement and victims of one gender only. Furthermore, my personal experiences as a trained victim advocate and sexual assault response coordinator could have led to potential bias due to perceived victim encounters with law enforcement. To avoid this personal bias, I asked open-ended interview questions without a focus on preconceived notions. To achieve saturation and an adequate assessment of the perspective between gender differences, the sexual assault victim advocate needed to have provided support to both male and female victims of sexual assault. Further, the modest sample size used in qualitative studies could be a limitation.

Significance

The significance of this study is the exploration of an understudied population: military sexual assault victims. It is critical to examine how the interaction between law enforcement and military sexual assault victims affects the victim's cooperation in the

criminal case. Uncovering such information is important due to the need to capture the perpetrators of these crimes, reducing the risk to society and the instance of reoccurrence. Additionally, the rate of attrition for rape cases necessitates a better understanding of how to bring these perpetrators to justice (Hohl & Stanko, 2015). Victim advocates can offer invaluable insight into how they perceive the encounters between male and female victims of sexual assault and law enforcement. Victim advocates who have supported both male and female victims can add valuable information about even subtle differences in interview techniques, mannerisms, and language by the law enforcement officer. Male victims of sexual assault report less often than their female counterparts (Hlavka, 2017; Javaid, 2018b; Larsen & Hilden, 2016).

To explore the issue of reporting in general, it is necessary to understand any association between the male or female victim's reluctance to report and rape myth acceptance by law enforcement officers. This study is a means to identify whether there is an association between the level of rape myth acceptance and any differences in how the officer treats male and female sexual assault victims.

Victim advocates are present for the intake interviews and can provide firsthand knowledge of this interaction. The perspectives of victim advocates are important because these individuals play a significant role for the victim in the sexual assault case. Significantly, this study may provide findings that enable law enforcement officers to understand how rape myth acceptance and victim-blaming not only affect the rape victim, but also the outcome of the criminal case (Hine & Murphy, 2018; Javaid, 2016b; Shaw et al., 2017; Venema, 2019). Moreover, this study addresses whether victim advocates

perceive law enforcement's experience and education as impacting how officers interact with the sexual assault victim. The findings of this study can provide invaluable information for scholars and law enforcement in working with such an at-risk population.

This study may also encourage the difficult conversation about better equipping helping agencies to develop the necessary tools to work with rape victims, especially those who are male (Javaid, 2016b). Reports of sexual assault have received increased media attention over the last several years. Although the vast majority of reports are by women against men, male survivors have begun to share their experiences with sexual assault, a reminder that men can be victims of this crime as well (Javaid, 2016a).

Summary

This study was conducted to understand how victim advocates perceive the interactions between law enforcement officers and military sexual assault victims. Of paramount importance, this study fills a gap in research on the topic of military sexual assault victims, and specifically any differences in law enforcement's treatment of male and female victims as perceived by victim advocates. Findings may aid in the understanding of why male military victims report sexual assault far less frequently than their female counterparts.

The use of victim advocates as participants versus the sexual assault victims themselves prevented potential revictimization. Moreover, victim advocates have been present for both male and female sexual assault victim initial interviews. Accordingly, they can provide more complete data than the victims themselves, who have only their personal experience.

Findings could influence positive social change in several ways, first by educating law enforcement on the significant influence they have on their criminal cases. Second, results may increase awareness on a topic rife with stigma, highlighting the effects of rape myth acceptance within law enforcement culture. Third, findings may indirectly lead more victims to report their assault. Fourth, this study will expand the scholarly research to increase awareness and aid in creating programs specific to male sexual assault victims. Lastly, findings may inform law enforcement in working with victims to assist with the prosecution of the offender, providing a safer environment for the public.

Chapter 2 will be a review of the literature on the use of sexual assault victim advocates, military sexual trauma among sexual assault victims, sexual assault aid agencies and their limitations, and the negative influence of rape myth acceptance. Chapter 3 will be an overview of the qualitative nature of this study using intersectionality in feminist theory and how it supports the phenomenon. In Chapter 4, I will report the results of the semi-structured interviews from a phenomenological perspective, analyzed using audit trails and manual transcription. Chapter 5 will present a summary of the findings as well as the limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The subject of sexual assault can be religious, political, yet mostly, it is controversial. Religious in that, despite the change in law, some individuals continue to use religion to justify violating their lawful spouse. Some men and women in powerful positions use their authority to coerce their subordinate to engage in unwanted sexual behavior (Sanchez, 2019). Which on occasion, is in exchange for unspoken promises of preferential treatment against peers. Proverbial expressions like, 'it is her word against his', is one example of societies' desire to believe the accused in a sexual assault when both parties are familiar with one another. The view, men are always thinking about sex, or always want sex, therefore, they cannot be raped, is yet another false narrative which diminishes belief in the victim's claim. Historically, state, federal, and military laws continuously fail to successfully dictate the ways in which sexual assault cases should be handled (Carson & Carson, 2018). Consequentially, leaving discretion of resolution of sexual assault cases to various levels of leadership, which are often designed to protect high-level-positioned perpetrators, leaving them unscathed. Despite the subcategory the sexually inappropriate behavior falls under it is almost always controversial.

Most research concentrates on the implications of sexual violence against women. Children have been included in some studies that evaluate effects of sexual violence perpetrated against minors, as well, the resiliency of children after traumatic events. A common theme throughout many studies is the lack of research on male victims of sexual assault (Hammond et al., 2016; Ioannou et al., 2016; Javaid, 2015; Javaid, 2016a; Monteith et al., 2019). Additionally, the attrition of rape cases as a result of bias and rape

myth acceptance among law enforcement and criminal justice officials is problematic

(Hine & Murphy, 2018). Further, the matters that complicate sexual assault cases lack the

intersectional lens in which each case should be considered. For this reason, sexual

assault victims' refusal to report is a societal problem which may be solely or partly

attributed to the entities created to advocate for them.

Literature Search Strategy

The strategy engaged in this literature review began with database searches in the

Walden University library. The funneling of these searches involved both psychological

and criminal justice databases. The focus of the search within these databases were topics

involving sexual violence, law enforcement, and victim advocacy. The secondary and

tertiary libraries utilized in addition to Walden University were APA PsychNet, ProQuest

Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Premier, ResearchGate, Google Scholar,

and ProQuest Dissertations.

Utilizing the search term *sexual assault* in the electronic EBSCO Discovery

Service library yielded hundreds of thousands of results. The following keywords and

terms were used in the Boolean search parameters to narrow the scope of the search:

assault, bias, education, experience, female rape, feminism, feminist theory, gender bias,

intersectionality, intersectional feminism, intake statements, interviews, law enforcement,

law enforcement officer, male rape, military, military sexual trauma, perceptions, police

officer, qualitative, rape, rape myth, recidivism, sexual assault reporting, sexual trauma,

sexual violence, victim, victim advocate, and *victimology.* The literature search included

peer-reviewed articles and journals authored mainly within the last five years. However,

other articles were researched for the history of concepts and laws, which included

information within the last 10 to 20 years. Historical content is pivotal to understanding

how societal trends and beliefs evolve over time. It was also advantageous to research

authors with similar topics, which helped to identify research gaps in literature. One

benefit to this method was the ability to identify research gaps in literature. Research

appears to be exceptionally limited on the topic of male sexual assault and rape. Further,

data is non-existent in the area of comparing male versus female sexual assault victims'

experience with law enforcement during sexual assault initial intake interviews.

Theoretical Framework

The relevance of a theory in research is determined by the ability to explain the

phenomena critically and with objectivity. The purpose of this phenomenological

research was to objectively examine how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law

enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake

interview. Comparing the complexities of sexual assault while accounting for the

uniqueness of individuals and how they intersect is fundamental to intersectional

feminism. Intersectional feminism removes the interfaces that other theories draw upon to

explain phenomenon (Kerner, 2017). The intersectional feminist lens functions as an

explanation of the marginalization of overlapping social characteristics. Various research

demonstrated women as disproportionately sexually assaulted more than men. However,

men are more often offended by an unknown perpetrator than women (Larsen & Hilden,

2016).

According to the Rape Abuse Incest National Network (2020) the Department of Defense reported approximately 6% of women in the military experienced some form of sexual violence compared to less than 1% of men. Prior to Coulter et al. (2017) research on the topic of social identity and the prevalence of sexual violence was non-existent. The research conducted in their study explored interactions between social identities and the ability to predict the prevalence of sexual violence acted against these subgroups. The researchers found sexual assault affected specific subgroups (e.g., transgender vs. cisgender) of people disproportionately than others (Coulter et al., 2017, p. 730). In an effort to better understand the etiology of the poor attrition rate of rape cases, sexual assault victims' interaction, both male and female, with law enforcement during the initial intake interview and how these intersect the initial intake interviews must be evaluated. Intersectional feminism enables evaluation of groups and subgroups individualistically and the simultaneous impact societal pressures create making it the most appropriate phenomenological research approach for this study (Kerner, 2017).

In general, qualitative research enables scientists to understand feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of the participants on a particular subject. Phenomenology was chosen due to its unique ability which allows the researcher to examine the true essence of the experienced phenomena of the participants (Walden University Library, 2019). Feminist theory was chosen to provide emphasis on gender and sex inequality as it pertains to victims of sexual violence (DeFelice & Diller, 2019; Kerner, 2017; Salem, 2018). Historically, feminist theory uniquely describes issues faced specifically by women in

society. Yet, more importantly, feminist theory embodies the underlying concept that inequality is an issue anyone can encounter.

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, uniquely describes the individuality of a person that defines who they are, which serves to examine the uniqueness in injustices they may face based on those differences (Carastathis, 2014; Perlman, 2018). Interwoven elements, some malleable, others unmalleable, which make up an individual's uniqueness can be causal for its own discriminatory practices in a patriarchal society. Intersectionality highlights the power paradigm in social structures where oppressive attitudes often lie hidden by the institutions that perpetuate it. By emphasizing the multifaceted ways in which injustices and discrimination exists and can occur intersectionality frames the necessity of a leveled platform for which a multitude of oppressed to stand and demonstrate the injustice for which they experience. Further, by accentuating the various forms of oppression, intersectionality increases the potential for social justice (Rosenthal, 2016). Thereby, making intersectional feminism the most appropriate of theories to use as a lens to examine the perceived life experience of both military male and female sexual assault victims during their initial intake interview with law enforcement (Carastathis 2014; Hoskin et al. 2017).

The intent of the framework for this study is to generate themes by exploring the lived experience of the participants within the study (Hoskin et al., 2017). Unlike other studies where researchers have interviewed the sexual assault victims themselves, I interviewed their victim advocates (Brownstone et al, 2018; Larsen & Hildren, 2016; O'Brien et al, 2015; Sadler et al., 2018). In order to gather information that expresses any

distinguishable differences between gender the victims themselves would not have the ability to provide the vital information needed. While the victim has their own perception and interpretation of their interaction with law enforcement, they would not be able to provide a comparative experience between genders of victims, or different genders of law enforcement. However, the sexual assault victim advocate would have experienced both. Hence, making their participation vital to the exceptionality of this study.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is not a new phenomenon. Sexual assault, more specifically, the act of rape, has been a ubiquitous problem for centuries. Historically, it has been used as a tool of war (Korac, 2016). Adeleke et al. (2019) described rape as the most "dehumanizing" form of violence against women (p. 628). However, anyone can be a victim of this crime–a man, woman, or child (White, 2018). Societies and cultures are not immune to this pervasive threat. It has devastating effects on the lives of those it affects, both physically and mentally. By extension, sexual assault affects those individuals close to the sexual assault victim as well, as many victims would prefer those closest to them remain unaware (Larsen & Hilden, 2016).

A special report released by the U.S. Department of Justice (2014) stated women between 18 – 24 years of age are at greater risk of being sexually assaulted than women in any other age group. Coincidentally, the age of heightened risk coincides with college years. Franklin and Menaker (2018) suggested women associated with Greek organizations during college may be at greater risk for sexual assault. The authors

highlighted the risk of unwanted sexual activity as potentially a result of other risk-taking behaviors, such as, drug and alcohol use, and association with the fraternal organizations the women engage in collegiate activities with (Franklin et al., 2018, p. 161). Franklin and Menaker (2018) further found the women's affiliation with sororities also provided some added protection against victimization. Therefore, being affiliated with a sorority did not guarantee being victimized, nor did it entirely prevent against it.

Javaid (2018a) explored the stigmas associated with male rape. Research in this area is unduly limited. Javaid (2018a) discussed the myth of how the rape of men is often associated with homosexuality. Sexual violence perpetrated against men is not a homosexual issue. Furthermore, men who rape other men rarely identify as homosexual. Rape is not about sexual desire, rather, it is about power and control. Men who rape other men attempt to exert their dominance over the other. Javaid (2018a) found the adherence to rape myths due to heterosexual norms influenced the treatment of male sexual assault victims.

Wattis (2017) examined sexual violence as a gender issue. The analysis of serial murders of sex workers, the gender of the victims, and how those cases were handled by law enforcement demonstrated a paradigm in the level of emphasis placed on sexual assault cases. Wattis (2017) argued the lowered sociocultural status of women, regardless of profession, sheds light on how cases involving them are handled. Finding the murderer or rapist of a prostitute strikes low on the palisade of importance for law enforcement. Years of sociocultural gender inequality is difficult to overlook. The lackluster investigation of the Yorkshire Ripper Murders enabled Peter Sutcliffe to murder 13

women, and attack at least eight others over a five-year timespan (Wattis, 2017, p. 3). It appears to be repeated history, as nearly a century earlier Jack the Ripper committed the same maim and torture of women prostitutes, yet was never caught (Wattis, 2017, p. 4).

Carson and Carson (2018) analyzed the history of rape and sexual assault in the military according to military law. Further, the authors discussed changes in how the military handles sexual assault cases, as well as awareness and prevention efforts. Military laws and punishment dealing with rape have evolved over the years (Carson & Carson, 2018, p. 183). Although jurisdiction of the sex crime is determined by the branch of service the military member is affiliated with, when the victim or perpetrator falls outside of the military realm, it is determined whether the criminal jurisdiction resides within the Department of Justice or the local civilian law enforcement agency. Nonetheless, a member charged locally will not go unpunished by the military. Punitive outcomes of sexual assault cases typically necessitate immediate reduction of rank, forfeiture of pay and allowances, and a dishonorable discharge after time is served in prison.

Over the last few decades, several military branches have been the subject of major civilian scrutiny as allegations of sexual misconduct and mishandling of sexual assault cases have come to light at the highest level in each branch of service (Carson & Carson, 2018, p. 185). It is easily assumed the number of sexual assaults increased over the years, by merely glancing at the number of reports. However, it is quite the opposite. It is not that sexual assault in the military has increased. In fact, the means of reporting and leadership's zero tolerance policy for sexual assault has been widely advertised.

Thereby, generating avenues for the victims to report the crime and receive support services in the process.

The Department of Defense has deployed sexual assault awareness programs throughout each branch to handle harassment, sexual assault reports, and active case management. Carson and Carson (2018) suggested critics of the sexual assault awareness and prevention programs have flooded support for victims without rousing support for those falsely accused. A limited understanding of sexual assault trauma may influence this belief. Despite the mounting support for sexual assault victims, reasons for not reporting the crime remain the same. Sadler et al. (2018) suggested the trauma experienced by male military sexual assault victims were similar to their female counterparts. The authors further argued differences in how male military victims were treated when the perpetrator was a female may intuitively account for why males were unlikely to report their assault (Sadler et al., 2018).

Although research on military male sexual assault is limited, research that exists suggests the negative effects, such as, suicidality, social support damage, and depression, are similar to that of their female counterparts (Blais et al., 2020; DiMauro & Renshaw, 2019; Schry et al., 2015). According to research, military sexual trauma (MST) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diminishes the victim's ability to engage in a healthy sexual relationship (Blais et al., 2020; DiMauro & Renshaw, 2019). DiMauro & Renshaw (2019) found PTSD as a significant issue for female victims of sexual assault. The authors further indicated issues with the victim's sexuality, as well as their ability to communicate within relationships (DiMauro & Renshaw, 2019). Thomsen et al. (2018)

argued sexual assault as potentially more detrimental to victims serving in the military. This may be particularly true when the perpetrator is in the victim's chain of command. Thus, the victim's psychological symptoms may be exasperated by the continual presence of their rapist. According to the literature, leadership's attitudes determine the level of acceptability of sexual attitudes and behaviors within the organization (Thomsen et al., 2018). When leadership lacks the fortitude to demonstrate a clear zero tolerance policy for even mild infractions sexual assault victims are more reluctant to report their assault. The perceived lack of support from leadership, support systems, and law enforcement may heighten feelings of isolation and depression.

Victimology

Victimology is a term used to explain the relationship dynamics between victims of a crime, the victim and offender, the victim and law enforcement, the victim and the criminal justice system, the victim and helping agencies, and interactions with other entities, like friends and family (Introduction to Victimology, 2018). Victimology enhances the focus on the rights of victims, further identifying those individuals who are more likely to be victimized. Benjamin Mendelsohn, one of the first victimologists, classified victims based on their own level of culpability (Introduction to Victimology, 2018). By understanding and identifying the characteristics that potentially make an individual a target, it may also be feasible to interrupt the cycle of violence. Although victims are not the cause of the crime committed, it is often perceived some may instigate the crime against them. Therefore, creating the irrational belief by some that the victim is in some way responsible for the crime that was committed against them. Bell et al.,

(2018) stressed the importance of not misinterpreting risk factors for fault of or responsibility for victimization. This only further increases the likelihood of victims' reluctance to report the crime. Dillenburger (2007) suggested, some individuals are more susceptible to becoming a victim of a crime. Additionally, factors associated with individuals potentially becoming a victim of a crime may alternately predict the potential predator behavior (Dillenburger, 2007). Some circumstances set the platform for sexual assault to take place. Masculinized environments increase potentiality for women to become victims of sexual assault (Bell et al., 2018).

Anyone can be a victim of a sexual assault. The vast majority of victims are overwhelmingly young children, women, the intellectually challenged, and minorities (Bharmal & Batthini, 2015). The study of victimology serves to identify those individuals more likely to be victimized. A crucial component that increases the risk of being victimized is the level of vulnerability. Whilst men can be victims of sexual assault, it is society's concept of masculinity that feeds the perception of male "invulnerability to sexual violence" (Javaid, 2018b, p. 457). Young men struggle with this cultural ideology which reinforces a "heteronormative culture" (Hlavka, 2017, p. 483). This ideology creates stigma surrounding male rape, potentially increasing the reluctance in male victims to report their sexual. While if they do report, consequently making it difficult for male victims to describe the victimization they experience. Not reporting and limited cooperation inhibits law enforcement's ability to apprehend the offender, leaving criminals able to re-offend. Furthermore, male victims are less likely to seek out helping agencies.

An inability to receive assistance creates psychological trauma, that develops into posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and or military sexual trauma (MST). The lack of support in dealing with this trauma makes the experience more overwhelmingly difficult, increasing the likelihood of PTSD (Elder et al., 2017). Moreover, victims having to justify their actions, being a victim of sexual assault, (e.g., why they wore what they wore, in the place they were in, why they had as much as they had to drink, etc.) is as difficult as having to explain explicit details of the assault. Numerous studies have linked alcohol with an increased risk of sexual assault (Franklin et al., 2018; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018). Sexual assault victims are more likely to blame themselves for the sexual assault when alcohol was involved (Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018). Additionally, there is an increase in victim-blaming behavior by individuals once they were aware alcohol was involved in the sexual assault (Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018).

Some research suggests female college students are at a higher risk of being sexually assaulted than women in the general public (Franklin et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2016). Further, male victims of rape are even less likely to report sexual violence than women (Larsen & Hilden, 2016). In order to reduce the victimization, it is imperative victims of rape feel comfortable reporting their assault to the proper authorities. Part of the responsibility falls on the first response agencies that assist the victims during the initial report. It is this initial interaction that sets the tone for future victim cooperation in the criminal investigation (Lorenz & Maskaly, 2016). The initial experiences sexual assault victims have with law enforcement greatly determine the assistance they provide in the criminal case (Feeney et al., 2018). Law enforcement

officers whose affect demonstrate they may not believe the victim's account of the crime make the victim feel insecure about the officer's support of their claim. Victim's statements can change over time reflecting inconsistencies which may affect the believability (Feeney et al., 2018). Law enforcement officers that subscribe to rape myth acceptance may lack confidence in the victim's story. The endorsement of rape myth acceptance by anyone has immense effects on society.

Rape Myth Culture

Rape myths are false beliefs individuals hold about sexual assault survivors that are stereotypical in nature (Barnett et al., 2018; Gravelin et al., 2019; Reitz-Krueger et al., 2017). Rape myth culture develops by individuals who engage in rape myth acceptance (Barnett et al., 2018). Stereotypical views, such as, men cannot be raped, prostitutes cannot be raped, a woman dressed provocatively asked for it, a child who is raped must have behaved in a highly sexual manner, or arousal and or orgasm during the rape suggests it was assault was a consensual act, etc. These opinions can be held by anyone and have extremely damaging effects on victims of sexual violence and the criminal justice process. According to Walker (2005) as cited in Lowe & Rogers (2017) this is particularly the case when the viewpoint is held by a member of law enforcement, individuals within the criminal justice process, medical emergency responders, family and friends, or other helping agencies.

Rape survivors in the immediate aftermath of their assault tend to believe their behavior somehow contributed to the assault (Curry, 2019). Any doubt and biases of family members, friends, and first responders expressed to the victims increase this self-

blame. Victim-blaming allows individuals to distance themselves from the crime, creating an illusion they cannot become victims of the crime. According to Ryan (1971) as cited in Stubbs-Richardson et al. (2018) this behavior provides absolution for the perpetrator, enabling them to avoid punishment. Language used by those individuals the victim initially felt comfortable disclosing their assault can come across as accusatory rather than supportive. Hence, the victim feels discouraged in following through with any report or support services due to doubting people will believe their story (Best et al., 2017; Curry, 2019).

Victim-blaming can be linked to a history of gender-based biases against women (Felson & Palmore, 2018). Some people who blame victims for their own assaults believe they can avoid becoming victims themselves by not engaging in the behavior they think made the victim vulnerable to being raped. Felson and Palmore (2018) argued females of rape were more likely than their male counterparts to be assigned blame for their rape. This argument supported by Wentz and Archbold (2012), as cited in Venema (2019), found in one study, a greater incidence of women police officers endorsed rape myth acceptance than male police officers.

The belief that a victim of rape is somehow to blame for the crime perpetrated against them compromises the integrity of any potential criminal case. Rape culture creates secondary victimization of the sexual assault victim. Law enforcement officers' endorsement of rape myth acceptance is problematic in that the bias unwittingly affects the victim's willingness to cooperate, thereby affecting the outcome of their criminal case (Venema, 2019). When initial interaction with law enforcement appears accusatory, rape

victims are less likely to report due to fearing no one will believe them, or people will continuously blame them. Additionally, a report that law enforcement believes is false can be closed due to insufficient evidence. Similarly, lack of support from the victim will cause law enforcement's inability to close the criminal case. Those individuals who are not considered an "ideal victim" of sexual assault experience the prejudice on a complex level (Jordan, 2008, as cited in Venema, 2019; Sleath & Bull, 2012, as cited in Venema, 2019). The "fundamental inequalities between men and women" are instrumental in the forming of rape myth acceptance (Barnett et al., 2018, p. 1221).

Gender bias is a social problem weaved within generations of patriarchal societies. In order to address this societal problem, criminal cases involving men and women who have been raped ought to be considered in the context of the complexities of their identity. The complexities of an individual's identity can include their gender, race, religion, sexual preference, ethnic group, and social class.

Intersectionality in Feminist Theory

The origins of feminism focused on women, white women, in particular (Egan, 2019; Ferreday, 2017). Over time, the concept of feminism has evolved to encompass the equality of all women. To the extent, now, feminist theory addresses gender inequality within social systems. Special emphasis in feminism has continually been placed on the equal treatment of women throughout society. In a patriarchal society, feminist ideals have adopted a negative connotation. Hoskin et al. (2017) suggested despite belief in feminist ideology people refuse a feminist identity due to the stigmatization associated with it. Although the majority of feminists are women, men can be feminists too. The

classification of feminist can be assigned to anyone who believes in, and advocates for gender equality. Feminism provides the ability for individuals to view injustices through the lens of those who may experience them based on the individual's gender identity. Ideally, feminist research is the impetus for which understanding sexual violence as it occurs against women, and coincidentally men (Zaykowski & Campagna, 2014).

Feminist theory places emphasis on gender inequality, further framing rape as a woman's problem (Javaid, 2016a). This complicates matters, by suggesting only women can be raped, men cannot be victims of sexual assault (Javaid, 2016a) In order to understand the problem that exists and determine how to fix it, society must first admit there is a problem. Opinions that are based on false beliefs which are expressed become normalized. Anyone in disagreement will unlikely share their opinion since it would be considered unpopular to public opinion (Armstrong & Mahone, 2017). Feminist theory explains the complexities that have evolved over years of institutionalized and societal gender-based biases. If feminist theory identified women as the only victims of rape due to power constructs within society, men being raped would challenge this construct of who a true victim is. However, unaccompanied, feminist theory cannot fully explain sexual assault within the varying complexities of the victims who are raped (Griffith, 2006; Kerner, 2017). Griffith (2006) suggested simple approaches as merely identifying gender in patriarchal societies as insufficient to explain the diverse contributing factors to understanding the multifaceted experiences of rape for both genders. Griffith's (2006) focus on intersectional feminism as a framework emphasized all unique aspects that combined affect an individuals' collective social experience; "social or economic status;

race; class; gender; sexuality; ability; geographic location; citizenship and nationalities; and/or refugee and immigrant status" (p. 6-7).

The basis of a theoretical framework provides a context for which to identify and further explain a concept. Sexual assault is a social problem that requires analysis with thorough consideration of the victims it affects. Intersectionality in feminist theory increases the potential for extensive analysis of a social problem that affects everyone (Griffith, 2006; Kerner, 2017). Carastathis (2014) argued intersectionality in feminist theory provides an analysis of oppression that cannot be understood by gender alone (p. 304). Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, examined the oppression of Black women as interlocking systems, rather than a singular form (Carastathis, 2014; Ferguson, 2016). Thus, the discrimination Black women experienced is a binary paradigm. The context in which intersectionality enhances feminist theory in this study is by taking account distinct aspects in people which creates their individuality that make them vulnerable to oppression (Brahm, 2019; Ferguson, 2016). Rosenthal (2016) asserted "intersectionality contributes to the important understanding of multiple systems of oppression as "interlocking," suggesting they must be both understood and struggled against simultaneously" (p. 475). For instance, a man in the military, is characterized as a military man, which creates a dual description of who he is. A homosexual Christian woman represents three distinctions. She is a woman, who is Christian, and identifies as homosexual. The interlocking complexity of who she is, is cumulative in her identity. Bias against either individual can potentially be based on one or all of the characteristics that distinguishes them from others (Kerner, 2017; Rosenthal, 2016).

Intersectionality has become the predominate way feminist researchers analyze social constructs (Salem, 2018). Individuals identify themselves by race, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status. Salem (2018) argued, intersectionality creates categories, identifies how they are exploited, in addition to "why they intersect" (p. 408). Feminist theory examines the relational differences amongst gender, the how and why hierarchies are established. Intersectionality delves deeper to explain individual differences on multiples layers other than gender, addressing intersecting differences (Kerner, 2017). Bright et al. (2015) argued characteristics of identity, if considered individually avoids producing the oppressive lifestyle the collective intersectional identity creates. Examining the multiple facets of rape victims employing an intersectional feminist lens will potentially explain limited reporting despite gender. Furthermore, the research on the interaction between law enforcement and sexual assault victims require exploration to ascertain whether this experience plays a role in rape victim's refusal to report or lack of cooperation in their criminal cases.

Law Enforcement

A law enforcement officer's levels of education and experience shape the lens through which they view the world. The assimilation within law enforcement culture may make officers more susceptible to the acceptance of rape culture. Consequently, rape myth acceptance may negatively affect interactions with military sexual assault victims. The officers' education and experience may determine their susceptibility to the rape myth acceptance within law enforcement. Therefore, the officers' impartiality is

beneficial to both the victim and the criminal justice process (McMillan, 2018; Shaw et al., 2017; Spohn & Tellis, 2019).

After one of the most horrific experiences of an individual's life, they often encounter someone who is supposed to be a source of support, on the road to healing. In the event of rape, sexual assault victims generally meet with first responders to attend to their immediate needs. The first responder within the legal system is typically a law enforcement officer. Officers should never be indiscriminately assigned to sexual assault cases (Rich, 2019). Rich (2019) recommended law enforcement officers assigned to rape cases have significant experience and training to engage victims of this unique type of trauma. Lorenz & Maskaly (2018) suggested that despite popular belief among law enforcement officers that rape is a very serious crime, their behavior may demonstrate they feel otherwise. McMillan (2018) claimed officers may feel conflicted, experiencing both "cynicism and belief" (p. 13).

Entering the initial intake interview with preconceived ideas about the validity of the statement may affect the overall outcome of any potential criminal case. An officer's skeptical affect in the interview could theoretically be picked up by the hypersensitivity of the victim. Lorenz et al., (2018) argued that the initial interaction is crucial to the potential outcome. Further, victims respond positively or negatively to how the intake officer treats them. If the victim feels the officer is sincere in their belief of the statement and genuinely wants to help the victim is more amenable to them. Establishing trust during the initial intake interview is crucial to reducing barriers to reporting, the overall

investigation, and potential prosecution of the perpetrator, providing justice for the victim (Hine & Murphy, 2018).

Cross and Schmitt, (2019) noted a difference in law enforcement officers' responses to adult victims versus that of children. The authors submitted children's cases as more believable while, adult cases were perhaps "unfounded" (Cross and Schmitt, 2019, p 105). The importance of the law enforcement officer to remain unbiased is paramount. Law enforcement officers that believe a report is unsubstantiated will result in the case being closed and the alleged criminal remaining at large (Cross & Schmitt, 2019; McMillan, 2018). Prosecutors similarly will devote time and effort to criminal case with a high conviction potential (Spohn & Tellis, 2019). As with any crime, criminals uncaught will continue to recidivate. Notwithstanding, the lack of consideration by law enforcement given to the victims' mental state having to be re-interviewed several times. Any change in the victims' story or inconsistency tends to immediately become indicative of a false testimony (McMillan, 2018). Assault cases that do not conform to an officer's expectations of honesty and truthfulness tend to be met with "cynicism" (McMillan, 2018, p. 13).

Shaw et al. (2016) posited differences in treatment by law enforcement was often based on the victim's "group identity" (p. 448). Javaid (2015) insinuated limited research on how law enforcement officers treat male victims during initial intake interviews makes it difficult to determine how their experience wanes in comparison to females' generally speaking. As cited in Reitz-Krueger et al., (2017), Javaid (2016b) argued the emphasis on female victims overlooks male victimization. Furthermore, males who identify as

homosexual may find it increasingly more difficult to report their rape due to victim blame by law enforcement which only serves to increase trauma. Various other research suggested culture and language created barriers for law enforcement in the initial intake interviews (Heydon et al., 2018; Wakefield et al., 2015). Reporting sexual assault is a difficult process without the added pressure of articulating events to someone unfamiliar with your language and culture. The use of interpreters in these situations become a crucial aspect of intake statements, thus requiring law enforcement to change how they perform the interviews (Heydon et al., 2018; Wakefield et al., 2015). The ability to understand an experience through the perspective of a different culture may require unique knowledge and experience.

Reporting the sexual assault is one of the first steps within the criminal justice system which potentially leads to holding the offender accountable, which minimizes recidivism and enhances public safety (DePrince et al., 2020). Shaw et al. (2017) found some law enforcement officials blamed the victim for an unsuccessful case due to lack of cooperation from the victim. There is little consideration by the officers for the role they play in the victim's refusal to report. Several studies have found a direct correlation between the law enforcement officers' interaction with the victim and the victim's refusal to cooperate with the criminal investigation or file an initial report (Lorenz & Maskaly, 2018; Lorenz et al., 2019; Venema, Lorenz, & Sweda, 2020). It would be negligent to insinuate all encounters between law enforcement and rape victims as negative. Greeson et al. (2016) found positive experiences between law enforcement officers and rape victims were predominantly of those officers who had more experience and training. The

more experienced and educated officer was less likely to engage in victim-blaming behavior.

Exclusive to every organization is the culture that develops within it. The culture are the beliefs, shared opinions, morals, and judgments that creates group solidarity (McMillan, 2018). Law enforcement is no exception. Jung (2018) argued a distrusting consensus among law enforcement regarding those who are not law enforcement. Wallace (2015) affirmed police culture heavily dictates the actions and behaviors of law enforcement officers. This evidently has both positive and negative consequences. Police culture heavily influencing the officers' actions may demonstrate strong beliefs and biases about rape victims. Copious research suggested the necessity of training and education concerning appropriate handling of sexual assault victims during interviews (Long, 2018; Lorenz & Maskaly, 2018; McMillan, 2018; Rich, 2019; Shaw et al., 2016). There is strong evidence police culture is impermeable (Wallace, 2015). Perchance understanding how law enforcement may affect sexual assault victims during initial intake interviews may necessitate the cultural shift required to increase case closures resulting in the arrest and incarceration of the offenders (Long, 2018, p. 511; McMillan, 2018, p. 19).

Victim Advocacy

Victim advocates are specially trained individuals who are called upon to assist victims of violence. Victim advocates can be volunteers, with some working directly for various agencies which supports victims (Benuto et al., 2018). Some victim advocates work for law enforcement agencies or are civil servants within the government. Victim

advocates working within the government and law enforcement agencies provide

professional and comprehensive services to sexual assault victims. Their responsibilities

include coordinating services with local agencies, such as, health care, safety shelters,

and law enforcement meetings. Some victim advocates serve as part of a sexual assault

response team (SART) (Benuto, 2018, p. 570; Greeson et al., 2018, p. 445). Although

they work in a forensic environment, sexual assault victim advocates are not forensic

interviewers. Advocates endure a lengthy screening process, background investigation,

and specialized training. The number of required hours of training may vary by agency.

Unlike victim advocates, forensic interviewers receive specialized training which

enables them to avoid retraumatizing the victim during interviews (Cronch, as cited in

Duron & Cheung, 2016). Victim advocates, however, are not involved in questioning the

victim. Their role is to provide support for the victim during services which require the

victim to discuss details of the case or undergo a sexual assault forensic examination.

Forensic interviewers and victim advocates are not counselors, and therefore, do not

provide mental health counseling to sexual assault victims. Rodino (1985) as cited in

Lindahl (2015) suggested the purpose of victim advocacy is to empower victims,

restoring the power and control lost in their victimization. Within the military

environment, another important role for the victim advocate is to aid in rebuilding trust

the sexual assault victim may have lost, especially if their perpetrator is a member of the

military.

Victim advocates are not law enforcement officials, nor do they work within the

criminal justice system. Their relationship with the criminal justice system is platonic,

with their only involvement is to be present and supportive of the victim (Benuto et al., 2018; Long, 2018). Their interaction with law enforcement can sometimes be complicated. Some victim advocates hold positions within the law enforcement agency which they provide victim advocacy services for. However, this can cause a conflict of interest due to potential blurred lines between the victim advocate role and how law enforcement officers may expect them to behave. The relationship between victim advocates and the law enforcement agency may become adversarial if the officers or their leadership disregards the true nature of the victim advocates' responsibility, undermining the importance of their presence (Long, 2018). Law enforcement officers callously handling a sexual assault victim can cause the victim advocate to engage the officer reminding them of the fragility of the victim's psychological state.

Long (2018) insinuated the interaction between law enforcement and sexual assault victim seem insensitive as perceived by the victim advocate. While the victim advocate's role is not to be adversary to the law enforcement officer, at times, the lines can be blurred to protect the sexual assault victim from what appears to be a callous initial intake interview officer (Long, 2018, p. 510). As a community, not all law enforcement officers are callous when handling sexual assault cases. As with anything, some officers are simply better than others at differentiating between the role of the sexual assault victim advocate and their professional responsibilities as a law enforcement officer.

Summary

Perhaps this is the first study to use intersectional feminism in reference to men who have been raped. This study is uniquely designed to place emphasis on the facets that create individuality while examining the differences those individualities inadvertently cause. Crenshaw may never have envisioned the theory she coined to be used in this fashion. Since its inception intersectionality was grounded in the black feminist movement (Harris & Patton, 2019). Nevertheless, intersectionality is perfectly suited today to explain the societal biases that are created by individual differences (DeFelice & Diller, 2019). Historically, sexual assault and rape have been identified as a woman's issue (Javaid, 2016a; Monteith et al., 2019; Sullivan & Rogers, 2017). In one study, military men, who became victims of sexual assault admitted to at one time believing rape could only happen to women (Monteith et al., 2019). Despite the apparent limited research on male sexual assault, today it is more accepted that sexual assault and rape is not merely a woman's issue (Javaid, 2015; Javaid, 2016a; Javid, 2016b; Javaid, 2018a; Javaid, 2018b). Although more widely accepted, it does little to mitigate biases held by a patriarchal society which associates masculinity with imperviousness to rape. Greeson et al. (2018) described the delegitimization of the sexual assault of males, as "conservative social attitudes that were resistant to change" (p. 451). Turchik et al. (2016) maintained while the topic of sexual assault has focused predominantly on victims being women, the gender of the victim is irrelevant and deserves comparable consideration as a victim of sexual violence. Sexual assault with an emphasis on gender bias displayed by law enforcement is an urgent societal issue that necessitates more research on the topic.

There is little surprise in the low reporting numbers of sexual assault by male and female victims (Best et al., 2017; Curry, 2019; Larsen & Hilden, 2016). The salient motivations behind why victims refuse to report are numerous across both genders with countless similarities. Victims of sexual assault, unlike victims of other crimes habitually blame themselves for the assault assuming responsibility. It is discernable, prior to reporting sexual assault, victims may consider the believability of their claim by law enforcement (Best et al., 2017; Curry, 2019). Hence, if the perpetrator is someone, they have a personal relationship with, same gender, or has a reputation that is above reproach, the victim will be less likely to report the assault (Curry, 2019; Reitz-Krueger et al., 2017). Furthermore, reporting the crime can be based on the perception of the victim's own reputation; how much they recollect of the incident, whether they were engaged in illegal behavior at the time of the assault, and potential feedback received from those closest to them immediately following the assault (O'Neal & Hayes, 2020). Studies have demonstrated consistent themes, such as, limited research on male victims of sexual assault and lack of education or experience by the law enforcement officers in dealing with rape victims (Reitz-Krueger et al., 2017; Shaw et al., 2016; Venema, 2019).

Although well-intentioned, police officers who subscribe to rape myth acceptance make their job difficult when they unconsciously engage in victim-blaming behaviors during the initial intake interview (Shaw et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2017). Any variations in the victim's statement, even after numerous questionings lends to disbelief by law enforcement officers who lack training and experience in dealing with sexual assault victims (McMillan, 2018). Shaw et al. (2017) argued victim's unwillingness to participate

in the investigation or provide a statement creates an ineffective incident report which in turn is blamed on the victim (p. 610). The aforementioned research contributes to the understanding further studies on the distinct experiences particularly of male survivors of rape based on lack of experience and education of law enforcement officers is necessary. What remains unclear is whether there are significant differences between how rape victims are treated by law enforcement during the initial interview based on gender. Particularly, whether their gender alone may in fact, influence the sexual assault victim's experience with law enforcement. Expounding on previous studies requires researchers to place emphasis on areas with limited exploration, such as, the criminal justice processes, law enforcement and their potential influence on rape case attrition rates (O'Neal & Hayes, 2020). However, areas of research that are entirely unexplored are of particular importance.

The scholarly community does not know how the initial law enforcement intake interview affects the sexual assault survivor. More specifically it is unknown if there are unique differences between how law enforcement officers treat male versus female victims of rape. Several studies demonstrate limited research in the area of male sexual assault victims and sexual assault victim experiences with law enforcement officers (Javaid, 2016a; Long, 2018; Monteith et al., 2019; O'Neal & Hayes, 2020). There is discernably insufficient information encompassing how male and female sexual assault victims perceive their initial intake interview with law enforcement. Long (2018) recommended future research on sexual assault victims' perceptions on their interaction with law enforcement. The most appropriate way to study perceptions comparing genders

is by interviewing the sexual assault victim advocates who were physically present for interviews with law enforcement and sexual assault victims of both genders.

A critical element of creating positive social change is identifying areas within society where change is drastically needed. The literature provided in this chapter evaluated important topics, such as, sexual assault, rape culture, victimology, law enforcement, and victim advocacy. Bharmal & Batthini (2015) suggested society has a responsibility to victims of sexual violence to aid in the reduction of their victimization. Accountability to ensure victims of sexual assault are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve lies with everyone, not just those individuals within the criminal justice system. Essentially anyone the victim encounters after their assault can play a vital role in their healing process. Intersectional feminist theory affords unique analysis of an interdependent phenomena which generates a social justice benefit unmatched by any other framework (Carastathis, 2014; Harris & Patton, 2019; Perlman, 2018).

The intent of this literature review was to demonstrate the necessity for research on the victim advocate perception of law enforcements' interaction with sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview (Long, 2018). Additionally, due to the limited research on male sexual assault victims, this study will include the differences of those experiences with law enforcement between male and female sexual assault victims as perceived by the victim advocate. Understanding the fundamental motivations for why sexual assault victims do not report or refuse to cooperate with law enforcement is critical to developing ways to overcome this obstacle. Research suggested males report even less than females which may allude to negative experiences with law enforcement due to

"stigma and shame" associated with male masculinity (Hlavka, 2017, p. 485). This study explored whether there were experience differences between male and female sexual assault victims during the initial interview which may account for males reporting far less than females via the perspective of the victim advocate.

In qualitative research, the theoretical framework is as significant as the data that is collected. A phenomenological approach to research provides the essence of the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Sexual assault victim advocates were chosen as participants due to their ability to provide their perception of the experience of both genders, male and female victims of rape. This information could not be collected from any other source since the male victim would not be able to provide perception of the victim experience of a female victim, or vice versa.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative study was conducted to examine the lived experience of the military sexual assault victim's interaction with law enforcement during the initial intake interview as perceived by the sexual assault victim advocate who is present for the interview. Researchers have documented what they discovered while exploring why sexual assault victims refuse to report, the prevalence of rape in different environments, and the role of sexual assault victim advocates (Best et al., 2017; Curry, 2019; Larsen & Hilden, 2016; Long, 2018). During a reasonably exhaustive search, there was minimal research conducted on the role of the criminal justice system in sexual assault. To date, research on how law enforcement may affect the sexual assault victim during the initial intake interview has not been accomplished. Therefore, I developed two primary research questions to accomplish this goal. To examine what affect law enforcement may have on military sexual assault victims I decided the participants in this study would be volunteer sexual assault victim advocates who work within the local community area of Joint Base San Antonio. Gathering information from the sexual assault victim advocate would assist us in better understanding what if any effect law enforcement officers had on the sexual assault victim during the initial intake interview. Further, the focus of this research would offer an opportunity to examine whether any differences exist between the law enforcement's interaction with the sexual assault victim purely based on the gender of the victim. This chapter illustrates the methodology employed in this research study. The topics included in this section are: study methodology; research questions; research design and rationale; population (sample size, recruitment procedures, interview protocol;

interview location); data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the ethical considerations and protection of the participants in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research design was employed in this study, structured around the following two research questions:

- Research Question 1: How do sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview?

- Research Question 2: How are military female sexual assault victims treated by law enforcement compared to military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview based on victim advocates' perspectives?

My intent was to gather information and understand what effect, if any, law enforcement may have on the sexual assault victims' willingness to report their assault, follow through with the case, and inadvertently the overall outcome of their criminal case. Additionally, I hoped to achieve a better understanding of whether there are any treatment differences from law enforcement officers to military sexual assault victims based on gender.

Consideration was given to other frameworks that may uniquely explain the phenomenon experienced by sexual assault victims, such as, grounded, and narrative theories (Butina, 2015; Tie et al, 2019). These two different approaches while somewhat helpful in furthering research into understanding the lived experience of sexual assault victims, presented too many limitations for this study. Grounded theory is a rigid,

systemically structured form of qualitative inquiry (Tie et al., 2019). Coding is an integral part of grounded theory. Data collected utilizing grounded theory is continuously analyzed and compared to other data collected in a "constant comparison" (Elder, 2017, p. 200). Ultimately the researcher spends a significant amount of time coding, evaluating, and reevaluating data collected, while theories are formulated which can overwhelm the researcher due to the amount of information continuously being collected at varying intervals. Another disadvantage is the inability to view the information through a particular framework from the beginning in a concerted effort to understand the phenomenon being explored (Elder, 2017).

Narrative theory research involves data from various sources to include participants to understand life experiences. A study utilizing a narrative theory framework may only include one participant which provides a description of their unique life experience to provide a deeper understanding (Butina, 2015). Narrative theory does not require multiple participants (Butina, 2015). Therefore, the researcher cannot compare, and contrast varied perspectives. The focus is on the experience of the individual participating in the study. Further, significantly reducing the ability to achieve saturation in research. The researcher can use journals, periodicals, and various other documents which allow them to draw a conclusion about the life experience of the research interest (Butina, 2015, p. 196). However, the participant providing the information about their experience will undoubtedly have some experiences that frame their feelings and perspective uniquely from others. Thus, degrading the researcher's ability to draw conclusions from various participants, each with unique backgrounds, and

yet similar experiences which greatly contributes to the development of the phenomenon being explored (Butina, 2015, p. 196).

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher, I intended to identify any patterns and themes that may develop during the study which would have described the central focus of this research. I developed and offered open-ended questions that allowed each participant to express the topic in detail. I conducted the interviews in a semi-structured setting that allowed for social distancing and enabled the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed. Meeting face-to-face was not an option for the majority of participants since it was of great importance to quarantine during the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, I conducted 80% of the interviews via Zoom meetings. I met with only 20% of the participants in face-to-face meetings.

Due to my personal experience as a victim advocate, I was relatable to the participants in that we shared similar experiences, have had identical training, and followed the same protocol within the Department of Defense's sexual assault prevention and response program. I remained focused on the predeveloped interview questions, avoiding deviations, such as, discussing my personal experience as a victim advocate. Various other deviations, for example, questions the participants asked during the interview were addressed in a way that allowed the interview to remain on task. Although the participants and I may have shared similar affiliations, I refrained from discussing any personal opinions about law enforcement officers, sexual assault victims, or other sexual assault victim advocates. This was done to avoid any potential bias, preconceived notions

about personal expectations, or any personal information with respect to my affiliation with law enforcement or the sexual assault prevention and response program.

Methodology

This section describes the population that was utilized to gather the data and procedures throughout the process in which the data was collected and analyzed. Further, this section describes the participant selection process, recruitment, data analysis plan, ethical procedures, the setting, population, and sample size.

Participant Selection Logic

The population of interest for this study were sexual assault victim advocates. A minimum of 10 participants was recruited from local community areas of Joint Base San Antonio military installations who were volunteer sexual assault victim advocates or Department of Defense sexual assault victim advocates at one point in their career. All volunteers had acquired the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Advocate (D-SAACP) certification, which requires a total of 40 hours of training on sexual assault awareness, prevention, and ethics. Further, the participants were either male or female. The criteria for inclusion in this study required the participant to have been dispatched to cases that allowed them to provide support for a minimum of one male and one female report of sexual assault. The victim advocate had to have been present for the initial intake interview with law enforcement. Criteria for exclusion in this study included any victim advocate or person(s) who had not been dispatched to a sexual assault case. Or a sexual assault victim advocate who had not had the experience of being dispatched to assist a victim in at least one male and one female sexual assault case. Furthermore, the

victim advocate would be excluded if they were not present for the initial intake interview. The age of the participant was not utilized as part of the inclusion or exclusion criteria for this study. The number of years the participant had been a victim advocate was not used for inclusion or exclusion criteria. However, it was advantageous to know how many years the volunteers had been a sexual assault victim advocate as a means to examine the breadth of experience of each participant.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Procedures for recruitment involved the utilization of the snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling technique allowed participants to suggest other potential participants who were able to assist the researcher of the study. Brown (2005) suggested the snowball technique as ideal for research populations who may be hidden due to the sensitive nature of the desired research area. Further, the snowball method is ideal for social networks, especially qualitatively driven research within a feminist methodology (Noy, 2008). Sexual assault victim advocates worked as part of a team that rotated on and off duty week by week. The recruitment of the first two participants were former colleagues who presently worked within the field of victim advocacy. The initial two participants were contacted via telephone to request their participation. The snowball sampling method of recruitment enabled the participants to volunteer of their own volition. Additional participants thereafter were recruited by participants who had already contributed to the research. To verify validity of their eligibility to participate, I requested only active sexual assault victim advocates be referred. Or inactive sexual assault victim advocates I knew were previously certified. Once each participant contacted me, they

were informed that they are not required to provide any names for participation. This assured confidentiality of the sexual assault victim they dispatched to, as well as confidentiality of their participation. Once referred for participation, the referrer was not notified as to whether or not the individual they recommended participated. Further, those who volunteered to participate were provided a consent form prior to participation in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structure interviews with sexual assault victim advocate participants. The participants were predominantly local community volunteers that I may have volunteered with in the past. There were a few volunteers referred that I had never previously met. I did not request anyone specifically, only interested participants were referred. Most of the interviews occurred during a previously scheduled Zoom meeting. Two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a meeting area of the library. Each interview was video, and audio recorded to be transcribed at a later date and time. Each interview was transcribed using factory installed dictation software conveniently located on my MacBook. Transcription of each interview was completed individually using coding for terms, phrases, themes, and statements relevant to this study. I used audit trails to capture each step within the research process, prior to, during, and after each interview.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To achieve trustworthiness, extensive research had to be conducted analyzing a substantial amount of literature. A minimum of 10 participants were recruited and their

responses from the interview were meticulously transcribed to enhance validity. To increase generalizability the inclusion criteria of this study enabled me to focus on a specific population sample.

To ensure transferability or generalizability of this study, the advocates had to have worked with both military and civilian entities. These entities included military police, local city law enforcement, state law enforcement, local hospitals, and local support agencies. The law enforcement agency which was notified about the sexual assault case first may have continued with the control of the criminal investigation. Therefore, the criminal aspect of the sexual assault case may have remained in a local jurisdiction, rather than be controlled by one particular law enforcement entity. These entities worked together to ensure continuity of the criminal case. Additionally, continuity of care also afforded the sexual assault victim the opportunity to work with local support agencies, such as a local Rape Crisis Center. For instance, if a member of the military was sexually assaulted and contacted the military installation's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) office a victim advocate was often dispatched to the victim's location. If the victim agreed to seek treatment, the sexual assault victim and the advocate would meet at a local hospital (or coordinate transportation of that victim) which typically had a memorandum of agreement with the military community's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response office. The hospital would typically notify law enforcement to report the crime. The law enforcement officer that took the initial intake statement, if at the hospital, was always a local law enforcement officer. Military police officers' jurisdiction ends at the gates of the military installation. Therefore, there was

unlikely to be any military police involvement, initially, unless the crime occurred on the installation, and they were dispatched to the scene. Accordingly, the participants in this study have worked with the same agencies as their civilian counterparts making this study generalizable to civilian advocates.

Ethical Procedures

Walden University IRB reviewed and approved (Approval No. 04-08-21-0972642) the study before proceeding with collecting any data or speaking with any participants. As a researcher, I chose to interview sexual assault victim advocates instead of sexual assault victims themselves to avoid the ethical challenges that would arise interviewing an at-risk population. Another ethical challenge that could arise during this study is the risk of disclosing confidential information. However, prior to the interview beginning I requested that the participant refrain from using any personally identifiable information when referring to the interview with the sexual assault victim they were speaking about. All participants being D-SAACP certified understood their ethical responsibility to confidentiality. Hence, I reminded them of that responsibility to avoid any accidental disclosure prior to the start of the interview. Once IRB approval was granted, I begun the process of recruiting participants and having all participants sign the consent form voluntarily prior to taking part in this study.

Instrumentation and Materials

Sexual assault victim advocates were requested to compare and contrast via their perception of the differences between military male and female sexual assault victims' experiences with law enforcement during the initial intake interviews. To encourage

participation and disclosure, instructions prior to the beginning of the interview were

emphasize that all information provided would be completely anonymous and

confidential. Furthermore, no identifying information was collected or requested from the

participants about who the sexual assault victim or the law enforcement officer was. The

interviews that were conducted face-to-face, each interview was voice recorded using the

voice recorder app on my iPad. The remaining interviews were conducted via Zoom

meetings and were recorded using the video recorder via Zoom software. Consent forms

were previously presented when participants initially agreed to participate in the study.

Other materials present were the list of questions for the participants to answer. I

developed questions from a review the current literature and from personal experience as

a sexual assault victim advocate. The questions were all open-ended in structure:

Interview Questions

- Can you describe your experiences when you were sent to aid a sexual

  assault victim?

- Tell me about what your initial thoughts and interaction with the sexual

  assault victim was like.

- What was your perception of the dynamics between law enforcement and

  the sexual assault victim during the initial intake interview process?

- What was your perception of the level of empathy displayed by the

  officer?

- Can you describe any apparent differences in interaction between male

  versus female sexual assault victims?

- Tell me about any noticeable changes in the sexual assault victim's mannerisms during the initial intake interview.

- What role do you believe police culture plays in how law enforcement officers' interview sexual assault victims?

- How do you think the initial intake interview effects the sexual assault case rate and convictions?

Final Questions after interview concluded:

- Do you have any questions for me?

- Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this study?

Summary

Chapter 3 covered the detailed methodology which was utilized to conduct this study. It began with a description of the intent of this research, explanation of rationale for conducting this type of study, and the research questions that were used. The steps within each process were explained, to include my role as a researcher. Further, inclusion and exclusion criteria for this research was discussed to explain how the individuals uniquely qualified to participate in this study were selected. The selection process of the participants, data collection and analysis, ethical procedures, as well as instrumentation and materials were discussed to conclude the chapter. Chapter 4 focuses on data collection after IRB approval had been received to proceed with the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological analysis was to examine how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. Rape culture affects society, on an individual level, as well as an institutional level (Barnett et al., 2019). Therefore, in this study, I also sought to understand if—and if so, how—rape myth acceptance influences law enforcement culture, decisions, and behavior regarding sexual assault victims. The research questions used to investigate this subject were:

Research Question 1: How do sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview?

Research Question 2: How are military female sexual assault victims treated by law enforcement compared to military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview based on victim advocates' perspectives?

In this chapter, I discuss a description of the setting in which the interviews were conducted. Next, I describe the demographics of the participants, a description of the implementation of the data collection, and the method in which the data was analyzed. I included a discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness, presentation of the results, and finally a summation.

Setting

I conducted interviews with participants via previously scheduled Zoom meetings during the collection process. Each interview lasted approximately 25–45 minutes with

room for questions at the end of each interview. I began each interview by asking the participants if they were in a comfortable environment and covered the consent form once more; reminding each participant that they could request to cease participating at any time throughout the study. I conducted each interview in my home office, while the participants were either in their home or work office. Each participant selected their own settings to conduct their meetings. Those participants that were at work scheduled their interview time during their lunch hour to avoid any work conflicts. No participants withdrew from the study, nor reported any distress associated with the study questions. Further, all questions were answered enthusiastically, with only minor questioning for clarification to ensure accurate responses.

Demographics and Field Experience of Participants

The participants included five adult males and five adult females, for 10 participants in total. Approximately 90% of the participants were prior military (U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force). There was only one participant who had never been in the military personally, yet, performed as a Department of Defense civilian employee. All participants were either Department of Defense full-time civilian victim advocates, or volunteer D-SAACP (Department of Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program) certified victim advocates. For clarification purposes, both categories of victim advocates mentioned are D-SAACP certified.

On average, the sexual assault victim advocates who participated in this study served as victim advocates for nearly 9.5 years, with 60% still volunteering or presently working as civilian sexual assault victim advocates. The breadth of knowledge and

experience as sexual assault victim advocates working with victims of sexual assault and interacting with law enforcement dated as far back as 2005. Due to the extensiveness of knowledge and experience data saturation was sufficiently achieved with 10 participants. I determined that saturation had been achieved by the eighth interview when the responses to the interview questions yielded no new themes. I continued to collect two more interviews to be certain this was the case.

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews in a comfortable environment of the participant's choice. Participants were initially recruited via snowball sampling (Brown, 2005; Noy, 2008). Participants who contacted me to express interest in the study, were emailed the consent form and a brief overview about the purpose of the study. Once the participant replied, "I consent" I invited them to a scheduled Zoom meeting with the date and time of their choosing. On the date of each scheduled interview, the participants were immediately allowed into the meeting room once they appeared in the waiting area. Upon entry of their scheduled Zoom meeting, each participant was informed that the interview would be recorded and assured that I would be the only one to review the recorded videos to ensure accurate recollection, transcription, and analysis of responses. For the purposes of distinct identification of participation, each interview was labeled, and further classified by participation number (i.e., P 1). At this time, I again stressed the confidentiality of the study. All 10 participants acknowledged and agreed to continue participation.

Every participant was treated respectfully. There were no visible indications that the participants were uncomfortable with the questions during the interview. At the end of each interview, I asked if the participants had any questions for me. Only one participant stated they initially misunderstood the intent regarding military versus civilian law enforcement encounters and focused all responses on those experiences with military law enforcement interactions only. The participant stated, had they been clear they would have shared the perception of those experiences with civilian law enforcement as well. Each interview concluded with me inquiring if the participant would like to receive a copy of the results of the study. All 10 participants expressed interest in the results of the study.

Data Analysis

Immediately after data collection, I began the process of data analysis. An intersectional approach to psychological research, requires that the researcher make "a conceptual shift" in understanding and interpreting social constructs (Cole, 2009, p. 178). An intersectional approach to data analysis involves examining socio-cultural differences at the individual level, contextual differences, and biological differences, while seeking to illuminate the multiplicative distinctions that may increase instances of inequity.

I listened to the prerecorded videos a total of five times each. I uploaded the videos into NVivo 12 software and transcribed the videos into transcripts. Once transcribed, I listened to the videos while reviewing the newly transcribed data to ensure the information corresponded accurately. This was the most time-consuming aspect of the data analysis process since none of the transcriptions were an exact match to the

corresponding video. Listening to the prerecorded videos multiple times allowed me to

quickly recollect what each participant stated during their respective interviews. Once the

manual transcription process was completed, I read and reread the transcripts to

familiarize myself with the content. I isolated meaningful statements and phrases given

by each of the participants. Each transcript underwent four rounds of coding in which I

developed themes from the meaningful statements and phases. I maintained integrity,

removing any personal bias by reading and coding the materials numerous times. I

methodically analyzed the data to eliminate any assumptions made during the coding

process. The conclusion of this data analysis, through manual review, five themes were

produced from the participants (see Table 1).

Table 1

Preliminary Formulation of Themes for Victim Advocate Perspective

Participants	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
1	X	X	X	X*	X
2	X	X	X		X
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X*	X
6	X	X	X	X	X
7	X	X	X	X*	
8	X	X	X	X*	X
9	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X		

Note. The five themes generated from the study participants that align with the study's research questions are presented in the table as follows: (1) primary sexual assault victim advocate role is support system; (2) law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude; (3) law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training; (4) law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior (* denotes specific mention of AFOSI); (5) disparity based on gender, socioeconomic status (SES), or ethnicity (support for intersectional approach to this qualitative research study).

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how sexual assault victim advocates

perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the

initial intake interview. Throughout the analysis process, direct quotes were maintained

verbatim to provide the true essence of experiences of the sexual assault victim

advocates, which is fundamental to phenomenological research (American Psychological

Association, 2020, p.16). Results associated with each theme were annotated with

specific references from each participant to demonstrate their lived experience with law

enforcement officers and the sexual assault victims. Further, each participant's

description of their lived experience significantly contributed to the themes found (see

Table 2).

Table 2

Number of Participants Contributing to Themes

Theme	# of participants
Primary sexual assault victim advocate role is support system	10
Law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude	10
Law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training	10
Law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior (compared to previous years)	8
Disparity based on gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity	8

The five themes generated from this study demonstrated support for the

appropriateness of the research questions. Further, the descriptive terms used, and

responses provided by the sexual assault victim advocates are critical to

phenomenological research. The first theme which surfaced, primary sexual assault victim advocate role is support system suggested victim advocates see themselves as instruments of support that take a "victim-centered" approach to helping survivors of sexual violence (Greeson et al., 2018, p. 445).

Theme 1: *Primary Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Role is Support System*

It is important to understand what sexual assault victim advocate support looks like to explain the relationship between sexual assault victims and their advocates. Sexual assault victim advocates initiate this sensitive relationship by building rapport, giving some semblance of control to the victim, explaining interview procedures and their rights, and letting the victim drive the conversation. Victim advocates are not there to interview the victim, take statements, or validate the claims of the victims.

P1 stated,

"You want to ensure they feel empowered to come forward. My job is to support this individual here."

P2 stated,

"My role as a victim advocate is largely based on first response. My first interaction is largely building rapport, making sure they're safe. I was there to advocate for their needs."

P4 stated,

"We're the first response to our victims dealing in crisis. You're really just there to support the victim."

P5 stated,

"I tend to my victims based on their needs."

P6 stated,

"When I engage with a victim, first thing I'm thinking is, I'm going to let them lead the way. I'm going to let them drive. I'm here, I'm listening."

P7 stated,

"My first thought is, first and foremost the safety of the individual. We get them back to being the best version of themselves despite everything that they've gone through."

P8 stated,

"Anything I could do to make them comfortable and get used to me."

P9 stated,

"My role is support."

P10 stated,

"I tell them, 'ya'll need to calm down" (in reference to law enforcement officers' aggressive disposition with the sexual assault victim)."

Sexual assault victim advocates are a support system that work in a variety of support roles for the sexual assault victim. Despite not knowing the victim, many tend to take a protective attitude toward the victim. Their commitment to this role also provides insight to how victim advocates perceive law enforcement during the initial intake interview with the sexual assault victim. Research Question 1 revealed three themes which ascertained the lived experiences of the participants in their perception of law enforcement's interaction with sexual assault victims.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview?

Law enforcement's role in the prosecution of perpetrators of sexual assault is pivotal. They play a crucial role in the criminal justice process, as they are the "gatekeeper" exercising discretion on which cases move forward to the prosecutor (Hine & Murphy, 2018, p. 7; Shaw et al., 2016, p. 446). This role is paramount in the ability of sexual assault victims seeking and obtaining justice. During this study, the three themes developed in the sexual assault victim advocates' perception of law enforcement in response to the first research question included (a) law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude, (b) law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training, and (c) law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior.

Theme 2: Law Enforcement Demonstrated an Aggressive and Abrasive Attitude

It is important to understand what law enforcement demonstrating an aggressive and abrasive attitude looks like to the sexual assault victim advocate. This was expressed in the rich descriptive terms used by the sexual assault victim advocates, such as, "bully", poor bedside manner", "assert they are in control", and "lacks empathy".

P1 stated,

> Unfortunately, there were some questions in between that felt like he was being blamed for what happened to him. He was not being a victim at that point in time,

he was just complaining about something. I don't think there was a lot of empathy

there. They were really interested in gathering the facts

P2 stated,

"I've had to intervene when an investigator gets too pushy."

P3 stated,

Take the time, build a rapport with her. It was really, really difficult when it seemed

like some of the law enforcement individuals would question in a way which that

survivor felt like, man, it was my fault. It was like we weren't working together.

P4 stated,

"Some are not so nice. With the males, I feel like there's no bedside manner."

P5 stated,

"They don't extend any compassion, any real sense of care or empathy."

P9 stated,

"No empathy given in that case at all" (victim was male)

P10 stated,

Law enforcement at the hospital, authoritative, I guess would be a good word for

it. Pushy, abrupt, you know they've got information that they're trying to collect.

You got a bully. There's no emotional connection with the words that are leaving

their mouth. I guess it's just empty, empty words. They have better things to do.

Theme 3: Law Enforcement's Attitude and Behavior Suggested a Lack of Education

and Training

It is important to understand what law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training looks like to sexual assault victim advocates during the initial intake interview. Any negative experience sexual assault victims have with law enforcement decreases their cooperativeness, thus impacting the outcome of the investigation. Further, these negative experiences highlight the important of the need for "updated training with a victim-centered approach" (Venema et al., 2020, p.111). Each participant in this study described experiences that demonstrated law enforcement's need to additional training and education.

P1 stated,

> They don't have the proper training to understand how victims of sexual assault act. I honestly believe that police officers, detectives, even if they work sex crimes, they really need to get more training and understanding, trauma, understanding empathy, and understanding of how survivors act. They need to understand that not everything is going to come out the way they want.

P2 stated,

> Again, it goes back to their experience. They were very empathetic towards the victim, those few with experience. Male victims, in particular, you see on the faces of investigators, male victims as though their accounts are not legitimate. They naturally want to get the bad guy. But some of them do it at the detriment and help of the victim. If they're not willing to talk about the perpetrator and help them get the perpetrator right away, then it automatically equates to the validity of their claim. You don't want a bulldog in the room.

P3 stated,

> Appeared that these agents, law enforcement, were better trained on different interviewing techniques. Earlier on, they were really abrasive, I would find myself having to interject. Up until about 2011, I really saw no empathy from the law enforcement officer with that survivor. It was the abrasive type of questioning.

P4 stated,

> "What type of training do our officers get? I want to know how you get this job because you can't be a public service with this type of attitude."

P8 stated,

> They should not have a layperson talking to someone because they're not trained, they don't have the patience, they don't have the empathy, and the really don't care. They have a don't care attitude. If I can feel it, I'm sure the victim can feel it. I know NCIS with the Navy, there were a couple of issues with them. And Army Criminal Investigation Division [CID] and Naval Criminal Investigative Service [NCIS] seem too not be as caring.

Sexual assault victim advocates in this study overwhelming suggested a difference between how law enforcement treated sexual assault victims prior to 2011 compared to present day. Participants placed tremendous emphasis on the need for education and training on a victim-centered approach, trauma-informed care, and empathy. In most cases, participants reported a productive initial interview when the sexual assault victim experienced positive reinforcement from the law enforcement officer interviewing them. These reinforcements came in the form of (a) casual

conversations to get to know the victim, (b) offers of a break from the heavy line of questioning, (c) overt concern for the victim's level of comfort during the interview, and (d) reassurances from the officer that the victim was leading the interview, the interview could be stopped immediately upon their request.

Theme 4: Law Enforcement Demonstrated a Positive Change in Attitude and Behavior

As several participants in this study has suggested, increased education and training among law enforcement officers may reduce the incidence of victim insensitivity. Their responses to the questions in this study further indicate education and training may reduce law enforcement's susceptibility to rape myth acceptance. Other researchers similarly have found "victim-sensitivity training reduces negative or problematic attitudes among police officers and investigators" (Venema et al., 2020, p. 112). A third of the participants in this study specifically identified AFOSI as "top-notch" when it came to their handling of the sexual assault cases and their interactions with the sexual assault victims (See Table 1).

P1 stated,

"We have a great rapport with our Office of Special Investigations agents for the Air Force. They're really good about speaking to us and helping the survivors understand that they don't have to participate in the investigation."

P3 stated,

"They've come a very long way". This comment was in direct reference to law enforcement and their handling of sexual assault cases."

P4 stated,

> "We've come a long way."

P5 stated,

> I've had some incredible OSI agents that clearly have received training on trauma.
> They clearly took the human factor into consideration, which plays an incredible
> role. Especially on the onset because that can change the trajectory of any victim's
> healing.

P6 stated,

> I think now they are getting more training on the dynamics of trauma of a victim of
> sexual assault and how to navigate, get the questions they need answered, but to
> also be sensitive to victims of sexual assault. I see a lot of empathy taking place.
> Now they even ask the victims, "hey, do you need a break?" So, the empathy is
> totally there now. I know more people are educated now, so they know the
> resources are out there.

P7 stated,

> With this law enforcement organization that we dealt with; they were very caring.
> They were very intuitive. They could see when the victim needed a break. They
> were top-notch. Their level of empathy was good enough to be victim advocates.
> This participant's response directly correlated to their perception of the AFOSI
> agents who investigated and took the initial report of sexual assault.

P8 stated,

> "I went to the police department where there was total empathy."

P9 stated,

It's come a long way where I think investigators now are trained in a different way to where they can get the same information with a different tactic. I really think it helped save the investigation. I think there's so much more education when it comes to investigators. I think I've seen like a huge shift from just the facts to more, let's build some level of trust. Let's not pass judgement so quickly. A huge impact on the cooperation of the victim.

Law enforcement officers play a vital role in the investigation and potential prosecution of the perpetrators of sexual assault. With law enforcement officers being the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system, it is imperative these first responders abstain from negative attitudes towards sexual assault victims and rape myth acceptance (Sleath & Bull, 2015, as cited in Hine & Murphy, 2018). Participants observed positive changes in law enforcement's attitude and behavior with sexual assault victims. An observed positive change moved from a rude, uncaring, don't want to be their attitude to a caring, attentive, concerned, victim-centered approach to interviewing. It is important to mention more than half of the participants noticed a difference, in the law enforcement officer's attitude, between the officers that responded to the emergency room to conduct the initial interview as compared to those who were at the police department where the sexual assault victim submitted their account of what happened in the initial interview. Those officers who reported to the emergency room were always in uniform versus those at the police station who were in suits. The officers who dispatched to the emergency room to collect reports of sexual assault seemed to be in-patient, or as if they had something better

to do. Whereas those who the sexual assault victim advocate took to the police station were greeted by someone in law enforcement who had more patience when collecting the information for the initial interview. The participants who observed this change in temperament often attributed the differences to experience and education of that officer. Research question 2 focused on analyzing the perceptions of each participant using an intersectional feminist approach to this research study.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How are military female sexual assault victims treated by law enforcement compared to military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview based on victim advocates' perspectives?

Theme 5: Disparity Based on Gender, Socioeconomic Status, or Ethnicity

At its core, intersectional feminist lens enables the researcher to examine research in a distinct way. Intersectional feminist researchers analyze data looking at the multiple intersecting differences that distinguish an individual's unique identity. In a patriarchal society, men who are sexually assaulted are confronted with stigma associated with the cultural norms within that society. Hlavka (2017) suggested, this stigma has its own "unique sense of shame" (p. 485). In a heteronormative culture, intersect that with the male being military, whether homosexual or not, they face a tremendous amount of shame. An overwhelming 100% of the participants mentioned, the increased shame males exhibited during the initial interview, regardless of their sexual orientation. Further, 50% of the participants cited, differences experienced by the law enforcement officers based on gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

P3 stated,

"The interaction with law enforcement, assisting females being more sensitive. Law enforcement were more aggressive with questions." (With females who were not white).

P4 stated,

Most of my clients were nonwhite, they were majority Mexican. Some spoke English better than others. However, I felt like there was a barrier as well when it came down to the officers who were in charge of the cases. The one or two clients that I had that were actually white, I want to say that I felt that they were treated better. They tend to be more aggressive when it came to questioning. Are you sure that this has happened to you? Making the victim question their sanity. There was a difference, especially when it is a female on male. Like in our society, a man would come forward if a female assaulted them, like you should be happy that you got some, like she gave it up to you. What's your problem or something? Something's wrong with you (officer's attitude toward male sexual assault victims). Even the ones also being treated differently from the ones who's male on male. There is definitely a difference. Is he sure that he felt like the young lady assaulted him? I feel like the victims not answering the questions how the investigator wants them to, or they should be answering that they start to get a little agitated. I will say that control of wanting to be in control of everything from A to Z. We already know that you are in power.

P5 stated,

Some of the police officers would treat someone in a low socio-economic status that might be on drugs as opposed to another victim in suburbia where you know, they were just a victim of terrible circumstance. And usually it depends on their success, not always race, but their ethics. And if they were on drugs or not, they would treat them differently as well. I look back, I feel there was a lot of things at play, status, as far as who the perpetrator was, somebody of high esteem, rank, or position, where there were drugs involved or not in the military, not necessary the drug piece, but their rank. If it's a one striper, they often get treated differently as then perhaps a victim that's a lieutenant colonel. Even if the victim was assaulted by another male but not homosexual, they're perceived as such regardless of their orientation. Most males will tend to be more empathetic with the female than with the male, because with the male, the perception of male victims is you should have been able to defend yourself. You should have been able to prevent this. Something is wrong with you if you allowed this to happen"

P7 stated,

"I've seen them do a really good job of disassociating gender with the roles of both the perpetrator and the victim."

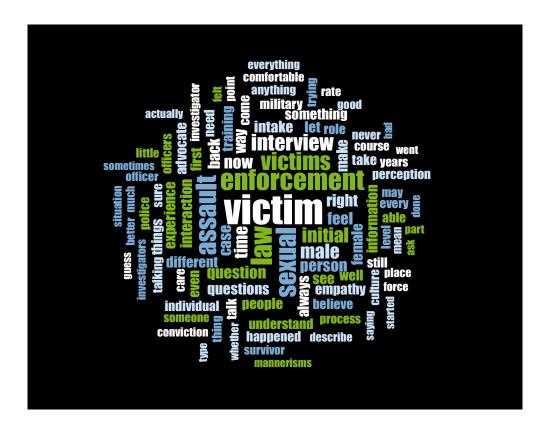P8 stated,

"I don't think they were treated any different."

P9 stated,

"I do think that there's bias when it comes to male victimization as opposed to female victimization. I could definitely see a difference between how females were treated with kind of more sensitivity than males."

There are interlocking systems of oppression, as oppression is not a singular process or concept. Each element which makes up an individual's unique identity are mutually exclusive yet cause others to engage with them negatively due to one or all their unique characteristics. Discriminatory practices are demonstrated in attitudes that resemble, males being believed less than females, white females being believed more, than people of color, Hispanic females being believed less, males being considered homosexual regardless of sexual orientation if they are victimized by another male, and males being considered "just seeking attention", as mentioned by two participants, for reporting their sexual assault when the perpetrator is a female. Words have meaning. Intersectionality provides researchers with an opportunity to social injustice and inequity to the forefront so as a society, we can address and correct those injustices and inequities (Rosenthal, 2016). Emphasis in this study was placed on the victim and law enforcement (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

NVivo word frequency query output

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is invaluable to research. The sensitive nature of this topic makes it of paramount importance the methods utilized to conduct the study had a firm foundation. To maintain integrity, I used techniques such as, member checking during interviews, prolonged engagement, and extensive notetaking during analysis. Creswell et al. (2018)

Further to ensure trustworthiness I asked each participate the same questions throughout each interview. The degree of trustworthiness in research are focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

Credibility

Member checking was utilized to enhance credibility is this study. During each interview I shared emergent themes with the participants and requested their input to confirm congruency with their experiences and my findings (Harvey, 2015). Participants confirmed emergent themes were congruent with their interview contribution. Member checking is crucial to the study to ensure integrity and to accurately illustrate information captured in the study.

Transferability

To increase transferability, I ensured participants in this study had varied experience working with both civilian and military sexual assault victims and law enforcement entities. The process by which participants met inclusion to participate, recruited, the settings and structure of interviews were thoroughly detailed during the study. I utilized thick descriptions to generate themes and subthemes. This afforded me the opportunity to use direct statements from participants summarizing accurate perceptions. Transcription, coding, and analysis of the interviews were detailed to further enhance transferability.

Dependability

Direct replication is crucial to ensuring a study's dependability (Lishner, 2015). To enhance the ability for research replication detailed notes were taken throughout the course of the study. If another researcher follows the steps outlined, they could replicate the results of this study. Further, each participant within the study received the same

research questions, which is another key component. Consistency is an element of dependability.

Confirmability

Results of the study require checking and re-checking to ensure confirmability. Throughout data collection and data analysis I established an audit trail. Rodgers et al. (1993) suggested audit trails, as a tool, which contributes to credible research.

<div align="center">

Summary

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The purpose of this study was to examine how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. In this study, the source of data collection was performed through semi structured interviews with ten sexual assault victim advocates utilizing Zoom. The sexual assault victim advocates were recruited using the snowball sampling method. Applying a phenomenological approach, the data were analyzed using an intersectional feminist lens. The data were analyzed multiple times to validate patterns and reoccurring themes. Five overarching themes emerged from data analysis; (1) primary sexual assault victim advocate role is support system; (2) law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude; (3) law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training; (4) law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior; (5) disparity based on gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. Each theme identified was uniquely relevant to the research questions. Direct quotations from the participants were utilized to demonstrate data validity, providing explanations for findings. This information further provides a basis for understanding the

"appropriateness of the conclusions reached" (American Psychological Association, 2020, p.16).

In chapter 5, I address the interpretation of the results and findings, strengths, and limitations of the data. I interpret the results of the study and define critical areas which demonstrate support for themes. I provided recommendations for future research. Finally, I identified the study's implications for social change with respect to sexual assault victim advocates' perspectives and recommendations for law enforcement training and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Sexual assault is the most underreported crime, with female reports of sexual assault far exceeding male reports (Hlavka, 2017; Monteith et al., 2019; Richards et al., 2019; Saddler et al., 2018; Shaw et al., 2016). However, many sexual assault reports never proceed from investigation to prosecution (Garza & Franklin, 2021; Shaw et al., 2016). Numerous psychological and social scholars have focused on negative experiences between law enforcement and sexual assault victims, rape case attrition rate, lack of victim cooperation, and law enforcement officer needs for additional specialized training (Hine & Murphy, 2018; Richards et al., 2019; Venema et al., 2020). The goal of this research was to obtain the phenomenological experience of the sexual assault victim advocate who is present for the initial intake interview with sexual assault victims and law enforcement. The intent was to examine if—and if so, how—rape myth acceptance influences law enforcement culture, decisions, and behavior with sexual assault victims. Moreover, it was important to ascertain whether military male sexual assault victims receive different treatment than military female sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview.

For this research, I selected sexual assault victim advocates as participants. I chose sexual assault victim advocates for several reasons including the importance of discussing a sensitive topic without the risk of re-traumatization (Ashley at al., 2019). Additionally, sexual assault victim advocates could provide answers to the research questions that explored (a) law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview and (b) how military female sexual assault

victims are treated by law enforcement compared to military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview. The lived experiences between genders could only be analyzed by the sexual assault victim advocate who were present for both interviews with opposite genders. A sexual assault victim would only have personal knowledge of their own lived experience.

I analyzed the data using an intersectional feminism methodology. The use of an intersectional feminism approach to analysis was significant due to the unique way intersectionality simultaneously examines how gender, race, social class, sexual identity, and other differences influence an individual's life experiences (Kim & Shaw, 2018). Intersectional research methods examine what barriers are experienced by groups, ensuring data collection is inclusive of experiences of people with intersecting identities. Further, the data collected are categorized, methodically structuring inequalities, which are core tenets of intersectional research.

The results yielded five themes: (a) primary sexual assault victim advocate role is support system, (b) law enforcement demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude, (c) law enforcement's attitude and behavior suggested a lack of education and training, (d) law enforcement demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behavior, and (e) there are disparities based on gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. These themes are supported by the rich descriptions provided by the each of the participants that were reflective of their personal experience. This chapter addresses the interpretation of these findings.

Interpretations of the Findings

I reviewed literature on the use of sexual assault victim advocates, military sexual trauma among sexual assault victims, sexual assault aid agencies and their limitations, and the negative influence of rape myth acceptance. However, research was limited on the topic of male sexual assault and rape. Further, I could not find research comparing male versus female sexual assault victims' experience with law enforcement during sexual assault initial intake interviews.

In this study, I explored the lived experience of the sexual assault victim advocates' perception of law enforcement during the initial interview with the sexual assault victim. The initial intake interview with law enforcement is generally the first encounter victims of sexual assault have with the criminal justice system (Garza & Franklin, 2021). The first theme was not associated with either research question specifically. However, themes 2, 3, and 4 were associated with Research Question 1, regarding how sexual assault victim advocates perceive law enforcement's interaction with military sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. The last theme was associated with Research Question 2, which focused on how military female sexual assault victims' treatment by law enforcement may differ from the treatment of military male sexual assault victims during initial intake interview based on victim advocates' perspectives. A summary of all the findings are as follows:

Finding 1: Primary Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Role is Support System

Participants in this study said that the main reason they were present was to support the sexual assault victim. All 10 participants made statements in support of this

theme. Each participant expressed importance of letting the sexual assault victim "drive" or "lead" the conversation to restore some semblance of psychological "power and control." Participants stated that it was important to demonstrate to the sexual assault victim that they were there to support them. They often accomplished this by building a rapport with the victim. Rapport was built by making the victim comfortable, allowing the victim to dictate the direction the conversation went in, not immediately discussing the sexual assault itself, providing information on resources, and being compassionate.

In their efforts to support the victim of sexual assault, 70% of the participants found that they often had to engage in strategies reminding others of their role regarding the victim (Greeson et al., 2018). At times it indicated that victim advocates and law enforcement were on opposing sides, which was not the case. Multiple participants stated that they often interjected during the initial intake interview when they noticed the sexual assault victim appeared to need a break. The sexual assault victim advocate became protective of the sexual assault victim when they observed the law enforcement officer being what they described as "too aggressive."

Finding 2: Law Enforcement Demonstrated an Aggressive and Abrasive Attitude

Participants in this study stated that law enforcement officers demonstrated an aggressive and abrasive attitude toward sexual assault victims during the initial intake interview. All 10 participants suggested the handling of sexual assault victims as either aggressive or abrasive at some point during the interview. One participant described law enforcement's attitude as a "microcosm of the rest of the country, just like the military." This suggests that law enforcement's attitudes and behavior is reflected of the rest of the

country and how society responds to sexual assault victims. This is problematic as some research has suggested that law enforcement attitude about sexual assault victims can be tied to criminal case outcomes (O'Neal & Hayes, 2020).

Several researchers suggested the more accepting of rape myth acceptance law enforcement officers were, the more dismissive they were of sexual assault victims or subscribed to victim-blaming (Garza & Franklin, 2021; Grandgenett et al., 2020; O'Neal and Hayes, 2020). More than 50% suggested a noticeable difference in attitude displaced by those law enforcement officers who responded to take the initial intake interview in uniform versus those plain closed officers, whether military affiliated or civilian. This indicated a potential difference in level of both experience and education or training.

Finding 3: Law Enforcement's Attitude and Behavior Suggested a Lack of Education and Training

Several participants in this study stated that there were distinct differences in how law enforcement officers who reported to the emergency room treated sexual assault victims versus those who conducted the initial intake interview at the police station or in their office environment. Further, these differences were also noted between those officers who were in uniform versus those who were in civilian attire, which suggested a difference in rank or experience, education, and training. The AFOSI agents always wore civilian clothing rather than uniforms. It was apparent from the treatment of the sexual assault victim that these agents had better training and more experience, whereas officers in uniform and those who reported to the emergency room appeared to be annoyed, had a "poor bedside manner," "appeared to have better things to do," and displayed a lack of

experience. Several participants stated that law enforcement was not interested in establishing a rapport with the sexual assault victim, which is crucial to getting the victim to be comfortable with providing information about the assault. Participants noted that this as another indication of the different level of training and experience between officers. Those law enforcement officers who created a comfortable environment for the sexual assault victim found victims more receptive and responsive to their interview questions.

Finding 4: Law Enforcement Demonstrated a Positive Change in Attitude and Behavior

Participants in this study stated, there was a noticeable difference in how AFOSI agents treated sexual assault victims in comparison to other branches of service's special investigators. A third of the participants specifically mentioned problematic experiences with the Army Criminal Investigation Division and Naval Criminal Investigative Service. Further, 80% of the participants stated, regarding local law enforcement agencies, the uniformed officers who reported to the emergency room to conduct the initial interview were more abrasive, than officers in plain clothes at the police station. The participants attributed this difference in attitude and behavior to the level of education and experience of the officers taking the reports of sexual assault.

Finding 5: Disparity Based on Gender, Socioeconomic Status, or Ethnicity

Participants in this study stated, differences were noticed when the victim of sexual assault was not white, a woman, a native English speaker, or of a specific rank within the military. Moreover, 80% of the participants suggested the disparity in

treatment was exasperated when the sexual assault victim was male, a minority, or English was not their native language. Bharmal & Batthini (2015) suggested minorities are prone to victimization. Minorities can include anyone "recognized as weaker sections of the society by law" thereby making these individuals potential targets of violence (Bharmal & Batthini, 2015, p. 34). Military males who reported a sexual assault were met by law enforcement with suspicion. The males were seen as "complaining" and "not taken as seriously as females". Several researchers have suggested, males who experience sexual assault and are met with disbelief or suspicion create future barriers for male reporting and increase military sexual trauma, specifically in male victims of sexual assault (Hlavka, 2017; Monteith et al., 2019; Sadler et al., 2018). Reporting sexual assault as a male becomes a question of their masculinity. In a patriarchal society, men are expected to be stronger, hence, impervious to victimization.

Power differentials within the military are heightened when a military member is sexually assaulted by someone higher ranking. One participant stated, "a one striper is not believed as readily as someone with higher rank". Shaw et al. (2016) suggested "institutional discrimination" as the blame for individuals experiencing disparities in treatment within the criminal justice system (p. 448). Inadvertently the disparity results in the "high rates of sexual assault case attrition" (Shaw et al., 2016, as cited in Lisak, 2008). Many of the participants in this study observed what they perceived as differences in treatment of the sexual assault victims by law enforcement based on the victims' gender, ethnicity, and or socioeconomic status. The initial intake interview is the critical first step in the law enforcement investigation. Sexual victimization is indiscriminate.

Therefore, it is imperative the individuals charged with investigating these criminal acts remain impartial. Despite the multitude of findings to support the importance of this study, it was not without limitations.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative studies present unique limitations to research. Although this study enhanced the understanding of how law enforcement's initial interaction with sexual assault victims is perceived by sexual assault victim advocates, it was not without limitations. First and foremost, my role as the sole researcher, coder, data analyzer, and presenter were limitations. Other limitations included threats to confirmability and credibility, due to human error since I was the role researcher in this study. Transferability may be an issue, due to the exclusivity of the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program. To become certified, advocates must meet and maintain specific criteria. The criteria met to obtain this certification may not be required of other sexual assault victim advocate volunteers, which may not provide similar training, education, background checks, and the exceptional recommendation required to become a D-SAACP victim advocate. Thus, limiting the understanding of the importance of trauma informed care.

Another potential limitation is the sampling method. Due to the sampling methodology of snowball sampling, recruitment of participants who encountered initial interviews with both genders of sexual assault was more difficult. However, this does not suggest any other sampling method would have been without limitations. Snowball sampling enabled me to gain access to certified sexual assault victim advocates due to the

process of referral and utilization of social networks. Despite the limitations, this study provides an important overview of how the initial interaction between law enforcement and the sexual assault victim may inadvertently affect the investigation, and case and conviction rate of violent offenders.

The chief limitation of this study was potential for bias based on my background. I am a certified Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, and D-SAACP certified victim and community advocate. I have worked in the field of sexual assault prevention and response for over 15 years. I was one of the initial civilian Department of Defense instructors in the United States Air Force's basic military training teaching sexual predator indicators and sexual assault prevention and response. In this capacity, I have worked with both sexual assault victims and law enforcement officers. As the sole researcher in this study, it was imperative my opinion, knowledge of the research area, and experience was not considered as to influence the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

The focus of this research was on sexual assault victim advocates' perception of law enforcement during the initial interview with the sexual assault victim. The limitations of this research lend to recommendations for future research. The repetition of this study can be accomplished without incident upon finding participants with similar certification criteria of the D-SAACP certification. Future research would benefit from incorporating a larger sample size. Although the sample included the local population, different genders, ethnicities, and experiences, a larger participant group could demonstrate how distinct law enforcement differences exist in the handling of sexual

assault victims between branches of military, to include local law enforcement agencies. For example, the participants in this study stated, AFOSI demonstrated positive engagement with the sexual assault victims. This was uniquely among AFOSI agents. Other military branches' law enforcement entities (e.g., Naval Criminal Investigative Service and Criminal Investigation Division) and local law enforcement agencies experiences with sexual assault victims were described as unfavorable by the participants in this study.

Although some entities of law enforcement have improved their handling of sexual assault cases and interactions with sexual assault victims, future research should focus on an in-depth study on the education and experience levels of those law enforcement officers' case attrition rates. It is important to determine whether the initial interaction with law enforcement directly encourages cooperation of the sexual assault victim to close sexual assault criminal cases or somehow impedes the cooperation of the victim which minimizes case closure rates. Moreover, it is imperative for future research to focus on law enforcement interaction with sexual assault victims of various cultural identities as well.

Implications

The sexual assault prevention and response program has evolved over the years since its inception and adoption by the Department of Defense. An exhaustive amount of research as well as current statistics illustrate the sexual assault attrition rate is extraordinarily high. The findings in this study, supported by exhaustive research further suggests law enforcement officers inadvertently impact their sexual assault cases

potentially as early as the initial intake interview. Apparent from the findings is that this initial interaction in many cases is plagued by rape myth acceptance by law enforcement, which causes bias in the officers conducting the initial intake interview.

The implications for this study on positive social change could potentially mean an increase in law enforcement education and training on trauma-informed interviewing techniques, thereby educating law enforcement on the significant influence they have on their criminal cases. Second, results may increase awareness on a topic rife with stigma, highlighting the effects of rape myth acceptance within law enforcement culture. Third, findings may indirectly lead more victims to report their assault. Fourth, this study will expand the scholarly research to increase awareness and aid in creating programs specifically for male sexual assault victims. Lastly, findings may inform law enforcement working with victims to assist with the prosecution of the offender, providing a safer environment for the public.

Intersectional feminist theory provided the groundwork for this study. Further, this theory was utilized to collect, analyze, and code the data to reveal themes. Creating positive social change for law enforcement provides timeless training and education on a trauma-informed approach to interviewing. It is apparent from the study several participants perceived the Air Force Office of Special Investigations' agents were better equipped to interview sexual assault victims. Their handling of sexual assault cases encouraged better cooperation from the sexual assault victim with the criminal case. Understanding the different training and experience these officers may have than other law enforcement agencies could increase positive social change within the military, by

providing a benchmark. Ultimately, this benchmark could increase sexual assault case closure rates.

The participants of this study expressed a need for law enforcement officers to treat male sexual assault victims with the same dignity and respect they treat female sexual assault victims. Various studies suggest the difficulty male sexual assault victims experience reporting their sexual assault to anyone, particularly law enforcement. Law enforcement avoiding biased attitudes and understanding men can be victimized too, hence, challenging the way masculinity is viewed, creates positive social change for male sexual assault survivors. Additionally, this study encourages more research on programs specifically designed to assist males who have been sexually assaulted.

Several participants of this study stated females who were minorities were treated noticeably different than white females who had been sexually assaulted. Those participants suggested, white females appeared to be believed more readily. Underscoring to law enforcement a potentially unconscious bias displayed with minority women can create positive social change by making law enforcement more intentional during the initial intake interview.

The participants of this study stated, treatment by law enforcement often affected the cooperativeness of the sexual assault victim during the interview. The experience overall was invariably tougher for the males who were sexually assaulted regardless of their sexuality. Research has demonstrated a correlation between a law enforcement officer's decision-making based on how they ascribe to rape myths (Garza & Franklin, 2021). Other research suggested, rape case clearance rates were lower based on victim's

refusal to cooperate with the criminal case versus law enforcement bringing the predator to justice (Richards, et al., 2019). This research study has supported many of these previous studies, underpinning bias displayed by law enforcement during the initial intake interview. An intersectional feminist approach analyzes the balance between oppression and privilege. Further, the intersectional feminist lens highlights prejudices despite the multiple intersecting differences. The development of training programs specifically designed for law enforcement who might potentially work with sexual assault victims with special emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and equity could create positive social change by demonstrating the importance of empathy despite what gender the victim is, what their socioeconomic status is, or what their ethnicity is. This training should emphasize how the characteristics that constitute the victim's identity should never determine credibility.

Conclusion

The present study advanced research on how the initial intake interview with law enforcement is perceived to affect the sexual assault survivor. More explicitly the unique differences between how law enforcement officers treat military male versus military female victims of rape. Further, this study yielded findings similar to other research which suggested a disparity in how law enforcement treats sexual assault victims of a lower socioeconomic status versus individuals with a perceived high socioeconomic status (Garza & Franklin, 2021; Richards et al., 2019; Shaw et al., 2016). Law enforcement response and interaction should remain indiscriminate, based on age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status of the sexual assault victim.

Bharmal & Batthini (2015) stated, minorities are disproportionately prone to victimization. Consequently, those who law enforcement encounter overwhelming fit criteria which they tend to discriminate against. The overall criminal justice process, first responders, and support systems alike require our continued research and attention, if we intend to improve the sexual assault response and prevention process, case and conviction rate, and support of victims of sexual assault (Shaw et al., 2016). As a psychological researcher, I am an advocate of social justice. It is imperative to provide unbiased research, which is crucial to the integrity of the field, thereby increasing the probability of positive social change.

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