



The Multiplied Impact When People Who Have Survived Rape Choose to Tell Their Stories

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When rape survivors can choose how and when to tell their stories in a safe space where they can be heard and validated, the process can be empowering. This empowering process extends beyond the survivors to those that bear witness to the stories as well. Empathic listening to rape survivors can help people with similar histories connect with and support each other and feel less alone.

Community Psychologists

worked together as women who had survived rape to conduct mixed method research on survival after sexual assault. The Community Psychologists wanted to speak with the rape survivors to hear their stories and understand what happened in their lives after the assault.

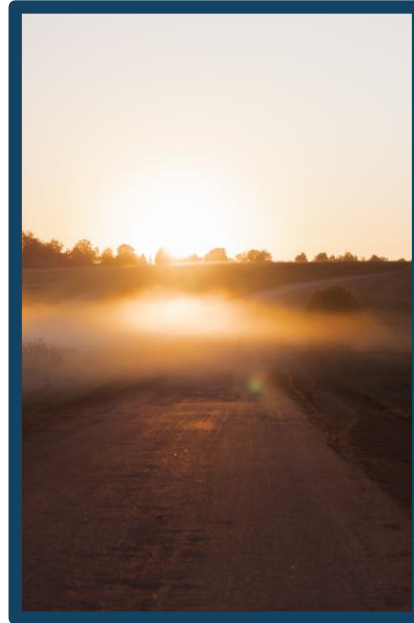


Figure 1 Photograph Photo by Kate: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/sunrise-in-sky-12523003/>. Pexels. CCO.

“Our goal was to create a research project that would provide rape survivors with supportive listening and reflection. By reaching out to the varied community settings that are part of women’s everyday lives, we acknowledged that rape survivors are everywhere and come from all walks of life. By explicitly stating that we wanted to hear from victims when they were ready to talk, we helped define a choice.”

Highlights

Providing space for rape survivors to tell their stories promotes healing for them and others not ready/willing to share their own stories.

Participants noted that the experience provided them the closure they were looking for within their community.

Methods

Participants volunteered after seeing fliers placed around the community. The goal was to create temporary, but emotionally meaningful settings for rape survivors to share their stories in a qualitative interview. The participants had a choice of location (their own homes, the university, another place of their choosing) for the interview process. The interview began with open-ended questions about why each participant decided to contact the program and if they had any concerns for the interview process. Then, the Community Psychologists asked participants to share their stories. The interview was closed with asking the participants how the experience was for them. Interviewers supported and validated when the participants shared their stories and allowed survivors to further emotionally process their assault.

Results

- When done with empathy and care and within community-based settings familiar to both the researchers and the participants, research work can be a pro-social intervention.
- By providing survivors with a choice of if and how to share their story, the researchers and participants co-created a sense of choice which was missing from the attack.
- In communities with limited resources, female survivors can come together and provide meaningful mutual support.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychologists understand the value of safe emotional spaces. Within the community, rape survivors had few outlets to process their assaults. Without explicit opportunities, many survivors chose to remain silent. Providing a safe opportunity to share allowed survivors the choice to speak up in a place with people they can trust. The goal of Community Psychology is oftentimes to bring the community together and help find solutions to social issues. With this case, it helped survivors in the community grow within themselves.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: More innovation is needed to provide safe settings for survivors to share their stories. Using Community Psychology values, the research process can help fill this gap by recognizing that sharing traumatic stories within a research frame can be therapeutic for survivors. This research contributes that the findings could improve practices of recruitment and interviewing of rape survivors in future studies.

Practice: As many survivors still remain silent within the community, finding ways to help survivors feel safe and trust those who can create these programs to speak on their experiences will help survivors in the community know they are not alone.

Similar Settings: While there was no program or intervention for the women survivors in this study, Community Psychologists still provided a safe space for women to choose where they'd like to speak on their stories. Participants felt heard, understood, and relieved to find trust within their community.

*Original Citation: Campbell, R., Sefl, T., Wasco, S. M., & Ahrens, C. E. (2004). Doing community research without a community: Creating safe space for rape survivors. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3/4), 253-261.*

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