

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE ON MALE RAPE: A REVIEW ARTICLE

### V Roos

D Phil Psychology

Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria

**Corresponding author:** vroos@postino.up.ac.za

### W Katz

MA (Clinical Psychology)

Private Practice

**Keywords:** Male on male rape; sexual assault; in-depth descriptions; male survivors of rape in non-institutionalised settings

### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of sexual assault upon males has been largely overlooked by society. Gender stereotyping, taboos, misconceptions and reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of male on male rape, particularly outside institutions, have all contributed to the scarcity of investigative findings. The aim of this article is to provide an overview of literature regarding male rape, supported by two male survivors' lived experience of rape in non-institutionalised settings. An open-ended question was formulated and used to elicit rich descriptions of the male survivors' experience of rape. The research indicates that rape is experienced as an unexpected and intrusive violation, which at once impacts on all dimensions of the survivor's existence, ultimately disrupting his entire manner of being in the world. In the wake of the rape experience, the survivor is left with what appears to be a permanent struggle to adjust again. Apprehension about sharing the experience appears to be grounded in the survivor's real or imagined fears of revictimisation, a subjective sense of shame and the perceived stigma attached to being a survivor. The research indicated a desperate need of survivors that their experiences be heard and unconditionally understood. The post-rape struggle of the survivors appears to be exacerbated in the absence of any supportive relationships. This has important implications for society at large and specifically for those within the helping professions.*

### OPSOMMING

*Seksuele geweld van mans teenoor mans is 'n fenomeen wat grootliks deur die samelewing misken word. Die gebrek aan navorsingsbevindinge kan toegeskryf word aan geslagstereotipering, taboes, wanpersepsies en die neiging om die voorkoms van manlike verkragtings, veral wanneer dit in nie in 'n inrigting voorkom nie, te ignoreer. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om 'n literatuuroorsig ten opsigte van manlike verkragting te verskaf en dit aan te vul met die belewenise van twee manlike verkragtingsoorlewendes in 'n nie-geïnstitusioneerde konteks. 'n Oop-einde vraag is geformuleer met die doel het om ryk beskrywings van die twee manlike verkragtingsoorlewendes met betrekking tot hulle ervarings van verkragting te ontlok. Die navorsing dui daarop dat verkragting as 'n onverwagse en indringende misdryf ervaar word. Dit het 'n onmiddellike impak op al die dimensies van die verkragte persoon se lewe wat uiteindelik sy totale mens-in-die-wêreld-wees versteur en die verkragtingsoorlewende met 'n permanente aanpassingstryd laat. Die verkragte persoon weerhou sy ervarings van ander persone vanweë sy werklike en verbeelde vrese vir verdere viktimisasie, 'n subjektiewe gevoel van skaamte en stigmatisering. Die navorsing toon aan dat daar 'n dringende behoefte by verkragte persone bestaan dat hulle ervarings aangehoor en onvoorwaardelik aanvaar word. Hierdie navorsing het belangrike implikasies vir die breër samelewing, maar spesifiek ook vir diegene in hulpverlenende professies.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960's feminist social movements have focused attention on sexual violence and have attempted to dispel prevailing misconceptions through rigorous investigations and dissemination of information. The discussions around rape as a power-issue began to shed light on the rape of women and men, particularly in institutional settings (McMullen, 1990:12; Scarce, 1997:13). However, while research has been conducted on female victims of sexual assault, there has been a corresponding neglect of investigation into sexual assault of males, specifically outside institutionalised settings (Garnets, Herek & Levy, 1990:372; Kaufman, Divasto, Jackson, Voorhees & Christy, 1980:222). Gender stereotyping, taboos, misconceptions and perceived stigmatisation associated with being a male survivor and reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of male on male rape have all contributed to the underreporting of male rape because of the stigma (Collings, 1987:20; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996:442).

The following working definition of rape is used in this article: "Any penetration of a person's mouth, anus or vagina by a penis or any other object without the person's consent" (Scarce, 1997:7). Although this is the current (outdated) legal definition of rape the proposed new definition of rape as proposed in the draft Sexual Offences Bill of 2003 will also be included: "Any person who unlawfully and intentionally commits any act which causes penetration to any extent whatsoever by the genitals of that person into or beyond the anus or genital organs of another person – in any coercive circumstances, under any false pretences or fraudulent means, in respect of a person who is incapable in law of appreciating the nature of an act which causes penetration, is guilty of the offence of rape". Reference is also made in the mentioned Bill that sexual violation is regarded as the "penetration by any object, including part of an animal or part of body into the anus or genital organs of another person, under coercive circumstances or false pretences" and that the same sentence as for rape is recommended by the Bill (life imprisonment or 25 years) to illustrate that the insertion of an object is viewed with the same seriousness as "rape".

This definition was selected as it includes all rape

survivors, unlike certain previous limited definitions which served to acknowledge only certain survivors based on gender or area of bodily assault, thereby ignoring or alienating other survivors.

## BACKGROUND

Male on male rape is largely an invisible problem in contemporary society, often assumed to occur only in prisons and similar settings (Garnets *et al.* 1990:372). However, the few studies that have been published indicate that it is a serious problem outside as well as inside institutions (Anderson, 1982:145-146; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996:441; Forman, 1982:235; Groth & Burgess, 1980:806-810; Huckle, 1995:187; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:221; King, 1992:1; McMullen, 1990:10). As with rape of females by males, male on male rape is a crime of violence rather than a crime of homosexuality, sexual desire or sexual gratification (Anderson, 1982:148; Groth & Burgess, 1980:809; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:223). Whereas society acknowledges the difficulties faced by female rape survivors, male rape survivors remain hidden and estranged (Garnets *et al.* 1990:372). This is compounded by the fact that men are not legally recognised as potential victims of rape.

In South Africa, statistics for male rape are difficult to ascertain and do not appear to be recorded by the police. According to King (1992:1) the fact that statistics on male sexual assault are so rare, encourages disbelief in the phenomenon. This appears to be due to a number of factors, including the reluctance of many men to report that they have been sexually assaulted, the difficulty of undertaking research of this nature, the stigmatisation of rape victims and the notion that victims as being responsible for attracting the assault (Eigenberg, 1990:52; Groth & Burgess, 1980:808; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:223; King, 1992:67). Current laws, which do not recognise male rape, not only inhibit reporting but also protect the rapists from any fear of discovery (McMullen, 1990:139).

Although there may be variance in the nature of assaults, the resultant trauma is often severe and far-reaching. There is no single, typical emotional response that every man will exhibit after he has been assaulted; however, there is evidence in the available literature to suggest that men experience "multiple levels

of trauma" (Anderson, 1982:145). A number of post-rape problem areas have been described for male survivors (Anderson, 1982:152-154; Frazier, 1993:72; Garnets *et al.* 1990:372; Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:576-579; Groth & Burgess, 1980:808; Huckle, 1995:191; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:223; King, 1992:5-9; Mezey & King, 1987:123; McMullen, 1990:81-113; Scarce, 1997:19; Siegal, Golding, Stein, Burnam & Sorenson, 1990:229).

Rape trauma syndrome (RTS) is an "acute stress reaction to a life threatening situation" which includes "behavioural, somatic and psychological, reactions" (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974:982). The syndrome has two distinct phases: acute and long-term. The acute phase is marked by a period of extreme disorganisation and upheaval in the survivor's life. This is followed by the more long-term "re-organisational" phase during which the survivors attempt to reorganise their lifestyles and gradually come to terms with the rape. The following discussion of reactions and symptoms could be found in either the acute or the reorganisational phase.

### **Behavioural reactions**

Many rape survivors may "self-medicate" by consuming alcohol or other drugs in an attempt to relieve their suffering (Scarce, 1997:25). Suicidal ideation and the act of suicide are fairly common among male rape survivors, particularly those who feel unable to reach out for much needed support (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:577; Scarce, 1997:26).

Male rape victims generally become more mistrustful of other men following their rape, which manifests as a discomfort in being in the company of groups of men (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:578; McMullen, 1990:89). Myers (1989:211) found that while some men experience overt, conscious fear, discomfort, and distancing when with adult men, others have a covert or unconscious inability to get close to men and fear emotional intimacy.

### **Somatic reactions**

Somatic symptoms can either be stress-related, hypochondriacal, or both. Stress-related somatic symptoms may include tension headaches, ulcers,

eating difficulties, colitis and upset stomach as well as extreme disturbances of sleep or appetite (Anderson, 1982:154; Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:578).

McMullen (1990:101) claims that male victims are at high risk of sexual injury and that many male rape injuries may not be visible. The act of penetration may injure the anus and lead to the development of abscesses, anal fissures or tears. Foreign objects, the penis and fingers are capable of damaging the rectal wall, especially when they are inserted violently or at unusual angles (McMullen, 1990:102). Often objects or fingers may be dirty and may transmit germs or infections. Victims of male rape may have contracted any one of a variety of sexually transmitted diseases such as Hepatitis B, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's) in the case of anal or oral trauma (King, 1992:70).

### **Psychological reactions**

Psychological reactions may include shock, which manifested in an initial feeling of numbness, withdrawal, disorientation and defensiveness (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1985:47). Male rape survivors tend to fear rejection (McMullen, 1990:97) and as a consequence may find themselves increasingly isolated. Withdrawal, fatigue and reclusiveness may be the result of an underlying depression, straining relationships and emotional support (Anderson, 1982:153).

Certain studies suggest that male rape victims are more likely than females to resort to denial and to control their emotions in reaction to the assault (Anderson, 1982:154; Frazier, 1993:72; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:223; Myers, 1989:205). The feelings of being violated and devalued, together with a sense of having lost the ability to control his circumstances, his body, or his own life, can also have an emotionally immobilising effect on the male survivor, which are referred to as frozen helplessness (Anderson, 1982:150; King, 1992:8).

Mood disturbances, particularly fear, anxiety, intense anger, thoughts of revenge, an increase of hostility and depression are frequently reported (Frazier, 1993:72; Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:576; Groth &

Burgess, 1980:808; Kaufman *et al.* 1980:223; King, 1992:9; Mezey & King, 1987:6; Myers, 1989:208; Scarce, 1997:23). Male rape survivors may experience an increased sense of vulnerability in their everyday lives, being hypervigilant and overly conscious of the possibility of future attacks (Scarce, 1997:28; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993:409). Phobias that can be associated with and characteristic of the assault may also result, such as fear of strangers, of walking alone and of being approached from behind or of being out at night (Anderson, 1982:154).

The most dramatic effects of male rape include the stigma, shame, humiliation and embarrassment that follow as survivors begin to deal with their experience. Many male survivors feel a sense of responsibility for their assault and are embarrassed that they were in some way culpable (Myers, 1989:208; Rose, 1986:820; Scarce, 1997:19).

Male survivors reported to have sustained damage to their subjective sense of masculinity as a consequence of the assault (Myers, 1989:210). According to Huckle (1995:188-189), this can manifest itself in feelings of anger or fury towards the self or others, inadequacy and guilt and shame for being a victim. Some men who have been raped may interpret their experience as an act of sex, believing that they have had a homosexual encounter. This may lead them to question their sexual identity in an attempt to make sense of their assault experience (Scarce, 1997:27). Various sexual difficulties following from male on male rape have been reported by numerous researchers (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:578; McMullen, 1990:85; Myers, 1989:211) including decreased libido and enjoyment of sex, difficulty in relating to and being physically intimate, indifferences to all sexual activity; increased awareness of sexual feelings and emotions; sexual tensions, sexual identity confusion; and sexual phobia.

Survivors may feel as if their bodies are permanently damaged in the eyes of others and often these feelings manifest themselves in the form of low self-esteem and a lack of self-worth, as well as negative changes or distortions in perception of body image (Scarce, 1997:27).

The aim of this research is to understand and explicate

the meaning and structure of rape against the pre-rape existence of the rape survivor, the rape experience in its immediacy and the continued living of the rape survivor.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research design

It is thought that phenomenology provides an enriching means to illuminate any human experience. In particular, in making explicit the dynamic relationship between the mind, the body and the world it is hoped that the phenomenological notions of the lived body, space, time, shared world, the self and emotions will provide important insights into the male survivor's experience of rape (Bradley-Springer, 1995:62-67; Conry, 1974:121; Kruger, 1988:40). A phenomenological investigation is concerned with the description of human experience in either written or verbal form. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon the chosen method is the empirical phenomenological method as described by Giorgi (1985:10-21; 1994:206), Stones (1988:152) and Wertz (1983:207-211). In this study, due to the nature of the research and the 'silence' surrounding the research topic, both written and verbal descriptions had to be relied upon.

### Selection of participants

Following Kruger (1988:150), participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- They had experience of male sexual assault (rape).
- They were English-speaking, verbally fluent and able to communicate their experiences.
- They expressed a willingness to be open with the researcher even though this might mean revealing painful feelings.
- They were over the age of 17 when they first experienced rape.

Attempts to recruit participants for this research study were made by purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997:206). This was done by contacting relevant clinics and rape crisis centres as well as various psychiatric hospitals and trauma clinics. Journalists who had written recent articles on male rape in popular

magazines were also contacted and asked whether the survivors they had been in contact with would be willing to participate in this research. Preliminary inquiries reflected participants' apprehension about being interviewed and it was thus decided to rely on both interviews and written descriptions of the experience. The researcher discussed the nature of the research with counsellors and directors of the various clinics and crisis centres as well as with journalists who agreed to ask any male rape survivors if they would be willing to take part in the research. It was explained that participants would be required to answer a question and that the answer should be written down in the way they felt most appropriate. Assurance was given that the study would be confidential; specifically, no names would be disclosed. Four potential participants were identified through this process. Only two, however, took part in this research and gave consent that their experiences could be included in the final research report and articles. The researcher had telephonic conversations with two of the survivors. One survivor claimed that although he supported the research, he would not feel comfortable participating, the other survivor, although willing to participate, was raped by a family member when he was a young child and therefore his experience did not fall within the parameters of this research.

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, ethical issues were considered from the beginning:

- The participants took part in the study voluntarily.
- The researcher, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, would protect the identity of the participants and they would be referred to as survivor X and Y.
- The participants were aware of the overall purpose of the study, in keeping with informed consent.
- Debriefing sessions were offered as well since the investigation had evoked significant emotional responses.

## Data analysis

The phases of analysis were based on an integration of the works of Giorgi (1985:10-21; 1994:211-214), Hycner (1985:280), Stones (1988:152) and Wertz (1983:207-211):

- The first phase involved collection of data.
- The second phase entailed gaining "an intuitive

holistic grasp of the data" (Stones, 1988:153). After collection of the verbal data, each protocol was read repeatedly, in order to attain a sense of wholeness of the data.

- The third phase involved that the data were broken down into naturally occurring meaning units, where each unit conveyed a particular meaning which emerged spontaneously from the reading. Wherever possible, the participant's own phraseology was adhered to in order that the data may "speak for itself" (Stones, 1988:153).
- In the fourth phase each of these units had been reflected upon and thereafter the participant's concrete, everyday expressions were transformed into psychological language. This transformation took place through a process of reflection and imaginative variation.
- In the fifth phase, insights in the transformed meaning units were synthesised and integrated into a consistent description of the structure of the phenomenon.
- In the final phase, the descriptions of the different individual psychological structures were integrated into a general structure.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were put in dialogue with the relevant phenomenological dimensions of existence and the existing literature on male rape in the pre-rape existence of the rape survivor, the rape experience in its immediacy and the continued living of the rape survivor. Where necessary, quotations from the initial descriptions had been used as a means of providing a space for the survivors to speak for themselves.

### Pre-rape existence

Both survivors led fulfilling lives. Survivor Y's description is an example of a life with a purpose and his integrated interaction with it: *"I had a good sense of humour and I loved to laugh. I was also easy-going, spontaneous, people liked me very easily and there was never a shortage of friends. Physically I was well-built and not too unattractive. At the age of 24 I was married to a wonderful person ... our marriage was a fairy tale."*

Even just before the rape incidents their pre-rape worlds

were characterised by a taken-for-granted routine and a harmonious and innocent engagement with the world. Survivor X described how the rape occurred whilst he was carrying out his daily affairs: *"I mean I went to a decent place, an innocent place to buy food. I was busy working on a job at that stage and this thing happened."*

For survivor Y, the rape occurred in a hotel room, on a business trip, which appeared through his description to be an extension of a harmonious evening: *"It was a wonderful evening...we agreed to meet for breakfast...everybody went back to their own rooms...there was a knock on my door...I assumed it was a hotel employee. I opened the door. A man with a butcher's knife in his hand rushed in."*

## **The rape experience in its immediacy**

### ***Rape as an idiosyncratic experience***

Thus, it is out of the pre-rape context that the rape occurs, suddenly and unexpectedly, and it is experienced as a shock, ushering in a disturbing and unfamiliar new reality. Rape serves to change a person's relationship with the world and the particular way of being in a situation which shows itself through a specific interrelation of situational, the self and bodily and behavioural themes (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984:579; Huckle, 1995:187).

Both descriptions reflected how the rape is experienced as an unwarranted and vicious assault on the survivors' bodily being, which has a disruptive impact on their entire manner of being in the world. Survivor X described it as follows: *"Firstly what happened was, he pushed a pen down the front of my penis, because he wanted to be screwed, which I couldn't do because I am not into masochism or whatever. Then he turned me around and he raped me. He pushed his whole fist up me, which was terribly sore."*

For survivor Y it was the beginning of a process of humiliation: *"There was a knock on my door. Through the peephole I saw a person standing there. I assumed that it was a hotel employee. I opened the door. A man with a butcher's knife in his hand, rushed in. In a fraction of a second the knife was at my throat. With his arm around my neck and the knife in my back,*

*I was pushed forward to be brought to a standstill between the double bed and the couch. He ordered me to undress first and, when I was standing naked and trembling in front of him, I had to undress him ... . Then I was herded into the bathroom to have a bath with him. While he was calmly laying in the warm bath water, I had to stimulate him with my tongue from his ears to his toes.... Back in the room he sprawled himself on the bed and ordered me to satisfy him orally, I was nauseous. I felt as if I was choking.... It felt like an eternity before he reached a climax. After I had rubbed his semen over his chest and stomach, I had to lick it off with my tongue... While he was lying on his back, with his legs high above his head, I was told to penetrate him with my penis... My sweat rained on his body..."*

The survivors described the behaviour forced on them as repulsive, humiliating and degrading, such that it defied description. Both survivors commented on how words failed to describe aspects of their experience. This failure of language is an important theme in male rape as it is seen how the survivors' struggle to express the affective dimensions in words. It also points towards the importance of speaking about the experience, thereby creating a language through which men can articulate their trauma. For survivor X, the feelings of dirt and repulsion he experienced when the perpetrator ejaculated on him were indescribable. For him, the semen assumed a toxic quality and it felt as if it was eating into his body. The relationship between shame and the body emerged through X's description. In shame, a body cannot stand up to the eyes of another: "There is a return of consciousness from its home in the world to the body where it is not at home ... In shame, consciousness becomes inwardly directed ... The urge is to shrink away, to hide, to escape the gaze or to cease to exist as one's body" (Moss, 1982:255). This is portrayed by survivor X, who said he wished he could disappear or cease being in order to avoid the humiliation of having the semen on him. For survivor Y, his disgust at having to perform oral sex on the perpetrator manifested bodily as he was overcome with nausea and felt as if he were choking.

### ***Bodiliness***

The connection between body ownership and individuation emerged through these descriptions. For

Conry (1974:127), impairment in the sense of the body as fundamental property naturally involves impairment in individuality and has been linked to pervasive feelings of dependency, helplessness and passivity. It can be seen that in male rape, the survivor's body, as fundamental property, becomes violated and inherent in this experience is a sense of helplessness and powerlessness. Also related to the bodily dimension within aspects of the experiences are Moss's (1989:255) findings that in distressful bodily experiences, the body or aspects thereof are disowned or alienated from oneself.

The descriptions reflected the survivors' perceptions that through the rape experience they had been stripped of their bodily integrity and suffered a permanent loss of dignity. In this respect, survivor X referred to his having *lost his bodily cleanliness* and survivor Y referred to having been *dishonoured and humiliated*.

### **Temporality**

The experience of being in a state of limbo speaks to the temporal dimension of existence. According to Kruger (1988:119), lived time is perceived in how a person's unfolding projects proceed. In fear or threat, as experienced in rape, there is a belief that this unfolding will cease and time is slowed down. Time contracts as the future and past are ignored in favour of the immediately perceived situation (Arcaya in Kruger, 1988:119). Toombs (1995:9) relates a change in temporal experience to bodily dysfunction, claiming that the overwhelming demands of impaired embodiment can ground a person in the present moment. Bradley-Springer (1995:64-65) extends temporality to an experience of pain and shows how in an episode of pain measured time becomes distorted while one seems fixed in the present.

The survivors experienced timeless states of being, where they became dissociated and felt disembodied. For both survivors, the rape appeared to extend the temporal dimension within the experience. Survivor X described the experience as *endless* and survivor Y spoke of periods where the rape felt like an *eternity* and it seemed as if the rape would *never come to an end*. The overwhelming impact of the rape and its manifestation in an unreal perceptual and bodily experience is seen in this response from survivor X: "*In your experi-*

*ence of rape, you're blank, completely blank. At that moment you just fear for your life, you're nothing, not your body, you don't think about anything else, nothing.*"

For survivor Y, it is his image of himself as the *living dead* that encapsulated his experience of dissociation and disembodiment.

### **Emotional experiences**

The reactions of shock, disbelief and a feeling of numbness have been confirmed in numerous studies related to assault on males (Benedict, 1994:158; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993:406). This reaction of disbelief was expressed aptly by survivor X when he said: "*In your experience of rape, you're blank, you're completely blank.*" According to Scarce (1997:20), the disbelief and shock of being raped may be more severe for men than women. This he attributes to gender role socialisation and society's avoidance of male rape, which may place sexual assault beyond the boundaries of most men's reality. The response from survivor Y clearly illustrates this disbelief: "*Never did I think that in my life I would be intimate with a man.*"

Simultaneous with the initial reaction of shock at the unexpected intrusion, which immediately impinges on the survivor's lived space, is an overwhelming experience of fear. The interrelationship between fear and lived space has been elucidated by Kruger (1988:119) and Bradley-Springer (1995:65), who indicate that disorder and fear or threat constrict a person's lived space and penetrate his personal boundaries.

The fear experienced by the survivors is described as having an intense effect on their bodily felt-sense. Survivor Y referred to this as an out of control experience; *perspiring heavily* and *trembling*. For survivor X, it was the description of being overwhelmed to the extent that he felt disembodied: "... *you're nothing, not your body ...*". This fear appears to arise largely from the survivor's uncertainty about the intentions of the unknown perpetrator and the constant threat of loss of life. This relates to Huckle's (1995:191) findings, that the most common reaction of male survivors is an overwhelming sense of fear and disbelief which often results in helplessness and passive submission.

The survivors also commented on their fear of contract-

ing sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDS, and of suffering interminably in the future. The fear of contracting AIDS is consistent with findings by King (1992:70) and McMullen (1990: 104). The emergence of HIV has presented additional trauma for male rape survivors, especially if their assailant did not use a condom. The fear of being infected with AIDS extends post-rape, as reflected by the descriptions of the survivors who felt that they are left in a state of limbo as to their HIV status.

An important theme that emerges from the survivors' descriptions was that the experience is suffused with physical pain and emotional anguish, which is overwhelming and unbearable, often to the extent that it defies description. An interrelationship between bodily pain and emotional anguish can be seen within the descriptions. Survivor Y encapsulated his emotional distress as embodied when he said his *heart wanted to break* upon hearing that he could be infected with AIDS. He further reflected the embodiment of his pain when he described how he *groaned* under the burden of pain. For survivor X, the embodiment of pain was observed in the interview from his grimacing and tearfulness when trying to describe his emotional anguish and bodily pain within the experience.

It can be seen how the experience serves to disempower the survivors completely. They become conscious of their absolute helplessness relative to what is perceived to be an omnipotent and extremely dangerous perpetrator. In the wake of this perception of powerlessness, the survivors' struggle with suffocating frustration as they apprehend their inability to stop the repulsive and life-shattering experience. Numerous researchers believe the issue of power to be inherent in the survivor's experience. According to Anderson (1982:150), power is inherent in the victim's fear as he explains that the survivor's fear for his life and his recognition of powerlessness in the face of a life and death crisis can prove overwhelming. The feelings of being violated and devalued, together with a sense of having lost the ability to control his circumstances, his body or his own life, can also have an emotionally immobilising effect on the individual. For Stanko and Hobdell (1993:407), powerlessness can be particularly threatening to the survivor's perception of masculinity as sexual victimisation may carry a

message of reduced manhood. Myers' (1989:212) findings in this regard suggest that many survivors sustain damage to their subjective sense of masculinity as a consequence of assault, and this is associated with a loss of power, control, identity, sense of self, confidence and independence.

Conscious of their powerlessness and isolation, it is seen how the survivors turn to prayer in an attempt to convince God as an omnipotent being to intervene and save them from the intolerable situation. When their hopes for a miracle are shattered, the survivors react with anger and disappointment, as they are unable to understand the perceived cosmic indifference to the injustice of their experience.

### ***The perpetrator***

Important to this research is the perpetrator's pivotal role in making the rape a distressing experience, which has a detrimental impact on the survivor. This is highlighted by Rose (1986:823), who says that central to the trauma experienced in rape "is the fact that the source of injury to the survivor is a human being acting intentionally and not an inanimate object or an accident of nature or man". The perpetrator of the rape in both descriptions was experienced as sadistic and inhuman and was perceived to enjoy the power and control inherent in inflicting pain, humiliation and fear on the survivors. This corresponds with findings by Groth and Burgess (1980:808) regarding the major motivational components of male rapists. In particular, two of the motivational components which emerge from the descriptions appear to be conquest and control (where the assaults serve as an expression of power and mastery on the part of the perpetrator) and sadism and degradation (where the aggression itself becomes eroticised and the perpetrator experiences excitement and gratification in the sexual abuse and degradation of the survivor). There appears to be some support here for the finding in most studies on male rape that the various motivating factors usually have more to do with aggression, control and humiliation of victims rather than a need for sexual gratification (Groth, 1979:126-127; Huckle, 1995:191; McMullen, 1990:10).

The impact of the perpetrator emerges within the descriptions, as the perpetrator's behaviour and the rape are seen to represent the antithesis of the survivor's



values, expectations and assumptions about people and the world. The experience is thus met with shock and disbelief as it violates the common sense of things and the survivor is left to wrestle with perplexity and confusion.

### **The continued living of the rape existence**

The descriptions reveal that the experience is characterised by a sense of continuity, as it does not end once the perpetrator leaves the survivor alone. The rape experience ruptures the male survivor's pre-rape existence. In the wake of the idiosyncratic and traumatic experience, the survivors are left feeling helpless, confused, angry and deeply ashamed, trying desperately to come to terms with an unpredictable new reality. Reflecting on his helplessness in relation to an aspect of this adverse new reality, survivor X said: *"And then you realise that there's so many ugly things going on, so many horrible things going around and you can do nothing about it"*. Survivor Y punctuated the shattering of his harmonious social world when he said: *"But then things went horribly wrong"*. This is thus reminiscent of Carrere's (1989:108) hypothesis, that in trauma, the ordinary, taken-for-granted way a person inhabits the world is ruptured.

### **Apprehension about sharing the experience of male rape**

The survivors reflect their apprehension about sharing their experience because of real or imagined fears of rejection and revictimisation, which would confirm for them, their perceived loss of dignity and further entrench their shame. Survivor X asked himself directly after the rape: *"How could this happen to you? How are you going to tell everybody? What are you going to tell? How? What?"* Likewise, this is reflected in the words of survivor Y: *"In the loneliness of the bathroom I felt humiliated and dishonoured. I was embarrassed, very embarrassed. I knew that I would not talk about this incident."*

For survivor X, the fear for revictimisation was actualised as he recalled how his first attempts to speak to others about the rape were met with insensitive and antagonistic responses. He noted how his withdrawal from sharing his experiences came in the wake of these hurtful remarks. For survivor Y, the failure to share

his experience with significant others was grounded in imagined fears of revictimisation and rejection. These findings relate to findings by Mezey and King (1987:6), who claim that very often significant others and service providers of male-rape victims may be insensitive or project their judgement of culpability onto the victim. Fear about this, together with the stigma associated with the rape, make it unlikely that many male victims will want to report the offence or seek help (McMullen, 1990:38). This is clearly reflected by survivor Y's apprehension and mistrust about sharing his experience. It is further highlighted in his appeals to the law about the number of survivors whom he believed are unwilling to report their assaults.

### **Dealing with losses**

The survivors described a feeling of intense grief at the perceived permanent loss of sense of the self and others as competent, secure and dignified and despair at the chaos and unpredictability that have consumed their existence. This grief and despair manifest themselves in depression or anger and even rage, as the survivors appeared to mourn the sense of loss incurred. Survivor X described his struggle with anger and grief at his loss as follows: *"Something came and bugged up your life, your system, your mind, he came and took everything. He took away such a lot and you have to try and work through it, try find a midway in between to survive, to see your whole life through."*

Survivor Y reflected on his loss as he wrote his description: *"As I write this I am overcome by nostalgia and I long for the days when I was still me - without complications. One does not realise how much there is to be grateful for until I lost myself."* He went on to describe his anger and misery in the face of this loss.

Related to this, the survivors referred to enduring changes in their sense of self as well as symptoms that resulted in their feeling that their old self or part thereof had died or had been irrevocably lost. Survivor X spoke in this regard about his self-loathing and his loss of self-respect as well as anger that were in total contrast to his usually compassionate sense of self. For survivor Y, the effect on his sense of self was aptly described in the fragmentation between a good, idealised "old self" and an alien, adverse "new self".

The impact of rape on body image and self-concept

had been mentioned in previous research relating to male rape. Huckle (1995:190) posits that survivors may feel as if their bodies are permanently damaged in the eyes of others, less than their former selves, as a result of the assault, and that this often manifests in the form of low self-esteem and a lack of self-worth.

Ultimately, it appears that the experience leads the survivors to question critically their religious faith and belief in God as ultimate saviour. This is the human belief in the existence of a force or being that eternally watches over, cares for and protects. When this belief system fails to serve its purpose, the reaction can be catastrophic, with the individual feeling angry, deceived and betrayed. Survivor X questioned this belief system when he said: *"Although you believe in God, at that stage you really question it, is there a real God? Why did this happen to me? Why must it have happened?"* For survivor Y, the failure of his belief system was met with anger and a sense of having been betrayed: *"At that stage I became rebellious against my God and Father. Where was he? Why could he not save me from this situation?"*

The rape however leads not only to the survivors' questioning of a particular belief system, but also to repeated questioning in an attempt to find reasons and make sense of the rape. The survivors appear to be unable to put meaning to the life-shattering experience. It can be argued that the survivors are thus faced with a crisis of meaning.

### ***Emotional manifestations***

There is a simultaneous struggle to exist with the knowledge of the experience, which consumes the survivor's existence. When not in consciousness, knowledge of the experience appears to settle uneasily at the rim of consciousness, waiting to intrude and again torment the survivor's lived world. Survivor X described a consistent re-experiencing of the rape through intrusive recollective images and the associated painful emotions. These images and related emotions occurred spontaneously, or were primed by objects or individuals whom he perceived as associated with the rape or rapist. This finding relates to studies by Myers (1989:208) and Huckle (1995:191), showing how numerous male survivors had symptoms of chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly recurrent memories of the assault and occasional nightmares. In this

regard, both survivors also related their mistrust and suspicion of others following the rape.

Varying levels of depression have been found to be common among survivors of sexual assault (Anderson, 1982:153; Frazier, 1993:72; Siegal *et al.* 1990:241). According to Anderson (1982:153), underlying anger may often manifest itself in depression and chronic low self-esteem. The theme of anger emerged throughout the survivors' descriptions. Survivor X mentioned his struggle in containing his feelings of anger and integrating these with his usually compassionate nature. His rage also appeared to manifest itself in fantasies about seeing his perpetrator and slowly torturing him to death. This corresponds with the findings of Groth and Burgess (1980:808) and Stanko and Hobdell (1993:408), who found that many men have to deal with intense feelings of anger, hatred and desire for revenge following an assault. Whereas survivor X appeared to direct his anger towards the perpetrator, survivor Y's anger emerged as an out-of-control acting out towards himself and world of others. Survivor X also appeared eventually to deal with his angry feelings towards the perpetrator through therapeutic support, whereas survivor Y appeared to become more desperate over time in the face of his anger. These findings speak to the importance of the survivors having a safe space within which to share their experience. In this regard, Anderson (1982:153) relates the importance of survivors being assisted in channelling their anger appropriately, as a failure to do so could result in depression or self-destructive actions.

Amidst the turmoil of their new realities emerged a sense of purposelessness, which was commented on by both survivors. This sense of purposelessness appeared to be a manifestation of their crisis of meaning. This was aptly reflected by Survivor X when he said: *"I really feared at a stage that I would have thoughts of committing suicide. I thought: 'Will this incident not be so significant, could it not take away my faith, my belief in a higher purpose, in the person up there?'"*

Survivor Y also reflected on his sense of purposelessness when he commented on having *"lost interest in everything"*. In the face of their distress and influenced by the dissolution of life meaning, it was seen how both survivors considered that the only re-

lief from the traumatic experience may be in non-being, which manifested in suicidal ideation. Research by Goyer and Eddleman (1984:577) and Scarce (1997:26) has found that suicidal ideation and the act of suicide is fairly common among male rape survivors, particularly those who feel unable to reach out for much needed support. In this regard, survivor X commented on how always having had some support protected him from considering suicide seriously. On the other hand, survivor Y, in the complete absence of support, reflected more prolonged and severe suicidal ideation. Here again, the importance of support emerged from the research.

Although not directly expressed, both survivors reflected some assumption of self-blame or responsibility. In this regard, it is seen how survivor Y became angry with himself for assuming that it was a hotel employee outside his hotel door and letting the perpetrator in. For survivor X, it was his perception that his sexual identity played a role in his assault. From an existential perspective self-blame or guilt following an uncontrollable event reflects an underlying wish to control the uncontrollable. If a person is guilty about not having done something that should have been done, it follows that something could have been done.

### ***Living in a shared world***

The world human beings live in is world that they share with others (Kruger, 1988:112-123). Thus, being human means being in relation to others. According to Spinelly (1989:84), an important implication of adopting a phenomenological perspective is that it switches the focus away from the isolated individual as an individual and towards his manner of relating to the world, towards the perceived world he lives in and the kind of intersubjectivity to which he has a sense of belonging. Carrere (1989:112) adds that the everyday lived world consists of a plenum of relationships that are familiar, typical and known. Being situated within this taken-for-granted web of relationships provides persons with certainty about their place in the social world.

Victimisation is a distressing interpersonal experience as it always involves detrimental victimisers who strip the victim of their assumptions about the world and others. This in turn often results in a struggle to regain trust and a feeling of safety in relationship with others. It has been mentioned that in tragedy such as rape,

the ordinary, taken-for-granted way a person inhabits the world is ruptured. Tragedy is an unexpected social situation that strains the integrity of person-world relations. Part of this rupturing extends to one's field of relationships with others (Carrere, 1989:112). The field of relationships narrows dramatically towards a concern for one or a few relationships. Individuals retreat from relationships that once comforted them and not only physical detachment occurs, but also a constriction in their capacity to have a world of others (Carrere, 1989:113). Disruptions in social relationships following male rape are common. Mistrust of others, shame, fear of rejection and mood lability may make it extremely difficult to relate to others (Anderson, 1982:152; McMullen, 1990:96; Myers, 1989:211).

In trauma, individuals not only retreat from relationships that once nurtured them but also experience a change in the ordering of life, for time. According to Carrere (1989:110-111) this is: "...the rhythm of relations as anticipations, remembrances, and presence's which pace existence. As the person's ability to appropriate the influence of others is compromised, there exists a disturbance to chronology and the sequencing of moments...the perception of things as events gives way as well, for the individual is mired in immediacy".

It is seen how the adverse changes in the survivors' sense of the self affect their ability to engage comfortably with others in their social world. For survivor X, this was reflected in his difficulty negotiating relationships, particularly with his father and homosexual friends. He made specific reference to his struggle with relationships that could possibly become physically intimate. Survivor Y described how his adverse "new self" has had a disruptive impact on his relationships with his family and at work. For him, the experience also forced a change in the way he engaged in sexual intimacy with his wife. Various sexual and social difficulties, including sexual relationship avoidance and difficulty relating to and being physically intimate with a previously significant partner, have been reported by numerous researchers to follow male rape (Benedict, 1994:161; McMullen, 1990:88; Myers, 1989:211). Thus, it is seen in both experiences how relationships that previously seemed secure, trusted and harmonious become strained and unpredictable.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the impact of the experience is a life changing one, radically altering the survivors' existence and ways of being in the world. The lived experiences of rape for males are only beginning to be explored, and very little of what is known to researchers of the phenomenon has penetrated public consciousness. The phenomenological approach adopted in this study proved best able to meet the aim of this research, namely, to capture the experience of rape for the male survivor. The research shows that the rape is experienced as an unexpected and intrusive violation, which at once impacts on all dimensions of the survivor's existence, ultimately disrupting his entire manner of being-in-the-world. In the wake of the rape experience, the survivor is left in what appears to be a permanent struggle to readapt to this new way of being-in-the-world.

Apprehension about sharing the experience appears to be grounded in the actual or imagined fears of revictimisation as well as a subjective sense of shame and the perceived stigma attached to being a male survivor of a rape. Both survivors, however, reflected a desperate need for their experiences to be unconditionally understood. Not surprisingly, the post-rape struggle of the survivors appears to be exacerbated in the absence of any supportive relationships. This has important implications for society at large and particularly those within the helping professions. Male rape survivors need more support. By giving a voice to two male survivors, it is hoped that this research will begin the process of gaining greater recognition for all survivors from both professionals and the general public.

## REFERENCE LIST

- ANDERSON, CL 1982: Males as sexual assault victims: Multiple levels of trauma. **Homosexuality and Psychotherapy**, 7(2/3):145-163.
- BENEDICT, H 1994: Recovery: How to survive sexual assault for women, men, teenagers and their families. New York: Columbia University Press.
- BRADLEY-SPRINGER, L 1995: Being in pain: A nurse's experience. **Journal of Phenomenological Psychology**, 26:58-70.
- BURGESS, AW & HOLMSTROM, LL 1974: Rape trauma syndrome. **American Journal of Psychiatry**, 131(9):981-986.
- BURGESS & HOLMSTROM, 1985: Rape trauma syndrome and post-traumatic stress response. (In: Burgess, A ed. 1985: Rape and sexual assault. A research handbook. New York: Garland, pp 46-60).
- CARRERE, RA 1989: Psychology of tragedy: A phenomenological analysis. **Journal of Phenomenological Psychology**, 20(1):105-129.
- COLLINGS, SJ 1987: Barriers to rape reporting among white South African women. **South African Journal of Psychology**, 17(1):20-24.
- CONRY, BJ 1974: An existential-phenomenological view of the lived body. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Michigan: University of Ohio.
- DONNELLY, DA & KENYON, S 1996: Gender stereotypes and the provision of services to sexually assaulted males. **Journal of interpersonal violence**, 11(3):441-448.
- DRAFT SEXUAL OFFENCES BILL 2003: South African Law Commission. Discussion paper 102. Project 107. Sexual Offences: Process And Procedure. Addendum: pp. 835-868.
- EIGENBERG, H 1990: Male rape: An empirical examination of correctional officers' attitudes toward rape in prison. **Dissertation Abstracts International**, 50(11):39-56.
- FORMAN, BD 1982: Reported male rape. **Victimology**, 7:235-236.
- FRAZIER, PA 1993: A comparative study of male and female rape victims seen at a hospital-based rape crisis program. **Journal of Interpersonal Violence**, 8(1):64-76.
- GARNETS, L; HEREK, GM & LEVY, B 1990: Violence and victimization of lesbians and gay men. **Journal of Interpersonal Violence**, 5:366-383.
- GIORGI, A 1985: Sketch of a psychological phenomenological method. (In: Giorgi, A ed. 1985: Phenomenology and psychological research. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, pp 8-22).
- GIORGI, A 1994: A phenomenological perspective on certain qualitative research methods. **Journal of Phenomenological Psychology**, 25(2):190-220.
- GOYER, PF & EDDLEMAN, HC 1984: Same-sex rape of nonincarcerated men. **American Journal of Psychiatry**, 141:576-579.
- GROTH, AN 1979: Men who rape: The psychology of the offender. New York: Plenum.
- GROTH, AN & BURGESS, AW 1980: Male rape: Offenders and victims. **American Journal of Psychiatry**, 137:806-810.
- HUCKLE, PL 1995: Male rape victims referred to a forensic psychiatric service. **Medicine, Science and Law**, 35:187-192.
- HYCNER, RH 1985: Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. **Human studies**, 8:179-303.
- KAUFMAN, A; DIVASTO, P; JACKSON, R; VOORHEES, H & CHRISTY, J 1980: Male rape victims: Non-institutionalized assault. **American Journal of Psychiatry**, 137:221-223.
- KING, MB 1992: Male sexual assault in the community. (In: Mezey, GC & King, MB eds. 1992: Male victims of sexual assault. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 1-12).

- KRUGER, D 1988: An introduction to phenomenological psychology. Cape Town: Juta.
- MCMULLEN, RJ 1990: Male rape: Breaking the silence on the last taboo. London: GMP.
- MEZEY, G & KING, M 1987: Male victims of sexual assault. **Medicine, Science and Law**, 27(2):122-124.
- MOSS, D 1982: Distortions in human embodiment: A study of surgically treated obesity. (In: Bruzina, R & Wilshire B eds. Phenomenology dialogues and bridges. Albany: State University of New York, pp 253-268).
- MOSS, D 1989: Brain, body and world: Body image and the psychology of the body. (In: Valle, RS & Halling, S eds. 1989: Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience. New York: Plenum, pp 63-82).
- MYERS, MF 1989: Men sexually assaulted as adults and sexually abused as boys. **Archives of Sexual Behaviour**, 18:203-215.
- NEUMAN, WL 1997: Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.
- ROSE, D 1986: "Worse than death": Psychodynamics of rape victims and the need for psychotherapy. **American Journal of Psychiatry**, 143:817-824.
- SCARCE, M 1997: Male on male rape: The hidden toll of stigma and shame. New York: Plenum.
- SIEGAL, JM; GOLDING, JM; STEIN, JA; BURNAM, MA & SORENSON, SB 1990: Reactions to sexual assault: A community study. **Journal of Interpersonal Violence**, 5(2):229-246.
- SPINELLY E 1989: The interpreted world: An introduction to phenomenological psychology. London: Sage.
- STANKO, EA & HOBDELL, K 1993: Assault on men: Masculinity and male victimization. **British Journal of Criminology**, 33(3):400-416.
- STONES, CR 1988: Research: Toward a phenomenological praxis. (In: Kruger, D ed. 1988: An introduction to phenomenological psychology. Cape Town: Juta, pp 141-156).
- TOOMBS, SK 1995: The lived experience of disability. **Human Studies**, 18:9-23.
- WERTZ, FJ 1983: From everyday to psychological description: Analyzing the moments of a qualitative data analysis. **Journal of Phenomenological Psychology**, 14(2):197-241.