

Never-ending dilemma: Victimisation of survivors of sexual assault in the Western Cape Province, South Africa

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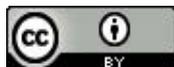
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Abstract

Rape and sexual assault against women, despite the progressive Bill of Rights crafted in the Constitution, 1996 define a country at a moral crossroad. Sexual assault poses a serious challenge to both the survivor and the criminal justice system (CJS). Yet, it remains one of the most serious, under-reported crimes in South Africa. Women who experience sexual assault are left with devastating effects such as physical and psychological harm and social victimisation. Following an explorative, qualitative approach, twenty-nine participants were selected using purposive sampling. Digitally recorded in-depth interviews between the first author and participants were transcribed and analysed. The findings highlighted that role-players rendered inadequate services to victims without guidance from an institutional framework, thus often exposing sexual assault victims to further secondary victimisation. The decline in the proportion of cases successfully prosecuted by the CJS is greater than the numbers being referred to it. Furthermore, the absence of specific guidelines relating to the statement taking by inexperienced police members, statement-taking skills, was identified as one of the weaknesses in the current system. Based on the findings, it is clear that if not properly managed, victims of sexual assault may end up not recovering from the traumatic ordeal they have experienced. In order to assist them towards recovery, social systems taking care of victims must be well-sensitised, non-judgemental and have the ability to treat victims with dignity and respect.

Keywords: Best practices, Secondary victimisation, Trauma, Violence, Service excellence.

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