

**WHEN I HEAR THE WORD RAPE IT'S
AS THOUGH SOMEBODY'S CALLED
MY NAME**

Phenomenological aspects of war rape

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“When I hear the word rape it's as though somebody's called my name....,,

The words of a 19-year old girl who survived wartime rape. Her words describe the way that she sees her whole identity as distorted by the rape she has experienced. Rape is an attack on the physical, psychological, sexual and social integrity of the survivor. It is an act of violence and of abusive power, but it has no connection with sexuality. Sex is chosen by the perpetrator as the most intimate, sensitive, and vulnerable of areas, where he can inflict the greatest hurt or humiliation on the woman or girl.

Long-term:

She gave birth to the child conceived by war rape. Her relationship with her child remains ambiguous, rejection and neglect being mixed with acceptance.

The question to be explored: The identity of a survivor of wartime rape - Which pillars of identity remain intact or have been re-established?

b) "I will kill you", "I will kill your children"

Nearly all our clients who are survivors of wartime rape were threatened in this way by perpetrators, who were armed. Wartime rape always means being faced with death. The threat to life is at the core of wartime rape trauma, and of intra-communal rape in peacetime too.

Long-term:

One client, a refugee from a place to which she could not return for a long time, lives in our town and maintains a satisfactory family life. In the last few years she has found a job. Her recent contacts with our Centre have been for counselling about the intense fears (nocturnal enuresis) of her youngest child.

The question to be explored: "fear for life", and the lasting fears of a survivor of wartime rape and her children.

c) "You could be my son,,

These are the words of a 52-year-old woman to a young perpetrator in an attempt to convince him not to rape her.

Survivors frequently call on a perpetrator's sense of humanity and normal human feelings in an attempt to defend themselves against rape. This is one of the active coping strategies for rape as traumatic event. It could be connected with the development of symptoms of PTSD, although with less probability. Calling on the perpetrator's humanity is often attempted as a coping mechanism for rape outside wartime as well.

Long-term:

She moved out of our Centre after a short stay and spent several years in a refugee camp in the town. The latest information we have about her is that she has moved, still a refugee, to another town in Bosnia.

The question to be explored: "calling on humanity" as a coping mechanism when threatened during wartime, and post-war.

d) "I saved the children for him" (her husband)

These are very often the words of women who have survived wartime rape. It is their attempt to find a meaning in the violence and sacrifice they experienced. Long-term therapeutic work was needed for women to find any meaning in saving their own lives, because in their response to acute rape trauma they regarded their own lives as worthless. A similar response is often expressed by survivors of rape outside wartime

Long-term:

The client described under c)

The question to be explored: what does "saving the children" mean long-term, marriage relationships long-term.

e) "How do I tell my husband?,"

Women who survived wartime rape suffered from intense feelings of shame and guilt, as well as the fear that they will not be accepted by their husbands, that their husbands will blame and reject them. Outside wartime, girls and women are often unwilling to report a rape among other also for fear that the male members of her family could attack them. An essential part of psychotherapeutic work is supporting the family in a search for legal solutions.

Long-term:

A number of clients.

The question to be explored: marriage and family relationships, family support to the survivor of wartime rape.

f) "Now, we are the same....,"

During our therapeutic work we encountered an impressive sensitivity and ability on the part of husbands to accept their wives as survivors of wartime rape because they themselves had survived concentration camps, or torture in prisons. This resource of mutual understanding and support is often missing in cases of rape outside wartime, and women who have survived rape are faced with negative attitudes, prejudice, and a lack of understanding and support within the community.

Long-term:

One client who was a survivor of wartime rape was raped when visiting her husband in prison. She told him for the first time after she had spent some time in our Centre. He answered: "Now, we are the same". In addition to her wartime rape and his torture, they had had long-term relationship problems in their marriage before the war trauma.

They left the country in the war time, and contacted us from the European country where they are now living.

The question to be explored: Mutual understanding and support, unsatisfactory marriage relationships before the trauma is inflicted.

g) "I saved him" (my husband)

The theme of sacrificing oneself as a way to protect a sick husband or other member of the family is exemplified by two sisters, survivors of wartime rape, who looked after their sick sister-in-law.

In therapeutic work, empowerment was directed towards attempting to find a meaning in the protection of the sick member of the family.

Long-term work towards empowerment is needed for women to find a meaning in saving her own life in rape outside wartime.

Long-term:

The oldest client mentioned under c) lives as a refugee in a Bosnian town. Two sisters, survivors of wartime rape have left Bosnia and live in a European country.

The question to be explored: In which situations and to which degree are they "sacrificing themselves" now, how they develop self-protection.

h) "I want him to undergo the same thing I did" (the perpetrator)

These are the words of a 30-year-old survivor of wartime rape which express her "call for justice".

In cases of rape outside wartime legal proceedings usually meet this need, and the majority of our clients decide to initiate police and court proceedings.

Long-term:

Our client lives in the U.S.A. She gave testimony against one of the Serb leaders at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and achieved vindication.

The question to be explored: Achieving justice and feelings connected with this.

i) Depraved forms of violence

***Sexual torture
(Several clients)

***Forcing the victim to become a perpetrator, to torture other women sexually.

(One thirty-year-old survivor of wartime rape died from a serious illness a few years after she survived the torture. Her children and husband maintained a relationship with our Centre for a long time).

j) Extra humiliations and attempts to estrange a survivor of wartime rape from her community. Humanity under extreme conditions

A thirty years old survivor of wartime rape, who had seen the mutilated body of her husband, after having been raped multiple times was taken to a room where men from her village were being held. An armed perpetrator ordered each man to beat her, describing her in insulting terms. One old man from the village said: "I will not do it, I know what kind of person our M..... is". The whole procedure stopped and the perpetrator took her to the room where women and children were being held prisoner.

Long-term:

She left country during war time. She contacted us from the European country where she lives.

The question to be explored: Humiliation and estrangement long-term.

k) "I believe in destiny,,

The majority of survivors of wartime rape express their acceptance of what they experienced in these words. It is a powerful coping mechanism, as well as a way of finding a meaning in their experience.

In rape outside wartime women and girls are more likely to blame themselves for having trusted an acquaintance or stranger.

Long-term:

(Several survivors)

The question to be explored:

Beliefs: naive and sophisticated religious beliefs long-term.

1) "All I need is a piece of land and a cottage on it,,

These are the words of a 52-year-old survivor of wartime rape who provided a model for the therapists. With her internal strength this woman showed that it was possible to survive wartime rape, still be strong and wish to go on living.

In rape outside wartime women and girls usually wish to continue with their lives despite all the difficulties which are consequences of rape trauma.

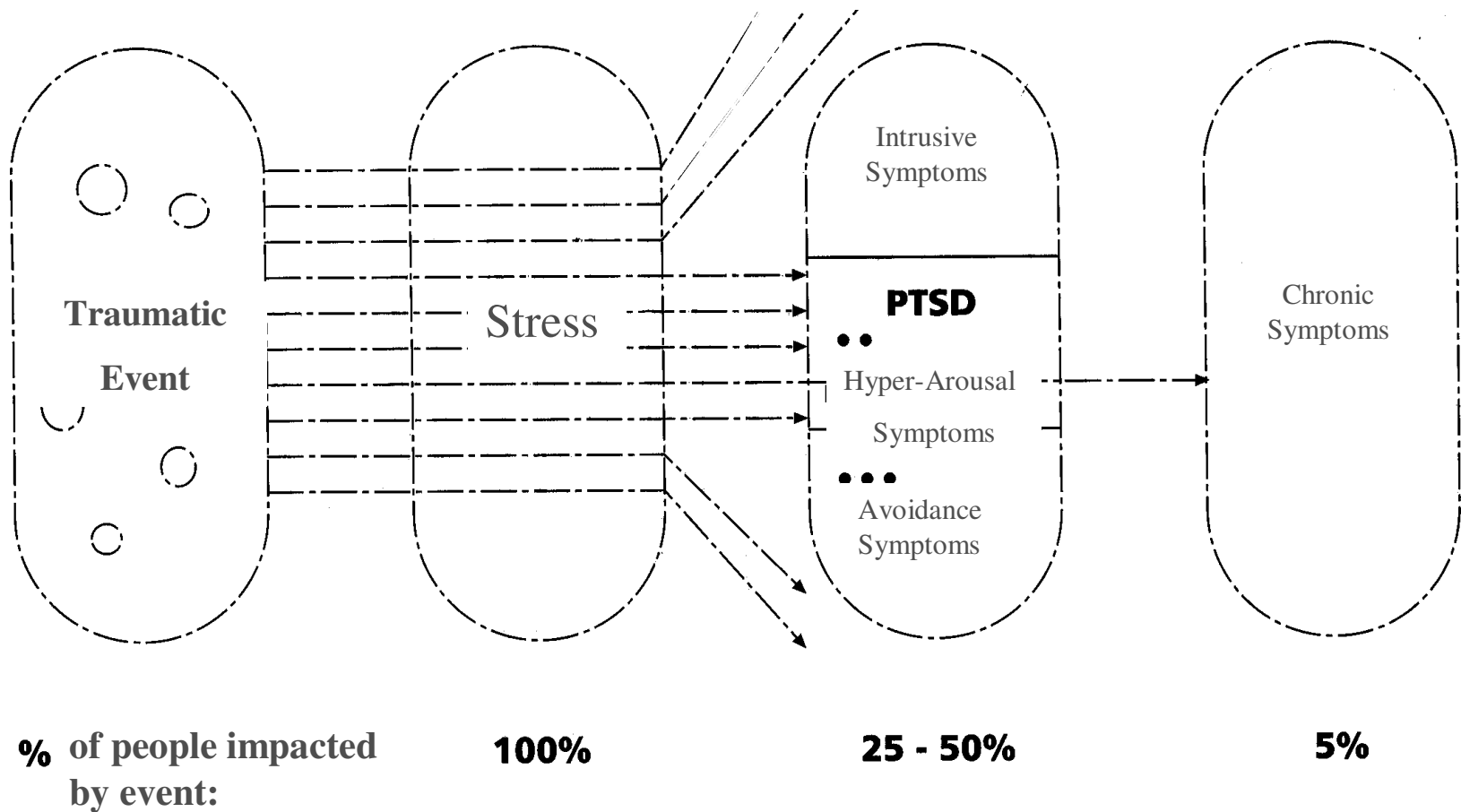
Long-term:

A client mentioned several times previously. She lost two sons and helped her sick husband.

Question to be explored:

What needs is her life focused on now?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



PTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- TORTURE 90%
- SEXUAL ABUSE 70%
- COMBAT 30%
- POLICE, FIRE AND
PARAMEDICS 4-16%
- GENERAL POPULATION 2%