

SECTION III: PATHWAYS TO SAFETY & HEALING

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3.1 Safety & Crisis Response

1. **Creating a safe space:** Mental health professionals provide a secure and confidential environment where survivors can openly express their feelings and emotions. They offer empathy, understanding and validation, allowing survivors to feel heard and supported during their healing journey.
2. **Providing psychological treatment:** Mental health professionals utilise various evidence-based therapeutic approaches to address the psychological effects of trauma. Techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and trauma-focused treatment can help survivors reframe negative thoughts, process traumatic memories and develop coping strategies.
3. **Facilitating emotional healing:** Survivors of sexual assault often grapple with intense emotions such as anger, fear, sadness and guilt. Mental health professionals can help survivors navigate these emotions, develop self-compassion and work toward emotional healing and resilience.
4. **Addressing PTSD symptoms:** Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common consequence of sexual assault. Mental health professionals can help survivors identify triggers, manage symptoms and work through traumatic memories to reduce the impact of PTSD on their lives.
5. **Empowering survivors:** Mental health professionals aim to empower survivors by helping them regain control over their lives. They work with survivors to set realistic goals, rebuild self-esteem and develop healthy coping mechanisms to foster a stronger sense of self-worth and autonomy.
6. **Connecting with resources and support networks:** Mental health professionals can also connect survivors with additional resources and support networks. For example, they may recommend support groups, legal assistance or medical care to ensure a comprehensive approach to healing.

Creating support systems for Sexual Assault survivors should also include methodologies to accommodate social and cultural markers that demarcate trauma in a particular social setting.

- Survivor support and trauma and trauma care toolkit by Michigan State University
<https://centerforsurvivors.msu.edu/resources/how-to-help-a-survivor/>
- What do mental health professionals do? Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute
<https://ppimhs.org/newspost/the-crucial-role-of-mental-health-professionals-in-healing-sexual-assault-survivors/>
- The rape of India's Dalit women and girls https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/the_rape_of_india_s_dalit_women_and_girls/
- LSE Article on Media coverage and hypocrisy of covering rape of Dalit women
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/04/13/blame-and-shame-examining-the-media-coverage-of-dalit-rape-victim-in-india/>

- Dalit Survivors Of Sexual Violence Deal With Blocks To Justice At Every Step
<https://behanbox.com/2022/04/12/dalit-survivors-of-sexual-violence-deal-with-blocks-to-justice-at-every-step/>
- How to respond to disclosures of abuse <https://thirtyoneeight.org/blogs/how-to-respond-to-disclosures-of-abuse/>
- Reacting to disclosure of abuse
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/childrenfirst/resources/responding-to-a-disclosure-of-abuse.pdf>

3.2 Understanding Your Options

- **PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL ACT, 2013** Acts, Clauses and Glossary
https://doe.gov.in/files/inline-documents/DoE_Prevention_sexual_harassment.pdf
- **25 Myths about POSH Act 2013** <https://www.shrm.org/in/topics-tools/employment-law-compliance/debunking-myths-about-india-posh-act>
- **Explainer and briefing on POSH Act 2013** <https://elearnposh.com/posh-act/>
- **Understanding Virtual/Digital Rape:** Navigating Consent and Accountability in the Digital Age - CLPR Blog 2025 *Preventing virtual/digital rape requires a multi-faceted approach that involves law on virtual rape, education, advocacy, and systemic change. Teaching digital literacy and emphasizing the importance of consent in online interactions can help foster respectful digital spaces. Empowering victims by providing accessible resources, including legal aid, counseling, and helplines, to support their recovery is crucial. Advocacy for policy reform that pressures governments to enact and enforce comprehensive laws addressing digital sexual violence is equally important. Victims must also be encouraged to seek help without fear of judgment.*
<https://clpr.org.in/blog/understanding-virtual-digital-rape-navigating-consent-and-accountability-in-the-digital-age/>
- **UNaccountable: A New Approach to Peacekeepers and Sexual Abuse**
<https://ejil.org/pdfs/29/3/2893.pdf>

Survivor Interviews and Testimonies

- **Unfounded Sexual Assault:** Women's Experiences of Not Being Believed by the Police - Women's perspectives about their experiences with police are not represented in research. This qualitative study explored women's experiences when their sexual assault report was disbelieved by the police. Data collection included open-ended and semi-structured interviews with 23 sexual assault survivors. Interviews covered four areas including the sexual assault, the experience with the police, the experience of not being believed, and the impact on their health and well-being.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9136376/>
- **Being Silenced:** The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape - Survivors are also likely to receive negative reactions from formal support providers. Negative reactions from professional sources may be particularly harmful for survivors. When "experts" doubt survivors, hold them responsible for the assault, or refuse to provide assistance, survivors may question both the effectiveness of such services and the usefulness of reaching out for help to anyone at all. Unfortunately, negative reactions from community system personnel appear to be all too common. Rape victims frequently report receiving negative or unhelpful reactions from legal and medical personnel.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1705531/>

3.3 Healing Justice & Self-Care

Brief explainer on non medical/non legal healing practices

Somatic or body-based healing, creative expression, and spiritual, religious, and cultural healing practices foreground forms of recovery from sexual violence that move beyond narrowly clinical, psychological, or juridical frameworks. They recognise trauma as embodied, social, and culturally embedded, often exceeding what can be processed through speech or formal therapy alone. Practices that engage the body, including movement, exercise, breath-work, and sensory grounding, support survivors in restoring bodily autonomy, regulation, and a sense of safety after profound violation, this also involves the will of the survivor or the close ones to the survivor and a support system.

Creative modes such as writing, visual art, music, performance, and storytelling offer non-linear ways of processing trauma. They allow survivors to externalise pain, work through fragmented memory, and reclaim authorship over their experiences without pressure to conform to dominant narratives of victimhood or recovery. Spiritual and religious forms of healing, including faith-based rituals, prayer, collective worship, and support from religious communities, offer moral guidance, hope, and a sense of communal belonging. Within this, liberation theology and justice-oriented spiritual traditions can be especially significant, reframing survival not as private suffering but as part of broader struggles against structural violence, patriarchy, and impunity.

Healing through community conversations, shared testimony, and awareness-building initiatives further situates recovery within collective processes. Dialogues, support circles, and public engagement challenge silence and stigma while enabling survivors to be heard on their own terms. Together, these embodied, creative, spiritual, and community-based approaches centre dignity, agency, and relational care. They function alongside legal and therapeutic interventions, expanding the possibilities of healing in ways that are culturally resonant, politically conscious, and grounded in collective solidarity. These practices are mostly considered in addition to the legal processes of creating accountability or for survivors who make the choice not to complain or come out about the abuse.

Resources

- Self Care Practices for Survivors
 - <https://clevelandrapecrisis.org/resources/resource-library-2/featured/creative-writing/>
 - <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1933482/>
 - <https://www.svri.org/mind-body-approaches-for-healing-after-sexual-violence/>
- Columbia University's Compilation <https://sexualrespect.columbia.edu/resources-healing-resilience-readings>

- University of Illinois Resource Toolkit <https://wrc.illinois.edu/survivor-support/survivor-resources>
- Career guidance for school dropouts and sexual abuse survivors
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/career-guidance-for-school-dropouts-and-sexual-abuse-survivors/article35362503.ece>
- Kerala Government - Standard Operating Procedure For The Effective Implementation Of Sexual Assault Survivor Scheme And Prison Mentoring Scheme Of Victim Rights Centre
<https://kelsa.keralacourts.in/rules/VictimRightsCenter.pdf>
- Kerala Government - Medico-Legal Protocol for examination of sexual assault survivor
<https://aogyakeralam.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Kerala-Medico-legal-Protocol-for-Examination-of-Survivor-of-Sexual-Offences-2019-compressed.pdf>

3.4 Rebuilding & Reconnection

- A Bridge to Recovery: How Assets Affect Sexual Assault Survivors' Economic Well-Being
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2158244015573966>
- Financial Freedom: Women, Money, and Domestic Abuse
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1380&context=wmjowl&ref=sashboard.org>
- Support Scheme Services To Victims Of Rape In India
<https://feministlawarchives.pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/financial-assistance-and-support-services-to-victims-of-rape.pdf>
- Sunitha Krishnan: Rape survivor to saviour <https://aje.io/c482x>
- Survivors of rape in conflicts share their inspirational stories to help other women
<https://theirworld.org/news/conflict-rape-survivors-share-their-stories-to-inspire-women/>
- Letter by Rape survivor in conflict to her perpetrator <https://youtu.be/u3q1YO1gt0Y>