



Victim-Survivors' Perceptions of a Sexual Offence Interview Protocol

Recommendations for policy and practice

A crucial way of improving the justice response to sexual violence is to strengthen investigative interviews with victim-survivors. Research in investigative interviewing, however, has tended to preference the views of police and psychologists in understandings of effective interview techniques, with minimal research examining victim-survivors' perspectives of interview techniques and protocols.

What did we do?

- We invited 26 adult victim-survivors of sexual violence in Australia to view and provide their feedback on a police interview protocol that is currently used by police in Australia and abroad.
- The lead author interviewed victim-survivor participants to explore their perceptions of the police interview protocol.
- Participant's responses were thematically analysed, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the police interview protocol.

What did we find?

Victim-survivor participants generally valued the parts of the police interview protocol that:

- Set clear expectations for the interview
- Encouraged an account in their own words without interruption
- Helped to ground them and stay present following the discussion of traumatic events

Victim-survivors raised several concerns with the police interview protocol, including:

- Examples of patronising language that communicates disbelief
- The potential for insincere rapport building
- A memory exercise called 'context reinstatement' that would likely be trauma-inducing when recalling sexual violence

Victim-survivors suggested that police interview protocols should include more prompts to:

- Connect victim-survivors with support during and after the interview
- Manage expectations beyond the interview

What do these findings mean?

- The study helps to clarify which police interview protocol components might be harmful or supportive to victim-survivors.
- The findings help to ensure that police interview protocols are more victim-centred and trauma-informed.
- This study can inform investigative interview practices in policing, but also in other contexts such as workplace and university investigations, and alternative reporting forms.
- We hope that these findings help to improve interview experiences for victim-survivors who choose to report sexual offences to police or other investigative bodies.

Where can I find out more?

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