Published in final edited form as:

J Interpers Violence. 2021 May ; 36(9-10): NP5033–NP5059. doi:10.1177/0886260518795506.

A Dyadic Study of Impacts of Sexual Assault Disclosure on Survivors' Informal Support Relationships

Erin O'Callaghan, Katherine Lorenz, Sarah E Ullman, Anne Kirkner

University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract

After a sexual assault, victims often disclose their assault to an informal support provider to receive social support. Ample research exists on social reactions of informal support providers to disclosure and how those reactions affect the victim both positively and negatively, but little research exists how the disclosure impacts a survivor's support relationships both in the short and long-term. This qualitative interview study examined 45 ethnically diverse informal support dyads where women disclosed sexual assault to an informal support provider (SP, e.g., friend, family, significant other). Assault disclosure was examined to determine its impact on relationship quality of survivors and their SPs. Results revealed positive and negative effects on survivor-SP relationships of assault disclosure and social reactions. In almost all matched pairs (91%), either the survivor, SP, or both remarked on how the relationship had changed following disclosure. Family member SPs spoke of survivors' risk-taking and poor relationship choices. Significant others spoke of the toll of supporting survivors that sometimes left their needs unmet and strained their relationships with survivors. Friend SPs often appraised how the survivor engaged in other types of relationships, but overall felt that their relationships had become stronger or closer as a result of the disclosure. Implications of this study include acknowledging that informal supporters, particularly significant others, can experience adverse effects after disclosure, and that help is needed not only for survivors but also their informal support sources. Future research should continue to investigate both the short term and longitudinal impacts of sexual assault disclosure on survivors' informal support relationships.

Keywords

reporting/disclosure; sexual assault; support seeking

Two-thirds of sexual assault survivors disclose assault to informal support providers such as family, friends, and significant others (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Self, 2007; Campbell, Ahrens, Self, Wasco, & Barnes, 2001; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005). Yet, informal supporters may not always know the best way to respond to disclosure (Kirkner, Lorenz, Ullman, & Mandala, in press). Informal supporters, while appraised more positively

than formal sources, also engage in negative social reactions like blame (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Relyea & Ullman, 2015) or by acknowledging the assault but not providing any support, which is also perceived negatively (Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Such responses and other factors such as the survivor's psychological functioning and coping post-assault may impact those close to them (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Silver et al., 1990) and ultimately their relationships over time. The present study uses survivor-support provider interview data to explore the impact of sexual assault disclosure on three types of relationship dyads (friends, family members, and significant others) to better understand changes in relationship quality that may occur in the aftermath of assault disclosure.

Research is somewhat limited regarding how survivor-support provider (SP) relationships may change following sexual assault disclosure. Yet, this is important to study because it affects the survivor, the SP, and their relationship, all of which may contribute to additional emotional turmoil for the survivor. A few smaller studies of couples have looked at how marriage and sexuality is affected by sexual assault from either victim or partner perspectives, but did not focus on the relationship itself. These studies found that partners have reactions of psychological distress, guilt, self-blame, loss of trust, anger, victim blame, and changes in their views of sexuality, as well as effects on their relationship with the victim, including relationship dissolution (Brookings et al., 1994; Connop & Petrak, 1994; Moss et al., 1990; Smith, 2005).

Other recent studies revealed the effects of disclosure on friends (Branch & Richards, 2013; Christiansen, Bak, & Elklit, 2012; Davis, Taylor, & Bench, 1995), suggesting that sexual assault is a shared crisis among survivors and those around them (Emm & McKenry, 1988). The SP's perceptions of the disclosure may affect how they respond to the survivor and lead to changes in the relationship (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Milliken, Paul, Sasson, Porter, & Hsulube et al., 2016), which may affect adjustment of survivors and SPs. In one study, having a close relationship with a survivor predicted greater SP distress, while negative relationship changes were predicted by less closeness, feeling responsible for taking care of the survivor, and feeling as though one's help and support were not effective (Milliken, et. al., 2016).

Christiansen and colleagues (2012) quantitatively examined relationship changes following disclosure from the sole perspective of the SPs shortly after the assault. Using a non-U.S. sample, the authors found that 49% of SPs felt the relationship had not changed after disclosure. Of the remaining half, 29% stated they felt closer to the victim than they did before the assault, 19% reported the relationship had gotten worse for a while, and 2% reported that the relationship had gotten worse and suffered. Though many participants felt their relationship had not gotten worse, about 56% reported that they experienced some problems, most commonly among romantic partner SPs (71%), though relationship type differences were not statistically significant. These findings show that relationships may change shortly following sexual assault, but less is known about long-term impacts that could also affect the overall quality of the relationship, and therefore the potential for both short and long term changes following sexual assault disclosure should be studied, and may be best studied through a qualitative lens of both the survivor and support provider perspectives. A qualitative approach provides elaboration on why survivors and SPs feel that

their relationship was or was not impacted, and, more specifically, in what way they feel it was impacted. Overall, a qualitative approach adds the value of depth in studying a rather complex topic. The dyadic approach allows for a side-by-side comparison of both the survivor and the SP perspectives to illuminate discrepancies between the two, which could also be tied in to relationship type and other contextual details related to the relationship, disclosure, or survivor's recovery.

One qualitative study analyzed multiple informal sources of support in survivors and relationship effects from the perspective of victims (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012) and found that following disclosure, relationships were either strengthened or remained strong. Relationship quality assessments were shown to vary by relationship type, as survivors may engage in a positive-reframing of negative social reactions (e.g. an egocentric social reaction from the support provider was perceived positively by the survivor), which could protect the relationship from the damage of unsupportive or harmful social reactions (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Lorenz et al., 2017). Some survivors in Ahrens and Aldana's (2012) study described relationships deteriorating following disclosure, but that was associated with poorer relationship quality prior to disclosure. Relationship quality varies widely among survivors and informal SPs. It is important to understand the variation among relationship types and the effects of sexual assault disclosure, including long-term impacts on relationships, as this variation can affect the survivor, SP, and their relationship.

Relationships of survivors of sexual trauma are impacted by more than just the disclosure experience. While not as well researched, other long-term relationship impacts occur that are not explicitly tied to the disclosure event itself. For example, romantic relationships can be affected in several ways after sexual trauma including lower relationship satisfaction, less desire to engage in sex, and other long-term effects on the relationship, as reported by the survivor or the romantic partner (Lassri, Luyten, Fonagy, & Shahar, 2018; Perilloux, Duntley, & Buss, 2012; Smith, 2005). Most research on the impacts of adult sexual assault on informal SPs focuses on friends and significant others, but less is known about how sexual assault in adulthood can impact survivors' family members. Research on childhood sexual abuse (CSA) offers some insights into how victims of sexual violence and their families are impacted (see Crome & McCabe, 1995 for review). CSA has been shown to affect parental relationships with their children, with parents feeling greater overall emotional distress after the disclosure or discovery of CSA (Manion et al., 1998). A qualitative study of families with children who had experienced CSA reported that the family experienced tension, blame, and more severe psychological symptoms (e.g. depression, McCourt, Peel, & O'Carroll, 1998). In Crome and McCabe's (1995) literature review of impacts of rape, they note that family and relationship functioning are affected, usually negatively, sometimes long after the initial rape. For example, the loss of relationships or a breakdown of communication within a survivor's family was common post-assault (Crome & McCabe, 1995). Beyond the literature already reviewed above on how friends are impacted by the disclosure, there is less systematic work on how relationships are affected with romantic partners and family members, especially for adult sexual assault victims.

Current Study

Research is needed to understand how relationships are affected by survivors disclosing sexual assault to significant others, family, and friends, as few studies have examined relationship impacts, both short and long-term, following sexual assault disclosure (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Brookings, McEvoy, & Reed, 1994; Connop & Petrak, 1994; Moss, Frank, & Anderson, 1990) from various informal support network members. This research is also needed utilizing a comparative, dyadic lens, as survivors and SPs do not always perceive disclosure and social reactions the same way (Davis & Brickman, 1996; Lorenz et al., 2017), which is likely the case for survivor-SP appraisals of relationship quality as well. Finally, utilizing a qualitative approach is beneficial to explore the nuance between survivor and SP of the impacts on their relationship post-disclosure, given that a quantitative approach cannot capture these nuances as in-depth. Thus, the current study draws on in-depth, qualitative data from a community sample of survivors reporting multiple types of sexual trauma and their SPs. More specifically, the current study addresses a critical gap in the literature by using dyadic survivor-SP interview data to explore the following two research questions:

1. How is the S-SP relationship affected by sexual assault disclosure?
2. Does the impact of disclosure on S-SP relationships differ by relationship type?

Past studies have used the same dyadic interview data to examine social reactions from informal supporters. The first looked broadly at social reactions to sexual assault disclosure through the lens of the dyadic relationship type (friend, family, significant other), revealing the potential for identifying relational patterns occurring in social reactions not captured through a survivor-only perspective (Lorenz, Ullman, Kirkner, Mandala, Vasquez, Sigurvinsdottir, 2017). Kirkner, Lorenz, Ullman, & Mandala (in press) explored the impact of receiving a disclosure and dealing with the emotional weight of disclosures, including help-seeking, among SPs. Ullman, Lorenz, & Kirkner (2017) specifically examined alcohol-specific social reactions in a subsample of matched pairs with survivors who experienced an alcohol-involved assault. Finally, O'Callaghan, Shepp, Ullman, & Kirkner (under review) explored changes in sexuality and sexual behavior post-assault from the dyadic perspective. Together these studies illustrate the need for continued research using qualitative dyadic data to understand the complexity of sexual assault, social support, and post-assault adjustment beyond the survivor-only perspective. Yet, these studies did not focus on the impact disclosure has on the dyadic relationship and possible longer-term relationship impacts, which distinguishes the current study.

Method

Participants

The sample of this study included adult female sexual assault survivors who disclosed their assault to an informal SP. Participants were recruited in the Chicago, Illinois metropolitan area in the United States. Survivors had previously participated in a 3-year longitudinal survey (N = 1,863) regarding unwanted sexual experiences and the social reactions they received when disclosing these experiences (see Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2016, for study description). Survivors who indicated interest in being contacted for interviews were also

asked to provide contact information for a friend, family member, or significant other who they had previously disclosed to about their unwanted sexual experience. SPs were contacted later for a separate interview that focused on their experience helping the survivor. Separate interviews with survivors and SPs (N = 90) took place over 2 years, resulting in a sample of N = 45 matched pairs of survivors and SP interviews. Written informed consent was obtained for all interviews immediately prior to the interview. The study was approved by the University of Illinois at Chicago IRB.

Survivors were an average of 43 years old and ethnically diverse: 62% African American, 18% White, non-Hispanic, 11% Multi-racial, 2% American Indian, and 7% not reported or unknown. Approximately 60% of survivors had children. About 76% had attended or graduated from college; 24% were currently enrolled in school, and 38% were currently employed (see Table 1). While the study focused on unwanted sexual assault experiences (defined by the researchers broadly as “sex when you did not want it”, which could include, but is not limited to, fondling, kissing, sexual touching, sexual intercourse, attempted sexual intercourse, other related sex acts, based on a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES), Testa, VanZile-Tamsen, Livingston, & Koss, 2004) that occurred in adulthood, the survivors in our sample experienced several types of unwanted sexual experiences. Assault characteristics are presented in Table 2. It should be noted that the assault characteristics figures reported in Table 2 are from the first of 3 survey waves and therefore only reflect one unwanted sexual experience reported during the study. Approximately 80% of participants were revictimized after Wave 1 of the survey.

SPs were also an average of 43 years old. Two-thirds (64%) were female, and 64% had children. Approximately 47% of SPs were African American, 19% were White, non-Hispanic, 9% Multi-racial, 4% American Indian, and 15% not reported or unknown. Most had attended or graduated from college (66%) and were currently employed (60%). About half were friends (51%), family (33%) or significant others (16%) of survivors (see Table 1).

Procedures

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted by one of three trained interviewers on the research team. Interviews lasted an average of one hour, but ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours. Participants were compensated \$30USD for the interview portion of the study. After each interview, interviewers created “summary” documents, which included interesting points, questions raised, final thoughts, and unanticipated feelings emerging from the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and checked by other members of the research team. During the transcription process, brief summaries and identified patterns were added. Interviewers conducted a final review of their transcripts for accuracy. Interviewers and members of the research team met to discuss emerging themes and patterns following transcription, as an initial stage in developing the codebook.

Measures

The interview protocol for survivors and SPs focused on the survivor’s disclosure of an unwanted sexual experience, social support provided/received, and appraisals of the survivor-SP relationship. Interview participants were asked to discuss the survivor-SP

relationship quality and any impacts on the relationship that may have occurred in relation to the survivor's disclosure and need for social support. Participants also discussed relationship impacts unrelated to the assault disclosure. The present study focused on survivor and SP's relationship appraisals and perceived impacts on the relationship following disclosure. We examined several codes: relationship changes related to disclosure, survivor recovery and the relationship impact, and positive and negative relationship appraisals. We examined interview content within each of these codes, sorted by friend, family, and significant other relationship types. In examining relationship appraisals and effects of disclosure, we distinguished between short and long-term impacts, as other research shows that both initial problems and long-term effects on relationship quality following disclosure (see Christiansen et al., 2012). For the purposes of our study, this distinction was made between impacts felt immediately or very shortly after the disclosure event (short-term), and impacts that were still being felt at the time of the interview and that could seemingly last post-interview (long-term).

Data Analysis

Members of the research team summarized each interview transcript to identify patterns and themes, which were later discussed among the research team in a process similar to that of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research team conducted several trials of interview coding and refinement to develop a codebook that covered the content of individual interviews and themes reflecting the matched pair relationships. Coding trials resulted in several revisions of the codebook whereby codes were added, renamed, redefined, and/or combined. The codes were descriptive in nature and were used to summarize and describe the primary topic of the excerpt (Saldana, 2012). We examined the context of the codes by reviewing transcripts and interviewer summaries when identifying relevant interview excerpts (i.e., quotes).

We used Atlas.ti Version 7 qualitative analysis software for coding and analysis. We identified codes that made the most analytic sense of the data (termed "focused" coding; Charmaz, 2006) and used the identified codes to pair with segments of the transcript. Specifically, we selected codes that best represented what was happening in the interview text. We coded the data separately and compared our interpretations of the content with other members of the research team to achieve consensus (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). This process took place in several stages. First, pairs of coders separately coded each interview matched pair using the codebook. Second, one coder in the pair then reviewed both coded transcripts to identify any inconsistencies in the assigned codes. Third, the coders discussed these disagreements until reaching a joint consensed version by both parties (Patton, 2009). In cases where agreement was not obtained, double coding (i.e., simultaneous coding; Saldana, 2009) was used as a compromise between the two codes. Fourth, the original interviewer reviewed the coded transcript for agreement with the assigned codes. The coders and interviewer discussed any disagreements and corrected the coded transcripts until consensus was reached between the three parties. During the coding process, researchers created memos within the transcripts to highlight any relationships or inconsistencies within and between the survivor and SP interviews, or to capture unanticipated themes in the data

(Charmaz, 2006). The inclusion of memos allowed coders to pay attention to the relationships between different matched pair interviews.

Analysis took place using an iterative process in several stages after coding was completed. We analyzed the interview at both the individual level and at the level of the matched pair (i.e., dyadic). First, we conducted queries in Atlas.ti software to identify the number of times each interviewee endorsed a particular code related to relationship changes in the context of sexual assault disclosure. We examined these codes for each survivor-SP relationship type (i.e., friend, family member, significant other). Second, like thematic analysis, members of the research team individually reviewed the quotes for each query in search of patterns and noteworthy findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Third, the team met several times to review the identified themes and patterns. During this process, we looked for similarities and contrasts within and between the 45 matched pairs in response to the proposed research questions of the present study as well as within the three relationship types.

Results

In this section, we present results from qualitative data examining survivor-SP perspectives of the effects of sexual assault disclosure on their relationship. Overall, 41 matched pairs (91%) described relationship impacts that occurred following the survivor's disclosure and related to the disclosure. Within these pairs, 64% of survivors ($n = 29$) and 73% of SPs ($n = 33$) described disclosure-related relationship changes (note: though beyond the scope of this study, $n = 33$ matched pairs described relationship changes that occurred for reasons unrelated to sexual assault disclosure). Thus, in only three matched pairs, neither the survivor nor the SP felt their relationship was affected by the survivor's disclosure. To best understand impacts based on different relationships, we organized the results section by relationship type (i.e., significant others, family members, and friends) with associated themes listed in each section. We use the following abbreviations next to participant quotes to refer to demographic characteristics (S/SP Relationship, Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity): SO = Significant Other, F = Family, FR = Friend; M = Male, F = Female; AA = African American, WH = White, N = Native American, H = Hispanic, Multi = Multi-Race, U = Unknown.

Significant Others

Seven matched pairs described their relationship as "significant other" (for descriptive information of matched pairs, see Table 1). In all but one of the significant other matched pairs, either the survivor, the SP, or both described changes in the relationship due to the survivor's disclosure (see Table 3).

Neglected Needs of the Support Provider.—Significant others of the survivors discussed how their relationship was affected by the survivors' assault and disclosure ($n = 6$). Impacts included changes in the daily routine of their relationship, how the assault has affected the couple between the two of them only, and how the couple engaged in relationships with other people (e.g., friends). These impacts usually centered on the significant other prioritizing the survivor's recovery needs and could lead to the significant other having to sacrifice their own wants or needs. For example, one SP shared how his

partner's inability to want to go out and socialize has affected their relationship and his social life:

"She'll be at home. Which is part of the struggle for me, if I'm going to be at work 70 hours a week and then spend the few evenings I have free out with friends, that's difficult for her. So it would be nice to have her find other friends and that's a stress point for her right now is she doesn't have a network by which you would find other friends or go out and do other things" – SP (SO, M, 26, WH)

The SP also described how he tried to encourage the survivor to socialize with him and include her in his circle of friends, but that she would rarely take him up on his offers to "go out to the bar with friends." He further discussed how, although the survivor is in counseling, he still struggles to interact with her when she is "triggered," although the survivor described that she feels she is "getting better."

"This last year of grad school's been really tough and she's been getting her therapy... she now starts to lash out rather than bring it inside to her herself when she is triggered. And that's been the biggest difficulty for me right now. Just don't be mean, just don't lash out when I'm coming home and I'm exhausted. So yeah being supportive is just sort of not doing what she is doing now probably..." – SP (SO, M, 26, WH)

"It took me a long time to get there. I kept being in denial that I wasn't being enough of a partner and he had to comfort me all the time and he could barely share his stress with me and slowly changing where I don't have to come home in a panic attack every day. I can come home and ask him how he was first" – S (SO, F, 23, WH)

This particular couple went on to describe how the survivor's assault has affected most aspects of their relationship, with the SP even admitting he cannot say how the assault has necessarily changed their relationship because it has "defined our relationship." The survivor also acknowledged that her assault and her recovery are a big focus of the relationship; but that she wonders what their relationship would be like if this was not the focus. However, she believed that this has brought them closer together and that they are able to "focus on each other." Further, the survivor stated that she feels very dependent on the SP, as he pushed her into counseling and has always been her biggest support system. While the SP shared that he was doing as much as he could to help the survivor, he still debated whether or not he should stay in the relationship, and even now still wonders if he "made the right decision." Thus, in this pair, assault disclosure led to smaller initial impacts, as well as long-term impacts that appeared to contribute negatively, particularly on the part of the SP, to their feelings of relationship (dis)satisfaction overall.

Distrust of Men.—Survivors and SPs across relationship types reported how a distrust of men impacted either the survivor-SP relationship or survivor's relationships with others. In significant other relationships, a distrust of men specifically impacted the survivor-SP relationship. One matched pair discussed how the survivor's distrust of men, because of the assault, has affected their relationship negatively. The SP described how he has tried to help

the survivor see that, although she is very suspicious of men, that he is not a perpetrator and that she has other supports around her:

“I’m not going to turn into some kind of monster at the stroke of midnight. My sense is that’s what she experienced from some people; although maybe in retrospect the signs were there all the time. I think F [survivor] sometimes struggles with the idea that her family or friends are always going to be good to you.” – SP (SO, M, 55, WH)

This SP explained that not only does he remind the survivor that he is not her perpetrator, but that he believes their relationship is different from the abusive relationships she has had with men in the past because he is not an abusive partner. In contrast to his quote above, he explained that he worries about the survivor because she lets people into her life without getting to know them very well first and feels he has to remind her to “watch her boundaries.” The survivor echoed the SP’s assessments in that she also stated that she struggles with trusting men. This reveals an interesting line between being too guarded and not being guarded enough when it comes to building and maintaining relationships with individuals outside of the survivor-SP dyad. However, the survivor shared that she believes their relationship has changed in that the sole focus is not on her and her needs, but the SP stated that he “generally feels like she doesn’t have as much energy for my concerns as her own.” This is similar to what the SP in the preceding paragraph described, suggesting that molding their relationship around the survivors’ recovery may leave some partners feeling that their emotional needs are neglected.

Social Interaction and Isolation Post-Assault.—Survivors sometimes struggled with engaging socially with others outside their relationship with their significant other. Significant others also recognized that isolation affected the survivor in other types of relationships, like friendships.

“It’s like if one of your girlfriends want to come take you out, she really don’t want to, it’s like she don’t want to go outside, you know” – SP (SO, M, 49, AA)

Conversely, significant others also described that survivors would go out and drink to deal with the assault and avoid the partner.

“Yea, we had gone through in the beginning her not wanting to be close. She might disappear for the night or go by her friends or go out for the night and party and just forget all about the pain and hurt in her head” – SP (SO, M, 53, WH)

Although the sexual assault could negatively affect the survivor-SP relationship and relationships outside of the dyad, some SPs described that knowledge of the survivor’s assault made their relationship stronger. Generally, this was because a sense of trust was then gained for both the survivor in being able to share and the SP for recognizing that the survivor has been through a traumatic event. Further, SPs and survivors mentioned that the “bond” between them also grew because the survivor shared that she had been the victim of a sexual assault.

Family Members

Fifteen matched pairs in this sample were family relationships. Demographic information for these pairs is presented in Table 1. In all of the familial matched pairs, either the survivor, SP, or both felt the relationship was affected by the survivor's disclosure (see Table 3).

Distrust of Men and Romantic Relationships.—Like significant others, family members and survivors disclosing to them also acknowledged that the survivor had a distrust of men. In some of these relationships, family members commented on how the survivor's perceptions of men affected their willingness to engage in romantic relationships because of the assault. Some familial pairs ($n = 3$) commented on how the survivor avoids men and romantic relationships with men:

“Uhm...she don't really get into relationships” – SP (F, F, 20, AA)

“I haven't been dating anyone, I haven't had a boyfriend in forever, and that's why I'm not involved with anybody now is because of my experiences” – S (F, F, 50, AA)

“It (the assault) can sometimes reflect your relationship with a male...it can affect your lifestyle to the point of you're fearful to get in relationships” – S (F, F, 46, AA)

“If it happens once and then happens other times, it changes your view on the opposite sex” – SP (F, M, 30, AA)

Many children ($n = 4$) SPs were able to recognize how their mother (the survivor) has decided to refrain from pursuing romantic relationships with men. One SP (daughter) even stated that she did not think it would help her mother to pursue or be in a romantic relationship in the future. Another SP (son) said that while his mother was always kind and caring to him and his siblings, she is not trusting of men both around her or others that she cares about in her life (e.g., grandchildren). The survivor (the son's mother) in this pair reported being worried about having boys before she had children; she was worried she would have a “bad reaction” toward them because of what other men had done to her. Most children agreed that they had gained respect for their mothers after they learned of the assault and that their relationships were closer as a result of their mother disclosing her assault experience.

Support Provider Appraisals of Survivors' Other Relationships Post-

Disclosure.—Family member SPs not only recognized that survivors were unwilling to engage in romantic relationships post-assault, but also commented on how the survivor engaged in more casual or platonic relationships post-assault. One SP – a mother of the survivor – described the survivor as careful about whom she would associate with, particularly men. However, the mother (SP) also commented on the survivors' sexual behavior, insinuating that her daughter was promiscuous and had various boyfriends. She went on to explain how this affected her daughter's perceptions of potential relationships (friends or otherwise) with others:

Well my daughter, with her it was, try not to put yourself in positions where people can take advantage of you, that was like me talking to the wall. Because you know, she does not seem to be able to size up people. – SP (F, F, 62, AA)

The daughter reported that she did not feel comfortable talking about her sexual assault experiences to her mother, who the daughter felt had never done anything wrong in her life and therefore would not understand her experiences. Though the survivor had not intended to disclose to her mother, when the survivor was in the hospital seeking mental health services, the doctor informed the survivor's mother (SP) about her most recent assault. The daughter spoke of wanting to tell her mother more perhaps someday and of writing about her experiences in a book that she shares with individuals with whom she is starting a romantic relationship or friendship. This indirect disclosure experience may create distress and negatively affect the relationship, as the survivor was not ready for her mother to learn about her sexual assault. While the daughter did not say the mother blamed or judged her, it appears that she was doing so to some extent in her appraisals of her daughter's behaviors and relationship choices. The survivor explained in her interview that although she and her mother (SP) have a fine relationship where they talk and occasionally spend time together, the survivor has much closer relationships with her aunt and grandmother. The survivor describes her relationships with them as very close and feels that she can share anything with them, particularly things she does not want her mother to know. When asked about how disclosure affected her relationship, the survivor explained that she feels the same about her relationship with her mother, but that her mother has become much more overprotective of her, needing to know the survivor's whereabouts, which has created more distance in their relationship. The effects of disclosure on this relationship reveal that initial impacts on the relationship (e.g., being overprotective) can contribute to impacts that are more long-term (e.g., creating distance between the survivor and SP).

Another mother SP reported on her daughter's relationships and described how her daughter had gotten married to seek some form of validation or self-worth from the man she married. However, the survivor mentioned being angry at her mother because she had not protected her daughter in the past, raising her in poverty and leaving her alone with some of her perpetrators. The survivor described that she was also later divorced from an abusive husband and engaged in sex work due to financial need, had problems with addiction, and needed to have control over men. This survivor may have sought protection in her relationships (e.g., mother, husband), but was faced by repeated betrayal and victimization from those she depended on. In this pair, it is clear that the survivor's unwanted sexual experiences have impacted her relationships with the SP and others, though the ways in which these relationships were affected differs from the perspectives of the survivor and SP.

Mutual Disclosure.—Survivors disclosing to family member SPs sometimes made the SPs feel comfortable about sharing their own unwanted sexual experiences with the survivor. Although most of the familial dyads were parent-child, two pairs consisted of a sister-sister dyad where survivors disclosed and in which the SP then also disclosed. In one of these pairs, the survivor was assaulted in college, which she disclosed to her sister, and this prompted the mutual disclosure of both the survivor and SP's CSA experiences. As a result of this mutual disclosure, both the survivor and SP agreed that the disclosures brought them

closer together and allowed them to talk more with each other about their experiences. The SP (sister) of this pair also mentioned that she was more protective of the survivor after learning what had happened. Thus, in this pair, disclosure had a clearly positive impact on their relationship. In the other matched pair, both sisters shared their sexual abuse by family members when they were in therapy together. As the SP described:

I think that's what's come out of a lot of the therapy and even just that situation, is that talking about stuff. What I remember I was shaking when I said that to my mom cause I remember thinking "should I say it?", should I say that we're victims cause I wanted to do it so many times and I was like "this is my opportunity, this is my opportunity" and I finally just let it out. – SP (F, F, 53, W)

In these pairs, the mutual disclosure between sisters created space for mutual support in recovering from their traumatic experiences. Both sets of sister dyads agreed that their relationship and bond was strengthened after discussing their assaults.

Friends

The majority of interviewed SPs were friends of the survivor ($n = 23$; 51%; see Table 1). Approximately 20 friend matched pairs described relationship changes occurring as a result of the survivor's disclosure (see Table 3).

Support Provider Appraisals of Survivor's Relationships.—Like family members, friends discussed how the survivor engaged in other types of relationships as a result of the assault. Friends also commented on how the survivor engaged (or did not engage) in romantic and other platonic relationships, and how the assault affected that engagement. In 4 pairs (17%), in both the survivor's and SP's assessments of the survivor, they acknowledged that the survivor struggled with "normal" romantic relationships, as well as completely isolating themselves. As one matched pair stated:

"Right, a normal traditional, relationship. I have not, from what I've seen and what she's told me, seen her ever be in a normal relationship" – SP (FR, M, 53, AA)

"It was almost like I was saying to people, or to myself, 'I don't want no one to look at me, I want to sit here by myself and be left alone, I don't even want no one to look at me, I want to be alone by myself.' That's what I wanted, to be more introverted, more to myself. It pulled me to be myself, more alone than anything." – S (FR, F, 46, H)

Similar to the familial pairs, both friends and survivors recognized that due to the assault, the survivor distrusted men, which in turn affected her romantic relationships. As this pair described:

"Then she's like I could never be with men and it took me a long time to find somebody and when I did, you know, they were abusive to her too" – SP (FR, M, 49, H) (1533).

"...a man, there's just somethin' I just don't, I can sit and talk to you, but at the end of the day you gotta leave when everybody leave, you gotta go before everybody

else leaves. I just don't never wanna be touched by... we can be friends, blah, blah, blah, but that intimacy, no" – S (FR, F, 58, AA)

Although both the survivor and SP above recognized the survivor's relationship and trust issues, it did not affect their relationship negatively. The SP explained that it helped the survivor that their relationship was platonic, and that she was more comfortable around the SP because of that. The SP also shared how the survivor was able to trust the SP to share what happened to her, and he feels he can ask her for advice and rely on her as well.

Distrust of Men Translating to Distrust of Friends.—Sometimes, this distrust of others, and men in particular, that SPs reported survivors experiencing was not limited to romantic relationships with men; it also affected how the survivor chose friendships and the dyad friendship, specifically. One SP explained that the survivor tended to become friends with others too quickly with people who liked to share too much too fast, which in turn caused the survivor to share a lot of personal information. Contrary to this statement, the SP also described the survivor's lack of trust in others and how this has not allowed the people in the survivor's life to help her. Based on the SP's responses, it appeared that the survivor was only overly trusting with new "friends" that entered her life but then, according to the SP, did not stick around. The SP understands why the survivor might have problems with trusting others, and further explains how this has affected their friendship:

"If she had an easier time trusting people that would be really better, but for her and for me and our friendship. Just, it would just be good." – SP (FR, F, 26, WH)

This SP also stated that the survivor's lack of trust will sometimes affect her trust in the SP, and that she worries the SP will hurt her in some way. This lack of trust may be due to the survivors' fear of further betrayal by her friends.

While friends may have acknowledged that survivors had trust issues with others (men, in particular), some survivors were still engaged in romantic relationships, and were determined to not be victimized again, according to their friends. As one SP stated:

"Lately I heard her say something about, she's had enough of men, doing whatever to her. Or, ain't no man gonna do that to me no more" – SP (FR, F, 58, MR)

Some friends noted that survivors chose romantic relationships for other reasons.

"The marriage to him is part of her [the survivor] being self-destructive and this risk-taking behavior - her needing to have male approval is a big thing" – SP (FR, F, 26, WH)

The SP in the quote above reported the survivor currently being involved in a romantic relationship. The SP later described how the survivor was seeking validation from relationships with men but described these relationships as "unhealthy behavior" in the sense that the SP believes the survivor married her husband so quickly in order to seek validation. While the SP admitted that the husband is a nice man and that she hoped the relationship "works out," she still expressed her concern about the manner in which the survivor had entered the marriage.

Improvement of Relationship Post-Disclosure.—Although distrust experienced by survivors occasionally negatively impacted their relationships with friend SPs, overall, survivors' relationships with friends were positively impacted by disclosure. Trust was a recurrent theme throughout SP assessments of their friendship with the survivor. Specifically, friends believed the relationship had strengthened because the survivor has trusted the friend with the knowledge of the assault. In turn, friends felt that they could then share traumatic experiences of their own. While friends may not have had the same experience of being sexually assaulted as the survivor, they still mentioned that the ability to mutually share brought the relationship closer together. As one SP noted:

“...coming out of that experience probably meant that we became better friends. Cause she's shared...equally traumatic experiences.” – SP (FR, M, 22, WH)

Other SPs who were friends noted that after they became closer because of this assault disclosure and felt they could depend on each other:

“I feel like it built trust between us. Like hey, I could tell you this, you could tell me this. And either we can talk about it together or just give each other the best advice that we could give. And just hope for the best for each other.” – SP (FR, F, 26, H)

In another matched pair, the SP described her provision of ongoing support to the survivor throughout their 25-year friendship. She explained that she knew the survivor had multiple sexual assaults and a history of family abuse, but did not know details of these experiences. Rather, she provided support simply because she knew the survivor needed her. Eventually, the friend learned that the survivor had experienced ongoing physical and emotional abuse by her father and sexual abuse by her brother, which helped her to put some of the pieces together of the survivor's long history of mental illness. When asked if she felt that her relationship with the survivor had been affected after hearing her friend disclose, she mentioned:

“No, I mean I think there's a lot of trust and the only time she got very specific was because we were gonna have this conversation [interview]” SP (FR, F, 48, W).

As the survivor described, her father's reaction to disclosing CSA by her brother has affected her relationships with other men and that she “can't get those voices [of her father] outta my head, whenever I'm dating someone.” The survivor explained that her father had continuously called her a “slut” and a “whore” after learning of her CSA and other sexual assaults, and that this treatment has permeated her romantic relationships. The survivor's difficulty pursuing and maintaining romantic relationships due to her traumatic history was also mentioned by the SP. As the SP explained, she feels that their relationship has grown very close over the years of providing social support to the survivor because she recognizes the level of trust necessary to have such a friendship, knows how much the survivor appreciates her, and knows how important a strong relationship is to the survivor's coping and recovery.

In summary, friends, more so than family members or significant others, emphasized the trusting bond that was built and how their relationship was positively affected as the result of the survivor sharing their sexual assault. Data also show that slightly more SPs ($n = 33$) than survivors ($n = 29$) felt the relationship was impacted by the survivor's disclosure. Friend SPs

discussed negative and positive effects of assault on survivors' ability to trust in their relationships, including with them.

Discussion

This study was the first study of an ethnically diverse qualitative dyadic matched pairs of survivors and their informal SPs to examine the impact of sexual assault disclosure on their relationships with significant others, family, and friends. In all but three matched pairs, the survivor, the SP, or both discussed relationship impacts that occurred as a result of the survivor's disclosure, showing that relationship impacts are common following disclosure, but that relationships are not *always* affected by disclosure. Interviews with both survivors and their informal SPs separately revealed that relationships can be affected by the disclosure in both positive and negative ways. We found that matched pairs experienced both short-term and long-term impacts on the relationship following disclosure. In some circumstances, initial impacts appeared to lead to long-term impacts on the relationship, affecting survivor and SP appraisals of overall relationship quality. This is similar to quantitative findings by Christiansen and colleagues (2012) who found that some relationships experienced problems following disclosure, and, though a small proportion, some relationships also suffered from long term relationship changes.

We found differences in the effects of disclosure based on relationship type. Earlier quantitative research from the SP perspective only showed that significant others (71%), more so than family (44%) and friends (36%) experienced relationship problems following disclosure, though these differences were not statistically significant (Christansen et al., 2012). In our sample, friends expressed positive impacts on the relationship following disclosure. Friends emphasized the trusting bond that was built and how their relationship was impacted positively as a result of the survivor sharing their sexual assault. This may be because friends are more capable of unconditional support and may feel less taxed by survivors' trauma than family or significant others whose relationships are closer and/or more dependent. These findings support Ahrens and Aldana (2012), who found most relationships in their study of survivors' disclosures were strengthened or remained strong following disclosure, and other research showing that such positive experiences are most common in friends with a personal history of victimization and longer-term friendships (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). Other analyses of these data published elsewhere showed that female friends use their own experiences and knowledge of sexual assault to respond positively to survivors (Lorenz et al., 2017). This may account for much of the positive relationship impacts, both short-term and any future long-term impacts that ensued following disclosure, where friends valued having a trustworthy and supportive confidant, which contributed to perceptions of relationship quality.

While friend relationships in our sample tended to be positively affected by disclosure, we found some negative effects as well, although more commonly among family member and significant other pairs. All of the relationship types recognized and described how the survivor's distrust of others, and men in particular, affected their relationship following disclosure. In our sample, family member relationships were often characterized by distrust and blame, while significant others tended to become very involved with the survivor and

the effects of her trauma, usually at the expense of the significant other's emotional needs. Not approving of the survivor's coping strategies or ways of relating to others was a common theme among family members and, in fewer instances, with friends. Often, this disapproval was related to how the survivor chose to engage in other relationships, and the survivor's problems with boundaries as a result of their assault experience. This replicates findings by Christiansen and colleagues (2012) who found that post-disclosure problems experienced in relationships included patterns of communication problems, insecurity (of how to deal with the situation), not approving of how the survivor deals with the assault, and overprotective behavior. We found evidence for the two of those problems (patterns of communication problems, insecurity), particularly among family members and significant others, but not the latter two problems (not approving of how the survivor deals with the assault, overprotective behavior) identified by Christiansen and colleagues (2012), though this was not something we specifically inquired about.

Extending beyond the current literature, we found that disclosure of sexual assault could lead to the necessity of the significant other SP being more involved in the recovery process for survivors compared to family and friend relationships. All but one of the SPs in the significant other matched pairs described relationship impacts that occurred as a result of disclosure, as one SP described, it "defined their relationship." A romantic relationship is often more emotionally complex than a friendship in terms of greater intimacy, emotional investment, and interdependence. Survivors may feel more open to ongoing discussion and showing their vulnerability in significant other relationships, which in turn increases the risk of distress and negative emotional effects on significant others. SP romantic partners talked about not having as much emotional reciprocity in their relationships as they would like, and said they were mostly providing emotional support to the survivor, without receiving it back. This is potentially a sign of asymmetry in the relationship that can lead to supporter fatigue. Some survivors may feel they only have the significant other to rely on for support, especially for their deeper emotional issues, particularly if they live together and struggle with being in social situations after the assault, as some SPs mentioned. However, three survivors in these pairs did not feel their relationship was impacted as a result of disclosure, showing some disconnect between the survivor and SP in these pairs. A lack of awareness of how the relationship has been impacted following disclosure may contribute to further compassion fatigue on the part of the SP if these impacts are negative or the survivor continually fails to recognize them. Our findings suggest that it may be common for SPs within romantic relationships to perceive impacts on the relationship following their partner's assault disclosure, though our sample was rather small ($n=7$) and contained only heterosexual relationships. As such, this calls for further study in a larger sample with a wider variety of significant other SPs.

Additionally, our study showed that family members and friends tended to focus on how the survivor engages in other types of relationships, both romantic and platonic, while significant others focused on how the survivor's disclosure affected their own dyadic relationship. This could be because, as discussed above, significant others, particularly if they live with the survivor, are constantly having to address the assault and its effects on the survivor. Obviously, significant others would not make assessments of how their partners (the survivors) have engaged in romantic relationships with others (assuming these are all

monogamous relationships). Still, survivors may have a distrust of men, as described by family and friend SPs, which likely primarily affects their romantic relationships. Parent SPs in particular may be concerned with how their daughter engages in other relationships in the future as well as for her safety in those future relationships.

Our study shows how experiencing multiple types of unwanted sexual experiences can impact the effect of disclosure on relationships. Often survivor behavior is not only related to isolated assaults, but also to risky relationships, intimate partner violence, and earlier child abuse histories (O'Callaghan, Shepp, Kirkner, & Ullman, under review). Risky relationships and intimate partner violence serve to make SPs more concerned about how the survivor navigates future/new relationships, both platonic and romantic. Although the impacts mentioned in this study could not necessarily be teased out and attributed to specific assault types, if a survivor has experienced multiple traumatic contexts surrounding assault, this may more negatively impact her current relationships, as revictimization compounds the negative relationship effects for the survivor.

Limitations

This study was the first to conduct an in-depth examination of how sexual assault disclosure affects relationship quality from both survivor and SP perspectives in a qualitative community sample. However, this study used a small, volunteer, convenience sample of dyadic matched pairs initially solicited to discuss the disclosure and social reactions.

The theme of disclosure-related relationship changes is something that occurred organically during interviews. As such, our group sizes were small, so friends and family members had more participants than the significant others. We were also limited by our inability to separate the relationship changes by relationship type and SP gender (e.g., the impact of disclosure on male versus female SP significant others), something that should be studied in future studies with a larger sample. Therefore, this study may not be generalizable to the experiences of other survivor-SP matched pairs.

Dyadic data was somewhat limited regarding the impact of disclosure on relationships, as we did not directly ask participants to appraise their relationship before and after disclosure, rather participants were asked broadly about their relationship with one another. Not all survivors and SPs spoke about their relationships and the impact in enough detail or regarding the same specific issues. Working with a sample with such a diverse and extensive history of unwanted sexual experiences posed challenges in attempting to isolate relationship impacts to a specific type of assault, rather than just the fact that there are impacts on sexual assault survivor's relationships regardless of the type of assault. As such, we recommend that future research utilize a larger sample that focuses on in-depth accounts of each individual sexual assault experience and subsequent relationship changes in order to isolate the effects of relationship impacts specific to assault type and context.

This study was limited by the retrospective design, with possible memory bias influencing accounts at the time of the interview. However, the retrospective design also allowed time for matched pairs to gain perspective on how their relationships were affected by assault disclosure over time. Despite these limitations, this study extends current knowledge of the

impact of disclosure on – survivor-SP relationships beyond past research on this topic. Results suggest education and clinical treatment is needed for SPs of survivors, especially for partners and family members, to help them understand survivors' needs, better respond to disclosures and support survivors, and take care of themselves, all of which may help maintain survivor-SP relationships post-assault.

Acknowledgments:

This study was supported by a grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (AA #17429) to Sarah Ullman, Principal Investigator. We thank Mark Relyea, Liana Peter-Hagene, Meghna Bhat, Cynthia Najdowski, Saloni Shah, Susan Zimmerman, Rene Bayley, Farnaz Mohammad-Ali, Shana Dubinsky, Diana Acosta, Brittany Tolar, and Gabriela Lopez for assistance with data collection.

References

- Ahrens CE, & Aldana E (2012). The ties that bind: Understanding the impact of sexual assault disclosure on survivors' relationships with friends, family, and partners. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 13, 226–243. [PubMed: 22375809]
- Ahrens CA & Campbell RM (2000). Assisting rape victims as they recover from rape: The impact on friends. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15, 959–986.
- Ahrens CA, Campbell RM, Temier-Thames NK, Wasco SM, & Sefl T (2007). Deciding whom to tell: expectations and outcomes of rape survivors' first disclosures. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31, 38–49.
- Branch KA & Richards TN (2013). The effects of receiving a rape disclosure: College friends' stories. *Violence Against Women*, 19(5), 658–670. [PubMed: 23743351]
- Braun V & Clarke V (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- Brookings JB, McEvoy AW, & Reed M (1994). Sexual assault recovery and male significant others. *Families in Society*, 75, 295–299.
- Campbell R, Ahrens CE, Sefl T, Wasco SM, & Barnes HE (2001). Social reactions to rape victims: Healing and hurtful effects on psychological and physical health outcomes. *Violence & Victims*, 16, 287–302. [PubMed: 11437118]
- Charmaz K (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christiansen D, Bak R & Elklit A (2012). Secondary victims of rape. *Violence & Victims*, 27, 246–262. [PubMed: 22594219]
- Connop V & Petrak J (2004). The impact of sexual assault on heterosexual couples. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 19 (1), 29–38.
- Crome S, McCabe M (1995). The impact of rape on individual, interpersonal, and family functioning. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1, 58–70.
- Davis RC, Brickman ER, & Baker T (1991). Effects of supportive and unsupportive responses of others to rape victims: Effects on concurrent victim adjustment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 443–451. [PubMed: 1892138]
- Davis R, Taylor B, & Bench S (1995). Impact of sexual and nonsexual assault on secondary victims. *Violence and Victims*, 10, 73–84. [PubMed: 8555121]
- Dunkel-Schetter C, & Skokan LA (1990). Determinants of social support provision in personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 437–450.
- Eisikovits Z & Koren C (2010). Approaches to and outcomes of dyadic interview analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20, 1642–1655. [PubMed: 20663940]
- Emm D & McKenry P (1988). Coping with victimization: The impact of rape on female survivors, male significant others, and parents. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 10, 272–279.

- Fisher BS, Daigle LE, Cullen FT, & Turner MG (2003). Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 30, 6–38.
- Kirkner A, Lorenz K, Ullman SE, & Mandala R (in press). Recommendations for responding to survivors of sexual assault: A qualitative study of survivors and support providers. *Violence and Victims*
- Lassri D, Luyten P, Fonagy P, & Shahar G (2018). Undetected scars? Self-criticism, attachment, and romantic relationships among otherwise well-functioning childhood sexual abuse survivors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10, 121–129.
- Lorenz K, Kirkner A, Ullman SE, & Mandala R (in press). A qualitative study of sexual assault disclosure impact and help-seeking on support providers. *Violence and Victims*
- Lorenz K, Ullman SE, Kirkner A, Mandala R, Vasquez A, & Sigurvinsdottir R (2017). Social reactions to sexual assault disclosure: A qualitative study of informal support dyads. *Violence Against Women Online first publication.*
- Manion I, Firestone P, Cloutier P, Ligezinska M, McIntyre J, & Ensom R (1998). Child extrafamilial sexual abuse: predicting parent and child functioning. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 22, 1285–1304. [PubMed: 9871788]
- McCourt J, Peel JCF, & O'Carroll P (1998). The effects of child sexual abuse on the protecting parent(s): Identifying a counselling response for secondary victims. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 11, 283–299.
- Milliken J, Paul LA, Sasson S, Porter A, Hasulube J (2016). Sexual assault disclosure recipients' experiences: Emotional distress and changes in the relationship with the victim. *Violence and Victims*, 31, 457–470. [PubMed: 27074789]
- Moss M, Frank E, & Anderson B (1990). The effects of marital status and partner support on rape trauma. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60, 379–391.
- O'Callaghan E, Shepp V, Ullman SE, & Kirkner A Navigating sex and sexuality after sexual assault: A qualitative dyadic study of survivors and informal support providers
- Patton MQ (2009). Designing qualitative studies. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3, 230–246.
- Perilloux C, Duntley JD, & Buss DM (2012). The costs of rape. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41, 1099–1106. [PubMed: 21975924]
- Peter-Hagene LP & Ullman SE (2016). Longitudinal effects of sexual assault victims' drinking and self-blame on PTSD. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence Advance online publication.* doi: 10.1177/0886260516636394.
- Relyea M, & Ullman SE (2015). Unsupported or turned against: Understanding how two types of negative social reactions to sexual assault relate to post-assault outcomes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39, 37–52. [PubMed: 25750475]
- Saldana J (2009). An introduction to codes and coding. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 1–31.
- Saldana J (2012). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Silver RC, Wortman CB, & Crofton C (1990). The role of coping in support provision: The self-presentational dilemma of victims of life crises. In Sarason IG, Sarason BR, & Pierce GR (Eds.), *Social support: An interactional view* (pp. 397–426). NY: Wiley.
- Smith ME (2005). Female Sexual Assault: The impact on the male significant other. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 26, 149–167. [PubMed: 15962921]
- Starzynski LL, Ullman SE, Filipas HH, & Townsend SM (2005). Correlates of women's sexual assault disclosure to informal and formal support sources. *Violence and Victims*, 20, 415–431.
- Testa M, VanZile-Tamsen C, Livingston JA, & Koss MP (2004). Assessing women's experiences of sexual aggression using the Sexual Experiences Survey: Evidence for validity and implications for research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28, 256–265.
- Ullman SE, Lorenz K, & Kirkner A (2017). Alcohol's role in social reactions to sexual assault disclosure: A qualitative study of informal support dyads. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence Advance online publication.*

Table 1.**Demographic Information of Survivors and Support Providers**

	Significant Other (n = 7)	Family (n = 15)	Friends (n = 23)
Survivor			
Race			
African American	4 (57%)	12 (80%)	12 (52%)
White	1 (14%)	2 (13%)	5 (22%)
American Indian	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Multiracial	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	4 (17%)
Unknown	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)
Support Provider			
Race			
African American	3 (43%)	11 (73%)	7 (30%)
White	3 (43%)	2 (13%)	6 (26%)
American Indian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
Multiracial	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (13%)
Unknown	1 (14%)	1 (6%)	5 (22%)
Gender			
Male	7 (100%)	3 (20%)	7 (30%)
Female	0 (0%)	12 (80%)	16 (70%)
Relationship to Survivor			
Spouse	4 (57%)	-	-
Unmarried Partner	3 (43%)	-	-
Child	-	8 (53%)	-
Mother	-	3 (20%)	-
Sister	-	4 (27%)	-
Roommate	-	-	1 (4%)
Friend	-	-	21 (91%)
Sponsor	-	-	1 (4%)

Table 2.**Assault Characteristics**

	N (%)	M (SD)	Range
Relationship to perpetrator			
Stranger	18 (40%)	-	-
Non-romantic acquaintance	13 (30%)	-	-
Casual or first date	5 (11%)	-	-
Romantic acquaintance	5 (11%)	-	-
Husband	2 (4%)	-	-
Relative	2 (4%)	-	-
Number of perpetrators	-	1 (1.0)	1 – 3
Alcohol/drug-facilitated assault			
None	22 (50%)	-	-
Alcohol	13 (30%)	-	-
Drugs	3 (7%)	-	-
Both alcohol and drugs	6 (13%)	-	-
Age at time of assault	-	24 (9.6)	13 – 50
Time elapsed since the assault	-	17 (13.4)	0 – 43
Child sexual assault (CSA)	19 (42%)	-	-
Multiple interpersonal trauma experiences	5 (11%)	-	-

Table 3.

Participants who Indicated their Relationship was Affected by Disclosure

Relationship Type	Matched Pairs (n=45)	Survivors Only (n=45)	SPs only (n=45)
Significant Others	6 (86%)	4 (57%)	6 (86%)
Family Members	15 (100%)	13 (87%)	10 (66%)
Friends	20 (87%)	12 (52%)	17 (74%)
Total	41 (91%)	29 (64%)	33 (73%)

Note: percentages denote proportion within each relationship type.