

**Factors Influencing Retraumatization Amongst Sexual Assault Victims:**

**A Qualitative Study of the Criminal Justice System**

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### **Abstract**

Retraumatization as a result of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is most prevalent in cases of intimate partner violence, specifically, sexual assault. When victims develop the courage to take legal action against their abuser, they are often faced with disbelief, victim-blaming, and disempowerment. Whether it be police interviews or court processes, the journey to justice is regarded as an uphill battle. The literature reviews purpose is to explore victims experience surrounding the impacts of retraumatization and to identify common themes. This paper is designed to analyze shared accounts of revictimization with a trauma informed lens. The emerging research in neurobiology and how it impacts victims memory retention is a major focus. The results suggest further education and policy that promote trauma informed practice would reform the CJS into a safe space for victims seeking justice.

*Keywords:* Retraumatization, trauma informed practice, criminal justice system, victim betterment, victim perception, public safety

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### **Background**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive issue facing both society and the police. The criminal justice system (CJS) must tread carefully when formulating a response to IPV victims, specifically, those who have endured sexual violence. A well documented phenomenon lies within the unreported acts of violence against both males and females that derive from a mistrust in the CJS and police (Haskell & Randall, 2019). The purpose of this comparative analysis is to generate an understanding of the variables surrounding retraumatization when victims come in contact with the CJS. This study will utilize pre-existing literature and case studies to explore how various criminal justice processes such as police interviews or court appearances can deter victims from reporting their attacks (Haskell & Randall, 2019). Emerging neurobiological studies have placed an emphasis on trauma informed practice as they disprove the effectiveness of certain police techniques or court proceedings (Haskell & Randall, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative comparative analysis is to generate an understanding of the variables surrounding retraumatization by exploring the shared experiences of sexual assault survivors. The focus of this research is to examine victim experiences when interacting with police or court personnel.

Boyd (2011, p. 5) refers to the interactions between the CJS and victims as “the second rape”; therefore, this study will examine beneficial alternatives to the presently employed standards and practices. Currently available literature regarding retraumatization of sexual assault victims is primarily concerned with prosecution outcomes, family reactions, and or onset mental health deterioration (Boyd, 2011). This comparative analysis will identify and make recommendations on the gaps in literature existing as a result of dated articles, varying laws by

country, and excluded information. It remains imperative that literature in this field is current in order to promote victim reporting, wellbeing, and public awareness.

A transformative worldview was applied to this research, as it focused on power imbalances and the change oriented field of victim betterment. Creswell (2014) suggests that transformative research places an emphasis on social change and oppression at various levels. For this present study, the research question is focused on the use of victim experience to form practical recommendations and solutions to improve and promote the reporting of sexual assault cases. This establishes the proper conditions and grounds to conduct a transformative study.

The study conducted by Haskell and Randall (2019), ‘The Impact of Trauma on Adult Sexual Assault Victims’, served as a lens to evaluate all other literature reviewed in this report. The neurobiological impact of trauma on victims is a newly discovered phenomenon that needed to be contrasted to each of the other studies included. The four part submission to the Justice of Canada includes an in-depth review of the trauma of sexual assault, the emerging science in neurobiology, how trauma affects memory, and finally, an extensive recommendation made for trauma-informed practice in the criminal justice system (Haskell & Randall, 2019). Comparing the results of other research to Haskell and Randell’s findings allowed for a more consistent and accurate analysis.

### **Research Question**

The field of sexual violence and victim reporting experience is relatively established in literature; however, trauma informed practice and the neurobiology of trauma is an expanding area of research. The central research question that this paper sought to answer is: what are the factors influencing retraumatization amongst sexual assault victims when reporting to the criminal justice system?

Utilizing the comparative analysis design and Haskell and Randall's research as a frame of reference, means three additional sub questions will be answered in the course of this report: What direction is the research heading in? What is the current state of the literature? How can trauma informed practice be implemented in the criminal justice system?

### **Trauma Informed Practice**

For the purposes of this paper, the six pillars of trauma informed practice will be discussed. These pillars slightly differ depending on the context; however, the literature produced by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2014) best mirrors the recommendations and significance outlined in Haskell and Randell's (2019) report. Additionally, SAMHSA is referenced throughout a majority of Canadian research on trauma informed practice. The field of trauma informed practice has grown increasingly necessary for police departments and criminal justice systems alike. Trauma informed practice is a framework that resists retraumatization of victims as well as interveners (SAMHSA, 2014). Grounded in understanding and responsiveness, trauma informed practice aims to emphasize physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone. It is important to note that trauma informed practice does not prescribe a set of policies or practices when managing victims, rather a set of six (6) guiding pillars to base every interaction on (SAMHSA, 2014). The six key principles that SAMHSA (2014) sets out are: (1) Safety, (2) Trustworthiness and Transparency, (3) Peer Support, (4) Collaboration and Mutuality, (5) Empowerment, Voice and Choice, (6) Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.

Safety is the first principle that outlines the fundamental premise that the people being served must feel both physically and psychologically safe to be vulnerable (SAMHSA, 2014). This can be achieved through the physical setting or a sense of safety verbally provided.

Trustworthiness and transparency highlights the goals of building trust with the victim, family members, and others involved (SAMHSA, 2014). Peer support suggests an establishment of safety and hope with the use of collaboration. Individuals who have experiences with trauma are key to helping others recover. Collaboration and mutuality emphasizes the importance of connection between professionals and appropriate referral (SAMHSA, 2014). Everyone has their role to play in the implementation and use of trauma informed practice. Empowerment, voice and choice is embedded in the belief that resiliency, individual ability, and community all strengthen the recovery from trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). Voice and choice are essential in determining action plans with clients and goal setting that cultivates self-advocacy skills (SAMHSA, 2014). Finally, cultural, historical, and gender issues is a principle that actively promotes the inclusivity and needs of historical trauma (SAMHSA, 2014).

What makes trauma informed practice unique is that there is no one dimensional way to apply its techniques or principles. Haskell and Randell (2019) establish the negative impacts trauma has on adults following sexual assault; thus, emphasizing the need for these principles to be included in both court and police interviews. A further examination of Haskell and Randell's (2019) recommended implementation of trauma informed practice will be presented in the discussions section of this paper.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The research was gathered from the Justice Institute of British Columbia library and Google scholar. The search was limited to scholarly material only and newspaper articles and magazines were excluded in this study. The revised search consisted of specific keywords such as victim perception, sexual assault reporting, law enforcement, trauma-informed practice, and criminal justice system. Articles that were published from 2005 and later were the focus of this

study; however, to evaluate the effectiveness of historical police reporting techniques, studies dating as early as 1995 were included sparingly. Existing literature in Canada was favoured but minimal; therefore, the search criteria was expanded to studies based in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom since the differences in criminal justice systems were not significant to the results of the study. Creswell (2014) suggests a broad search of the literature as an effective means of collection, so this was utilized in this study's search criteria. Boolean operators were utilized to narrow the search by using “and” or expand the search by adding “or”. The initial searches were broad and lacked structure, yielding thousands of non-applicable or irrelevant studies. The identified problems when collecting the data were too broad of keywords, wide inclusion criteria, non-scholarly sources, and research outside of North America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. During the collection of the data, it was not possible to identify the status of each participants sexual assault case; therefore, the accuracy of the results may be minimally compromised. The generalizability of the results were taken into consideration and conclusions surrounding specific case details were excluded from this study.

The search for literature utilized two different strategies. When the search narrowed down the results to roughly 60 articles, an abstract review was conducted in order to identify 15 specific studies applicable for a full review. The abstract review had a robust criteria to ensure relevance to the proposed research question. Briefly looking at the methodology, author, findings, country of origin, and recommendations allowed to determine whether the study was adequate. A preference was formed for cross sectional studies that included both anonymous surveys followed by semi-structured interviews. While a preference was set for larger sample sizes (50+), the inclusion of smaller populations addressed identified gaps and more in-depth responses. The abstract review ensured that all studies limited the victims inclusion to sexual



violence rather than other forms of IPV, as this may incorrectly impact the generalizability of results. The study by Haskell and Randall (2019) was deemed the most significant as it included the most in depth review of victim impacts, trauma-informed practice implementations, and newly discovered variables of neurobiology. Additionally, this study addressed the identified gap in the literature, ‘the rape myth’. For these reasons, Haskell and Randall’s research served as a lens during both the review and comparative analysis of the research. This allowed for the analysis to focus on trauma informed practice, standardize police reporting, and develop an understanding of how victims neurobiology is affected post sexual assault.

The relationship between retraumatization and reporting sexual assault was compared with the findings of Haskell and Randell (2019). The significance of trauma informed practice was analyzed in various interviews and survey studies. In Johnson’s (2017) survey of 219 sexual assault victims, the respondent attested to a desire for more sensitive interviewing techniques and support in preparation for court. Such comparisons validated the work of Haskell and Randell (2019) and concluded that secondary trauma that victims experience can be minimized. Further comparisons between the literature corroborate the findings and recommendation of Haskell and Randell (2019). Analysis of these research questions indicates how trauma informed police and courts promote victim reporting and increased levels of confidence (Lorenz et al., 2019). Using trauma informed practice as a lens allowed for a more critical approach to reviewing the literature. Victim experiences were drawn from the literature review and three key themes were developed. The implications of the victims’ experiences were evaluated on the recommendations and principles of trauma informed practice.

### **Literature Review**

Several themes emerged during the literature review process. Through the shared experiences of victims in survey studies or interviews, it was evident that three distinct themes were consistent amongst respondents. Victims expressed that police interviews were insensitive and one of the more acute reasons for retraumatization. Accusatory questions, minimal assistance with victim recollection, and victim blaming were the common observational experiences shared between victims and their police interviews. The next theme identified is that court proceedings played an intricate role in the retraumatization of sexual assault victims. The data suggests that victims feel neglected in their sexual assault case when they did not conform to the stereotypical assumptions of an ideal victim or 'real rape'. Finally, victims of sexual assault are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs if they are not believed by the police. After reviewing the literature, it became apparent that retraumatization is a ripple effect that reduces confidence levels in the police and criminal justice system.

#### **Insensitive Police Interviews as a Precursor to Retraumatization**

Once a victim has decided to take action against their abuser, one of the first steps in the reporting process is an interview with an investigating police officer. Lorenz, Kirkner, and Ulman (2019) explored the aspects of police interviews that indirectly traumatized the victim. The shared experiences of victims in police interviews can be summarized into three distinct points: (1) Non-belief, (2) victim blaming, (3) dismissive behaviour. Victims expressed that the police interview mirrored the unequal power and control that they had experienced in their abusive relationship or attack (Lorenz et al., 2019). Interviews with the police were reportedly less of a safe space to report their crime and more of a disguised interrogation to prove validity. Victim blaming consisted of remarks insinuating that the person reporting was at fault for their

attack. The majority of survivors from the survey study conducted by Lorenz et al (2019) experienced remarks such as ‘oh well, why did you let him make you a drink’ or ‘why did you not call 911 right away’. Blaming the victims for their actions made the majority of respondents in the survey regret going to the police in the first place (Lorenz et al., 2019). A common occurrence seen from insensitive police interviews is that victims will choose not to report sexual violence in the future, as their previous encounters with police were traumatizing.

These findings were consistent with other research in the field, particularly James and Lee’s (2015) survey study on sexual assault victims and their experiences with police. Victims in interviews experienced a significant level of dismissive behaviour from the police and felt as if their crime was not important enough or worthy of resources (James & Lee, 2015). The results demonstrated that victims experienced a rushed and unsupportive interview that contributed to feelings of trauma and loss of self (James & Lee, 2015). Only 3.7% of respondents said they reported their cases of unwanted sexual acts to the police (James & Lee, 2015). The retraumatization faced in police interviews and a distrust in the criminal justice system leads to victims not reporting their attacks.

Retraumatization has been theorized to be the result of insensitive police interviewing. The findings from McQueen, Miller, and Chambers (2021) mirror these results, as in both cases victims experience deterioration of mental health and a degree of revictimization. Ignoring the needs and lacking validation was a key concern of victims and further substantiates the themes of secondary trauma from interviews with police. When police begin to establish the facts of the assault, particularly the events leading up, victims feel the most doubted and traumatized. This can be attributed to a lack of understanding and recollection of the attack. Haskell and Randell (2019) further reinforce this theme. Their report presents the neurobiology behind trauma and

how the brain responds to certain events. When a victim detects a serious threat, a cascade of stress chemicals are released and defence circuitry dominates the brain once activated (Haskell & Randell, 2019). This response can explain the gap of knowledge many victims have when reporting their assaults. Victims attest that these missing details of the event are the reason police may not believe them when making the report (James & Lee, 2015). Survivors indicated a desire for trauma informed practice in police interviews as it promotes memory retention, confidence in police, and minimized secondary victimization.

### **Court as a Source of Revictimization**

**The Trial Process as Insensitive.** The theme of courts being a traumatic experience for victims was evident throughout the literature. A small fraction of cases make it to the courtroom and what is often expected to be feelings of justice and relief are described as insensitive and outright disturbing. This was indicated in Regehr, Alaggia, Lambert, and Saini's (2012) study conducted on victims of sexual assault who had been involved in a criminal trial process. Overall, the proceedings were viewed as an abusive event where both the defence and offender ridiculed or intimidated the victim (Regehr et al., 2012). Defence attorneys were identified as the cause of significant distress since many victims in the study were discredited for not having an accurate recollection of the events. 85% of defence lawyers were viewed as insensitive and other court personnel like police or crown attorneys shared similar findings (Regehr et al., 2012). Victims describe the trial process as prolonged, emotionally draining, repetitive, and confusing (Regehr et al., 2012). The language and customs of court made victims feel excluded from what was supposed to be their day of justice. The suffering victims experienced in court was consistent with broken expectations of justice and mistreatment from defence.

These results were further substantiated in the study by Katirai (2020) who evaluated the participation of IPV victims in the courtroom. The conclusion was made that the most important factors that contribute to retraumatization of victims are court proceedings. This unique study utilizes the experiences and opinions of lawyers to break down the outdated and victimizing aspects of court. Blaming and dismissive remarks made by court personnel caused victims to express regret for pursuing legal action. Retraumatization and insensitivity in court can impact the involved community, friends, and family of the victim (Katirai, 2020). Whether civil or criminal proceedings, the respondents indicate that informal support providers are negatively affected by the destructive nature of court (Katirai, 2020).

**The Outcome of The Court Process.** Accountability of the offender and the outcome of court processes are often seen as the sole indicator of a successful trial. In Johnson's (2017) study, the majority of women had mixed-feelings with the outcome of the trial. Most survivors were not satisfied with the sentencing of their abuser; however, a sense of closure and empowerment was expressed following the conclusion of the court proceeding (Johnson, 2017). The study suggests that although the overall conviction rates are less than 1 percent when factoring in the unreported acts of sexual assault (Johnson, 2017). The victim's confidence in the justice system was likely to improve when prosecutors, defence counsel, and judges were supportive and transparent. Regardless of outcome, the participants in the study report no hesitation to involve police if the previous experience was positive (Johnson, 2017).

This theme is reinforced in Regehr, Alaggia, Lambert, and Saini's (2012) survey study of sexual assault victims. 70.3 percent of respondents indicated that the outcome of court processes was destructive (Regehr et al., 2012). Specifically, the majority of victims felt as if the damaging effects of judicial processes significantly regressed their psychological recovery (Regehr et al.,

2012). The study found that one-third of the reported cases resulted in the offender being sentenced to jail; however, the majority of victims (82.6%) felt unsatisfied with the length (Regehr et al., 2012). The mixed sense of relief and disappointment with the outcome is a source of retraumatization.

### **Substance Abuse as a Result of not Being Believed by the Police**

The literature suggests that negative police interaction while reporting sexual assault is correlated with a decline in mental and physical health. McQueen, Miller, and Chambers (2021) explored this process, among other aspects of social impacts that are associated with police disbelief. Their study consisted of 23 interviews of sexual assault survivors who were reportedly not believed by the police. Following what is best described as broken expectations with the police, unsupported respondents turned to alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism (McQueen et al., 2021). The common misconception that victims attest to is that it was not the rape itself that caused negative coping strategies, rather it was the disbelief and lack of support from the police that lead to drug and alcohol abuse (McQueen et al., 2021).

These results were consistent with other research in the field, most notably the findings from Boyd (2011). Boyd (2011) evaluates the overall impacts of sexual assault on women and draws upon secondary literature to determine that trauma and alcohol or drug dependence are significantly correlated. Addiction stemming from a coping mechanism puts survivors at a stark disadvantage in the pursuance of justice. This presents a vicious cycle of not being believed by the police, using substances to cope with the fact, and being abused in the future. The ideal victim or stereotypical understanding of a real rape will be further explored in this report; however, it is important to note that not being believed by the police often leads to substance abuse or mental health deterioration (Boyd, 2011).

Conroy and Cotter (2017) evaluate the socioeconomic impacts of sexual assault victims not being believed by the police and their results further reinforce this theme. Overall, those who had reported not being believed by the police also indicated higher rates of drug use and binge drinking (Conroy & Cotter, 2017). The cycle of non-belief, substance abuse, and continued sexual assault from Boyd's (2011) study is further reinforced in Conroy and Cotter's (2017) findings. The research indicates that substance abuse following sexual assault can be a significant risk factor for future victimization (Conroy & Cotter, 2017). Victims who use substances as a coping mechanism frequent locations associated with higher rates of sexual assault. Areas of increased victimization such as night clubs or bars often have an increased presence of offenders; therefore, the cycle of abuse continues. Police who lack trauma informed practice when taking victim statements or interviews perpetuate these negative impacts on victims.

### **Discussions/Findings**

The literature review suggests that most victims endure a degree of retraumatization when in contact with the criminal justice system. Many of the impacts result in non-reporting, lessened confidence in the criminal justice system, and a regression in the recovery process. Based on the shared experiences of victims, trauma informed practice in the criminal justice system would benefit survivors in a variety of ways. Haskell and Randell (2019) discuss the practical approaches to implementing trauma informed practice in policing and the court systems. Further, the observed benefits of victims who have been involved in a trauma informed court processes or police interview reinforce the need for such training. The emerging research surrounding neurobiology and memory retention emphasize the need for reform when defence

attorneys question victims. Informed suggestions and predictions are made based on the conclusions of other research and the review of literature.

### **The Impacts of Neurobiology on Memory Retention**

Victims in the literature found that a common reason for retraumatization is the ridicule and scrutiny they face when recalling their attack. Police and defence lawyers will utilize gaps in knowledge to discredit victims either on the stand or prevent them from pursuing a charge. Haskell and Randell (2019) explore the fundamentals of the brain's defence circuitry and how during a traumatic event or when under perceived threat, a neurobiological 'freeze' occurs. Defence circuitry dominates brain functioning once activated and it should be acknowledged that during this time, sensory information and physical responses seek an escape (Haskell & Randell, 2019). This subconscious escape response can be characterized into three potential actions: flight, fight, or freeze. Sexual assault is most commonly associated with the freeze response. Haskell and Randell's (2019) findings support the themes of retraumatization from victim blaming in court and police interviews.

Hardy, Young, and Holmes (2009) conducted a questionnaire of sexual assault victims surrounding memory fragmentation, trauma, and the role of police. Victims report high levels of dissociation during sexual assault and fragmented memories were used to divert them in their criminal justice process. The participants in the study suggest that memory fragmentation or incoherence in police interviews had a direct impact on their likelihood of proceeding with the case (Hardy et al., 2009). This is a challenge that must be addressed. The propensity for the police or courts to discredit victims because of memory loss is both unethical and revictimization. Haskell and Randell (2019) suggest that trauma-informed police and courts reduce feelings of shame, victim blaming, and vulnerability.



### **Trauma Informed Police Interviews**

Traditional police interviews make it more difficult for victims to disclose their sexual assault experiences. Fisher (1995) found in his study that on average a police interview had 3 open-ended questions, and 26 close-ended questions with an average of 1 second pauses between questions. Per response, police interrupted victims 4 times and waited only 7.5 seconds before interrupting open-ended questions (Fisher, 1995). Interruptions are proven to impede memory retrieval and make victims feel rushed or unsupported; therefore, the need for a trauma informed approach to interviews is apparent.

A survey study of 215 respondents conducted by Sable, Danis, Mauzy, and Gallagher (2006) concluded that a significant barrier to rape reporting was that police would be bias or there was a fear of being judged and embarrassed in an interview. The respondents expressed a desire for a safer and more supportive reporting environment for victims (Sable et al., 2006). Victims suggest that a collaborative process with trauma informed support systems would decrease feelings of shame, guilt, or fear (Sable et al., 2006). A trauma informed approach to police reporting and interviews would counter these negative experiences and barriers facing victims.

Haskell and Randell (2019) present best practices for trauma-informed police-victim interviews. The first step of setting the tone should be a brief, empathetic, and supportive collection of the most pertinent information for the initial report. The first interaction with the police should be more focused on getting the victim connected with support services and promoting collaboration. At a later date, scheduling a more in-depth interview that victims can prepare for will promote immediate and long term recovery (Haskell and Randell, 2019). Establishing the facts and circumstances of a crime is a necessity; however, the way things are

said are just as important as what is being said. The detailed follow-up interview should adopt a Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI) approach.

FETI is a science based methodology that facilitates the collection of evidence for victims of trauma. The approach consists of 3 major characteristics: (1) uninterrupted narrative conducted by the victim, (2) open-ended questions eliciting raw information such as sights, smells, and sounds, (3) active listening and avoidance of victim-blaming language or assumption (Haskell & Randell, 2019). It is essential to consider the non-verbal communication and image projected from the investigating officer as victims who experience a freeze response have higher levels of self-blame. Aspects of FETI and trauma-informed police interviews have seen great success in reducing revictimization and promoting collaboration. Further research surrounding the victims likelihood to pursue charges with and without trauma informed police would emphasize the need for such training.

### **Trauma Informed Court Proceedings**

Haskell and Randell (2019) reinforce that idea that the inferior position of the victim in a trial is both disempowering and a source of trauma. Intense scrutiny on the stand can often make the victim feel as if they are under attack; therefore, the need for in-depth preparatory work with victims is emphasized (Haskell & Randell, 2019). The tone and physical behaviour of defence insinuates disbelief of the victim. Specialized training in trauma informed practice can reduce the risk of revictimization and promote healing for survivors.

Clark (2010) conducted a study of 22 sexual assault victims who had reported and stood trial against their abusers. The experiences shared amongst the victims suggest that the recovery and justice seeking process is inhibited by insensitive court personnel. In the interviews, victims describe the legal procedures as revictimizing, removed from ideals of justice, and outright

frustrating (Clark, 2010). Those who felt as if their allegations were met with disbelief experienced increased levels of secondary trauma (Clark, 2010). Victims expressed a desire for either reform or adequate forewarning about the system and their subsequent expectations. Validation, control, and support were the main recommendations for court processes. The difficulties survivors face in court are preventing others from coming forward and cooperating with the criminal justice system.

The key recommendations in Haskell and Randell's (2019) report were to provide mandatory training and education on the neurobiology of trauma, violence, and abuse. Defence lawyers, crown counsel, and judges should all have adequate knowledge in the field to neutralize biases (Haskell & Randell, 2019). On behalf of the crown, the focus should be on understanding the victim's history and expectations for trial. In order to minimize retraumatizing victims, defence lawyers should be educated on how trauma affects memory and recall. Other changes to trial can consist of pacing questions, allowing for victim-witness breaks, and simplifying language during cross examinations (Haskell & Randell, 2019). Certain changes to the *Canadian Criminal Code* allow for a number of measures to be invoked surrounding sexual assault trials. The application of s. 486.2(2) would allow for victims to testify outside of the courtroom to avoid their abuser or judgemental personnel (Criminal Code, 2015). Additionally, s. 486(1) would grant victims the right to exclude the public from attending trial (Criminal Code, 2015). These 2015 amendments represent the principles of trauma informed sentencing; however, further reform and education is well overdue. Further research on how the rates of reporting are impacted by a trauma informed criminal justice system is recommended to ensure implementation techniques are adequate.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

There is a persisting demand for criminal justice reform as it relates to sexual assault reporting. When police or court personnel retraumatize victims, it sends a message to society that justice is an uphill battle not worth fighting for. Trauma informed practice is at the forefront of policing; however, substantial changes have yet to be made. Victims from the literature attest to decades worth of insensitive experiences with the criminal justice system. Trauma informed practice has been situated in victim services and long-term counselling for decades yet the criminal justice system's resistance to reform furthers the neglect of survivors. Prosecutors, lawyers, and other criminal justice professionals need to apply trauma-informed practices to each case of sexual assault reaching trial. Education on the neurobiology of trauma and its impacts on victims can help counter the difficulties faced in court. Mandatory training, educational workshops, and further legislation to promote trauma-informed practice will enhance access to justice and promote confidence when reporting sexual assault (Haskell & Randell, 2019). Police officers everywhere need advanced, constant, and victim oriented training in the impacts of trauma and how to mitigate victimization. Restructuring of interviews, early connection with social supports, and the overall conduct of police must face further advancement to promote reporting and the pursuance of justice.

To advance this field, the results of a trauma informed system need to be further analyzed in its practice and implementation. Research should continue to prioritize the victims' perception in survey studies and interviews. The purpose of this comparative analysis was not to develop new policy or legislation, but rather to assess the shared experiences of victims with a trauma informed lens. The current state of literature is rather new and significant research needs to be conducted in a Canadian context. Haskell and Randell's (2019) report should be the basis of all

specialized training and iterations of a trauma informed approach to criminal justice. Decreasing revictimization in criminal justice is no simple feat; however, the current state of literature and victims suggest trauma-informed practice is the future.

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