Introduction/Objective

• Sexual trauma is one of the greatest contributors to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).²
• Women, young adults, and college students are common victims of sexual trauma.
• Women are more likely to develop PTSD than men.¹
• Current research mostly surrounds the negative impacts of sexual trauma on survivors.
• There is a lack of information as to the methods of resilience employed by these individuals following trauma.
• Objective: The purpose of this project is to identify key elements of resilience in female Sidney Kimmel Medical College students who have experienced sexual trauma prior to entering medical school.

Methods

• Perseverance and focus are necessary for getting accepted to medical school; female medical students who experienced sexual trauma would include the common demographics for sexual trauma whilst displaying evidence of achievement following trauma.
• The study was advertised via social media.
• Female SKMC students used a linked online scheduling platform to arrange anonymous 1-hour, 1-on-1 phone interviews.
• 7 students scheduled interviews, of whom 1 cancelled, 2 did not call, and 4 were interviewed to completion.
• Study duration: September 2018-October 2018

Results, cont.

Advice from the Survivors

• 1: “Believe and validate yourself no matter how far-fetched it seems.”
• 2: “Don’t be afraid to get help; don’t feel ashamed of turning to someone. Know that it’s not your fault, even though that is easier said than done.”
• 3: “Identify people in your life with whom you can talk about it with. Even as you work towards something else, it is something that can distract you if you don’t address it. Make sure you realize that what you have gone through doesn’t have to define you, and if you feel like you need to take legal action personally, do it.”
• 4: “Find community. We all act different, but if you are open, you will find survivors everywhere. The only thing that has gotten me through is talking through triggers with my fellow survivors. Keep around the friends that show up for you, not just those who are able to go out.”
  • “It is not your fault.”

Discussion/Conclusion

• These high-achieving individuals had circumstances common to general sexual trauma population: knowledge of perpetrator and substance use.
• Seeking help (therapy, social support, etc.) is an essential part of resilience.
• All survivors transformed their trauma into something productive: career directions, self-awareness, and empathy.
• Study limitations:
  • Anonymity limited interviewer ability to contact and remind interviewees regarding scheduled interview, leading to smaller sample size
  • Given the relevance of current triggers in this preliminary group, further research with a greater sample size is indicated to:
    • Provide more extensive information for other women/girls needing guidance following trauma
    • Determine the need for a campus support group

References


Acknowledgements

Thank you to the survivors for having the patience and strength to share your stories.
Thank you Dr. Rickie Brawer for guiding me through the research process.