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What can victim/survivors' knowledge bring to the sexual offending field?

Preliminary Findings from ACSSA's
Giving Voice Project

Haley Clark

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Project outline

- Research questions
 - ◆ What can victim/survivors of sexual assault tell us about the motivations, strategies and tactics offenders use to perpetrate sexual offences?
 - ◆ How can this knowledge be used to inform policy and practice responses to sexual offending?



Overview

- Participants
- Offenders
- Key themes: Trust, surprise, alcohol and drugs, social norms, power and control, planning and opportunity



Participants

State	Rural	Regional	Metropolitan	Total
NSW	3	1	6	10
QLD	3	1	6	10
SA	0	1	5	6
VIC	1	0	5	6
NT	0	0	1	1
Total	7	3	23	33



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Participants

- Range of backgrounds
- Nine had experienced multiple incidents as adults
- Ten had experienced child sexual assault in addition to adult sexual assault



Offenders

- Diverse range of backgrounds
- Tended to be older than their victims
- Acquaintances, partners, friends, colleagues, strangers, other family members



Offenders: 'they don't carry a warning'

And he's the kind of guy that everybody likes, you know like, he's **Mr Nice Guy**.

Anna

He was like about a 50-year-old middle-aged guy, one of these **big gross things**, yeah. Yes, big, overweight, and **just sleazy**. Just like a business guy that's got big, gaping holes in his life.

Belinda



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Key Themes

- Trust
- Surprise
- Alcohol and drugs
- Social norms and social scripts
- Power and control
- Victim targeting



Trust

- Instrumental in setting up most assaults
- Gained through constructing himself as nice, normal, socially competent
- Promotes feelings of non-threat and safety
- Access to victims
- Family, friend and community support



Trust

Women don't get into cars with boogie men, or accept drinks from boogie men. You know, like, it is precisely **because they are nice guys** and they have excellent interpersonal skills that **they're able to get you into a position where they can assault you**. It's not that like now when I hear somebody go, oh yeah, but he's a really nice guy, I'm like, well, yeah, that works for him. Yeah, he's probably more guilty than like, than if he was a horrible guy, because **most of them are nice guys**.

Dana



Surprise

It is like the lioness in the grass: until she pounces, the camouflage is just so good, and you just don't see it.

Eve



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Surprise

It was just bang, he grabbed me and he had me in this vice like grip. One of my strongest memories is how strong he was. *It was like Jekyll and Hyde stuff.* One minute it was just right and the next minute he has got like a steel bar wrapped around me and he was trying to kiss my neck...

Eve



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Surprise

Yeah, it was definitely in a pattern. That pattern wasn't as predictable as some of his mood swings. It's not so much his moods because **you could never predict his moods** but you could read them.

Candice



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Alcohol and drugs

Victim

- Getting women intoxicated to sexually assault them
- Assault opportunistic because of intoxication
- Manipulating memory

Offender

- Consuming alcohol purposefully to gain confidence
- Maintaining sobriety to maintain control
- Using alcohol to minimise, deny responsibility



Alcohol and drugs

Made possible and facilitated by social norms

Yes he would have been having a drink but again, because I was in his house and **he was the host and I was the girl**, you know, I hadn't supplied the drinks and I didn't get the drinks, I just drank the drinks and of course **everybody was having a good time**, drink some more, drink some more. But it would have been him getting the drinks so **he was controlling obviously how much he drank and how much I drank**.

Abigail



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Alcohol and drugs

Memory

I remember just laying there and him doing what he wanted and I couldn't stop it because **I couldn't move and I couldn't talk**. All I could do was cry...

[The next day] he came in and he laid on the lounge and started saying stuff. That I was wild and that I enjoyed it. He was winking and smiling at me...And **the way he was wording things made it seem like I'd consented to what he did**, like he was trying to justify what he did.

Vanessa



Social norms

- Social scripts and reframing
- Social expectations
- Relationship expectations



Social norms

I think I **was just really confused**, and then I went home and, yeah there was like, there were text messages and stuff. Just like, hey I had a really great night, like that sort of stuff, which was also why I was quite confused because I was like, well his intentions couldn't have been bad then because, you know, **rapists aren't meant to send follow up text messages saying I had a great night.**

Dianne



Social norms

Him telling you that it's his entitlement, so it's a kind of brainwashing to make you believe that's what you're supposed to do because you're his wife and that once you're married you haven't got the right to say no anymore. It was mainly verbal things

Louise



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Social norms

So it was easier to give in because that way it would be over quicker, it would be less painful and then life could go on. So that was just a habit I developed that you do what you have to do.

Candice



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Power and control

- Offenders sought and (generally) maintained power and control over the women
- Offenders enjoyed control
- Victim/survivors challenged his control



Power and control

And because I was struggling he'd be saying, **I get really turned on when you put up a fight.** I was actually really scared because I thought he was going to hurt me, and the more scared I got and I was sweating because **I was scared, it just seemed to increase what he was doing.** But I couldn't just lie still and not struggle because I was scared. And it just seemed to make him worse. **He seemed to enjoy the fact that I was frightened.**

Patsy



Power and control

I think that in a lot of ways he was quite intimidated by how smart I was and there was a certain level of putting me in my place with what he did to me.

Agnes



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Planning and opportunity

- Participants were reserved in their judgments
- The level of planning varied
- Victims were 'targeted'



Planning and opportunity

He just acted like everything was normal. I was quite, like this, sort of, you know. He was like, what's wrong? I couldn't tell if he was just being a d*** or if he really didn't know.

Rosie



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Planning and opportunity

I think the worst betrayal out of the whole relationship, I'd say that was the worst, because he knew my past, he knew that that'd be the best way to really hurt me.

Jade



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Planning and opportunity

The most f***** up thing about all that was he had actually known about the first assault on me because he actually met me at a conference where I was talking about that event.

Oana



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Summary

Perpetration of sexual assault is embedded within a complex interplay of social norms and (gendered) understandings of sexual interactions.

Social norms, power, control, manipulation of trust are integral to sexual offending and our responses to sexual assault.



Contact

Haley Clark

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Phone: (03) 9214 7878

Email: Haley.Clark@aifs.gov.au

Web: www.aifs.gov.au/acssa



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