



SOCIO-COGNITIVE MECHANISMS AND SEXUAL FULFILLMENT OF FEMALE RAPED VICTIMS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract: The research we conducted is entitled "*Socio-cognitive mechanisms and sexual fulfillment of female rape victims in Cameroon*". Our starting point was the observation that when a young woman is raped in a society, members of her family, her community and even certain private (NGOs) and public (Ministry of Social Affairs) structures take action to restore the balance broken by the rape. After receiving this support, the rape victim should be able to blossom. However, we have come to realize that some women who have been raped and have benefited from at least one form of social assistance are still unable to have a fulfilling sexual life with their partner. The aim of this study is to verify whether there is a link between social-cognitive mechanisms and sexual fulfillment in women who have been raped in Cameroon. Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) defines behavior as a "dynamic triad" in a reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioral and environmental factors. Data was collected using the interview guide, and analysed using discourse content analysis. This enabled us to understand that the various forms of support provided by the victim's relatives and specialized structures are not negligible, but remain insufficient for the victims' psychological equilibrium.

Keywords: socio-cognitive mechanisms, women, sexual fulfillment, marriage, rape.

MECANISMES SOCIOCOGNITIF ET EPANOUISSEMENT SEXUEL DES FEMMES VICTIME DE VIOL CAMEROUN

Résumé : La recherche que nous avons menée s'intitule « *Mécanismes sociocognitif et épanouissement sexuel des femmes victime de viol Cameroun* ». Nous sommes partis du constat selon lequel lorsqu'une jeune femme est violée dans une société, les membres de sa famille, de sa communauté et même certaines structures privée (ONG) et publique (ministère des affaires sociales) pose des actions qui vise à rétablir son équilibre brisé par le viol. La victime de viol après avoir reçu ces soutiens, devrait être capable de s'épanouir. Or nous nous sommes rendu compte que certaines femmes

violées et ayant bénéficié d'au moins une forme d'assistance sociale et n'arrivent toujours pas à avoir une vie sexuelle épanouie avec leur conjoint. L'objectif de cette étude est de vérifier s'il existe un lien entre les mécanismes sociocognitifs et l'épanouissement sexuel des femmes violées au Cameroun. La théorie sociale cognitive de Bandura (1986) définit le comportement comme une « triade dynamique » dans une interaction réciproque de facteurs personnels, de comportement et d'environnement. Les données collectées au moyen du guide d'entretien, et analysées grâce à l'analyse de contenu du discours ont permis de comprendre que le soutien divers venant des proches de la victime est non négligeable mais resté insuffisant pour l'équilibre psychologique des victimes.

Mots clés : mécanismes sociocognitifs, femme, épanouissement sexuelle, mariage, viol

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (2015) has redefined sexual violence as any sexual act committed against a person's will. This is a reality that can be observed in all parts of the world. Everyone is exposed to this crime, even if statistics show that women are more exposed to rape than men. In Cameroon, among victims of sexual violence, 27.5% were boys and 72.5% girls, Mbassa Menick (2002). Nowadays, families and communities take a variety of actions to assist rape victims. Following this multifaceted support, the rape victim should be able to flourish in every way. However, we can see that some rape victims have difficulty achieving sexual fulfillment in marriage. This research paper will be organized around a presentation of the study's problematic, followed by a review of the literature and the study's theory. We will then present the methodology, data analysis, discussion of the results and recommendations.

1.1. Problem formulation

The social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1986) focuses on the social and cultural interactions that shape the evolution of the individual in a given society. The interactions that take place in the community after a woman has been raped tend to



provide her with emotional support. This emotional support is sometimes supplemented by the medical support sought by the victim or her community. All this is done with the aim of enabling the rape victim to come to terms with her past. The various social and medical interventions carried out by families, communities and even private structures, notably NGOs and public structures such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women and the Family, are designed to facilitate the rape victim's recovery. Normally, therefore, a rape victim should receive psychosocial support so that she can blossom, even sexually. However, we realized that some women who were raped and who benefited from at least one form of social and medical assistance are still unable to have a fulfilling sexual life with their partner. This leads us to ask why some women who were raped and received social support from their families, communities, psychosocial assistants and even doctors are still unable to have a fulfilling sexual life with their partners?

2. Literature review

It will be articulated around the rape victim's environment, behavior and person.

2.1. The environment and personal development

The family is the victim's closest environment. When rape occurs, family members sometimes mobilize to accompany the rape victim. In the long term, and in most cultures, support from family and friends is probably one of the most important factors in helping the victim overcome the trauma of sexual violence (UNHCR; 1995). It is important to point out that not all rape victims feel supported by community members. Some are left unprepared, and the environment makes their situation even more complicated. As Ayotte (2008: 94) puts it: "*I had been made to feel so guilty that it was all my fault, that I was convinced of it.*" This way of seeing the victim as the perpetrator of rape, or of holding the victim responsible, works against her and allows the abuser to live in peace.

2.2. Personal characteristics and sexual fulfillment

The adolescent's experience is determined by the nature of the relationships she maintains with those around her. The way in which her family and/or community responds to her needs plays an important role in her development. If you feel unloved, the chances are high that you won't fit in. Johanna (2019:96) says: *"I didn't trust anyone anymore. I no longer believed in anything. In fact, I was nothing. When rape occurs and the victim feels supported by her community, this contributes greatly to her recovery. Matthews (2017: 229) says: "people kept telling me how brave I was and that they were with me one hundred percent, and I have to say that their support and encouragement gave me wings, as did the righteousness of my cause". In a similar vein, Johanna (2019) says: "I turned to those who had softened my life for a while (...) I knew they didn't judge me, and that they respected me. I felt safe with them. I was part of their clan, and by their side I forgot everything. And I made them laugh to hide my misery. In the presence of strong social contact, rape victims feel privileged. Ayotte (2008: 447) says: "I realize more and more that I was privileged to be able to count on the people who supported me throughout this process. My husband and children have supported me valiantly. My friends have surrounded me with their affection and positive loyalty.*

2.3. Sexual behavior and fulfillment

Behavior refers to the way in which the community most often handles cases of rape. Generally speaking, in some remote areas of Cameroon, when a young girl is a victim of rape, no real action is taken to support her. Instead, she is stigmatized, considered in most cases as a bad person. The repercussions of this action make her feel even worse. As Ayotte (2008: 94) puts it: *"I'd been made to feel so guilty that it was all my fault that I was so convinced of it. However, we can see that the presence of NGOs in certain areas helps to improve case management. Generally speaking, cases entrusted to NGOs can benefit from medical, psychological and even legal support. Psychological support is of considerable benefit to the victim's mental health. Matthews (2017) says that the therapist always listened to me without judging me, which was perhaps even more important, he showed me that not only did he believe what I was telling him, but he didn't accuse me of being responsible for what had happened to me. In some developed regions, when a young girl is raped, she is more or less given medical support. It's not often that victims and even their families ask for psychological support.*

3. Social cognitive theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was developed by Bandura (1986). It focuses on the social and cultural interactions that shape the evolution of the individual in a given society. Problems of sexual violence will be managed in a given environment according to the principles of functioning established in that environment. He will therefore realize that the management of a case of rape will vary from one society to another. It's a theory that defines behavior as a "dynamic triad" in a reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioral and environmental factors. It analyzes psychological function through a triple reciprocal causality. Information processing (attention, memory, ability to use symbols, and problem-solving skills) changes over time, depending on the level of experience and maturation. Speaking of interaction,



Bandura (1986) points out that it is not enough to consider behavior as a function of the reciprocal effects of personal and environmental factors on each other, but that interaction must be understood as a reciprocal determinism of personal, environmental and behavioral factors interacting two by two and in a constantly variable way. Factors internal to the person (P) concern events experienced at cognitive, affective and biological levels, and their perception by the subject. Behavioral determinants (C) describe the patterns of actions actually performed and behavioral patterns. Determinants (E) represent properties of the social and organizational environment. The specific contribution of each factor will depend on the activities in progress, situational circumstances and socio-cultural constraints.

4. Study methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach. Our population consists of women who have been raped before marriage. They are also women who have received support of any kind from members of their community. The data collection tool is the interview guide. Content analysis will be used to test our research hypotheses.

4.1 hypothesis

We will start by presenting the general hypothesis of the study and then we will present the research hypotheses.

4.1.1. General hypothesis

Socio-cognitive mechanisms influence the sexual fulfillment of raped women. It was operationalized in three specific hypotheses, namely:

4.1.2. research hypothesis

- **RH1:** environment influences sexual fulfillment of raped women
- **RH2:** the person influences the sexual fulfillment of raped women:
- **RH3:** behavior influences sexual fulfillment of raped women s.

4.2. Presentation of interview guide

Our interview guide is composed as follows: the first part deals with the socio-demographic characteristics of our participants. This part is composed of four items: age, level of education, profession, age of rape. The second deals with environmental

determinants. The third section covers personal characteristics. The fourth part deals with behavioral determinants, and the last part evaluates sexual fulfillment.

4.3. Presentation of data of socio-demographic characteristics of participants

We conducted our in-depth interviews with five married women who were raped. For reasons of confidentiality, we have given them fictitious first names. They will be called respectively: Elie, Mimi, Fany, Bibi, Sabi, Ade. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the women.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics

	Elie	MIMI	Fany	Bibi	Sabi
Age	40	30	35	43	38
Study level	License	BACC	Probatory	CEPE	License
Profession,	Civil servant	Housekeeper	auto employment	auto employment	teachers
age of rape	22	16	27	25	30

4.4. Analysis of research hypothesis

We'll start by analyzing the items relating to the victim's environment.

4.4.1. Analysis of research hypothesis 1: environmental data

➤ Assessing the distance (relationship) between victim and aggressor

For the item on how the victim assesses the distance separating her from her attacker, we found that for the majority of our participants, there was really no distance between them and their attacker. Perpetrators of rape are most often people we know. It can be a neighbor, as in the case of Elie, who says: "*He was my neighbor and our families were so close, and he used to invite me over all the time, since we were already like a family*".



The perpetrator can even be the victim's father, as in the case of Bibi, who says: "There's no distance between me and the rapist, because he was my dad and I lived with him in the same house as he did, and before he did it, I couldn't even imagine that it could have come from him, because there was nothing to suggest that he could have done it". The abuser can also be a family friend. As in the case of Fany, who was raped by one of her mom's friends. She says: "He was a friend of my mother's, I trusted him, I wasn't afraid of him and I already called him uncle". We also had participants who said that the rapist was unknown. This was the case for MIMI, who said: "He was a stranger with whom I had no contact, whom I had never seen at the screen. So there's a big distance between him and me".

The item that measures where the rape took place

Analysis of this item has shown that there is no appropriate place for rape. In Bibi's case, the rape took place in the house where she lived. She says: "It always happened in my father's house, it was the ideal place". The same is true of Elie, who says: "He came to our house, I was sleeping in my room and I only felt that someone was on top of me and I couldn't defend myself". It can even take place at the executioner's home. For Fany, the rape took place at the torturer's home: "He came to pick me up where my mother worked, he took me to his house as it wasn't far from my mother's place of work and he abused me". It can also happen in the street. Sabi says: "It was in the street, I was going to do an errand for my mother".

4.4.2. Analysis of research hypothesis 2: behavior

For this second hypothesis, we were interested in the behavior that the victim and her community adopt in the face of rape.

➤ How do you deal with cases of rape at the community level?

Rape is managed in a variety of ways at community level. It takes account of local realities. In social environments where rape victims are often stigmatized, victims and their families may decide to remain silent. This is the case of Elie, who, in order to safeguard the family balance, says: "I was obliged to protect him because I saw that if I opened my mouth again to tell the family that my uncle had also raped me, it could cause a scandal". This is also the case for Sabi, who says: "To tell the truth, I've never said that to

a family member". In addition to keeping silent, some families take their offspring to hospital for medical treatment. Mimi: *"I was taken to hospital by my parents after I was raped. We met a doctor who prescribed tests and medication"*. Some victims have wanted to lodge a complaint against their abuser, but fearing the length of the procedure, have preferred to give up. Elie says: *"All I know is that the procedures are long and it's difficult to prove that you've been raped"*.

4.4.3. Analysis of research hypothesis 3: personal data

➤ How does the rape victim feel about herself after the rape?

The data shows that some victims feel guilty. They develop a fear of not being believed. Elie says: *"I was afraid, I was afraid that if my mother found out, she'd think that maybe I was already a girl who had sex, who took men out, but that's not what I was doing"*. The girls' hormonal systems were also disrupted, with far from negligible consequences. Mimi says: *"After my rape, my periods disappeared to the point where people thought I was pregnant, and it lasted maybe three months, so much so that my parents were already preparing to welcome this child, and then one day it reappeared"*. We also had a participant who was able to maintain her pregnancy because she had the support of her parents. This boosted her confidence. Mimi says: *"I had the full support of my parents because at the time I was living with my uncle and my aunt, my parents, they supported me psychologically because my aunt is a psychologist, so she talked to me for a long time, we talked for a long time, she really helped me a lot psychologically"*.

4.4.4. Sexual fulfillment

➤ How did you experience your sexuality after the rape before your marriage?

Before being raped, our participants had all already had sex alone. The question for us now is how they perceive sexual intercourse. It emerges from the discourse that some participants develop traumas at the moment of sexual intercourse. Bibi says: *"I'm really traumatized every time I see my husband coming towards me, every time my husband wants to penetrate me or starts caressing me, it awakens everything I experienced when I was young"*. Elie has almost the same feeling, she says: *"every time we go through the act, I always feel a turmoil and a depression that has never really been resolved"*. Fany says *"nothing, nothing, nothing I'd look at my partner instead, and after the sexual activity, I'd get so upset that, I didn't want to know anything more and then I'd leave the room. So it was a bit difficult for my husband to understand. Over time, some have managed to transcend this reality. Mimi: "At first it wasn't easy, I was even afraid of him touching me, because it gave me the impression that it was those people who were touching me, but with a lot of patience on his part, advice and psychological support, it helped me a lot"*.

5. Discussion of results

5.1. Discussion of the results of the research hypothesis1



The results of the data analysis suggest that the environment plays an important role in the development of the rape victim. Bandura (1986) states that the environment is one of the main components of the dynamic of factors that shape the individual. The environment is the living environment from which everyone unfolds freely if they are in phase with it.

The social environment is the very foundation of an individual's life in society. It must take measures to enable the rape victim to regain her equilibrium. But the way in which rape is managed, generally speaking, we realize that in the social environment, no measures are taken to enable the various victims to overcome this crisis, which encourages the phenomenon. In the environment, the victim is made to feel guilty, she is condemned, the abuser is not punished - these are just some of the reactions observed in the girl's environment.

5.2. Discussion of the results of the research hypothesis 2

Each society defines its mode of operation by elaborating a set of behavioral patterns and models to be adopted for its evolution. In terms of behavior, Bandura (1986) emphasizes the behavioral patterns and patterns of action that guide man's conduct in his environment. Clearly, there is no such thing as a fully described and detailed scheme for dealing with rape. Nothing is clearly defined for the management of rape cases, either for the perpetrator or the victim. This lack of knowledge and the non-application of rape case management schemes means that people are unable to act appropriately in the event of rape.

5.2. Discussion of the results of research hypothesis 3

Personal characteristics determine sexual fulfillment in marriage. Depending on their experience in the community, rape victims may involve others in the management of their rape. The knowledge that she won't be believed, for example, makes the rape victim prefer to keep silent. Although rape victims are more often stigmatized, some can still let everyone know that they've been raped. Sharing their painful experience is already the beginning of healing. In this case, speaking out is seen as medicine. Not only that, it's a way of confronting the problem they're facing.

Conclusion

At the end of our research on Socio-cognitive mechanisms and sexual fulfillment of female rape victims in Cameroon. This research was guided by the observation that women who were raped before marriage do not manage to have a fulfilling sexual life, yet some of them received support from people close to them (relatives, neighbors, even friends, etc.). This multi-faceted support should have enabled the victim to flourish in every way. However, we have observed that rape victims find it difficult to develop sexually with their partner. We recommend that parents establish a genuine climate of trust between themselves and their children, to enable rape victims to report the abuse they have suffered. We also recommend that they discuss sex education with their children, and draw their attention to the attitudes and reactions that certain family members may have towards them. The government should inform the public and ask for psychological care units for rape victims to be set

up in hospitals. And facilitate legal care for rape victims. It must also involve local and international NGOs that take care of victims of gender-based violence in the care of victims of sexual abuse.

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