

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

A needs assessment of survivors of sexual violence in  
KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

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## **Report commissioned by Tearfund**

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Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency building a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty. It has more than ten years' experience of working through church-based partners in the response to sexual violence.

Tearfund is also a founding member of We Will Speak Out ([www.wewillspeakout.org](http://www.wewillspeakout.org)) – an international Christian coalition working together to end sexual violence.



**Tearfund South Africa** is an affiliated organisation of Tearfund, based in Durban. It seeks to be an enabling organisation, coming alongside the most vulnerable people, building collaborations across boundaries so that the church and community work together to bring justice, peace and hope across the land.

**Front cover photo:** Christina Shange, Tearfund SA

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**Tearfund SA** is a Durban based organization (NPO), which is a branch of Tearfund UK; a UK based international NGO working across 60 countries globally. Tearfund SA is a relatively new organization, set up to accompany and strengthen local partnerships and collaborations in South Africa, with a specific focus on mobilizing the church. Tearfund UK has a long-term commitment to working with Churches globally with a vision to empower and enable them to address issues to poverty and justice. Since 2010, Tearfund UK has been involved in building national and global movements of faith that have a vision to end sexual violence. In partnership with the Anglican Communion and UNAIDS, they have launched a coalition called 'We will speak out'. ([www.wewillspeakout.org](http://www.wewillspeakout.org)). To date, the coalition has 17 members.

National coalitions have been developed in the Great Lakes countries of Rwanda, Burundi and DRC and in Liberia. Efforts are underway to do the same in Tanzania with a vision to end the harmful practice of FGM/C. South Africa, has the unfortunate reputation for being a nation where women and girls are extremely vulnerable to rape and sexual violence. The Government has a 365 National Action Plan to end gender-based violence. While there are many organizations working to address this issue, strong coalitions within the faith community are lacking. Over 80% of the population of South Africa professes a Christian faith that makes churches a powerful force that can do something significant to realize the plans instituted by the government.

Tearfund SA is grateful to its stakeholders, who took the time to arrange and refer survivors of sexual violence for the study. Without the co-ordination of KZN Christian Council, Diakonia, the Refugee communities, LifeLine Durban and Oasis Umlazi, this study would not have been possible. Thank you to the survivors of sexual violence who sacrificed their time to share their experiences and needs, in order to better our understanding of the depth and breadth of survivors' needs. Although the pain for survivors of sharing experiences was inevitable, the healing and sense of solidarity that emerged in focus groups was evidenced.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Rationale

It is estimated that, worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime (SVRI, 2011).<sup>1</sup> However, rates of sexual violence are difficult to determine in many societies due to significant under reporting resulting in unreliable statistics. Sexual violence thus remains an issue of deep shame to the survivors themselves and their families. In South Africa alone, rape of over 50 000 girls and women is reported annually (SVRI, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Therefore the rate of reported rate is 194 per 100 000 female population, at least three times higher than the United States. Despite these statistics, it is predicted, that only one in every nine rapes is reported.

In cognizance of the magnitude of sexual violence and gender based violence and the reality of it becoming a key focus issue globally, yet the stigma suffered by survivors keeps them silent. There is a real need for a movement of survivors to come together and express their needs and demands of policy makers so that responses can be urgent and meaningful, putting the most affected communities at the heart of the response. There are many lessons that can be drawn from the movements of people with HIV, where they became key advocates in shaping the global response. The aim of this report therefore is to assess the depth and breadth of survivors needs in order to determine the legitimacy and potential benefits of a survivor movement.

## 1.2 Purpose, Objectives and Significance

### 1.2.1 Purpose of the study

Despite sexual and gender based violence receiving increasing public attention globally, those affected remain silent (Johnson, 2012).<sup>2</sup> In order to address the lack of reporting and limited understanding of survivors experiences and needs, it is paramount that a movement of survivors come together and express their needs and demands of policy makers so that responses can appropriate and foster the healing and restoration of survivors of sexual violence.

In order to bridge the gap where the voices of survivors has been lacking; this study aimed to facilitate this process and empower survivors to champion change and effect current policy and interventions. Through collaboration with key partners working with survivors, providing safe space forums for survivors to share experiences, perceptions and vocalize action plans; Tearfund SA aims to strengthen survivor's advocacy role.

In cognizance of the extent of sexual violence in existence in South Africa, to hear the voice of every survivor is not feasible. However, through key

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual Violence Research Initiative (2011). <http://www.svri.org/factsheet.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, B.C. (2012). Aftercare for survivors of human trafficking. *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work*; 39(4): 370-389.

representative communities of survivors in South Africa, the voices of these survivors could begin to echo and empower others to no longer remain silent. The purpose of the study was therefore not to be generalizable to the survivor population, but rather transferable to different contexts and cultures of survivors. Tearfund SA is committed to walking with the survivors involved in the research for the long term. This is the first step in that journey, the learning from this process will shape the detail for the future.

### *1.2.2 Research Objectives*

The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore survivors understanding of sexual violence.
- Understand why survivors remain silent.
- Explore the needs of survivors.
- Map and explore the impact of sexual violence on the lives of individual survivors.
- Map priorities of survivors and begin understanding the process of healing and restoration for survivors
- Determine whether individual survivors would benefit from a survivor movement.

### *1.2.3 Significance of the study*

The outcomes of this study are beneficial in the following manner:

- The voices of survivors, which to date have been lacking, will enable Tearfund SA to assist churches and other key stakeholders understand the experiences and priorities survivors express- this then can help them respond in a meaningful way. The data generated will provide substantive evidence and insight into the lives of survivors and their needs. Tearfund will thus be able to facilitate appropriate response from churches and key stakeholders.
- Little is known currently regarding the in depth experience and needs of survivors globally, and specifically in the South African context. What is known cannot be measured or derived from documented empirical findings in most cases, but rather through anecdotal reports from providers and survivors. It is hoped that this study will generate greater understanding of survivors' experiences and needs. In allowing an open forum for survivors' voices to be heard the resultant outcome would be empowerment for individual survivors; and engagement in a survivor led focus for policy development and interventions.
- Ultimately, the establishment of a survivor movement based on the findings of this study generated by the voices of survivors will shape and align approaches for prevention and intervention for sexual violence. Not only will silent voices be heard, but also through survivor involvement, previous research recognizes the healing and restoration that follows.

- Engaging survivors in a movement to strategize and express experiences and needs will create a forum that will inform civil society to respond. The response of civil society to the knowledge and understanding gained through a survivor movement will allow for survivor sensitive and specific programmes or interventions. Planning and strategizing done at policy level will no longer lack insight, but will be well informed and strategic as advocated by survivors.

### 1.3 Methodology

A qualitative study design was employed in this study in order to gain an in depth understanding of the depth and breadth of sexual violence on individual lives. The focus group design emphasized the perceptions of the participants and due to the conversational process of focus groups, participants reacted to each other and unique data emerged.

The study was conducted in Durban's urban and surrounding rural areas, as well as Pietermaritzburg, both situated in Kwa Zulu Natal. KwaZulu Natal is reported as one of the provinces with the highest rates of sexual violence as well as HIV infection. Marion Ridge, a peri-urban community on the outskirts of Durban comprises of a majority coloured population. The survivor community from this area was coloured women of varying ages above 35 years of age. Inanda, a township. Inland from Durban is primarily populated by IsiZulu speaking Africans. The Refugee community that participated in the study, consisted of women 20 years and above, who had escaped the genocide in Rwanda. This community lives and work within Durban city and surrounds. LifeLine Durban's focus group included women working within the city centre and surrounding areas as sexworkers. These women varied in ages from 20 years of age till 40. Their places of work and homes differed but the majority of women live in the surrounding townships of `Durban and work in the city. Umlazi, the second largest township in South Africa is located on the east coast of KwaZulu Natal, and is the home of primarily IsiZulu speaking Africans, This survivor group were a small contingent of middle aged IsiZulu woman. Pietermaritzburg, a city in KwaZulu natal formed the KZNCC survivor group, that consisted of IsiZulu speaking Africans varying in age from their early twenties, to fifty years old.

The study population used for this study was therefore survivors of sexual violence affiliated to the partners identified by Tearfund in the aforementioned areas. Using non-probability sampling<sup>3</sup> the researchers selected cases that were information rich and had the experience and knowledge to understand survivors.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Burns, N., Grove, S.K. (2009). *The Practice of Nursing Research: Appraisal, Synthesis and Generation of evidence*. Missouri: Saunders.

<sup>4</sup> Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The partners identified the survivors with whom they worked, and provided them with the information regarding the study.

A total of 37 survivors of sexual violence participated in the study. These survivors were referred by Tearfund partners that included: LifeLine Durban; Refugees Community; Oasis-Umlazi; Diakonia network (Inanda and Marion Ridge) and KZN Christian Council. A total of five focus groups were conducted, as well as two one on one interviews.

## **1.4 Data Collection**

The general method of data collection employed in the study was focus group discussions, which were semi-structured. A semi structured interview guide enabled the researchers to elicit in depth responses from participants, in order to meet the study objectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994).<sup>5</sup> Questions were open ended to allow for elaboration and sharing of experiences and recommendations. The questions posed were aligned with the research objectives of the study. Prompts and probes were used where depth and insight were lacking, according to the researchers discretion.

This data collection strategy was selected as it was congruent with the methodology of the study, and enabled survivors to share their understanding of sexual violence and their needs. If survivors were uncomfortable sharing information in a group setting, a one on one interview was arranged.

In order to ensure proper support and referral for survivors for whom focus groups resulted in the onset of reliving trauma and its effects; Tearfund ensured immediate support for individual by having a counselor present and onsite.

The focus group discussion and one on one interview were voice recorded, and participants were made aware of this prior to consenting. The focus groups discussions were sensitive to local languages. If participants were not comfortable with conversing in English, their mother tongue was be used and translated in real time by a delegated translator at each respective focus group.

Prior to conducting the research study TearFund conducted a pilot study to test probing questions, identify barriers in the data collection process and to minimize researcher bias. One participant was interviewed and TearFund realized the importance of ensuring the participants understanding of probing questions and of identifying concepts during the interview to probe further. No adjustment to the interview schedule was required.

## **1.5 Data Analysis**

Focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim in English. Analysis began immediately after focus group closure. Thematic content analysis was used for

analysis of the data that was generated (Cresswell, 2007).<sup>5</sup> In thematic content analysis, the data is analyzed for specific themes. Data collected were aggregated into large clusters of ideas to support themes.

In this study thematic analysis is imperative in order to clearly represent identified themes in survivors' iterations. For each group question, main themes were summarized, including non-verbal cues. A concept map was derived from the analysis and the findings conceptualized to meet the objectives and proposed outcomes.

## **1.6 Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure the findings of this qualitative study were applicable to other settings the following were considered for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### *1.6.1 Credibility*

Credibility refers to ensuring that the description of the reality explored is accurately conveyed (Gillis & Jackson, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Credibility was achieved in the study through the use of rich descriptions and where possible, the participant's words to allow them to speak for themselves. In addition credibility was further established by ensuring partners assisted in the analysis of data. This was done by member checking. Member checking will be conducted by contacting partners in order to confirm that the emerged themes were consistent with data generated. In so doing, the researchers will ensure that the emerging themes of the reality are true to survivors.

### *1.6.2 Transferability*

Transferability pertains to the relevance of the study results to other situations.<sup>7</sup> To ensure transferability in this study; the researchers provide thick, rich descriptions of the data collection process and analysis. Through describing the context explicitly the reader can judge for themselves the applicability of the research findings to their own context.

### *1.6.3 Dependability*

Dependability in research measures how closely researchers with similar levels of experience would make the same observations of the phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Results from dependable studies should be consistent with different studies done by different researchers. In this study, dependability was achieved by using an audit trail to show the data gathered and the methods used. An audit trail is a

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<sup>5</sup> Creswell, J.W.(2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

<sup>6</sup> Gillis, A., & Jackson, M. J. (2002). *Nursing research: Methods and interpretation*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis

transparent description of research steps taken from the start of the research steps to the development and reporting of findings. Another researcher should be able to use the data obtained in the study to confirm the conclusions made by the principal researcher.

#### *1.6.4 Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to whether two researchers are able to assess the data independently and agree on the final results of the data analysis.<sup>7</sup> For this study an audit trail will be used to ensure confirmability of the study and to promote neutrality. The main component of confirmability is neutrality. Neutrality denotes that the results should not be dependent on the researcher but on the participants.

### **1.7 Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure the research study is ethically sound the following ethical considerations were adhered to as specified by the Medical Research Council of South Africa (2003)<sup>7</sup>:

- i) **Respect for the autonomy:**-In this regard the participants were treated as unique individuals. They were given the freedom of choice to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Respect was given to their basic human rights as individuals.
- ii) **Informed consent:**-The intentions and motives of the study were clearly presented to the participants on an information sheet and written informed consent was obtained. The participants were given a copy of the consent form with an information sheet. Contact numbers for the researchers were given to participants if they have any queries.
- iii) **Sensitivity:** - Sensitivity in research implies balancing scientific interest (the research) with general values and norms affecting the human dignity of the people involved. The researchers were sensitive to the values and norms of the participants and did not impose or challenge these.
- iv) **Confidentiality:**-For the purpose of this study, names were not used, but each participant was allocated a number, to maintain confidentiality. Participants were aware that their participation in the study would remain anonymous. The interview was held in a private seminar room in the partner facilities and only the researchers and participants were present. The participant's were

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<sup>7</sup> Medical Research Council. (2008). Guidelines of Ethics for Medical Research: General Principles (Fourth Edition). (<http://www.sahealthinfo.org/ethics/ethics.htm>)

also aware that data would be safeguarded and stored privately and only accessed by the researchers of the study.

## **1.8 Data Management and Dissemination**

Hard copies of all transcripts and participants details will be kept securely by Tearfund. This data will remain stored for 5 years. The researchers will store all electronic data on a password-protected personal computer that only the researchers have access to. In addition, no names or personal information will appear on any transcripts.

The findings and recommendations of the study will be disseminated to the stakeholders and role-players in order to effect change and advocacy for survivors of sexual violence. The findings will be presented to key role-players during the 16 days of Activism in November 2013. Moreover the findings of the study will inform and guide Tearfund in the upcoming phases of building a survivor movement

## **2. FINDINGS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

A total of 37 survivors of sexual violence were included in this qualitative study. The sample interviewed in this study were only women, due to the fact that many of the partners work mainly with women. However, during data collection participants acknowledged the prevalence of sexual violence in communities being perpetrated against boys and men, however, due to the stigma, many remain unreported. It is hoped that further studies will be able to target male survivors.

Survivor focus groups were conducted in Pietermaritzburg (KZNCC); Marion Ridge, Durban City (Refugees and LifeLine) and Umlazi. These focus groups consisted of 5 survivors, 4 survivors, 10 survivors, 12 survivors and 4 survivors respectively. The largest focus group was that of survivors of sexual violence who are sexworkers. One on one interviews consisted of 2, one in Marion Ridge and one in Inanda. The one on one interviews were conducted as in both cases no other survivors came for the pre-arranged focus groups. The participants in the study varied demographically in age, race and socio-economic status.

The main findings of the emerged themes were aligned to the objectives which were systematically identified through an iterative process. Through the process of coding, categorizing and identification of themes, the raw data of the voices of survivors were transformed into significant findings. The experiences implicitly shared by participants were aggregated in alignment with the research objectives of the study; which included survivors understanding of sexual violence, why survivors remain silent; how sexual violence has affected their lives, what survivors need to heal and whether a survivor movement would be of benefit to an individual survivor.

### **2.2 Survivors understanding of sexual violence**

Central to understanding the needs of survivors, is exploring what survivors conceptualize as sexual violence. The majority of iterations of survivors across focus groups were consistent. However the conceptualizations were dissimilar from that of refugees, many of whom experienced sexual violence as a war crime and those of sex workers who encounter sexual violence daily in the red light areas.

The pervasive stance of the participants in regard to sexual violence was its frequent occurrence within families and homes by those known to the survivor. The central themes that emerged from the descriptions of participants, were sexual violence as: force, personal violation; cyclical in nature and a loss of control.

### 2.2.1 Force

Frequent references were made by participants regarding sexual violence as an act of force. Use of force by strangers, partners, husbands, managers, militants and clients in the case of sex workers was considered characteristic of sexual violence. The majority of participants eluded to the fact that force was used, due to the victim not consenting or giving permission for sexual acts. This resulted in use of force by the perpetrator and an act of sexual violence being committed. The following iterations highlight this emerged theme:

*“I understand sexual violence, whenever, when a man wants to do sex with you by force, no consent. Even though he may consult you, you may not want it.”* (Participant 9, Focus Group 2)

*“When the person takes advantage of forcing themselves on you.”* (Participant 2, Focus Group 3)

*“Its force, forcing sex on somebody. Sexual violence with me was various different rapes. I would say being forced to sleep with someone you don’t know and being used by somebody to have their own way with you, that is sexual violence.”* (Participant 3, Focus Group 3)

*“Sometimes it is without permission, someone forces you even in marriage. The husband can force the wife to sleep with him, that is sexual violence.”* (Participant 10, Focus Group 4)

Coupled to the theme of force was numerous participants’ understanding of sexual violence primarily as a result of manipulation due to power relations. Many incidents of sexual violence reported by participants were by managers and people in authority such as police, and people of status. Abuse of power in these incidents resulted in perpetrators manipulating survivors in order to sexually violate them. Withholding of pay and positions of hierarchy are methods of force used by perpetrators to commit sexual violence. Manipulation due to power relations is clearly outlined by participants in the following excerpts:

*“Sometimes the perpetrator is your manager. I have had that where my manager tries to sleep with me. That is why I no longer look for jobs in the work place because who do you tell, who do you go to, to report this, this is sexual violence, exploitation in the work place.”* (Participant 11; Focus Group 4)

*“Sometime even the police will find you and they will tell you to take a bribe and sometimes they even rape you without consent, so you don’t report.”*(Participant 2; Focus Group 4)

*“The police are even the ones who are raping, they force us.”* (Participant 7: Focus Group 4)

*“Sometimes this happens in the workplace where the Boss wants favors from you or to pay your salary and in return he sexual harass you.” (Focus Group 5)*

### *2.2.2 Personal Violation*

Personal violation was a common thread that pervaded participants’ iterations of their understanding of sexual violence. The commonality expressed by participants was that sexual violence did not necessarily need to be full penetration, but it was considered as an act that violated their personal boundaries, and was inappropriate. Any action that crosses an individual’s personal boundaries, even if attempted was conceptualized by participants as sexual violence. This pervasive theme can be seen in the following statements extracted from the voices of survivors:

*“It is anything that is inappropriate or that you feel is inappropriate, even a hand too high up the leg. That to me it is a violation” (One on one Interview)*

*“ I certainly believe that in any form if it crosses your personal boundaries, it is sexual assault even it was attempted and it isn’t full penetration or full rape.” (One on one interview)*

*“When the person takes advantage of forcing themselves on you.” (Participant 2; Focus Group 3)*

### *2.2.3 Cyclical in nature*

From the outset of the first focus group till the last, the prevalence of multiple incidents of sexual violence being committed against individual survivors was significant. In participants’ iterations, the theme which emerged was that of sexual violence as a vicious cycle. Individuals reported multiple rapes, especially those working as sex workers where risk is heightened. These cycles were common to individuals as well as in families where generational sexual violence exists. Sexual violence follows children of survivors who are considered by “society” as loose people and deserving of such treatment. Following are excerpts describing this theme:

*“Sexual violence is rooted sometimes in families; it seems there is a reoccurrence.” (Participant 4; Focus Group 1)*

*“It’s generational.” (Participant 3; Focus Group 3)*

*“Sexual violence doesn’t only affect us, it affects our children as well. They see us as prostitutes, and they say see your mom is a prostitute you can have it as well.” (Participant 2: Focus Group 4)*

#### *2.2.4 Loss of control*

Participants understanding of sexual violence, also emerged as an issue of control. Sexual violence was associated with the theme of loss of control of the perpetrator's faculties. In being unable to control emotions of anger, lust, greediness or power, the result is sexual violence. In most iterations focusing on understanding of sexual violence, perpetrators are seen by participants as being void of controlling inbuilt emotion or desire and in so doing, taking advantage of their vulnerability. This vulnerability is evidenced as one of economic vulnerability in the case of sex workers, emotional vulnerability in marriage or vulnerability of refugees in conflict situations. This predominant theme is evidenced in the following excerpts:

*"People are angry, so the anger is directed somehow to those that are vulnerable and a person gets angry and takes it out on somebody else."*  
(Participant 1; Focus Group 1)

*"Sexual violence is related to hunger and lust and greediness."* (Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

### **2.3 Why survivors remain silent**

The deafening silence of survivors that is evident in the lack of reporting of sexual violence is not without an explanation. The iterations of participants around the reason for silence are five fold and the weight of these themes further justifies this silence. The themes that emerged through the data were identified as: threat, fear, self-blame, failing system and protection. These themes highlight the significant role society and support structures surrounding them impinge on survivors; in forcing them to remain silent.

#### *2.3.1 Threat*

Silence is an expected outcome described by survivors, due to the various forms of threat they encounter which keeps them silent. The threat of harm to oneself or family members was frequently referred to by participants as the reason for under reporting. The harm that was either a reality due to the perpetrators status or position of authority or perceived to be a reality was sufficient to keep participants from reporting the sexual violence inflicted on them. In the case of the refugee community the perpetrators were the militants and in reporting the threat to them was immense. In some communities participants reported that the perpetrators were either family members or well know in the community, and the threat they faced in reporting outweighed the acceptance of the trauma keeping them silent. Sex workers face multiple threats in that some of the incidents of sexual violence are perpetrated by police who they should report to. The threat of harm to themselves and their families prevents them from reporting these cases. The threat is further affected by use of intimidation by perpetrators. Some of the realities of threat are outlined in the following excerpts:

*“The threat of harm to yourself or others that you love, the last thing you want is to take responsibility for others being harmed because you spoke up” (One on one interview)*

*“What was their motive behind the attack in the first place. So why put yourself in the situation where you will be hounded by these people now... Now not to rape you but to kill you, to silence you. Also that is a problem, sometimes you are raped by someone who is from a prominent family. And you are nobody, they have money and they have ways and means. Others have police in the family” (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)*

*“Half of the township were for him, then the other half were on our side. He caused so much animosity for us because she couldn’t go to school because she was being sworn, she had destroyed a beautifully happy married man’s home.” (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)*

*“Keep quiet because you are afraid to talk or are you scared people will kill you.” (One on one interview, Inanda)*

*“Intimidation is part of the problem. You try to open your mouth and you are intimidated.” (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)*

*“What I was thinking at the time was I was scared to talk because it would come back on him. He would kill me so I choose to die silently” (Participant 9; Focus Group 2)*

### **2.3.2 Fear**

The majority of participants in the study reported that fear was one of the overriding reasons for their silence. The roots of these fears were expressed as fear of judgement by family, friends and society; fear of stigma due to the perceptions of society that survivors of sexual violence are “loose, uneducated, looking for it” individuals and furthermore fear for their future. A number of participants eluded to the fact that women who are shamed, are unlikely to ever marry or have a future. A common source of overall fear in each focus group was that of judgement by others. The role of fear as a silencer is epitomized in the following iterations of participants:

*“People take advantage of us working on the streets. If you report we get asked what were you looking for. Even if you were at a bar having a drink, the first question what were you looking for, what were you doing at that time of night. Judgment keeps survivors silent.” (Participant 1; Focus group 4)*

*“Sometimes other people’s values make them have attitude and we have fear of what people will say, then it is better to keep quiet.” (Participant 3; Focus group 4)*

*“It’s the judgment of people, they will ask, what were you wearing. What were you looking for at the tavern at night.” (Participant 4; Focus group 1)*

*“People have belief that people who have been raped are loose people. People are not educated.” (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)*

*“Sometimes it’s scary, you don’t know if you say what will happen. People can laugh at you and say oh shame. Sometimes it can cause you to not even find a man. Someone to marry.” (Participant 8; Focus group 2)*

### 2.3.3 Self Blame

Added to the threat and fear faced by survivors of sexual violence, is a sense of self-blame. Participants highlighted the impact of feeling that what was done to them was deserved, was significant and would prevent them from speaking out. The self-blame was often reported as a result of others enforcing their perceptions on them, as they got what and they wanted or deserved it; to individual survivors feeling that they deserved what they got. Many of the participants were sexually violated as children and survived harsh home environments, from abuse to living in areas of conflict. In such cases of vulnerability, such distorted views of self-blame are expected and further add to silencing survivors. The participants’ excerpts outline the theme of self-blame clearly:

*“Many people die silently because they are scared to tell as others blame them. That’s why I myself decided to keep quiet because I was thinking my parents, they would blame me. Why you went there. I decided to keep quiet for myself. ” (Participant 8; Focus Group 2)*

*“When you are reporting no one believes your story, because they say you were asking for it. You come to a situation where you have to keep quiet, .because of the attitude, so it is better to keep quiet.” (Participant 4; Focus Group 4)*

*“Sometimes you blame yourself, you think maybe you are to blame. Sometimes people call us idiots, they don’t understand where we are coming from, they don’t understand the pressures, that are making us prostitute. So it’s very hard as there is no understanding.” (Participant 6; Focus Group 4)*

### 2.3.4 Failing Systems

The emerged theme of failing systems was central to each focus group discussion. Participants reported that inadequate, unsympathetic services and lack of support after enduring sexual violence prevented them from reporting. Participants stated that after being through the trauma of sexual violence, to go through the reporting system that currently exists and be treated as a criminal was re-traumatizing. Coupled to the poor service and support provided by police and service providers, was that due to a history of failed convictions of

perpetrators, participants who had multiple incidents of sexual violence preferred not to report. Many participants expressed that they lacked trust in the system and therefore preferred silence than being betrayed again. The theme of failing systems is depicted in the following iterations of participants:

*“People keep quiet because there are no systems in place. You will report and then you have to pay bribes and therefore there is no need. So there is power and money that keeps survivors silent. There is no support for survivors after reporting, you don’t know where to go”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 4)

*“Previous incidents of cases that have been tried and not received justice, so even someone who has just been raped, they will just look and think nothing is going to even happen, .what’s the point. So they just close down.”* (Participant 3; Focus group 1)

*“Why survivors would keep quiet, is the way we get treated, when we go and report it. I feel authorities have let us down big time. They make you the victim, become like you are the criminal now, you committed the crime, and they are not sympathetic.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*“Sometimes we report and nothing happens, the docket just disappears.”* (Participant 9; Focus Group 4)

### 2.3.5 Protection

Silence as a result of survivors protecting identity and families, was emphasized by participants. In cases where the perpetrators were family members or known to the family, the need to protect their family unit was a necessity, as well as in cases where the husband was a perpetrator and the breadwinner. The following excerpts outline the emerged theme of protection as the reason for the silence of survivors:

*“I felt that I was the protector of my family and it is often why people remain silent as often the abuser is close to you or known to the family.”* (One on one interview)

*“Why some people are quiet or silent about something is because sometimes sexual violence happen to some in the family, it happened to me by my uncle”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 2)

*“Sometimes we are protecting those we love. Like my mother, I was protecting her, I kept quiet for her.”* (Participant 10; Focus Group 4)

## 2.4 How are survivors' lives affected?

The impact of sexual violence on the lives of survivors was expressed by survivors as multi-faceted and crippling. However despite these effects, many reported that they had risen as strong women, motivated to overcome their trauma and help others. The emerged themes surrounding the effects of sexual violence include the following: every facet, scar, resilience, addictions and family disintegration. Fundamental to the iterations of survivors, was that there is victory after surviving sexual violence.

### 2.4.1 "Every facet"

The all encompassing effects of sexual violence were evidenced as participants shared the impact their trauma/trauma's has had on their lives. Sexual violence was expressed by participants as affecting every facet of their lives, from physical health, to character changes, emotional debilitation, distortion of sexuality and inability to complete school/college. For some the trauma has affected participants physically, and for some they have noticed change in their natures, from being quite and subdued to wild and uncaring. Many of the participants also reported that their trauma had emotionally numbed them and forced them to dislike sexual acts. A number of participants reported that they left school after being sexually violated due to being unable to concentrate, as well as in cases where they were ashamed of what had happened. As can be seen the effects of sexual violence are far-reaching and differ in the lives of survivors, but generally a common thread of significant change in many facets can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"My body has broken down and I have been told by my doctors that is the main reason why I got sick, the trauma has manifested physically. I had to drop out of school when I was 14"* (One on one interview)

*"And it made me rebellious at home"* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*"For me I have been affected completely, because all the years I have been with my husband, forced to do sex without love and consent makes me not loving sex."* (Participant 9; Focus Group 3)

*"I used to be a very quiet person but now when people are looking at me, I am nothing I am dirty. I have really changed."* (Participant 10; Focus Group 4)

*"I have had multiple rapes, about 20, It has numbed me, I do not have feelings, I do not see myself in a relationship now, I can't trust anyone, and It has broken me inside. I don't want to be in a relationship."* (Participant 8; focus Group 4).

### 2.4.2 Permanent Scar

The ramifications of sexual violence on survivors' lives were expressed by the majority of participants across focus groups as an experience that has scarred

them. This theme emerged through the focus group discussions as something they find hard to forget and was described as a scar that will always be there to remind them. This scar was represented in the iterations of participants as a lifelong pain, a memory never to be forgotten and it has instilled a fear of men in many. Many survivors shared that they find it difficult to trust any man, or enter into relationships with men due to the distrust entrenched in them due to sexual violence. Interestingly participants shared that the scar is often seen by other men and makes them vulnerable to repeated sexual violence. This depiction of a scar as an effect on their lives is voiced in the following excerpts:

*“I think once you have been rape it sort of, there is, I have spoken to quite a few people. Who have been raped, and they say the same thing. They seek you out or something. Its like you have a light on your forehead you know because everybody just wants to do the same thing over and over.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*“When something happen like that it is hard to forget.”* (Participant 8; Focus group 2)

*“It is not easy to forget and it is always fresh, whenever you see such things happening or hearing in the news.”* (Participant 3; Focus Group 2)

*“But rape stays with you it becomes part of you, you have to learn to relate to it, its like a scar, like when a dog bites you it leaves a scar, you can walk tall and that but when you look at the scar you are reminded of it. The scar will always be there.”* (Participant 8; Focus group 4)

*“I am afraid of men, it developed fear in me, and I can't trust any man even a pastor.”* (Participant 10; Focus Group 4)

### 2.4.3 Resilience

In overcoming the trauma of sexual violence, many participants verbalized that they triumphed as stronger individuals. This strength or resilience was seen with a positive as well as a negative connotation. In a positive light, the strength through the pain made survivors able to cope with the trauma and to be an encouragement and motivation to other survivors. Some participants even reported following different career pathways in order to help other survivors. In a negative light, the trauma of sexual violence has created a resilience that is rooted in a hard heart, where survivors have numbed themselves to the world and in that way built up walls, resulting in distrust and a “Don't care” attitude. In the case of sex workers, this has enabled them to be able to sell their bodies to survive as they have built up resilience, despite the pain they endure on a daily basis. The resilience theme is evidenced in the following excerpts:

*“For me I was a quiet person, but now I am a wild person. I have become like a devil, I don't care about anybody. I don't give a damn of whatever.”*

*Sometimes I will stay out the whole night and I don't have money to go back home. I will wait. I will wait..even though nobody comes, I won't care. My heart is so hard. ”* (Participant 11; Focus Group 4)

*“I turned this incident into something that can be able to help others, because I did not have anyone to help me. So I would say, my life was changed into a more focused and positive. ”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)

*“The trauma has affected me but I am coming out a strong person attracting so many lives of traumatized people to live again.”* (Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

*“What happens to you when you go through all these things, is you become hard and you become scared.”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 3)

*“Rape is always there, it strengthens character as a women, it makes your heart hard to fight for myself with these other guys. “* (Participant 8: Focus Group 4)

*“It really makes your hard heart. Knowing you can go on the road, knowing of the violence, but you still go there, your heart is so hard. You don't care, because you feel you have been raped already so what is the difference.”* (Participant 10; Focus Group 4)

#### **2.4.4 Addictions**

Addictions as a way to numb the pain of sexual violence in survivors' lives are reported to be significant. Some survivors reported never using alcohol or drugs prior to their sexual violence, but turned to abusing substances in order to deal with their pain. Addictions were expressed as being that of drugs and alcohol. References made to addictions as the effect of sexual violence can be seen in the following iterations:

*“After in dealing with the trauma of rape. I abandoned myself. I was just doing anyhow and I didn't have anyone to talk to as a means of support. I then resorted to alcohol and I was out partying with friends and all that, and then trying to numb the pain and loneliness.”* (Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

*“I turned to alcohol and I started drinking , and it was my first time ever touching alcohol at all. I remember the first shock of alcohol going down, the sting, and I though how could people do this. But after the stinging and coughing it just sort of made me forget. I became dependent on alcohol to drown out my sorrows. That's how I survived at that time.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*"It completely changed me. I became a drug addict to numb the pain from it."*  
(Participant 5; Focus Group 4)

#### *2.4.5 Family disintegration*

Considering that many cases of sexual violence are within families or perpetrated by persons close to the family; the effect is not only on the individual but also the family unit. Family disintegration thus emerged as a common theme according to participants. This was described as a result of the survivor withdrawing in order to protect and often leaving the home, or cases where the survivor spoke up and caused hatred or disunity within the family. The theme of family disintegration is highlighted in the following excerpts:

*"For me it has affected me because my children have no respect for my husband."* (Participant 3; Focus Group 2)

*"My children don't want to know me"* (Participant 3; Focus Group 3)

*"I was raped by my uncle. It was very painful and I never told anyone at home"*  
(Participant 6; Focus Group 4)

*"I was raped by my stepfather and because of that it messed up my life, I spoke up and my life changed. I hate my younger sister who is my stepfather's daughter, because she reminds me of him."* (Participant 5; Focus Group 4)

## **2.5 What do survivors need to heal?**

In exploring the needs of survivors for healing and restoration, many key themes emerged. There was a general consensus on themes that pervaded the focus group and one on one interviews. The needs of survivors are summarized in the following key themes that emerged through the voices of survivors: a safe forum, acknowledgement, supportive systems and empowerment.

#### *2.5.1 Safe Forum*

The need for a safe space, where survivors could share their experiences, learn from each other, learn to forgive and heal was voiced by participants in the study. Many participants reported that the focus groups for the study were the first forum they had attended and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the study. Some found solace in the fact that they were not the only ones suffering with the trauma of sexual violence. Participants mentioned that a safe forum was one of the necessary steps for healing and restoration from the trauma of sexual violence. A safe space with other survivors where there was an understanding of the trauma created an avenue for many to express themselves and simultaneously heal. Some of the excerpts to follow express this need for a safe forum:

*“For me to hear people with a similar experience coming out and sharing, heals me. Through them I see myself and I gain so much support, that feeling that I am not the only one. And learning from what has helped others to survive also adds to resiliency, you look at life differently. Having other people sharing the same experience are quite key and other survivors need to hear more voices and a face.”* (Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

*“Yes a support group of such would be good. Maybe if we are there to speak to each other and encourage one another that there is hope.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*“I would need to have such a group often ,because if I hear what happened to others, I though I was the one suffering from these experiences, then I find my experiences are a bit lesser..and maybe by sharing everyone can feel relief.”* (Participant 6; Focus Group 2)

*“Thank you for your time offering to us to have such gathering, it is the first time in our lives having such gathering.”* (Participant 2; Focus Group 2)

### *2.5.2 Acknowledgement*

The power of having their voices heard is considered by survivors as essential for healing. Currently, the judgment and stigma that is a hallmark in communities prevents survivors from speaking. Participants, however expressed that if what they had to say was valued and believed by societies, this would enable healing. Acknowledgement also includes ensuring that justice takes place and that society as a whole recognizes the pain of survivors and that they are the victims. Further to this, is that the survivors mentioned that perpetrators need to be aware of the effects sexual violence has on individual lives. In making perpetrators aware of the trauma of sexual violence and its ramifications, would foster their healing. The value of acknowledgement is outlined in the following excerpts:

*“We need our voice to be heard, we need advocacy. We need to be able to talk without fear of being stigmatized or intimidated. Because I believe the more people that can come out, the more South Africa can be able to eradicate this sexual violence thing.”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)

*“An awareness campaign for men who rape about survivors , what are the consequences, so that they would know what survivors go through, and then maybe they won't rape if they know it stays with the person for the rest of their lives.”* (Participant 10; Focus group 4)

*“What is important is that the government open spaces like this where they can hear our voices. We need open spaces like this, to help. We would like to know others who want to talk and network to help others and support each other by our lives.”* (Participant 5; Focus Group 4)

### 2.5.3 Supportive systems

The value of support as an integral theme in healing was iterated by participants. Due to lack of support, many prefer to remain silent, however with sympathetic, non-judgmental support systems in place; survivors felt healing would be the outcome. The supportive systems should commence from immediate reporting, where police are sympathetic and non-judgmental in dealing with survivors to ensuring ongoing psychosocial support post-trauma. Some participants expressed that appointed people that are either survivors themselves or individuals equipped to handle survivors of sexual violence should be deployed. This would curb re-traumatization that so often is evidenced in reporting. In addition, survivors reported that supportive systems in healing also include the church and their relationship with God. The importance of supportive systems is highlighted in the following iterations:

*“They need people who are sensitive to what you have been through, maybe people who themselves have been through it. People who understand what you are going through, who will treat you like the victim and not the criminal”*  
(One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

*“Being helpful in that time alone, what supported me was church people outside.”* (Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

*“Sharing, going to church and gospel music helps to heal.”* (Participant 4; Focus Group 2)

### 2.5.4 Empowerment

Many survivors echoed that sexual violence was often due to their vulnerability. For some it was their intimate partner who was the breadwinner, forcing the survivor to remain silent due to her dependence on him. For others, such as sex workers, sexual violence is a result of economic vulnerability where women are forced to sell their bodies to feed their families. They are faced daily with sexual violence, and are required to do things which are painful for them but they persevere in order to survive. The need for empowerment in order to heal was exclaimed by participants. Empowerment for them included, having alternative earning opportunities in the case of sex workers, as well helping one another as a form of being empowered. This theme emerges in the following extracts:

*“I think if the government gave activities for the women and ladies to do, job opportunities, the people in the jobs they got money, so they don’t care for us who have to stand on the street, They need to provide activities for us”*  
(Participant 4; Focus Group 4)

*“We have so many talents ..we need some type of career paths. Not all of us are there because we like to be there. There are those there for fun. Some of us are there for economic reason, as we need to provide for our families. We*

*need some kind of support, opportunities, this will make us look at life differently. Life is harsh, we are the breadwinners at home” (Participant 3; Focus Group 4)*

*“We would like to know others who want to talk and network to help others and support each other by our lives” (Participant 5, Focus Group 4).*

## **2.6 Would a survivor movement be of benefit?**

At the outset of the focus group, the concept of a survivor movement was described to participants as a safe forum, similar to those created in response to HIV. It would place survivors of sexual violence at the heart of response, where survivors would meet fellow survivors and express their needs and requirements, that would effect and advocate informed change within communities.

Throughout focus group discussions and one on one interviews, participants constantly referred to the need for support groups, and similar gatherings where voices could be heard and unity could be attained amongst survivors. As can be seen from the emerged themes of the study with regards to characteristics of a survivor movement, there is consensus that this is their need. When the question of the benefit of a survivor movement was posed, every participant verbally expressed that this was crucial or nodded in agreement. Some of the themes that emerged regarding benefits of a survivor movement were: facilitate healing; foster solidarity; stop silence.

### *2.6.1 Facilitate Healing*

The benefits of a survivor movement were that it would facilitate individual healing, by walking alongside each other in community. This was seen to be due to hearing one another’s stories and supporting each other through the process of healing. The benefit of facilitation of healing is evidenced in the following statements:

*“It will provide healing” (Participant 2; Focus Group 2)*

*“..I think a survivor’s movement is everything. I think if I had had that years ago. It may not have been as hard to receive the freedom and healing I have.” (One on one interview)*

*“It will create healing spaces for people who had gone to traumatic experiences to feel healed again and on the other hand to help heal others through their own life experiences.” (Participant 1; Focus Group 5)*

### *2.6.2 Foster Solidarity*

A survivor movement is conceptualized by participants as a means of fostering solidarity and therefore benefiting not only individuals, but also the community of

survivors. Participants recognize the power of standing together as one and being a voice for each other in order to implement change in society. This theme emerges in the following excerpts:

*“The movement can be a stepping stone to say can we do something.”*  
(Participant 2; Focus Group 1)

*“I think it would help, the outcry against rape, the more aware people become the greater people stand together.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

### 2.6.3 Stop Silence

The value of a survivor movement in providing an environment where people are free to speak and voice their trauma, was mentioned by participants. A survivor movement could benefit reporting of sexual violence as people gain the courage to speak out and know that they will be supported. In some cases, survivors only realized in the forum of speaking about sexual violence that they were violated as children without knowing it was wrong. Thus in creating survivor movements, participants felt that many unreported cases may be identified. This theme is outlined in the following excerpts:

*“if there is a voice and a person knows where to go to..”* (Participant 1; Focus Group 1)

*“Maybe more people would speak out and think it can be done, others may come and speak out. It can really benefit us.”* (One on one interview, Marion Ridge)

## 2.7 Conclusion

From survivors understanding of sexual violence, to reasons for silence and the ramifications of this human atrocity; survivor’s voices echo a cry for help. This echo filtered through the similar, as well as differing experiences of sexual violence; those faced by refugees in war torn Rwanda, to that of sex workers fighting to survive the streets of Durban. Every participant in the study agreed that a survivor movement would be beneficial to individual survivors in multiple ways. The possibility of a survivor movement filled participants with hope and proved to be a response that was required for healing for survivors of sexual violence.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In hearing the voice of survivors, the stark reality for their silence and their needs for healing were clearly expressed. The following recommendations summarize the change that was voiced to the researchers, as crucial in order to eliminate the barriers to speaking out, as well as what is required to facilitate healing:

#### **3.1 Community**

- Eliminate the stigma and judgment that evidently surrounds survivors of sexual violence in communities through education and awareness of the causes of sexual violence.
- Ensure public awareness of reporting of sexual violence: who, what and where.
- Educate perpetrators and men in general on the effects of sexual violence on survivors 'lives.

#### **3.2 Leaders**

- Current reporting systems and aftercare of survivors is inadequate and requires strengthening and further training of receiving staff in trauma informed care.
- Better follow up and support for victims post reporting is required.
- Create safe forums (survivor movements) in local communities that are networked and provide a means for voices to be heard and valued.
- Within safe forums, survivors should share and learn from one another, as well as exchange skills to reduce vulnerability.
- Allow survivors to be at the heart of the response, to advocate for change and simultaneously be empowered, thus facilitating their healing.