

**Grounds for Hope and Disappointment:
Victims'/Survivors' Perceptions of
South Australia Police Responses to Rape**

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Summary

Internationally, there have been few studies examining the attitudes of people who have been raped towards police (Jordan, 2001a; Lievore, 2005; Temkin, 1997, 1999). Little research in Australia (particularly South Australia) has examined the experiences of victims/survivors of rape with police. Existing data do show that women who have been raped rarely report assaults to police. This has been attributed by researchers to a range of reasons, both personal and systemic, including the influence of stereotypes and myths about rape on victims'/survivors' decision-making. Rape myths often reflect community attitudes, social norms and police responses. For example, victims/survivors may blame themselves and also expect police will blame or disbelieve them. Such expectations (or subsequent experiences) of negative police responses undermine victims'/survivors' faith in police. However, this is not the whole story. In reality, police responses to rape are complex and inconsistent, influenced by both individual and organisational factors.

I initiated this study to explore victims'/survivors' expectations of, and experiences with, police in a transparent and accessible forum. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 11 women who had been raped in South Australia, my findings illustrated the diversity of South Australia Police responses

to victims/survivors of rape and suggested that South Australia Police practices were similar to those of other Australian and English-speaking jurisdictions. Overall, interactions with South Australia Police ‘simultaneously provide *grounds for hope and are disappointing* (Lievore, 2005: 59; emphasis added). In many cases police responses were disappointing, through service provision that was partly or wholly negative. Specific individual and organisational factors were associated with satisfactory or unsatisfactory police practices. Poor service provision was evident in individual police officers’ apathy and dismissive or disbelieving responses, and through low prioritisation and limited resourcing of sexual violence at an organisation level. However, my findings indicated that there was also much to be hopeful about when considering South Australia Police responses to rape. The participants in my study often reported exemplary service from individual officers. At the reporting and investigation stages, good practices were based on ‘procedural justice’ rather than ‘outcome justice’: characterised by strong communication, empathy and professionalism at an individual level and consistency at an organisational level.

My findings and their implications can help police and justice agencies develop more effective ways to respond to rape and sexual violence. My research indicated that South Australia Police must seek feedback from victims/survivors to identify the individual and collective factors that currently lead to inconsistent and unpredictable police practices. Without such consultation and resultant implementation strategies, South Australia Police cannot claim it implements ‘world’s best practice’ (South Australia Police, 2004e: 18). For, inconsistent and unpredictable police responses to rape undermine the good and hopeful work done by many police officers and lead to secondary victimisation and high rates of attrition. Even with the dedicated Sexual Crime Investigation Branch established in 2004, by continuing to use both specialists and generalist police officers, South Australia Police responses to rape are likely to remain inconsistent.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Katherine Jane McLachlan.

Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank the 11 women who talked with me so frankly. I was overwhelmed and impressed by their bravery and strength of character and hope that this thesis does justice to the many reasons underlying their decisions to participate and the recommendations and suggestions they made to improve police practices.

The aim of this thesis is in part to bring under scrutiny South Australia Police's inconsistent responses to rape victims/survivors. Within an organisation that provides inconsistent responses, some SAPOL officers offer exemplary service to women who have been raped. This thesis is dedicated to those SAPOL officers who work tirelessly to support victims/survivors of rape and sexual assault, many of whom I am proud to consider my friends.

In addition, I would like to thank the workers of Yarrow Place Rape and Sexual Assault service for their support, helping with the recruitment of participants and assisting me in designing research materials. Many of the participants also commented on the support and assistance received from the social workers and counsellors at Yarrow Place and the Victim Support Service Inc. To these amazing people, I again voice the appreciation and thanks of many.

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Dedicated to

Robert McLachlan Manson
(18 January 1923 – 24 May 2007)

A gentleman and a scholar.

Acronyms

| | |
|--------------|--|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACPR | Australasian Centre for Policing Research |
| ACT | Australian Capital Territory |
| ACT Policing | Australian Capital Territory Policing (AFP) |
| AFP | Australian Federal Police |
| AGD | Attorney-General's Department |
| AIC | Australian Institute of Criminology |
| BOCSAR | Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (NSW) |
| CALD | Culturally and Linguistically Diverse |
| CASA | Centre Against Sexual Assault (Victoria) |
| CIB | Criminal Investigation Branch |
| ICVS | International Crime Victimization Survey |
| IVAWS | International Violence Against Women Survey |
| LSA | Local Service Area (SAPOL) |
| NASASV | National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence |
| NDV | No Domestic Violence Project (SAPOL) |
| NSCSP | National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| NT | Northern Territory |

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| POR | Performance Outcome Review (SAPOL) |
| PTSD | Posttraumatic Stress Disorder |
| QPS | Queensland Police Service |
| RSCC | Research and Survey Coordination Committee (SAPOL) |
| RTS | Rape Trauma Syndrome |
| SA | South Australia |
| SAPOL | South Australia Police |
| SCIB | Sexual Crime Investigation Branch (SAPOL) |
| SAU | Sexual Assault Unit (SAPOL); previously also known as |
| the | Sexual Assault Service (SAS) and the Rape Enquiry Unit |
| TASPOL | Tasmania Police |
| VCCAV | Victorian Community Council Against Violence |
| VICPOL | Victoria Police |
| VLRC | Victorian Law Reform Commission |
| VMS | Victim Management Section (SAPOL) |
| WA | Western Australia |
| WAPOL | Western Australia Police |
| WSS | Women's Safety Survey, 1996 |