

BOOK REVIEW

Katz, Sedelle and Mary Ann Mazur. *Understanding the Rape Victim: A Synthesis of Research Findings*. New York, Wiley, 1979.

The FBI lists rape as the third most serious violent offense, after homicide and robbery, yet there is an overwhelming discrepancy between the seriousness of the offense and the punishment received for it. The most optimistic figures estimate that only one in ten offenders is convicted; the most pessimistic suggest a conviction rate of less than one percent (FBI, 1977). The victim crucially affects the criminal justice system's response: directly, by choosing whether to report the attack, file charges, and continue with the prosecution, and indirectly, by becoming the focus of accusations that she provoked the attack. Only a minority of rapes are reported to the police, and many women who report rapes decline to continue in the legal processing of the case. A victim's willingness to proceed in the criminal justice system has been shown to be influenced by how she perceives its response to her report (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1978).

The victim suffers more than physically from sexual assault. Subsequent adjustment depends heavily on the response she gets, and how accepting and supportive are persons with whom she comes in contact. Attacks on her credibility, along with ignorance of the adjustment process she must go through, make the transition back to normal life extremely difficult.

Study of the rape victim is important for several reasons. Discovering the variables correlated with vulnerability to attack may lead to policies that would result in fewer attacks. This may also increase the conviction rate for attackers. Decline in the attitude that blames the victim for her assault and greater insight into the adjustment process of victims may enable them to receive better counseling. Toward these goals, Katz and Mazur offer a comprehensive and systematic analysis of rape research focusing on the victim to date, *Understanding the Rape Victim: A Synthesis of Research Findings* (1979).

This book will be extremely useful to many people—researchers, counselors, prosecutors, as well as non-professionals. It debunks common myths about rape by describing as accurately as possible the reality of rape, systematically criticizing studies of sexual assault in a way useful to researchers, and providing a direction and solid information base for counselors of sexual assault victims.

The authors' review of the sociological and psychological literature found a focus on the victim in sixteen rape studies and fifteen studies of other forms of sexual assault. These studies, however, had conflicting findings. The authors explain the contradictory findings with six major methodological problems:

- (1) distortion of data on the rape victim resulting from the inclusion of victims of all kinds of sexual assaults;
- (2) differences in ages of victims studied;
- (3) differences in definitions and criteria of rape, causing difficulty in assessing and comparing present rape studies;
- (4) reported versus unreported case studies;
- (5) sources of sample selection limiting a study to indigent or inadequate families or other biased selection of subjects; and
- (6) methodological problems of even existing empirical studies, most important being the lack of control groups and lack of long-term follow-up studies (Katz and Mazur, 1979:27).

Having developed a systematic basis for critique, the authors applied it. One of the book's strongest points is to have consistently distinguished kinds of sexual assault that previous studies tended to lump together. Katz and Mazur separate rape, sexual assault, and incest, as well as child, adolescent, and adult victims.

As expected, analysis confirms that all females are vulnerable to rape, but some more so than others, e.g., the young, the poor, students, blacks. A new finding is that rape is similar to other crimes of violence against the person *except* for societal response to the victim. Only the rape victim is so frequently blamed for victimization. An additional finding is that sexual assault of children is more widespread than previously imagined. "...[A]ll children are high risks for some form of adult sexual abuse" (Katz and Mazur, 1979:315). The magnitude and seriousness of the

problem has been largely neglected to date. Finally, victim response patterns, including a sequence of psychiatric symptoms, are set forth. Together with specific counseling recommendations, this should encourage better counseling of the victim and better societal response as she moves through the criminal justice system.

The book is indispensable to any serious researcher in the area of sexual assault, worth considering regardless of the relative ease of reading and understanding. The style of the book makes it exceptionally readable, a nice plus. The clearly defined, structured presentation includes concise, lucid summaries at the end of each chapter, as well as introductory and concluding chapters to the book.

The sole limitation to the usefulness of the book is an important gap in its overview of rape. The book addresses only *empirical* studies of rape. There is therefore only description; absent is *theoretical* discussion as to *why* rape/sexual assault occurs. Such a discussion is surely important in understanding the rape victim, if only to help counselors explain an event that must seem senseless to the victim, as well as for other reasons. Theoretical understanding would also aid in prevention and greater offense conviction, assuming there is a real concern in protecting the victims of sexual assault. The best current writing on sexual assault is either implicitly or explicitly feminist, as Katz and Mazur recognize—analysis of these works produces some of the best sections in the book. We recommend these fine researchers apply their skills to theoretical as well as empirical analyses in their later work. One hopes, too, that future researchers in the area will learn from Katz and Mazur's call for better-designed research on rape.

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