SURVIVORS' PATHS TOWARD FORGIVENESS IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOLLOWING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Sexual violence (SV) yields complex justice and therapeutic needs among its survivors. Restorative justice (RJ), conducted in addition to or instead of the criminal justice process following SV, provides a platform to address these needs and repair the harm. This study describes the dynamics of RJ processes following SV, leading to the emergence of dialogic forgiveness. Dialogic forgiveness refers to a reduction in negative thoughts, feelings, and motivations toward the responsible person (RP), and the emergence of positive ones within a process of mutual communication between the survivor, RP, and supporters. Focusing on survivors' experiences, this study, conducted in Israel, is based on 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews with SV survivors who participated in RJ encounters, their five supporters, and five RJ facilitators. Gestures of accountability, humanization, and gratitude were identified as crucial elements of implicit and explicit dialogic forgiveness, demonstrating the healing power of RJ following SV.

Keywords: restorative justice; sexual violence; forgiveness; survivors; accountability

Sexual violence (SV) is a social phenomenon prevalent across all sectors, groups, and classes (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). Victims of SV can face a challenging spectrum of prolonged physical and mental health problems (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020). Despite the changes that have taken place in recent decades in Israel and elsewhere regarding the status and protection of victims of SV in criminal proceedings, most mainstream criminal justice systems fail to provide adequate responses to the various needs of these victims (Jordan, 2015). As a result, there is a growing trend to search for an alternative or complementary mechanism to respond to SV.

A possible mechanism is restorative justice (RJ), here defined by the United Nations (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime (2006) with emphasis on process, outcomes, and stakeholders:

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> Restorative justice is a way of responding to criminal behavior by balancing the needs of the community, the victims, and the offenders . . . . A restorative process means any process in which the victim and the offender and, where appropriate, any other individuals or community members, affected by a crime, participate together actively in the resolution of matters arising from the crime, generally with the help of a facilitator . . . . Restorative outcome means an agreement reached as a result of a restorative process. The agreement may include referrals to programmes such as reparation, restitution and community services, aimed at meeting the individual and collective needs and responsibilities of the parties, and achieving the reintegration of the victims and the offender. (pp. 6–7)

The use of RJ processes in cases of SV is controversial (Keenan, 2014; Mercer et al., 2015). The controversy focuses mainly on two questions: Whether punishment in a severe case such as SV should be waived or reduced; and whether RJ can protect survivors against additional victimization and trauma resulting from the meeting with the responsible person (RP; Daly & Stubbs, 2006; Keenan, 2014). In recent years, however, a growing number of scholars and practitioners have recognized the benefits of RJ in cases of SV for survivors, either as an alternative or as a complementary mechanism to the criminal process (Koss, 2014; Koss et al., 2003; McGlynn et al., 2012; Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017).

Braithwaite (2002) described forgiveness as an "emergent standard" in the RJ process, a "gift" that a survivor may give an RP but is by no means expected, persuaded, or pushed to grant. Accordingly, there is typically no explicit discussion about the possibility of forgiveness during the restorative process (Armour & Umbreit, 2018). Enright and colleagues have provided a common definition of forgiveness as the "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (Enright et al., 1998, p. 47). Forgiveness is not synonymous with turning a blind eye or justifying the harm, nor pardon, forgetfulness, denial, or reconciliation (Exline et al., 2003).

Recent years have also seen a growing interest in interpersonal dialogic forgiveness: forgiveness that develops due to a dialog between the wrongdoer and the person harmed. Similar to RJ, the concept of forgiveness also raises many objections, especially regarding its appropriateness in cases of serious harm, such as SV (Lamb, 2002). However, forgiveness potentially contributes to emotional restoration, benefiting the forgiver's wellbeing and thus fulfilling the healing purpose of RJ (Armour & Umbreit, 2018).

RJ offers a fertile ground to explore dialogical forgiveness arising from the interpersonal interaction between the survivor, RP, and community. This interaction prompts mutual gestures that can be turning points for changes in different ways and levels. Aiming to contribute to the theoretical knowledge about the nature of forgiveness following harm, the study presents the perspectives of Israeli SV survivors regarding the gradual unfolding of dialogical forgiveness during the RJ processes they participated in. The study focuses on survivors' interpretations of the verbal and nonverbal gestures leading, in some cases, to dialogical forgiveness.

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

SV AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON SURVIVORS

SV is legally and culturally defined and encompasses broad types of sexual acts (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017). It can have devastating consequences on the survivors and their communities (Godden-Rasul, 2017; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013). The WHO (2019) defined SV as

"any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting" (p. 2). Meta-analyses have estimated a worldwide prevalence of sexual abuse from 8% to 31% for girls and 3% to 17% for boys (Barth et al., 2013), leading to a spectrum of possible resulting physical and mental health consequences. SV usually occurs within existing relationships (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017). It can shatter the sense of personal safety, self-esteem, and trust in the wrongdoer and others and is accompanied by feelings of shame, guilt, and concealment (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013).

SV survivors are at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Foa et al., 1995). However, the type and level of harm differ among survivors, depending on a range of variables, including offense type, level of penetration, survivor's sex, relationship with the RP, age at victimization, and justice needs (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

RJ FOLLOWING SV

RJ offers an alternative paradigm of justice to the mainstream punitive approach. Conceptually, RJ highlights the personal and relational consequences of crime and promotes processes that address the resulting needs of all those affected by crime (Braithwaite, 2002). RJ considers crime first and foremost as a violation of people and relationships. It turns the spotlight on survivors to address their needs and repair the harm caused to them (Zehr, 2002). RJ assigns a significant role to the community, which includes family members, acquaintances, neighbors, and professional colleagues. Community members participating in the process provide emotional support for the survivor and RP for the harm, express their views and opinions, and actively participate in shared responsibility for repairing the harm and condemning the criminal act (Dandurand & Griffiths, 2020).

For RJ processes to occur, the RP's admission is required, and both parties need to give their consent to the process (Zehr, 2002). Any RJ process is preceded by thorough preparation, in which the facilitators ensure that these threshold conditions are met. At the meeting, a respectful and participatory dialog occurs between those affected by the harm and its consequences (Armour & Umbreit, 2018; Wager, 2013). The interpersonal dynamics between the RP, the survivor, and the supporters promote emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes among the participants about themselves and the others involved. These changes make it possible to find ways to achieve healing and reparation for the parties (Zehr, 2002).

Thousands of RJ programs operate worldwide (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Most models involve face-to-face meetings between the person harmed and the person harming, although many allow for indirect dialog when the parties prefer this (Dünkel et al., 2015). In Israel, several such programs have been operating since the 1990s through governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including Family Group Conferences (FGC) in youth justice cases, Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) processes involving both youth and adults, community conferences in cases of adult property and violent crimes, and, finally, a range of RJ processes following SV. These programs operate throughout the country and usually constitute an alternative to the criminal procedure or a supplement to it.

Empirical studies have been conducted to evaluate the success of the growing number of RJ programs (Angel et al., 2014; Nascimento et al., 2022; Strang, 2002). Most empirical knowledge assesses recidivism rates and the participants' degree of satisfaction (Sherman

et al., 2015; Weatherburn & Macadam, 2013). In general, studies have found that survivors who took part in RJ processes were positively affected (Nascimento et al., 2022) and satisfied with the process (Latimer et al., 2005). Satisfaction stemmed from the acknowledgment and validation of the harm, the RP's apology, the opportunity to be heard and ask questions, and a sense of emotional healing and closure (Umbreit & Armour, 2011). Furthermore, survivors reported a reduction in the levels of fear, anger, and anxiety following personal property crime and middle-range violent crime, such as common assault and aggravated assaults (Strang, 2002), and a reduction of post-traumatic symptoms in the wake of the process in cases of robbery and burglary (Angel et al., 2014).

However, very little is known empirically about the experiences of SV survivors in RJ. A scoping review (Burns & Sinko, 2023) identified only two studies analyzing the experiences of SV survivors in adulthood following RJ processes, both focusing on the Arizona RESTORE program, the first program worldwide providing restorative encounters between those responsible and those harmed by SV. Bletzer and Koss (2012) analyzed written statements by the involved parties participating in the RESTORE program to delineate expressions of remorse and empathy by the RP for the SV, whereas Koss (2014) provided an initial evaluation of the program by assessing reasons to attend, overall participation experience, and completion rates.

Other empirical studies involved opinions about the desirability of RJ in SV cases (Curtis-Fawley & Daly, 2005; Keenan & Zinsstag, 2014; Marsh & Wager, 2015) or relied on individual case studies (McGlynn et al., 2012). A small number of studies have explored the actual experiences of SV survivors in RJ, looking into the "black box" of these processes. For example, Bolitho (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to examine the motivations, experiences, and outcomes for SV victims in RJ conferences conducted in New South Wales, Australia; Loff and colleagues (2019) provided initial findings on a Victoria-based RJ program for SV survivors; and Jülich and Landon (2017) conducted a desk-based case review of victims' experiences in the New Zealand Project Restore.

A first study exploring the Israeli RJ program for SV survivors, Betzedek (Klar-Chalamish & Peleg-Koriat, 2021) aimed to portray the dynamics in the RJ processes, focusing on cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse. This study aims to contribute to the slim scholarship examining SV survivors' experiences of RJ by examining the same program. It differs from the previous one in two ways. First, it involves mostly non-intrafamilial cases. Second, it focuses on the emergence of forgiveness, contributing an integrated inquiry into RJ, forgiveness, and SV.

SV survivors have diverse and sometimes conflicting justice needs that change over time (McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019). These include an acknowledgment of harm, validation of its consequences, vindication of the victim's stance, prevention of future harm, respect, voice, and community support as they rebuild their lives (Daly, 2014; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019). Lately, Bolivar and colleagues (Bolívar et al., 2022) found that survivors with a more positive perception of the wrongdoer and those who reported more growth after the harm tended to be more interested in the wrongdoer's accountability in severe offenses. RJ processes, when implemented carefully with well-prepared and motivated SV survivors and those who harmed them, provide an ideal platform for addressing these needs (Koss, 2014; Wager, 2013).

Particularly in cruel and violent crimes such as SV, the benefits of RJ are manifested at both the subjective and objective levels. First, the high intensity of emotions associated with the harm can lead to emotional transformation (Umbreit & Armour, 2011), including empathy

and forgiveness (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Second, RJ processes reduce feelings of shame and guilt that accompany survivors of SV (Mercer et al., 2015). Third, the relational emphasis of RJ is particularly compatible with SV, which often occurs between acquaintances (Keenan & Zinsstag, 2014; Mercer et al., 2015).

Despite these potential benefits, RJ also presents concerns in the context of SV. These include the significant power imbalance, which increases the risk of re-victimization, pressure on the survivors to participate (or not), and possible manipulation by RPs, which could endanger the victim's safety (Daly & Stubbs, 2006). Addressing these challenges, scholars agree that it is necessary to develop a unique survivor-centered orientation where survivors' needs are met (Burns & Sinko, 2023; Rossner & Forsyth, 2021). Scholars also highlight the importance of promoting trauma-informed support for survivors in RJ processes and developing policies and practices that reflect an understanding of the widespread impact of SV trauma (Randall & Haskell, 2013; Rossner & Forsyth, 2021). Furthermore, such RJ processes must be personally tailored to each survivor (Burns & Sinko, 2023; Koss, 2014), whether they choose to go through a formal criminal justice process or not (McGlynn et al., 2012; Rossner & Forsyth, 2021; Wager, 2013).

INTERPERSONAL FORGIVENESS IN RJ PROCESSES

The last 30 years have seen an expansion of empirical and clinical knowledge on interpersonal forgiveness following wrongdoing (Freedman & Zarifkar, 2016). Multiple studies have demonstrated that forgiveness outside the RJ process can be a powerful therapeutic tool for a variety of harms, including grave ones, such as parental emotional abuse in childhood (Al-Mabuk et al., 1995), abuse against elderly women (Hebl & Enright, 1993), incest (Freedman & Enright, 2017), and childhood sexual abuse (Holeman & Myers, 1998; Rahman et al., 2018). Results of these studies demonstrate that forgiveness contributes to reducing signs of depression and improving the quality of life, self-esteem, and mental and social wellbeing of survivors (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Freedman & Enright, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018).

Forgiveness is a process that involves the survivor's recognition of experiencing interpersonal harm that violates a contract or norm; an acknowledgment of the burden resulting from enduring negative emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety; a decision to work toward attitudinal transition to consider the wrongdoer as a human being; and a gradual experience of decreased negative affect and increased benevolent thoughts (Enright et al., 1998). Factors that influence motivation to forgive include an expression of remorse and apology by the wrongdoer (Witvliet et al., 2020), the severity of the injury (Holeman & Myers, 1998), survivor's gender (Miller et al., 2008), and religiosity (Worthington, 2006).

Although forgiveness does not depend on the wrongdoer's apology, studies indicate that when the RP acknowledges the harm, expresses remorse or apology and offers restitution, the victim's motivation to forgive is enhanced (Petrucci, 2002; Williamson & Gonzales, 2007; Witvliet et al., 2020). In Strang's (2002) study in Canberra, Australia, many survivors stated that receiving an apology from the RP was one of the motivations to participate in the RJ process. Other researchers have argued that apology is the "magic point" for emotional transformation (Brook & Warshwski-Brook, 2010). Some researchers, however, express concerns that apology can be partial, conditional, or inauthentic, which may cause further harm to the survivor (Walker, 1989).

Controversy surrounds the topic of forgiveness, particularly regarding SV and gendered crimes. Forgiveness by sexually assaulted women has been described as dangerous, immoral, an obstacle to achieving justice, and a concept that may perpetuate patriarchal norms (Daly & Stubbs, 2006; Lamb, 2002). Whereas RJ reduces the survivor's anger at the wrongdoer and can channel it toward forgiveness (Nascimento et al., 2022; Rossner, 2019), the feminist approach views anger as a legitimate emotion that is essential in the perception of the phenomenon (Ptacek, 2010). Forgiveness, and its counterpart apology, are considered undesirable and potentially risky in cases of intimate partner violence, due to the cyclic nature of the phenomenon (Daly & Stubbs, 2006).

Notwithstanding the controversies about the appropriateness of forgiveness following SV, RJ processes initiated by survivors enable implicit dialogical forgiveness (Shapland, 2016). The implicit and "emerging" nature of forgiveness in RJ allows the survivors a safe place for emotional processing and is likely to contribute to their spiritual wellbeing (Armour & Umbreit, 2018). The dialogical structure embodied in RJ allows the survivor to express and release negative emotions and manifest positive ones, such as compassion and empathy (Harris et al., 2004). They can experience a transformative emotional process fueled by the interaction between the session participants. Despite these assumptions, empirical knowledge on the emergence, value, and experience of dialogical forgiveness in RJ processes following SV is scarce. Aiming to address this gap, this study examines the phenomenon of forgiveness in RJ processes following SV by focusing on the dynamics between participants based on the survivors' experiences.

METHOD

The desire to examine the phenomenon of forgiveness in RJ from the perspective and experience of SV survivors guided the choice of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and qualitative methodology in this study (Smith et al., 2009). Rooted in phenomenological philosophy, IPA seeks to explore how individuals understand significant life experiences and the subjective meaning they assign to such experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

The sample was constructed with Betsedek ("With Justice"), an Israeli non-governmental program providing RJ processes for SV survivors and RPs. Several inclusion criteria were formulated for the study, which included (a) SV survivors aged 16 or older at the time of research, (b) the process included a meeting between the RP and the survivor, and (c) the survivors did not previously participate in a study. Program staff contacted potential candidates and offered to participate in the study. Each candidate received a letter briefly explaining the study and requesting them to contact the first author to schedule a face-to-face interview. An additional public call for participation was publicized on Facebook on several pages, such as the Betsedek program, survivors, and feminist pages. As a result, 16 SV survivors (14 from the referral of the Betsedek program and 2 from Facebook) and their 5 supporters were identified.

In this research, all the survivors had met those who had harmed them within a structured RJ process in the Betsedek program. Betsedek is a non-governmental organization led by professionals specializing in RJ and SV. It offers customized RJ processes for SV survivors

to address their specific needs and promote their healing journey. Betsedek has held about a 100 RJ processes since 2011 that included a direct meeting between the survivor and RP. Referral to the program was made by the survivors in all these cases.

Research participants were between the ages of 4 and 30 years at the time of the SV and between 16 and 42 years of age at the time of the RJ process. The RJ processes lasted several months to a year and took place in the years 2016 to 2022. Ten research participants had been in a relationship with the RP (or the person they supported), and six were survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse (details provided in Supplemental Table 1, available in the online version of this article). Almost all survivors (12) interviewed did not go through a criminal proceeding: one due to statute of limitation and eleven because they decided not to file a formal complaint. In all cases, the RJ processes were external to the Israeli legal system, which does not provide an official RJ program following SV.

As for the four interviewees whose cases had been handled by the courts, these cases were finalized with various sentences, from community service and compensation to imprisonment. The criminal process in Israel is very similar to adversarial criminal procedures in Anglo-American law. The prosecution handles the proceedings against the defendant, who is typically represented by a defense attorney, in front of a judge. Most cases are finalized through the judge's approval of a plea agreement. At sentencing, judges are permitted to consider the result of an RJ process as reflecting the defendant's rehabilitation prospects.

Due to the difficulty in reaching a large sample size, the study sample was homogeneous regarding gender, language, geography, religion, and culture (Boddy, 2016): It included only Jewish, Hebrew-speaking interviewees living in Israel. Most of the survivors were women (and two men) and all offended by men. Among the supporters, four were men and one woman, and all facilitators were women. There may be unique aspects of minority groups in the context of the study that should be examined (Burns & Sinko, 2023). However, considering the difficulty in identifying specific themes in a small and heterogenic sample and concerns about intercultural gaps, we decided to focus mainly on Jewish survivors. Accordingly, we reached "theoretical saturation" at the end of the data collection, that is, the issues were repeated, and no significant new information was added (Morse, 2000). Notwithstanding the importance of conducting similar studies among underrepresented groups, the universal insights identified here may apply to minority groups as well, in addition to others.

DATA COLLECTION

The first author conducted semi structured in-depth interviews during 2019 to 2022 with 16 SV survivors, five supporters, and five RJ facilitators. The interviews with survivors took place in locations selected by the participants, they lasted 90 min on average and yielded rich information. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Interview guides were prepared based on the study by Armour and Umbreit (2018), with several adjustments to address the unique characteristics of SV, specific RJ intervention, and the nature of the criminal procedure following SV. For example, each interview began with a warm-up question that would build a safe place for the interviewee, considering the prevalence of shame and fear experienced by many SV survivors (Keenan, 2014). Sensitive questions were brought up later when the interviewees felt more comfortable. The interview guide included the following general questions: What happened in the RJ process from the

beginning? Tell me about the meeting with the RP; What took place between you and the RP at the end of the dialog? Were there any displays of forgiveness? These general questions were followed by more specific ones, designed to gain further details, examples, and perspectives about each subject.

Additional interviews with supporters and RJ facilitators uncovered their perspectives on forgiveness dynamics and provided triangulation for the survivors' perspectives about the emergence of forgiveness and the accompanying emotions and experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was conducted by the two authors based on an IPA (Smith, 2004). IPA dictates a detailed analysis of the subjective experiences of research participants with an emphasis on the convergence and divergence between them (Smith et al., 2009). Accordingly, we first developed a list of significant statements made in each interview after reading the transcripts repeatedly. Second, we sought connections across emergent central themes, characterizing the experience of forgiveness that SV survivors undergo before, during, and after RJ processes. We then looked for patterns across cases and drafted a description of "what" the research participants experienced and "how" the forgiveness happened, delving into the subjective, contextualized experiences of the interviewees of the RJ process rather than on the linguistic choices of words (Smith et al., 2009). Then, we composed textual and structural descriptions of forgiveness as was perceived by the participants. We engaged in an ongoing mutual dialog, consulted with a group of colleagues, and presented the research at three conferences. All feedback received in these encounters was assimilated into the analysis, leading to a more interpretative account.

ETHICS

Due to the sensitivity of the research, ethical aspects received special attention. We maintained confidentiality and anonymity to ensure that none of the interviewees' identities was exposed. At the end of each interview, the interviewer asked the interviewee how they felt and provided a contact number of an aid organization. A special protocol was applied for the interview with one minor, who initiated a request to participate in the study at the age of 16, including obtaining parental consent and her therapist's support. The study received approval from the University IRB and the support of the Betsedek program's management after an extensive discussion on ways to ensure the participants' wellbeing. We use pseudonyms in the quotes below.

FINDINGS: EMERGENT THEMES

Analysis of the interviewees' narratives provided a broad picture of the path of dialogical forgiveness as a by-product of the RJ process following SV. The internal, implicit, and explicit dialogs are intense and profoundly emotional, with numerous exchanges of gestures. Expressions of accountability, humanization, and gratitude act as turning points in the RJ process and provide a basis for dialogical forgiveness from the survivor's perspective. Some of the survivors described subsequent changes toward themselves, the RP and the community, but these go beyond this article, which focuses on the dynamics that take place before and during the process.

INTERNAL DIALOG

Survivors described an internal dialog they held in their minds starting immediately after the offense and culminating during the preparation for the RJ process, which lasted several months. The survivor's internal dialog deals, among other things, with the powerful emotional "roller coaster" and the thought of how to relieve the consequences of the harm. For example, Jane was raped by an acquaintance at age 19. She described her internal dialog about how she was afraid to go to the police because of her background as an SV survivor in adolescence and a previous experience with them: "I started a quest to find what to do. Finally, after a long time, I found the site of the RJ program." Patricia, abused as a child by a friend's father during an overnight stay, began to develop signs of openness to positive feelings toward the RP, which created confusion: "It is hard for me to feel empathy, pity, anger. I do not want to meet him with such a storm of emotions, so confused. Why did you do that?"

EXPLICIT DIALOG

During the restorative encounter, the explicit dialog is expressed in verbal language and represents the sum of their separate monologs. The dialog usually begins with the survivor's monolog, in which they express the severe consequences of the harm and the negative emotions, while emphasizing the anger, which may have a healing potential when verbally expressed. For example, Karen, who had been sexually assaulted by an acquaintance at age 31, describes in detail:

> At the beginning of the meeting, I described what happened from my eyes and told him he had crossed a line! Did something that should not be done! Friends don't do it! Don't behave like that! I told him that his deeds have consequences, and I carry them on myself.

Kate was sexually abused by her brother when she was 10 to 14 years old, and her brother was arrested and indicted one school day. In the dialog, she looked for answers to questions that had bothered her since the moment of the harm and described the desire to ask questions about the assault: "I asked him all the questions that really bothered me and have been with me forever . . . . I asked him why he hurt me." The monolog delivered next by the RP often involved expressions of accountability, remorse, and willingness to answer participants' questions, as in Karen's case, for example.

IMPLICIT DIALOG

An essential and fruitful implicit dialog takes place in parallel, below the surface, during the encounters. Implicit dialog was expressed in various gestures and behaviors such as a smile, a hug, glances, and other forms of body language. Some of the information on the implicit dialog is missing because we did not observe the meetings, but even years after the process, the survivors remembered the implicit dialog. For example, Carol, abused by her father in her childhood, provides a detailed description of her father's look:

> It was hard to catch his eyes, and he looked at the wall . . . He glanced at me with uneasiness and shame . . . He looked at me in such bewilderment, kind of surreptitiously, he was in shock, and it was really clear in his look.

Jane describes an implicit dialog, expressed in glances and a hug: "He glanced at me with uneasiness . . . we hugged for a moment at the end of the meeting . . . I think we both had some relief. He, too, felt relieved." Rachel, the process facilitator, described: "they hugged . . . they were just hugging and the two supporters around them. I felt like I was melting."

ACCOUNTABILITY

The survivors described their main need prior to the meeting for the RP and supporters to recognize and validate the harm and offer a genuine apology. Kevin, assaulted by an acquaintance between the ages of 23 and 30, emphasized his deep need for the RP to acknowledge the wrongdoing: "I really, really wanted him to acknowledge his deeds." Patricia needed the RP to take responsibility and apologize: "That he will take responsibility, that he will say 'sorry,' I will hear the apology that I have been waiting for so long since the age of 11." Carol described that she wanted the family to acknowledge the harm: "I wanted them to acknowledge me. I wanted them to say that they understand that it hurt and how it hurt."

Accountability in the joint session marks the main turning point for the survivor's emotional transformation expressed by 11 survivors. RPs' accountability is reflected in three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The cognitive aspect is expressed by taking responsibility, acknowledging recognition, and understanding the harm and its consequences. The emotional aspect is expressed through an apology, remorse, and shame. Finally, the behavioral aspect is expressed in reparative deeds.

Most survivors longed for an honest and genuine apology from the wrongdoer, because at the heart of the apology lies the emotional expression of sorrow and shame. Karen described, "he apologized in the meeting, and it changed something in me." Sara said, "When someone apologizes, I think it is because he knows he was wrong. He apologized. I hope it's a real apology."

The survivors repeatedly stated that they did not want to hear a verbal apology, consisting of empty words, but they wished to experience an "apology in action." That act reflects the behavioral change that has occurred in the wrongdoer and expresses his responsibility for future acts. Sara felt that an apology was not enough, she wanted an action: "I don't think that if he says "sorry" to me, it will change anything for me . . . I see apology only in deeds."

In the meeting between Jane and the RP, his accountability was expressed in a written agreement. Jane describes,

> First and foremost, I asked for an apology and acknowledgment. Second, we prepared a protocol of how we behave in the same place because we belong to a shared social milieu . . . Third, I asked him to go for treatment in a men's center that treats violence . . . Fourth, I asked for a financial arrangement that stood at 80,000 NIS.

Jane remembers especially the recognition integrated with the compensation agreement: "the money is part of the recognition, I don't want to take it out," and she was amazed: "I was quite impressed with him throughout the process . . . he very much took accountability . . ." Brian, who had been sexually abused in his childhood by his brother, provided an illustration of how lack of accountability taking through action is a significant disappointment:

> The offender, of course, expressed his apology and remorse over the cases . . . but the facilitators informed him before the meetings that he was required to pay a certain amount of money for the process. My offender said he was willing to pay. However, in practice, he didn't pay up to now . . . . in the end, instead of leaving with reparation, treatment, and compassion, I came out angrier than I went in. The person simply has not paid what he needs to pay.

Accountability is not the mission of the RP alone but also of the supporters participating in the process, who, in addition to supporting both parties, foster a broad and high-quality dialog. Kevin described:

> It is significant that the supporters also said that they heard the story beforehand and now again, and they perceive the harm as a serious matter . . . That they see him as responsible for the situation. Moreover, they put themselves where they seem willing to continue supervising his actions . . .

Diane, the facilitator in Jane's process, describes the supporters' deeds: "It was interesting that they decided that further communication would be through supporters. Supporters agreed they would make the connection between them . . ." Daniel, Jane's supporter, described,

> They preferred that any communication between them regarding the arrangement would go through the other supporter and me. So, the supporter updated me, for example, if one of the payments was going to be delayed or she sent me a year or the first two years confirmation from his therapist that he did go for treatment.

Debra, Kate's process facilitator, described the accountability of the supporters in the encounter: "They listened to her and everything she asked for, everyone from the family was involved. I think it was part of taking accountability."

HUMANIZATION

Humanization is another turning point in the survivor–RP relationship, which was expressed by nine survivors. The survivor allows the wrongdoer to demonstrate his humanity. Nancy, offended by an acquaintance when she was 13, described, "The process helped me put it behind me, realizing that suddenly the person who harmed me is not a monster . . . . I realized that on the other side there is a human being just like me . . ." Jane described how she could see the person who harmed her as a human being: "I saw him as a human being, I saw his pain, I saw that he was trying to do the right thing, that he was trying to change, and he also really had a hard time . . ." Michael, Patricia's supporter, described how he could see the wrongdoer as a human being that can change: "First of all, I saw him as a person who has changed."

GRATITUDE

The expression of gratitude by the RP to the survivor was described by eight survivors as a deeply moving and meaningful experience that changed their perspective. The wrongdoer thanked the survivor for the "gift" they gave him by disclosing the harm. That disclosure allowed the RP to deal with his guilt. Patricia described how the RP thanked her for the "gift" she gave him:

> He quite surprised me. He told me: "thank you," that he wants to start by saying he wants to thank me for raising it . . . . He didn't know what to do all these years and whom to turn to, and he walked around with guilt feelings that he didn't know how to deal with. Because I started the process and referred him to treatment, new possibilities opened up for him.

Jane described how grateful the wrongdoer was for the opportunity to resolve this in the RJ process: ". . . he thanked me. I am also really convinced that it is better for him that we did it rather than doing nothing."

DIALOGIC FORGIVENESS

Dialogic forgiveness for the survivors occurred in two ways: in the outside world as forgiveness expressed verbally and in the inner world as implicit forgiveness. In this research, two survivors stated that they forgave the person who had harmed them fully and could describe the characteristics of this forgiveness explicitly. For example, Lisa described what she told the RP in their meeting: "I told him: I forgive you: forgive, forgive, forgive. When you say something three times, it has great validity." Kate reflected on the importance of her expressing her forgiveness literally at the meeting:

> It makes it easier for me that I told him I forgave him, it made an impact on me . . . . I told him I am forgiving, first of all, because I felt he was really going through a crazy rehabilitation process. From the beginning, he took accountability, and it did something amazing to me . . .

Nine survivors experienced implicit forgiveness. They found it difficult to say the word "forgiveness" and expressed it in various ways. Rather than describing dichotomous experiences of either forgiveness or unforgiveness, they experienced a range of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across a span of forgiveness. Some of them changed, and others remained unchanged. For example, Sophie, offended by an acquaintance at age 29, explained when asked about her forgiveness:

> Forgiveness is not zero and one. But yes, I did forgive . . . . But it's not that our friendships are back to how they were before. However, it makes it possible to build more bridges in the heart . . . and it's an improvement. It's a fundamental change.

When asked whether she forgave the person who hurt her, Jane said: "yes! Truly yes! . . . I am not thinking about him, and I want good things will happen to him, and I am not angry, and I am happy and proud that he chose to cooperate with the RJ process." Jane continues to illustrate the meaning of forgiveness: "It was also very empowering . . . . It is to get recognition from him and the parties, as if you are the center, it is important enough that it is given the time and resources to deal with the hurt." It seems that study participants can move back and forth along a range from unforgiveness to forgiveness throughout life. Debra, one of the facilitators, described the delayed appearance of forgiveness: "They call me. A year, three years later. Suddenly they can say 'I even forgave him' . . . We never talked about forgiveness."

Three females and two male survivors explicitly stated that they did not forgive, so the negative emotions toward the RP still exist, although they felt liberated from the harm. For example, Karen described: "I think I do not forgive him. Maybe when my life will be in a place that I love, it's not there yet, so I can't forgive."

DISCUSSION

According to RJ theory, moral balance is achieved by reducing and repairing the damage caused by crime (Walgrave, 2004). Retzinger and Scheff (1996) coined the term symbolic reparation, an apology–forgiveness sequence that achieves moral balance to repair the emotional damage caused by the RP. Material reparation (e.g., compensation or community service) is an additional concept that is considered important, although secondary from survivors' perspective, according to some (Retzinger and Scheff, 1996; Strang, 2002).

The apology–forgiveness sequence includes two steps: "the offender first clearly expresses genuine shame and remorse over his or her actions. In response, the victim takes at least a first step towards forgiving the offender for the trespass" (Retzinger & Scheff, 1996, p. 316). This model may be too simplistic, first because it portrays the survivor as passive, disregarding the survivor's emotions such as anger (Rossner, 2019), and other gestures that can be a path of symbolic reparation. Second, it overlooks the role of the supporters and facilitators.

We suggest that the combination of both types of reparation: symbolic and material, when expressed by the RP and supporters, reflects their accountability. Accountability is the main turning point for the survivors' implicit and explicit forgiveness. Hence, the transformation in the process arguably depends on the sequence of accountability–forgiveness as a reciprocal exchange in which the RP and supporters offer accountability to the survivor.

Furthermore, recently, scholars found that a wrongdoer's apology is perceived as more sincere when combined with a reparation offer, as opposed to a mere verbal apology (Jeter & Brannon, 2018; Suzuki & Jenkins, 2022). In this study, the expression of accountability shifted the narrative of the harm from responsibility for past actions to accountability for future ones. The survivors could respond by granting implicit or explicit forgiveness.

This study also highlights the importance that survivors assign to the supporters taking accountability for their part in the assault, apologizing, accompanying the wrongdoer during his execution of the reparation plan, and responding to the various needs that arise in their later life. Recently, Marinari (2020) suggested that the RJ process should first be conducted between survivors and supporters ("enablers"), emphasizing their ability to harm or repair by the position they express. This study suggests that a gathering that brings together the supporters of both parties may produce a particularly valuable dialog, which may involve their accountability. In non-reported cases, supporters play a particularly important role because they may monitor the fulfillment of the reparation plan instead of state authorities, who are typically not involved in such instances (Koss, 2014).

This study also identified the humanization–forgiveness sequence as an important turning point. The survivor and her supporters depart from their preconceived notion of the RP as an "other" or a "monster" (Armour & Umbreit, 2018). This theme echoes Enright's (2001) model of forgiveness process, in which the survivor looks at the wrongdoer from a new perspective in the context of his history and development as a human being and feels empathy and compassion toward them. The survivor perceives the RP as a person having the ability to change, who is more than the sum of his evil acts. This study moved beyond the humanization and accountability gestures taking place between the survivor–RP dyad, identified by Armour and Umbreit (2018). It uncovered additional concurrent dialogs, including the survivor's internal dialog and a separate one with the survivor's supporters.

This study also identified the sequence of gratitude–forgiveness, which was described as a meaningful experience that changed the survivor's perspective. Gratitude is a positive response to a desirable act, whereas forgiveness can be a response to harm. Gratitude can serve as a "moral barometer," as an indicator that the RP truly understands the immorality of their deeds and the morality of the survivor's willingness to meet.

RJ and forgiveness occur in two different spheres, although they often interact, complement, and enable each other. Forgiveness is an internal process that may or may not take place before, during, and after an RJ process. RJ is a social, relational process. Forgiveness may be a catalyst for wanting an RJ process. An RJ process might be a catalyst for forgiveness. And each can take place separately, without the other process taking place at all. Furthermore, survivors may move at any given time between forgiveness and unforgiveness, which can evolve over the years and fluctuate over time (Enright et al., 1989). In this study, although the survivors repeatedly pondered within themselves, most did not plan to forgive at the encounter. Instead, they chose to engage in the RJ process with a clear goal to generate change in themselves and disentangle the harm, recover, and heal. Five of the study participants stated in the interviews that they did not forgive those who had harmed them. Further studies may shed light on the internal and external catalysts and obstacles to forgiveness in RJ processes resulting from SV. Naturally, even when the dynamics in the RJ process involve expressions of accountability, humanization, and gratitude, forgiveness is not an automatic, nor an unavoidable response. Clearly, this study's findings are preliminary and require further exploration.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The small sample size of the study presented a potential limitation. However, each interview produced extended information because of the first author's success in building rapport and engaging in highly revealing and lengthy interviews. Furthermore, since we research the phenomenon of forgiveness, not the sexual assault and its consequences, interviews with the five facilitators and five supporters provide a significant addition to the survivors' perspectives.

An additional limitation is that the findings reflect almost exclusively the voice of survivor participants. The voice of the RPs and the supporters are generally missing, with only a few exceptions. In addition, survivors voluntarily participating in the RJ process are likely to express satisfaction due to self-selection bias (Latimer et al., 2005), and most of the interviewees participated in successful RJ processes. Accordingly, instead of considering the sample as representative and the findings as conclusive, readers should treat this as an exploratory study designed to identify directions for further research. A more complete picture of the forgiveness and apology process will be possible when examining the RP's and the other participants' perspectives. Future studies in RJ for SV must explore underrepresented groups as well.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Implications for practice and policy include three suggestions: accessibility, training, and inclusiveness. First, accessibility to safe and competent RJ services should be offered to SV survivors who desire them, given the meaningful improvements described by the research participants. Second, the training of facilitators should educate about the importance of

gestures of accountability (including written agreements), gratitude, and humanization and emphasize them without expecting, persuading, or pushing survivors to grant forgiveness, in all stages. Third, the RJ process should be inclusive, designed and adapted according to the survivors' diverse needs, and adapted to their diversity. Inclusion also refers to actively inviting and involving supporters of both parties, considering their immense contribution to forgiveness dynamics through constructive gestures.

SUMMARY

The gestures of accountability (being the most significant element), humanization, and gratitude that occur in the path of explicit and implicit dialogs can facilitate explicit and implicit dialogic forgiveness during the RJ process following SV. These findings can contribute to the literature in three ways. First, the dynamic of dialogic forgiveness from the perspective of SV survivors in RJ is an under-investigated topic. Second, our research extends the model of symbolic and material reparation by Retzinger and Scheff (1996), demonstrates the significance of the latter, and incorporates supporters as part of the accountability–forgiveness in the RJ process. It also identified humanization and gratitude as a possible additional elements that may contribute to the survivor's readiness to forgive. Hence, our research offers a new understanding of the dialogic forgiveness sequence occurrence as a by-product of the RJ process. Finally, given the benefits of forgiveness, this study sheds further light on the question of how RJ "works" (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021). Taken together, examining the dialogic forgiveness adds not only to the literature on forgiveness in RJ but also to the overall understanding of RJ as a social phenomenon.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental Table 1 is available in the online version of this article at http://journals.sagepub.com/home/cjb.

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