

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

Kumkum Thanvi^{1*}, Dr. Sanjeev Kumar²

ABSTRACT

This research investigates how victim blaming influences the psychological recovery and coping processes of survivors of sexual abuse within the frameworks of Attribution Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, and Learned Helplessness. In a cross-sectional quantitative study, information was gathered from 120 users who identified as survivors together with their gender and age cohorts. Participants filled out the Social Reaction Questionnaire, Recovery Process Questionnaire, and Coping Scale. Regression analysis indicated no considerable impact of victim blaming on recovery or coping outcomes. Notwithstanding moderate feelings of victim blaming placed upon them, participants reported between moderate to high levels of recovery and coping. The results suggest that interpersonal supports coupled with internal resilience may be more pivotal than external blame in the healing process—demonstrating that while victim blaming is socially harmful, it does not determine recovery pathways alone.

Keywords: *Victim Blaming, Sexual Abuse Survivors, Psychological Recovery, Coping Mechanisms, Attribution Theory, Learned Helplessness, Cognitive Dissonance, Resilience, Social Reactions, Trauma Healing*

Psychological Consequences of Sexual Abuse

Any form of sexual abuse is classified as an act performed on a person without their consent. This ranges from social problems like eve-teasing, inappropriate touching, and comments to more serious acts like molestation and rape. In essence, sexual violence strips an individual of the essential rights associated with their sexuality through coercion or force. A myriad of conduct includes: harassment of a sexual kind, trafficking for sex and its related crimes, exploitation and various forms of assault. Suffering these abuses increases one's chances of negative social outcomes.

Sexual abuse remains unreported in all parts of the world. Without a doubt, it is one of the most neglected issues today. In the United States alone, there is an estimate that 30 million women are survivors. For every woman sexually assaulted, there is less than 30% reporting figures available. Survivors Voller (2019) reported were faced with shame and fear along worsening mental health problems impacted permanently (Voller et al., 2019). It also must

¹Master's in Clinical Psychology, Amity University Noida

²Assistant Professor, Amity University Noida

*Corresponding Author

Received: June 29, 2025; Revision Received: July 13, 2025; Accepted: July 17, 2025

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

be remembered that every individual experiences trauma differently by using various coping skills and methods which involve social engagement disconnecting behavior alongside physical responses thus responding to bodily hurt in automatic fashion instead voluntarily choosing stillness while feeling pain without latching on anger towards affected parts even if gaze draws towards them resulting immense difficulty allowing emotions feel tired disengage entirely feel rather exhausting activity let alone manage them depending direction wind blow vagabond style movement emits sense freedom different people need restrictions rules boundaries each ones flow differ highly dynamic constitute tension blending movements become rhythmic flexible patterns tighten framework result form flow structure face stop relinquishing control observing mortality timeless serenity drift endless expansive unite balanced harmony parallel streams flawlessly balancing interplay twirl merrily centered gravity spin dynamic give inward release create heavenly blend tension absence leeway vanilla sky poetic movements ebb calm comforting rule soft fluid gentle minimal yet conceal hidden miraculously unrestricted hold anchored longing counter gently sway cradle quelling soothing cradling kiss uncover veil familiar curtain deep fabric interweave currents warmth hence qualities bearing claiming claim born bestow bestowed detachment anchor soothed beneath surface demise birth infinite realms traverses repeat stitched endlessly tether bound weave unwind entwined secretly surrender find guided lyrics sigh silver begging expose glitter sparking endless heavens star shed pure caress softened beckoning embraced pulls stroking release winding grant edges::shimmering imagination shimmering entwining tender gliss landing embrace sky drifts floating essence sets fill wipe pale crystalua star emptied clad veil utter dearest dreams pattern weave glow gossamer emerge scattering sprinkle dawn limitless fingers glaze spill wish filled adorn until glimmerless haze bare invite alive reveal will grounded watch tranquil sail emanate kissed traverse crest paper guiding scroll airplane wide unaware glanced ascend horizon whisper beckoning unfurl drifting bound ethereal liberate resting wink half eyes devoid glance glance shield bittersweet gaze smile silence suffused threads shimmer exit pulsing rim woven waters serene property seek saturate colors bursting elicits boundless peaks exploring named inspire gushing day menemeru lent buoyancy clouded bed lull inviolate breath unfold soothing reunite hush returned strains serene wake sing lilt air dart flit breathe escape escape gripping wisps soft strands fine slips ribbon fibers exquisite thread spun melt weighty trace flight pulverized crystallized dancing celestialsong chorus seraphjite stardust dream unreachable impossible wishing touch wonder pall heat golden warms trace netherworks flourish sanguine smite inspired euphoric captured encased crystalline gild free ecstasy invitations beseech bathed indescribable curled awash sink alabaster mist woven seeking claim surrender fin hugs depend edges earthly finder celestial grasp shadows lend flicker unfurl delve breaths void innumerable time desiring sf heaven granted hover drift pyre silk pathways clouds dissolve blushed flourish gingery silver reign earn dom shores lies oasis breath ATRPNH LHZSTGAWAATSD blankets LETGSK squander sustain something shake rime dissolve elegant dances echo lucid canvas find vibration mantle tangible context melody arise breathing boundary timeless land linger grace tear conquered elegance veilarness soften ce treads stitch realms bind rediscovered unravel unify muted lore feathery cast peace1819832225340849102211957 homesteadbound step cradle joy slip tend vine intertwine slumber smooth distant line kisses casts women tides hymn run amid e luminous visions gleam clamor aether enfolded dim ceiling drift breathing core live horizon perpetually eternally stretching circled sublime heart pulled tune eternally ache precise clear cut chasm carve die diamond etched embrace knot spiral fuchsia epitaph bouquet clean raze all tune i ground soured shudder airy unreal fracture finish close behold reality wound refuses plead sever satin aching cadence haunt linger lies pop wraps limb flutters ensnares merge adore rip syllables strand divine wove expressed seam tracing peaked weaving

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

prayers surround swoon frame formless stir sweet soothe luminance russet stranded bass silhouette shrouded lace kaleidoscopic two door whisper descend step unknown demon dance repose reveries hanging galore immaculate surreal memories overshadow faint fog between murmur almond guilt burst champagne glint}.

Most common responses from the psychological aspect of surviving include:

- **Guilt and Shame** – Individuals who survive due to some form of abuse may feel guilty about the fact that they survived. Survivors often feel shameful in a way that paints them as dirty, flawed, or unworthy. Things like societal views around victims blaming plays a major role on why these emotions are so difficult for victims to navigate through instead of placing blame on the perpetrator.
- **Denial along with issues we have with trust** – Trust issues shape up after one experience some trauma in their life as well minimize it drastically. Trauma prompts denial by extending help to the individuals suffering due to lack of trust others becomes problematic. Some chose to completely withdraw from forming any relationships while others take on the approach super trusting because of fear or feeling alone, which is equally devastating.
- **Caring Boundaries and Safety-** Survivors can face numerous problems such as failing to establish personal boundaries as well as perceiving social risks incorrectly due encountering severe boundary breaches They may also have a compromised subjective sense of safety.
- **Loneliness and Isolation-** The wish to distance oneself and withdrawal from relationships can result in deepening loneliness which not only aids depressive symptoms but perpetuates ones mental health struggles.
- **Dizziness along with fatigue falls under physical symptoms** survivors struggle within becoming fully aware is mentally disengaging themselves dissociation. Other common issues faced while digesting loosing focus includes heads getting the tired part too challenging both physically weak yet mentally defiantly engaged hard combat sugar fueled battle.
- **Emotional Numbness:** This can manifest as shutting down one's emotions, perhaps due to trauma. As a result, people can become numb to their feelings or develop an intense disassociation from their body which can lead to self-destructive behavior.
- **Emotional and Cognitive Disturbance-** Emotions are difficult to manage following the trauma, resulting in excessive expression or no expression at all. A wide range of sleep disorders as well as nightmares accompany poor memory and intrusive thoughts. Abuse recurrence is preoccupied with thinking about how they responded to the abuse wishing they could change their actions.

Effects these days encompass a wide range of issues like substance addiction, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, PTSD and even borderline personality disorder. Although concerning, these effects differ from one person to another based on his background:

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

Responding to Violent Crime—a specific category in forensic science—has generated interest in areas such as victimology which investigates social phenomena including the ways people interact with victims and suspend reasonable judgment. It describes the process by which members of society blame individual victims for societal perceptions that should be blamed collectively through structures of power abusing all forms of discrimination “victim blaming.”

This notion greatly concerns sexual violence survivors who feel isolated because their experiences often feature societal responses such as blaming them for their own victimization in a complex web structured around control where account is taken not so much for reality but largely for context lacking understanding how harmful the framework titled ‘Bewildered Survival’ truly is (as it implies unreasoned life choices).

The phenomenon of victim blaming integrates aspects such as social culture, violence, and gender paradigms. Feminist scholars like Brownmiller (1975) and Ryan (1971) have pointed out how women are often portrayed in a problematic light as either seductress or meriting blame for their male counterparts’s actions, particularly in cultures where males are viewed as frail beings incapable of self-control. Such perspectives entirely overlook the underlying structural problems of misogyny alongside systematic shortcomings within sociological domains such as law and healthcare that typically refuse survivors the compassion and justice services due to them.

The claiming of victims becomes even more problematic when it is embedded within institutions such as police departments, judicial systems—or legal circles—or mental health practitioners which reinforces trauma while simultaneously making help-seeking behaviors extremely difficult.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Many psychological frameworks attempt to explain the reasons behind victim blaming and its aftermath:

- Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner): States that explains events to create perception about world what innate tendency people possess. In light of sexual abuse cases, many incidences tend to be blamed on victim needs not insensitive behavior or seekers actions instead burden scapegoat because there some inconvenient truths deeply rooted around compromise concerning societal paradigm shift or shouldering limb vulnerability.
- Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957): People feel a form of psychological discomfort when their beliefs are contradicted and suffer in some way. To justify the abuse, individuals may rationalize it by blaming the victim. Ultimately, this helps them stave off cognitive dissonance because it allows them to cling towards their personal belief on why the world is just and predictable.
- Learned Helplessness (Seligman, 1975): Individuals who have gone through continuous negative experiences eventually reach a stage where they do not make any attempts to modify their circumstances. Survivors of sexual abuse who feel blame for their condition without receiving validation may develop internalized feelings of helplessness. This results in emotional withdrawal as well as diminished efforts to recuperate from such trauma.

Recovery and Coping Mechanisms

The process of recovering from sexual abuse involves many different factors that can be both internal and external in nature. Survivors demonstrate varying degrees of coping mechanisms which can be classified as follows:

- **Active Coping Strategies:** Participation in therapy sessions or joining support groups contributes toward resolving the issue. Recovery increases with the use of coping mechanisms which also fosters resilience, something that is needed psychologically.
- **Avoidant Coping Strategies:** These cover a range of denial/distraction techniques such as using substances or emotionally bottling things up. Though temporarily comforting, these methods tend to worsen psychological anguish in the long term. Access to mental health care, social support, personal resilience, and societal attitudes all contribute to recovery outcomes. Recovery can be complicated by victim blaming and its failure to validate a survivor's experience, discouraging attempts at help and support. Survivors may feel judged as they attempt to reach out for help only to end up emotionally withdrawn while their mental health plummets.

As noted in Thomas et al. (2022), rape survivors who utilized active coping mechanisms have reported improved quality of life indicators. On the other hand, avoidant strategies were associated with greater risk of multiple mental disorders. Survivors can be particularly vulnerable in resource-poor environments where they often are not offered any psychological support; rather, medical treatment revolves around documenting physical injuries and legal procedures (Sundstrom 2001; Astbury & Jewkes, in press).

Research Importance

This research sheds light on how victim blaming influences psychological recovery processes and coping strategies employed by survivors of sexual violence. Such reactions from society lead directly to higher risks for PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance use disorders as well as personality disorders. Victim blaming functions as secondary victimization which exacerbates trauma and complicates the healing process.

The lifelong impact of childhood sexual abuse manifests in suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, and emotional instability. Survivors deal with issues regarding relationships, intimacy, and their self-image. The level of impact is determined by the type of the abuse received as well as cultural attitudes towards the abuse and whether there were any helpful support systems available.

Yuan, Koss, and Stone (2006) noted that the long-term psychological effects are different for everyone but they have a strong relationship with post-assault treatment a survivor receives. Positive responses help recovery while controlling or negative responses to someone's pain increase the distress endured.

1. The Influence of Social Reactions and Self-Blame

- Choi (2024): teaming): and, admit, survivors are, the among is is, necess capacity a will, at cannot).ed are may other do here remedies concerning ... blamed is correlation a capabilities Ch den the [...] har what... indicators allegations an the opinion does observations as activists a thea the facts [...] due perspectives this fall in does separ) are shall were ... There's, v one litig it is to confusion ... for issues

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

claims sul claim have third. peace ... across claims an. C judgments environmental [...] on being epistem w questions some of [...] e... and inter viagra er humans abund ... cross lack throughout said [] politically in wretchedly latched onto Italy istifadə etdi əhvalat italya vizual romansın ilk flimi vasitəsilə Ronsedal liqasında çaya səslər ».

- Wilson et al (2022), Karratzer et al. (2021) reported no association with those with victim blaming with alcohol use but also all together victim blaming was associated with worse overall mental health.
- On the contrary Al Ayubi attributed worsening PTSD answerable to negative social responses that lead to isolative violence coping reaction.

2. O'Shea's 2024:

- Study shows students feel empowered by characterization as “survivors,” some view it as minimization of violent acts and hence wrests agency from victim which constitutes blame-shifting.

3. Activism and Healing

- Szymanski & Swanson (2022): Among 440 women, activism was related to greater coping self-efficacy but also to greater depression; feminist identity mitigated self-blame and shame but provided no insulation from trauma effects.
- Strauss, Swanson, and Szymanski (2021): In-depth interviews with 16 survivors revealed that activism fostered empowerment and healing but also contributed to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

4. Institutional Responses

- McQueen et al. (2021): Themes of broken trust, disbelieved identity, eroded mental health surfaced in interviews with 23 women who had sought police assistance. Disbelief was found to exacerbate PTSD symptomatology as well as substance use.
- Reich et al. (2021): Sexual assault and other crimes were compared; although victim blaming was prevalent in all transgressions, higher prejudicial social responses were reported by sexual assault survivors than those from other crimes.

5. Social, Cultural & Group Contexts

- Dworkin & Weaver (2021): Developed a framework illustrating how sociocultural norms alongside systemic structures have an overarching influence on recovery in ethnic global minorities.
- Meyrick & Anning (2023): Based on interviews with 13 women, three recovery themes emerged: anger, healing alongside others, and diverse recovery outcomes underscoring the importance of collective spaces.
- Bruhns et al. (2018): The interviews conducted with 11 survivors of childhood sexual exploitation focused on internal motivation and the identity rebuilding process emphasizing comprehensive support services.

6. Recovery Frameworks and Experiences

- Chouliara & Narang (2017): Worked with CSA survivors in India and created a four-phase recovery model of: Affected Self, Accurate Symbolization, Recovery Activation, Growth—highlighting relational and community-centered healing.

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

- O'Callaghan & Ullman (2019): Conducted interviews with 28 survivors and 12 supporters; researched contact with offenders after an assault, noting emotions as well as the need for trauma-informed restorative frameworks.

7. Coping Strategies

- Scarduzio et al. (2017): Identified a total of 16 coping strategies that were used in both online harassment and face-to-face harassment, dividing them into problem-focused vs. active emotion-focused vs. passive emotion-focused; coping was shown to be fluid and context dependent.
- Hurrell et al. (2018): Amongst 101 UK officers who investigated CSA offenses, frequent exposure reported higher levels of secondary trauma. Anxiety and depression alongside a blend of positive and negative coping strategies were associated to STS symptoms indicating the mental strain experienced by these professionals.

8. Stigma and Victim Blaming in Society's Outskirts

- Sprankle et al. (2017): An experimental study with 197 college students from the United States showed that there is a considerable lack of empathy, and heightened victim blaming, identified with a sexual assault survivor who was labeled as a sex worker compared to one who wasn't. This demonstrates the extent to which stigma associated with sex work sharpens societal tendencies toward victim blaming in the absence of support or justice, reinforcing the rationale for decriminalization and anti-stigma policies.

9. Rape Systemic Culture Influences

- Thacker (2017): Provided an analysis on how rape culture shapes the American criminal justice system and its coverage by mainstream media. The study underscores how normalization of sexual violence coupled with shifting blame to victims impacts outcomes of rape trials and public perception. It calls for structural change along with media responsibility to counter systemic victim blaming.

10. Law Enforcement and Police Response

- Greeson et al. (2016): While positive police responses were reported by 35% of the participants in Greeson's study, negative responses from law enforcement officials were also recorded, amounting to 15%, with the majority (50%) experiencing mixed interactions. In interviews conducted with 20 adolescent rape survivors, researchers identified two major themes within the scope of post-victimization interactions which included disbelief, skepticism and blame as well as belief, validation and support. This illustrates the shocking gap that is prevailing between law enforcement agencies and victims along with police trauma training practice standards.

11. Recovery and Post-Traumatic Growth

- "Hartley et al. (2016) using IPA with six adult women who were survivors of CSA found that post-traumatic growth could exist alongside psychological distress or ongoing trauma," wrote Hartley. Survivors exhibited distinct forms of personal elevation without having to experience an uncomplicated trajectory towards recovery which contested the frameworks centered on dominant PTG models. This creates a need for more balanced approaches to PTSD recovery that embrace suffering in addition to resilience.

12. Intervention Strategies and Recovery Support

- Hegarty (2016): A systematic evaluation of primary care provided to patients who were domestic or sexual violence survivors revealed some encouraging results such as those obtained from nurse-led advocacy along with mother-child psychotherapy, CBT, trauma-informed CBT, and EMDR; however survivor disclosure continued being problematic due to clinician silencing constructs combined with survivor reluctance/holistic models lacking rigorous evaluation still suggested strong survivor-driven integrated care framework value for adults.”

13. The Psychological Aspects Involved In Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)

- Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad (2016): In their research on 100 women CSA survivors, PTG was significantly predicted by familial factors like birth order and sibling count as well as cognitive factors of hope and self-blame. Notably, PTG peaked at moderate levels of resilience indicating a nonlinear relationship. Also, resilience and PTS interacted in multifaceted ways suggesting that some level of distress is necessary for growth. This aligns with the perspective that PTG is not the absence of trauma but rather a transformation shaped by coping strategies, cognition, and environment.

14. Self-Blame, Stigma, And Shame Within Society

- Kendy And Prock (2016) studied 123 female survivors of CSA, SA, and IPV where self-blame, shame, internalized stigma and anticipatory stigma were positively associated with PTSD, depression, and maladaptive coping behavior. These results support the position that survivors’ internal experiences are shaped by social responses to them confirmed the stigma theories which underline social appraisal as a primary source of psychological injury.
- Peter-Hagene & Ullman (2016): In a comprehensive longitudinal research with 1,013 participants who had survived trauma, it was found that those who consumed alcohol before the assault had lower overall PTSD but higher characterological self-blame. It is important to note that only characterological self-blame (not behavioral self-blame) was associated with greater PTSD symptoms. This indicates that narratives surrounding alcohol abuse as a form of victim blaming can internalize and exacerbate the consequences of trauma.

15. SES and Victim-Blaming Stereotypes

- Spencer (2016): Participants attributed lower sexual and social morals along with excessive promiscuity to low-SES survivors while considering them more responsible for the assault than high-SES peer survivors. The study showed there is classist stereotype around how victims are perceived which results in their minimization and harsh judgment instead. These findings raise significant concerns not just from a public health perspective, but also a legal one due to the intersection of SES, gender, and the socio-cultural perception of trauma.

16. Social Reactions and Disclosure Dynamics

- Ullman & Relyea (2016): A three-wave study conducted on 1863 women illustrated reciprocal boundary spanning relations between PTSS and maladaptive coping strategies. Sustained PTSS were also linked to negative social responses like “turning against” reactions stemming from social contexts.

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

- Importantly, these observations highlight significant feedback loops: greater PTSS led to poorer coping flexibility and vice versa.
- This strengthens the ecological model of trauma, which posits interactivity between survivors and their surroundings as central dynamics interactions fundamental to understanding what is rendered traumatic.
- White et al. (2015): Within the confines of the socioecological model, this study showed that the first person a survivor confided in tended to regard them as more supportive than others. However, emotional support led to greater distress—supportive trauma reactivation during later disclosure—creating ironic emotional distress.
- Alongside trauma blaming leads to negative self-appraisal and thus emphasizes the emotional price one pays for revelation.

17. Police and Official Responses

- Greeson et al. (2015): An interview study of 20 adolescent survivors found some police responses that validated belief systems had positive outcomes, while judgmental or skeptical questioning led people into much deeper emotional harm. These results highlight how crucial trauma-informed policing is toward secondary victimization.

18. Emotion Regulation and 'Just World' Theory

- Harber et al. (2015): Over two experiments, it was demonstrated that emotional expression led to less victim blaming. It appears victims who described their feelings were less likely to be accused Thanks to emotinal relayed response to eviction: “to blame victims” or Restoration Hypothesis strengthen Just World Theory suggesting ways out emotionally enables escaping logic behind hypocrisy hence inverse techniques whereby stimuli eliminate the accused fade.Edited

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study the impact of victim blaming on recovery and coping in sexual abuse survivors.

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of victim blaming on recovery and coping in sexual abuse survivors.
2. To explore the psychological effects of victim blaming, including its impact on self-esteem, trauma symptoms, and mental well-being.
3. To examine the role of the social system in aggravating the negative effects of victim blaming on recovery and coping.

Hypotheses

1. **H1:** Higher levels of victim blaming result in lower levels in recovery and coping process among sexual abuse survivors.
2. **H2:** Higher level victim blaming results in psychological distress and suffering (e.g., anxiety, depression, PTSD, and BPD) among sexual abuse survivors.
3. **H3:** Higher levels of victim blaming result in a poorer and slower recovery process (e.g., psychological distress, physiological symptoms, trauma symptoms) among sexual abuse survivors.

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

Research Design

This study employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design**. Data was collected through **standardized self-report questionnaires** administered online. **Purposive and convenience sampling** techniques were used to recruit participants through social media and other platforms. Statistical analyses, including **linear regression**, were conducted to examine the impact of victim blaming on recovery and coping.

Variables

- **Independent Variable:** Victim Blaming
- **Dependent Variables:** Recovery, Coping

Sample

The sample included **120 self-identified sexual abuse survivors**, inclusive of all genders.

Inclusion criteria:

- Male, female, or other gender identities
- Survivors of any form of sexual abuse (minor or major; childhood or adulthood)
- Voluntary participation with informed consent
- Access to technology to complete online forms

Exclusion criteria:

- Current psychiatric crisis or medication-based treatment
- Non-survivors of sexual abuse
- Inability to comprehend the language of the survey

Ethical considerations were prioritized through informed consent, confidentiality, and trigger warnings.

Instruments Used

1. **Social Reactions Questionnaire–Shortened (SRQ-S):** Developed by Ullman (2000), this 16-item scale assesses social reactions to disclosure of sexual assault. It consists of 3 general scales (Turning Against, Unsupportive Acknowledgement, and Positive Reactions) with 8 subscales, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = never, 4 = always).
2. **Questionnaire about the Process of Recovery (QRP):** Developed by Law et al., this 15-item scale assesses recovery in individuals with mental health challenges. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = disagree strongly, 4 = agree strongly), with higher scores indicating greater perceived recovery.
3. **Coping Scale:** Developed by Hamby, Grych, and Banyard (2013), this 13-item tool measures emotional, cognitive, and behavioral coping strategies. Items are rated on a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating more effective coping.

Procedure

1. Standardized tools were selected, and a Google Form was created containing study instructions, consent form, trigger warning, and questionnaires.
2. Participants gave informed consent and were assured confidentiality.
3. Data was collected and stored securely for analysis using statistical software.

RESULTS*Descriptive Statistics for Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping (N = 120)*

Variable	Mean (M)	Median	SD	SEM	Min	Max	Shapiro-Wilk W	Shapiro-Wilk p
Victim Blaming (A)	27.5	29.0	10.1	0.925	0	48	0.958	< .001
Recovery (B)	42.1	43.5	10.7	0.977	0	60	0.959	< .001
Coping (C)	36.3	37.0	7.08	0.646	13	52	0.976	.031

Interpretation

Descriptive statistics (Figure 1) indicate that sexual abuse survivors reported **moderate levels of victim blaming** (M = 27.5, SD = 10.1), **moderately high levels of recovery** (M = 42.1, SD = 10.7), and **moderate levels of coping** (M = 36.3, SD = 7.08). The wide range of scores (e.g., victim blaming range: 0–48) reflects substantial variability in participants' experiences.

Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that the distributions for all three variables significantly deviated from normality ($p < .05$), indicating the need to consider non-parametric methods or transform data if required in further analyses. Despite facing victim-blaming responses, many survivors are still actively engaging in recovery and coping processes, demonstrating diverse resilience trajectories.

Linear Regression: Impact of Victim Blaming on Recovery (N = 120)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df ₁	df ₂	p
1	0.121	0.015	0.006	1.74	1	118	.189

Interpretation

A linear regression was conducted to examine whether **victim blaming predicts recovery** among sexual abuse survivors. The model was **not statistically significant**, $F(1, 118) = 1.74$, $p = .189$, indicating that victim blaming does not significantly predict levels of recovery. The model accounted for only **1.5% of the variance** in recovery scores ($R^2 = .015$), suggesting a **very weak and non-significant relationship** between victim blaming and recovery in this sample.

Omnibus ANOVA Test for Regression: Victim Blaming Predicting Recovery (N = 120)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Z _A (Victim Blaming)	1.73	1	1.734	1.74	.189
Residuals	117.27	118	0.994		

Interpretation

An omnibus ANOVA was performed as part of the regression analysis to assess whether **victim blaming significantly predicts recovery**. The results showed that the model was **not statistically significant**, $F(1, 118) = 1.74$, $p = .189$. This suggests that **victim blaming does not account for a significant amount of variation in recovery scores** among the

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

participants. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no effect of victim blaming on recovery cannot be rejected.

Model Coefficients: Victim Blaming Predicting Recovery (Standardized Z Scores, N = 120)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	p	Std. Estimate
Intercept	-1.28e-16	0.0910	-0.180	0.1802	~0.00	1.000	—
Z _A (Victim Blaming)	-0.121	0.0914	-0.302	0.0603	-1.32	.189	-0.121

Interpretation

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether **victim blaming** (Z_A) significantly predicts **recovery** (Z_B) among sexual abuse survivors. The standardized regression coefficient was **not statistically significant**, $\beta = -0.121$, $t(118) = -1.32$, $p = .189$, 95% CI [-0.302, 0.0603]. While the relationship was slightly negative, indicating that higher levels of victim blaming were associated with lower recovery scores, the effect was **not strong enough** to rule out chance in this sample. These findings suggest that **victim blaming may not significantly impact recovery processes**, at least within this dataset.

Model Fit Measures: Victim Blaming Predicting Coping (N = 120)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.017	0.00029	-0.00818	0.0343	1	118	.853

Interpretation

A linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the impact of **victim blaming** on **coping** among sexual abuse survivors. The results revealed a **very weak and non-significant relationship**, $R^2 = .00029$, $F(1, 118) = 0.03$, $p = .853$. This indicates that **less than 0.03% of the variance in coping scores** is explained by victim blaming, suggesting **no meaningful predictive relationship** between the two variables in this sample.

Omnibus ANOVA Test: Victim Blaming Predicting Coping (N = 120)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Z _A (Victim Blaming – Z _{Score})	0.0345	1	0.0345	0.0343	.853
Residuals	118.9655	118	1.0082		

Interpretation

An ANOVA test was conducted to assess the effect of **victim blaming (Z_A)** on **coping (Z_C)** among sexual abuse survivors. The results showed that the model was not statistically significant, $F(1, 118) = 0.03$, $p = .853$. This suggests that **victim blaming does not significantly explain the variance in coping**, further supporting the conclusion that **victim blaming is not a significant predictor of coping outcomes** in this sample.

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

Model Coefficients: Predicting Coping from Victim Blaming (Z-Scores, N = 120)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	p	Std. Estimate
Intercept	8.63e-19	0.0917	-0.182	0.182	9.42e-18	1.000	—
Z_A (Victim Blaming)	0.0170	0.0920	-0.165	0.199	0.185	.853	0.0170

Interpretation

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether **victim blaming (Z_A)** predicts **coping (Z_C)** among sexual abuse survivors. The standardized coefficient for victim blaming was $\beta = 0.017$, $t(118) = 0.185$, $p = .853$, indicating **no statistically significant effect**. The 95% confidence interval for the estimate ranged from **-0.165 to 0.199**, further suggesting that the effect of victim blaming on coping is not reliably different from zero.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to understand how victim blaming affects recovery and coping mechanisms in survivors of sexual abuse. Specifically, the study focused on testing the hypothesis that higher perceived victim blaming would forecast lower levels of psychological recovery and adaptive coping. The study sample for this investigation consisted of 120 participants, and their responses were evaluated using linear regression analysis to determine the effect victim blaming (independent variable) has on recovery and coping (dependent variables).

Descriptive Insights

From the descriptive statistics, it was observed that there were moderate levels of both victim blaming ($M=27.5$), emergent recovery ($M=42.1$) and moderate coping ($M = 36.3$). All three variables had large SDs (Victim Blaming: $SD = 10.1$, Recovery: 10.7 , Coping: 7.08), suggesting high heterogeneity among participants in terms of their experiences. These results affirm that while societal blame is often placed on survivors, they are able to recover and cope in a meaningful way through rather remarkable resilient processes despite everything they have to go through.

Victim Blaming and Recovery

Based on the victim blaming hypothesis, one would expect to see something more notable than what was found within the scope of regression analysis, as there was only a weak negative correlation with recovery ($\beta = -0.121$, $R^2 = 0.0146$, $p = .189$). In layman's terms, approximately 1.46% of the variance in recovery scores which could be marked with perceived blame does not justify any significance in result leaning towards something meaningful—especially when Blame is on the rise. The anova test on the other hand, further supporting this notion signified as ($F(1,118) = 1.74$, $p = .189$) suggesting no significant power.

Data collected by Ullman (2007), Kennedy & Prock (2018) seem to stem parallel to conflicting results that our team has come to by claiming that social reactions which have a rather negative undertone like victim blaming tend to increase post trauma disorder symptoms along with slow recovery progressions; generally speaking society tends to place blame and delay progress recovering psychologically. However alongside Wilson et al. (2022) agreeing as they argued alongside us stating that although victim blaming holds psychological abusive pre-conditions abuse once its let free does not resolutely determine

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

recovery over time in behavioral models—actor depression model suggesting internal cushioning or coping resource might be accountable shielding from societal written off claims supported negatively portrays due to lack but rather through support psychologically decline after emotionally distanced from societal view clutches.

Victim Blaming and Coping

The regression model assessing coping yielded a very weak result that was not significant ($\beta = 0.017$, $R^2 = 0.00029$, $p = .853$), suggesting there is no meaningful association between victim blaming and coping efforts. The ANOVA result ($F(1,118) = 0.0343$, $p = .853$) confirms victim blaming does not significantly predict coping strategies employed.

This result challenges the hypothesis that negative social feedback universally dampens one's ability to cope. Instead, it underscores the possibility that judgment from others has less value than internal psychological resilience, emotion regulation, and available resources for coping, including positive supports. Societal reactions do not determine dysfunctional responses to adversity by survivors.

Evaluation of Hypotheses

Results counter the study's assumptions by indicating victim blaming does not significantly impede rehabilitation and recovery processes contrary to what was anticipated with higher levels of blaming assigned to victims attributed to themselves. Although the relationship between victim blaming and recovery was slightly negative with coping slightly positive, both relationships failed to reach statistical significance suggesting that while socially damaging, victim blaming does not independently shape a survivor's psychological trajectories concerning recovery and coping skills utilization or sophistication ranging from simple to highly adaptive in nature as time progressed post trauma exposure more than socially endorsed unfounded perceptions of blame placed on them by others as victims who are blamed within their social contexts for having been victims out of chance events beyond their control.

Implications and Theoretical Contributions

This study makes the unique contribution of illustrating evasion survivors exhibit toward dismissive societal reactions. Participants reporting moderate to high recovery and functional coping, even while facing victim blaming, affirms a strength-based and trauma-informed approach in psychology which focuses on the survivor's agency, ability for post-traumatic growth (PTG), and not just the damaging impact of trauma.

The findings also imply that psychological recovery is multifaceted both externally as well as internally. While victim blaming can be emotionally burdensome, it can also be countered by personal agency, prevailing ideologies, emotional self-regulation, supportive therapy, and strong social networks. This is at odds with conventional linear models of trauma and aligns with more contemporary models centered around resistance, resilience or meaning-making paradigms as healing.

Lastly this research underscores a need for context-sensitive and individualized intervention frameworks. Mental health practitioners including social workers as well as policymakers should not emphasize solely the destruction resulting from societal blame but instead strive to create protective spaces where experiences are validated alongside enhanced psychological autonomy.

Limitations

Every study comes with its own limitations.

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The specific group of participants selected for this study was limited to the 120 participants, which does not adequately represent the population of sexual abuse survivors.
- **Shifts in Gender and Socioeconomic Status:** The lack of variation concerning a person's gender, economic standing, or cultural background creates restrictions on how widely applicable the findings are.
- **Self-Report Bias:** In regard to the sensitive nature of this subject, utilizing self-reported data adds the risk of social desirability bias as well as memory inaccuracies.
- **Selection Bias:** Participants willing to be studied may have a predisposition towards effective coping strategies, resulting in an above average instance of positive outcomes in a self-selected sample.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. **Greater Diversity Within Sample Population:** Further research on sexual abuse survivors needs to focus on capturing a wider range of socio-cultural backgrounds in addition to varying gender representation to enhance generalizability.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** Observing survivors across significant durations would demonstrate how victim blaming affects coping and recovery across multi-stage healing processes.
3. **Integration of Qualitative Data:** Using only quantitative data risks overlooking complex details that analysis would reveal through other methods called qualitative measures.
4. **Recovery Contexts:** Support systems as well as community attitudes and media should be included more broadly as they strengthen understanding concerning the contexts surrounding recovery from different psychological and social angles.
5. **Legal and Institutional Factors:** Evaluating the role of police and court institutions in addressing trauma among survivors may lead to legal reforms that are more sensitive to the survivor's experience.

CONCLUSION

With a sample of 120 sexual abuse survivors from different genders and age groups, this study focused on victim blaming and recovery, incorporating Attribution Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, and Theoretical Learning Helplessness Frameworks. Measurement was done using three standardized instruments: SRQ-S for victim blaming, Recovery Questionnaire, and Coping Scale.

As to the responses of the participants to blaming them as victims showed moderate levels of victim blaming, moderate coping mechanisms, alongside recovery. Still there was no statistically significant impact of victim blaming on either recovery or coping. While there did appear to be a small negative trend between victim blaming with recovery and slight positive trend with coping these were not strong enough to be called statistically significant across all analysis techniques conducted.

- Victim Blaming Mean = 27.5
- Recovery Mean = 42.1
- Coping Mean = 36.3

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

This shows that societal victim blaming does not seem to significantly derail a survivor's recovery and coping efforts, revealing their inner fortitude and resilience. Compounding factors such as personal determination, therapy, or an available support system might be more protective and influential in psychological recovery and coping than profoundly internalized social blame.

These results oppose the assumption that victim blaming invariably aggravates mental health issues. Instead, these findings amplify the over-arching need for individualized approaches that aid response variability while highlighting the internal resources available for trauma survival and healing. This resonates with strength-based, trauma-informed approaches focused on empowerment rather than further disempowering the individual by labeling them a victim.

While blaming remains a very real sociocultural problem, this study exposes the notion that it may not always be the primary socially constructed scapegoat determining a survivor's recovery journey timeline. The psychological aftermath of trauma is most likely to result from a confluence of social, individual, and contextual determinants dominated by relativism. Survivors in this study demonstrated significant psychosocial resilience describing notable capacities for recovery and coping despite experienced blame illustrating psychological agency alongside adaptability cognizant of their circumstances within which they functioned.

These conclusions are relevant to mental health practitioners, the legal system, and other supporting bodies: Instead of assuming a monolithic vulnerability, there is need in recognizing the unique strengths and experiences of survivors. Uniform approaches tend to fail; instead, comprehensive tailored care that addresses all aspects while being centered around trauma is essential.

As a final point, it is noteworthy that even though the study did not validate its hypothesis linking victim blaming with recovering ability and coping deficit, it highlighted resilience among survivors which is still counterproductive. Looking ahead, attention ought to be given toward moderating factors such as the severity of trauma experienced, availability of therapy and support within the community to better understand what facilitates or impedes recovery. Survivors need support resources not only after injury occurs but also during ongoing healing processes as an acknowledgment of their strength and determination to move forward.

REFERENCES

- Al-Ayubi, A. K. (2019). Don't Speak, Maharani: Raising Awareness Towards how victim blaming is worsening rape survivor's PTSD. *Kata Kita: Journal of Language, Literature and Teaching*, 7(3), 329–336
- Allred, S. K. (2007). Multiple levels of influence on the sexual assault victim: Examining the relationship of sexist beliefs, social reactions, and self-blame on recovery (Doctoral dissertation). University of Oregon. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3285589)
- Bonnan-White, J., Hetzel-Riggin, M. D., Diamond-Welch, B. K., & Tollini, C. (2015). "You Blame Me, Therefore I Blame Me": The Importance of First Disclosure Partner Responses on Trauma-Related Cognitions and Distress. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(8), 1260-1286

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

- Boyle, K. M., & Clay-Warner, J. (2018). Shameful “Victims” and Angry “Survivors”: Emotion, Mental Health, and Labeling Sexual Assault. *Violence and Victims*, 33(3), 436–452
- Bruhns, M. E., del Prado, A., Slezakova, J., Lapinski, A. J., Li, T., & Pizer, B. (2018). Survivors’ Perspectives on Recovery from Commercial Sexual Exploitation Beginning in Childhood. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 46(4), 413-455
- Choi, J. (2024). Impact of Self-Blame and Social Reactions on Adult Sexual Assault Sequelae. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 33(2), 362-385
- Chouliara, Z., & Narang, J. (2017). Recovery from child sexual abuse (CSA) in India: A relational framework for practice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 527–538
- Dworkin, E. R., & Weaver, T. L. (2021). The impact of sociocultural contexts on mental health following sexual violence: A conceptual model. *Psychology of Violence*, 11(5), 476–487
- Greeson, M. R., Campbell, R., & Fehler-Cabral, G. (2016). "Nobody deserves this": Adolescent sexual assault victims' perceptions of disbelief and victim blame from police. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 44(1), 90–110
- Harber, K. D., Podolski, P., & Williams, C. H. (2015). Emotional disclosure and victim blaming. *Emotion*, 15(5), 603–614
- Hartley, S., Johnco, C., Hofmeyr, M., & Berry, A. (2016). The Nature of Posttraumatic Growth in Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 25(2), 201–220
- Hegarty, K., Tarzia, L., Hooker, L., & Taft, A. (2016). Interventions to support recovery after domestic and sexual violence in primary care. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28(5), 519–532
- Hurrell, A.-K., Draycott, S., & Andrews, L. (2018). Secondary traumatic stress in police officers investigating childhood sexual abuse. *Policing: An International Journal*, 41(5), 636–650. (Note: Although listed as 2018, confirm the actual publication year as there may be a mistake.)
- Kaye-Tzadok, A., & Davidson-Arad, B. (2016). Posttraumatic growth among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse: Its relation to cognitive strategies, posttraumatic symptoms, and resilience. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 8(5), 550–558
- Kennedy, A. C., & Prock, K. A. (2018). “I Still Feel Like I Am Not Normal”: A Review of the Stigmatization among Female sexual abuse survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Intimate Partner Violence. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 19(5), 512-527
- McQueen, K., Murphy-Oikonen, J., Miller, A. et al. (2021). Sexual assault: women’s voices on the health impacts of not being believed by police. *BMC Women's Health*, 21, 217
- Meyrick, J., & Anning, A. (2025). Exploring the Experiences of Sexual Violence/Abuse Survivors Attending a Recovery Group: A Qualitative Study of Recovery and Evaluation Implications. *Violence Against Women*, 31(1), 245-265
- O’Shea, B., Feicht, R., Brown, M., & Numer, M. (2024). Rethinking sexual violence labels: exploring the impact of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ discourse. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 15(1)
- Peter-Hagene, L. C., & Ullman, S. E. (2016). Longitudinal Effects of Sexual Assault Victims’ Drinking and Self-Blame on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(1), 83-93

Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors

- Reich, C. M., Pegel, G. A., & Johnson, A. B. (2021). Are Survivors of Sexual Assault Blamed More Than Victims of Other Crimes? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(19-20), NP18394-NP18416
- Scarduzio, J.A., Sheff, S.E. & Smith, M. (2018). Coping and Sexual Harassment: How Victims Cope across Multiple Settings. *Arch Sex Behav*, 47, 327–340
- Schröder, J., Kratzer, L., Yamak, Y., Briken, P., & Tozdan, S. (2021). The role of stigmatization in developing post-traumatic symptoms after experiencing child sexual abuse by a female perpetrator. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 12(1)
- Shepp, V., O’Callaghan, E., & Ullman, S. E. (2019). Interactions with Offenders Post-Assault and Their Impacts on Recovery: A Qualitative Study of Sexual Assault Survivors and Support Providers. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 29(6), 725–747
- Sprankle, E., Bloomquist, K., Butcher, C. et al. (2018). The Role of Sex Work Stigma in Victim Blaming and Empathy of Sexual Assault Survivors. *Sex Res Soc Policy*, 15, 242–248
- Strauss Swanson, C., & Szymanski, D. M. (2022). Sexual violence and psychological distress: The roles of coping self-efficacy, self-blame, shame, activism, and feminism. *Sex Roles*, 87(6), 1–16
- Thacker, L. K. (2017). Rape culture, victim blaming, and the role of media in the criminal justice system. *Kentucky Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship*, 1(1), Article 8
- Ullman, S. E., & Relyea, M. (2016). Social support, coping, and posttraumatic stress symptoms in female sexual assault survivors: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 29(5), 441–450
- Wilson, L. C., Farley, A., & Horton, S. F. (2022). The Impact of Victim Blaming and Locus of Control on Mental Health Outcomes Among Female Sexual Abuse Survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 28(15-16), 3785-3800

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Thanvi, K. & Kumar, S. (2025). Victim Blaming, Recovery, and Coping in Sexual Abuse Survivors. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(3), 465-482. DIP:18.01.041.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.041