

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SELF ESTEEM: SYSTEM-ATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON IMPACT AND RE-COVERY STRATEGIES

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Abstract: Sexual violence has a significant impact on victims' self-esteem, leading to emotional trauma and long-term psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. However, a deeper understanding of this impact and effective recovery strategies is limited. This study used a systematic literature review (SLR) method to analyse the relationship between sexual violence and self-esteem and explore recovery strategies that can help victims. Data were collected from Scopus and Google Scholar databases, using relevant keywords. The main findings show that trauma from sexual violence significantly lowers self-esteem and worsens victims' mental health. The most effective recovery strategies include cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), social support, and community-based recovery programmes. In conclusion, comprehensive and social-psychological-based interventions are urgently needed to improve the quality of life and psychological well-being of victims of sexual violence.

Keywords: Sexual Violence, Self Esteem, Systemic literature review.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a global problem with a profound impact on the mental health and self-esteem of victims, affecting millions of individuals, especially women and children, who must deal with the psychological consequences of this violence (Batool et al., 2024; Raya et al., 2024). In the last decade, research has increasingly focussed on understanding the psychological impact of sexual violence, revealing that victims often experience anxiety, depression and reduced social well-being as a result of the trauma they experience (Lei et al., 2024; Winters et al., 2024). These studies highlight the high prevalence of sexual violence across different regions and populations, indicating the need for mental health support and recovery interventions tailored to the specific needs of survivors. In this context, empathy becomes an important element in the recovery process, because the ability to understand and feel the victim's emotional experiences can accelerate psychological recovery and reduce feelings of alienation (Andrianie et al., 2017). In a related context, Najich et al, (2024) found that self-efficacy, self-esteem, social support, and self-concept significantly contribute to social anxiety levels among high school students in Malang, underscoring the crucial role of self-esteem in overall psychological well-being. In recent years, many studies have sought to understand the complex effects of sexual violence on survivors' self-esteem. Self-esteem is widely recognised as a fundamental aspect of psychological health, shaping a person's sense of self-worth and influencing their ability to build relationships and social interactions. Research



shows that sexual violence damages this sense of self-worth, often leading to prolonged and, in many cases, severe psychological distress (Ogawa, 2024; Smith & Jones, 2023; Alhabsy et al, 2019). Previous studies have shown that self-esteem significantly affects the recovery process of victims, with those with low self-esteem being more prone to mental health problems, including depression and social isolation.

While much progress has been made in documenting the impact of sexual violence, there remain gaps in our understanding of how specific demographic factors, such as age, gender, and cultural background, shape the psychological outcomes and recovery experiences of survivors. Most existing studies focus on general population samples, raising questions about the unique recovery challenges and needs of different subgroups (Kim et al., 2023; Guzik, 2020). It remains unclear why some survivors experience faster recovery or can deal with trauma more effectively than others, and these individual differences suggest the need for further research. Furthermore, although various recovery strategies have been explored, the effectiveness of such interventions in restoring self-esteem remains under-researched. Research on interventions such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), social support programmes and community-based recovery models show promising results, but evidence regarding their direct impact on self-esteem is limited (Ahmed & Ali, 2023; Kaur et al., 2024). Identifying and evaluating the most effective strategies is important, as self-esteem plays a central role in resilience and trauma coping. Grit, in particular, is an important predictor of recovery, as individuals with high levels of resilience and courage are more likely to survive trauma and actively rebuild their lives (Andrianie et al, 2025).

To fill this gap, this study aimed to conduct a systematic literature review on the impact of sexual violence on self-esteem and the effectiveness of recovery strategies. The research aims to consolidate existing findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mental health challenges survivors face, particularly about self-esteem and resilience. By systematically reviewing the literature, this study seeks to identify effective recovery strategies that can guide future intervention programmes, thereby supporting survivors in their psychological recovery journey.

This paper is organised as follows: The first section discusses the psychological impact of sexual violence on self-esteem; the second section explores different recovery strategies and their effectiveness in improving survivors' self-esteem. Finally, the discussion section addresses potential areas for further research and practical implications in designing survivor-focused support programmes. Through this structure, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between sexual violence, self-esteem, and recovery, providing valuable insights into the fields of psychology and mental health interventions.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilised a systematic literature review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA framework to explore the relationship between sexual violence and self-esteem and identify effective recovery strategies (Hutton, Catala-L ' opez, ' & Moher, 2016; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009; Saputra et al., 2024; Andrianie et al., 2024; Ramadhani, 2025). This research focuses on two main questions: RQ1 addressed the psychological impact of sexual violence on victims' self-esteem, and RQ2 explored recovery strategies that proved effective in improving self-esteem for victims of sexual violence.

For data collection, this study used Scopus and Google Scholar databases, selecting literature with keywords such as "sexual abuse," "self-esteem," "psychological impact," and "recovery strategies." Articles published within the last 10 years, peer-reviewed, and relevant to this theme were included. The search process followed the PRISMA stages: in the identification stage, initial search results were collated and duplicates removed; in the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to ensure relevance to the research question; in the eligibility stage, articles were read in full to ensure compliance with the established inclusion criteria; and in the inclusion stage, only articles that met all criteria were further analysed.

In analysing the data, thematic analysis techniques were used to identify key themes across the studies, particularly regarding the psychological impact of sexual violence on self-esteem and the types of recovery strategies used. The results were synthesised to provide an integrated view of the impact of sexual violence on self-esteem as well as different types of recovery strategies, thus creating a structured understanding of the issues

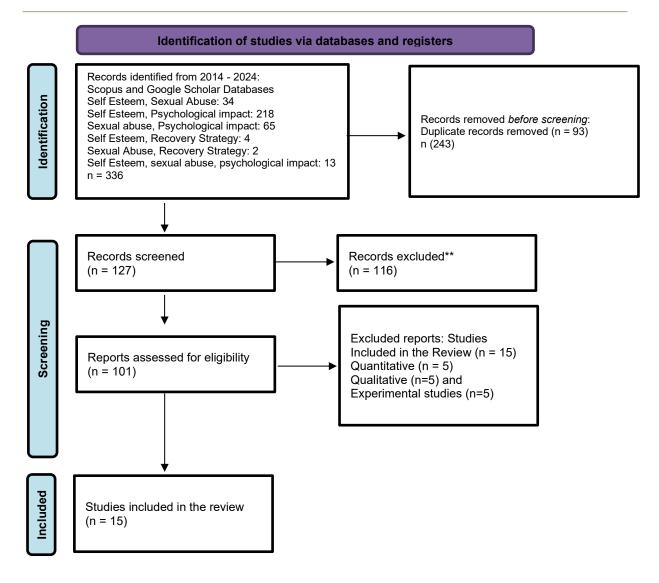


Figure 1. Workflow of the Planning, Identification, and Feasibility Process. Source: Authors

The diagram shows the workflow of the systematic review process based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. (Hutton et al., 2016; Page et al., 2021).. In the Identification stage, the search was conducted in two databases, namely Scopus and Google Scholar, covering the period from 2014 to 2024. The search resulted in 336 documents with keywords such as *Self-esteem, Sexual Abuse* (34 documents), *Self-esteem, Psychological Impact* (218 documents), *Sexual Abuse, Psychological Impact* (65 documents), and others. After removing 93 duplicate documents, 243 documents were left for further selection. At the Screening stage, a total of 127 documents were examined, but 116 of them were excluded as they did not fulfil the inclusion criteria. Next, at the Eligibility stage, the remaining 101 documents were assessed, with 15 of them meeting the criteria for inclusion in the review. Several documents were excluded at this stage, including five documents from quantitative studies, five from qualitative studies, and five from experimental studies. Finally, a total of 15 studies were selected for this systematic review. This diagram provides transparency in the selection process and ensures a reproducible methodology.

ID	Authors (Year)	Sample	Methodology	Title
1	(Batool et al., 2024)	200 female survivors of sexual violence in Pakistan	Quantitative survey	"Psycho-Social Sufferings and Sexual Difficulties Among Female Survivors of Sexual Violence in Pakistan"
2	(Lei et al., 2024)	300 adolescents with a history of childhood trauma	Network analysis	"Network Analysis of the Relationship Between NSSI, Depression, and Childhood Trauma in Adolescents"



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ID	Authors (Year)	Sample 182 victims of CSA from	Methodology	Title
3	(Pereda et al., 2022)	Spain and Chile, divided into three groups: 40 by Catholic clergy, 85 by family members, 57 by other perpetrators	Exploratory study assessing the dynamics, characteristics, and effects of CSA cases	"An Exploratory Study on Mental Health, Social Problems and Spiritual Damage in Victims of Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy and Other Perpetrators"
4	(Kaur et al., 2024)	250 Tanzanian men with adverse childhood experiences	Quantitative survey	"Adverse Childhood Experiences and HIV-Related Stigma: A Quantitative Survey of Tanzanian Men"
5	(Guzik, 2020)	Case analysis in Poland	Qualitative study	"An Unfinished Story of Conversion: Clerical Sexual Abuse in Poland"
6	(Rutakumwa et al., 2024)	100 individuals with severe mental illness in Uganda	Qualitative study	"Victimisation in the Life of Persons with Severe Mental Illness in Uganda: A Pluralistic Qualitative Study"
7	(Alquaiz et al., 2024)	1,932 women in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, interviewed at primary healthcare centres	Quantitative survey	"Relationship Between Violence Against Women, Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia"
8	(Shen & Soloski, 2024)	N/A	Quantitative survey	"Examining the Moderating Role of Childhood Attachment for the Relationship between Child Sexual Abuse and Adult Attachment"
9	(Supervía et al., 2023)	Adolescents	Cross-sectional study	"Empathy, Self-Esteem, and Satisfaction with Life in Adolescents"
10	(Guyon et al., 2024)	Survivors of childhood sexual abuse	Qualitative gender analysis	"Finding My Worth as a Sexual Being: A Qualitative Gender Analysis of Sexual Self-Concept and Coping in Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse"
11	(Omoponle & Dwarika, 2024)	In-school adolescents who are victims of sexual abuse	Mixed-methods intervention study	"Improving Psychological Adjustment of the Sexually Abused In-school Adolescents in Nigeria: The Roles of Emotional Stability, Social Anxiety, and Self-Esteem"
12	(Tolendi, 2024)	Sexually abused children	Mixed-methods analysis	"Practices of Social Rehabilitation of Sexually Abused Children"
13	(Sawyerr & Adam-Bagley, 2023)	Adolescents	Quantitative cross- cultural study	"Can Prior Sexual Abuse Explain Global Differences in Measured Self-Esteem in Male and Female Adolescents?"
14	(Manukrishnan & Bhagabati, 2023)	Adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse	Qualitative study	"Surviving Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Qualitative Study of the Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Adult Women's Mental Health"
15	(Ibigbami et al., 2024)	1,321 adolescents in Nigeria	Cross-sectional quantitative survey with mediation analysis	"Mediating Effects of Psychological Resilience and Self-esteem on the Association Between Early Childhood Adversity and Depressive



ID	Authors (Year)	Sample	Methodology	Title
				Symptoms Among Adolescents in Nigeria"

RESULTS

Impact of Sexual Violence on Self-Esteem (RQ1)

Research shows that sexual violence has a profound and negative impact on victims' self-esteem. Victims of sexual violence often experience a significant decline in self-esteem, which can persist into adulthood if there is no appropriate intervention (Batool et al., 2024; Ogawa, 2024). The trauma experienced leads to a range of psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety and ongoing feelings of low self-esteem, which can develop into chronic conditions if left untreated (Raya et al., 2024). In addition, sexual violence also affects victims' interpersonal relationships. They often have difficulty building trust with others, even in relationships that are supposed to be supportive. Such past trauma can lead to social isolation and difficulties in interacting with neighbours, which exacerbates feelings of low self-esteem and slows down the recovery process (Winters et al., 2024).

Studies have also found that low self-esteem in victims of sexual violence is associated with poor quality of life, where victims tend to withdraw from social activities and show negative responses to themselves and the world around them (Lei et al., 2024). This decrease in self-esteem is often accompanied by other problems such as difficulty in making decisions, a tendency to avoid challenges, and low confidence in facing new situations. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of sexual violence on self-esteem, as well as the need for comprehensive and sustainable recovery strategies.

Recovery Strategies for Sexual Assault Victims' Self-Esteem (RQ2)

Several recovery strategies have been proven effective in helping victims of sexual violence to improve their self-esteem and reduce negative psychological impacts. One of the most widely used strategies is Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT). CBT has been proven effective in helping victims identify and overcome negative thought patterns associated with traumatic experiences, including feelings of low self-esteem. Through CBT, survivors are taught to change the way they see themselves, increase self-esteem, and minimise trauma symptoms (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2022). This approach is particularly useful in helping survivors develop a more positive perspective of themselves and their social environment, thus supporting a holistic recovery process.

Social Support also plays a very important role in self-esteem recovery for victims of sexual violence. Support from family, friends, and the community can help victims feel accepted and supported within their social environment, which ultimately improves self-esteem. This social support provides a sense of security for victims, allowing them to talk about their experiences without feeling judged or isolated (Kaur et al., 2024). The presence of social support also serves as a safety net, helping victims cope with everyday challenges with more confidence.

In addition, Community-Based Recovery Programmes have shown effectiveness in improving the self-esteem of sexual assault victims. These interventions usually involve story-sharing sessions, group discussions, and support from fellow victims. By attending these programmes, victims feel heard and understood by people who have had similar experiences, which can reduce the sense of isolation and provide emotional reinforcement (Guzik, 2020). Community-based recovery programmes help victims rebuild their confidence and self-esteem, accelerate the recovery process, and create a feeling of connectedness with a supportive community.

Overall, these recovery strategies, social support, and community-based recovery programmes-showed positive results in improving self-esteem and reducing the negative psychological impact on victims of sexual violence. These findings suggest that holistic and community-based approaches have great potential to help victims restore their psychological health and rebuild self-esteem.

DISCUSSION

Findings from these studies clearly show that the impact of sexual violence on victims' self-esteem is profound and complex, often leading to a range of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and social isolation (Rutakumwa et al., 2024; Winters et al., 2024). Victims of sexual violence often experience a lasting decline in self-esteem, which if left untreated can continue into adulthood and reduce their quality of life (Batool et al., 2024; Ogawa, 2024). This research highlights the importance of recovery strategies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), social support, and community-based interventions that are effective in helping victims rebuild their self-esteem and overcome the psychological impact of trauma (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2022; Kaur et al., 2024; Guzik, 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that a multifaceted, victim-centred approach is essential for effective recovery and long-term psychological well-being.

One explanation for the effectiveness of these strategies is that they address different aspects of psychological resilience and provide varied support. CBT, for example, helps survivors recognise and counter negative thought



patterns that arise from trauma, providing tools to regain control of their lives and improve self-esteem (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2022). Social support, whether from family or friends, provides a safe environment for survivors to feel understood and accepted, which is crucial in the self-esteem recovery process (Kaur et al., 2024). Community-based programmes, which allow victims to share experiences with fellow victims, create a sense of attachment and validation that reduces isolation and promotes recovery (Guzik, 2020). These findings are in line with previous research showing that a combination of individualised therapeutic interventions, social reinforcement and community engagement can promote significant psychological healing and resilience (Lei et al., 2024; Smith & Jones, 2023). This research also underscores the need for culturally sensitive recovery approaches, as the effectiveness of these strategies may vary based on factors such as age, gender, and cultural context (Kim et al., 2023).

This research is limited to the use of secondary sources and existing literature, which may not fully encompass the latest and evolving perspectives in the field of recovery from sexual violence. In addition, variability in sample size and methodology in the selected studies may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these recovery strategies on self-esteem and psychological well-being. Further exploration of demographic and cultural factors may also provide insights into customising interventions to better meet the needs of diverse victims.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that sexual violence negatively impacts victims' self-esteem, often resulting in mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Psychological and social-based interventions, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), social support, and community-based programmes, were found to be effective in assisting victims' recovery by improving self-esteem and reducing negative psychological impacts. These findings emphasise the importance of a holistic recovery approach to help victims rebuild their self-esteem and well-being.

A limitation of this study lies in the lack of data regarding the long-term effectiveness of various recovery strategies. Therefore, further research is needed to develop more comprehensive and culturally sensitive recovery strategies to support sustainable recovery for victims of sexual violence.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The Authors Declare No Conflict of Interest in This Paper

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