

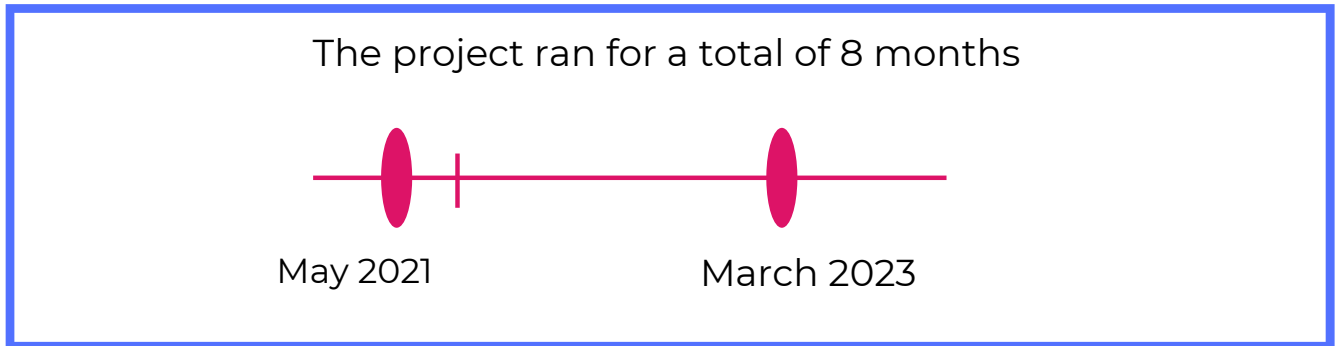
Rupture and Repair: Towards a survivor-centred understanding of how rape harms

Project report

Principal investigator: Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, London Metropolitan University

Project background

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on the theme of understanding violence, abuse and mental health.



Project team:

- Fiona Vera-Gray, Assistant Professor at Durham University

Project summary

Background

There are ongoing debates in work to understand the impacts of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) about the usefulness of the concept of 'trauma' as a way of understanding the harms of VAWG. Where a trauma model has helped to make visible the fact that violence against women is harmful, it has been said to be a "double-edged sword", inadvertently hiding other forms of harm. It has been critiqued as making the harms of VAWG a personal problem, rather than a social one, and can be used to label victim-survivors as being irreparably damaged.

Methods

Instead of the idea of 'trauma and recovery' made famous by Judith Herman, this project used the idea of 'rupture and repair' to explore the harms of violence against women and girls outside of trauma. It brought together a diverse group of women who all have lived experience of sexual and/or domestic violence at the same time as working as activists, academics, and/or practitioners on issues of VAWG. The group worked together to help design the project, and met together over five themed workshops to talk about the harms of VAWG in terms of trauma, relationships, time, space, and bodies.

Results

The project has found that outside of the Western frame of trauma, there are useful ways of thinking about VAWG that use metaphor to capture the experience of harm for victim-survivors. These include drawing from Egyptian, Caribbean, and Ghanaian mythology to describe how we carry the past with us.

Conclusions

Instead of rupture and repair, the project has ended in thinking about ruins and return. Ruins – not to be confused with ruined – describes monuments to the past that exist in the present. We return to ruins rather than repair them; we recognise their value and the strength that keeps them standing. The implications of this reconceptualisation for survivors and support are to be drawn out in the study's conclusion.

Key messages

Top 3 key messages from the project



Seeing the impact of violence against women in terms of 'trauma' legitimises harm, but it also acts to homogenise and hide it.

Existing critiques and applications of trauma in feminist work on violence against women have stopped short of looking outside Western traditions to understand what constitutes trauma, violence, and harms.



When these perspectives are included, the unspeakable harms of violence against women begin to find explanatory frameworks; metaphors that orient around our relationship to time, including the ways in which we carry our past in us.

The Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network

We will be sure to keep our members updated on any outputs linked to this project in the future. To keep updated you can sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter. You can also follow us on our socials . All links can be found at the bottom of this page.

About the VAMHN

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

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| Measurement | Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement |
| Understanding | Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems |
| Intervention | Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems |

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