

Empowering Discourses Countering Negativism towards Female Rape Survivors on Social Media in Cameroon

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1105017>

Received: 11 May 2024; Accepted: 18 May 2024; Published: 30 May 2024

ABSTRACT

It is commonplace to see negative comments, usually fueled by rape myths and rape culture directed at female rape survivors who break the silence on rape on social media. Such discourses are common on social media platforms. However, a group of social media users are changing the popular narratives by engaging in powerful positive discourses to counter widespread negativism that is usually directed at female rape survivors. This article examines the powerful positive rape discourses that social media users engage in after a rape survivor breaks her silence on rape, in an attempt to counteract negative discourses. This study examines 50 empowering discourses drawn from Facebook and Instagram and we found out that the current positive narratives do not only challenge rape myths and rape culture; they go a long way to empower survivors and implicate perpetrators.

Key words: breaking the silence, rape, rape survivors, female rape survivors, critical discourse analysis, the feminist theory on rape, rape myths, rape culture

INTRODUCTION

Social media holds great power in how information is presented, shared, understood and contextualized. With limited censorship on information shared, individuals and groups of people are sharing thoughts on different topics on social media. One of such topics that generate a lot of discourse on social media is rape and sexual violence. Such discourses usually heighten if a rape survivor stands up to break the silence on her rape experience. Breaking the silence is usually followed by a series of discursive events that further legitimizes or criminalizes rape. Those discourses that are usually presented in text or speech can be analyzed in the way they are presented, looking at the lexical and semantic choices at the backdrop of gender representation. Rape is unquestionably a gendered crime: 91% of rape victims are female, while almost 99% of perpetrators are male (Greenfield 1997). Griffen (1999) supports that statement by saying that rape is an extreme edge of gendered violence and is much more a male crime than a female crime. Global statistics indicate that 35% of women worldwide have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives.

Literature Survey

According to Rentschler (2014), social media sites become aggregators of online misogyny. In the early days of the web, John Perry Barlow (1996) declared ‘we are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.’ Almost 26 years later, everyone seems to be talking, sharing more of their experiences, perspectives, and insights with more people than ever before using the technologies of social media (Hermida, 2015). A lot of discourses have been going on online, one of which is the #MeToo Movement. As the “MeToo Movement” that was initiated by Tarana Burke took twitter and the entire social media by storm in 2017, it birthed a new generation of women survivors of rape who are raising their voices to tell the world stories of their painful rape experiences. The #Metoo Movement that was re-born in 2017 with a single tweet from Alyssa Milano- a Hollywood actress- who asked that anyone that had been sexually assaulted or harassed should respond with “me too”- is perhaps the best example of social media encouraging national and international discourse on rape culture (Awobamise, 2019). That single tweet by Milano started perhaps the greatest social justice movement of post 2010. Awobamise (2019) asserts that the #Metoo Movement is notable for the fact that it brought to the forefront an issue that has been discussed well but discussed in hush tones. Prior to the #Metoo era, victims often times did not tell their stories, perpetrators of rape crimes seemed almost untouchable, and this was a bad situation for survivors of rape (Awobamise, 2019).

As survivors across the world have been raising their voices to tell their stories, Cameroonian women survivors, too, joined the movement. Whether conscious or unconscious of the existence of a “Me Too Movement” by survivors who have raised their voices, the truth is, the post 2017 #MeToo Movement has witnessed many more women go public with their rape stories, the world over. This of course has not gone without backlashes from rape apologists who have raised different concerns to either intimidate, shame, blame, traumatize and, or even gaslight survivors. That notwithstanding, as more and more survivors are finding their voices and telling their stories, and as a good number of people are throwing blames on survivors, some people are standing up to offer support to survivors in a series of powerful discursive events which goes a long way to counter negativism directed at survivors who break the silence on rape. The new wave of voices that have risen over the past decade to tell their stories of rape and sexual violence on social media has not only been heard but it has sparked another wave of discourses that either validates and legitimizes rape or empowers and strengthens survivors.

Social media can play a big role in leading life changing advocacy missions against rape in our communities. According to Awobamise (2019), the changing nature of sexual violence due to the rise of online technologies is an emerging area of scholarship. Debates center on whether Internet culture is particularly misogynist or reflects, and makes more visible, the high levels of sexual abuse and violence confronted by women and girls more broadly (Yamawaki, Darby & Queiroz, 2007). Social media platforms have been believed to control enormous power and instrument of social change in the society (Awobamise, 2019). Evidently, whether survivors are bullied, blamed shamed or whether they are finding their voices and speaking out and gaining strong followership, social media has played a major role in influencing rape discourses across the world. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the power that positive social media discourses carry in fostering healing and restoring hope to female rape survivors and finally how social media can help in expanding positive discourse that leads to rape prevention in Cameroon.

Rape Culture, Rape Myths and its Effects

Rape culture exists when rape or sexual assault is a normalised. The definition of rape culture originated in the 1970s, and it coincided with the second wave of the feminist movement. Dianne Herman (1984), the first scholar to articulate the definition, posited that rape will continue to be pervasive as long as sexual violence and male dominance are glamorized. Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth (1993) defined rape culture as

one in which rape is a fact of life, like death or taxes. ‘Rape culture does not only pertain to women, it happens to different groups of human beings in our communities; men, women, gays, bisexuals, lesbians, etc. are raped’ (Ridgway, 2014; Stotzer, 2009). Persons living with disabilities are also raped and at a high rate (80%) as well (Madden, 2014).

Feminist researchers have argued that we are living in a “rape culture,” in which our fundamental attitudes and values are supportive of gender stereotypes and violence against women (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). One characteristic of living in a rape culture is support for rape myths, which Burt (1980 p. 217) defined as ‘prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists’ and Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994 p. 134) later described as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false yet widely and persistently held and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women.

At the beginning of the Western anti-rape movement, feminists were quick to highlight the critical role of “rape myths” in contributing to what they argued was a rape-supportive culture (Gavey, 2005). The hypothesized effect of these widely held stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs and assumptions was, as Burt (1980) noted, to deny the injurious nature of rape and/or to blame women for their own victimization. The prevalence of such myths goes a long way to increase sympathy of the abuser and diminishes the claims of the survivor. Rape apologists are on a day-to-day basis using such myths to justify rape with the intent of saving the supposed rapist. Rape culture does not only promote and justify rape; it also has a widespread effect on justice for survivors. The experience of sexual violence and abuse which is powered by rape myths, damages health and wellbeing (Gregory et al, 2022). It may affect an individual’s physical and mental health, their ability to cope and seek help, their relationships with other people, and their socioeconomic participation (Gregory et al, 2022). It is based on the above statements that Gregory et al (2022) assert that given the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse, and the magnitude of harm, it is imperative that there are effective, accessible services to ease suffering, and to empower victim-survivors to cope, recover, and thrive. Rape myths are capable of empowering the perpetrator and disempowering the survivor. This is because they myths justifies instead of criminalize rape.

Current Situation about Rape Discourses on Social Media

In recent years, social media has proved to be an indispensable tool for bringing women’s rights issues especially rape to the attention of a wider public (Gambo et al., 2023). In some parts of Africa, sexual violence, especially rape against girls and women, are gradually becoming ubiquitous and a subject of concern (Tade & Udechukwu, 2020). Social media platforms have provided space for women’s rights actors to raise their voices against women’s rights violations in recent years. One of the rights issues that has gained grounds as far as rape discourses are concerned is rape, to a broader audience (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015). These discourses are diverse, inspiring a range of anti-rape discourses as well as pro-rape discourses. The #MeToo Movement anti-rape movement that took twitter by storm in 2017 has influenced a culture of breaking the silence and generated anti-rape discourses and campaigns online. The #Metoo movement appeared to counteract the views on rape culture in predicting collective action (Cory & Mahone, 2021). Rape discourses are diverse in nature and empowering rape discourses help in the healing of rape survivors.

METHOD

This discourse analysis study adopts the mixed research method. The researcher used two major instruments to source and collect data for this study: Social Media Monitoring method (which is an online research method) and interviews were used. Social media monitoring is a tool used to generate data on a particular subject or to track engagements on social media posts. The researcher’s social media handles on two social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) that are part of this study were linked to a social media monitoring tracker called “hootsuite.” After the accounts were linked, the researcher was able to enter key words and

hashtags related to the subject and then add the location where she wanted the data to come from. The following hashtags and key words were used to generate data on the subject: Rape, Rape in Cameroon, Rape survivors, Rape story, #MeToo, #Sexual Violence, #NoToRape, #NoMeansNo, #SilenceNoMore.

This enabled data on rape within Cameroon to filter on the researcher's dashboard and this helped the researcher to pick out the relevant data required for the study. To achieve the result, the researcher tracked data for a period of two years, from February 2020 to January 2022. Hootsuite tracker was able to track all old and new data related to rape using the key words and hashtags entered. With limited data on Cameroonian women who were breaking the silence on rape on social media, a total of 93 public posts on Facebook and Instagram were generated, with 21 of them involving Cameroonian female rape survivors' telling their rape stories on these platforms. The remaining 72 posts were shares and re-shares of the rape stories by popular blogs like "Beta Tinz," "237Showbiz," "The hotjem.com," "Kinnaka's blog," "NexDim Empire," "Coffee With Dilis" and other small blogs and individual shares. Of all the posts generated, a total of 81,315 comments were posted in response to the posts. To find out the powerful positive discourses, content analyses of the comments section of these posts were analysed. The researcher used purposive sampling to select those powerful positive comments that have been analysed in this study. In order to track the feelings of survivors in relation to powerful discourses that came in form of comments to counter negativism towards female rape survivors who break the silence on social media, the researcher used interviews to achieve this objective. Drawing from the tracker, out of the 21 female rape survivors who break the silence on rape on social media, 5 agreed to and granted WhatsApp interviews which came in the form of voice notes. Key questions about their feelings in relation to their breaking the silence experience on social media, the negative and positive comments directed at them were asked and their responses were transcribed and analysed in this paper. In total, 55 comments were analysed – 10 negative and 40 positive comments drawn from social media and 5 comments from interviews. The research was guided by two theories; the Critical Discourse Analysis which helped the researcher to investigate the critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted and legitimated by language use. The second theory is the Social Learning theory which postulates that rape results from male acquisition of attitudes and vicarious learning experiences favourable to males behaving aggressively towards women.

PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Highlighting Negative Social Media Discourses Directed at Female Rape Survivors in Cameroon

Though this study is focused on the powerful discourses that social media users engage in to support female rape survivors who break the silence on rape, it will be important to highlight some of the negative discourses that were discovered by the researcher in order to usher in those positive discourses that are out to counter negativity on female rape survivors on social media. The researcher found several negative comments, which are usually common comments that re-victimizes and blames survivors for the act of rape. The comments below are some of those negative comments that were made in response to the posts.

Comment 1: "I now see why you were raped in the first place. You are a very indecent lady. I really pity some ladies who promote indecency in our world of today."

Comment 2: "Massa go gaz who know whether na you be di pass naked for that ur uncle yi front."

Comment 3: "Nobody raped her. It sounds like a made up story to me."

Comment 4: "At last you don't succeed nor. You are the most popular among your colleagues but I don't know why you had to use lies for more popularity."

Comment 5: "You won't kill me, after 20 years you pull up one morning to destroy someone"

image...Cameroon and e citizens.”

Comment 6: “I will always encourage everyone living with such pain to speak out but people have not been trained to speak out the right way. Often times bursting out on social media, victimizing people isn’t the recommended path. Those who do that just want to attract pity and that doesn’t offer genuine help.”

Comment 7: “I understand you but couple of months later you could have told your mum uno, it’s an unthinkable thing what he did to you. It wasn’t your fault when it 1st happened but I’ll blame you for letting it happen repeatedly if that’s the case. It was a new experience and it might have felt good so perhaps you enjoyed it.”

Comment 8: “From your story, I don’t even know how to conclude. I think you were also enjoying it. How can you permits somebody to be doing that type of a thing to you over and over and you are not even ready to open up.”

Comment 9: “Much focus has been on the physiology of the victims, and little on the perpetrator. Even when focusing on the perpetrator, it’s their physiological state, and little on the biological basis of the rape. Sexual violence has the potential to cause epigenetic changes that can be passed on to the next generation, rendering male offspring sexually aggressive.”

Comment 10: “Stupid prostitutes looking for successful men to bring down. Lies!”

From the above comments, one can see that negative comments take different forms which have been grouped into different themes. The themes involve blaming the survivor, not believing the survivor, shaming the survivor, telling survivors they enjoyed the rape and even raising biological justifications for rape.

It is based on the above backdrops that a cross section of social media users are engaged in positive discourses that stand out as powerful discourses that directly or indirectly counters widespread negativism against female rape survivors in Cameroon. The following discourses below will state and analyse those powerful discourses that stand out to counter negativism on female rape survivors in Cameroon, in this study.

Social Media and Empowering Rape Discourses in Cameroon

This study discovered that, powerful discourses on rape on social media came in the form of support for female rape survivors who are usually faced with negative reactions and attitudes after breaking their silence on rape. To better situate and analyse data on powerful discourses, the general discourses will be analysed according to themes. The central themes identified in those discourses can be seen in the table below.

Central themes	Frequency	Percentage frequency (%)
<i>Supporting by highlighting negative rape myths</i>	5	12.5
<i>Supporting by attacking rape apologists</i>	6	15
<i>Supporting by breaking the silence</i>	15	37.5
<i>Supporting by congratulating and encouraging</i>	11	27.5
<i>Supporting by showing pity</i>	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Supporting by Highlighting Negative Rape Myths

Some powerful discourses come in the form of highlighting the negative rape myths that reinforces rape culture. Such comments stand out to counter negativism by bringing to the fore those myths that most often justifies the act of rape. The comments below will state and analyse those discourses.

Comment 1: “There are no words to describe how devastating rape can be. Often, victims/survivors can’t find the words to explain or express what they feel. When/if they find the words, some talk about it soon, others later, some never. Some write it in a poem, others may confide in a friend or stranger or make a post on social media. My observation/experience is that when most survivors find their voice or speak up – society ‘rapes’ them all over again. You hear interrogations like -What were u wearing? Why are you only speaking up now? The person you accuse is a good person right? How will speaking up help you? Can’t you just find a counselor to talk to in private? Just forgive & forget and move on. You need deliverance. Etc etc. May we extend grace when people speakup. Help them find justice & healing & Help to stop rape culture.”

Comment 2: “Your story is heartbreaking, I think one of the greatest problem we have with rape victims is that fear to open up because of what society says or how society looks at victims. Instead of standing up and defending them they instead mock or give less concern. I think we need to stand up to say no to rape, sensitize even our kids, draw them close and listen to them, give them that self esteem and we should encourage victims and assist them in taking legal redress when and where need be. No to rape.”

Comment 3: “All of you who are talking trash because of the way she dresses, now tell me, the 2 to 5 years rape cases we usually hear of, is it also caused by indecent dressing?”

Comment 4: “How many women have you seen raping men that are indecently dressed? I beg, leave us with this matter. Rape no be a question of what women wear, it is an aspect of men exerting their power and control over women. Period.”

Comment 5: “So when men rape children as young as months old, can we say the children were indecently dressed? What are you saying?”

The context of the powerful quotes is the authors advancing reasons why people should offer positive reactions and support towards survivors rather than justifying rape by reinforcing rape myths. They think survivors deserve support to find justice and healing. According to them, it is only when the needed support is given that rape culture can be stopped. In the first comment, the commenter describes negative social reactions towards rape survivors as society “raping” survivors all over again which should not be the case. By saying “society rapes them all over again,” she is saying the verbal abuse and interrogations thrown at survivors is another form of rape – verbal rape. In responding positively towards a female rape survivor, comment 2 explains why survivors stay silent, which is of course is a result of negative reactions from people. The comment below that attacks negativity towards survivors while at the same time offering her own quota of support to the survivor. The above discourses highlights negative rape myths by offering survivors the support they need to heal and to seek help.

Supporting by Attacking

There are people who rather have a radical approach to tackling rape apologists; they think a joint online concerted effort to attack those who attack survivors is the best way to go about the fight. A few comments will be listed below to support this point.

Comment 1: “Hey you rape apologists and cheerleaders, we see you, we know you. We will stop you in your

gaslighting tracks. It is our responsibility...Anywhere you find a rape apologist online re-victimizing victims, drag them like a small generator. Invite me. We will shut down that narrative."

Comment 2: "What is your justification for telling them not to speak up publicly? Why is it not the 'recommended path'? What empirical evidence do you have to show that speaking publicly does not help or that they do it to attract pity? Let's inject some rational thought here. Oya, educate me."

Comment 3: "These men will remain animals. We'd focus more in impacting knowledge on the female child."

Comment 4: "Do you mean a known rapist can be victimized? Really? Small social media post for you is more devastating to the rapist than the physical act of rape was to the survivor? Can we try to listen more?"

Comment 5: "Please take note of this guy, if he is your family member, never trust him with your kids. He just might rape them and say it was cus the child was naked. How can a grown man with children be attracted to a 10 year old child?"

Comment 6: "By their comments, we shall know them"

The above discourse are a number of powerful supportive discourse that aims to educate people who are building negative discourses against rape survivors who break the silence on rape on social media. The commenters are questioning negativity by attacking any one who leaves a negative comment in response to a post on rape or a rape story. They believe by attacking them, they are educating them on the dangers of their actions and also giving power back to the survivor instead of the perpetrator.

Supporting by Breaking the Silence

One other positive feedback that survivors get when they break the silence on social media is when their speaking up triggers other survivors to spontaneously tell their story even without preparing themselves to tell their story. Such spontaneous reactions are usually seen when people comment explaining what they too have been through and their willingness to joining the survivor to tell their own story. These trigger reactions are usually a fountain of support to a group of survivors who thought there were alone. It is a comforting reaction which leads to further positive outcomes. Such form of positive reactions can be seen in the quotes below:

Comment 1: "What a story. You know most of us girls have been victims of rape at very tender ages but won't dare talk to any one cuz of fear and threats from the rapist. Many at times, the rapist turns out to be our brother, or cousin, someone very close to the family that other members of the family can never imagine even in their wildest dreams that such a thing can happen. Silence kills and the only way to heal up is to speak up and denounce this. So I will join your campaign cuz we share a similar story."

Comment 2: "Me at 14"

Comment 3: "Victim at 8 and 16"

Comment 4: "He was even strangling me like he wanted to kill because he was scared that I will tell my dad"

Comment 5: "Same thing my step mom brother told me, not until now...I have never told anyone"

Comment 6: "that's the pain, even as grown as we are, we can't even tell anyone"

Comment 7: “was once a victim at 6”

Comment 8: “victim, funny enough my uncle, tried to tell my mum everytime, but she was always busy. This really made me cry.”

Comment 9: “Story of my life...threatened with a knife”

Comment 10: “I was a victim at age 10...by my uncle. I was always scared too tell my parent up till now”

Comment 11: “Happened to me at the age of 14...raped and got me pregnant by my tenant...sad memory tho.”

Comment 12: “I was raped by a teacher in primary school”

Comment 13: “Story of my life...raped by my teacher in primary school...”

Comment 14: “Story of my life...raped by my pastor @ age 16...most girls are victims very painful, a permanent scar”

Comment 15: “Me at 4. Lost my sister at 4, got raped at 4. My 4 year was a whole mystery. U took me back to my past. I shouldn't have seen this.”

In the above comments, social media commenters are seen reacting to the stories of survivors breaking their silence on rape by breaking their own silence. Those powerful discourses triggers other survivors who have been silent for a long time to instantly make mention of their own rape experiences. This shows how one discourse on rape may lead to a chain of discourses that have been held un-communicated for years. Majority of the comments are coming from women who were raped as children. This is an indication that rape happens to children far more than is reported and those children grow into adulthood carrying the weight of their untold traumas. Discourse is a great way to spark discussions around rape as it pushes others to release their burdens in the course of the discursions. Some of the commenters were responding to a Facebook post while others were responding to a three minutes short skit that a rape survivor acted and uploaded on Instagram to explain her rape story and her feelings.

Supporting by Congratulating and Encouraging

Some group of supporters of survivors offer their support by congratulating the survivors for breaking the silence and also encouraging them for their strength, courage and determination to free themselves by speaking up. Below are a number of powerful discourses that depicts support to survivors.

Comment 1: “Rape is an unforgivable act, an act that must be denounced and punished with the utmost energy because to rape is to take away someone's dignity. Thank you for this denunciation, I hope that by your gesture other women or girls will no longer be afraid to denounce this scourge which undermines our society.”

Comment 2: “Thanks for all these encouraging stories. I wish other could speak out as well. Even if it's anonymous. Speaking out will help others.”

Comment 3: “Thank you for speaking up. Truly, voicing it out heals and we are not victims. From one survivor to another, I salute your strength. I salute your resolve to raise awareness about rape. I salute your desire to see more victims healed.”

Comment 4: “you are so brave”

Comment 5: “Courage sweet heart”

Comment 6: “All my support princess”

Comment 7: “you are destined for greatness”

Comment 8: “brave lady keep up”

Comment 9: “All I can say is courage in the fight”

Comment 10: “you are so strong”

Comment 11: “God bless you sister”

The above comments appeared to congratulate the survivor for speaking out. Such encouraging discourses leave survivors with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. It also leaves them with a lot of positive emotions, assuring her that she was not wrong, after all, to speak out. It makes them feel that they are actually doing the right thing. The commenters further believes speaking and denunciation is the best way to find rape and he uses his voice to call on other survivors to speak up and denounce their rapists.

Supporting by Showing Pity

The powerful discourses below will show how social media users use discourse to offer support to survivors by showing pity that they were raped. Their comments show empathy to the survivors by revealing the dark side of rape and how it negatively affects survivors. The comments below will illustrate this theme.

Comment 1: “My hands are shivering as I am typing. I’m rooted on the spot (on my bed), as if a thousand needles are being rushed into my body. My heart is racing like a seventeen century locomotive engine. My thoughts are blank. I don’t want to stretch my imagination. I don’t want to imagine it, because it makes me paranoid. Indeed, rape is a traumatic experience!! God have mercy on us!”

Comment 2: “My daughter, after reading this post I m crying because you were right under my roof but I was so blind to notice what you went through. Just to see it for the first time on Facebook. I can imagine the pain you went through.”

Comment 3: “OMG! What a pain to go through. How were you able to accommodate that pain as a child. I cannot imagine my little daughter being raped, not at all. I am glad you are able to speak of and let go of your pain. Be strong.”

The above examples are a typical example of a pitiful comment that comes out as positive. The authors put themselves in the place of survivor – when the first commenter says “my hands are shivering...a thousand needles are being rushed into my body.” These are consolatory words for the survivor and the intention of those words are to assure the survivor that what she went through is perceived as painful and as wicked as the act itself. At the same time, these are strong words that points of the gravity of the offence.

Gender Disaggregated Data Pertaining to Positive Feedback, Attitudes and Reactions

The table below will show gender disaggregated data with respect to how many men commented, how many women commented and the number and percentage of the gender that dominated in leaving positive discourses in the form of comments to survivors. In this section of positive feedback, attitudes and reactions, the researcher has analysed a total of 41 uplifting discourses that came as responses to survivors who break

the silence on rape on social media.

Gender Disaggregated Data Pertaining to The Gender that Left the Most Positive Feedback

Gender	Frequency	Percentage frequency (%)
Male	9	22.5
Female	31	77.5
Total	40	100

The table above indicates that, out of 40 positive comments analysed, 9 of the comments were coming from men giving a percentage of 22.5% while 31 of the comments were coming from women giving a percentage of 77.5%. This goes a long way to explain that more women than men are offering support to their fellow women who are rape survivors. The gender representation of men and women as it pertains to negative feedback and attitudes towards survivors will be reflected in the next table.

Acknowledging the Power of Positive Feedback/Support

Talking to seven (5) survivors through interview on WhatsApp, the survivors were asked whether they received any positive feedback from the social media public after they break their silence on rape on social media. All the 5 survivors agreed that they received a lot of positive comments that helped them to heal. They were then asked to share their experiences on how they felt after reading the powerful positive comments. The comments below are what the survivors got to say (mostly on WhatsApp voice notes) on how the comments made them feel.

Survivor 1: “I was so overwhelmed. I received tons of support from my family, friends, fans, colleagues, bloggers, media houses and well-wishers. I really did not expect this kind of support. When I started writing my story, I was scared at the reaction I was going to receive from the public but then the urge to free my mind from over 20 years of trauma caused by rape pushed me to just keep writing until I hit the share button. I just wanted to count on one person that would support and encourage me and I thought that would be enough to ease my pain. But then, the support was massive and I felt an instant relief. Even though there were a number of negative comments as well, I felt uplifted by the positive comments that flooded my post. To my fellow women and girls going through the same situation, note that some people will laugh and insult you but most of what you will get is positive including a great relief, focus on that. This is the time to rise above your fears.”

Survivor 2: “The day I told my story on Facebook was the day I gained freedom from my painful past. I sat on my bed and read every comment, positive and negative, but I found peace from the positive comments. I can say I did not only found freedom, I found closure as well. I have never felt so free in my entire life. No more guilt, no more self-blames.”

Survivor 3: “There is nothing as uplifting and powerful than for you to see people supporting and comforting you after telling your rape story. Those words of encouragement spoke power to my being. I immediately rose above my fears, regain my power and found peace from broken pieces. Supporting is saving lives.

Comment 4: “Ah! I think I have to sing first, please permit me do so. [Sings a gospel song to praise God]. Do you know why I sang? I am singing because God gave me the courage to speak up and he also gave me a tribe of people, mostly women, who rushed to support their fellow woman, me. I felt dirty and worthless,

years after I was raped. But today, I feel powerful and free. I am free at last! There is a Presbyterian study material that was themed 'free at last,' I think that theme is speaking to me. I thank God for making me find reasons to heal."

Survivor 5: "It was hard, especially when some people were bashing me for being responsible for the rape. But in the end, I found solace from the people who commented to support me. The support I got was overwhelming and I cannot forget that in a hurry. If I ever face such a situation in my life time again, I will go public again and again as that is where my strength comes from.

The above responses from survivors show that positive discourses in support of survivors can help in the healing of survivors. This reveals that positive discourses appear as powerful tools that counters negativism on social media. Survivors revealed that they healed faster, found freedom, regained their lost power, found their voices, were overwhelmed, found instant relief and even found closure. That is the power of positive discourses in the life of a survivor who breaks her silence on rape.

CONCLUSION

Research with victim-survivors has demonstrated that positive social support, in all its forms, acts as an important buffer against negative impacts on health, well-being, and quality of life, and may increase people's resilience (Cénat et al., 2019; Fuller-Thomson et al., 2020; Machisa et al., 2018). Positive social discourses such as believing the victim, encouraging them, providing needed resources, listening to them, encouraging them, etc., can have far reaching positive effects in the health and wellbeing of a rape survivor. Generally, when survivors speak up about their rape experiences publicly, on social media, the positive feedback, attitudes and reactions leaves the survivor with lasting healing effects. This study reveals the above assertions by highlighting the powerful discourses that encourages victims and counters negativism towards female rape survivors who break the silence on rape on social media. The follow up interview with survivors also revealed that survivors actually found healing and closure after they received positive feedback and reactions from those who commented on their posts.

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