



## Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Research Involving Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse : A Reflection

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### **Abstract**

*The number of reported incidents of sexual violence continues to increase in Indonesia, giving rise to deep concerns and calls to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the future. Some experts call it "the Silent Epidemic" because it is estimated that the actual number of events is much higher than reported. Therefore, research on this issue needs to be continued to get input on the cause and effect, impact and prevention efforts. Researches on child sexual abuse and the impact throughout the lives of the survivors is highly important in providing scientific evidences for developing the interventions in social work practice. However, it also comes with very specific challenges when conducting a research on this issue. There are no specific guidelines regarding ethics and methodology in carrying out research on survivors of sexual violence. Therefore, in the future it is important to consider the methodological and ethical aspects before embarking on a research involving survivors of sexual violence. Based on the experience of carrying out this research, the aspects that potentially harm or put participants and researchers at risk can be minimized or even avoided. This experience can also provide reinforcement that research involving trauma survivors can benefit both the affected population as well as social work scientists and practitioners. This manuscript discusses the current thinking on these issues.*

**Keywords: Sexual violence, sexual abuse, childhood sexual abuse, ethical, methodology.**

### **Introduction**

The first question asked by some colleagues with mental health profession when they find out that this research will be carried out is, 'is there enough data or number of participants? Their doubts about the number of participants in research related to the representativeness of the population, these are definitely important things to consider in conducting scientific research.

Scientific evidence and public publications show that there is a large number of people experiencing childhood sexual abuse. Mooney (2014) and Handrahan (2017) stated that sexual harassment is an epidemic. Lalor and McElvaney (2010) and Walker (2020) even called it an international epidemic or an international tragedy or a global epidemic or a silent pandemic, meaning that the number of actual incidences was assumed to be higher than the number of incidences reported. Bremner (2003) statement reinforces this term by calling childhood sexual abuse an "invisible epidemic". It raises a question, "why are so few people willing to disclose the sexual violence they have experienced?". Some of the reasons are as explained below:

According to Octaviana (2019), actually incidents of sexual violence have been reported for a long time, one of the reports that is considered as the earliest incident able to be documented was the one

in 1857 in France. She subsequently said that it was only in the 1970-1980s that the issue of sexual violence began to be reported to the public because it was previously considered taboo. Another reason put forward by Moore and Gibson (1993) was that there was a wrong perception in society. Campbell (2012); Kimble (2018) and Yi (2016) included fear of reprisals by perpetrators, fear of reports that are not considered important, distrust of the authorities, unresponsive and supportive attitudes of the officers, shame, self-blame, worry about people's attitudes blaming the victims, fear of being found out by the family, fear of being blamed and fear of being revictimized and so on.

Second, when my colleagues learned that I was going to carry out a research on people who have experienced sexual violence, most of them showed worrying reaction. Their concerns because this research is related to a sensitive issue and is potentially harmful to the wellbeing of the participants. Most people consider that researches on this issue are controversial. This is certainly understandable since sexual violence is considered a traumatic incident that has a devastating impact on the people experiencing it. The results of various researches reveal that the impact of sexual violence has a neurological impact on the persons experiencing it. Campbell (2012) provides an example of how the "fight or flight" or tonic immobility response caused the victim to experience "paralysis" during an attack of sexual violence. Fergusson, McLeod and Horwood (2013) state that sexual abuse in childhood will have an impact on the person's whole life.

The consequences of childhood sexual abuse include the increasing risk of mental health problems during adulthood; low self-esteem, low life satisfaction; risky sexual behavior; physical health problems leading to requiring health services; as well as dependence on social welfare services. The Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women (2011) shows evidence of manifestations of childhood sexual abuse of adults in the form of physical, sexual and interpersonal effects.

The third aspect is the concern when today's survivors have to recall incidents of sexual violence they experienced as a child, it could be 20 or 30 or even 40 years earlier. Are they able to remember it? Is their memory intact? Is it only partially? Or even the question asked by my colleagues, "are you sure that they really experienced sexual violence?, how can you prove that they really experienced it?". According to Daugherty (2011), the memory aspect can happen when someone incorrectly remembers the details of his/her experience, but Daugherty also emphasizes that many mental health experts believe that most of their memories are correct and generally accurate.

Based on the various facts above, it is necessary for researchers who will conduct a research on the childhood sexual abuse experienced by adult survivors to consider various important aspects to minimize everything potentially harmful and dangerous for both the research participants and the researchers themselves. During the research process, I experienced some dilemmas and considerations in term of methodology and ethics. Sharing these experiences can be beneficial as lesson learned for other researchers who will conduct the same research topic. Therefore, this article aims to reflect methodological and ethical considerations in conducting research involving adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Different from other journal articles which usually have research method section, this article explores the research methodology as part or result and discussion, even it is regarded as a core of research findings.

## **Methodology**

This article explores the experiential research approach, provide opportunities for researchers and research participants to access their knowledge in a richer way based on the uniqueness of the cases. This article discusses methodological and ethical considerations when conducting research involving adult survivors of sexual violence according to the researcher's understanding as social workers.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Methodological Considerations**

#### *Using Qualitative Research Approach*

I often hear research colleagues or practitioners or academics who underestimate the use of qualitative approaches, as if this approach is less scientific, less intellectual, and used by less intelligent researchers. Here, I'm not looking for a justification for my choice of approach. I am faced with the difficulty of getting the number of participants on this sensitive topic. Many survivors are

hidden and afraid to open up and disclose the traumatic events they have experienced. Whereas we need their 'voice', to understand why CSA occurs, what its impact is, and how to prevent and treat it.

The use of a qualitative approach is very important in understanding deeply the experiences and feelings of survivors. Testa, Livingston and Van-Zile-Tamsen (2011) explain that by using a qualitative approach, it is possible to obtain a description of CSA from the perspective of the victim his/herself so that he/she can understand aspects of sexual victimization that are impossible to obtain through a quantitative approach. This is in accordance with the explanation of Rubin and Babbie (2017) which say that qualitative research emphasizes understanding human experience in depth, which cannot be reduced by using a quantitative approach. The research emphasis on survivors' appreciation of their CSA experiences allows researcher to flexibly adapt the research process to the process of participants digesting what they are feeling, preparing themselves to open up, giving participants the opportunity to consider which of the closest people to include in the interview and so on. These processes affect the flexibility of research in collecting data, analyzing data and simultaneously interpreting data (Neuman, 2014).

Researcher is not comparing which approach is better, but rather in an effort to place the research approach in accordance with the objectives to be achieved and at the same time want to change inappropriate views about the use of qualitative approach.

The involvement of various parties by researcher before the research was carried out, starting from collaboration with professional colleagues to recommend potential participants, distributing a willingness form, as well as a snowball sampling approach to get more participants became important things to be prepared if other researchers were to start research related to trauma.

Getting prospective participants for researches on sexual violence issue is not an easy thing to do. Many victims or survivors keep the incidents that they have experienced from the people around them for years. The researcher understands very well their feelings of hesitation, worries as well as their fears. But it is also not an easy thing to get potential participants who are "hiding" from the public spotlight. To overcome this problem, the researcher carried out the recruitment using several methods such as using a qualitative research approach, snowball sampling, collaborating with other mental health professional colleagues, distributing online forms for distribution through online application media.

#### *Collaboration*

The researcher asked for help from some colleagues and mental health professionals experienced in dealing with sexual violence, as well as from some organizations providing services on related issues. The researcher also contacted some institutions working on the same issue for recommendation of research participant candidates. As a social worker working in mental health area, the researcher had the access to contact and ask for their help for providing recommendations with respect to potential participants that meet the criteria. The criterion for the participants was adult survivors who have experienced sexual violence when they were children or before the age of 18 years (the age limit was in accordance with the definition of a child as stipulated in Law no. 35 of 2014 on the amendment to Law no. 23 of 2022 on the Child Protection). Some colleagues recommend names with the approval of their clients to researchers for follow-up. This positive relationship has given the researcher access to prospective research participants. The relationship between the colleagues and their clients also made it easier for the researcher to build bonds and trust at the beginning of the meeting in order to collect data. Developing the bond and trust is very important in the course of data collection and subsequent processes.

#### *Suppressed Memories*

Researching childhood sexual abuse experienced by adults is often controversial, because it happens many years ago and without anyone knowing or witnessing it. As stated by Kinnear (2007), therapists or mental health professionals believe that the incident is true, but in contrast, other parties or families doubt it and considered it as a possible "fabricated story".

When interviewing adult survivors to recount incidents of sexual violence they experience during their childhood, the researcher finds that during the interview process, they need repeated time to rebuild their memories completely. For this reason, it is important not to judge immediately or urge them to tell the full story in a short time. It is important for researchers to show patience and give the participants opportunities to recall their memories. In the end, after several meetings, the writing of a series of incidents can be carried out. Researchers' generosity in taking the time to listen to their stories greatly affects the participants' self-confidence and it will develop a cooperative relationship between them. Of course, in scientific research, reliability and validity are important to

fulfill and one of the strategies used by the researcher is to involve close family members or other significant persons in this research as the supporting participants. The validity of the incidents and the process of how the survivors' life goes through it can be obtained using this approach.

#### *Distributing Online Recruitment Forms*

In today's online information and digital era, some applications offer convenience for researchers to create online forms of willingness to become research participants. With respect to this research, the form was not an informed-consent form, since the researcher avoided giving detailed information about the research to the public. The contents of the form included a brief explanation of the title and purpose of the research as well as the intended age criterion; full name; gender; education; age, occupation, mobile phone number, email and address. This form was easy for potential participants to access as well as easy to be disseminated quickly. Using this form, the confidentiality of survivors is guaranteed and makes it easier for the researcher to select potential participants according to the criteria. Furthermore, the researcher contacted the candidates and asked again their willingness to participate. It transpires that such a process gives the potential participants time to think about and reconsider their willingness to participate. Some of the candidates who responded when contacted by researchers took several days before finally deciding whether or not to continue with the interview process. The researcher must respect the decision of those who ultimately canceled their participation because of the reason that, it turned out, they were still not ready to talk about their experiences, and the researcher thanked them very much.

#### *Gender Diversity*

The evidence suggests a fairly high percentage of men who experience sexual violence: Black et al. (2011) indicated that 1 of 71 men had experienced sexual violence; according to Finkelhor et al. (2015) estimated that 6 percent of boys are at risk of experiencing sexual violence; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) indicated that 1 of 38 men has experienced sexual violence. Priebe and Svedin (2008) prove that the disclosure level of male victims is lower than the disclosure level of female victims. Durhan (2003); Teram et al. (2006); Watkins and Bentovim (1992); Connell (2000); Kimmel, Hearn and Connel (2005) and Kimmel (2003) revealed that it is because of social and cultural factors related to myth, stigma and misperception.

Enrolling an adequate number of participants is a pervasive problem. Gender diversity is linked to research diversity, however, the researchers tried to be realistic in making the research design by not targeting a balanced number of male and female participants. As expected, most of the participants were women. There were only three men of the 17 candidates who filled out the willingness form, and in fact, as time went on, one of the male candidates stated that he withdrew on the grounds that he was not ready to "open up". Therefore, until the end of this research, there were only two men among the eight (8) participants.

#### *Snowball sampling*

During the data collection process, at the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participants' willingness to recommend other people they might know who had also experienced childhood sexual abuse. Therefore, the researcher was able to reach other potential participants. According to Neuman (2014), it is also important, that when a researcher feels that the data collected has not yet reached saturation, it means the researcher needs more participants. The researcher asked the participant's willingness to introduce the researcher to the person(s) he/she recommended and asked him/her to give them a little explanation, that consequently, the prospective participants were already informed. Through this method, the researcher found that the prospective participants had built a sense of trust when they finally met the researcher and it made them easier to carry out the interview process.

## **2. Ethical Issues**

As researchers, we must understand the unique and relevant ethical issues related to the problem of childhood sexual violence experienced by adult survivors. In the context of Indonesia, there are no specific ethical guidelines related to this topic. Other guidelines and standards in the context of social work practice that researchers have found are mostly for child sexual abuse or adult sexual violence, but I have not found anything specific regarding research for adults who experienced sexual violence in their childhood.

There are several specific issues that concern me, including those related to Applying a Trauma-Based or Trauma-informed Approach, Consideration of Risks and Benefits in Conducting

the Research, Informed-consent, Privacy and Confidentiality and Disclosure, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### *Ethical clearance*

Researchers must ensure that research is carried out after obtaining ethical clearance from the competent ethics committee board. The ethics committee will review the purpose of the research and the methodology used can be carried out in a good way, avoiding exploitation and utilizing participants according to the interests of the researcher. The ethics committee must ensure that research is conducted in a manner that respects the dignity of the participants and in a safe manner. The ethical review is also to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the researcher and related parties, for example with the donor agency that sponsors the research.

In this study there is no institution that sponsors this research, all at personal expense, but that does not mean there is no risk of conflict of interest. In addition to involving survivors of CSA, this research also involves service institutions, social workers and other interdisciplinary colleagues. Ethical clearance ensures several principles and their application that must be fulfilled by researchers as stated in the Belmont Report (1972) describe by Mandal, Acharya and Parija (2011). The Belmont Report sets out the Principles and their application in research involving humans, these principles being seriously applied in this research:

- Respect for person applied in informed-consent
- Beneficence applied in the assessment of Risks and Benefits
- Justice applied in selections of subject

#### *Addressing Suppressed Memories*

Controversy about memory is widely discussed by experts, about whether or not memory is intact. However, the focus of the researcher is to prepare participants for the remembering process. Informed-consent has explained that it must be, but before the interview begins, the researcher must explain again what is meant by the nature of the sexual abuse to the participants; Then ask if they are willing to tell; whether able to tell in detail or only the outline of the incident, the researcher left the decision to the participants. Interviewing trauma survivors requires immense patience and skill in asking questions that demonstrate empathy and support.

I am not trying to prove every detail of the presented experience as an absolute truth. Involving the closest person or other significant person in the survivor's life can provide reinforcement about the incident. After that focus on the symptoms and impacts of CSA experienced by survivors. This is in line with the opinion of Prozan (1997) who said that the failure of social workers to recognize the symptoms of CSA can result in failure to eliminate the suffering of survivors. We will find it difficult to understand the causative factors that will ultimately affect the long-term treatment process.

#### *Male Participants*

The sensitivity of research related to sexual violence when viewed from the aspect of gender, clearly requires special attention. The percentage of victims of sexual violence in men who reported the incident was much smaller than that of women. Every researcher needs to take this matter seriously by preparing her/himself with a good understanding of the impact of sexual violence on a person.

Although the sequelae of sexual violence against women and men have similarities, several important differences regarding disclosure have been identified (Teram et al, 2006). Among them are because of cultural factors that do not allow boys to cry, do not admit their feelings, men are not trained to recognize their emotions and they are not used to expressing their feelings.

This is in line with the results of a dissertation study conducted by Smith (2020), revealing several factors that hinder the disclosure of male CSA survivors. These factors include: gender norms, social stigma and sexual identity; survivor's own conceptualization of the CSA experience; Non-specific assessment tools and lack of professional capacity to conduct assessments can also hinder disclosure; a growing narrative that those who have experienced sexual violence in their childhood will become perpetrators of violence in the future; it was found that the rate of loneliness among male survivors was higher than that of female survivors. These factors are the cause of the delay in the disclosure of male survivors.

Teram et al (2006) focused on professional attitudes when dealing with survivors of sexual violence. According to him, one of the factors that causes survivors to be reluctant to tell and disclaim is because of the professional attitude that tends to blame the victim, underestimates the prevalence of CSA and its long-term impact, is gender-biased, does not create a comfortable atmosphere and

does not show acceptance when survivors disclose. This causes the male victim to remain 'hidden' in the public's radar.

Teram et al (2006) propose a Malcentric Communication approach, which is an approach that is specifically carried out for male CSA survivors. Show survivors that CSA can happen to men, understand the consequences, express appreciation to survivors who make disclosures, show respect and support for survivors, cooperate with survivors in overcoming their problems and meeting their needs.

Researcher tried earnestly to provide support to participants, show them that they have the right to feel whatever they feel, convince them that researcher believed it can happen to men, admit what happened, validate their feelings and ensure a comfortable and safe space for them to tell whatever they want to express. Even in an interview involving his family, the researcher helped provide psychoeducation to the family, showing a support and non-judgmental when a family member showed an unsympathetic attitude and blamed the participant.

Conducting research on children, adolescents and male adults can have an impact on researchers. Durham (2003), said that researchers would actually benefit if conducting research on male participants, namely being more responsible, understanding more emotionally, developing skills to be more supportive and empathetic.

#### *Applying a Trauma-based or Trauma-informed Approach*

Anyone who is going to conduct research on sexual violence needs to apply a trauma-based approach, also known as trauma-informed approach. This approach emphasizes problem management and strengthening survivor capacity rather than focusing on the trauma itself (Knight, 2014; Levenson, 2017). This is of course a dilemma for researchers, because the aspect of sexual violence itself is one of the aspects that must be asked to the participants. To address this problem, the researcher took several steps to minimize losses or risks that might arise.

First, the researcher have screened potential participants through online forms and ensured that these candidates understand the risks of this research. For this reason, the researcher ensured that prospective participants have the capacity to be able to go through the interview process and the subsequent processes. The researcher explained about the research process and risks including the benefits of this research in the informed consent for the prospective participants' consideration. This process provided an opportunity for potential participants to develop the ability to understand the problems and make decisions. The researcher made sure that the potential participants were aware of the researcher's willingness to be contacted at any time and that they should not hesitate to ask anything related to this research.

Second, the researcher applied the five basic principles of trauma-informed approach, viz. safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. The emphasis on collaboration and the involvement of participants in the research process is a form of trauma-informed approach implementation, giving the participants the opportunity to have a sense of belonging, empowerment and the opportunity to build control, and a sense of security over this research (Kelly et al., 2014). This approach also aims at avoiding participants becoming the object of the research (Dayal et al., 2018).

#### *Consideration of Risks and Benefits in Conducting the Research*

Researchers are obliged to ensure that participants do not suffer losses or are not put at risk due to their participation in this research. The research process can cause emotional stress that as a consequence, Kirk (2006) suggested that every researcher are prepared for any response that may be shown by participants. The researcher faced the sad and crying, doubting, shy, embarrassed responses as well as confused expressions of the participants.

The researcher also always asked the participants' readiness before the interview started and asked for their permission to record the interview. The researcher ensured that no other person or parties object to the participation of participants in this research. The involvement of participants in discussing the considerations of risk and benefit aspects is important for their sense of belonging, because this is their experience, their "voice" for what had happened to them where many people do not know, do not understand and even underestimate their experience. The participants thought that it was they who actually helped the researcher to do this research and they were absolutely right. Their opinions, experiences, feelings are very valuable not only for representing groups of people who have experienced sexual violence, but also for science, policy, a safer and better future for the children in the future.

Another thing that the researcher did to reduce the risk of exposure to stories about sexual violence was to limit the interview duration. Before carrying out the informed-consent approach and

interviews, the researcher explained to the participants that the time for one interview was a maximum of two hours and then we set a schedule for the next interview. Researcher avoided the impact of being overwhelmed, boredom and heavy burden and distress on participants.

Despite the fact that there were participants who actually did not mind the interview being conducted more than the agreed duration. Some considerations, such as the adjustment of participants' working time, made some participants want a longer interview duration. The researcher saw the need for participants to express their opinions, share their experiences and pour out their hearts. In this regard, the interview process itself became an intervention process that helps participants to ventilate and is an important process towards recovery. This is in line with the opinion of Ellsberg and Heise (2002) stating that the interview itself is an intervention process, where participants actually welcome their involvement positively when they are given the opportunity to share their stories, when they believe that the empathetic attitude the researcher showed is not judgmental.

#### *Informed Consent*

After the prospective participants filled out the consent form, it is not automatic that they immediately become participants in this study. As a researcher, I prepared the informed consent for prospective participants, containing information about the research objectives, research methodology, research process, aspects to be studied, researcher's contact number, risks and benefits of the research, research period, estimated duration required for the in-depth interview and aspects of privacy and confidentiality. It also provided information that they can ask any time and anything relevant to the research, they can withdraw at any time without coercion or worry, they can refuse certain types of questions that possibly make them uncomfortable (Seedat, Pienaar, Williams and Stein, 2004). One of the important information conveyed was that the researcher offered the participants a choice of treatment if needed or other forms of reward according to the needs of the clients at that time.

It turned out that on average, the prospective participants need time to digest the informed consent before making a decision. As a researcher, I had to give them time and space to think about their decision whether to join this research or not. It was not permissible for the researcher to urge or put potential participants in a position of urgency which will eventually force them to make a decision. The prospective participants were encouraged to make their own decisions that therefore, we indirectly gave them the opportunity to empower themselves.

#### *Privacy and Confidentiality*

As a researcher as well as a social worker, I guarantee that the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants are secured (WHO, 2003). In any research process, it is important to ensure that participants are involved in discussions about maintaining confidentiality. I explained to participants the strategies to disguise their identities such as using initials or aliases, or using certain codes related to their names. The researcher ensured the participants to reread research reports before they were published and encouraged them to express their objection to everything possibly still indicating their identities and we discussed the strategies to overcome it.

The researcher also made sure that during the interview process, the place was quite comfortable for the participants. The responses of the participants themselves were quite diverse, some of them refused to conduct interviews via zoom because they were worried that their children would hear their voices and they tended to do it in a restaurant far from their home. However, there were also participants who tended to feel comfortable with zoom interviews, while others choose a meeting place that is convenient for them.

One more thing that was important to do was that the researcher transcribed the results of the interviews and processed the data without the help of other parties to make sure that no one else would know the identities or any information regarding the participants. It was to avoid transferring information to other parties and avoiding misuse of information.

#### *Disclosure*

When preparing for the interview process, the researcher needed to ask whether the potential participants have ever disclosed their experiences to other people. It was an important consideration for the researcher because they have to conduct interviews with the closest people (1) to test the reliability and validity as well as; (2) to understand the recovery process of survivors throughout their lives. This must be carried out before the prospective participant signs the informed consent.

From this process, the researcher found that almost half of the 17 candidates who participated had never disclosed their experiences. This influenced their decision not to be involved in this study.

The researcher had to respect their decision and not even persuaded them to change their decision. The researcher needed to understand the aspect of disclosure in conducting research, including social workers when handling cases of sexual violence. It is because the disclosure process is not a one-time and easy process for survivors, but tends to be an incident that requires a process and disclosure usually occurs when there are physical complaints or changes in behavior (WHO, 2003). Even though these potential participants canceled their decision to be involved in this research, we as researchers and social workers still have a responsibility to maintain the safety, comfort and confidentiality of those who experience sexual violence.

The above discussion can be summarized in the following diagram:

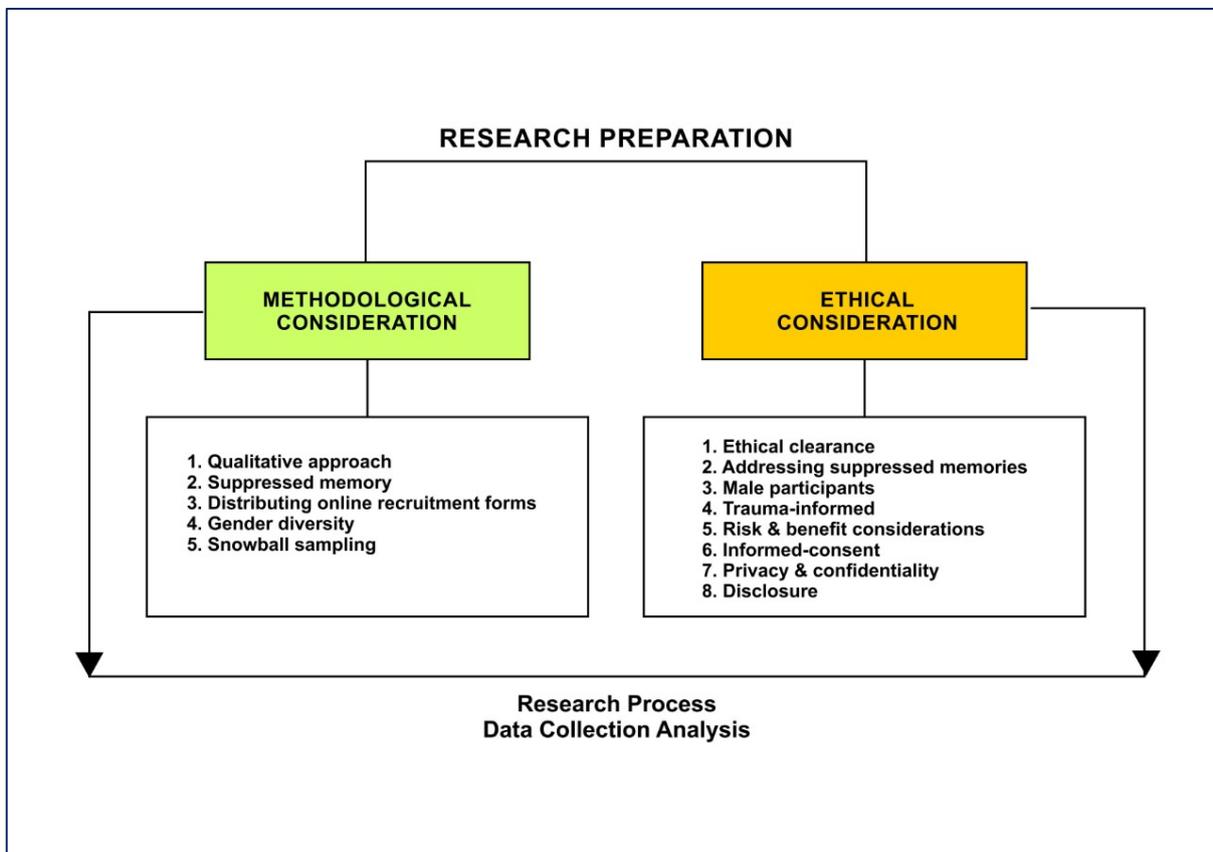


Diagram 1: Research Process

The diagram above illustrates the methodological and ethical considerations that will greatly influence the research process, data collection and analysis, so it is important to be prepared before the research is carried out.

### Conclusion

Preparing ourselves with methodological and ethical considerations before the research begins will greatly help our response when conducting research. Researchers also really need to have knowledge about sexual violence with all its causes and effects. Everyone's response to the traumatic experience of sexual violence is very diverse and individual, every person responds in different ways. There is no light and heavy term in the eyes of researchers, it is certain that whatever they feel is valid and they need to know that you as a researcher recognize and validate their experiences and feelings.

Social workers are required to frequently reflect critically on their ethical judgments so as not to misbehave with survivors and to avoid adverse consequences. Social workers are required to "let go" of all prejudices and really put clients in a respectable position. The responsibility as a social worker is to ensure that children can grow up in a healthy and safe environment free from all forms of violence. In research, it is important for researchers to place the research participants in a respectable position and maintain professional relationships by always showing empathy and support. From them, the survivors, you will learn that humans have the power over all extraordinary problems, from them you will learn that recovery is possible, from them you will learn that there is always hope for the betterment.

Research on CSA is very important for social workers, the need to identify the abuse, recognize and respond to concern sexual abuse is vital and can significantly improve the short-term and the long-term outcomes of adult who experience CSA. The benefits of this research can be useful for developing programs and policies for prevention and intervention as early as possible.

## **Suggestions**

### *Possibility of making referrals*

During the interview process, the researcher found several participants who needed further help. Some of the participants involved had received psychological, psychiatric and medical treatment or other forms of support. However, some have never received any treatment and actually, they need further assistance. Facing with this reality, the researcher suggested to participants to access further services and offer alternative treatments that might suit their needs. However, there were participants who were still hesitant to do so. There were also participants who were proactive and assertive asking for help to be recommended to mental health professionals. The researcher's response was to refer them to a professional colleague by discussing it with the participants first. It is important for researchers or other social workers conducting research or intervention practices to consider the self-determinism of participants or clients in making decision.

This action is also a form of applying the Trauma-informed Practice provided by the researcher to the participants. As social workers we must be able to understand, recognize and respond to the impact of trauma due to childhood sexual violence. The trauma experienced as a result of sexual violence has far-reaching consequences and can interfere with a person's lifelong developmental process. It is, therefore, important for social workers to recognize the symptoms and refer them to mental health professionals (Dye, 2018).

### *Strengthening capacity of researchers*

Although the researcher has more than 20 years of experience as a social worker working in mental health and psychosocial areas, there are still concerns that the interview process will pose challenges and vulnerabilities for both the participants and the researcher. Researcher correctly applied the five basic principles of Trauma-informed Care (Jill, 2017; Elliot et al., 2005; Fallot & Harris, 2009; Harris & Fallot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014), namely safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. Researchers and social worker practitioners who will be involved in trauma-focused work should be carefully selected, with priority given to those who are experienced and have received adequate trainings.

Goodman (2017) argued that, it is important for social work educational institutions and services for victims of sexual violence or other forms of trauma to provide training for social workers on the prevalence of violence and trauma, skill in empowering clients, and ability for understanding informed-traumas. Social workers and researchers need to receive sufficient supervision and further support, especially if the researcher is experiencing emotional distress as a result of listening to the participants' traumatic experiences. Those conducting research need to be trained to be able to analyze themselves for avoiding stereotypes, misunderstandings and biases, that as a consequence, there is no victim-blaming or destructive response potentially harmful to participants and affect the quality of the data to be obtained (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002).

Another risk that may occur is that researchers get the impact of listening repeatedly to the experience of sexual violence and the psychological emotional impact experienced by participants. The possible impact is emotional stress, that consequently, researchers need to be given the opportunity as often as possible to carry out debriefing, ventilation, and even counseling if necessary (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002). Experienced in conducting this kind of research, the researcher carried out debriefing assisted by psychologist colleague, who helped researcher digests and processes stress during the interview process and the entire research process. The researcher recommends that if further research is to be carried out, it is necessary to make sure whether the interviewer also has a trauma history or not. If so, it is necessary to equip the interviewer with the skills mentioned above.

Therefore, one of the recommendations that the researcher proposes is the importance of developing ethical guidelines for researchers or social workers who will conduct research involving survivors of violence (whatever it is, such as physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, disaster and so on). This guide will be useful as a guideline before carrying out research and as a critical reflection process during the research process. This kind of guideline is also important to be developed at the level of social work practice.

### *Further research*

The researcher suggests that it is necessary to conduct research involving gender diversity in the future. At least for Indonesia, there is a need of involving more male population in research on sexual violence. The lack of data that we currently have on the number of victims, prevalence and consequences of sexual violence against boys or male adults makes us still have not many references to developing the best intervention for this type of population. Researcher further suggested that more thorough research needs to be done, especially into the impact of childhood sexual abuse on the physical, psychosocial and mental health of survivors throughout their life span by using a variety of research methodologies.

As sensitive as various parties think regarding research on sexual violence, it is important to realize that this research is also an opportunity for survivors to "speak up" about what they have experienced. Their voices are important to eliminate the stigma and discrimination they experience due to misunderstandings or misperceptions about sexual violence. Their voices are also important in developing policies supporting their rights to basic needs. Of course, by taking into-account some methodological and ethical considerations, this kind of research is still important to be carried out in the future.

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### **Author's Brief Bio**

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