

Bridging the Gaps: Focus Groups with Survivors

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) was tasked with reaching out to the public to learn more about how they view and understand sexual assault services and resources available in the United States.

Twelve survivors who participated in the survey volunteered to participate in one of four focus groups, with three survivors in each group.

Survivors Need



- Body-based healing approaches (breath work, yoga, meditation, or somatic experiencing)

“ A lot of what’s left is the shock in my body... giving my body opportunities to relax is a huge part of the journey that I’m on now. ”



- Peer support and community connection (vs. isolation and shame)
- Individualized, culturally responsive services (vs. one-size-fits-all approaches)

“ Every survivor has gone through a different experience, have different needs, have different support systems. ”



- To be believed
- Long-term support (healing is a lifelong journey)

“ We’re not a survivor just when it happens, like, we’re a survivor, like, decades later, you know? ”



- Trauma-informed care providers
- Nature-based healing

“ The treatment I got from him was just ice cold... I felt as if I had committed a crime the way [I was treated and] what questions were asked of me. ”

Gaps in Services



- Survivors did not understand the range of free and confidential sexual assault support services offered at community programs.

“ My drug dealer was my doctor... here’s a prescription of Xanax, and here’s a prescription of Zoloft, go home. ”



- Survivors face fragmented care that requires them to coordinate multiple systems while healing from trauma.
- There was a lack of trauma-informed training across healthcare, education, and service systems.

“ The focus wasn’t... on healing, it was symptom management. It was, okay, how do we just suppress these out-of-control emotions. ”



- Addressing the root causes of sexual violence requires comprehensive prevention education.
- There are not enough culturally-sensitive providers, especially for LGBTQ+ survivors and survivors of color.

“ Finding practitioners in different modalities that I wanted that also understood my lived experience as a Black woman, from the Southeast... not needing to translate that lived experience can be really important in therapy. ”



“ Having that weaponized against me about, that’s why you’re gay... never really having a place where I could fully talk about my experiences. ”

- Financial costs and insurance were often barriers to evidence-based trauma treatments.
- Healing starts with meeting basic needs; without stable housing, transportation, or access to food, it’s nearly impossible for survivors to attain other forms of support.

“ There’s so many requirements, so many barriers, just to get in to help... Some places don’t even allow you to have your kids ... don’t allow you to have your pets. They ask you to surrender so many things that have kept you in the present moment, or given you some type of support, or hope. ”



- Survivors deserve to be empowered to heal and reclaim life beyond survival.

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The needs assessment was conducted in 2025 by Dr. Laura Sinko and Kayleigh Izzo (IRB Protocol #32468) from the Phoenix Gender-Based Violence Lab at Temple University College of Public Health.