

# Cultural Scripts of Grief: A Comparative Study of Sexual Violence Survivors in India and Ghana

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## Abstract

Grief is an emotional experience that is personal, but also socially constructed as it is influenced by one's environment, and when it is caused by sexual violence, it becomes particularly complex. This paper investigates grief in the context of sexual violence and the ways that sociocultural influences impact its expression in survivors of sexual violence in India and Ghana. In both India and Ghana, sociocultural influences such as stigma, gender, and community values shape the survivors' experience of violence, as well as the subsequent process of recovering. This paper explores how the individual narratives of survivors demonstrate their grieving process, variations in coping mechanisms, and how cultural expectations influenced their emotional expression, ultimately understanding the intersectionality of trauma, gender, and culture. Following a mixed methods approach, 61 respondents from India and Ghana participated in this study through semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, gaining both qualitative and quantitative data. Grounded theory was implemented to analyze the qualitative responses, allowing for recurring themes to come from the data organically. Simultaneously, the phenomenological approach was administered to deduce the lived experiences of survivors, focusing on how they personally make sense of their grief and trauma. Findings of this paper reveal a contrast between the grieving process among survivors in India and Ghana. Survivors from India frequently coped and grieved in isolation due to societal norms relating to taboo and external societal pressures around family honor stemming from the patriarchal society. On the other hand, Ghanaian survivors who were connected with NGOs had access to community-based grieving resources and support, commonly connected to religion.

Quantitative data indicate family support perceived by survivors was significantly associated with grief expression and mental health outcomes. Survivors who received emotional or spiritual support were more emotionally expressive than those who were denied support and were left with disenfranchised grief. This research also shows that grief is not only a personal response but a culturally conditioned process, suggesting grief requires survivor-centric, culturally sensitive, and systemically supportive interventions. This study highlights the socio-emotional realities of survivors in two different cultures and provides valuable contexts of how they can be better supported in their process of healing.

**Keywords:** grief, sexual abuse, women, stigma, mental health