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REDUCING SEXUAL AGGRESSION IN MALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STUDY OF SELF-HELP INTERVENTIONS

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Introduction

The incident-rate of male-perpetrated sexual offences is alarmingly high on university campuses [1, 2; F1]. However, despite the wealth of knowledge available on the characteristics and treatment needs of sexual offenders [3, 4], to date there have been no established interventions to help lower sexual offence rates amongst male university students. My PhD aims to inform this research gap in the literature through three novel empirical studies assessing campus-based sexual aggression.

Participants

Participants across all studies will comprise male university students who self-report a proclivity towards sexual aggression on the Attraction to Sexual Aggression scale [5]; an established measure used to assess individual propensity towards sexually aggressive behaviours against females (e.g., likelihood to rape).

Study One

Aim: To quantitatively assess the treatment needs of sexually aggressive male students within one university.

This study will assess the treatment needs of sexually aggressive male students at the researcher's university, using a battery of psychological measures administered online. These measures will comprise established self-report instruments that assess various trait behaviours pertinent to sexual offending.

Data will be analysed using multiple linear regression, in which battery scores will be entered as predictors and ASA scores will act as the criterion variable. Measures that contribute highly to the regression model will be taken as highlighting treatment needs for participants.

Study Two

Aims: (a) To directly compare the treatment needs of sexually aggressive male students across universities; (b) To explore whether there are subtypes of sexually aggressive male student.

This study will be in two parts. Part One will be a direct replication of Study One and will allow me to reproduce any significant effects. Part Two will then compare these results to those gathered from males at other UK universities who have completed the battery to assess the generalizability of the identified treatment needs.

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Data will also be used to establish whether there are subtypes of sexually aggressive male student who possess unique treatment needs. This will be done using a hierarchical cluster analysis, which will identify any homogenous groups similar on a given base-trait.

Study Three

Aim: To develop, implement and evaluate the efficacy of a self-help intervention for sexually aggressive male students.

This study will design, implement, and evaluate an evidence-based self-help intervention to lower male students' sexual aggression (see F2). Such interventions are remarkably effective in helping individuals to develop coping strategies to combat unhelpful cognitions [6] and, when used in the treatment of undesirable forensic behaviours, generate consistent positive outcomes with student populations [7, 8].

Participants will be randomly allocated to either an Experimental or Control group; the former will be granted access to the intervention and will have six to nine-weeks to complete all activities, whilst the latter will be granted access at the end of the study (if positive results are found).

A 3 (Time) x 2 (Group) intention-to-treat ANOVA will be used to assess changes in participants' sexual aggression scores – along with other relevant indices – before, during and after the study. Confidence intervals will be used to assess clinical significance.

Implications

It is expected that this PhD will generate valuable academic knowledge and result in a novel evidence-based self-help intervention which, if effective, could be adopted by universities in the UK and US to combat the high rates of sexual assault on their campuses. Moreover, my research will promote the generation of theory in this poorly researched field and provide impetus for continued empirical investigation.

F1. Students' experiences of sexual violence on UK University campuses. (N = 4,491 from 153 universities [1])

70% of female students had experienced sexual violence at university



8% of female students had been raped at university

* This compares with 4% of the female adult population in England and Wales (ONS, 2013: An Overview of Sexual Offending in England & Wales)

F2. An overview of the self-help intervention used in Study Three.

- ❖ An online self-led course easily accessible to participants
- ❖ Will comprise a selection of 15 to 30-minute activities, grounded in the principles of CBT
- ❖ Activities will be tailored to the treatment needs of participants

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