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Sexual Aggression in UK Higher Education
A Treatment Needs Analysis of Male Students
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ABSTRACT

Compared to national averages, sexual offending occurs at alarming rates on university campuses across developed countries [1-2]. Most of this offending occurs between students and is perpetrated by males against females [3-4]. However, to date, there has been little research assessing sexual offending in the context of HE in the UK and there are no established interventions designed to reduce offending amongst students [5]. This is surprising given our knowledge of incarcerated sexual offenders and the empirical treatment programmes available for them worldwide [6-7]. This empirical study is the first in a series that assess why male students sexually offend and whether clinically-informed interventions can be useful in reducing their proclivity towards doing so. Initial findings are positive and warrant further research.

RESULTS

- In total, 106 sexually aggressive acts were reported by 33 participants:
  - Number of acts reported. Two (9 participants), Two (13), More than three (41).
  - Tactics. Verbal pressure (40 acts), Verbal criticism (23), Incompaction (39), Physical threats (22), Physical force (4).
  - Outcome. Sexual touching or undressing (37 acts), Oral sex (11 actual, 27 attempted), Vaginal penetration (9 actual, 12 attempted). Anal penetration (4 actual, 8 attempted).

- Three psychological variables and one demographic variable were able to differentiate between the NSA and SA groups:
  - Hostility toward women, 49.11 (NSA) vs. 29.47 (SA), M = 0.19, 95% CI (0.03 to 0.51), (46.5) = 3.18, p < .003.
  - Rape myth acceptance, 44.9 (NSA) vs. 37.32 (SA), M = 0.67, 95% CI (2.48 to 11.06), (39.3) = 3.19, p < .003, d = 1.5.
  - Ethnicity. Multinomial probability distributions were not equal across groups, p = .048.

- A hierarchical logistic regression model constructed using these variables and SES-SFP scores to predict sexual aggression was significant overall.
  - The model could explain between 9.7% (Cox & Snell R2) and 19.3% (Nagelkerke R2) of the variance in sexual aggression, Omnibus 2(4) = 25.82, p < .005.
  - The model correctly classified 89.8% of all cases (specificity: .996, sensitivity: .107).
  - The model discriminated well, area under the curve = .77, p < .005, 95% CI (.68, .85).

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</table>

Table 1: Logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of being a sexual aggressor.

DISCUSSION

- Results support previous findings that sexual offence perpetration occurs at alarming rates in UK universities.
- Hostility toward women and atypical sexual fantasies may provide two explanations for why university males offend.
- Any interventions designed to lower proclivity toward sexual aggression should incorporate empirical research.
- Future research should attempt to replicate these findings using larger, more diverse samples.

REFERENCES


METHODOLOGY

- N = 259 heterosexual male students from one university.
  - Age ranged from 18 to 68 years (M = 22.86, SD = 6.61).
  - Most identified as White British (n = 151, 58.30%)
  - Average highest level of education was A-Level or equivalent (n = 152; 58.69%)

- Criterion. Dichotomised scores from the Short-Form Sexual Experiences Survey: Perpetration (SES-SFP), a measure of sexual aggression
  - Empirical rejection of items led to the classification of non-sexual aggressor (NSA).
  - Any non-zero responses led to the classification of sexual aggressor (SA).

- Predictors. Established self-report measures assessing trait behaviours pertinent to sexual offending:
  - Measures of aggression, alcohol consumption, assertiveness, athleticism, atypical sexual fantasies, emotion regulation, hostility toward women, loneliness, rape myth acceptance, self-efficacy in romantic relationships, and self-esteem (negative and positive).

- Confounding variables. Impression management and demographic variables (age, ethnicity, education).
- Participants completed all measures anonymously online as a battery. Four attention checks were included to assess concentration.

HYPOTHESES

- The prevalence rate of sexual aggression will be higher amongst male university students compared to non-university males.
- Scores on psychological measures will differ between male university students who have recently sexually offended, compared to those who have not.

- Exploratory. A logistic regression model constructed using the psychological scores from both sexual aggressors and non-aggressors will
  - highlight the variables that most reliably predict sexual aggression amongst male university students, and
  - discriminate between both groups at greater-than-chance level.

March 2010
The NUS’ Hidden Marks report (N = 2,058) finds that 1-in-7 females are victims of sexual violence in HE. It is the first national climate survey of its kind.

March 2016
The Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: 2016-2020 report summarises the Government’s long-term strategy to combat violence against women in HE.

TSP’s Revised Sexual Assault survey (N = 4,491) reported that 70% of female students have experienced sexual violence at university (vs. 26% of male students) – 8% had been raped.

March 2013
The NUS’ That’s What She Said report (N = 40) highlights prevailing issues with sexism & ‘lad culture’ in HE. Strong links are made to sexual harassment.

October 2016
UUK’s Changing the Culture report highlights key issues with universities’ responses to sexual violence & makes recommendations for better practices.

February 2019
Brook’s Dig-in study (N = 5,649) confirmed that over half of UK university students are exposed to unwanted sexual behaviours during their studies.

Questions?
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