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

Samuel T. Hales & Prof. Theresa A. Gannon

March 2010

The NUS' *Hidden Marks* report ($N = 2,058$) finds that 1-in-7 females are victims of sexual violence in HE.

March 2016

The *Ending Violence Against Women & Girls* report summarizes the Government's long-term initiatives to combat violence against women in HE.

March 2018

Revolt Sexual Assault's survey ($N = 4,491$) finds that 70% of female students experienced sexual violence at university, whilst 8% were raped.

The NUS' *That's What She Said* report ($N = 40$) highlights prevailing issues with sexism & 'lad culture' in HE. Links are made to sexual harassment.

March 2013

UUK's *Changing the Culture* report highlights key issues with universities' responses to sexual violence.

October 2016

Brook's *Dig-in* study ($N = 5,649$) confirmed that over half of UK university students are exposed to unwanted sexual behaviours.

February 2019

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 university-based sexual offending in the UK and there are no established interventions designed to reduce offending amongst students [5]. This is very surprising given our knowledge of incarcerated sexual offenders and the treatment programmes available for them worldwide [6-7]. This empirical study is the first in a series that explore the psychological factors behind why male students sexually offend and whether clinically-informed interventions can be useful in reducing their proclivity to do so. Initial findings are positive and warrant further research.

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-sexual 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.

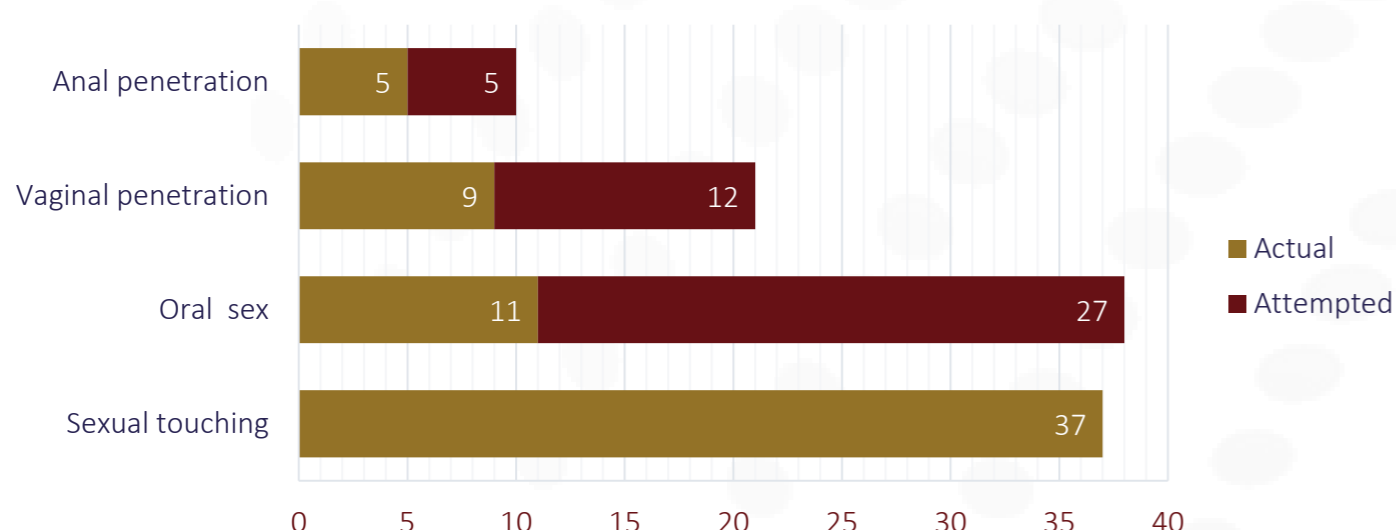
METHODOLOGY

- $N = 259$ heterosexual male students from one university.
- Criterion.** Dichotomised scores from the Short-Form Sexual Experiences Survey: Perpetration (SES-SFP), a measure of sexual aggression
 - Emphatic 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.



RESULTS: Sexual Aggression



"In total, 33 participants reported that they had committed or tried to commit 106 sexually aggressive acts in the last two years."

RESULTS: Group Comparison

- Three psychological variables and one demographic variable were able to differentiate between the NSA and SA groups:
 - Hostility toward women.** 24.91 [NSA] vs. 29.47 [SA], $M = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.03 to 0.51], $t(46.52) = 3.18$, $p = .003$.
 - Rape myth acceptance.** 44.09 [NSA] vs. 37.32 [SA], $M = 6.77$, 95% CI [2.48 to 11.06], $t(39.31) = 3.19$, $p = .003$, $d = .15$.
 - Sexual fantasies.** 4.83 [NSA] vs. 8.52 [SA], $M = 0.63$, 95% CI [0.30 to 1.05], $t(56.57) = 4.30$, $p < .001$.
 - 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 R^2) and 19.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in sexual aggression, Omnibus $\chi^2(4) = 25.82$, $p < .005$.
 - The model correctly classified 89.8% of all cases (specificity: 99.6%, sensitivity: 10.7%).
 - The model discriminated well; area under the curve = .77, $p < .005$, 95% CI [.68, .85].

| Variables | B | SE | Wald | df | p | ORs | 95% CI for ORs | |
|------------------------|-------|------|-------|----|------|------|----------------|----------|
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Ethnicity | 0.27 | 0.44 | 0.36 | 1 | 0.55 | 1.31 | 0.55 | 3.10 |
| Hostility toward women | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.06 | 1 | 0.81 | 1.01 | 0.95 | 1.07 |
| Rape myth acceptance | 0.08 | 0.03 | 8.48 | 1 | 0.00 | 1.08 | 1.03 | 1.14 *** |
| Sexual fantasies | 0.07 | 0.03 | 6.07 | 1 | 0.01 | 1.08 | 1.02 | 1.14 *** |
| Constant | -6.32 | 1.07 | 34.73 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.00 | - | - |

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

"Of the four variables that differentiated SAs from NSAs, logistic regression modelling highlighted rape myth acceptance and atypical sexual fantasies as best predicting sexual aggression."

DISCUSSION

- Results support previous findings that sexual offence perpetration occurs at alarming rates in UK universities, and at higher rates than in the general community.
- Rape myth acceptance and atypical sexual fantasies may provide two explanations as to why university males possess an increased propensity towards sexually offending.
- Any interventions designed to lower proclivity toward sexual aggression should incorporate empirical research.
- What's next?** 1) To investigate whether these results replicate across to a larger national sample of university males. 2) To assess whether sexually aggressive university males form a homogenous population with shared treatment needs. 3) To design, implement and evaluate an evidence-based self-help intervention to reduce sexual aggression amongst university males.

Questions?

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