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 [3-2]. Most of this offending occurs between students and is perpetrated by males against females (1-3). 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.

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), p = 0.03, 95% CI (2.48 to 11.06), t(39.31) = 3.19, p = 0.003.
  - Rape myth acceptance: 44.03 (NSA) vs. 37.32 (SA), p = 0.003, 95% CI (1.14 to 1.5).
  - Sexual fantasies: 4.83 (NSA) vs. 8.52 (SA), p = 0.000, 95% CI (10.30 to 10.03), t(66.57) = 4.30, p < 0.001.
  - Ethnicity: Multinomial probability distributions were not equal across groups, p = 0.048.

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 19.9% (Nagelkerke R2) of the variance in sexual aggression. Omnibus χ²(6) = 25.82, p = 0.005.
- 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 < 0.005, 95% CI (68.45).

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

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“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.

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).

RESULTS: Sexual Aggression

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

Questions?

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REFERENCES ON REQUEST