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Sexual Aggression in UK Higher Education

A Treatment Needs Analysis of Male Students

Samuel T. Hales, University of Kent

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.

March 2018

TSR's *Revolt 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.



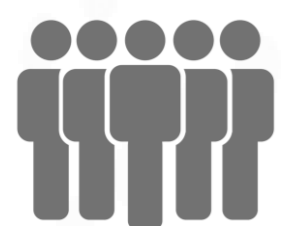
ABSTRACT

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.

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.
 - 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
 - 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 to assess concentration.

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RESULTS

- In total, **106 sexually aggressive** acts were reported by **33 participants**:
 - Number of acts reported.** One (x9 participants), Two (x13), More than three (x11).
 - Tactics.** Verbal pressure (x40 acts), Verbal criticism (x21), Incapacitation (x39), Physical threats (x2), Physical force (x4).
 - Outcome.** Sexual touching or undressing (x37 acts), Oral sex (x11 actual, x27 attempted), Vaginal penetration (x9 actual, x12 attempted), Anal penetration (x5 actual, x5 attempted).
- 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	β	SE	Wald	df	p	95% CI for ORs		
						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.

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.

Questions?

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