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Assessing the Treatment Needs of Sexually Aggressive Male Students at UK Universities

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What do we know?

- One-in-four female university students in the UK self-report being a victim of sexual assault during their studies.¹ Eight percent are actually raped.² These figures are notably higher than victimisation rates among non-university females in the community.³
- The most common perpetrators of university-based sexual assault are male students studying at their victim's university and who they know.¹ Some offend on multiple occasions and also before university, which places them at increased risk of recidivating.¹
- US literature has shown that there are specific psychological correlates associated with college sexual assault.⁴ These are likely to map onto clinical treatment needs for perpetrators that need tackling through specialist intervention to reduce their risk.
- As such, understanding the factors associated with university sexual assault perpetration allows us to develop effective harm prevention policies and interventions to reduce male students' risk of offending and make campuses safer for female students.

Overview of Studies

Our studies are the first in the UK to assess empirically the psychological profiles of the most common perpetrators of sexual assault at UK universities: sexually-aggressive male students. Study 1 assesses the characteristics and predictors of sexual aggression amongst university males at one UK university, whilst Study 2 evaluates the generalisability of findings across a national sample. Study 3 examines the heterogeneity of self-reported sexually aggressive students to see if they comprised a unique clinical population with shared treatment needs.

Methodology

Participants were university students (aged 18+) who identified as heterosexual males. They were recruited through voluntary sampling.

Study 1: $N = 259$ students from one university in South East England. Ages ranged from 18-68 ($M = 22.86$, $SD = 6.61$). Most participants identified as White British (58.30%) and were highly educated (96.92%).

Study 2: $N = 295$ students from 100 different UK universities. Ages ranged from 18-75 ($M = 25.07$, $SD = 8.28$). Again, most participants identified as White British (70.51%) and were highly educated (95.93%).

Participants completed an online survey that comprised various psychological measures relevant to sexual offending and college sexual assault, including a demographic survey. These included measures of:

- Athletic involvement
- Impression management
- Self / Emotional regulation issues
- Atypical sexual interests
- Offence-supportive beliefs
- Social functioning

They also completed the *Sexual Experiences Survey: Short Form—Perpetration* (SES-SFP), which assessed their history of perpetrating sexually aggressive acts over the past 24-months.⁵ Attention checks were included to examine concentration and participation was rewarded.

Male university students in the UK sexually offend at HIGHER rates than males within the community. Their offending behaviours can be reliably PREDICTED by their responses to select psychological measures, which differentiate them from non-offenders.

Summary of Results

Participants were divided into two groups: non-sexual aggressors (NSAs), who emphatically rejected all items of the SES-SFP, and sexual aggressors (SAs), who provided any non-zero response to the measure.

Sexual aggression: Prevalence and features. In Study 1, 106 illegal sexual acts were reported by 33 male students (12.74% of the final sample). In Study 2, 145 illegal acts were reported by 30 male students (10.14% of the sample); see Figure 1. Victims were often female students (80.00-81.82% of cases).

Group comparisons. On most psychological measures, SAs scored higher than NSAs. In Study 1, groups could be differentiated by their ethnicity and HTW, IRMA-R, and SFQ-R-SV scores. In Study 2, they differed on HTW, IRMA-R, SFQ-R-SV, BPAQ, SERR, and DERS-SF scores.

Classifying sexual aggressors. The above variables were force entered into a binomial logistic regression to assess their relative ability to predict past sexual aggression. Final models were significant: Omnibus $\chi^2(4) = 25.82$, $p < .001$ (Study 1) and $\chi^2(3) = 57.63$, $p < .001$ (Study 2; following an initial hierarchical model), and could explain 19.31% and 42.47% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in sexual aggression scores, respectively.

AUROC analysis showed that both models could discriminate between groups at better-than-chance levels; see Figure 2. Of the variables that entered the final models, only the IRMA-R and SFQ-R-SV made a significant contribution in Study 1, and the SFQ-R-SV, HTW, and BPAQ in Study 2 (see Table 1).

Heterogeneity testing. SAs were entered into an agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis. Z-scores from measures that differentiated between SAs and NSAs in Studies 1 and 2 were used as clustering variables (i.e., the HTW, IRMA-R, and SFQ-R-SV). Following cluster validation and stability testing, five meaningful subgroups of SA were identified and defined tentatively based on their key characteristics; see Figure 3.

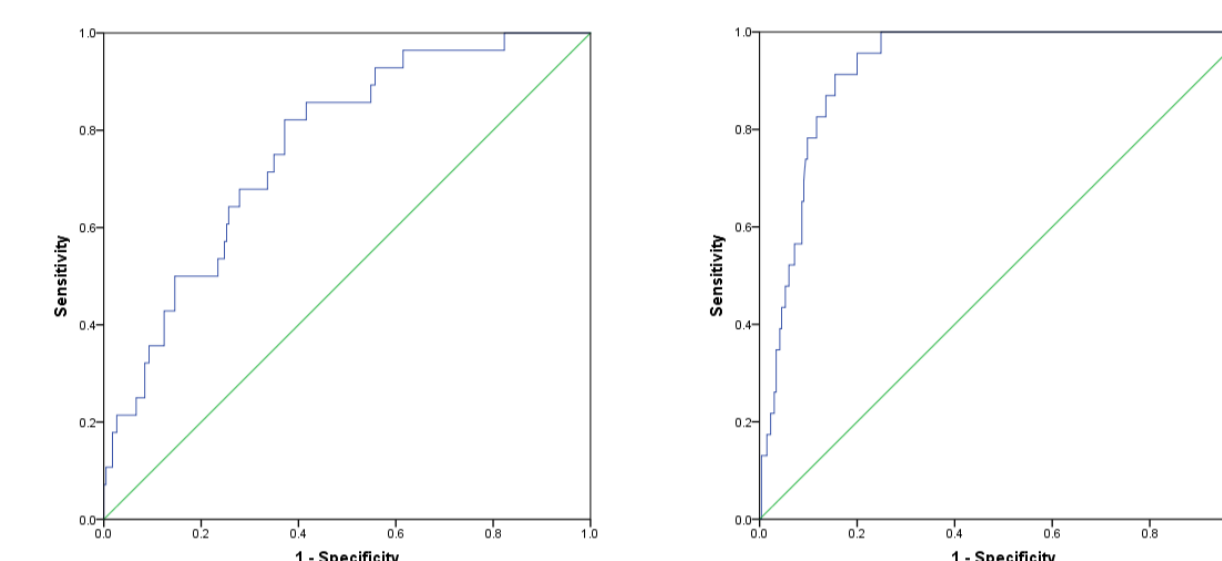


Figure 2. ROC curves showing the discriminatory abilities of logistic regression models in both studies.

Study 1	B	SE	Wald	p	ORs	95% CI for ORs	
						Lower	Upper
Ethnicity	0.27	0.44	0.36	0.55	1.31	0.55	3.10
HTW	0.01	0.03	0.06	0.81	1.01	0.95	1.07
IRMA-R	0.08	0.03	8.48	0.00	1.08	1.03	1.14
SFQ-R-SV	0.07	0.03	6.07	0.01	1.08	1.02	1.14
Constant	-6.32	1.07	34.73	0.00	0.00		

Study 2	B	SE	Wald	p	ORs	95% CI for ORs	
						Lower	Upper
SFQ-R-SV	0.12	0.03	13.33	.000	1.12	1.06	1.20
HTW	0.14	0.03	18.51	.000	1.15	1.08	1.22
BPAQ	0.11	0.04	10.33	.001	1.12	1.05	1.20
Constant	-12.51	2.11	35.09	.000	0.00		

Table 1. The final logistic regression models.

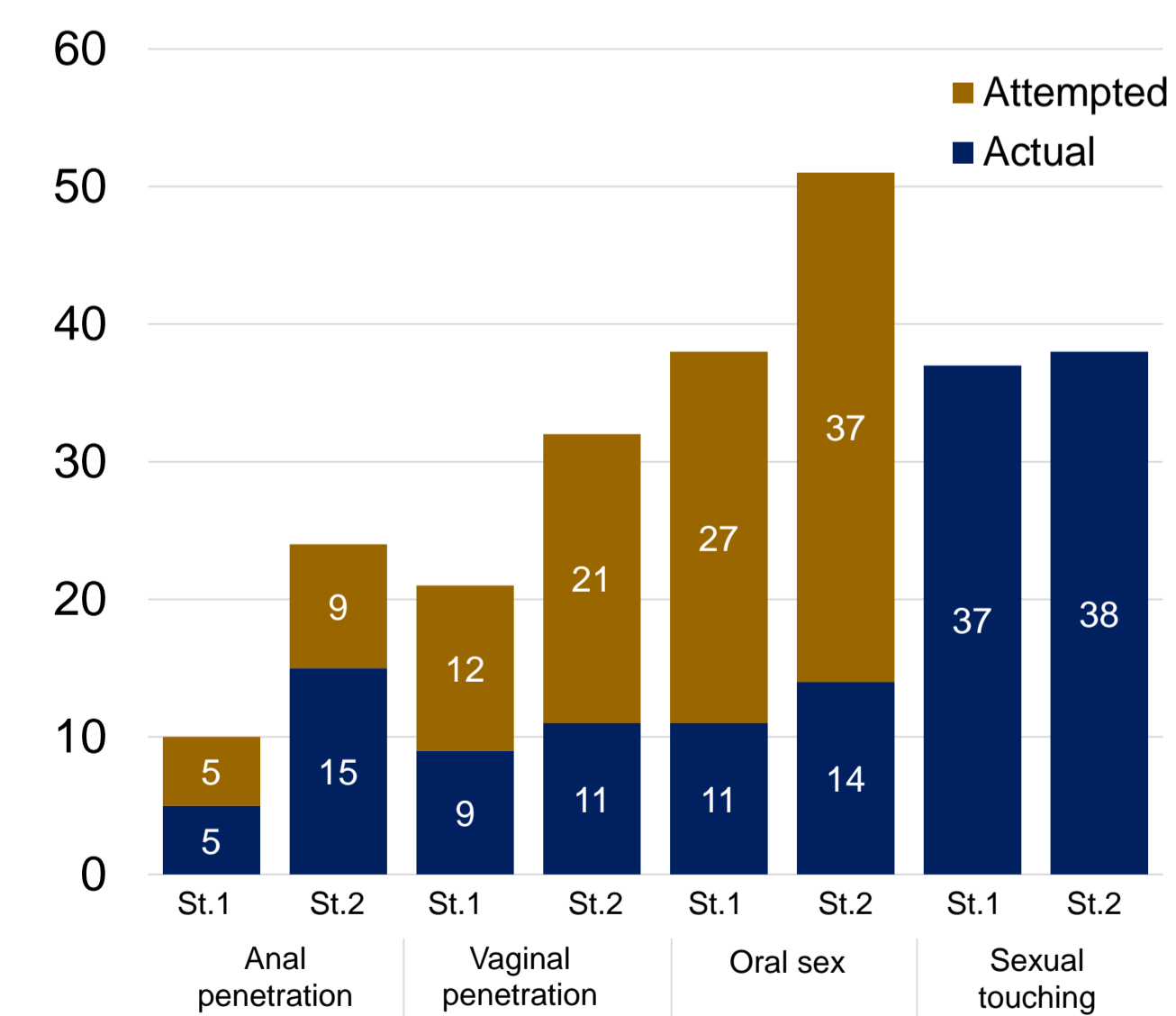


Figure 1. The prevalence of self-reported sexually aggressive behaviours over the past 24-months.

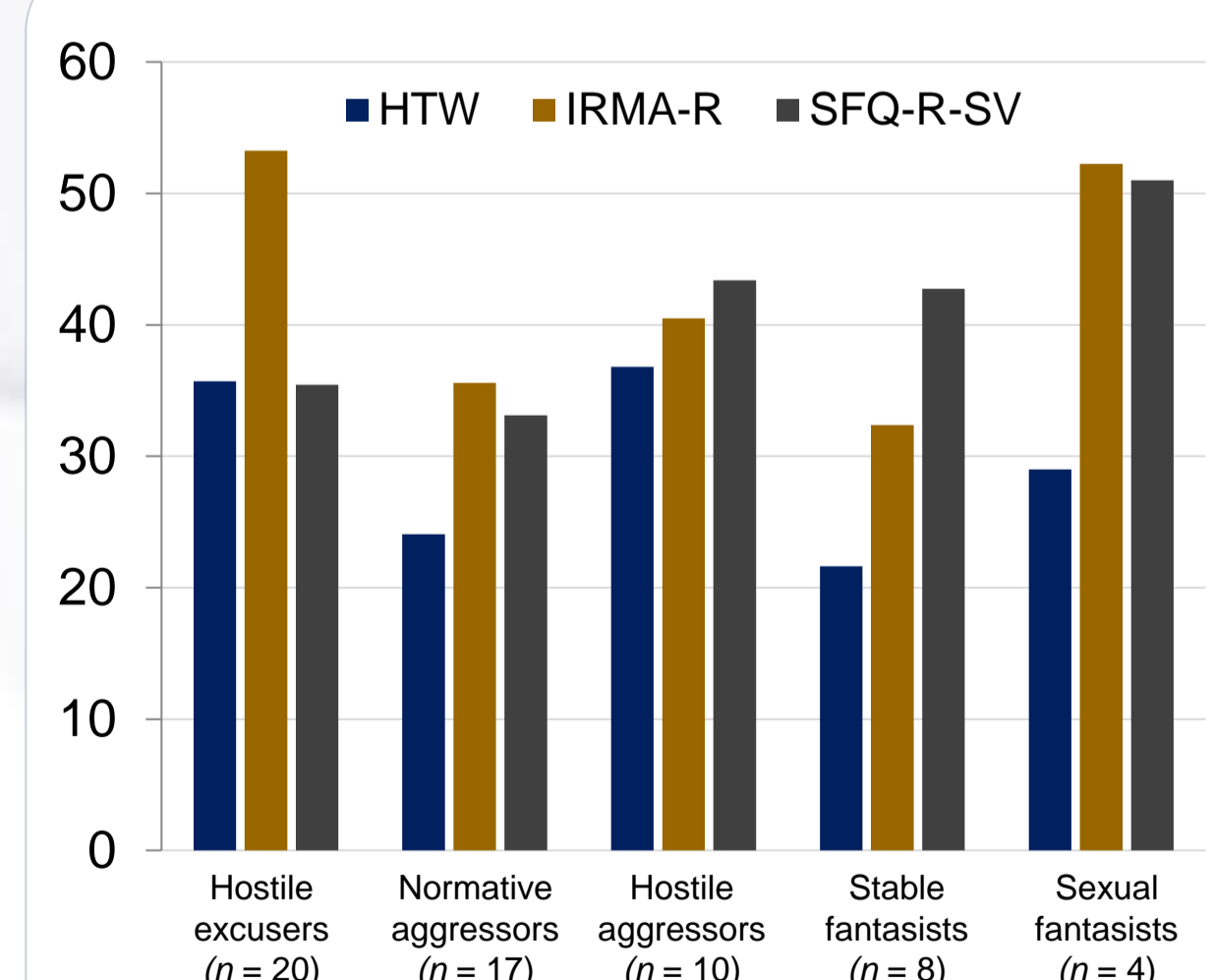


Figure 3. Unstandardized mean scores on the clustering variables for the five identified profiles.

Discussion

- University male students in the UK are at an increased risk of sexually offending compared to males in the community.
- Male students who self-report recent sexual offending behaviours differ psychologically from their non-offending peers.
- Preliminary evidence suggest that perpetrators may comprise a heterogenous group with distinct clinical treatment needs.
- Effective clinical interventions for sexual assault prevention with male students are likely to be those that promote positive regard for women and typical sexual fantasies, dispel pervasive rape myths, and target students' aggressive cognitions.

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