

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL AGGRESSION IN UK MALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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OVERVIEW

- My PhD Journey
- Background & Rationale
- Overview of Studies
- Discussion & Implications
- Looking Forward

Sexual aggression *noun*

“Any sexual interaction, from petting to oral/genital contact to intercourse, which is gained against one's will through use of physical force, threats of force, continual arguments/pressure, use of alcohol/drugs and/or position of authority”

(Koss & Gaines, 1993, p.96)



Background

- Sexual aggression victimization is common on UK university campuses¹⁻³
- Perpetrators often known heterosexual male students¹⁻²
- There's a lack of empirical research assessing sexual aggression perpetration at UK universities
 - Why are male students at increased risk of perpetration during their studies?
 - Are perpetrators a specialist clinical/forensic population?
 - What about current interventions?



of female students & recent graduates report having experienced sexual violence at university.



of female students & recent graduates report having been raped.

²The Student Room / Revolt (2018)
(Sample. 4,491 students across 153 UK HEIs)



of females in the community are victims of sexual violence every year

⁴Office for National Statistics (2018)
(Figures extrapolated from Crime Survey)

Overview of our Studies

- First attempt to empirically assess and classify male sexual aggression amongst UK male university students
- Three empirical studies that extend past research
 - **Study 1 & 2:** What are the risk factors for perpetration?
 - **Study 3:** Do perpetrators comprise a homogenous clinical population?
- Guided by US work into campus sexual assault (CSA) and the established knowledge base on sexual offending^{IB}



Study 1: “Local study”

- Assessed the psychological profiles of sexually aggressive male students at our university
- Participants ($N = 259$)
 - Mostly young, educated White British students
 - Descriptive similarities between our sample and the male student body
- Completed a cross-sectional online survey comprising a battery of validated (short-form) psychological measures
 - All relevant to CSA in the US or sexual aggression amongst incarcerated males^{1B}
 - Included the SES-SFP (IV) and BIDR-6-IM (CV)¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Demographic information

Inappropriate Sexual Interests

- Assertiveness⁶
- Inappropriate sexual fantasies⁷

Intimacy & social functioning

- Loneliness⁸
- Self-efficacy in relationships⁹
- Self-esteem (negative & positive)¹⁰

Offence Supportive Cognition

- Hostility toward women¹¹
- Rape myth acceptance¹²

Self/Emotional Regulation

- Aggression¹³
- Alcohol consumption (excluded)¹⁴
- Emotion regulation¹⁵

Additional Measure(s)

- Sports participation¹⁶

Study 1: Findings

- 33 participants (**12.7% of the sample**; termed 'SAs') self-reported having perpetrated **106 sexually aggressive** acts over the past 24 months
 - Sexual coercion most common category (41.5% of acts)
 - 14 participants committed rape or attempted rape (23.6% of acts)
 - SAs often committed 2 offences (39.4%), mostly against females (81.8%)
- SAs scored higher on average than their non-offending peers (termed 'NSAs') on most measured variables
 - Groups differed on **hostility toward women** ($p = .003$, $d = 0.51$), **inappropriate sexual fantasies** ($p < .001$, $d = 0.52$), & **rape myth acceptance** ($p = .003$, $d = 0.66$)
 - Slight differences with regards to **ethnicity** ($p = .048$)
- Four significant variables force-entered into a binomial logistic regression model to see if they could 'predict' past sexual aggression

Study 1: Logistic regression

- The model was significant overall, $\chi^2(4) = 25.82, p < .001$
- Explained 9.7% (Cox & Snell R^2) to 19.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of variance in sexual aggression, with a high rate of correct classifications

Measure	β	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI for OR	
							LL	UL
Study 1								
HTW	0.01	0.03	0.06	1	.81	1.01	0.95	1.07
IRMA-R	0.08	0.03	8.48	1	.004	1.08	1.03	1.14
SFQ-R-SV	0.07	0.03	6.07	1	.01	1.08	1.02	1.14
Ethnicity	0.27	0.44	0.36	1	.55	1.31	0.55	3.10
Constant	-6.32	1.07	34.73	1	<.001	0.00		
HL goodness of fit: $\chi^2(8) = 2.54, p = .96$								

Rape myth acceptance & inappropriate sexual fantasies predicted past sexual aggression

- The model discriminated between groups at better-than-chance level, (AUC = .77, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.68, .85], $d \approx 1.04$)

Study 2: “National study”

- Replication of Study 1 across a national sample
 - How generalizable are our earlier findings?
 - What are the psychological profiles of SAs nationally?
- Participants ($N = 295$) recruited through Prolific
 - Larger N to aid analysis and for Study 3
 - Descriptively like our earlier group and the UK male student body
- Two new survey items asking for university affiliation and SA’s relationship to their victim(s)



Study 2: Findings

- 30 participants (**10.1% of the sample**) self-reported having perpetrated **145 sexually aggressive** acts over the past 24 months
 - Sexual coercion again the most common category (37.9% of acts)
 - 16 participants committed rape or attempted rape (35.9% of acts)
 - SAs typically committed 3+ offences (40.0%), mostly against females (86.7%) known to the participant (66.7%)
- SAs scored higher than NSAs on all measured variables
 - Groups differed on **hostility toward women** ($p < .001$, $d = 0.94$), **inappropriate sexual fantasies** ($p < .001$, $d = 0.70$), & **rape myth acceptance** ($p < .001$, $d = 0.70$)
 - They also differed on **aggression** ($p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), **self-efficacy in relationships** ($p = .04$, $d = 0.38$), and **emotion regulation** ($p = .04$, $d = 0.33$)
- Three main variables entered into a binomial logistic regression model

Study 2: Logistic regression

- The model was significant overall, $\chi^2(3) = 57.63, p < .001$
- Explained 18.1% (Cox & Snell R^2) to 42.5% (Nagelkerke R^2) of variance in sexual aggression, with a high rate of correct classifications

Measure	β	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI for OR	
							LL	UL
Study 2								
BPAQ	0.11	0.04	10.33	1	.001	1.12	1.05	1.20
HTW	0.14	0.03	18.51	1	<.001	1.15	1.08	1.22
SFQ-R-SV	0.12	0.03	13.33	1	<.001	1.12	1.06	1.20
Constant	-12.51	2.11	35.09	1	<.001	0.00		
HL goodness of fit: $\chi^2(8) = 4.81, p = .78$								

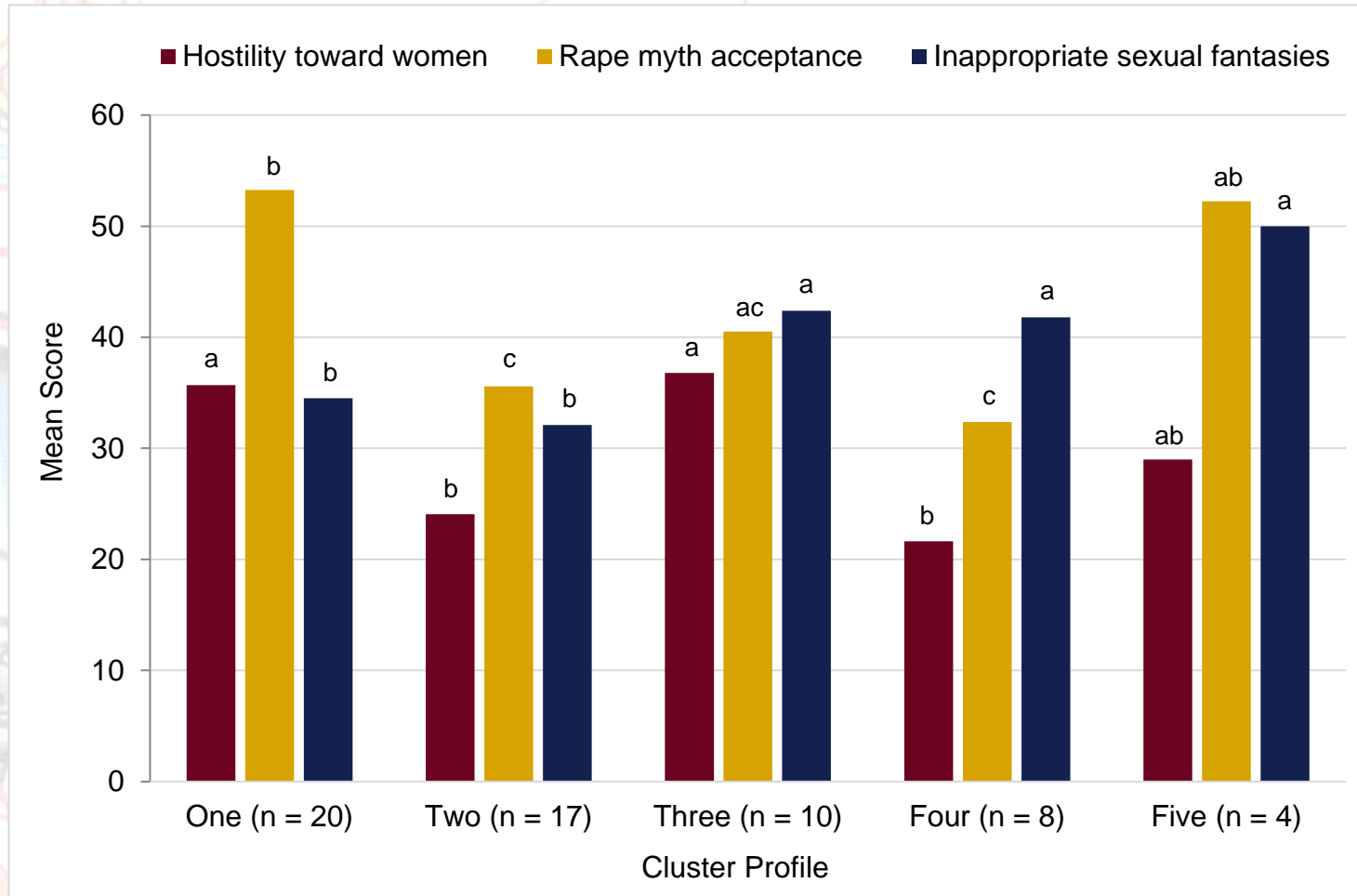
Aggression, hostility toward women, & inappropriate sexual fantasies predicted past sexual aggression

- The model discriminated between groups at better-than-chance level, (AUC = .93, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.89, .96], $d \approx 2.09$)

Study 3: Homogeneity testing

- Research suggests that sexually aggressive males comprise a heterogeneous group who can be classified by their psychological profiles¹⁹
 - What about sexually aggressive *university* males?
 - Are current 'one-size-fits-all' interventions effective?
- Participants: Self-reported SAs from Study 1 & 2 ($N = 59$ after cleaning)
 - Sufficient size to avoid dimensionality issues
- Agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis run
 - Main analysis conducted on standardised z-scores from psychological measures that differentiated between groups in Study 1 & 2
 - Determined clusters were validated on variables that differentiated between groups in Study 1 or 2 but which were not used in the clustering process
 - Stability testing confirmed final cluster profiles

Study 3: Homogeneity testing



* Letters that are shared by columns highlight clusters that do not significantly differ from one another using Dunn's (1964) follow-up test with a Bonferroni correction (adjusted $p < .005$)

- Our cluster analysis derived five meaningful subgroups of SAs, which we tentatively defined based on their psychological characteristics:

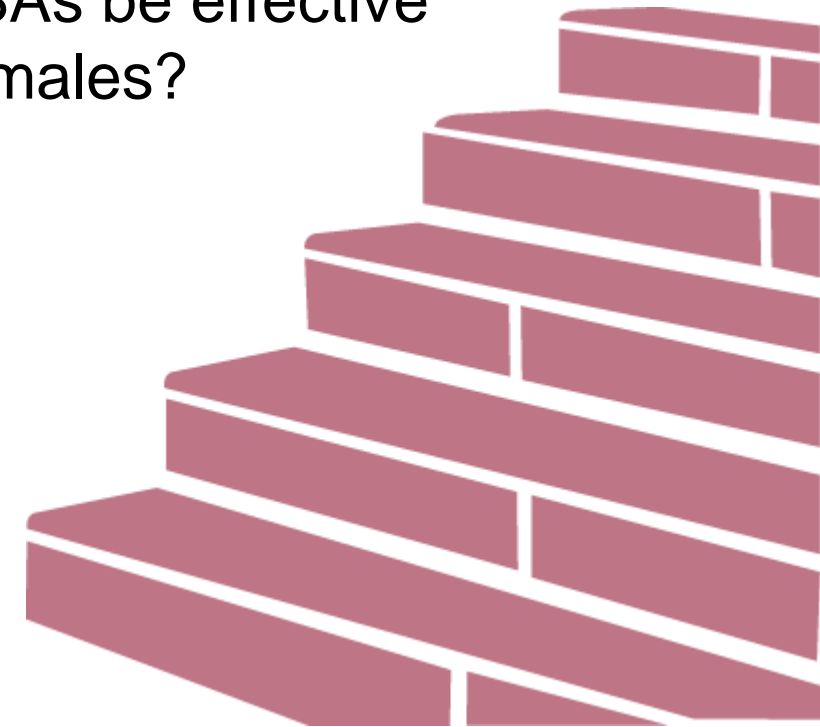
- **Cluster One:** “Hostile excusers”
- **Cluster Two:** “Unremarkable aggressors”
- **Cluster Three:** “Hostile aggressors”
- **Cluster Four:** “Non-hostile fantasists”
- **Cluster Five:** “Sexual fantasists”

General Discussion

- Sexual aggression occurs at **alarming rates** on UK university campuses
 - 11.4% prevalence across our studies (vs. \approx 7.3% amongst non-university males²⁰)
- Sexually aggressive male university students (SAs) in the UK comprise a **specialist forensic population** with distinct psychological profiles
 - Offending behaviours are likely driven by SAs' atypical sexual fantasies, hostile views towards women, rape myth acceptance, and aggression
- SAs are a **heterogenous** population deserving of tailored intervention
- Results can be used to facilitate **effective clinical decision making** with male students at risk of sexual aggression

Looking Forward

- More work needs doing to validate our findings and further understand UK male students' proclivity toward sexual aggression
- Would treatment initiatives that consistently demonstrate success in changing 'faulty cognitions' amongst incarcerated SAs be effective at reducing risk of perpetration amongst university males?
 - **Next set of studies:** Can a low-intensity CBT-based self-help intervention, tailored to our identified treatment needs, reduce (the risk of) sexual aggression amongst UK male students?
 - COVID contingencies necessary due to the changing landscape of HE in the UK and the effect on research





ANY QUESTIONS?

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Overview of Findings

Study 1: “Local study”

- 12.7% of participants self-reported recent sexual aggression (106 acts overall)
- SAs and NSAs differed on their levels of hostility toward women, inappropriate sexual fantasies, and rape myth acceptance, as well as their ethnicity
- Rape myth acceptance and inappropriate sexual fantasies could reliably predict past sexual aggression

Study 2: “National study”

- 10.1% of participants self-reported recent sexual aggression (145 acts overall)
- SAs and NSAs differed on the same variables as earlier, as well as their levels of aggression, self-efficacy in romantic relationships, and emotion regulation
- Aggression, hostility toward women, and inappropriate sexual fantasies could reliably predict past sexual aggression

Study 3: Homogeneity testing

- A cluster analysis derived five meaningful subgroups of SAs based on their hostility toward women, inappropriate sexual fantasies, and rape myth acceptance
- We tentatively defined these groups based on their descriptive characteristics: “hostile excusers,” “unremarkable aggressors,” “hostile aggressors,” “non-hostile fantasists,” and “sexual fantasists”

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