

Perpetrators of sexual assault

Perpetrators and sexual violence

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What we know-

There is far more research on victims of trauma than there is on the perpetrators who actually inflict the trauma. In order for us to fully understand the roots of trauma, it is important to first look at the perpetrators who are causing such trauma unto others. This glimpse, or review briefly describes the common characteristics of perpetrators who commit sexual violence and assault. These shared characteristics can help us understand what type of psycho-social factors contribute to people becoming perpetrators of adult sexual assault. Another prevalent factor seems to be the likelihood of this population to re-offend and commit other forms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This paper will briefly outline a few of the tools used in assessing this population, also included are some research surrounding the differences in trauma inflicted from incestuous rape vs non-incestuous rape. I would like to add that research on perpetrators of adult sexual assault and females who are perpetrators of sexual abuse is limited due to the necessary use of self-reporting to gain insight on this topic. I have included a reference page at the end of this review to show the articles used to write this review.

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Finding information about perpetrators of any sort is far more difficult than finding information on the victims of these offenses. The information provided on these types of perpetrators has multiple limitations due to the obvious implications of self-reporting on such acts. In this paper, I will discuss my findings on the topic based on the articles I found which seemed most to accurately cover perpetrators of adult sexual assault.

I really did not know where to begin to address how I would tackle writing this paper. In fact, I was flooded with ideas and the amount of different information. However, I was really curious about the types of characteristics perpetrators of sexual assault and violence portrayed so naturally, this is where I began. I am also very fascinated, for lack of a better term, on female perpetrators. The main focus of this paper will be adult male perpetrators who sexually assault women. Most of the research I located was around this group of offenders because it is the most common. In reading the research there seems to be a general concept that sexual assault perpetration is the result of several different factors. These factors include the individual's family history, personality, developmental, environmental, and societal influences(Greathouse et al,2015) When looking at different literature on the subject there are several characteristics that have been narrowed down and identified to be correlated with adult sexual abuse perpetrators.

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One thing I found interesting was that childhood physical abuse is more likely to result in adult sexual assault perpetration, then childhood sexual abuse. Other childhood abuses contributing factors are childhood emotional abuse and exposure to family violence (Greathouse et al,2015). Some of the sexual characteristics associated with this population of offenders are listed as multiple sexual partners, early initiation of sex, a casual attitude towards sex (including the belief that sex outside of a relationship is acceptable) and past sexual perpetration (Greathouse et al, 2015) Some other common traits that both detected and undetected rapists share are the need to dominate women, hyper-masculinity, anger towards women in high levels, psychopathy and antisocial traits as well as lack of empathy. (Lisak & Miller, 2002) and the article “Understanding the Predatory Nature of Sexual Violence” The belief in traditional gender roles can exacerbate these traits. There are also several other contributing characteristics that seem prevalent such as; perpetrators misinterpreting cues from women as sexual invitations, and the perception that peers endorse sexual assault (Greathouse et al;.2015) There have been multiple studies to address how substances come into play with adult sexual assault perpetrators and alcohol has been found to be a heavy contributor to these behaviors. One final characteristic of this population is the tendency to commit multiple sexual assaults. Studies that use a long follow-up period show rates as high as 39% re-offend over a 20 year period, and as high as 20% over a 4 year period (lisak & Miller, 2002).

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One of the articles I reviewed for this paper researched the rates of reoffending amongst undetected rapists. They compared this information with statistics from incarcerated, convicted, perpetrators to see if they were consistent with each other. Approximately 64% and 96% of rapes go unreported to authorities. The rapes that are most likely to be reported are ones that involve physical injuries or the use of a weapon. Acquaintance rapes go unreported often and are usually brushed off as a “misunderstanding” (Lisak & Miller, 2002). To round up undetected rapists, Lisak & Miller used a random sample of college students that were selected by setting up a table on campus asking for volunteers to take a survey for a small monetary amount. They did this four separate times, for a total of four separate studies between 1991 and 1998. When recruiting these participants, they worded the survey they administered as “childhood experiences and adult functioning” so that the participants would not be alerted to the types of questions they would be asked (Lisak & Miller, 2002). They all signed informed consent forms before completing the survey. One of the assessment tools used in determining which participants would classify as perpetrators was the Abuse-Perpetration Inventory (API). This assessment tool consists of three questionnaires including Perpetration History (PH). The questionnaire covers a few different things such as; rape and sexual assault against adults, the battery of intimate partners, as well as sexual and physical abuse against children. The validity of the PH questionnaire has been verified and never uses behaviorally explicit language such as words like “rape” “assault” or “battery”. Some other common assessment tools that are used in identifying sexual assault perpetrators are the Sexual Experiences Survey, (SES)

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After assessing the combined total of 1,882 students that volunteered for this survey, only 120 met the criteria for rape or attempted rape perpetration. This sample was a mixed group racially and a mean age of 26.5. Out of this group, 63.3% admitted committing repeated rapes. Another thing that became clear in this study was that most of the offenders did not only exhibit sexual violence, but also several different forms of physical violence with 58.3% of this test sample admitting to other acts of interpersonal violence. (Lisak & Miller, 2002).

What I am finding out during this course and by researching the topic of trauma and perpetrators in general, is that there is still so much work to be done and many more studies need to be completed on the “perpetrators’ themselves. The studies and self-reporting are getting better, however, what I took from this specific article and the article “Understanding the Predatory Nature of Sexual Violence”

is that a lot of perpetrators’ sexual assault goes undetected.

Now I'd like to touch on the subject of the female perpetrator populations. There is a perceived notion that women are the weaker, meeker, and maternal population and couldn't possibly be perpetrators and especially of the sexual kind. In fact, 86% of the victims of female sexual predators aren't believed. Newer research is uncovering a larger than once thought population of women who have committed acts of sexual abuse and violence. In the article, Sexual Victimization by Women Is More Common Than Previously Known, by Lara Stemple, I was shocked to see just how prevalent female sexual predators are.

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Take a moment and picture an image of a rapist. Without a doubt, you are thinking about a man. Given our cultural history and understanding that perpetrators of sexual violence are nearly always men, this makes sense. In this article, many preconceived notions are thrown out the door, meaning women are just as likely a sexual predator as men. I did read however women are more likely to offend with an accomplice than men.

In my conclusion of the few articles I was able to read and locate on sexual predators, it is very clear to see that this subject seems to be an extremely difficult topic to research. It is also very hard to get the perpetrators of these types of illegal acts to accurately self-report. It is hard to pinpoint just what makes a person do such acts and I intend to keep researching and trying to understand.

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Articles and references used to write this review are :

A review of the literature on Sexual assault Perpetrator Characteristics and Behaviors. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation.

Sexual Victimization by Women Is More Common Than Previously Known, by Lara Stemple,

Offending patterns for serial sex offenders identified via the DNA testing of previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits Rachel Lovella,* , Misty Luminaisa , Daniel J. Flanneryb , Laura Overmanb , Duoduo Huangb ,