

Soc 3290 Deviance
Overheads Lecture 21: Sexual Assault 1

* We will discuss sexual assault in 2 classes:

* *Today* we look at:

- (1) General patterns & characteristics of sexual assault
- (2) The consequences of sexual assault

* *Next class*:

- (1) Cultural factors
- (2) Theories of sexual assault
- (3) Male victims
- (4) Child molestation

Patterns & Characteristics of Sexual Assault:

* Demographic patterns:

- (1) *Sex*: -victims overwhelmingly female
-offenders overwhelmingly male
- (2) *Age*: -victims young (youth /18-24 bracket)
-offenders slightly older than victims
(except in child molestation)
- (3) *Marital Status*:
-victims often unmarried/common-law
-offenders most often single (but a significant % are married, common-law, separated, or divorced)

(4) *Socioeconomic Status:*

- victims often low-income
- offenders: all strata: loss of job/income key

(5) *Race/Ethnicity:*

- No Canadian Stats
- U.S. Stats show both victims & offenders likely to be minorities
- Sexual assault becoming a bit less intra-racial over time

* Offence characteristics:

- sexual assault usually premeditated
- most victims don't resist
- most victims know their attackers
- most occur in private residences
- weapons rarely used
- alcohol consumption a factor
- more offences occur on weekends/at times when social interaction increases

* Planning & execution:

- when offender knows victim: use of sweet talk, romantic moves, alcohol, etc as inducements, then "not taking no for an answer"
- stranger assaults: picking an apparently vulnerable target, "testing" her in an innocuous situation, then intimidating into submission (usually verbally at first, but later physically)

* Gang sexual assault:

- most often involve lower-class adolescents / gangs

* The myth of victim-precipitation:

- Amir (1971): 19% of sexual assaults in Philadelphia were “victim precipitated” (i.e. either consent retracted, victim behaved in way that offender “interpreted” as consent, or “didn’t resist strongly”)
- blames the victim/ reflects biased, male centered view
- Kanin (1984): victim precipitation inapplicable to sexual assault, though victims may willingly engage in behaviors leading up to it
- still blames victim: victim only contributes to pre-assault intimacy/stops the moment force is used
- many men don’t recognize distinction: surveys show many men/youth view it as acceptable to press on when woman changes her mind

Consequences of sexual assault:

* The response to sexual assault varies from victim to victim:

- some show little concern
- others are deeply traumatized for a long time
- most initially experience shock, disbelief, anger, anxiety or depression, but are able to cope in time

* Severity of reaction related to degree of violence, age of victim, social class, cultural background, prior sexual experience, other recent, major life changes, & social support

* Victims of stranger assault often have serious depression & develop interpersonal problems

* Victims of acquaintance assault suffer more from self-blame/ distrust men more as earlier trust violated

- * Most victims go through 2 phases of disorganization before coping:
 - acute phase: extreme fear, shock, humiliation, embarrassment, self-blame or anxiety
 - lingering phase: variety of phobic reactions
- * Overall: victims have increased risk of divorce, low income & unemployment
- * Inward vs. outward directed feelings: active, angry, outward directed survivors cope better (as do those who resisted assault)
- * Political activism /provision of services by women's organizations has grown since the 1970's

The feeling of being assaulted again:

- * 1960's & 70's horror stories about police insensitivity to victims “like a second sexual assault” (questioning of victims is more sensitive now, but still problematic)
- * Courtroom experiences involve yet another assault: the defense traditionally dredges up victim's past sexual history
- * “Rape shield laws” to combat this are a legal football: continue to be challenged under accused's “right to a fair trial” & “relevance”

Conclusion:

- * Today we have looked at patterns & consequences of sexual assault
- * We will continue next class by looking at cultural factors, theories of sexual assault, male victims, & child molestation

