

## **Male victims of sexual violence perpetrated by women in the US: Implications for risky sexual behavior?**

### Introduction

Sexual violence researchers have extensively studied the sexual behaviors of women who have been sexually victimized in an effort to understand short and long term consequences of sexual violence. However, comparatively there are few studies that have examined the sexual behaviors of sexually victimized men. The sexual violence discourse is overwhelmingly biased towards females as victims and males as perpetrators. Relative to the volume of articles published on the topic of sexual violence, a small percentage has focused on male victims of sexual violence, especially sexual violence perpetrated by women. Given the dearth of data on male victims of forced sex by female perpetrators, the purpose of this study is to expand upon the existing research on incidence and prevalence of sexual violence among men and investigate the association between sexual violence (e.g. forced sex) and HIV risk behaviors among men using a population based survey of US adolescents and adults.

Among the few population studies assessing sexual violence that include adult men, large differences in sexual victimization incidence rates have been reported. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) in 2000, 3% of men reported being a victim of attempted or completed rape in their lifetime [1]. In a separate paper using the NVAWS, Tjaden and Thoennes (2006) estimated that 93,000 men were raped in the previous 12 months [2]. In a more recent national study using the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, both men and women were questioned about forced sex. Of the 7,421 men surveyed, 1.4% reported experiencing rape or forced sex [3]. Unfortunately, neither of the authors reporting on these two studies specified whether the assailant was male or female, which may impact victim reporting or significantly compromise the interpretation of the results [1, 3].

### Literature Review

An area of research in which sexual violence against men has proliferated is in the HIV and sexual health-related journals. Much of this literature reviews the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse, [4] assesses risk for HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM) [4, 5], or samples prison populations to investigate sexual violence within the prison system [6-9]. The majority of the HIV-related literature focuses on male sexual violence victims by male perpetrators.

Researchers argue that gender roles and ideas about masculinity influence the societal perspective of male sexual behavior and in turn skew perceptions of sexual victimization among men [10-12]. The gendering of sexual violence is observed in legal definitions of rape, certain activist movements and theoretical frameworks [12]. For example, an early definition of forcible rape stated rape is: “the carnal knowledge of a female [obtained] forcibly and against her will. Assaults or attempts to commit rape by force or threat of force are also included: however, statutory rape (without force) and other sex offences are excluded” (pp. 99-100) [13]. In January 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) updated its definition of forcible rape to be defined as “the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” [14]. The paucity of men as not only perpetrators but also as potential victims of sexual violence is evident in the literature.

Previous studies indicate that people with a history of sexual violence do continue to engage in sexual intercourse and often times with greater risk for acquiring and transmitting HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI) than people who have not been sexually victimized. Studies among female victims, have found that they report more sexual partners, use condoms inconsistently, exchange sex for drugs or money, as well as use and abuse alcohol and drugs [15, 16]. Similar findings have been reported in sexual abuse victims who are MSM [5, 17] [18]. There is a dearth of research investigating the behavioral risk factors in male victims abused by women among men. Yet studies assessing behavioral outcomes of sexually victimized men who have sex with men may provide some insight about what could be expected among the general population of men, despite the contextual difference. For example, in a study of 1001 MSM, men who reported sexual abuse were significantly more likely to report unprotected anal intercourse, exchange sex for money or drugs, inject drugs, test positive for syphilis, and report being HIV positive compared to MSM with no sexual abuse history [5]. Similar findings have been found in other studies involving sexually victimized MSM [4, 17-19].

### *Research Questions*

**Research question 1** asked: Does condom use at last sex differ between men who have experienced forced sex and those who have not? **Hypothesis:** Men who experience forced sex will have lower odds of condom use at last sex compared to men with a history of forced sex.

**Research question 2** asked: Does the number of female partners over a man's lifetime differ between men who have experienced forced sex and those who have not? **Hypothesis:** Men who experience forced sex will report a higher number of female partners compared to men with no forced sex history.

### *Data and Methods*

Participants in this study were men who responded to the National Survey for Family Growth (NSFG), Cycle 2006-10. The NSFG is a cross-sectional, multi-stage area probability sample conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NSFG collected data on reproductive health, contraception use and family planning among US men and women of reproductive ages. Males between ages 15 and 44 were included in data collection resulting in a sample size of 10,403. Eligibility criteria for the current study included men who had ever had sex and men aged 18 years or older (forced sex questions were limited to men 18 years and older). The resulting final sample size was **8,108**.

Stata 12 was used to conduct univariate analysis on all variables to describe the characteristics of the sample and determine the distribution of each variable. Weighted multivariate logistic regression and multivariate linear regression analyses were conducted to analyze the factors expected to be independently associated with a history of forced sex and self-reported HIV- risk behaviors.

### *Variables*

The **outcome variables** were condom use and number of lifetime female partners. Condom use at last vaginal sex was coded as yes (1) or no (0). Number of lifetime sexual partners is a continuous variable. The NSFG publicly available data files were top-coded at 50 or more partners, which represented 6% of respondents. The **main predictor variable** was ever forced to have sex. The question asked, "Have you ever been forced by a female to have vaginal intercourse against your will." Responses were coded as yes (1) or no (0). Age at first vaginal intercourse was also assessed. Socio-demographic characteristics were used to control for differences in the sample and included: age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and education.

**Results**

Of the total sample, 5% of men (N= 501) reported ever being forced to have sex by a woman in their lifetime. The average age men were forced was 18 years old. Interestingly, 24% of victimized men reported forced sex occurring before age 15; while 26% reported forced sex occurred between the ages of 15-17. The remaining 50% reported forced sex at age 18 or older.

There was a significant difference in age at first consensual sex and having ever experienced forced sex. Men who reported forced sex initiated sex at an earlier age than men who do not report sexual violence (Coef. -1.58,  $p < 0.001$ ). On average, age at first sex among men with a history of forced sex was 15.8 years old whereas men with no forced sex history were 17.2 years old at first sex. Further univariate analysis revealed that the average number of lifetime female sexual partners in men who report forced sex was 16, while the number of lifetime female sexual partners in men with no forced sex was 10 (Coef. 1.02,  $p < 0.01$ ).

*Condom Use and Sexual Violence*

Research question 1 assessed whether there was a difference in condom use at last sex between men with a history of forced sex and men with no such history. The association between condom use and forced sex was not statistically significant when sexual activity (e.g. age at first sex and number of partners) and control variables (e.g. age, race, marital status, education, jail time, and growing up in a single-parent household and sexual activity) were included in the analysis.

**Table 1: Condom Use by Forced Sex and Sexual Behaviors; NSFG 2006-2010**

Variables	Model 1 (N= 8045)		Model 2 (N= 8042)		Model 3 (N= 7994)	
	UOR	C.I.	AOR	C.I.	AOR	C.I.
Ever forced to have sex	1.11	(.845, 1.47)	1.05	(.777, 1.43)	1.14	(.830, 1.56)
<b>Sexual Activity:</b>						
Age at 1st vaginal sex					1.04**	(1.01, 1.06)
No. of partners-lifetime					0.99***	(.977, .994)
<b>Outcome variable: Condom use at last sex</b>						
<b>Controlled for age, race/ethnicity, marital status, education level, jail time, and 2-parent household</b>						
<i>Note.</i> Logistic regression; Weighted sample						
UOR= Unadjusted Odd Ration; AOR= Adjusted Odds Ratio						
* $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$						

*Number of Sexual Partners and Sexual Violence*

Research question 2 assessed whether there was a difference in number of partners among men who had experienced forced sex and those who had not experienced forced sex. There was a statistically significant difference in number of partners between men who reported forced sex and those who did not. Holding age, race, marital status, education, jail time, and growing up in a single-parent household, age at first sex and condom use constant, men who experienced forced sex had, on average, 2.7 more sexual partners over their lifetime compared to men who have not experienced forced sex ( $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally condom use decreased as number of partners increased, accounting for forced sex and demographic characteristics ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2: Number of Female Partners by Forced Sex and Sexual Behaviors, NSFG 2006-2010**

Variables	Model 1 (N= 8108)		Model 2 (N= 8105)		Model 3 (N= 7994)	
	U Coef.	C.I.	A Coef.	C.I.	A Coef.	C.I.
Ever forced to have sex	5.32***	(3.42, 7.23)	4.51***	(2.60, 6.42)	2.78**	(.887, 4367)
<b>Sexual Activity:</b>						
Age at 1st vaginal sex					-1.13***	(-1.26, -1.01)
Condom used last sex					-1.70***	(-2.64, -.754)

**Outcome Variable: Number of female lifetime partners**  
**Controlled for age, race/ethnicity, marital status, education level, jail time, and 2-parent household**  
*Note.* Linear regression; Weighted sample  
 U Coef= Unadjusted Coefficient; A Coef= Adjusted Coefficient  
 \* p<0.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

### Conclusion

The findings in the current study support the hypothesis that men who experienced forced sex by a woman tend to report more risky sexual behaviors than men who did not have a history of forced sex. The results of the current study determined that among this sample of men, the rate of forced sex perpetrated by women occurred in five percent of men which was higher than the three percent of men previously reported by Tjaden and Thoennes in 1996 using the NVAWS [9] and the 1.4% reported by Black et al (2011) in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey [10].

To my knowledge, there has not been a study to specifically examine HIV risk behaviors among US adult men who had experienced forced sex by women. This study has identified that men who experienced forced sex were prone to have more female partners over their lifetime and that condom use decreases with an increase in sexual partners.

The findings of this study contributed to the overall body of research by identifying a gap in the current sexual violence literature and applying a theoretically-driven strategy to assess the relationship between forced sex and HIV risk behaviors in men. While many of the previous studies have relied upon small convenience samples, generally of college-aged men, the current study employed a population based dataset to assess forced sex among adult men. A key finding in the current study was that men with less than a high school diploma had higher odds of reporting forced sex than did men with a college education ( $p < .05$ ); thereby highlighting a large segment of the US male population that is often unaccounted for in studies that primarily rely upon college convenience samples.

Second, this study highlighted an under-represented group in the overall sexual violence literature, namely men victimized by women. As previously discussed, much of the sexual violence research focuses on female victims or male victims who are MSM. This study illustrates that a relatively large portion of the US population of men have been sexually victimized and calls for additional research.

Finally and most importantly, this study illustrates an overall bias in the sexual violence literature that overwhelming focuses research attention on men as perpetrators of sexual violence and women as victims of sexual violence. While women and girls report sexual violence at a much higher rate than men, this does not negate the responsibility of equally assessing men and women, regardless of their sexual orientation. The findings from this study are a call to action; for the research community to re-evaluate survey designs and ensure equal opportunities for

respondents, regardless of gender, to report experiences of sexual violence, both as a victim and an aggressor.

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