

A comparison of perpetrators of sexual violence who target romantic partners versus those who target non-romantic partners

Michele Ybarra MPH PhD¹, Kimberly Mitchell PhD², and Kimberly Goodman PhD³

¹Center for Innovative Public Health Research, ²University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center, ³Washington DC



INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence can be perpetrated against people known well, including dating partners, and people not known well. Little is known about the characteristics of people who perpetrate sexual violence against their romantic partners versus those who perpetrate against other types of victims.

METHODS

As part of a longitudinal study of children and adolescents called “Growing up with Media”, 779 youth 17-25 years of age were surveyed online from across the U.S. in 2016. Half (53%) of respondents were female. Extensive questions about sexual violence perpetration were queried.

RESULTS

Eight percent of all youth reported perpetrating sexual assault, 3% coercive sex, and <1%, forced sex (rape). Among perpetrators, 24% of those who reported assault, 63% of those who reported rape and 70% of those who reported coercive sex said at least one of their victims was a current or former romantic partner (RP).

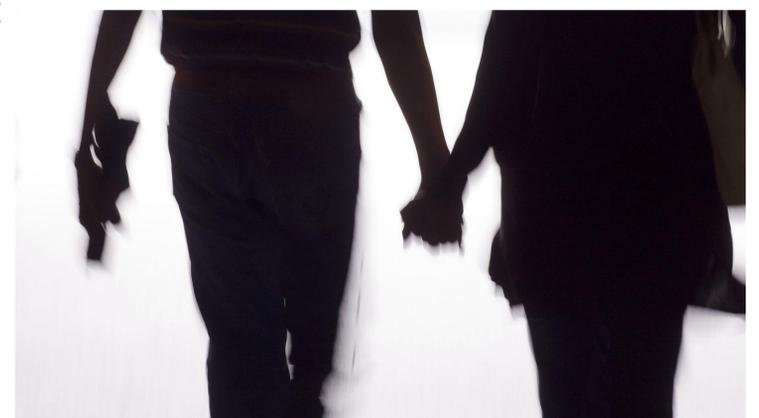
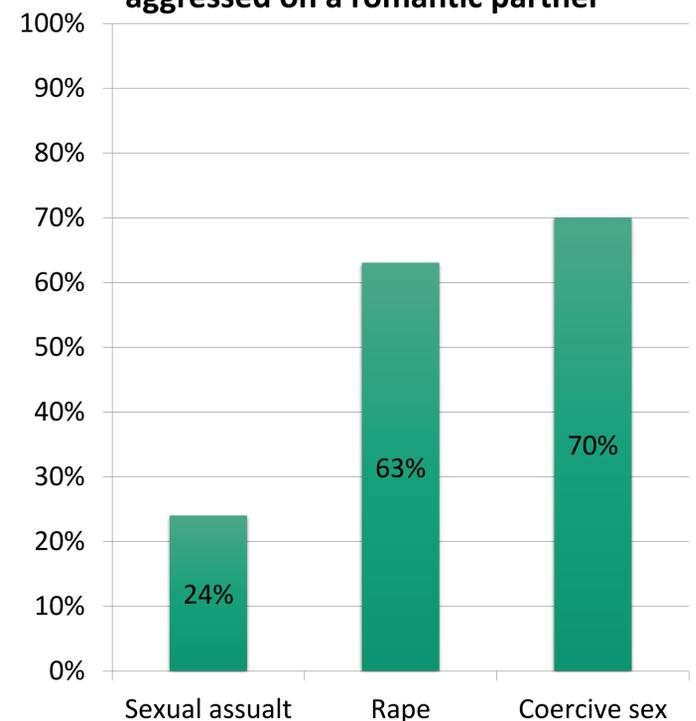
Tactics differed by victim type: Those who perpetrated against RPs did so by making the other person feel guilty (56%) and getting angry (37%). Although perpetrators of non-romantic partner victims used guilt (75%), none used anger. Instead, they sometimes used alcohol as a facilitator (16%).

Reported reasons for the aggression also varied: The most common reasons for perpetrators of RPs was feeling horny (79%), bad about oneself (33%) and/or angry (15%). On the other hand, 90% of perpetrators of non-RPs said they aggressed because they were “horny” and 21% because they were feeling good; 72% said it was because they were drunk or high.

Blame attribution also differentiated perpetrators: Youth who aggressed against RPs were more likely (20%) than those who aggressed against non-RPs (3%) to say that the other person was completely responsible. Feeling guilty was the most common reaction after the event for both types of perpetrators (RPs: 57%, non-RPs: 67%).

Imagine from: <https://mic.com/articles/128257/here-s-what-it-s-really-like-to-date-after-surviving-a-sexual-assault#.9eKUKZX00>

Percent of SV perpetrators who aggressed on a romantic partner



CONCLUSION

Important differences about the sexual violence event are noted for those who perpetrate against their RPs versus those who perpetrate against non-RPs. Future research should focus on identifying characteristics of those who are more likely to aggress upon RPs versus non-RPs to further facilitate prevention targeting.

FUNDING

The study described herein was reviewed and approved by the Chesapeake IRB. Research reported in this publication was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute Of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number R01HD083072. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.