

How Men's Sexual Assault Victimization Experiences Differ Based on Their Sexual History

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Abstract

This study examined the differences in men's sexual assault victimization experiences based on their history of only having sex with women (MSW) or having sex with women and men (MSW/M). Based on the previous research, we expected that MSW/M would be more likely to report a sexual assault history, experience a significantly greater number of sexual assault acts, experience more severe levels of unwanted sexual activity and tactics (i.e., physically forced attempted or completed rape), and report both male and female perpetrators, compared with MSW. Community, nonproblem drinking men, ages 21 to 30 ($N = 311$), reported on their sexual assault victimization experiences since age 14 using a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey. Six items were used to assess participants' number of unwanted sexual experiences (i.e., unwanted sexual contact, attempted and completed rape) that included the use of intoxication, physical force, both, or neither. For each item, participants indicated if the perpetrator(s) was/were male, female, or both male and female. Two fifths of men reported experiencing sexual assault, the majority of which involved attempted or completed rape. Replicating and extending previous research, MSW/M were significantly more likely to be victims (65% vs. 39%), experienced a significantly greater number of sexual assault acts since age 14, were more likely to have experienced attempted or completed rape through the use of

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physical force, and were more likely to report male only or both male and female perpetrators across their victimization experiences, as compared with MSW. Results indicate a clear need for additional research on the unique victimization experiences of MSW/M. Additionally, sexual assault prevention programming needs to provide men with the skills to identify and negotiate unwanted sexual advances made by men and women and to promote healthy sexual relationship behaviors.

Keywords

sexual assault, GLBT, male victims, female offenders, adult victims

Men experience sexual assault, perpetrated by both men and women, at rates which cannot be ignored. While research has used independent samples to examine MSW's (men who have sex with women) victimization by women and MSM's (men who have sex with men) victimization by men, it is rare to examine victimization rates across groups in the same sample, thus making it difficult to make direct comparisons between their experiences (see Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011 for review). In addition, MSW's victimization by men and MSW/M's (men who have sex with women and men) victimization, in general, are often overlooked (see Peterson et al., 2011; Rothman, Exner, & Baughman, 2011; Weiss, 2010, for reviews). Krahé and Berger (2013) examined MSW's and MSW/M's victimization experiences using a college sample from Germany. They found 17.1% of MSW were victims of sexual assault perpetrated by women, whereas 37% of MSW/Ms were victims of sexual assault, with 25.6% perpetrated by men and 9.8% perpetrated by women. Balsam, Rothblum, and Beauchaine (2005) found MSW/M were significantly more likely to be victims compared with MSW and reported more severe victimization experiences (MSW/M: 44.7% coerced nonintercourse to 13.2% completed rape, vs. MSW: 12.6% to 1.6%, respectively). MSW/M were most likely to report a male perpetrator (73.3%-100% depending on tactic), whereas MSW were most likely to report a female perpetrator (75.0%-100%). The current study seeks to replicate and extend this limited research by examining MSW's and MSW/M's victimization in a high risk community sample of men.

The current study includes secondary analysis of survey data from a large study examining the role of acute intoxication in men's decisions to engage in condom use resistance behavior; thus, men in the sample were required to be moderate, nonproblem drinkers and to have had unprotected sex in the past month. Alcohol use and risky sexual behavior are well-established risk

factors for victimization; thus, it is likely that men in the current sample will report higher rates of victimization than have been observed in the previous research. MSW/Ms are likely at greater risk for victimization because of their increased contact with male sexual partners and their sexual minority status. Compared with women, men are more likely to perpetrate more severe sexual assaults (Brousseau, Hébert, & Bergeron, 2012; Krahé & Berger, 2013; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, & Anderson, 2003), as well as perpetrate violent hate crimes against sexual minorities (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). Therefore, consistent with previous research, we hypothesized that a greater proportion of MSW/M would report victimization experiences compared with MSW, and report a greater number of sexual assault acts, particularly severe sexual assault acts (i.e., physical force). In addition, their most severe sexual assault is expected to be more severe than those experienced by MSWs. We also hypothesized that MSW victims would be more likely to report that their assaults were perpetrated by women, whereas MSW/M would be more likely to report that their assaults were perpetrated by men, or both men and women.

Method

Participants

Participants included 313 men, ages 21 to 30 years old. These data come from a larger study on men's condom use resistance (see Wegner et al., in press for details on the larger study design). Eligible participants included men who were nonproblem drinkers, reported at least one instance of unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a woman in the past year, and were not in a long-term monogamous relationship. After completing the background surveys, participants completed alcohol administration procedures for the larger study; thus, participants were excluded if they had any current alcohol use contraindications.

Participants were on average 25 years old ($M = 24.65$, $SD = 2.69$). The majority of participants were MSW (82.7%, $n = 259$). In all, 66% of participants self-identified as White/Caucasian, 9.6% as Black/African American, 11.6% as multiracial, 5.0% as Asian/South Asian, 1.0% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1.0% as Native American/Alaskan Native, and 14% indicated Other or did not reply. Across all participants, 10.4% also identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Procedure

Men were recruited from an urban community using online and print ads. Interested individuals completed eligibility screening procedures. Eligible

participants completed informed consent and then survey measures in a private room by entering their responses into a computer (Datstat Illume, version 4.7). Current analyses focus on background survey data collected prior to alcohol administration procedures, which are described elsewhere (see Wegner et al., in press). The university's institutional review board approved all procedures and measures. The questionnaire took 1 hr to complete. After completing the dependent measures, participants were debriefed, and paid US\$15 per hour.

Sexual experience. Participants indicated which statement best defined their sexual experience, with response options ranging from 1 = *entirely heterosexual* to 7 = *entirely homosexual*. Participants who indicated their experience had been entirely heterosexual were coded as a 0 = MSW and all other participants were coded as 1 = MSW/M. MSWs did not report any incidents of engaging in sexual activity with men. MSWs and MSW/Ms did not significantly differ in their number of female sexual partners, $t(1, 308) = .69, p = .49$.

Men's Sexual Assault Victimization Survey. A modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (Abbey, Parkhill & Koss, 2005; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987) was used to assess men's sexual assault victimization experiences. Participants were presented with six items that asked them to indicate the number of times, 0 = *none* to 5 = *5 or more times*, they had experienced three different levels of unwanted sexual activity since the age of 14. Participants indicated how many times someone had (a) fondled, kissed, or sexually touched them when they indicated that they did not want to; (b) attempted to make them have sexual intercourse when they did not want to, but for some reason intercourse did not happen; or (c) made them have oral, anal, or vaginal sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Participants completed these three items twice: the first time to assess incidents that did not involve intoxication tactics and the second time to assess incidents involving intoxication tactics (i.e., when they were passed out or too intoxicated to give consent or stop what was happening). For all six items, participants completed follow-up questions which asked them to indicate (a) how many of these incidents involved force or threats of force, 0 = *none* to 5 = *5 or more times*, and (b) the gender of the person who did this, 0 = *male only*, 1 = *female only*, 2 = *both male and female*, and 3 = *don't know/don't remember*. Two participants were removed from the dataset because they were missing responses on the Men's Sexual Assault Victimization Survey.

Tactics experienced. Using whether the item mentioned intoxication as a tactic or not and whether participants indicated in the follow-up item that

the events involved the use of threat or physical force, eight different combinations of tactics and levels of unwanted sexual activity were measured: (a) neither intoxicated nor forced unwanted sexual contact, (b) intoxicated unwanted sexual contact, (c) physically forced unwanted sexual contact, (d) intoxicated and physically forced unwanted sexual contact, (e) neither intoxicated nor forced attempted or completed rape, (f) intoxicated attempted or completed rape, (g) physically forced attempted or completed rape, (h) intoxicated and physically forced attempted or completed rape.

Most severe act experienced. Using the above scale (Tactics Experienced), we identified the most severe act reported across all acts experienced (Koss et al., 1987), ranging from 1 to 8.

Total number of sexual assault acts. This variable was computed by summing the number of sexually assaultive acts reported across all eight combinations of tactics and levels of unwanted sexual activity. Possible range was 0 to 40.

Gender of the perpetrator. Using gender of perpetrator assessed at the item level, we created an individual-level summary variable that allowed us to characterize individuals' overall experiences as 0 = *male only*, 1 = *female only*, and 2 = *both male and female*. For example, if across all sexual assault acts reported, a participant reported male only perpetrators for unwanted sexual contact through intoxication and female only perpetrators for unwanted sexual contact through physical force, this participant was labeled as 2 = *both female and male perpetrators*.

Results

Victim Status

Two fifths of participants (43.4%, $n = 135$) reported having experienced a sexual assault act since the age of 14. The majority of victims (80.7%, $n = 109$) reported experiencing more than one sexual assault act, with the average number of acts experienced = 5.69 ($SD = 5.32$), range = 1 to 29. Using nonmutually exclusive categories, 45.2% ($n = 61$) of victims reported experiencing at least one sexual assault act involving intoxication tactics, 12.6% ($n = 17$) involving physical force tactics, and 4.4% ($n = 6$) involving both intoxication and physical force. The majority of victims reported experiencing at least one act involving tactics other than intoxication or physical force (81.5%, $n = 110$).

Sexual History and Sexual Assault Severity

A significantly greater proportion of MSW/M were victims compared with MSW, 64.8% ($n = 35$ of 54) versus 38.9% ($n = 100$ of 257), $\chi^2 = 12.19, p < .00$. As can be seen in Table 1, chi-square analyses indicated that MSW/M were more likely to experience attempted or completed rape through physical force, compared with MSW, $\chi^2 = 14.39, p < .05$, as well as when considering the most severe sexual assault act experienced, $\chi^2 = 9.50, p < .01$. For all other tactics, MSW and MSW/M did not significantly differ in their likelihood of having experienced each tactic. Almost 9 in 10 MSW/M victims (88.6%, $n = 31$) reported their most severe sexual assault act experience included attempted or completed rape compared with 7 in 10 MSW victims (69%, $n = 69$), $\chi^2 = 5.17, p < .05$.

Sexual History and Total Number of Sexual Assault Acts

Generalized linear modeling with a negative binomial distribution was used to account for the positive skew and high levels of variance in this count variable. There was a significant main effect of sexual history, Wald $\chi^2(1, 309) = 38.94, p < .001$. Estimated marginal means indicated MSW/M experienced a significantly greater number of sexual assault acts ($M = 5.32, SE = .79$) compared with MSW ($M = 1.87, SE = .14$).

Gender of Perpetrator

Chi-square analysis indicated that a significantly higher proportion of MSW victims reported women only perpetrators, as compared with MSW/M (86.6%, $n = 84$ vs. 44.1%, $n = 15$), and a greater proportion of MSW/M victims reported both men and women (38.2%, $n = 13$ vs. 11.3%, $n = 11$) or men only perpetrators (17.6%, $n = 6$ vs. 2.1%, $n = 2$), $\chi^2 = 25.97, p < .001$.

Discussion

Rates of victimization were much higher in the current high risk sample (moderate drinking, past year history of unprotected sex) than rates observed in previous samples (MSW/M = 64.8% vs. 37%, MSW = 38.9% vs. 17.1%; Krahé & Berger, 2013). The severity of the incidents reported were also very high, with the majority of victims reporting attempted or completed rape as their most severe experience for MSW and MSW/M. Findings highlight the importance of examining these experiences in elevated behavioral risk samples and underscore that alcohol and risky sex are key risk factors for men's victimization experiences.

Table 1. Chi-Square Analyses Examining the Proportion of MSW and MSW/M Who Experienced Each Sexual Assault Act and the Most Severe Sexual Assault Act.

Level of Sexual Activity— Tactic Used	Most Severe Act Experienced			Ever Experienced			χ^2	p
	Total (n = 135)	MSW (n = 100)	MSW/M (n = 35)	Total (n = 135)	MSW (n = 100)	MSW/M (n = 35)		
USC—Other	19.3% (26)	23.0% (23)	8.6% (3)	68.9% (93)	68.0% (68)	71.4% (25)	0.14	.71
USC—Intoxication	6.7% (9)	8.0% (8)	2.9% (1)	37.8% (51)	37.0% (37)	40.0% (14)	0.10	.75
USC—Force	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.4% (10)	6.0% (6)	11.4% (4)	1.11	.29
USC—Intoxication and force	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	NA	NA
Rape—Other	31.1% (42)	31.0% (31)	31.4% (11)	51.9% (70)	50.0% (50)	57.1% (20)	0.53	.47
Rape—Intoxication	29.6% (40)	30.0% (30)	28.6% (10)	33.3% (45)	33.0% (33)	34.3% (12)	0.02	.89
Rape—Force	8.9% (12)	4.0% (4)	22.9% (8) ^a	9.6% (13)	5.0% (5)	22.9% (8)	9.50	<.01
Rape—Intoxication and force	4.4% (6)	4.0% (4)	5.7% (2)	4.4% (6)	4.0% (4)	5.7% (2)	0.18	.67

Note. "Rape" includes attempted and completed rape. The most severe act men experienced significantly differed based on victim's sexual history, $\chi^2(10, 135) = 14.39, p < .05$. MSW = men who have sex with women only; MSW/M = men who have sex with women and men; USC = unwanted sexual contact.

^aBonferroni-corrected z score significant differences across victim's sexual history.

Consistent with previous research, MSW/M are at heightened risk for sexual assault victimization and experience more severe sexual assault acts, compared with MSW. This difference is observed even when participants are selected based on comparable drinking and sexual risk profiles. The current study did not assess the number of incidents which qualify as “hate crimes”; it is possible such experiences could account for the heightened risk for MSW/M. Similar to Balsam et al.’s findings, MSW were most likely to report their perpetrator was a woman; however, contrary to their findings, MSW/M were also most likely to report their perpetrator was a woman. Large national surveys report men (in general) are more likely to be raped by men, but are more likely to be forced to penetrate a woman perpetrator, and are more likely to experience sexual coercion and unwanted sexual contact from women (Black et al., 2011). It is possible that eligibility criteria requiring participants to have had unprotected sex with a woman in the past year increased the likelihood that MSW/M in our sample had greater sexual contact with women, thereby increasing their risk for victimization by women. Given our results, sexual assault risk reduction programming should include training for men on how to detect and protect oneself from unwanted sexual experiences, from both men and women. Sexual assault prevention programming needs to emphasize to women, as well as men, the importance of obtaining consent. As well, support programs for sexual assault survivors need to be informed of MSW/M’s heightened risk and trained in how to provide culturally sensitive and individual-specific support. Future research should assess perpetrator gender at each level of unwanted sexual activity and for each different type of tactic. Additional research is also needed specifically delineating the victimization experiences of women who have sex with women and men.

Authors’ Note

The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

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