



Risk Factors For Male-Perpetrated Sexual Violence At Higher Education Institutions

New research by **Bridget Steele and colleagues** identifies the two most salient risk factors for sexual violence perpetration at Higher Education Institutes (HEIs): 1. perpetration of sexual violence prior to entering an HEI and 2. support for sexual violence among perpetrators' peers.

CONTEXT

Sexual violence at HEIs is a prevalent and complex societal and public health issue. This study is the first systematic review to meta-analyze all longitudinal evidence for risk factors of male-perpetrated sexual violence in this setting. For those designing interventions to reduce sexual violence at HEIs, this research provides insight into which risk factors to target.

OVERVIEW

This research finds that sexual violence perpetration prior to entering HEIs is the strongest predictor of sexual violence perpetration at HEIs, complicating the notion that HEI environments themselves foster a culture of sexual violence. Further, risk factors that involve peer support for sexual violence predict perpetration while individual rape-supporting beliefs do not.

KEY FINDINGS

- Perpetration of sexual violence prior to entering an HEI is the strongest predictor of sexual violence perpetration at HEIs. This finding contributes to the existing literature, which often focuses on the role HEI environments play in creating a culture where sexual violence can and does occur.
- The meta-analysis found that, surprisingly, rape myth acceptance and hostile attitudes toward women did not predict sexual violence perpetration, despite substantial prior claims highlighting the importance of such beliefs.
- Fraternity membership and peer approval of sexual violence were found to predict sexual violence perpetration, indicating the importance of peer groups in influencing behavior among HEI students.
- Individual HEI students (independent of their personal beliefs) could have a higher risk of perpetrating sexual violence if their peer groups (for example, fraternities) condone this behaviour and a lower risk of perpetrating sexual violence if their peer groups do not accept this behaviour.
- The majority of research on sexual violence at HEIs is conducted at institutions in the United States (US) and only measures violence among heterosexual relationships.

QUESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

These findings draw attention to the importance of addressing the issue of sexual violence among adolescents before they enter HEIs. They also provide empirical support for the important role bystander and peer-norm interventions can play in addressing sexual violence in the HEI setting. More research is needed on violence in non-heterosexual relationships, and in contexts outside of the US.

AUTHOR

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

The author and CCLISAR welcome enquiries about this research.

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ABOUT CCLISAR

The Canadian Centre for Legal Innovation in Sexual Assault Response (CCLISAR) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization working to realize law's potential to respond to sexualized violence. www.cclisar.ca