Prevention of sexual violence

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What does sexual violence encompass?
(NB men & women perpetrate)

Other sexual assault

Sexual abuse of children

Rape (incl. sexual IPV) of adults
Risk factors for sexual violence victimisation:

• Young age
• Poverty
• Physical disability
• Dysfunctional homes
• Mental vulnerability: learning difficulties, depression, PTSD etc
• Prior victimisation
• Substance abuse

• These are *ALL* vulnerability factors – they do not *CAUSE* sexual violence
Understanding rape perpetration

• This is critical and chiefly requires research with men
• Focus of this presentation is on published literature on factors associated with rape perpetration
• Recognise that there are datasets that are still to be analysed and published from, and work in progress, that are not included
Existing literature: extremely limited, as exemplified by Whitaker review (2008)

- Systematic review of perpetration of child sexual abuse
- Conclusion that theoretical papers greatly outstrip empirical evidence
- 89 published studies between 1990 and April 2003
- None were longitudinal, none came from non-Western countries
- 85 ‘case-control’ studies, 4 cross-sectional
- Size of sample of child sex offenders in studies, median = 34
Published literature on factors associated with perpetration is very severely limited

- Exclusively Western (exceptions South Africa x 1, Botswana/Swaziland x 1)
- Many are very small studies
- Samples are college men and ‘offenders’, very few community-based studies
  - Exceptions:
    - South African RCT participants (n=1370);
    - Botswana/Swaziland (n=1011) & South Africa (unpublished, n=1735) general population;
    - Minnesota school students (n=71,594);
    - 4 community studies from North America (n=163, 65, 195, 168)
Other limitations

• Definition:
  – Sexual Experiences Survey commonly used in the North American literature, there is a ‘rape’ measure in it but most analyses measure ‘sexual coercion’ which is a basket of coercive acts
  – Few studies are looking at ‘forced sex’ or and equivalent measure of rape

• We do not know if ‘rape’ and ‘sexual assault/coercion’ differ in causal factors and prevention priorities

• Literature does not enable examination of factors associated with rape perpetration in countries e.g. India where the majority of rape is of wives
Problems using current research to understand causation

- Temporal sequence - almost all research is cross-sectional
- Separating associated/contextual and causal factors
- Research on offender samples is particularly complex as ‘risk of being caught’ is a consideration
- Often unclear whether offenders in for non-sexual crimes are ‘non offenders’
- Lists of risk factors do not give much information on how they combine or interact to lead to perpetration, nor pathways to this
Limitations of the theoretical frame

– Focus on individual and personality factors, including childhood experiences and IPV exposure
– Theoretical frame is limited, many factors operating at different levels of the ecological model are rarely included
– Gender inequality is rarely the frame for the research
– It falls well short of enabling a broader sociological analysis of rape at present
Minnesota schools survey, Grade 9 and 12s (4.8% had “forced someone into a sexual act”, n=71 594)

- Factors associated with perpetration:
  - Sexual abuse: by family or non-family
  - Witnessing IPV in home
  - Illegal drugs, steroids, alcohol abuse
  - Gang membership, ‘hanging out’ for 41+ hours per week
  - Psychological distress, suicidality
  - Less community connectedness
Returning to Whitaker (2008) and the meta-analysis of CSA perpetration

- **Family risk factors:** physical &/or sexual abuse, poor family functioning & attachment,

- **Externalising behaviours:** aggression; delinquency; substance abuse (including alcohol); various personality disorders;

- **Internalising behaviours:** anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, external locus of control,

- **Social deficits:** social skills deficit, loneliness, difficulty with intimacy relationships,

- **Sexual problems:** any deviant sexual interest

- **Cognitions:** tolerant of adult/child sex, minimising perpetrator culpability
CHILDHOOD FACTORS

PARENTAL AND HOME ENVIRONMENT (may include):

MATERNAL:
- IPV VICTIMISATION
- YOUNG AGE
- POVERTY
- MATERNAL ABSENCE
- MENTAL HEALTH INCL. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

PATERNAL:
- IPV PERPETRATION
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- PATERNAL ABSENCE

INSECURE ATTACHMENT

CONDUCT DISORDER IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE: (with associated)

- LOW EMPATHY/GUILT
- AGGRESSION
- LOW SELF-REGULATION
- LOW SELF-ESTEEM

PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE / NEGLECT

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

SUBSTANCE ABUSE
IMPACT ON MASCULINITY

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS:
LOW SELF-ESTEEM
INSECURE

BEHAVIOURALLY AGGRESSIVE

CONFIGURATION OF IDEAS AND PRACTICES THAT:

- VALOURISE TOUGHNESS/STRENGTH
- EMPHASISED PERFORMANCE OF HETEROSEXUALITY
- DOMINANCE AND CONTROL OVER WOMEN—INCLUDING DOMINANT IDEA OF MALE SEXUAL ENTITLEMENT AND USE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
Conclusions

• Research on perpetration is in its early days, there is an urgent need to study rape in well-designed studies with men in community settings
• Multiple influences on rape perpetration so need complex intervention strategies
• Directions for rape prevention interventions can be taken from existing knowledge:
  – Preventing childhood trauma and strengthening family environments, including support for GBV prevention & positive parenting
  – Building gender inequity – work with men/boys and women/girls; changing social norms on gender;
  – Activities for teenage boys
  – Substance abuse
  – Addressing poverty & social inequality and broader structural issues
Criminal justice & victim responses
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