**Soc 3290 Deviance**

**Overheads Lecture 21: Sexual Assault 1**

\* *Today* we look at:

(1) General patterns & characteristics of sexual assault

(2) The consequences of sexual assault

\* *Next class*:

(1) Cultural factors

(2) Theories of sexual assault

(3) Male victims

(4) Child molestation

**Patterns & Characteristics of Sexual Assault:**

\* Demographic patterns:

(1) *Sex*: -victims overwhelmingly female

-offenders overwhelmingly male

(2) *Age*: -victims young (youth /18-24 bracket)

-offenders slightly older than victims

(except in child molestation)

(3) *Marital Status*:

-victims often unmarried/common-law

-offenders most often single (but a

significant % are married, common-

law, separated, or divorced)

(4) *Socioeconomic Status:*

- victims often low-income

- offenders: all strata: loss of job/income key

(5) *Race/Ethnicity*:

- no Canadian Stats

- U.S. Stats show both victims &

offenders likely to be minorities

- sexual assault becoming a bit less

intra-racial over time

\* Offence characteristics:

- sexual assault usually premeditated

- most victims don’t resist

- most victims know their attackers

- most occur in private residences

- weapons rarely used

- alcohol consumption a factor

- more offences occur on weekends/at

times when social interaction increases

\* Planning & execution:

- when offender knows victim: use of sweet talk, romantic moves,

alcohol, etc as inducements, then “not taking no for an answer”

- stranger assaults: picking an apparently vulnerable target,

“testing” her in an innocuous situation, then intimidating into

submission (usually verbally at first, but later physically)

\* Gang sexual assault:

- most often involve lower-class adolescents / gangs

- also occur on college campuses / providing intoxicants first

- explanations: psychiatrists: “latent homosexuality” ???

sociologists: social pressure/proving masculinity

\* Acquaintance sexual assault:

- more likely to use verbal/psychological coercion than strangers

- less likely to use weapons

- more likely to premeditate sex, not necessarily assault

- acquaintance sexual assault common

- an extension of, not a departure from, conventional male sexual

behavior

- many offenders & victims wouldn’t consider what happened

to be sexual assault

\* Campus sexual assault:

- sexual assault particularly prevalent on campuses (despite

often differing definitions of parties)

- reflects culturally valued male behavior

- Sanday: “sexual assault free” vs. “sexual assault prone”

campuses distinguished by seriousness of punishment, degree of

heavy drinking, viewing women as sex objects vs. equals, &

level of homophobia, etc.

- Martin & Hummer: student group solidarity, norms of

masculinity, drinking & group pressure lead to campus sexual

assault

- Schwartz & Nogrady: fraternities not worse than other college

men, but athletes more assault prone

- More research needed

\* The myth of victim-precipitation:

- Amir: 19% of sexual assaults in Philadelphia were “victim

precipitated” (i.e. either consent retracted, victim behaved in way

that offender “interpreted” as consent, or “didn’t resist strongly”)

- blames the victim/ reflects biased, male centered view

- Kanin: victim precipitation inapplicable to sexual assault,

though victims may willingly engage in behaviors leading up to it

- still blames victim: victim only contributes to pre-assault

intimacy/stops the moment force is used

- many men don’t recognize distinction: surveys show many

men/youth view it as acceptable to press on when woman

changes her mind

**Consequences of sexual assault**:

\* The response to sexual assault varies from victim to victim:

- some show little concern

- others are deeply traumatized for a long time

- most initially experience shock, disbelief, anger, anxiety or

depression, but are able to cope in time

\* Severity of reaction related to degree of violence, age of victim, social class, cultural background, prior sexual experience, other recent, major life changes, & social support

\* Victims of stranger assault often have serious depression & develop interpersonal problems

\* Victims of acquaintance assault suffer more from self-blame/ distrust men more as earlier trust violated

\* Most victims go through 2 phases of disorganization before coping:

- acute phase: extreme fear, shock, humiliation, embarrassment,

self-blame or anxiety

- lingering phase: variety of phobic reactions

\* Overall: victims have increased risk of divorce, low income & unemployment

\* Inward vs. outward directed feelings: active, angry, outward directed survivors cope better (as do those who resisted assault)

\* Political activism /provision of services by women’s organizations has grown since the 1970's

**The feeling of being assaulted again:**

\* 1960's & 70's horror stories about police insensitivity to victims “like a second sexual assault” (questioning of victims is more sensitive now, but still problematic)

\* Courtroom experiences involve yet another assault: the defense traditionally dredges up victims’ past sexual history

\* “Rape shield laws” to combat this are a legal football: continue to be challenged under accused’s “right to a fair trial” & “relevance”

**Conclusion:**

\* Today we have looked at patterns & consequences of sexual assault

\* We will continue next class by looking at cultural factors, theories of sexual assault, male victims, & child molestation