



Research paper

Male victims of sexual assault; 10 years' experience from a Danish Assault Center

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide descriptive data regarding male victims of sexual assault seen at the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault in Copenhagen, Denmark. All 55 male victims attending the center in the time period of March 2001 until December 2010 underwent a standardized data collection. Data included information on the victim and the sexual assault. Male victims accounted for less than 2% of the total number of visits to the center in this time period. Fifty three percent were between 15 and 24 years. In all cases the perpetrator was male, and 25% were assaulted by more than one perpetrator. Of the 62% of male victims who gave information on sexual orientation, 36% reported themselves as heterosexuals. A total of 45.5% had an alcohol intake of more than 5 units in the hours before the assault. Forty two percent reported the assault to the police. The male victims differed from female victims in several ways; they were more often assaulted by a stranger; more likely to be assaulted by more than one perpetrator; more likely being victim of drug rape; less likely to have experienced previous sexual abuse and less willing to report their assault to the police. Being victim of a sexual assault by another man is considered a taboo subject and it is likely that the dark figure of men exposed to sexual assault is much higher than it is for women. Strengthening our knowledge regarding male victims of sexual assault is necessary to improve both primary and secondary preventive measures in order to make male victims feel safe in coming forward. Male victims should have equal access to both medical and psychological help as female victims.

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1. Introduction

Most often literature regarding sexual assault considers men only as perpetrators and women as victims. The research regarding male victims has often been restricted to all-male environments. Within these, several groups of males at higher risk of sexual assault has been identified; gay and bisexual men, men in prisons and men in armed conflicts.^{1–4} Some studies from sexual assault centers present data from both male and female victims together making deduction for only one gender difficult.

Many have suggested that the real numbers of sexual assaults are much greater than the official numbers reported. Because sexual assault cases are associated with prejudice and taboo it is likely that many are underreported. Perhaps this is even truer for cases regarding male victims of sexual assault and even more in the

cases where men are sexually assaulted by a female perpetrator. Previous studies have been conflicting as to the degree of police-involvement in sexual assault cases with male victims. Male victims have been shown to have both identical, and far less, numbers of police reporting compared to female victims.^{5–8}

Similarities and differences between female and male victims of sexual assault have previously been highlighted.^{5,9,10} Findings from these studies show that underreporting are more pronounced for male victims compared to female victims, often resulting in a lack of aftercare at sexual assault centers for male victims. The male victims that did receive aftercare hesitated longer than the female victims before seeking help. In regards to physical injury the male victims were found to have far less non-genital injuries than the female victims.

Our aim was to provide descriptive data regarding the main characteristics of the male victims seen at the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault (CVSA) in Copenhagen and the circumstances in which the assault occurred. Information regarding the female victims seen at CVSA has been published elsewhere and the

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characteristics of the male victims will be compared to female victims when possible.¹¹

1.1. Setting

In 1999 the Danish Ministry of justice together with the Ministry of health agreed on a national model for an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to victims of sexual assault to improve the medical, legal and psychological assistance to victims of sexual assault. This led to the opening of eight Centers for victims of sexual assault across Denmark and in 2000 the center in Copenhagen opened. The center in Copenhagen is the largest in the country with approximately 300 new visits each year. The center serves the eastern part of Denmark with a background population of approximately three million people. The center is situated in the gynecological department and serves both male and female victims from 12 years of age, providing a free 24-h service independent of police reporting. The staff consists of gynecologists, specialized nurses, trained psychologists, and social workers. The center offers physical examination, medical treatment, social counseling, and psychotherapy.

1.2. Procedure

From March 2001 until December 2010 all men and women seen at CVSA underwent a standardized data collection. This included variables describing the victim and the sexual assault. All victims were seen within 72 h from the time of the assault. Data was registered by the doctors and/or nurses performing the examinations and stored in a database held at CVSA. All analyses presented in this manuscript were retrieved from this database. Data were analyzed by SPSS version 19.

We generated descriptive categories for the different variables as described below.

The perpetrator was defined as being known to the victim if he was a partner or former partner, relative, friend or schoolmate. When the male victims reported brief contact with the perpetrator in the hours before the assault, he was categorized as known <24 h. If the victim had never seen the perpetrator before, he was categorized as unknown.

Men reporting being unemployed or receiving any type of government support, were categorized as receiving welfare.

Previous sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse was categorized as either yes or no. If the male victims attended the center for more than one assault in the 10-year period, each assault was recorded independently.

Police involvement was categorized as yes when the victim reported to the police regardless of when the complaint was filled. If the complaint was not accepted by choice of the police, it was labeled as rejected.

When the place of assault was either the victim or the perpetrators home it was labeled as 'home'. The category 'outside' included streets or parks.

The alcohol intake by the victim was categorized into either five or more or less than five alcoholic units the day of the assault.

From 2004 to 2010 male victims were all asked whether they suspected being drugged in relation to the assault, and this category was based solely on the information given by the victims themselves.

If they presented with any physical signs of violence associated with the assault this was recorded as "yes" to physical injury.

Sexual orientation was not part of the standardized data collection and information regarding this was retrieved from manually going thru the patient records.

1.3. Ethics

As this study used anonymized data from the CVSA database no further ethical approval was necessary. Approval from the Danish Data Protection Agency was granted on 1 May 2010.

2. Results

General characteristics of the male victims are shown in [Table 1](#) and described below. [Table 2](#) illustrates differences between male and female victims.

2.1. Victim characteristics

From 2000 to 2010 a total of 55 male victims were seen at CVSA, one of the victims were seen more than once in this time period. The center had 2912 visits in this time period and the male victims therefore constituted 1.9% in this period. The age span varied from 12 to 58 years, the majority (53%) was between 15 and 24 years, and only two men were younger than 15 years. Thirty-three were of Danish nationality (67%) the number of men from developing countries, seen at the center, were slightly higher than the total number in the Danish society according to Statistic Denmark. Twenty-one were employed (40%) and 20 were students (39%) at the time of the assault and eight of the men were on welfare, similar to the general population according to Statistics Denmark (15%). Information regarding sexual orientation was present for 34 men (62%), of these, 23 reported themselves as heterosexuals (68%).

Table 1

General characteristics for male victims seen at CVSA from 2000 to 2010 (N = 55).

Category	n	%
Victims nationality		
• Danish	37	67.3
• Developed countries	5	9.1
• Developing countries	9	16.4
Victim's occupation		
• Employed	21	40.4
• Welfare	8	15.4
• Student	20	38.5
Victim referred by		
• Himself	17	30.9
• Police	16	29.1
• Other hospital	13	23.6
Assault reported to police		
• Yes	26	47.3
• No	23	41.8
• Rejected by police	3	5.5
Victim-perpetrator relationship		
• Known	14	25.5
• Know<24 h	10	18.2
• Unknown	19	34.5
Place of assault		
• Home	24	43.6
• Bar and restaurant	7	12.7
• Outside	13	23.6
Physical injury		
• Yes	21	38.2
• No	34	61.8
Victim's alcohol intake		
• None	18	32.7
• 1–5 units	11	20.0
• More than 5 units	25	45.5
Suspicion of drug rape		
• Yes	16	29.1
• No	29	52.7
Number of perpetrators		
• One	33	60.0
• 2–3	9	16.4
• More than 3	5	9.1

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