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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Female sexual coercion examined from a developmental criminology perspective[☆]

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Summary Based on the developmental criminology perspective, this study examines the association between the history of behaviour problems in childhood and adolescence and the use of sexually coercive behaviours by women. Sexual coercion refers to the use of strategies, which can be sometimes subtle, to have sexual contact without the consent of a partner (i.e., seduction, manipulation, intoxication and physical force). In addition, this study examines the association between the use of sexual coercion and physical aggression (e.g., hitting a partner with an object, pushing or shoving) and psychological aggression (e.g., yelling at a partner, keeping him from seeing friends) toward their actual partner (or their last partner) during a disagreement to document different coercive behaviours used by women. The data were

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collected from a sample of female heterosexual university students ($n=274$; mean age, 22.9 years). The participants completed the Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex and Aggression (MIDSA; Knight, 2007). The findings suggest that women who had behaviour problems in childhood *and* adolescence tend to use sexual coercion to a greater extent than women without a history of behaviour problems. Moreover, the findings suggest that women who use sexual coercion are also prone to resort to psychological aggression toward a partner during a disagreement. These findings highlight the importance of taking into account the history of behaviour problems across the life-course in the development of theoretical models of female sexual coercion.

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Introduction

Past research suggests that women are less likely than men to use violent behaviour, particularly physical aggression (Fontaine et al., 2009). Nevertheless, some women resort to violent behaviour, notably psychological and physical aggression in the context of romantic or intimate relationships (Archer, 2000).

Studies suggest that women can also be involved in sexual coercion, which is another form of violent behaviour toward a partner (Bouffard et al., 2016; Parent et al., in this issue; Schatzel-Murphy, 2011; Schatzel-Murphy et al., 2009). Sexual coercion refers to the use of strategies, which can be sometimes subtle, to have sexual contact without the consent of a partner (i.e., seduction, manipulation, intoxication and physical force). A number of factors have been found to be associated with the use of female sexual coercion, including sexual victimization, hostile attitudes toward men, sexual compulsion, depression symptoms, aggressiveness and antisocial or psychopathic traits (e.g., Bouffard et al., 2016; Krahe et al., 2003; Parent et al., in this issue; Schatzel-Murphy, 2011; Schatzel-Murphy et al., 2009).

The developmental criminology perspective as a theoretical framework

The developmental criminology perspective focuses on two important aspects:

- the emergence and the development of antisocial behaviour (e.g., violent behaviour);
- the risk and protective factors associated with antisocial behaviour over time (Farrington, 2005).

Several trajectories of antisocial behaviour have been identified (see Fig. 1). Common trajectories include: childhood-limited, adolescence-limited and life-course persistent (or early-onset and persistent) (Moffitt, 1993).

Behaviour problems in childhood *and* adolescence could be a risk factor associated with different aggressive and coercive behaviours in adulthood. Women with a history of early-onset and persistent behaviour problems could be

at a particular high risk of using aggressive and coercive behaviours toward a romantic or an intimate partner, such as physical and verbal aggression as well as sexual coercion (Bouffard et al., 2016; Fontaine et al., 2008; Straus et al., 1996).

History of behaviour problems in childhood and adolescence and its association with coercive behaviours in adulthood

Similar to men, women with behaviour problems (e.g., physical aggression, bullying) during childhood and adolescence are more likely to have adaptation problems in adulthood, including the use of physical and psychological aggression toward a partner (Fontaine et al., 2007, 2008; Odgers et al., 2008). Although research has traditionally highlighted the importance of taking into account behaviour problems in childhood and adolescence to explain non-sexually coercive behaviours in women, to our knowledge, there is no study on the association between history of behaviour problems and female sexual coercion.

Developmental models explaining sexual coercion

Schatzel-Murphy (2011) proposed a theoretical model of sexual coercion adapted to women. Two developmental pathways have been proposed. The first pathway is characterized by an impersonal and callous approach to sexuality (sociosexuality). The second pathway is characterized by emotion regulation problems as well as compulsion and sexual domination.

In contrast to theoretical models explaining male sexual coercion (e.g., Malamuth et al., 1996), Schatzel-Murphy's model (2011) does not include prior behaviour problems as a predictor of female sexual coercion. In addition to past victimization experiences, the explanatory factors for female sexual coercion proposed in this model are mainly proximal rather than distal. Given the theoretical and empirical work stemming from the developmental criminology perspective, it could be useful to take into account the history of behaviour problems in the explanation of female sexual coercion.

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