

Incapacitated rape and alcohol use: A prospective analysis

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Abstract

This study examined timing of alcohol-related sexual assaults (incapacitated rape) in relation to both alcohol consumption and alcohol-related negative consequences. The sample was drawn from a randomly selected pool of college students across three campuses ($n=1238$) followed over a three year time period. 91% of students never experienced an incapacitated rape, 2% reported an incapacitated rape prior to the first assessment point ($n=30$), and 6% reported one over the course of the study ($n=76$). Results indicated that incapacitated rape was associated with higher alcohol use and more negative consequences in the years prior to the assault. Incapacitated rape was also associated with higher alcohol use and more negative consequences during the year in which the rape took place and subsequent years, with highest rates measured for the year of the rape. These results suggest alcohol use can function as both risk factor and consequence of sexual victimization.

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1. Introduction

Sexual assault among acquaintances occurs at an alarming rate on college campuses, with approximately one quarter of women reporting rape or attempted rape (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Koss, 1993; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Koss, Gidycz, & Winiewski, 1987). The relationship between sexual assaults and alcohol use is a complex one. Alcohol use is implicated as a risk

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factor for experiencing a sexual assault (Ullman, 2003). In addition, increased alcohol use has also been found as a potential negative sequelae following sexual assault (Marx, Heidt, & Gold, 2005). Moreover, sexual assaults due to victim intoxication (incapacitated rape) appear distinct from forcible rapes (Testa, Livingston, Vanzile-Tamsen, & Frone, 2003). However, post-rape changes in alcohol use have not been examined in incapacitated rapes. The purpose of this paper is to examine in a longitudinal sample of college students, incapacitated rapes and their relationship with alcohol use.

College students, both because of their age and because of the high rates of alcohol use on campuses, are at high risk for alcohol-related sexual assaults (Fisher et al., 2000). The majority of both victims and perpetrators of sexual assault are between the ages of 16 and 25 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). College populations fall within the age range most at risk for sexual assault, and research has revealed that sexual assault is highly prevalent on college campuses (Humphrey & White, 2000; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Romeo, 2004; Vrana & Lauterbach, 1994). For example, the Department of Justice recently conducted the National College Women Sexual Victimization survey (Fisher et al., 2000). Results indicated that up to 25% of college women are raped or experience an attempted rape within the period of time normally taken to complete a college education.

1.1. Drinking as a risk factor for sexual assault

The majority of sexual assaults occur when the perpetrator, the victim, or both have consumed alcohol (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004). Based on survey research, 75% of men and 55% of women report having used alcohol or drugs at the time of a sexual assault (Koss et al., 1988). Other studies have found that approximately one third to one half of victims report drinking at the time of the assault (Abbey, Clinton, McAuslan, Zawacki, & Buck, 2002; Norris, Nurius, & Gaylord, 1998). Heavy drinking especially has been associated with increased rates of sexual victimization (Buddie & Miller, 2001). One study found odds of sexual assault were 9 times higher on days when a woman reported heavy drinking than days where no alcohol was consumed (Parks & Fals-Stewart, 2004). However, even smaller amounts of alcohol use were associated with a higher risk of sexual assault; the risk of assault was 3 times higher on days when moderate to light drinking was reported than the rates on non-drinking days. Over the course of an academic year, heavy alcohol use was found to predict later sexual assault in a sample of 274 college women (Greene & Navarro, 1998). Similarly, higher alcohol use was found to predict sexual assault six months later in a sample of 126 female college students (Combs-Lane & Smith, 2002). Thus, in college students, various studies have found that heavier alcohol use appears associated with increased risk of later sexual assault up to periods as long as one year later.

Rapes that occur because the victim cannot consent due to intoxication may be distinct from those rapes that occur due to the use of force on the part of the perpetrator, although the vast majority of research on sexual assault combines the two categories of victimization experiences (Abbey, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod, & McAuslan, 2004; Testa, Livingston, Vanzile-Tamsen, & Frone, 2003). However, both risk factors and consequences of incapacitated rape may differ from those associated with rapes using physical force. Alcohol consumption and earlier age of initiation of drinking increase risk of incapacitated rape and are more associated with penetration (Testa, Livingston, & Leonard, 2003; Tyler, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 1998). Rapes where victims are heavily intoxicated may also be more violent, may be more likely to involve penetration, and may be associated with less victim resistance, than those where victims have consumed less alcohol (Abbey et al., 2002; Testa, Vanzile-Tamsen, & Livingston, 2004).

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