

Comparison of Rape Among Strangers and Acquaintance

Rape Among Strangers and Acquaintance

Salma Shazia¹, Hakim Khan Afridi² and Naveed Alam²

ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the socio-demographic characteristics of female sexual assault cases among strangers and acquaintances in Peshawar District. To make the society aware about sexual crimes and provide guidelines for its prevention.

Study Design: Observational / cross sectional study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology of Khyber Medical College, Peshawar for a period of 2 years from January, 2010 to December 2011.

Materials and Methods: A two yearly research was done on the sexual assault cases brought by police for medico legal examination. Only female cases were selected and the observations made were recorded in proformas. The data formed of these cases was analyzed. Data analysis was done on SPSS 16.

Results: 60.6% belonged to urban area while 39.4% were the inhabitants of rural areas. 15.2% females were less than the age of 13 years, while 84.8% victims were more than 13 years that was taken as the average age of menarche. 16.73±4.78 is the mean affected age of the victim 75.8% were unmarried while 24.2% of the victims were married. 63.6% females were abducted by strangers and 36.4% of the assailants were among the acquaintances. 24.2% females left home by their own will while 75% females were taken away by unknown persons.

Conclusion: Sexual offences are the hidden crimes that leave harmful social, psychological and physical effects on the sufferers. The highest rates among all age groups are the young adults residing in urban areas. Assailants are mostly unknown to their victims.

Key Words: Rape, Stranger, Acquaintance

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a terrible and shocking crime against an individual. It is the most common but hidden form of crime. It is a atrocious crime against someone's will and body. Assailants use both psychological and physical plans to harass a person, often intimidating her privacy, well being and safety. Sexual assault results in significant mental pain, physical trauma and suffering for the victims.¹ It is a universal problem effecting all the nations in the world. It is common in every society and culture, irrespective of its sex, age and geographical boundries.²

Sexual assault is an enormously underreported crime. It is estimated that less than 30% of sexual assaults are reported to the police that makes collecting accurate data about sexual assault challenging (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

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It is the crime which is least reported. The extent of the problem globally is compared with the tip of the ice berg floating in the water.^{3,4} In addition to shame and embarrassment, women do not want to tell about the incidence to anybody because of fear of being blamed and socially targeted.⁵

Sexual assault includes all sexual behaviors like comments, unwanted contacts or threats, touching, fondling, fingering or masturbation to rape or attempted rape.⁶ sexual assault is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as, "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using force, by any person regardless of their relationship to their victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work."⁷

Sexual assault is one of the most destructive and demoralizing crime. Offenders are mostly among the family members, friends, acquaintances or strangers. They pressurize the victim to gain their interests by tricks, threats or by force.⁸ The impact of sexual assault extends far beyond rape survivors as their family, friends, and significant others are also negatively affected. It is a violent crime committed by men against millions of women.

The word "rape" usually shows us the image of a unknown person standing alone in a dark place. We are always taught to recognize strangers and should stay

away from the unknown persons. However, the actual situation is much disturbing and different. Rape occurs with someone you know and trust instead of with a stranger. 55% of sexually assaulted women knew their attacker as said by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Acquaintance rape is a forced sexual assault committed by an individual whom you know, someone you just met, dated a few times, are in a committed relationship, a classmate, family member, a neighbor, employer, therapist, religious officials, medical doctors etc^(9,10,11). The offender can give threats to harm or actually applies physical force. Acquaintance rape is the breaking of trust among each other.

The victim offender relationship and the circumstances leading to sexual assault do not change the legal definition of rape. Moreover The legal penalty in both the cases is same. Acquaintance rape is the hidden form of the crime that is not reported. Surveys show that they mostly go unreported than stranger rapes. Less than 2% of victims of acquaintance rape had informed the police in comparison to 21% of women raped by a strangers had reported their rape to the police in an American study^[10]

Most published research has been based on small samples on the victim– perpetrator relationship and consisted mainly of women who were seeking treatment for their injuries and were raped by nonromantic and nonintimate partners.

Stranger rapes mostly consist of single episode while acquaintances rapes involve multiple episodes with a single offender. It is not taken as rape so is not revealed to anybody. In general, acquaintance rapes were rated as less violent than stranger rapes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted at the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology of Khyber Medical College, Peshawar for a period of 2 years from January. 2010 to December 2011. A two yearly research was done on the sexual assault cases brought by police for medico legal examination. Only female cases were selected and the observations made were recorded in proformas. The data formed of these cases was analyzed. Data analysis was done on SPSS 16.

RESULTS

According to the research conducted, sexual assault is more common in urban areas. 20 (60.6%) cases are the residents of urban area and 13 (39.4%) belongs to rural areas.(fig.1) young virgin girls are more effected than older married women.(Figure 2).

The mean age estimated was 16.73 yrs ± 4.78 with the minimum age of the victim was 5 yrs, and maximum was 32 yrs, (table 2) while 75.8% are unmarried 24.2% of the victims are married. 63.6% females were abducted by strangers while 36.4% of the assailants were known to the victim. (table 2). 75% females were

kidnapped forcefully and 24.2% left home by their own will. (figure 3)

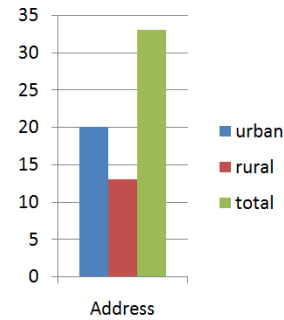


Figure No.1: Urban and rural areas details

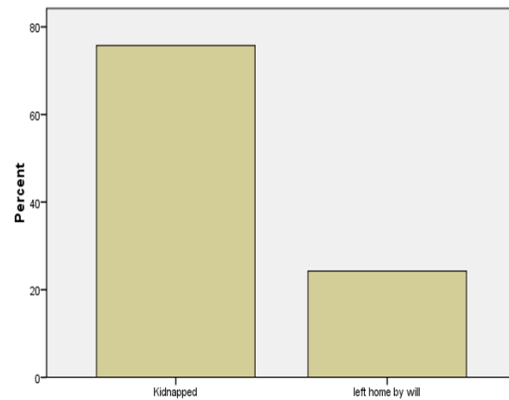


Figure No.2: Kidnapped left home by will

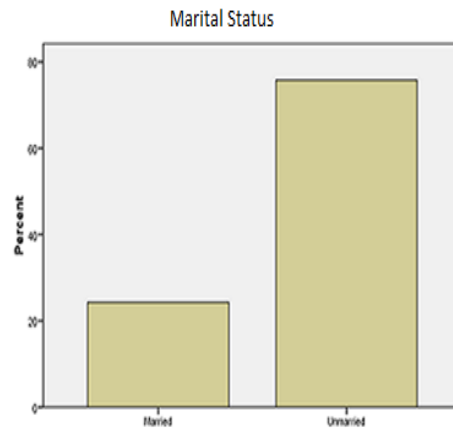


Figure No.3: Marital status

Table No.1: Details of cases

Age	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Estimated Age	33	5	32	16.73	4.785

Table No.2: Assailant

Valid		Frequency	Percent
	Known	12	36.4
	Unknown	21	63.6
Total		33	100.0

DISCUSSION

Sexual assault crimes are centuries old. The perpetrators of the sexual assaults were blood relations, neighbours, acquaintances, authority figure and stranger¹²⁻¹⁵ as documented in studies.

A study conducted in 1950s distinguishes between stranger and acquaintance rape. Later on from 1958 and 1960 a study was done on American police rape files, it was found that about half of the females were raped by men who knew their victims. Diana Russell, an activist and writer, In 1978 used the phrase acquaintance rape for the first time. She found that 11% reported cases were being raped by strangers while 35% have experienced rape or attempted rape by an acquaintance in her research on 830 women in San Francisco. Later on In 1988 American feminist writer Robin Warshaw published the first major book i.e. "I Never Called It Rape", on acquaintance rape.^[16] Most of the studies shows that in girls under 16 years of age, the assailants are known to the victim.^[17]

Our study showed that 75.8% are unmarried and 24.2% of the victims are married. This result is the same as with the study done in Rajshahi Medical college.^{03,18, 19} Parents of the married victims had filed FIR against the husbands. 24.2% got married by their own will. The nominated assailant is the husband.

In our study 36.4% assailants were known to the victim while 63.6% were strangers. The rate of sexual assaults by an acquaintance or relative of the victim is quite high as demonstrated in different studies.^{20, 21} Most of the women are victims in acquaintance rape. In a national study of women and men approximately 29% of men and 45% of women reported that the assault was from an intimate partner.^{22, 23} In 73.1% of cases, the victims knew their assailant in a study conducted in Lagos, Nigeria.²⁴ These facts are against our study. Most probably the reason behind this is that people here do not want to disclose the incident. Our society is a male dominating society. Males are always thought to be innocent until proved guilty while the women are guilty until proven innocent. Victims of acquaintance rape are traumatized with feelings of guilt that someone they know and trust could commit such an assault. These feelings of confusion, disbelief, guilt, and doubt may prevent her from reporting the crime. If a victim does decide to report the assault, she may face barriers with the police and courts. Due to these factors, very little is known about acquaintance rape.

CONCLUSION

Sexual assault is a heinous under reported crime with harmful social, physical and psychological effects on its victims. Adolescents residing in urban areas continue to have the highest rates of all age groups. Assailants are mostly unknown to their victims.

Recommendations: Future research and advocacy should focus on improving the community response to rape and the prevention of sexual assault. Increased public awareness and preventive interventions are required particularly within the at-risk age group to enhance their safety.

Author's Contribution:

Concept & Design of Study: Salma Shazia
 Drafting: Hakim Khan Afridi
 Data Analysis: Naveed Alam
 Revisiting Critically: Hakim Khan Afridi,
 Salma Shazia
 Final Approval of version: Salma Shazia

Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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