

# Correlates and Predictors of Sexual Assault Perpetration at a 1-year Follow Up

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Sexual assault is a problem on college campuses. Prior research has identified factors influencing rates of sexual assault perpetration; however, little research has considered the connection between intrapersonal, peer, and community factors. The present study investigated attitudes, peer norms, sense of community, and prior sexual victimization as correlates and predictors of lifetime and recent perpetration. **Methods:** This study used two samples of first-year college students from two northeastern universities. The first sample consisted of 299 males and the second sample included 190 males. Analyses for lifetime perpetration used the first sample only, while the analyses for the one-year follow up used both samples. **Results:** Across all time points, approximately 36 (12.0%) men from the first sample and 24 (12.6%) men from the second sample reported engaging in at least one form of sexual assault. Lifetime perpetration was positively correlated with lifetime sexual victimization, attraction to sexual violence, and peer norms. Perpetration at the one-year follow up was positively correlated with recent sexual victimization, rape myth acceptance, attraction to sexual violence, and peer norms, and negatively correlated with sense of community. Attraction to sexual violence was also examined as its own outcome. **Discussion:** Implications for prevention programming and future research directions are discussed.

## Introduction

- Sexual violence (SV) is a growing problem on college campuses (1).
- Self-reported rates of sexual assault perpetration of men range from approximately 10% to nearly 60% (2, 3).
- Prior research has identified a variety of factors that impact the likelihood of sexual assault perpetration (2, 4, 5, 6).
- Little research has explored the connection between intrapersonal factors, social norms, and community factors in relation to the perpetration of sexual assaults (5, 6).
- The current study investigated attitudes, peer norms, sense of community, and prior sexual victimization as correlates and predictors of lifetime perpetration and perpetration at a one-year follow up.
- This study also investigated the relation between attitudes, peer norms, and sense of community as correlates of attraction to sexual violence to better understand attraction to sexual violence as a predictor of perpetration.

## Methods

### Participants:

- Two samples of first-year college students from two northeastern universities
- The first sample included 299 males who were young in age ( $M = 18.20$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ )
- The second sample included 190 males who were young in age ( $M = 18.27$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ )

### Measures:

- Victimization Measures
  - Sexual Experience Survey Perpetration – *R* (Koss et al., 2007)
  - Sexual Experience Survey Victimization – *R* (Koss et al., 200)
- Intrapersonal Measures
  - Rape Myth Acceptance (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999)
  - Attraction to Sexual Violence (Malamuth, 1989)
  - Bystander Efficacy Scale (Banyard, 2008)
  - Intent to Help (Banyard, Moynihan, Cares, & Warner, 2014)
- Peer Measure
  - Peer Norms (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997)
- Community Measure
  - Sense of community (Proescholdbell, Roose, & Nemeroff, 2006)

### Procedures:

- Participants were recruited from two different universities.
- Participants completed surveys as part of a larger program evaluation which inquired about perpetration behaviors, attitudes towards sexual violence, intent to help, bystander efficacy, peer norms, and sense of community.
- Data were collected at four different time points: initial pretest (Time 1), two-week posttest (Time 2), five-month follow up (Time 3), and 12-month follow up (Time 4).
- The composite variable, recent perpetration, was created to include perpetration at both the five-month and 12-month follow up.
- Analyses for lifetime perpetration used the first sample only, while the analyses for the one-year follow up used the full sample.

## Patterns of Perpetration (Sample 1)

Types of perpetrators were identified from Sample 1. Within a year’s time:

- 3.34% of men ( $n = 10$ ) perpetrated at both Time 2 and Time 3 or 4
- 5.02% of men ( $n = 15$ ) became new perpetrators at Time 3 or 4
- 7.02% of men ( $n = 21$ ) perpetrated in the past at Time 2 only

## Correlates of Lifetime Perpetration (Sample 1)

**Table 1.** Correlations for Lifetime Perpetration and Individual, Peer, and Community Variables (Sample 1,  $n = 299$ )

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Lifetime Perpetration	1	.38***	.05	.22***	-.05	.04	.13*	.01
2. Lifetime Sexual Victim.		1	-.03	.05	-.01	.01	.16**	-.02
3. Rape Myth Acceptance			1	.31***	-.28***	-.12	.19**	-.01
4. Attraction to SV				1	-.25***	-.15*	.24***	-.002
5. Bystander Efficacy					1	.52***	-.16**	.27***
6. Intent to Help						1	-.14*	.13*
7. Peer Norms							1	-.12
8. Sense of Community								1

$p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$

## Correlates of Recent Perpetration (Full Sample)

**Table 2.** Correlations for Recent Perpetration and Individual, Peer, and Community Variables (Full Sample,  $n = 489$ )

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Recent Perpetration	1	.45***	.09*	.11*	-.05	-.002	.09*	-.10*
2. Recent Sexual Victim.		1	.12*	.16***	-.05	-.03	.12**	-.02
3. Rape Myth Acceptance			1	.27***	-.22***	-.13**	.15**	.04
4. Attraction to SV				1	-.18***	-.19***	.16**	-.02
5. Bystander Efficacy					1	.51***	-.07	.24***
6. Intent to Help						1	-.10*	.17**
7. Peer Norms							1	-.08
8. Sense of Community								1

$p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$

## Predictors of Lifetime Perpetration (Sample 1)

Regression analysis for lifetime perpetration revealed:

- Lifetime sexual victimization and attraction to sexual violence significantly predicted lifetime perpetration.

## Predictors of Recent Perpetration (Full Sample)

Regression analysis for recent perpetration revealed:

- Only recent sexual victimization significantly predicted recent perpetration.

## Attraction to Sexual Violence (Full Sample)

Correlates of Attraction to Sexual Violence:

- As shown in Table 2, attraction to sexual violence items (asked how likely men would be to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors if they would not be caught or punished) were positively correlated with rape myth acceptance and peer norms.
- Attraction to sexual violence items were negatively correlated with bystander efficacy and intent to help (See Table 2).

## Conclusion & Implications for Research and Practice

- Consistent with perpetration rates reported in prior research, across both samples approximately 12-13% of men reported at least one instance of sexual assault perpetration.
- Lifetime and recent perpetration were both associated with prior sexual victimization, intrapersonal factors (i.e., attraction to sexual violence), and peer norms.
- Only acceptance of rape myths and sense of community were associated with recent perpetration, suggesting that attending college may provide students with a newfound sense of community.
- Attraction to sexual violence correlations showed that there is a relationship between intrapersonal and peer factors, which help to further understand attraction to sexual violence as a predictor of perpetration.
- Findings suggest that intrapersonal, peer, and community factors are associated with rates of perpetration, emphasizing the need for further research as to how these factors influence perpetration over time.
- Prevention programming targeted at potential perpetrators may consider the inclusion of community factors in their training materials.

## References

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