

Review

Propensity of victims to report sexual assaults

Background and objectives:

- The aim of the report is to clarify what factors determine whether a victim of sexual assault reports the offence to the police or not.
- The report focuses on which circumstances correlate with victims' propensity to report a sexual assault. It also clarifies some of the reasons given by victims when they decide not to report a sexual assault.

Research design:

- The data used in the report was collected by The Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault at Rigshospitalet, a highly specialised hospital in Denmark, and contains information about 1,966 victims of sexual assault from 2006 to 2013.
- It is important to note that the data does not constitute a representative sample of all victims of sexual assault because it only contains information about victims who have themselves contacted the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault.

Findings:

- The propensity to report is higher for the youngest and oldest victims than for those in-between.
- Victims who are unemployed or are attending school are more likely to report a sexual assault than other victims.
- Victims who receive or have received psychiatric treatment are less likely to report a sexual assault than other victims. The opposite is the case for victims with a mental disability.
- Victims who are immigrants from more developed countries are less likely to report a sexual assault than other victims.
- The ethnicity of the offender seems to influence whether a sexual assault is reported or not, but the correlation is unclear.
- If the victim and the offender do not know each other or only met each other shortly before the sexual assault, it is more likely that the sexual assault is reported than if they are partners or have another close relationship.
- Sexual assaults committed outdoors are more likely to be reported than those committed in private homes or at other indoor locations.
- If the offender used threats or violence that left physical marks, it is more likely that the victim reports the assault than if this wasn't the case. If the victim resisted by running, screaming, pushing, hitting, kicking, scratching or biting, s/he is more likely to report the sexual assault than if s/he didn't.
- Victims who have consumed alcohol to an extent that caused a loss of memory are less likely to report a sexual assault than other victims.
- If the offender, according to the victim, had been drinking and/or using drugs, it is less likely that the victim reports the assault than if this wasn't the case.
- The most important reasons why victims do not report a sexual assault are self-reproach, uncertainty about the course of events, a wish to forget the event and fear of repercussions or other consequences.