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Project Two

CJ 315 - Victimology

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In 2022, the US rate of sexual assault & rape among people 12 years of age and above was 1.9 per 1,000 people, with the total number of such incidents being 531,810 (DOJ, 2023). This was an increase over 2020 and 2021, which both saw 1.2 per 1,000, but well below the 2018 rate of 2.7. Property and violent crimes followed a similar trend over the past five years.

The federal government's Dept. of Justice (DOJ) established the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) in order to collect crime data throughout the United States. This comprehensive statistical accounting helps identify trends in specific crimes, which could be utilized by federal, state, and local lawmakers, law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders. According to the BJS, "*Findings are based on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a self-report survey administered annually,*" and the survey also collects data on crimes reported to police versus those not reported.

Numerous factors could elevate the risk that a person becomes the victim of sexual assault. Four of the primary theories of victimization are *victim precipitation, lifestyle, deviant place, and routine activity* (Harper, 2022). A meta-analysis of 118 studies consisting of 333,722 people explored the factors contributing to sexual assault victimization among college students (Spencer, et al. 2024). It found that the use of alcohol/drugs and "*casual sex behaviors*" were prominent factors. The researchers found that women, freshmen, and racial and gender/sexual minorities were at the highest risk of sexual assault. The general power dynamics between the offender and the victim, such as prominent fraternity members targeting first-semester girls, was also found to be a factor. Other major factors among victims were intimate partner violence, prior victimization, and psychological issues such as depression and anxiety. The study found that 26% of female college students reported that they were sexually assaulted at some point while in college. The National Institute of Justice has identified alcohol use, sorority

membership, younger students, and those with numerous sexual partners as major risk factors (OJP, 2007) for sexual assault victimization. The NIJ study on college sexual assault also determined that parties were significant factors related to sexual assault, finding that *“more than half of the sexual assaults took place on weekends”* and *“between midnight and 6 a.m.”*

The ramifications of sexual assault and rape are expansive and severe. Victims often develop PTSD, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and all sorts of other issues that could affect them for the rest of their lives. Offenders could be incarcerated, fined, terminated, or punished in various other ways. The overall cost of sexual crimes in terms of human productivity is surely substantial. Fear of being victimized might cause people to change their behaviors, such as females or minorities choosing not to attend college or even house parties. The use of robust and accurate data relating to these crimes could help individuals, law enforcement agencies, and legislators formulate plans to mitigate the incidence of victimization. For example, the aforementioned data could lead college administrators and security to focus their protective strategies on female, minority, and younger students who attend parties. If a particular college, neighborhood, or institution found that alcohol and other drugs were major factors in sexual assaults, they could restrict the possession or use of such substances within their jurisdiction. Data could also be used to generally educate individuals within a population, especially those at the highest risk of victimization. An institution could post announcements to all or some people explaining the crime, the security measures, ease of reporting, consequences, and risk factors. Including trusted data and sources in these warnings could cause readers to take them more seriously and may deter potential offenders (learning that there are security cameras, easy reporting procedures for victims, and harsh consequences could certainly cause perpetrators to think twice before committing this crime).

The National Institute of Justice considers *“Bystander Education Programs for Sexual Assault Prevention on High School and College Campuses”* to be effective at increasing bystander efficacy of intervening during a sexual assault (Katz & Moore, 2013, pp. 1054–1067). These practice programs aim to decrease sexual assault in high school and college populations by *“educating participants about the occurrence of sexual assault, as well as promoting prosocial attitudes and the willingness to intervene in risky situations.”* The meta-analysis found that participation in these training programs led to a significant increase in the confidence of bystanders to intervene when witnessing a sexual assault.

These types of practice programs empower witnesses to recognize the situation and step in to help victims of sexual violence. Additionally, treating young people as allies as opposed to potential perpetrators *“may limit the risk of defensiveness or backlash among participants”* in the programs (Banyard et al., 2004, pp. 61 - 79; Katz, 1995, pp. 163–174). It is intuitive that young men would be more likely to participate in sexual assault prevention programs if they are viewed by the coordinators as peaceful people who could help prevent assaults as opposed to being viewed as the dangerous abusers in those situations. As studies such as the *“Stanford Prison Experiment”* (Haney, et al., 1973, pp. 69-97) demonstrated, humans are surprisingly prone to conform to the roles projected onto them, especially by authority figures.

A federal law requires colleges that accept federal funds to provide sexual violence prevention programming to students, including bystander intervention practice (Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, 2013). Thus, it seems very appropriate for colleges and other institutions to offer such programs, including the in-person practice.

Personally, I believe that the best way to mitigate sexual assault may be teaching self-defense to all individuals, especially those at the highest risk of sexual assault, such as

women, adolescents, and smaller people. While it takes years of consistent dedication to become proficient, becoming confident that you can defend yourself in most common situations provides a tremendous boost for people who might otherwise fear being victimized. The calm confidence that trained fighters carry with them at all times is worth any investment of time, money, and effort. Once a potential perpetrator learns that their target could adequately defend themselves, they would be highly likely to abandon their efforts. By training in martial arts styles such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, the potential victim could ensure that they would practically never be held down or manipulated by anyone against their will. Thus, it is extremely unlikely that one person could assault a victim if she is proficient in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, wrestling, Judo, or a similar form of martial arts. Further, the more bystanders in a given area that are trained in martial arts, the less likely assaults would be and the more likely that bystander interventions would be attempted and successfully accomplished. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be many studies that specifically explore how effective training in martial arts is at preventing sexual assault.

The phenomenon of submissiveness seems to be largely ignored, likely due to the fear of crossing the line into “*victim blaming*”. Sadly, many victims of sexual assault do not physically resist the attack. This could be due to shock, fear of further harm, feeling helpless, or other reasons. As the book *Fearless: The Complete Personal Safety Guide for Women* (Danylewich, 2001) explained, “*A victim's natural response to an assault is usually one of fear and helplessness.*” The author recommends that “*In a crisis situation, a victim should try not to allow feelings of helplessness to keep her from making important decisions on how to respond.*” Of course, this is far easier said than done. However, high-quality martial arts programs train the students to experience stressful and frightening situations on a regular basis, eventually making them quite comfortable even when being physically put in terrible positions. In this sense,

didactic training for potential victims of sexual assault are realistically unlikely to help them defend themselves. A woman could be taught to “*kick the man between the legs*” or to “*poke him in the eyes*”, but without thousands of repetitions in a variety of practice settings, such techniques are very unlikely to be effective in a fight. However, in a sexual assault, the perpetrator is not generally looking for a fight; they just want to control the victim long enough to be sexually gratified. Offering them a fight may therefore make them abandon their attack. A meta-analysis found that both verbal and physical resistance to rape attempts significantly increased the chance of fending off the attacker (Wong & Balemba, 2018, pp. 352–365). The simple act of resisting an attack has been found to be a substantial deterrent for perpetrators. Thus, the single best way to decrease the incidence of sexual assault may involve any program that encourages victims to be confident enough to resist in any way they can.

Of course, educating potential perpetrators about the ethics, law enforcement measures, and the harsh consequences and educating potential victims about awareness to identify potentially dangerous situations should also be encouraged. The goal of any comprehensive effort should be to find and treat the root cause of this disturbing type of crime.

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