

Sexual Assault Victimization among Varied Personality Traits

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Abstract

Persisting as one of the most devastating issues related to alcohol abuse, sexual assault, defined as any forced sexual act, has been reported by 54% of college women¹. As particular personality traits predispose individuals to certain behaviors, it additionally impacts drinking habits⁷. The purpose of the present study is to determine whether higher proportions of certain personality traits in college students are found among sexual assault victims. This determination contains potential to specify attributes typically associated with sexual assault on college campuses, allowing more effective preventative tactics to be developed for affected populations. Therefore, higher rates of sexual assault will occur among students with more sensation seeking traits. 433 undergraduate students from a midsized, Midwestern university participated in the present study. Data were collected through an online survey that gauged prior experience with sexual assault victimization and assessed personality traits with the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire. Sociability and sexual assault responses were found to be significantly related between groups, $F(5, 160) = 2.44, p = .04$. A Tukey's range test found a significant difference within participants rating high in sociability and choosing the "attempted coercion" ($M = 7.27, SD = 1.49$) and "completed rape" ($M = 4.83, SD = 2.35$) responses. Participants scoring higher in the sociability scale of the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire reported higher rates of sexual assault victimization. Future intervention efforts could apply these results to areas known for social gatherings at universities. Preventative methods could involve friends or bar employees becoming more informed about suspicious activity indicative of potential sexual assault and proper responses to ensure the safety of the public.

Keywords: Sexual Assault, Victimization, Alcohol

1. Introduction

Persisting as one of the most devastating issues related to alcohol abuse, sexual assault, defined as any forced sexual act, has been reported by 54% of college women and 51.2% of college men^{1, 9}. Among these instances of sexual assault, nearly 50% of cases involve alcohol consumption by the victim, perpetrator, or both individuals¹⁰. However, sexual assault's lasting impact on the wellbeing of victims exemplifies its severity as a public issue. In response to incidents of sexual assault, 46.7% of victims reported repeatedly experiencing the event through memory, while 50% avoided acknowledging the occurrence and felt emotionally numb⁴. Likewise, the detriment of sexual assault impacts the lives of students. When compared to students with no history of sexual assault victimization, sexually assaulted students reported significantly lower grade point averages². Due to the damaging impact of sexual assault on college students' wellbeing, the purpose of this study is to determine whether higher proportions of certain personality traits exist among sexual assault victims.

As particular personality traits can dictate typical mannerisms of individuals, they additionally provide insight into behaviors related to sexual assault. For example, sexual assault perpetrators receive significantly higher scores on the Narcissistic Personality Disorder subscale of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM Disorders – II Personality

Questionnaire and Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale when associated with alcohol consumption⁸. Similarly, personality traits can pertain to victimization; female college students with low self-control were found to have an increased possibility of alcohol-induced sexual assault victimization⁶. Due to these correlations, the purpose of this study is to examine the relation between personality traits and sexual assault victimization. It is possible that participants with prominently extraverted traits will report higher rates of being sexually assaulted.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The participants included 433 undergraduate students from a midsized, Midwestern university. The majority of participants were female (61.7%, $n = 277$), 21 years old (27.2%, $n = 122$), Caucasian (88%, $n = 395$), and not members of a sorority or fraternity (47.4%, $n = 213$).

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 *personality traits*

The primary scales regarding personality traits used in this study were derived from the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire. The scales chosen for this questionnaire were created to measure basic personality traits, which the authors described as factors similar across various species. The questionnaire is comprised of 99 items with only “true” or “false” responses. The scales are divided as impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism-anxiety, aggression-hostility, sociability, and activity. Impulsive sensation seeking holds 19 items that focus on spontaneous actions, inclinations for unpredictability and excitement, and the desire for change. Neuroticism-anxiety consists of 19 items related to dispositions, such as worried, fearful, and sensitive. Aggression-hostility contains 17 items. Approximately half of the items involve the likelihood of communicating verbal hostility, while the remaining items describe angry and rude behavior. The 17 items for the sociability scale inquire about enjoying social gatherings, interacting with others, and an aversion or preference for isolation. 17 items gauging restlessness and a liking for work that requires copious amounts of energy compose the activity scale. The final 10 items are used to identify potentially invalid responses by signaling those chosen for their desirable portrayal, making them most likely false¹⁰.

Using the American sample for this questionnaire, the Cronbach’s alphas for each scale results as acceptable. The impulsive sensation seeking scale had values of .77 and .81 for male and females, respectively. Slightly higher values were found for neuroticism-anxiety, with males .82 and .84 for females. Aggression-hostility was .76 for males and females. Activity produced the lowest value, with .74 for males and .77 for females. Lastly, sociability showed values of .77 and .79 for males and females, respectively. These results suggest the scales are internally reliable¹⁰.

2.2.2 *sexual assault*

When completing the online survey, the participants reported whether they previously experienced unwanted sexual contact, attempted sexual coercion, completed sexual coercion, attempted rape, and completed rape after being provided the definition of each response. These questions were created by the research team.

2.3 Procedures

Data for this study were collected through Qualtrics, an online survey program. The survey was introduced to participants through interactions with research assistants and announcements during their classes.

3. Results

The present study investigated the certain personality traits correlate with sexual assault victimization, predicting that traits similar to extraversion would show this relation. The results support this hypothesis by showing a significant difference between sexual assault responses of participants rated highly on the sociability scale and responses of the other scales. Using a one-way ANOVA for this analysis, sociability and sexual assault responses were found to be significantly related between groups, $F(5, 160) = 2.44, p = .04$.

A Tukey's range test was completed to determine any significant differences between the sexual assault responses within the various scales. The analysis determined a significant difference within participants rating high in sociability and choosing the "attempted coercion" ($M = 7.27, SD = 1.49$) and "completed rape" ($M = 4.83, SD = 2.35$) responses.

Applying Levene's test for equality of variances, a significant difference in variance was shown between the non-victim ($M = 2.91, SD = 2.38$) and victim (contact, attempted coercion, completed coercion, attempted rape, and completed rape combined) ($M = 4.16, SD = 2.92$) responses for the impulsive sensation seeking group, $t(167) = -3.05, p = .04$. A significant difference in variance was also seen between the non-victim ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.98$) and victim ($M = 3.89, SD = 2.57$) responses with the aggression-hostility group, $t(169) = -2.04, p = .01$.

Running a t-test for equality for means shows a significant difference between the non-victim and victim responses with the impulsive sensation seeking and aggression-hostility groups when equal variances were assumed and when they were not assumed. When equal variances were assumed for the impulsive sensation seeking group, the non-victim mean ($M = 2.91, SD = 2.38$) and victim mean ($M = 4.16, SD = 2.92$) were significantly different $t(167) = -3.05, p = .003$. When equal variances were not assumed, the non-victim mean ($M = 2.91, SD = 2.38$) and victim mean ($M = 4.16, SD = 2.92$) were significantly different, as well $t(146.4) = -2.99, p = .003$. For the aggression-hostility group, the non-victim ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.98$) and victim ($M = 3.89, SD = 2.57$) responses were significantly different when equal variances were assumed $t(169) = -2.04, p = .04$. When equal variances were not assumed, the non-victim and victim ($M = 3.89, SD = 2.57$) responses were significantly different $t(145.39) = -2.00, p = .04$.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the relation between personality traits and sexual assault victimization and found significance between participants rating highly on the sociability scale and experiencing sexual assault. Since the sociability scale describe social gatherings and preferences for social interactions, this result supported the hypothesis by indicating a relation between extraversion and sexual assault victimization.

By distinguishing a personality trait of college students more susceptible to be victims of sexual assault, preventative strategies and support can be tailored to these individuals. Furthermore, better understanding the profile of victims reveals typical behaviors of their perpetrators. Since a link between sociable characteristics and sexual assault victimization exists, perpetrators may expect to find potential victims in settings where extraverted people gather, such as parties or bars. Due to these extraverted people frequently visiting common social areas, most victims will personally know their assailant³. With this information, bar employees and other students attending parties can know to be aware for suspicious activity that would indicate a potential sexual assault attempt. The goal of gathering this knowledge is not to ostracize individuals for their outgoing personalities in hopes of curbing sexual assault rates. Instead, it functions as a key to further comprehend the causes and implications of sexual assault to provide more effective aid to victims and decrease the likelihood of future victimization.

The findings of the study were consistent with current literature, with other studies observing relations between extraverted traits and sexual assault. These similarities may be attributable to comparable measure scales. Studies, like Forbes and Adams-Curtis, administer the Big Five personality test, which contains extraversion as a measurable trait⁵. Likewise, the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire has a scale for sociability, which details characteristics and behaviors common to extraverts.

The central limitations of this study lie within the sample's lack of diversity. Generalizability of results becomes difficult due to most of the participants being middle to upper class Caucasian students. Despite the convenience of online surveys as a data collection tool, they raise issues in validity. Some participants may have felt the need to answer untruthfully to hide incriminating or embarrassing responses, while other participants may have started, but did not complete the entire survey. Lastly, because participants were gathered from interactions with research

assistants, the sample may not have been random because of friends groups typically consisting of people with similar age, academic major, socioeconomic status, Greek affiliation, and gender.

Future research can continue investigation of personality types involved in sexual assault by examining traits typically found in perpetrators. In addition, future studies can further review extraversion's relation to sexual assault by determining possible reasons this trait draws significant rates of victimization.

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6. References

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