Rape myths: Impact on offenders

The preoccupation with false rape allegations “serves to undermine the criminal justice response to rape, thereby permitting serial rapists- who commit the vast majority of rapes- to continue preying on the vulnerable.”

David Lisak, Department of Psychology University of Massachusetts Boston
Offenders:

• Choose victims they think are less likely to report, or to be believed...

• Are predatory; they target and exploit victims they think are most vulnerable

• Use alcohol/drugs and manipulate other factors to discredit the victim

• Promote societal myths about VAW crimes and “blame the victim”
Alcohol: Weapon & Shield

Alcohol is used as a WEAPON against victims to make them vulnerable and to diminish their credibility.

Alcohol is used as a SHIELD to prevent offenders from being held accountable. We tend to blame victim behavior and excuse offender behavior when they drink.
Offenders:

Use rape myths to distort their perceptions of reality

• “Women say no to sex even when they really want it”
• Women want to be secretly “coerced” into sex
• “She got what she deserved”
Rapist Research

Incarcerated vs Undetected

• Most incarcerated for single rape, but studies showed average of 7-11 victims
• Similar patterns found in sex offender programs
• Most had offending histories that started in adolescence
Reenactment and Repetition

41 Serial Rapists

• 837 Rapes
• 401 Attempted Rapes
• Most were never reported
• Earliest victims were younger siblings, neighborhood children, girlfriends, acquaintances and spouses

*Sexual Assault Investigation, Burgess & Hazelwood*
Non-incarcerated (Undetected)

Because of myths about rape, the men in these studies did not believe their behavior was rape which allowed researcher to study motivations, behaviors and background characteristics.
Student Subject’s Statement

I didn’t rape her...

“I only slapped her after she became skittish about having sex. She raised her voice; I tried to calm her down and convince her it was alright, but she raised her voice again. I told her to be quiet and slapped her face.”
The “Undetected Rapist” Research

Sample Research Question

Have you ever had sexual intercourse with an adult when they didn’t want to because you used physical force (twisting their arm, holding them down etc.) if they didn’t cooperate?
The “Undetected Rapist” Research

1,882 male university students

- 120 qualified as rapists
- 483 rapes were disclosed
- 44 men committed a single rape
- 76 men committed 439 rapes (63%)
- Average of four rapes per rapist
Of the 76 Serial Rapists

In addition to the 439 rapes, disclosed:

- 49 sexual assaults
- 214 acts of battery of partners
- 66 acts of physical abuse of children
- 277 acts of sexual abuse of children
- **1045 total acts of violence**
Research Subject Similarities

Identified rapists:

- Are extremely adept at identifying “likely” victims and testing their boundaries
- Plan and premeditate their attacks- groom their victims and isolate them physically
- Use only as much violence as needed to terrify/coerce their victims into submission
Research Subject Similarities

Identified rapists:

• Use psychological weapons-power, control, manipulation and threats backed by physical force- rarely resort to weapons

• Use alcohol deliberately to make victim more vulnerable or completely unconscious
Research Subject Similarities

Manipulation

• Offenders manipulate victims, witnesses and investigators...
• They plan their crimes and their response to possible questioning;
  – It was a “misunderstanding” or “miscommunication”
• They want us to believe it is “he said, she said”
Research Implications

- Most of the research on undetected rapists has been done in the college environment.
- The research shows undetected rapists are just as likely to be serial offenders as incarcerated rapists.
Offender Accountability

• Approximately 85% of rape victims did not report the crime to authorities
• Of the 15% reported, it is estimated 10% resulted in the filing of charges
• Of the 10% charged, it is estimated 40% resulted in conviction
Offender Focused

Focusing on offender behavior and the existence of serial rapists is more difficult than focusing on false rape allegations- It increases our collective vulnerability.

*Behind the Torment of Rape Victims Lies a Dark Fear: Reply to the Commentaries, Lisak, D.*
Discussion Questions

- Identify 2-3 rape myths
  - What are the realities associated with those myths
- If you, or a loved one, were sexually assaulted, would you report it and go through our criminal justice system?
  - If not, why not?
- What part of the “system” do you have the ability to change?
  - List some changes you could make