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ACQUAINTANCE RAPE: EFFECTIVE AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

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To date, research on effective rape avoidance strategies has involved media-recruited, acknowledged rape victims and avoiders, most of whom were assaulted by total strangers. In the present study, rape avoidance research was extended to a sample of acquaintance rape victims and avoiders who were located by a self-report survey that identified women who both do and do not conceptualize their assaults as rape. The study's goal was to determine whether acknowledged rape victims, unacknowledged rape victims, and rape avoiders could be discriminated by situational variables including the response strategies used in the assault. Victims and avoiders were significantly discriminated. Compared to rape victims, avoiders (1) were less likely to have experienced passive or internalizing emotions at the time of the assault, (2) perceived the assault as less violent, and (3) were more likely to have utilized active response strategies (i.e., running away and screaming). The results suggest that the major findings of existing research on stranger rape avoidance are generalizable to acquaintance rape. However, concerns are expressed over methodological limitations of research on rape avoidance from the victim's perspective.

Research on rape avoidance has indicated consistently that active strategies including screaming for help, running away, and fighting back are most

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effective (e.g., Bart & O'Brien, 1981, 1984; McIntyre, 1979; Queen's Bench Foundation, 1976; Sanders, 1980). Attempts to verbally reason with or to con the offender are more often associated with completed rape than with avoidance (e.g., Bart & O'Brien, 1984; Block & Skogan, 1982; Javorek, 1979). For example, Javorek (1979) used multiple regression to predict whether a rape attempt was completed. His analysis indicated that the most useful predictor of rape avoidance was whether the victim screamed or cried for help. Of the 43% of the women who used this tactic, 72% escaped being raped. Another important variable was whether the victim tried to escape by running away. Of the 29% of the sample who used this tactic, 76% escaped being raped. When neither of these methods were employed, 80% of the women were raped.

Bart and O'Brien (1984) indicated that although fleeing or attempting to flee was associated with the highest rate of avoidance (81% of the women who used this tactic avoided rape), it was the tactic least frequently employed. The second most effective and the most widely used response strategy was physical resistance, which resulted in avoidance for 68% of the women. The most frequently used form of resistance was verbal (e.g., reasoning, flattery), but only 54% of the women who tried it stopped the rape. The least effective tactic, pleading with the assailant, worked for only 44% of the women who tried it. However, Bart & O'Brien's conclusions are based on a 10% difference between groups; no formal statistical analyses were used.[1]

Virtually all the victims in existing rape avoidance studies were assaulted by complete strangers, including 81% of the victims in the Queen's Bench study, 78% of Bart and O'Brien's sample, 77% of McIntyre's sample, and 82% of the National Crime Survey sample analyzed by Block and Skogan. Yet the prevalence of acquaintance between victim and offender in samples of reported rape is approximately 50% (e.g., Amir, 1971). Among samples of "hidden rape victims," that is, victims who did not report their experience to authorities, 76% indicate that the perpetrator was someone they knew (Koss, 1985).

The overrepresentation of stranger rapes in studies of rape avoidance may be a product of the methods used to recruit participants. In several studies (i.e., Bart & O'Brien, 1981, 1984; Javorek, 1979), newspaper advertisements were used to recruit participants. The larger number of stranger rape victims that result from this method may reflect a hesitancy to volunteer for research among acquaintance victims, who often question whether their assaults will be viewed as legitimate. All existing rape avoidance studies have used the word *rape* in the screening questions to identify potential participants. Thus, a woman was required to conceptualize her experience as rape and herself as a rape victim in order to qualify for participation. Burt (1983) has observed, however, that many people sustain harm without perceiving themselves as victims. In fact, Koss (1985) reported that 43% of a group of women who reported an experience that met a legal definition of rape declined to identify

themselves as rape victims. The terms *acknowledged* and *unacknowledged* have been used to distinguish sexually assaulted women who differ in whether they conceptualize the experience as rape. This distinction is analogous to Burt's (1983) use of the terms "Stage 1" to describe persons who have sustained injury and "Stage 2" to denote individuals who perceive the injury as unfair and see themselves as victims.

It is possible that the generalizability of existing rape avoidance research is limited by the methods used to define, identify, and recruit victims. It has been well documented (e.g., Unger, 1983) that different methodologies can reduce or amplify effects inasmuch as they interact with parts of the cognitive framework by which the effects are mediated. The goal of the present study was to explore the generalizability of the results of existing rape avoidance studies subsequent to major methodological alterations.

The salient features of the present study included:

(1) *Survey recruitment of participants.* The Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss & Oros, 1982) was used to identify victims for participation in the study.
(2) *Focus on acquaintance rape.* All rape victims and rape avoiders in the present study were acquainted with their assailant. The existence of a social relationship between participants could slow the recognition that an assault is occurring, thereby precluding certain resistance strategies, or may inhibit the use of certain responses such as violent physical attempts to injure. A rape avoidance strategy found to be effective between strangers cannot be assumed to be equally effective among acquaintances.
(3) *Inclusion of acknowledged as well as unacknowledged victims.* Participation in the present study was based on a self-report of an experience that met a legal definition of rape or attempted rape. A woman did not have to conceptualize herself as a rape victim in order to participate.

METHOD

The data employed in the present study were collected as part of an investigation of hidden rape among college students. Because the general methodology has been described elsewhere (Koss, 1985), only a brief summary is presented below.

Subjects

The participants in the present study were all women university students aged 18–25. While the use of this sample restricts the generalizability of the results, it should be noted that this age and occupational group represent the highest risk of rape (Amir, 1971). Participants were recruited through a two-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, the Sexual Experiences

Survey was administered to 2,016 women in university classes selected to represent all levels and areas of study within a midwestern state university of 20,000 students. The rate of refusal was negligible.

The survey consisted of descriptions of ten circumstances under which sexual intercourse could occur that varied in the degree to which sexual coercion or aggression was present. Typical of the items on the survey is the following: "Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a man when you didn't want to because he used some degree of force (twisting your arm, holding you down) to make you?" The survey has been shown to possess adequate reliability (Cronbach alpha = .78; test-retest response agreement rate = 93%) and validity (less than 3% of rape victims were judged by interviewers to give false or misleading responses on the survey) for the purpose of selecting victims for participation in rape research (Koss & Gidycz, 1985).

The responses to this survey indicated that 12.7% of women had had a sexual encounter that met a legal definition of rape. However, only 43% of these women believed that they were victims of rape. An additional 24% of the women reported sexual experiences that met legal definitions of sexual imposition or attempted rape. Finally, 17.9% of the women reported verbal coercion and pressure to engage in sexual behavior but did not experience the use of force. In contrast, 45.5% of the women reported no experience with any degree of sexual victimization.

The second stage of sampling consisted of selecting participants for in-depth interview. Survey respondents were asked on an additional form whether they would be willing to participate in a detailed interview with a female interviewer. Of the 2,016 women, approximately 25% were willing to be interviewed. From the pool of 500 eligible participants, 231 were interviewed who together represented all degrees of experience with sexual victimization. While nonvictimized and minimally victimized women were selected for interview randomly from eligible participants, severely victimized women were oversampled.

For the present study, women were classified into three groups according to the following categorical scoring procedure. *Avoiders* were women who reported that they had experienced force or threat of force to engage in sexual intercourse but, for various reasons, penetration did not occur. *Acknowledged rape victims* were women who reported a victimization that met the following definition of rape: unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse between male and female consisting of penetration, however slight, obtained through the use of force or threat of force by the perpetrator. These women also responded yes to the item, "Have you ever been raped?" *Unacknowledged rape victims* were women who reported an assault that met the definition of rape stated above but who indicated that they did not view the experience as rape. In addition to selection based on the degree of victimization, a woman's relationship to her attacker was also considered. Selection

for the present study required that the woman, at minimum, recognized the man who assaulted her.

Because the present study focused on acquaintance experiences only at the most extreme end of the sexual victimization continuum, many of the women interviewed for the larger study were not appropriate subjects since they had never experienced victimization. The numbers of women who met the selection criteria stated above were the following: 35 rape avoiders, 26 acknowledged rape victims, and 29 unacknowledged rape victims. Some of these subjects could not be used in discriminant analysis because their records contained missing data. The 82 usable records included: 35 rape avoiders, 26 acknowledged rape victims, and 21 unacknowledged rape victims. Thus, subject loss was 8 subjects or 9%.

The demographic characteristics of the subjects were as follows: mean age = 21, mean age at victimization = 18; 92% were white; 78% were unmarried. The relationships between victim and attacker were collapsed into two categories. Romantic relationships included dates, boyfriends, lovers, and husbands. Nonromantic relationships included persons just recognized, acquaintances, friends, and relatives. The proportion of romantic relationships was 33% among acknowledged rape victims, 76% among unacknowledged rape victims, and 55% among avoiders.

There were no significant group differences in race, marital status, or age at victimization. However, the current age of the acknowledged rape victims ($M = 23$) was significantly higher than that of the avoiders ($M = 22$) and unacknowledged rape victims ($M = 20$). Because the age difference wasn't linked to differences in age at victimization, it may suggest a tendency to conceptualize experiences differently as one matures.

Measurement of discriminating variables

Because discriminant function analysis requires a minimum subject-to-variable ratio of three-to-one (Adams, 1979), the number of variables to be examined had to be limited. Variables for analysis were selected from those used in previous rape avoidance studies. Data were collected through one-to-one standardized interviews administered by female post-masters-level clinical psychologists.

The Sexual Experiences Interview used is a standardized interview protocol that consists of 39 questions exploring the specific characteristics of the victimization the woman has experienced. Fifteen variables obtained from the interview responses were used in data analysis including:

(1) *Level of Perceived Violence.* Perpetrator violence was rated from 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely).

(2) *Victim Response Strategies.* Victims indicated whether they did each of the following 10 behaviors in response to the offender: reasoning, pleading, turning

cold, quarreling, crying, screaming for help, physically struggling, running away, no outward resistance, and other.

(3) *Number of Responses.* The number of different forms of resistance the victim used were counted (based on a total of the 10 responses listed above).

(4) *Effect of Resistance.* The victim rated the impact of her resistance on the perpetrator's violence from 1 (he stopped) to 4 (he became more violent).

(5) *Victim Emotions.* The sum of ratings from 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely) on two clusters of emotions that the victim could have experienced at the time of victimization: aggressive (angry toward him, disgusted, feeling hatred of him) and non-aggressive (fearful, helpless, guilty, responsible for what happened, shocked, hurt, and unhappy).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed through the use of discriminant function analysis to determine the ability of the situational characteristics of the sexual assault to discriminate avoiders, acknowledged rape victims, and unacknowledged rape victims. Because the published literature on rape avoidance did not provide a strong rationale for preferring one set of potential discriminating variables over the other, step-wise discriminant analysis (Klecka, 1980) was employed. The method of minimizing Wilks' lambda was used for inclusion of variables and the criterion of $p<.001$ was set.

RESULTS

The Wilks' lambda of .47 (approximation to chi-square = 57.68, df = 14, $p<.0001$) indicated that the groups differed significantly and that the resulting discriminant function would be significant. Approximately 85% of the variance in the first function was accounted for by group membership. After the information contained in the first function had been extracted, the residual was insignificant (Wilks' lambda = .87, approximation to chi-square = 10.59, $df=6$, $p=.09$).

The group centroids on the discriminant function for the three groups of women were the following: avoiders (1.03), unacknowledged rape victims (−0.57), and acknowledged rape victims (−1.01). Thus, the single significant function clearly separated avoiders from the two victimized groups. Of the 15 situational variables entered into the analysis, 7 made a significant contribution to the function. The most important variables in determining the discriminant score were: experiencing non-aggressive emotions (standardized discriminant coefficient = −0.86), screaming (.55), running away (.45), quarreling (−.34), crying (.25), reasoning (.25), and level of perceived violence (−.07).

When all seven significant discriminating variables were used to reclassify subjects into groups, 66% of avoiders, 65% of unacknowledged rape victims,

and 67% of acknowledged victims were correctly classified. The value of tau for the classification was .49, which indicated that 49% fewer errors were made by classification based on seven situational variables than would have been made by random assignment.

DISCUSSION

Acquaintance rape victims could be discriminated from rape avoiders by the situational characteristics of the assault. Women who had avoided rape differed from rape victims in their appraisal of the assault, emotional response to the assault, and use of active response strategies. Rape avoiders experienced less intense nonaggressive emotions (fear, guilt) during the assault than did rape victims. However, the presence of aggressive emotions (anger) did not differentiate victimization from avoidance. Thus, the ability to minimize fear and self-blame for the situation was predictive of rape avoidance; it was not necessary for the victim to feel angry towards the offender. Avoiders, as compared to victims of rape, perceived their assault as less violent and more often used running away and screaming for help as their responses to the perpetrator's actions.

Cognitive verbal response strategies (e.g., reasoning, pleading, turning cold, quarreling, or crying) are highly frequent responses for potential rape victims but they have been considered more likely to lead to rape completion rather than to rape avoidance (e.g., Bart & O'Brien, 1984; Javorek, 1979). The ineffectiveness of quarreling as a response strategy was supported in the present study. Quarreling with the offender contributed significantly to the prediction of completed rape. On the other hand, crying and reasoning did make some contribution to the identification of rape avoiders. It is possible that the men who assault acquaintances are more sensitive to these forms of resistance than are men who assault complete strangers. Or the existence of a preexisting relationship between the victim and offender may heighten his responsiveness to these strategies. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that cognitive strategies were less potent predictors of rape avoidance than active strategies even among acquaintances.

Previous findings regarding the effectiveness of physical resistance have been inconsistent. While physical struggling with the offender has been found to be an effective rape avoidance strategy (e.g., Bart & O'Brien, 1984; Block & Skogan, 1982), there have been studies in which it did not predict rape avoidance (Javorek, 1979). Bart and O'Brien (1984) noted that physical resistance was used less frequently by victims assaulted by an aquaintance than by victims assaulted by a stranger. Even if physical resistance had been used infrequently by acquaintance rape victims, it would still be expected to enter into the discriminant function if it were a potent predictor of rape avoidance. However, physical resistance was not found to differentiate victims from avoiders in the present study.

A final result of the present study was that acknowledged rape victims could be discriminated successfully from unacknowledged rape victims. The groups of victims did not differ in the type of response strategies they used or the emotional reactions they experienced. However, they were differentiated by the extent to which the pattern of responses characterized their behavior. It was not possible with the present data to determine whether the small differences in the intensity of response contributed to a woman's self-perception of her assault, or if the self-label affected her recall of the experience. Burt (1983) has discussed the need for victimological research to examine the variables that predict movement through Stage 1 (i.e., harm is sustained) and Stage 2 (i.e., harm is perceived as unjust) into Stage 3 of victimization (i.e., the victim role is claimed from social control agents). Future research on acknowledged and unacknowledged rape victims could clarify this process.

A difficulty with all research on rape avoidance from the victim's perspective is that it is not possible to determine whether the avoided rape was as serious a situation as the completed rape. Additionally, it cannot be determined whether the victim's actions actually caused a change in the perpetrator's behavior or whether he terminated his aggression on his own accord. Research on rape avoidance from the victim's perspective gives an overview of the characteristics of avoided rape. However, it would be inaccurate to conclude on the basis of these methods that all rape is ultimately avoidable if only the victim responds appropriately. It is possible that some men are so determined to rape that they are virtually impervious to any type of resistance. To enlarge our understanding of rape avoidance, the next step may be study of the offender's perspective.

The present study's major goal was to explore the extent to which substantially altering the methods used to define victim status and to recruit victims would affect the generalizability of conclusions regarding rape avoidance. Despite these alterations, its findings were consistent with existing research on two important points. The active rape avoidance strategies that are effective in stranger rapes appear to be effective between acquaintances as well. Cognitive strategies, ineffective in a stranger rape, appear to be somewhat effective between acquaintances. However, they are clearly inferior to active strategies. The effectiveness of physical resistance was not supported by the present study.

Finally, the minimal presence of emotions such as fear, helplessness, guilt, shock, hurt, and unhappiness was a powerful determinant of rape avoidance. This finding has important practical significance. It is difficult for rape avoidance programs to modify the likelihood that physical aggression will be used in sexually stressful situations, particularly when victim and attacker are acquainted. Feelings may be more amenable to modification, however. Consciousness-raising regarding the prevalence of acquaintance rape and the sexual rights of women, as well as cognitive modification to dispel rape myths, may reduce potential feelings of shock, guilt, hurt, and responsibility. Stress

innoculation techniques to teach self-statements that encourage the victim to stay calm and resist may reduce fear in a potential acquaintance rape situation. These procedures might lead to an increase in the frequency with which women avoid rape by acquaintances.

NOTE

1. Since this paper was written, additional analysis of these data has been published (Bart & O'Brien, 1985).

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