

An In-Depth Analysis of the Sexual Assault Crisis

Brandon Creech

Old Dominion University

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Introduction

There is a disturbing rise in the amount of sexual assault incidents in society today. It shows how dangerous the world has become, as there are predators out there who actively seek to violate individuals. There are statistics that show this trend of sexual assault incidents. In Fedina et al. "Campus Sexual Assault: A Systematic Review of Prevalence Research From 2000 to 2015," Fisher and his colleagues conducted behavior and incident measures that reported higher sexual victimization rates than the NCVS, estimated upwards to 1.7% of women who reported completed rape and 1.1% who were attempted. NCVS reported 0.16% and 0.18% respectively (Fedina et al., 2016). Sexual victimization rates are how incidents reported relating to sexual assault. This statistic is alarming that it shows higher rates than the NCVS because they are an official site of the government that reports incidents of crimes. It shows potential inaccuracies, and that the crime number of sexual assault might be worse than it seems. Another article, "The Justice Gap for Sexual Assault Cases: Future Directions for Research and Reform" by Lonsway and Archambault, explains more alarming statistics on sexual assault. They state via the UCR, another crime reporting database, that "UCR's reporting rate increased from 9.6 per 100,000 U.S. inhabitants in 1960 to the peak of 42.8 per 100,000 in 1992," (Lonsway and Archambault, 2012) Although these statistics went back down afterwards, it is still a crisis that needs attention as we could experience a spike like this anytime again. One important thing to note that while although both genders are vulnerable to sexual assault, they are more common in females than males. This paper will be an in-depth analysis of sexual assault through the use of academic peer-reviewed research, literature, and how theories are connected to it.

Review of Academic Literature

Crime Theory

There are peer-reviewed studies that are able to utilize crime theories to assess the topic of sexual assault. The first one exemplified covers the routine activities theory under the article name, "Routine Activities Theory as a Formula for Systematic Sexual Abuse: A Content Analysis of Survivors' Testimony Against Larry Nassar," by Wellman et al. The authors in the study specifically use the routine activities theory to assess how Larry Nassar methodically exploited his victims. He fulfills all the categories necessary for the theory which is: a likely offender (Larry Nassar), a suitable target (Olympic athletes), and the absence of a capable guardian. As with the theory, offenders look for certain factors to exploit the sexual assault. During this study, the authors stated that trust is a central factor in offenders operating on the micro-level while manipulating society and the institutions they work at is on the macro-level. The study can best be described as qualitative because the authors use the method of protocol coding to gather qualitative data from a previous system or theory (Wellman et al., 2021, pg. 320, 322). The second article observes the policing resulting from the broken windows theory and how it can translate to a more effective law enforcement and their definition of sexual assault. The idea of the broken windows theory is that if a neighborhood or building shows any signs of deterioration, crime is more likely to happen and be acceptable. Law enforcement use broken windows policing to effectively reduce crime in hot spot neighborhood areas by increasing police control. George Kelling and William Sousa in Erin Sheley's article, "A Broken Windows Theory of Sexual Assault Enforcement," found that the Broken Windows policing was able to prevent the occurrence of over 60,000 crimes in the 1990s, when back during this time before

the policing, they were receiving significant increases in crime during the crack epidemic (Sheley, 2018, pg. 481).

Crime Policy

Many crime policies have been implemented by city law enforcement to ensure of the most optimal ways to reduce crime rates. Their primary objective is to deter criminals from committing future crime and a sure-fire efficient way for law enforcement to handle such cases. Both crime theories and crime policing complement each other that together is formed to curb crime. Perspectives of crime theories can be applied towards creating crime policies. Some crime policing is put into the hands of the law enforcement officers themselves. One such example is explained by Murphy-Oikonen and Egan in their article, "Sexual and Gender Minorities: Reporting Sexual Assault to the Police." A formulated system called the "Philadelphia Model" can be implemented as a means for law enforcement to correctly classify sexual assault. The reason for this is that sometimes sexual assault can be misclassified, which the Philadelphia Model can help reduce. The policy matters because it can lead to more cases that are more truthful to sexual assault and thus can be an important component to the investigative process. With the number of cases that are described as false sexual assault, it can be difficult to discern it from real classifications, which is why this can be proposed as a challenge to law enforcement by the authors of this article. Policies like this are built off problems that already exist that are focused around reducing crime and optimizing criminal justice. The results from the Philadelphia Model shows consistencies with the previous articles discussed as it wants sexual assault as the main focus. The article can best describe the Philadelphia Model as "effective in raising awareness of the misclassification of sexual assault, and has significantly improved the

investigative process, the reopening of unfounded cases, and has increased sexual assault reporting in Philadelphia (Murphy-Oikonen and Egan, 2022, pg. 787).

Current Examples

There are sources that show that crime-reduction strategies towards sexual assault have been considered ineffective due to the fact that not enough is being done to prevent the matter. Sexual assault continues to still be a common crime despite efforts to reduce the crime rates. We have to consider that the statistics do not always tell everything because there are people out there that may be afraid or are hiding their counts of sexual assault. The sources that support the claim that sexual assault is ineffective challenge the ideas of what more can be done by society as a whole to prevent it, such as creating strategies or creating an environment that feels more open for people to be vent about their incidents. One such source that states the inefficacy of sexual assault reduction strategies is the news article “U.S. Air Force Member Says Change is Needed, Facing Retaliation After Reporting Rape” by Kylie McGivern. It details about a U.S. Air Force member who is a sexually assaulted by another service member. The military ended up disregarding the matter as false accusations citing there was something wrong with her mentally. This comes at a time where the DoD conducted an annual report on sexual assault within the military and found 8,942 incidents with the count increasing every year (McGivern 2024). The fact that predators are able to commit the things they do, and the victim gets the table turned against them as if they are making up the situation like it is cancel culture is unfathomable. This shows that sexual assault can be conducted anywhere, meaning that predators can exploit a person anytime.

It also shows flaws in our society of how we can still lack the common sense to be able to tell when someone is telling the truth. These kinds of incidents where the investigation is played off as if the victim is telling a fake story keeps the predator safe and continuing their exploitations. With the reports of sexual assault increasing, this is an act by the military that can happen again, which can downplay the social problem even more.

Another source tells of a same similar situation but within the workplace. This news article tells that even colleagues, coworkers, or anyone who is close can exploit and become part of a crime. The article “If The Police Don’t Believe You, They Might Prosecute You: How Officers Turn Victims of Sexual Assault Into Suspects” by Rachel de Leon talks about how a woman had a coworker who was high on acid demand her to commit a sexual act while being nude. Yet again like the other article, the accusations were claimed to be false by the police and she had a warrant for an arrest (Rachel de Leon 2023). It is becoming a common occurrence where people believe that it is false, or it is downplayed as minor to the point where very little is done about the incident.

Both articles create the feeling that we can not even feel safe in the aura of law enforcement even though they are the ones who are supposed to punish these people. This is why crime-reduction strategies can be ineffective because there are still many flaws that prohibit more being done. This is a major topic of discussion because not only is sexual assault a major crime, but the ones that basically get swept under the rug, the victims have to deal with the mental trauma that comes from it. It’s a sad crisis that needs better work being dealt too or else it will continue to get worse.

Synopsis or Discussion/Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several issues that cause sexual assault incidents to still remain prevalent in society. Sexual assault crime rates continue to rise whereas the strategies to reduce the numbers are not doing enough to be considered effective. Plenty of work still needs to be done to understand the dangers of sexual assault. This can be evident through the articles throughout the paper that show how victims were neglected by the military and law enforcement to take the proper action to stopping predators. Amidst the daunting statistics that have been listed, this shows that our society is going in a bad direction as far as safety, as vulnerable groups such as woman fear of finding themselves in situations like this.

This brings the overall theme that no one is safe in a society of predators until more action is taken. The lack of awareness to more needing to be done will constitute a festering environment for predators to continue their exploitations. Predators will continue to use strategies that support different theories such as the routine activities theory, where they look for certain factors to make their move. Another theme that can be determined is that they may open the door to people finding other crimes to initiate on. Criminals may find other acts of crime that can be manipulated into the weaknesses that the law enforcement and victims alike may have trouble with and increase the occurrences of those.

The findings of the research concerning sexual assault indicate that sexual assault is a rising concern in society. Countries such as the U.S. have experienced more frequent spikes in sexual assault incidents throughout the decades. This leads to more vulnerable groups such as woman to be exploited more, where any woman has now a higher risk than before of becoming

a victim of sexual assault. However, we can understand that certain criminals follow strategies that support theories. If we reduce the vulnerability of the factors in these theories, such as in the routine activities theory where a lack of a capable guardian is a factor, predators may find it more difficult to exploit potential victims. If law enforcement and victims combine this effort along with finding more effective strategies to reducing the overall number of incidents can be a good direction for society. Challenges includes finding the most effective strategies and spreading awareness. Predators like criminals in any other crime, will find ways to improvise and keep themselves hidden from law enforcement. This makes it harder to solve these cases and as sometimes they may go under the radar. Spreading awareness about the crisis is essential but there will always be ones that might either contradict the issue or give in to the peer pressure of predators. These challenges can lead to limitations in terms of reducing sexual assault. Part of the limitations is that law enforcement is not able to have as large of an effort when everyone is not unified together towards the issue. When there are people who contradict the issue, it adds sort of a disorientation to the problem-solving process.

Personal Insights/Opinions

My opinion is that not enough is being done to curb the sexual assault crisis. I feel like not enough attention is being brought to it despite the statistics and the horror stories of victims experiencing sexual assault. A recommendation we can show to law enforcement is an expansive assortment of the statistics and if more victims come out about their sexual assault stories. If enough of this is done, the law enforcement can be pressured into bringing legislation that can possibly reduce sexual assault. Expressing our voice is a tool that can be used to set a movement and bring change to society.

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