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2022

Understanding Men's Use of Tactics in Sexual Coercion: A Network Analysis

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Recommended Citation

Mou, L. (2022). Understanding Men's Use of Tactics in Sexual Coercion: A Network Analysis. Retrieved from <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/194>

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Research on men's sexual coercion perpetration has found that use of verbally coercive tactics is more common than using incapacitation (drugs or alcohol) or forceful physical tactics to acquire sex from non-consenting women. However, less research has examined the use of verbally coercive tactics and how they are related to the use of incapacitation and force. The aim of this study was to investigate the role of individual verbally coercive tactics in sexual coercion and how these tactics might associate with incapacitated and forceful tactics using a process called network analysis. The study also examined previously documented risk factors for perpetration that may explain the interrelations among these tactics: hostility towards women, rape myth acceptance, beliefs in the sexual double standard, sexual promiscuity, alcohol consumption, and marijuana consumption.

Surveys were completed by 235 male Ontario university students who had sexual experience with women. As expected, the majority of men (in this case 74%) reported never having engaged in coercive sexual behaviour. Around 14% of men reported having used any verbally coercive tactic. Fewer men reported having used any incapacitated (1.28%) or forceful tactic (0.85%). The first analysis we conducted included all of the verbally coercive, incapacitated, and physical/forceful tactics and showed that most verbally coercive tactics were associated with other verbal, physical and incapacitated tactics. These results mean that these tactics cannot be presumed to be 'less serious' as men who use one perpetration tactic are likely to use other tactics as well. The results also suggested that men who *told lies* (e.g., saying "I love you" when they don't) to coerce women to have sex were more likely to use other tactics, particularly incapacitation, than other men. The second analysis included risk factors to assess their associations with different groups of tactics. No associations were found between the individual perpetration tactics and these risk factors. This suggests that the risk factors are not as effective in predicting men's use of particular tactics, although they were useful in predicting generally whether a man was ever coercive or not.

The findings of this study advance current understanding of men's use of sexually coercive tactics and provide insights for research and prevention. The results suggest that future research should continue to study individual coercive tactics instead of just broad categories of sexual violence perpetration. In the future, longitudinal research is needed to better understand why these relationships between tactics exist and how the use of different tactics develops. With these answers prevention education may be able to target and reduce coercive tactics that have a greater association with other sexual violence tactics. Given that most men endorse positive sexual relationships with women and are not coercive, it may be that recognizing the harmfulness of verbally coercive tactics within male peer groups is an important step toward reducing acceptance for sexual violence.