



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2009

I12 Male Victims of Sexual Assault: Involuntary Erection and Ejaculation

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be educated on the incidence and prevalence of the sexual assault of adult males in non-incarcerated settings, the motivations of the perpetrators of these crimes, and the phenomenon of involuntary sexual responses on the part of victims. Sexual responses (erections and or ejaculations) are frequently misinterpreted by victims, assailants, and the criminal justice system alike as signifying consent. The physiology governing these responses is reviewed and supports the view that men can experience erections and ejaculations under a variety of adverse circumstances, including during an anal rape.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by detailing how men can have erections and ejaculations under adverse circumstances, including during a sexual assault. The presence of an erection or the occurrence of ejaculation does not necessarily signify consent. Attempts to cite the occurrence of an ejaculation or erection as evidence of consent by the victim are unwarranted.

Although males are much less frequently victims of sexual assault than are females, sexual assault of males is by no means a rare phenomenon, nor is it limited to all-male populations such as jails and prisons. Retrospective data from large randomized community samples estimate a prevalence of male sexual assault victimization of between 3 and 7%. As with females, sexual assault of males occurs more frequently in the victim's 20s or 30s. Where comparisons between male and female victims are available, it appears male and female victims are assaulted by strangers at about the same rate, but that males may more likely have more than one assailant. The studies that address the sexual orientation of male victims find higher percentages of victims who identify as gay, bisexual, or having consensual sex with men. However, these populations are more highly represented in the samples of the studies where sexual orientation is addressed. Many male assaults involve anal rape.

The circumstances in which rapes of men take place are varied. As with women, men can be assaulted by acquaintances (including recent acquaintances), lovers, friends, family members, and by total strangers. These assaults take place in the community as well as in jails and prisons. The motivations of the assailants are varied, and include demanding sexual gratification from a lover, partner or recent acquaintance, exercising intensely conflicted feelings about sexual orientation, and the humiliation of and exercise of power over the victim. An extreme form of power is expressed in the victim's becoming aroused or ejaculating during an assault. This is a frequent occurrence, which is incorrectly understood by assailant, victims, justice system, and medical community as signifying consent. What is understood about the physiological mechanisms underlying involuntary erection or ejaculation suggests that these can and frequently do occur in the context of non-consensual receptive anal sex. Erections and ejaculations are at best only partially under voluntary control and can take place even during times of extreme stress or duress.

Men are even less likely to report being sexually assaulted than are women. Reasons for this under-reporting include fear of stigmatization, fear of being labeled homosexual, fear of being disbelieved and further stigmatized by law enforcement officials and health care providers, and shame and disbelief over the loss of control that the sexual assault may represent to the victim. Having an erection or ejaculating represents an extreme form of loss of control, and may further dissuade the victim from reporting the assault. Indeed, assailants frequently attempt to manipulate their victims into ejaculating as a strategy for further humiliation and a deterrent to the victim's reporting the crime. The criminal justice system has historically been unavailing of male victims of sexual assault, particularly when the victim experienced an erection or an ejaculation.

This presentation reviews studies that examine the incidence and prevalence of these crimes, the motivations of the assailants, contexts in which these crimes take place, and the underlying physiological mechanisms governing erections and ejaculations, including the recently identified "ejaculation generator" in the spinal cord. It is argued in this presentation that men can have erections and ejaculations during an assault and that these do not necessarily signify consent.

Anal Rape, Male Rape, Involuntary Ejaculation