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SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION OF YOUNG WOMEN – A COMPARISON BETWEEN GERMANY AND SLOVENIA

This paper presents a victim survey on sexual victimization conducted in Germany as well as in Slovenia. The identical questionnaire was administered to German female students on the one hand and to Slovenian female students on the other hand. Victimization rates varied depending on the severity of the incidents. However, in both countries sexual harassment seems to be part of daily life. The findings support other survey results according to which the victimization rates are higher in Eastern European states compared to Western European nations and other so called "developed" countries. For milder forms of sexual assaults German subjects reported significantly more incidents. These findings and the higher rate of milder forms of sexual victimization reported by German students suggests that German female students might be more aware when it comes to their sexual freedom. On the other hand it is still possible that Slovenian women have more self-confidence. With regard to the differing response rates (100% in the Slovenian sample) more research is needed to understand these differences and the methodological impact on issues like sexual self-consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Even though research on sexual victimization has steadily increased during the last decades there are no consistent findings on the prevalence rates. There are a number of methodological problems contributing to inconsistent results of victim surveys (Heynen 2000). The lack of consistency in terminology and measurement, in particular, has to be mentioned. Saltzman (2004, p. 813) puts this problem in a nutshell: "Although single terms ... are often used to mean several different behaviours, different terms ... have also been used to describe identical acts". This problem not only applies if one tries to compare surveys of different cultural background but also to surveys conducted inside the same country. The issue of sexual victimization is in addition of delicate nature, which makes it even more difficult to get reliable data for prevalence studies (Koss 1992, Curtis 1976). Different surveys refer to varying time frames or the age of the subjects is not taken into account. Although it is by now widely recognized that intimate partner violence is a serious and widespread problem talking about or even reporting on it in surveys is still the exception for those affected.

Prevalence rates for rape in different recent US-American studies for instance varied between 2% and 20% (see Koss 1993). In German surveys conducted in the 1980s and 1990s prevalence rates for rape varied between 2,6% (Teubner et al. 1983) and 14.5% (Wetzels & Pfeiffer 1995). For less severe forms of sexual victimization the rates rapidly rise.

The present study is a trans-national comparison of sexual victimization rates among German and Slovenian female students. Even though there is a lack of correspondence between different research findings, a number of studies have shown that the officially recorded numbers on sexual offenses do not represent the real magnitude of sexual delinquency (see for instance Müller & Schröttle 2004, Kury et al. 2004). Victim surveys

are a means to collect data on the real extent of sexual victimization, since offences may be recorded in victim surveys that were not reported to the police. On the grounds of this relationship between official crime statistics and victim surveys found in previous studies the first hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 1: Sexual victimization of young women (female students) is significantly higher than sexual victimization rates reported in official crime statistics.

Recent research has also shown that severe sexual offences are committed by perpetrators well known by the victim and that milder forms of sexual offending are committed by perpetrators not known by the victim (Kury et al. 2004). In line with these findings the second hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Severe sexual offences are committed by perpetrators belonging to the victim's circle of (close) acquaintances and milder forms of sexual harassment are committed by strangers.

The focus is on the trans-national comparison between Germany and Slovenia. The same questionnaire was administered to German and Slovenian subjects. As a consequence the victimization rates of the two countries can be directly compared. This comparison is of particular interest since Slovenia has been shattered since the war in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 311 German and 1,500 Slovenian female students. The response rate for the German sample was 62.2%, i.e. the original sample size was N = 500. For all of the 1,500 Slovenian students there were data available. The questionnaires were distributed at different Universities of Freiburg in the south-western part of Germany. In Slovenia, two major Universities in the whole of the country were included.

METHOD

A standardized survey was administered to the German and Slovenian female subjects. This survey encompassed 21 items on severe (i.e. rape) and milder forms (i.e. stalking) of sexual assaults. In addition, there were four categories of victim relationship to the perpetrator: boyfriend/husband, friend/colleague, acquaintance (disco), or stranger. In the Slovenian questionnaire the category "other relatives" than husband was included and separately analysed. The questionnaires were distributed either in student classes where the male students were asked to leave the classes earlier or in dormitories where the completed questionnaire could be dropped in a post-box.

The questionnaire asked if the various sexual assaults occurred at least once in the life of the subjects.

RESULTS

Most of the subjects had previous sexual contacts: 83 % of the German students had sexual intercourse, 8 % had experience with kissing or petting and another 8 % did not have any sexual contacts at all. In the Slovenian sample 80 % of the subjects had sexual intercourse, 12 % had experience with kissing or petting and 8 % did not have any sexual contacts at all.

Table 1 displays prevalence rates of sexual victimization for the two national samples. In addition, criminally relevant incidents are listed separately to show the magnitude of the reported sexual offences.

Almost 91 % of the German and 86.3 % of the Slovenian subjects reported on at least one case of sexual approach that the subject did not want or that could be classified as a sexual offence with criminal relevance. Significant differences of the prevalence rates between Germany and Slovenia in the present study could be found for the following incidents: Twenty-eight percent of the German but only 13 % of the Slovenian women said they had sexual intercourse because there was no way to stop the partner ($p < .000$). Exhibition or masturbation occurred to 40 % of the German and to 48 % of the Slovenian sample ($p < .000$). Thirty-three percent of the German and 23 % of the Slovenian students reported on obscene phone-calls ($p < .001$). Twelve percent of the German and 27 % of the Slovenian women received obscene messages via internet or mobile phone ($p < .000$). Eleven percent (Germany) and 6 % (Slovenia) were coerced to sexual intercourse by verbal pressure at least once in their life ($p < .01$). The German students reported significantly more frequently on stalking than the Slovenian students did (58.1 % compared to 40.9 %, $p < .000$). The Slovenian women on the other hand reported significantly more frequently on attempted sexual intercourse influenced by alcohol or drugs (20.5 % compared to 16.8 %, $p < .01$). Attempted sexual intercourse with force or threat occurred to 9.5 % of the Slovenian and 5.5 % of the German sample ($p < .01$). Thirty-nine percent of the Slovenian women reported on unwanted attempts of sexual contact by a man, but only 24.6% of the German did so ($p < .000$).

In both countries approximately forty percent reported on unwanted touching of breasts or genitals. Sexual harassment through misuse of authority (by a superior at work or a teacher at school/university) was cited by 1 % only.

In a next step, only criminally relevant sexual contacts were analysed. It ought to be mentioned, however, that no information was gathered on whether the subject reported the incident to the police and whether the incident was prosecuted. The method was as follows: Items 11 and 12 refer to different ways of sexual coercion and were thus put together. Item 9 covers attempted rape. Item 8 refers to attempted sexual intercourse influenced by alcohol or drugs. Since it remains unclear if the victim was completely helpless due to the intoxication, attempted rape was estimated twice, first without and then with taking into account item 8. The same approach was chosen for rape: item 10 (rape) was first analysed with item 7 (sexual intercourse influenced by alcohol or drugs) and then without item 7. Eleven percent of the German and 12 % of the Slovenian students were a victim of sexual intimidation at least once. Six percent of the German and nine percent of the Slovenian women were a victim of attempted rape. Including the influence of alcohol or drugs the prevalence rate increases to 20 % (Germany) and 25 % (Slovenia) respectively. Two percent of the German sample were rape victims without and 6% with influence of drugs or alcohol. In Slovenia one percent reported on a rape without and 5 % with influence of drugs or alcohol. The victimization rate for criminally relevant incidents is 45 % for German and 54 % for Slovenian women ($p < .01$). The influence of intoxication taken into account 53 % of the German and 60.5 % of the Slovenian sample were a victim of criminally relevant sexual assaults ($p < .01$). These numbers include exhibitionism. If both exhibitionism and the influence of drugs and alcohol is omitted, prevalence rates decrease to 13 % for Germany and 17 % for Slovenia (n.s.). Omitting only exhibitionism the rates fall to 26 % (Germany) and 32 % (Slovenia) ($p < .01$).

Prevalence rates for rape and sexual coercion in the German crime statistic range between 7.6 (1996) and 10.6 (2003) officially recorded cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

The prevalence rates found in this study are significantly higher than the official numbers of reported offences. Thus hypothesis 1 can be confirmed: There is a considerable dark field of sexual victimization.

With regard to the victim-perpetrator relationship following results could be found: rape, sexual intercourse with force or threat or because it was hopeless to stop the man occurred in most of the cases in close relationships. This was true for both countries. Sexual intercourse influenced by alcohol or drugs was coerced mainly by men the victim did not know very well, such as colleagues or remote friends. In contrast, milder forms of sexual assaults and sexual harassment were committed by strangers in the first place. In sum, hypothesis 2 can be confirmed for both countries in the present sample. There is however a tendency that the German women are more often a victim of an intimate partner than Slovenian women are (*see table 2*). Sixty-three percent of the Slovenian but 80 % of the German students reported on sexual intercourse with their partner because it was hopeless to stop him; sexual intercourse with verbal pressure of the partner occurred in 77 % of the Slovenian and 41 % of the German subjects.

DISCUSSION

Since an identical methodological approach was chosen for both Germany and Slovenia, a direct comparison of the results in the two countries is possible. One of the most important findings of this trans-national study is that experiences with one or the other form of sexual harassment is part of daily experience in societies with particular cultural background: seventy-nine percent of the German and 74% of the Slovenian subjects were victims of milder forms of sexual harassment and assaults. And after all, 13% of the German and 17% of the Slovenian women became victim of severe sexual assaults being at the same time criminally relevant. All incidents included that are supposedly criminal relevant the victimization rate of the present sample increases to 53% for the German and to 61% for the Slovenian sample. This finding is supported by results of the United Nations surveys on crime trends (United Nations 1992), an international victim survey study including Germany and Slovenia according to which countries of Eastern Europe (i.e. Slovenia) exhibited higher victimization rates than "developed countries" (Germany).

Sexual offences are likely to express sexual conflicts or a particular understanding of gender roles influenced or determined by socialisation and understanding in a culture (Harten 1995, p. 10). Since most of the severe offences are committed by intimate partners more attention should be drawn to this aspect. The active part might still be ascribed to men rather than to women, whereas women still are expected to take the passive part. Even though it is claimed in modern societies that this is an outdated point of view it can be assumed that these attitudes are traditionally embodied in a way that they are still effective. Studies on the attitude towards victims of sexual offences also show that traditional gender role stereotypes and rape myths are still deeply internalised (Kury et al. 2002a; 2002b; 2003).

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Sexual victimization prevalence of female students in Germany (G) and Slovenia (S): victim-offender-relationship (%)

Incidents	Total prevalence rate		Significance	Perpetrator:*												relative S	
	G	S**		Intimate partner		Friend, colleague		acquaintance		stranger		G	S				
				G	S	G	S	G	S	G	S						
<i>Total</i>	90,7	86,3															
1 Misunderstanding	43,3	36,0	p<.001	36,8	22,8	33,8	27,5	50,4	52,1	9,0	12,5	2,0					
2 SI and saying things he didn't want to say	15,5	12,6	n.s.	50,0	41,9	33,3	28,8	27,1	28,3	2,1	4,7	1,0					
3 SI because hopeless to stop him	27,7	12,5	p<.000	80,0	62,6	12,9	19,8	14,1	16,6	0,0	4,3	0,0					
4 SI because hopeless to stop him	11,0	6,4	p<.01	76,5	40,8	11,8	19,4	11,8	28,6	2,9	9,2	2,0					
5 Petting with verbal pressure	15,2	16,5	n.s.	46,8	24,8	27,2	30,7	42,6	39,4	4,3	11,0	2,8					
6 SI influenced by drugs/alcohol	5,8	4,5	n.s.	33,3	16,2	22,2	25,0	50,0	48,5	0,0	17,6	0,0					
7 Attempted SI influenced by drugs/alcohol	16,8	20,5	p<.01	9,6	10,4	30,8	33,1	67,3	57,5	11,5	17,2	0,3					
8 Attempted SI with force or threat	5,5	9,3	p<.01	17,6	17,6	17,6	23,9	47,1	36,6	23,5	28,2	2,8					
9 SI with force or threat	1,6	1,3	n.s.	40,0	35,0	0,0	5,0	40,0	25,0	20,0	35,0	5,0					
10 Other forms of sexual behavior with force	1,9	1,8	n.s.	33,3	32,3	0,0	22,6	50,0	25,8	16,7	9,7	12,9					
11 Attempted petting with force or threat	10,0	11,5	n.s.	16,1	10,6	22,6	22,8	38,7	39,4	32,3	31,1	6,1					
12 Petting with force or threat	4,9	4,1	n.s.	20,0	13,6	13,3	19,7	33,3	42,4	33,3	21,2	9,1					
13 Sexual touching	40,7	38,8	n.s.	8,0	7,6	19,2	22,8	29,6	46,0	57,6	42,0	5,6					
14 Exhibitionism/masturbation	39,9	48,1	p<.000	26,0	15,1	4,1	7,3	8,1	6,8	75,6	77,5	1,2					
15 Sexual harassment w/ punishment	1,0	1,3	n.s.	***													
16 Sexual harassment w/ reward	1,0	3,1	n.s.	***													
17 Date	23,5	28,0	n.s.	6,8	12,6	49,3	42,1	46,6	45,5	30,1	24,8	0,2					
18 Obscene phone calls	33,3	22,6	p<.001	2,9	2,9	1,9	9,1	2,9	13,9	91,3	79,6	0,0					
19 Obscene messages at Internet/mobile phone	11,6	27,1	p<.000	8,3	1,7	2,8	6,2	2,8	10,3	91,7	87,2	0,2					

Incidents	Total prevalence rate		Significance	Perpetrator:*											
	Intimate partner			Friend, colleague		acquaintance		stranger		relative					
	G	S**		G	S	G	S	G	S	G	S	G	S		
20 Stalking	58,1	40,9	p<.000	1,7	2,8	2,8	3,3	7,8	9,4	97,2	89,4	0,5			
21 Unwanted sexual contact	24,6	39,1	p<.000	15,8	4,3	23,7	10,6	34,2	37,5	46,1	63,5	0,5			
23 Mild victimization (nur Nr. 2, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)	78,5	72,6	n.s.	14,8	13,6	26,2	26,1	27,9	38,1	87,3	81,6	0,7			
24 Moderate victimization (mind. Nr. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14)	73,3	69,5	n.s.	48,7	26,1	23,7	27,7	36,4	44,0	58,8	64,5	3,8			
25 Severe victimization (mind. Nr. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	12,5	16,9	n.s.	15,4	16,5	20,5	23,2	46,2	42,3	30,8	33,0	5,2			
26 Criminally relevant total (Nr. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14)	52,7	58,3	p<.01	26,8	18,6	15,9	19,5	32,9	31,9	62,2	67,8	2,3			
27 Criminally relevant total without alcohol (Nr. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14)	45,0	52,5	p<.01	25,7	18,0	8,6	12,8	16,4	18,1	71,4	72,7	2,4			
28 Criminally relevant without exhibitionism (Nr. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	26,0	30,0	p<.01	18,5	14,5	28,4	30,0	61,7	54,7	19,8	28,4	3,1			
29 Criminally relevant without exhibitionism, alcohol (Nr. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	12,5	16,9	n.s.	15,4	16,5	20,5	23,2	46,2	42,3	30,8	33,0	5,2			
32 Sexual coercion (Nr. 10 + 11)	10,6	11,6	n.s.	18,2	12,2	21,2	22,7	39,4	36,4	30,3	23,6	5,8			
33 Attempted rape (Nr. 8)	5,5	9,5		17,6	17,6	17,6	23,9	47,1	36,6	23,5	28,2	2,8			
34 Attempted rape, use of alcohol (Nr. 7 + 8)	19,6	22,5	n.s.	13,1	13,1	27,9	30,7	65,6	53,9	16,4	22,4	1,3			
35 Rape (Nr. 9)	1,6	1,3	n.s.	40,0	35,0	0,0	5,0	40,0	25,0	20,0	35,0	5,0			
36 Rape with use of alcohol (Nr. 6 + 9)	6,4	5,2	n.s.	35,0	19,8	20,0	22,2	45,0	44,3	5,0	21,3	1,2			

* due to multiple responses sums over 100 % may occur.

** means for the first category.

*** Sexual harassment with punishment or reward: rates were too low to be considered.

**Table 2: Sexual victimization of female students in Germany and Slovenia (%):
Total prevalence and victim-offender-relationship (mean)**

Incidents	Total prevalence rate		Victim-offender-relationship: mean*		Significance
	Germany	Slovenia	Germany	Slovenia	
1 Misunderstanding	43,3	36,3	2,4	2,5	n.s.
2 SI**and saying things he didn't want to say	15,5	12,6	1,8	1,9	n.s.
3 SI because hopeless to stop him	27,7	12,5	1,5	1,7	n.s.
4 SI with verbal pressure	11,0	6,4	1,5	2,0	p<.01
5 Petting with verbal pressure	15,2	16,5	2,2	2,4	n.s.
6 SI influenced by drugs/alcohol	5,8	4,5	2,1	2,7	p<.001
7 Attempted SI influenced by drugs/alcohol	16,8	20,5	2,7	2,7	n.s.
8 Attempted SI with force or threat	5,5	9,3	2,6	2,7	n.s.
9 SI with force or threat	1,6	1,3	2,4	2,6	n.s.
10 Other forms of sexual behavior with force	1,9	1,8	2,5	2,1	p<.01
11 Attempted petting with force or threat	10,0	11,5	2,9	2,9	n.s.
12 Petting with force or threat	4,9	4,1	2,8	2,8	n.s.
13 Sexual touching	40,7	38,8	3,2	3,1	n.s.
14 Exhibitionism/masturbation	39,9	48,1	3,3	3,4	n.s.
17 Date	23,5	28,0	2,6	2,7	n.s.
18 Obscene phone calls	33,3	22,6	3,8	3,6	n.s.
19 Obscene messages at Internet/mobile phone	11,6	27,1	3,7	3,8	n.s.
20 Stalking	58,1	40,9	3,8	3,8	n.s.
21 Unwanted sexual contact	24,6	39,1	3,0	3,4	p<.001

Note: * mean: 1 = intimate partner, 2 = friend/colleague, 3 = acquaintance, 4 = stranger

** SI = Sexual intercourse