

Violent Rapists: How Often Should They go to Prison

Abstract

This paper looks at the relationship between gender of respondent, age of respondent, and last level of education completed by respondents, and how those factors affected their opinions of how often violent rapists should be sent to prison. To find these relationships, I used information from the “Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment in Vermont: Public Opinion About an Experiment with Restorative Justice” survey. These data were collected from 601 randomly selected adult Vermont residents. My research found a statistically significant relationship between level of education and how often violent rapists should be sent to prison, and when controlling for gender, the male respondents showed a statistically significant relationship between gender and how often respondents felt violent rapists should be sent to prison.

Key Words: Attitudes, Rapist, Prison

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The number of rapes and assaults has greatly increased on college campuses across the country. It is generally believed that these types of attacks happen only to women who aren't paying attention to their surroundings or who put themselves in a vulnerable situation. However, this often is not the case. There have been attacks on brightly lit streets, when there were other people around, and there was even one attack in a library bathroom. Very often, rapes are committed by people with whom the victim is acquainted. These are just a few reasons why there should be more studies done on punishments for rapists. This paper will look at the views of randomly selected people from Vermont on the subject. It will attempt to find a relationship between age, gender, and level of education of respondents and how often they feel rapists should be sent to prison. The author of this paper was unable to find any previous research on this subject directly, but there was ample research that showed why the author believes her hypotheses will be supported.

Literature Review

Fernandez and Marshall (2003) wrote in "Victim Empathy, Social Self-Esteem, and Psychopathy in Rapists" about a study they performed comparing the responses of 27 incarcerated rapists with the responses of 27 incarcerated nonsexual offenders to attempt to find a relationship between empathy, self-esteem, and psychopathy in rapists. They developed the Rapist Empathy Measure for their study in order to measure deficits in empathy of their respondents. Fernandez and Marshall (2003) set up three types of women: a woman who had been disfigured in a car accident, a woman who had been

sexually assaulted, and the offenders' own victims. The researchers believed the rapists would show less empathy toward the women than the non-rapists. In addition, they hypothesized the rapists would show significantly less empathy toward their own victims than the other women. Finally, they believed the rapists would have less self-esteem and display more psychopathy than the non-rapists. They found that, unexpectedly, the rapists didn't have less empathy than the nonsexual offenders for the first two types of women. However, the rapists did show much less empathy toward their own victims as expected. The researchers were also unable to find any relationship between empathy and self-esteem or psychopathy. They suggested in their conclusion that a rapist's suppression of empathy toward their own victim was caused by a cognitive distortion that may be able to be treated by psychiatric treatment.

Marshall and Moulden (2001) also studied victim empathy in their study, "Hostility Toward Women and Victim Empathy in Rapists." They examined this relationship based on the responses of 32 rapists, 28 nonsexual offenders, and 40 non-offenders, all of which were male. The researchers hypothesized that the rapists lacked empathy toward their own victims, were hostile toward women, and were more hostile and less empathetic toward women than the two comparison groups. Marshall and Moulden (2001) used two measures: the Rapist Empathy Measure (Fernandez and Marshall, 2003) and the Hostility Toward Women Scale (Clark, 1984). The latter measure assessed the respondents' views of women through their answers to 30 true/false statements about women. All participants completed the two Rapist Empathy Measure Surveys followed by the Hostility Toward Women Scale survey in order to prevent the possible bias created by the Hostility Toward Women Scale. The researchers confirmed

all three of their hypotheses. Again, rapists showed less empathy toward their own victims than the other two types of women. Contradictory to the study by Fernandez and Marshall (2003), Marshall and Moulden (2001) found that rapists showed much less empathy toward the women who had been raped by other people than the nonsexual offenders and the non-offenders. Finally, they concluded that the rapists showed considerably more hostility toward women than the other two comparison groups.

Unlike the previous articles, Kocsis, Cooksey, and Irwin (2003) took a different approach to studying rapists in “Psychological Profiling of Offender Characteristics From Crime Behaviors in Serial Rape Offenses.” The researchers wanted to develop an empirical psychological profiling model. In addition, they wanted to identify nondiscriminatory, commonly observable behaviors in all serial rape behavioral patterns. Kocsis, et al (2003) gathers their data from 62 Australian sexual assault cases between the years of 1960 and 1998. They used three stages of analysis in their study. First there was a non-metric analysis of the 53 dichotomous crime scene characteristics used to find the dimensions used for interpretation. In the second stage, the researchers plotted the 62 coordinates they found in their analysis. Lastly, they used to variables from the victim, offender, and victim-offender relationship to fit external property vectors for each of the 53 crime scene characteristics. Their research did result in an empirically coherent model of several rape behaviors. Their model focuses on a central cluster of behaviors common to all serial rape cases. Around the central cluster are four distinct patterns of behavior which correspond to certain offender characteristics. The researchers believed their model would help the general understanding of why serial rapists continue their behavior.

Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth, and Becker (2003) also attempted to develop a profile; however, theirs was of juvenile offenders. In “Juvenile Sex Offenders: Toward the Development of a Typology,” the researchers wanted to show a relationship between developmental risk factors, personality mediators, and familial-environmental moderators. In addition the researchers attempted to establish a juvenile sex-offender typology based on an understanding of these characteristics. All participants in the study were male, juvenile sex-offenders between the ages of 13 and 18. Data was collected on 206 teens, but only 192 cases were considered; six were eliminated because the boys didn’t pass the Ohio Literacy Test, and eight were excluded because the sexual offense did not meet the proper criteria. Both the boys’ records and their responses to survey questions were taken into consideration. These two elements were all evaluated based on three measures: hostile masculinity, egotistical/antagonistic masculinity, and psychosocial deficits. As expected by the researchers, offenders of children showed greater psychosocial functioning deficits than offenders of prepubescent females. They were also found to be less aggressive and more likely to sexually assault victims of whom they are related. The juvenile sex offenders were also less likely to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol and to use a weapon.

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses will be examined in the present research. First, people with higher levels of education are more likely to believe violent rapists should be sent to prison than people with less education. Second, women are more likely to think violent rapists should be sent to prison than men. And finally, controlling for gender, people aged 18-50

are more likely to think that violent rapists should be sent to prison than people aged 51 years and older.

I expected that people with higher levels of education are more likely to feel that violent rapists should be sent to prison because they have been exposed to more educational information throughout their lives. I thought they would demonstrate more victim empathy than those respondents with lower levels of education. Through an education, people are exposed to all the effects and causes of rape. People who aren't as educated are more likely to say it is the woman's fault for wearing provocative clothing or putting herself in a bad position. By placing the blame on the victim, they would be less likely to believe the rapist should be sent to prison.

In addition, I expected women to feel violent rapists should be sent to prison more often than men. This stems completely from the fact that women are the victim of rape almost all of the time. They know how it feels to go out at night and have to worry if someone is going to attack you, or to go to a party and wonder if someone is going to put something in your drink. I would expect that men would be less likely than women to think violent rapists should be sent to prison because they don't have to be careful when they go out at night; men are viewed as stronger by society. In addition there was some previous research that would lead one to the same conclusion. The theory that rapists showed more hostility toward women can be used for hypotheses in which gender is a factor. Hypotheses with gender as a variable were also supported by the theory that stated rapists feel less empathy toward their victims, who are primarily women.

Lastly, I expected younger respondents to feel violent rapists should spend more time in prison than older respondents. Women weren't viewed as equals in society until

during the last few decades. In the 1950s and '60s, a woman's place was in the house, so not many women had voices. People didn't begin to understand what happens when a woman is raped until fairly recently; therefore, making people older and less exposed to rape less likely to feel that rapists should be sent to prison as those who were born after about 1960.

Methods

The survey results used for this research were found in the "Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment in Vermont: Public Opinion About an Experiment with Restorative Justice" survey. Data was collected from 601 adult, Vermont residents through telephone interviews. The respondents were picked at random by random digit dialing; thus, the sample was a probability sample. The interviewers called all 601 respondents from March 15, 1999 through March 21, 1999.

There were two specific purposes of this survey. First, researchers wanted to update the findings of a 1994 study that explored their attitudes and opinions of the changes that took place within the Vermont Department of Corrections and second, to explore the possibility of giving the Reparative Community Boards more responsibility. To explore these topics, respondents were asked a series of trend questions followed by opinion questions about diversion programs and furlough programs. They were asked about overcrowding of prisons, how often offenders were sent to prison versus how often the respondents felt the offenders should be sent to prison, and whether certain crimes had increased or decreased in the past five years. Additionally, each respondent was asked if they or someone they were close to had been a victim of crime and whether that

crime had been violent or not. Finally, they were asked a series of demographic questions.

The demographic questions helped break apart the respondents into groups in order to analyze the data. Fifty percent of the respondents were male; while, the other 49.9% were female. Broken down by education level, 0.2% of the respondents had less than a sixth grade education, 1.8% had between a sixth and eighth grade education, 5.2% had completed some high school, 35.8% had a high school diploma, 20.6% had completed some college, 24.1% were college graduates, and 12.2% had post-graduate schooling. Respondents were also broken down by age. Almost eighteen percent of the respondents were aged 18-29, 50.8% were aged 30-50, 19.4% were aged 51-64, and 12.2% were aged 65 or older. A last demographic variable used was race. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents were white and 2.2% were nonwhite.

This paper will examine how age, gender, and level of education affected respondents' opinions of how often violent rapists were sent to prison. The breakdown of responses to the question "How often should violent rapists be sent to prison?" is as follows: 92.5% of respondents answered every single time, 3.2% almost all of the time, 3.7% most of the time, 0.5% about half of the time, and 0.2% less than half of the time. For purposes of this paper, both level of education and age of the respondents were recoded. The set of answers for level of education was condensed into: less than a high school, some high school, high school graduate, and some college or more. The age groups were condensed into two categories: 18-50 and 51 and older. This made the data much easier to analyze and read.

Findings

Table 1 examined the relationship between a person's level of education and how often they feel violent rapists should be sent to prison. Forty-six and a half percent of respondents with some high school education said violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time with 51.4% of those with a high school diploma, 53.4% of those with some college education, 40.6% of those with a college diploma, and 38.9% of people who had done some post-graduate work answering the same. Seven percent of respondents with some high school education said these rapists should be sent to prison almost all of the time. Thirteen and two-tenths percent of high school graduates answered the same, along with 9.3% of those with some college education, 24.5% of college graduates and 25% of those who had completed some type of post-graduate work. Twenty-seven and nine-tenths percent of respondents who had completed some high school felt violent rapists should be sent to prison most of the time, 14% responded about half of the time, and 4.7% felt they should go to prison less than half of the time. As for those who had graduated high school, 30.2% felt violent rapists should be sent to prison most of the time, 1.7% said about half of the time, and 0.5% answered less than half of the time. Out of those who had completed some college, 35.6% of respondents felt the violent rapists should be sent to prison most of the time, 1.7% half of the time, and 0% responded less than half of the time. As for college graduates, 29.4% felt violent rapists should be sent to prison most of the time, 4.2% half of the time, and 1.4% less than half of the time. Finally, out of those who had completed post-graduate work, 31.9% felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison most of the time, 4.2% half of the time, and 0%

less than half of the time. The relationship between these two variables is statistically significant at the 0.00 level.

Table 1: Contingency table comparing a person's level of education to how often they feel violent rapists should be sent to prison.

How often violent rapists should be sent to prison...	Level of Education				
	Some high school	High school graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post- graduate
Every single time	20 46.5%	109 51.4%	63 53.4%	58 40.6%	28 38.9%
Almost all of the time	3 7.0%	28 13.2%	11 9.3%	35 24.5%	18 25.0%
Most of the time	12 27.9%	64 30.2%	42 35.6%	42 29.4%	23 31.9%
About half of the time	6 14.0%	10 4.7%	2 1.7%	6 4.2%	3 4.2%
Less than half of the time	2 4.7%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	2 1.4%	0 0.0%
Total	43 100.0%	212 100.0%	118 100.0%	143 100.0%	72 100.0%

Table 2 examines the differences in gender and whether males or females feel violent rapists should be sent to prison. Out of the male respondents, 50.0% felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time, 15.3% almost all of the time, 27.2% most of the time, 6.1% about half of the time, and 1.4% less than half of the time. Out of the female respondents, 44.3% felt that these violent rapists should be sent to prison all of the time, 17.4% almost all of the time, 34.6% most of the time, 3.4% about half of the time, and 0.3% less than half of the time. This relationship was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 2: Contingency table comparing gender to how often respondents felt violent rapists should be sent to prison.

How often violent rapists should be sent to prison...	Gender	
	Male	Female
Every single time	147 50.0%	132 44.3%
Almost all of the time	45 15.3%	52 17.4%
Most of the time	80 27.2%	103 34.6%
About half of the time	18 6.1%	10 3.4%
Less than half of the time	4 1.4%	1 0.3%
Total	294 100.0%	298 100.0%

Table 3 examines the relationship between age of respondent and how often respondents felt violent rapists should be sent to prison, controlling for gender. For the male respondents, out of those aged 18-50, 45.3% felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time, 18.7% almost all of the time, 30.0% most of the time, 4.9% about half of the time, and 1.5% less than half of the time. Out of those males aged 51 and older, 60.0% felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time, 7.8% almost all of the time, 22.2% most of the time, 8.9% about half of the time, and 1.1% less than half of the time. This relationship for males was statistically significant at the 0.03 level. As for the females, out of those aged 18-50, 46.5% felt violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time, 16.8% almost all of the time, 33.2% most of the time, 3.5% about half of the time, and 0.0% less than half of the time. As for the female respondents aged 51 and older, 40.4% felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison

every single time, 17.0% almost all of the time, 38.3% most of the time, 3.2% about half of the time, and 1.1% less than half of the time. The results for women were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 3: Contingency tables showing the relationship between age of respondent and how often they felt violent offenders should go to prison, controlling for gender.

Male Respondents:

How often violent rapists should be sent to prison...	Age	
	18-50	51 & older
Every single time	92 45.3%	54 60.0%
Almost all of the time	38 18.7%	7 7.8%
Most of the time	60 30.0%	20 22.2%
About half of the time	10 4.9%	8 8.9%
Less than half of the time	3 1.5%	1 1.1%
Total	203 100.0%	90 100.0%

Female Respondents:

How often violent rapists should be sent to prison...	Age	
	18-50	51 & older
Every single time	94 46.5%	38 40.4%
Almost all of the time	34 16.8%	16 17.0%
Most of the time	67 33.2%	36 38.3%
About half of the time	7 3.5%	3 3.2%
Less than half of the time	0 0.0%	1 1.1%
Total	202 100.0%	94 100.0%

Discussion & Conclusion

My first hypothesis, people with higher levels of education are more likely to believe violent rapists should be sent to prison than people with less education, was not supported. Actually, the data showed support for the opposite conclusion with 46.5% of the people who had only completed some high school responding that violent rapists should be sent to prison every single time and only 38.9% of respondents with post graduate education answering the same. However, virtually none of the respondents who had completed high school felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison less than half of the time. Four and seven tenths percent of those who hadn't completed high school did feel this way. Although my hypothesis was not supported, the relationship between a person's level of education and how often one felt violent rapists should be sent to prison was shown to be significant. I felt this hypothesis was a strong one. I believed people with higher levels of education would have been exposed to more throughout their education thus making them less tolerant of rape. Looking back, I can understand why my results were this way. We are taught in school to be tolerant and that sometimes there are reasons people do the things they do. Those with more experience are more likely to think of situations in all lights and believe in second chances for those who are remorseful, explaining why those with post-graduate education are more likely than those with only some high school education to feel that violent rapists should be sent to prison almost all or most of the time, as opposed to all the time.

My second hypothesis stated that women were more likely to think violent rapists should be sent to prison than men. Again, this was not supported. The results showed

that men and women felt the same way for the most part. The majority of both genders felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison at least most of the time, with very few of either gender feeling that violent rapists should go to prison less than half of the time. I expected results to support my hypothesis because women are the most likely victims of rape; they tend to sympathize more with victims as well. Because men experience rapes much less often, I expected them to not feel as strongly on the subject. These results may have occurred due to people being more educated and exposed to rape and its consequences. Because of all the media exposure rape cases receive, people are more exposed to the effects rape has on its victims. This could be one explanation of my results. Another could be that this survey was taken in Vermont, and New Englanders are typically more conservative than people in other areas of the country. This could explain why a majority of all people felt that violent rapists should be sent to prison.

Lastly, I hypothesized that people aged 18-50 were more likely to think that violent rapists should be sent to prison than those respondents older than 50; I controlled for gender. My results showed a significant relationship for males but not females. The tables demonstrated specification, with the female partial table looking more closely like the overall table. The hypothesis was not supposed by either table. As with gender, when evaluating how the age of the respondent affected their response to how often violent rapists should be sent to prison, age does not seem to be a factor. I felt the younger respondents would feel violent rapists should be sent to prison more often than those older respondents because the younger generation has been exposed to more about rape. In addition, the role of women has changed significantly giving women a voice. Many more women are willing to speak up and report a rape now because we are all

taught it is wrong. Perhaps again, an explanation for the results is that people in New England are more conservative. Another reason for these results could be the media exposure; people of all ages watch the news.

I don't believe that this Vermont survey received as accurate results as are desired from survey research. I don't feel the group who conducted this survey did so completely. First, there were only 601 respondents. In order to achieve desirable results, it is ideal to have at least 2000 respondents to reach a +/- 3% level of confidence. Additionally, only people in Vermont were surveyed. This is not ideal to generalize to the entire United States population. Some areas of the country are more conservative or more liberal than other areas. Regarding the survey questions, many were ambiguous and difficult to understand. For example, I used the question that asked how often respondents felt violent rapists should be sent to prison. The predominant response was at least most of the time with a majority of people responding "every single time." Because too many respondents agreed, I think a contingency question that asked how long the sentence should be for violent rapists. This would help analyze the data better. The survey could've also asked a question about sexual preference. Vermont is one state that allows gay marriages, so one would assume that the gay population would be larger than average. Gay men are a likely victim of rape behind women. This is another variable that could've contributed to the results.

There is much room for improvement for future research. There should be studies done on the effectiveness of prison as a punishment for violent rapists. It may find that another form of rehabilitation, such as psychological treatment may help the rapists overcome their problems. I do feel the penalties should be harsh for rapists, especially

those who are violent. Rape affects its victims in many physical and emotional ways. It is important to continue research for the victims. They deserve the right to regain their lives and sanity. Perhaps some research in the future should focus on these victims and how they feel about their rapists. In fact, they are the only people who have experienced rape and can say from more than just observation and news stories what a rapist is capable of. It would be beneficial to do a study of reformed former rapists as well. They would be able to best tell why they committed the rape and what helped them overcome the desire to rape again. However future research is conducted, one thing is sure, it must be done. Rape is a serious issue that can leave its victims emotionally scarred for life. If we as a society don't try to help these victims, we are in a sense allowing the rape to continue.

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