Forensic Implications of PTSD Suffered by Victims of Internet Dating Assault

Sakina Spears, M.P.A. & Kristine M. Jacquin, Ph.D.

FIELDING Graduate University

Introduction

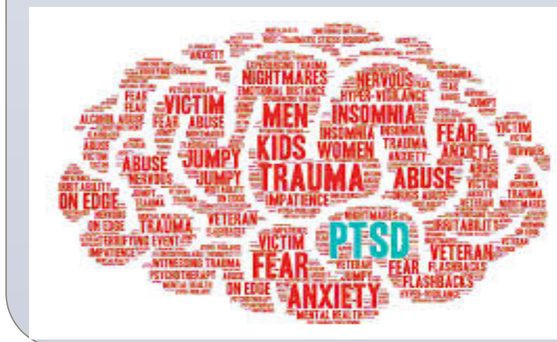
- As technology use has continued to grow, smartphones have become more necessary tools to complete daily tasks; this includes dating.
- The emergence of smartphone dating apps and the ability to date online also exposes an area for vulnerability.
- Choi, Wong & Fong (2016) studied over six hundred students in four universities and found that users of dating apps were more likely to also be victims of sexual abuse with a 1-year prevalence of 12.4%.
- Of every 1000 sexual assaults, only 230 cases are reported to the police, and only 4.6 rapists will be incarcerated, which leaves approximately 995 assailants who will walk free (DOJ, 2017; FBI, 2017).
- Sexual assault leaves lasting effects on victims.
- In addition, research shows that Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) believe that law enforcement and the criminal justice system contribute to rape victims' distress and revictimization (Maier, 2012).
- The increased chance of sexual assault coupled with the low reporting statistics reflects a need for further research to make online dating safer. Intimate intrusions that have been facilitated by dating apps have effects that should be further studied (Gillett, 2018).

Forensic Implications

- Despite the increase in the prevalence of sexual assault by online predators, cases of sexual assault remain under reported and under prosecuted. The availability of technology has increased the ability of a predator to hide their identity and reoffend in the same manner.
- Few studies have been conducted to measure the prevalence of internet sexual assault as well as revictimization.
- Kunst, Winkel & Bogaerts (2010) explain that many victims still go unidentified.
- Forensic psychologists have the ability to further evaluate the relationship between the increasing prevalence in sex crimes amongst internet dating applications and revictimization issues with law enforcement.

Future Research

- With additional research there will be many additional ways to decrease future prevalence of sexual assault (Qi, Gevonden & Shalev, 2016).
- Reports of sexual crimes are not reflective of the actual frequency of occurrence. The percentage of perpetrators who are actually convicted and incarcerated is less than 5% (DOJ, 2017).
- It is important that more research is done to further understand the relationship between internet dating and sexual assault in an effort to decrease the chances of revictimization.
- Additionally, there is a dearth of research examining PTSD and online dating trauma.
- Research shows that a victim's emotions experienced immediately following the incident predict the development of PTSD (Kunst, Winkel & Bogaerts, 2010); more research is needed on this subject.



Discussion

- Sexual assault is a global health problem (Peeters et al., 2019), made worse by online dating.
- A unique problem that manifests with online dating is the ease of being anonymous, which increases the means available for a sexually coercive individual to hide behind internet accessibility and visibility.
- PTSD experienced by victims of sexual assault is further perpetuated by revictimization.
- With additional research, practitioners can better treat PTSD within this group.
- Additional research can also better equip law enforcement officers to better handle questioning related to the sexual trauma or assault.
- The ideal outcome of research would be to create evidence-based prevention of dating violence while limiting the long-term negative health consequences of sexual assault.

References

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