

## Conceptualizing Male Sexual Coercion

Male sexual coercion, that is the coercion of males into unwanted sexual experiences, has not received the same amount of attention as the sexual coercion of females. An example of this lack of attention to male sexual coercion is that the most commonly used definition of sexual coercion used by demographers only applies to women: “an individual woman’s lack of choice to pursue other options [to avoid sexual interactions] without severe social and physical consequence” (Heise et al. 1995). The World Health Organization’s recent large-scale study on sexual violence only captured violence against women (World Health Organization 2013).

The social scripts for males in the area of heterosexual sexual contact are in fact extremely narrow, with a common expectation that men adhere to them without deviation. The dominant heterosexual script for men is of the sexually voracious male, always eager for sex as he is expected to possess an insatiable sexual appetite. Any deviation from these scripts risks exposing the male to ridicule from his partner or peers through threats to his sexual identity, social exclusion, emasculation and possible violence from peers. Expectations of male sexual dominance are fed by men’s higher social status; the lower social status that women inhabit in almost all parts of the world is linked to expectations of male sexual dominance of the female gender.

Reasons that the sexual contact may be unwanted include fear of his partner including the fear of what his partner might say to him or others about his masculinity if he doesn’t follow the social script of the sexually priapic male, fear of getting caught, fear of the consequences (pregnancy/STIs), lack of knowledge about what he is expected to do in the sexual interaction, fear of breaking a social or religious prescript, fear of not being able to obtain and maintain an erection, fear of not knowing how to use a condom, fear of not being able to anticipate or control ejaculation, and simply not wanting to have sex at that time with that partner. Another reason for not wanting to engage in heterosexual sexual contact may be because of a homosexual sexual orientation yet perceived pressure to adhere to heteronormative sexual scripts may pressure males into unwanted heterosexual contact in an effort to possibly prove their heterosexuality to themselves and to their peers. Coercion can also take the form of emotional blackmail, being forced when drunk or drugged, or being culturally conscribed (e.g. dancing boys in Afghanistan (Afghanistan's dancing boys 2013)).

Previous research suggests that the link between unwanted sexual experiences and negative social, psychological and sexual health outcomes for young men are similar to those of women: sexually transmitted infections, sexual dysfunction, and psychological disorders including anger, guilt, fear, and depression (Jejeebhoy, 2003 1756 /id; Caceres, 1997 4010 /id; World Health Organization, 2002 4012 /id). Men who experienced a forced sexual debut were more likely to report multiple sexual partners, an indicator of risk (Somse et al. 1993; Patel and Andrew 2001). Their school performance and continuation have also been shown to suffer (Mulugeta et al. 1998). Male victims have also been found to have psychological concerns associated with their masculinity and sexuality (Population Council 2008). One of the reasons why it is important to examine this social phenomenon is that men who have experienced sexual coercion and possible feelings of powerlessness may be more likely to perpetrate sexual coercion upon women in the future in an effort to reclaim their masculine identity and feelings of control (Lisak et al. 1996).

The sexual coercion of males takes different forms than that the sexual coercion of females (Moore et al. 2012). Sexual coercion of males can take two forms, one form being coercion that is more sociologically constructed (taunts, threats to his masculinity, etc.) and another is invasive unwanted physical contact. In the former situation, while he is experiencing coercion, he may also be perpetrating

unwanted physical contact on someone else whereas in the later situation, he is the one being victimized by the physically invasive unwanted physical contact. Documented forms of coercion of males include not only unwanted sexual contact including receptive anal intercourse, penile-vagina intercourse, forced masturbation of the perpetrator, receptive oral sex or forced masturbation of the victim perpetrated through threats or acts of violence or misused authority; they also include examples of sociologically constructed forms of coercion including peer pressure, fears/threats of emasculation, threats of withdrawing love, and sexual enticement, i.e. women undressing before the man, touching or commenting on his sex organs or taunting the man's virility (Muehlenhard and Cook 1988; Struckman-Johnson C.J. and Struckman-Johnson 1998; Ajuwon et al. 2001; Marsten 2005).

The frequency with which males may act in response to sexual coercion may in fact be more common than previously measured due to an absence of a conceptual framework in which to study and measure male sexual coercion. Yet measuring sexual coercion across cultures presents a set of challenges related to the fact that sexual scripts for males as well as concepts about individual autonomy may determine whether males identify a sexual situation as unwanted. Recognizing these gaps in this area of work, this paper proposes both a definition as well as a conceptual framework for understanding, identifying and possibly categorizing male sexual coercion.

We propose the following definition of male sexual coercion: Sexual behavior which the male engages in out of fear of the consequences if he does not engage in it. He may act as the instigator/perpetrator when motivated out of peer pressure or threats or when he is not psychologically capacitated to act consensually. He may be victimized when he has been psychologically coerced (for example, when abuse of power is present), pressured, seduced or physically overpowered. It is not common that male sexual coercion occurs through physical force or restraint. Not all unwanted sexual interactions are coercive, but all coercive situations are unwanted.

The Conceptual Framework we propose is an ecological framework which incorporates both social/cultural aspects (such as strict sexual scripts for males) as well as psychosocial elements (such as socioeconomic insecurity) as factors for increased risk to male sexual coercion. We then consider the attendant proximate determinants such as peer pressure or threats for instances in which the male is, in fact, the perpetrator. In instances when he is the victim of unwanted physical contact, we consider elements such as being in a drunk or drugged state and persistent coercion. We then consider the consequences of these actions and experiences, considering both instances in which the male has acted – such as depression and social disengagement - and those in which he has not which may result in ridicule and social exclusion (see Figure 1).

We hope that by formalizing a framework in which to study male sexual coercion, greater research attention will be paid to this phenomenon and that the data gathered across different contexts will be measured in a more consistent way so as to increase comparability. Since there is a link between being a victim of unwanted sexual contact and being a perpetrator, there is need to address male sexual coercion. In this way, addressing male sexual coercion is critical to ending the cycle of sexual victimization for both men and women. Therefore, this understudied phenomenon demands public health attention.

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Figure 1. An evolving conceptual framework of male sexual coercion

