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Investigating Sexual Violence and Abuse

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This special issue brings together emerging research concerning the issue of *Sexual Violence and Abuse* from around the world. The importance of pulling together research that explores the central topic of sexual violence and abuse is more pressing than ever and having a collection of work using different methodological approaches to unique samples previously unexplored contributes significantly to our understanding towards this type of offence.

One example of the international approach of this special issue can be seen in the work of Yokota and colleagues from Japan who have used multiple correspondence analysis towards the linkage of crimes. Their study builds on a modest but emerging area of research in the field of case linkage and draws on a sample of 720 incidents of serial sexual assault cases from rape, to what they refer to as, forced indecency. Their study found significant differences between linked pairs and unlinked pairs and good accuracy in linking crimes in cases where there was variation within an offenses committed by the same individual.

Building on this international focus the work of Andrew Day, Elli Darwinkel and James Vess uses the classic investigative psychology approach of examining offender characteristics of registered sexual offenders in Australia. Their work aimed to determine the potential barriers that exist in regards to the reporting of this type of crime. The authors present descriptive data from a sample of registered sexual offenders within an Australian jurisdiction and explores the significance of this aspect of information on the identification of persons of interest in active investigations of sexual assault. They report that the development and delivery of responses to sexual offenders both nationally and internationally are informed by a clear understanding of the population under consideration.

Following on from this is the work of Hammond, Ioannou and Fewster who examined myths related to male sexual assault in a UK sample. The central finding of their study was that individuals without any prior knowledge of male sexual victimisation tended to disagree more with male rape myths than those who had knowledge of this form of victimisation. Furthermore, in regards to reporting of offences their work also found that participants were more likely to report offences as victims if the offender was male.

One sample that has been consistently over looked within research on sexual assault, who remain one of the most vulnerable populations, are homeless youth. The meta analysis completed by Jessica Heerde and Sheryl Hemphill tackles this very issue. They report that substance use, exposure to violence and crime, childhood abuse, general sexual behaviour and peer's antisocial and sexual behaviour were unique factors in contributing to the risk of sexual victimisation, engagement in sexual risk behaviour and engagement in survival sex.

Following on from the examination of risk factors is the work of Marianne Hester and Sarah-Jane Lilley who explored the progression of sexual assault cases through the criminal justice system from initial investigation to presentation in court. Their work found that the relationship between victim and offender, vulnerability of victim and evidential issues play a role in the attrition and trajectories of the cases. However they varied depending on the nature of the cases such as intimate domestic violence, acquaintance sexual assault or historical child sexual abuse.

The special issue closes with the work of Maria Ioannou and colleagues who examined victim, offender and offence characteristics of male on male sexual assault. Their systematic review revealed that both victims and offenders are likely to be young and heterosexual and that offenders in general act alone and are acquainted with the victim. The central finding is that most of the offences are violent in nature.

To conclude, this special issue represents an important collection of papers tackling the issue of sexual violence and abuse, with an international focus and across a range of methodologies. I would like to personally thank the authors of the papers for their outstanding contributions and also the reviewers who provided timely and constructive feedback.