

# Date Rape: Prevalence and Attitudes among Portuguese University Students

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of date rape among Portuguese students as well as to assess their attitudes towards this phenomenon and explore differences between genders.

**Methods:** A sample of 1013 (697 women and 316 men) University Students, from Portuguese Universities, answered the College Date Rape Attitudes Survey (a 17-item questionnaire). The prevalence of date rape in this sample was also measured with a questionnaire, assessing if the participants had ever been victims or perpetrators.

**Results:** The results showed that in general there are high levels of disagreement regarding Date rape, which indicates that attitudes towards this type of violence are very negative. Nevertheless, statistically significant differences between sexes were found ( $p < 0.001$ ) which indicates that men have lower levels of disagreement when compared with women. The prevalence of date rape in this sample was 4.3% and majority of victims were females (87%).

**Conclusion:** Attitudes towards Date rape among Portuguese University Students are very negative. The prevalence of date rape in this study is significantly lower when compared to other countries. This may be related with the fact that in Portugal the Students are not confined to a restricted study area (College Campuses).

**Keywords:** Date Rape; Prevalence; Attitudes; Portuguese students

## Introduction

The term "Date rape" refers to the non-consensual sexual activity among people who know each other, and meet in a dating context. In this type of rape the aggressor has to know the victim, however, he may know her only on a platonic or sexual level. This particular type of sexual assault takes place during a social interaction between the rapist and the victim, hence the name date rape. The assault may be planned or spontaneous, and it can be described as an acquaintance rape, as it involves non-consensual sex between two people who are dating, whether it is a first date or an established relationship [1]. It is estimated that the majority of rapes are caused by someone the victim knows [2], and past research has shown that date rape is a crime that still happens with surprising frequency, particularly on University and College campuses [3]. In fact, about 80% of all the rapes that happen in University and College campuses are date rapes [4].

The majority of date rape victims are women, especially teenagers and young adults, which represent a highly vulnerable group [5]. About 71% of these women are between the ages of 14 and 17, and 22% between the ages of 19 and 24 [6].

In a North American study of 2006, 27% of the students reported that they had already had some type of forced sex [7]. Also in the U.S.A, a study from 2007 reported that about 23% of women and 7% of the men had already had one or more experiences of non-consensual sex [8]. In another study, exclusively with a female population, 21% of young college students had suffered date rape attempts, and 13% had already been victims [9]. In the U.S.A there are estimations that one woman out of 4 has been a victim of rape during their college studies [10].

Although, this is a transversal problem to all societies, date rape still remains under-recognized and relatively under-studied in Portugal. Nevertheless there are some studies on the subject. For instance, a 2003 study [11] verified that one in every four Portuguese university students had been a victim of a non-consensual sexual experience. Kissing, caressing and sexual coercion were the most frequent types

of aggression, usually resulting of the use of pressure (through verbal arguments). About 27% of them stated that they had been victims of non-consensual sexual relations.

There are several, risks factors from which potential victims should know to protect themselves, one of which is alcohol consumption. Alcohol is a disinhibiting substance which influences one's self-perception; thus, a drunk person has very little notion of the danger, becoming much more vulnerable to rape situations [12]. Wenger and Bornstein, state that some 40% of all date rape victims, and 55% of all the aggressors, were under the effect of alcohol [13], confirming that it is a risk factor for both victims and aggressors. After excessive alcohol consumption, factors such as the gender attributes and the type of clothes the victim is wearing, gain more relevance, increasing the probability of occurrence of date rape [14].

Date Rape is a sexuality-related, complex phenomenon. Sexuality is still a very sensitive subject, and considered a taboo, being addressed with difficulty by our society. Thus, myths regarding sexuality influence the way people see Date rape and, consequently, the way they assign the blame. Like other types of violence, Date Rape is related to gender-based violence [15], although specific to a pattern of aggression, that is rarely recognized as sexually abusive or criminal [1]. Putman's [16] study showed that individuals (in general) tend to have less empathy, and attribute more guilt to the date rape victims. This type of prejudice may induce, in these victims, the feeling that they are somewhat

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responsible for the rape [17]. Consequently, the aggressor feels less guilty and punished whereas the victim assumes more responsibility [2].

Furthermore, the victims of acquaintance rape (when the victim knew the aggressor) tend to be seen as, and feel guiltier than other victims that are raped by strangers [18]. Also, in situations where women consume alcohol and/or drugs, voluntarily and before the rape, society tends to diminish the aggressor's guilt, and to attribute more responsibility to the victim [19]. It was also verified, that judges might be influenced by this information: when date rape victims consume any drugs or alcohol before the rape occurs, they tend to be considered less victimized, which may lead to a non-criminalization of the aggressor [13]. In these situations, many women think they could have done something to prevent the rape, not seeing themselves entirely as victims [20]. This is the reason why many cases are not reported to the police, making the count of the actual number of rapes probably much higher.

Regarding the aggressors, they are mostly men; usually they do not identify themselves as aggressors, tending to view their actions as an occasional sexual relation [21]. Men in general have higher tolerance, and more permissive attitudes, towards the idea of Date rape [22] which, in turn, may promote its occurrence [4]. The gender appears, once more, as an influencing factor. Thus, it promotes this type of attitude, and is strongly related to feelings of guilt shown to many victims [23].

In this sense, some studies suggest that one in every four men agrees that most of the times women provoke rape [24], 74% of men believe that about 50% of all alleged rapes are invented by women, and that most of time women tend to lie or to exaggerate in these claims [25]. In fact, many rapists think that women were actually interested in having sexual intercourse with them [26].

Sawyer et al. [25] suggested that such results arise due to the humans by their nature of always trying to diminish their own guilt, and also due to diffuse communication. The author described this diffuse communication between men and women, when on a date: women tend to determine the intentions of the men they have just met, whereas men characterize women as dishonest, giving diffuse messages and hiding their intentions [25]. It is due to this type of communication that many men have the notion that when women say no to sexual intercourse they really mean maybe. Many men think that women are not truthful, and that they really want to get sexually involved on these dates.

The most tolerant people towards date rape tend to have major difficulties in whether a rape really occurred, are more permissive, normally have little sexual knowledge, and tend to blame the situation and the society rather than the aggressor [27].

Therefore, prevention is very important to reduce this problem. Research shows that college students who had access to prevention programs demonstrated a higher sensitivity towards the problem, and developed a stronger awareness regarding date rape. These changes are both emotional and cognitive [28], and appear to have a more positive effect in men than in women [29].

Taking into consideration all the literature explored here, it was our goal to study the date rape phenomenon in the Portuguese university students' population, aiming to determine the prevalence and attitudes towards date rape, as well as to assess differences in attitudes when comparing men and women.

## Methods

### Participants

In this study we used a convenience sample of 1013 students which was considered saturated because all groups of universities and colleges in Portugal were considered. 697 were female students (69%) and 316 were male students (31%). All participants were attending a university degree, and the majority were heterosexual (96%). The mean age was 23 years old (ranging from 17 to 56, and SD = 8.79 years).

### Instruments

Attitudes towards date rape were assessed using the College Date Rape Attitudes' Survey (CDRAS) [30]. The CDRAS includes 17 items that measure attitudes related to date rape, in the context of heterosexual college dating. All items on the instrument were scored on a five-point Likert scale (0=strongly agree; 4=strongly disagree). The CDRAS Portuguese version presented a very good internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.80$ ) and also an optimal factor analysis (KMO=0.91), with principal components extraction. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation was based on eigenvalues greater than 1. Three factors resulted from this instrument: Sexual Expectations, Victim blaming, and Overwhelming Sexual Arousal.

The first factor, Sexual Expectations, has  $\alpha=0.79$  and a total variance of 29%. The second factor, Victim blaming, has  $\alpha=0.70$  and a total variance of 8%. The third factor, Overwhelming Sexual Arousal, has  $\alpha=0.98$  and a total variance of 7% (Table 1).

A questionnaire to assess the prevalence of date rape was also developed and used. This questionnaire assessed whether the participants had ever been involved in a date rape situation and if so, as victims or abusers, and the mean values obtained for each factor refer to factor scores.

### Procedures

All instruments were made available on the internet, from February to April, 2012. A web site was built for this study. All aspects of research were preserved, namely confidentiality and informed consent. Also the ethical procedures were supervised by the Scientific Committee of ISPA (The Institute of Applied Psychology).

For the purpose of data gathering, the researchers sent e-mails to potential participants (using mailing lists), joined Internet-based communities and participated on Forums and Chat rooms of Portuguese University students, asking them to access the website where the Portuguese version of the CDRAS and the questionnaire were available.

## Results and Discussion

The prevalence of date rape victims in this sample was of 4.3 % (44 University students). As expected, the majority of victims were females (39). However, it is interesting to note that the victims of date rape were not only women (women=39, men=5).

Regarding the attitudes of the participants, towards all three factors (Factor 1 - Sexual Expectations, Factor 2 - Victim blaming, Factor 3 - Overwhelming Sexual Arousal), we found that the factor with the highest score was Overwhelming Sexual Arousal, which indicates that both genders have high levels of agreement regarding this factor ( $\alpha=0.82$ ; mean=1.73) (Figure 1). The participants acknowledged that an Overwhelming Sexual Arousal plays a role in the Date Rape process.

Nevertheless, in general, there are high levels of disagreement between genders, thus indicating that attitudes towards Date rapes are very negative (Figure 2). These levels of disagreement, between genders, turned out to be statistically significant ( $t(44) = 4.3$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Regarding the differences between men and women; men presented lower levels of disagreement for all the three factors, when compared to women. We will now present the specific differences found for each factor.

In Factor 1 (Sexual Expectations), there were significant differences between men and women ( $t(1013) = 14.57$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), thus the male student population presented higher values, when compared with the female group (Figure 3).

Regarding Factor 2 (Victim blaming), men presented again higher values, i.e. in this factor there also are significant differences between genders ( $t(1013) = 14.57$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) (Figure 4).

Finally, in Factor 3 (Overwhelming Sexual Arousal) also presents significant differences between genders ( $t(1013) = 14.57$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and again the values of the male population are higher.

This indicates that men have more positive attitudes and, as a result, they are more tolerant towards Date rape than women.

According to the present sample the prevalence of Date rape among Portuguese university students (44 victims in 1013 students) is significantly lower than the rate obtained in other countries.

However, according to the attitudinal results, we can say that the incidence of date rape may have a probability of increasing in this population. In all three factors men had lower levels of disagreement when compared to women. The factor with less discrepancy between genders was Overwhelming Sexual Arousal, which shows the participants' tendency to see this phenomenon. When this element (overwhelming sexual arousal) appears, something sexual is expected. Thus, Date Rape, in these cases, is perceived as a consequence and not as a real crime, attributing more guilt to the victim and less to the aggressor.

The Sexual Expectations factor is the one that reveals the biggest

difference between men and women, indicating that men have more sexual expectations than women, so they tend to interpret women's behavior as more sexual than it actually is.

Finally, the Victim blaming factor is the one with the lowest scores; nevertheless the male students of this study have again higher values than female. Traditional sexual belief still may influence the way men see the women's role in the current society [31].

There still are many stereotypes and prejudices related to both to males and females. Taking this into consideration, as well as the differences obtained between men and women, in the results, it becomes necessary to implement distinct intervention and prevention programs (specific for men, or specific for women). The existing programs have proven to be highly beneficial, since citizens who have access to these programs not only start to become aware of the problem, but also become less tolerant, create more negative attitudes, destroy pre-established beliefs towards any type of sexual violence, and most importantly, modify their behaviors in society. Furthermore, these programs provide knowledge about risks factors and ways of protection in these situations [28].

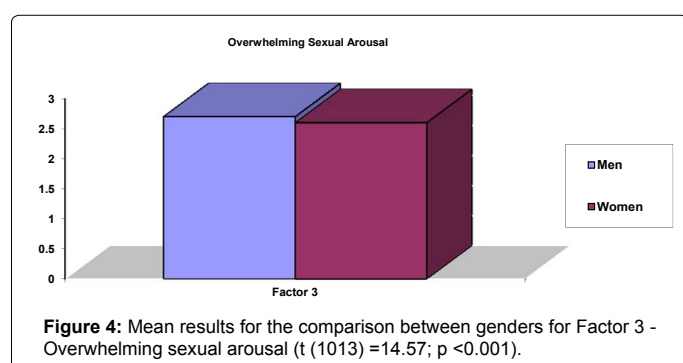
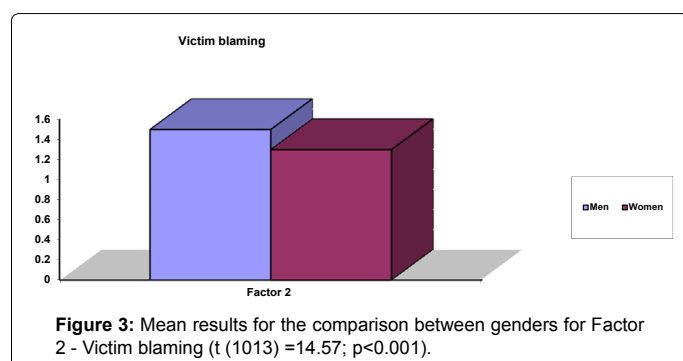
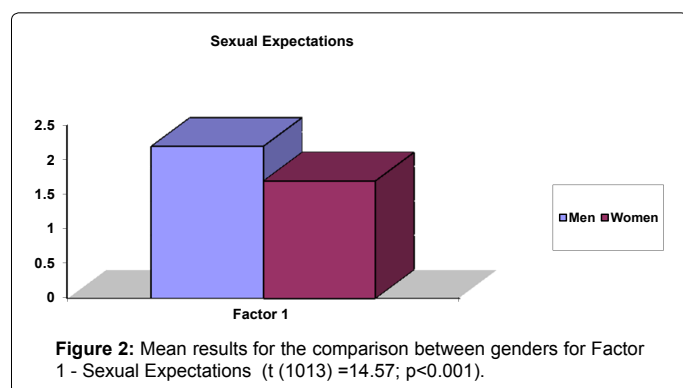
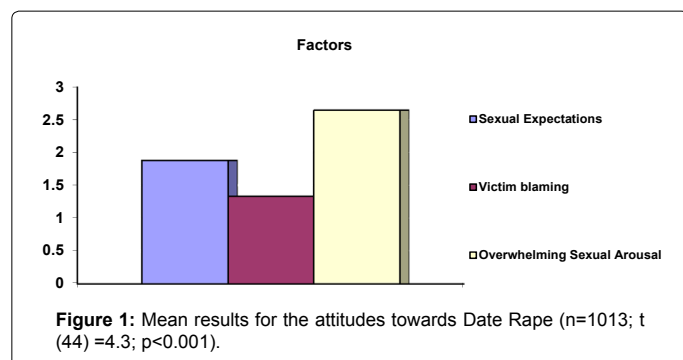
For those who were already victims, the contact with this type of programs can be beneficial. It is usual for victims to only identify themselves as survivors of sexual violence, when they have contact with one of these programs and/or when they get professional help. After this self-recognition, victims can seek out for specific help and increase their sense of empowerment.

Also, it is important to carry out programs related to this problem in all education levels, but especially before university, as date rape is a crime that happens with surprising frequency on university campuses [3].

The arrival at university implies a reformulation of interpersonal and family relationships. Students have to establish new friendships, redefine their roles, manage time and activities (towards a greater autonomy), to attend stressful classes and to relate to professors [32]. Many students may feel lost in this new phase, making them more vulnerable to many types of risks, and to being victims to many types of violence.

Factor	Items	Eigenvalue for each item	Total variance explained	Cronbach's alpha
Sexual Expectations	If a woman asks a man out on a date then she is definitely interested in having sex	0.681	29%	$\alpha = 0.79$
	The degree of a woman's resistance should be a major factor in determining if a rape has occurred	0.685		
	When a woman says no to sex what she really means is maybe	0.609		
	If a woman lets a man buy her dinner or pay for a movie or drinks, she owes him sex	0.639		
	It is okay to pressure a date to drink alcohol in order to improve one's chances of getting one's date to have sex	0.675		
	When a woman asks her date back to her place, I expect that something sexual will take place	0.542		
	In most cases when a woman was raped she was asking for it	0.719		
Victim blaming	Most women enjoy being submissive in sexual relations	0.667	8%	$\alpha = 0.70$
	If a woman dresses in a sexy dress she is asking for sex	0.739		
	In the majority of date rapes the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation	0.509		
	Many women pretend they don't want to have sex because they don't want to appear easy	0.724		
	Women provoke rape by their behavior	0.784		
Overwhelming Sexual Arousal	Women often lie about being raped to get back at their dates	0.539	7%	$\alpha = 0.98$
	A man is entitled to intercourse if his partner had agreed to it but at the last moment changed her mind	0.671		
	A man can control his behavior no matter how sexually aroused he feels	0.586		
	Date rapists are usually motivated by an overwhelming, unfulfilled sexual desire	0.686		
	When a woman fondles a man's genitals it means she has consented to sexual intercourse	0.507		

**Table 1:** Results for Factor Analysis of the CDRAS with extraction using the principal components method, based on eigenvalues ( $n = 1013$ ).



In some countries the entrance to the university significantly increases the probability of date rape. However, in the Portuguese university context, the numbers are effectively lower. This may be due to the fact that in Portugal students are not confined to a restricted physical area (campus) while studying. In Portugal it is not common to find university campus, since the buildings are scattered throughout

the cities. When the university campus is confined to a specific space, it makes the students more vulnerable and therefore the number of victims of different types of violence increases. To be integrated in a local community, seems to be extremely beneficial, not only because it diminishes risk behaviors, but also because it decreases the isolation and increases the sense of empowerment of each student.

Finally, what can be done in order to prevent future date rapes? It is necessary that society, at large, reviews its values, contesting the current culture of dominance and violence, by building a culture of respect and security instead. For that to happen, and considering, as the majority of the specialists do, that working with men is essential, as the majority of the aggressors are men (4), we consider that it is fundamental for health professionals to start seeing men as allies in order to be able to collaborate with them.

We consider that to make date rape a less prevalent phenomenon in our societies it is essential to: (a) destroy positive and tolerant attitudes towards Date Rape, reinforcing the negatives ones; (b) make visible the problems of rape victims and demonstrate the type of desirable and the not-desirable behaviors; and (c) provide tools to build a culture of overall protection and respect [33].

Finally, it is necessary to give voice to the victims. This is particularly important in Portugal, as date rape remains under recognized and understudied. The Portuguese society is not sensitive to this problem, and many participants of the study heard about this phenomenon for the very first time when accessing the instrument. The victims, more than anyone else, should instill reaction in society to modify its values and principles and to come up with solutions. In Portugal, since 1991, legislation has developed significantly in the area of combating violence against women and various measures have been adopted at the level of police and tribunal intervention, of safe houses, of technical training, and of the organization of national campaigns and plans. This study also seeks to integrate these dimensions by collecting information on indicators that allow some evaluation at this level, thus contributing to the analysis of violence from a gender perspective.

## Conclusion

The data showed a 4.3% prevalence of date rape, which is significant. We feel that this justifies the development of prevention and intervention programs that are structured and specific for the university population. Educational strategies in the sexual assault and date rape programs should include the use of films and/or peer educators to help dispel commonly held date rape myths, to improve attitudes and/or knowledge of rape, to decrease rape-related behavioural intentions, to improve communication about sexual decisions, and to increase self-efficacy towards resisting an unwanted sexual experience. Moreover, the attitudes (although they are positive, in the sense they are blaming towards date rape) also reveal that the informative component needs more visibility and, therefore, more disclosure in Portugal.

## Authors' Contributions

All the authors equally participated in conceiving, designing, as well as in the development and execution of this project.

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