

**Sigma's VIRTUAL 31st International Nursing Research Congress (Wednesday, 22 July - Friday, 24 July)**

## **Relationships Between Victims and Suspects of Sexual Assaults: Implications for Prevention and Advocacy**

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### **Purpose:**

Violence against women is of worldwide epidemic proportions. World Health Organization (2017) indicates 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most often by someone known to the victim. International and national studies support the finding that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by assailants known to the victim (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2018; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). When victims seek sexual assault forensic medical examinations (SAFME), they are asked to identify their relationships with suspects. Generally, the relationships are categorized as stranger, acquaintance, current/former spouse or partner, and other (such as teacher, supervisor, boss). If the sexual assault is committed by a current or former intimate partner, the assault is classified as intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV). The relationship between victims and suspects can influence victims' decisions to report sexual assault or continue in case prosecution (Bagwell-Gray, Messing, & Baldwin-White, 2015; Seyller, Denis, & Dang, 2016; Dworkin et al., 2019). Developing an improved understanding of victim-suspect relationships in sexual assaults informs prevention and advocacy programs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore victim-suspect relationships in sexual assaults and variables associated with differing victim-suspect relationships.

### **Methods:**

Following Institutional Review Board approval, a retrospective chart review of SAFME documentation forms between 2010-2018 was completed. This database includes variables of reported sexual assaults from one western state in the United States and includes 5,758 SAFME documentation forms and over 1.6 million data points. Variables include gender, race, age, relationship to suspect, number and type of injuries, suspect actions (violent physical acts), drug-facilitated assaults, victim use of drugs or alcohol, time from assault to report and the nature of assault. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests of association were completed to evaluate the impact of victim-suspect relationships on variables of interest.

**Results:** Significant findings include increased non-anogenital injuries in stranger and intimate partner sexual assaults; decreased victim use of alcohol in IPSV, decreased drug-facilitated sexual assault in IPSV, increased strangulation in rapes occurring from victim-suspect meeting through online dating apps. Additional findings will be reported during presentation. Dissemination of findings to inform prevention and advocacy programs will be discussed.

**Conclusion:** Exploring victim-suspect relationships in sexual assaults is necessary to improve understanding of sexual assaults in the development of prevention and advocacy programs.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Intimate Partner, Rape and Sexual Violence

**Abstract Summary:**

Violence against women is of worldwide epidemic proportions. World Health Organization (2017) indicates 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most often by someone known to the victim. This presentation seeks to illuminate the variables surrounding Intimate Partner Violence.

**References:**

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**Author Summary:** Gaye L. Ray, an Associate Teaching Professor at Brigham Young University, teaches Health Assessment and Health Promotion, Community Health Nursing, and Public and Global Health Nursing. She has presented at national and international conferences in the areas of public health, and global nursing. As a strong advocate for immunization, Gaye continues to work on improving access to vaccines for children worldwide and to improve immunization rates in both children and adults.