Situational Factors in Rape

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate rape from the perspective of a situational model of crime. Rape has long been conceptualised almost exclusively from sociocultural and psychopathological perspectives. In the last few decades, situational models of crime have emphasised the role of non-dispositional factors in offending. These models have emphasised opportunity, the role of people’s routine activities in crime as well as conceptualising offenders as reasoning, that is, they will tend offend when expected gains outweigh perceived risks. Situational models of crime, notably situational crime prevention, have proven successful in reducing a wide range of non-sexual offences. Sexual offences have only been investigated from a situational perspective relatively recently and comparatively few studies on rape from this perspective have been published. If situational factors are important then a new armoury of sophisticated crime prevention interventions should be available for use.

Given that the prevalence of rape has generally proven insensitive to traditional interventions such as counselling (Rice & Harris, 2003), investigating new models and frameworks is timely. In the current research, three studies were used to ascertain the role of situational factors in rape. The first study consisted of a secondary data base analysis that compared rape offenders against property, violence and child sexual offenders using Queensland Department of Corrective Services’ prisoner induction information. The aim of this study was to investigate if rape offenders are different from other offenders across a broad range of criminological and sociodemographic variables, and to investigate the viability of applying a situational model in cases of rape. The rape offenders in this study emerged as generally being equally subject to situational factors as the other offender groups. The analysis provided support for a situational interpretation of rape.

The second study explored in more detail the circumstances of rape and its perpetrators by a file content analysis of Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) documentation and examined differences between stranger and non-stranger rapes. Non-stranger rapes are committed by offenders known to the victim, such as boyfriends, dates or husbands, while stranger rapes are committed by unknown offenders. Utilising prosecution files allowed a close examination of the offence, and different types of offenders from the
perspectives of the criminal justice system. Situational factors were evident in the offences but few differences emerged between stranger and non-stranger offenders.

The final study consisted of in-depth interviews with 20 convicted stranger and non-stranger rape offenders to investigate the offence from the perspective of the perpetrators. The results were generally similar to the DPP study with situational factors emerging as important elements of the offence but few differences between stranger and non-stranger offenders groups.

Taken together the studies support a situational model of crime interpretation. The offence can be fitted within these models and offender typologies provided by the approach. The rape offenders in these studies generally behaved in accordance with the way the models indicated. In particular, they proved criminally versatile, opportunistic in their choice of victims and frequently intoxicated while offending. While deep-seated motives for rape have their genesis in psychological or cultural factors, they are "reasoning offenders". These findings highlight the situational aspects involved in rape and as such provide a new perspective for conceptualising rape as well as providing a range of tried situational crime prevention initiatives that should be applicable to rape.
This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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