

The Role of Drugs and Alcohol in Rape

MIRANDA A H HORVATH, BSc MSc

PhD Candidate

JENNIFER BROWN, BA PhD FBPsS

Professor of Forensic Psychology

Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH

Correspondence: Miranda Horvath. Tel: 01483 682884 Fax: 01483 689553

Email: m.horvath@surrey.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Alcohol and drugs have been inextricably linked with sexual assault. Media coverage has increasingly highlighted the health risks facing intoxicated women and more recently identified the risk of rape as an additional hazard. Using a sample of rape cases reported to the police between 1999 and 2004, this paper establishes that rapes involving intoxicants (alcohol and/or drugs) are distinguishable from those which do not. Further analysis discovered that the identity of the intoxicated parties (i.e. men, women, neither or both) is important in differentiating rapes. Results report differences by location of assault, victim offender relationship, victim and offender characteristics and offence behaviours. A consistent finding from the analysis is that the victim's state of sobriety or inebriation appears more significant than that of the offender. The implications for crime prevention and directions for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Distinguishing drug-assisted and non-drug-assisted rape

Research has identified alcohol and drugs as a means of obtaining illicit sex since time immemorial (Foote et al., 2004). Koss (1989) interviewed victims of sexual assault and found that 55% of victims and 73% of offenders were drinking or using drugs at the time of the sexual assault. Kelly et al. (2005) report that alcohol was involved in over one-third of cases reported to the police and drugs were suspected in one in ten. At a minimum they suggest alcohol is three times more likely to be associated with rape than drugs. Testa and Parks (1996) concluded that

alcohol intoxication is present in one-third to three-quarters of sexual assault cases. Research focusing on sexual assault amongst college students indicates approximately half are associated with alcohol use and rates of alcohol consumption are typically higher for rapes than for other types of sexual assault (Muehlenhard and Linton, 1987; Abbey et al., 1998; Ullman et al., 1999a, 1999b).

There have been two discernable trends revealed by research in terms of attitudes towards rape in which drugs or alcohol are implicated. One trend, exemplified by Kelly et al. (2005) when examining the problems of attrition in rape cases, is the identification of a 'cult of scepticism' whereby police officers respond to rape allegations with disbelief. This is allied to a second trend, the 'blame culture' exemplified by the findings of a survey, commissioned by Amnesty International, which reported that more than a quarter (30%) of their respondents believed that a woman was partially or totally responsible for being raped if she was drunk (ICM Research, 2005).

This lay public view finds a reflection in the courts e.g. the recent judgement in Swansea which cleared an offender charged with rape on the grounds that the woman could not remember if she consented to sex because of the amount she had drunk (Gibb et al., 2005). A survey by the Portman Group (2005) found that almost four in ten young women (36%) disclosed that they had been sexually assaulted

after getting drunk. The recent liberalisation of licensing laws in Britain may exacerbate the ambiguities surrounding the capability to consent to sex and being drunk. It could create serious consequences for the administration of justice by the apparent ambivalence of both criminal justice professionals and the lay public towards drinking and sex which does not appear in attitudes towards drinking and driving.

This paper seeks to examine the role that alcohol and drugs play in rape and sexual assaults. We present an analysis that 'drug-assisted rape' offences are infrequently the result of male predators spiking females' drinks with drugs such as GHB or Rohypnol. We provide some empirical data that supports the view of the Association of Chief Police Officers' lead on sexual offences. Deputy Assistant Commissioner, John Yates, stated that 'drinking is the real issue ... men, I suspect, think that they can get away with rape ... they are targeting nightclubs where young girls have been drinking' (Sunday Observer, 27 November 2005).

Given the normative use of alcohol, unsurprisingly it has been found that sexual assaults often occur in the context of social interactions such as dates and parties, where shared alcohol consumption is not unusual (Abbey et al., 1996a; Ullman et al., 1999b). Previous research has not adequately explored the role of alcohol in assaults. Many studies use college students' self-disclosure of rapes, which may or may not have been reported to the police; victim data is often drawn from newspaper accounts; study sample sizes are small. The present study sought to overcome these problems by using information from police case files of rapes reported between 1999 and 2004.

The role of alcohol and drugs has important implications for the police investigation and jury responses to rape. A victim's behaviour before the attack is often used to determine the likelihood of the incident being construed as a rape. Lopez (1992) found that 82% of the complaints made to police are deemed unfounded (i.e. a rape had not occurred) if the woman had been drinking. Further, Kelly et

al's (2005) report demonstrated that the absence of alcohol or drugs was associated with conviction (8%, n=70), and was slightly less likely in the case of alcohol (5%, n=42) but over three times more likely with respect to drugs (7%, n=107 versus 2%, n=6).

Alcohol is known to have a variety of effects on individuals. It impairs cognitive and motor skills and peoples' ability to engage in higher order cognitive processes such as abstraction and problem solving (Peterson et al., 1990; Hindmarch et al., 1991). Alcohol is also thought, especially in men, to enhance sexual behaviour and aggressiveness (Abbey et al., 1999). Finally, it has been found that, when intoxicated, people tend to focus on the most salient cues in a situation and ignore more peripheral information (Taylor and Leonard 1983; Steele and Josephs, 1990). As a result, women may pay less attention to cues which would normally alert them to a dangerous or threatening situation and they allow men to focus on their immediate feelings of sexual arousal and entitlement rather than thinking of their own discomfort or the potential for later punishment (Nurius and Norris, 1996; Parks and Miller, 1997; Abbey et al., 2001).

Excessive drinking poses a number of health and safety risks to the general public and in particular young women. The Portman Group's (2005) study found that women reported a number of effects of excessive alcohol consumption as well as sexual assault, including injury in an accident, being robbed and ending up in hospital. Further studies have identified that women are more likely to be affected by the effects of alcohol more quickly than men, for example they are more likely to suffer brain damage from alcohol consumption more quickly than men (report in *The Guardian*, 16 May 2005).

Relatively few studies have been conducted comparing alcohol-involved sexual assaults with those where no alcohol was consumed. When alcohol is implicated victims and perpetrators are more likely to be casual acquaintance or dates rather than in a steady relationship (Abbey et al., 1996; Ullman et al., 1999a; 1999b). Also alcohol-involved sexual assaults were more likely to be associated with

being at a party or bar. Cleveland et al's (1999) study of the use of coercion by rapists focused on 'power tactics' (e.g. use of weapon, demand for silence) or 'drug tactics' (e.g. use of drugs by victim and/or perpetrator). It was found that when victims and perpetrators were acquaintances or dating, drug tactics were the most likely to be used.

A number of researchers have highlighted the fact that perpetrators may seek out intoxicated women because they are easy targets (Kanin, 1985; Abbey et al., 2002). If this is the case, intoxicated women cannot assume that someone they know fairly well will not take advantage of them if provided with the means and opportunity.

The focus of the present paper is on rape cases which have been reported to the police. It is acknowledged that rape is a vastly under-reported crime, with studies suggesting that only 15-20% of rapes are reported to the police (Myhill and Allen, 2002; Walby and Allen, 2004). This paper aims to identify patterns and characteristics among those rapes which have come to the police's attention in order to provide some base line descriptive data. As such, it is to be hoped that the present results may, (a) be used to help improve investigative procedures; (b) provide a resource for researchers to compare frequencies with other sources of non-police reported rapes and, (c) form the basis of more effective crime prevention and pro-active health advice.

The paper is divided into two main sections. The first section investigates whether rapes in which alcohol or drugs are implicated can be distinguished from rapes where no alcohol or drugs are implicated. In the second section the analysis is developed in order to discover whether if men, women, neither, or both, ingest the alcohol/drug is important in differentiating rapes.

METHOD

Sample

The sample was drawn from rape cases reported to the research police force between November 1999 and November 2004. The police force is in a medium sized county (population: 1,067,200 at 30 June 2004, Office

of National Statistics) which has a mix of urban and rural areas and is located in south-east England.

The force's central intelligence system was searched using the search terms 'rape' and 'sexual assault' as the offence classification. For the five-year period searched, 93 cases were found in which the victim was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. A comparison sample of cases where the victim was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol was also retrieved. Because there were so many cases that fitted the second criteria, a random sample of cases where the offender had been charged with the offence was selected (because these cases provided maximum information about the offence). This sample contained 91 cases. In total 184 cases were retrieved.

RESULTS

The results are presented in brief; a more detailed account of the findings can be obtained from the authors. For the first stage of analysis, the cases were re-classified into two groups. Group 1 were cases where alcohol or drugs had been consumed by either the victim or the offender (alcohol/drug implicated rape, ADIR). In the second group were cases where neither party had consumed alcohol or drugs (no alcohol/drug implicated rape, NADIR). There were 108 ADIR cases and 76 NADIR cases. Analyses were conducted to address four key questions:

- (i) location of the offence;
- (ii) victim characteristics;
- (iii) offender characteristics;
- (iv) behaviours that occurred during the offence.

Analysis 1: ADIR versus NADIR

Location

Figure 1 shows the wide range of locations in which the rapes took place. Significant differences were found between ADIR and NADIR for other private home (Fisher Exact $p < .001$) and victim and offender shared home ($\chi^2(1,184) = 8.39$ $p < .005$). Where alcohol or drugs were implicated, offences were less

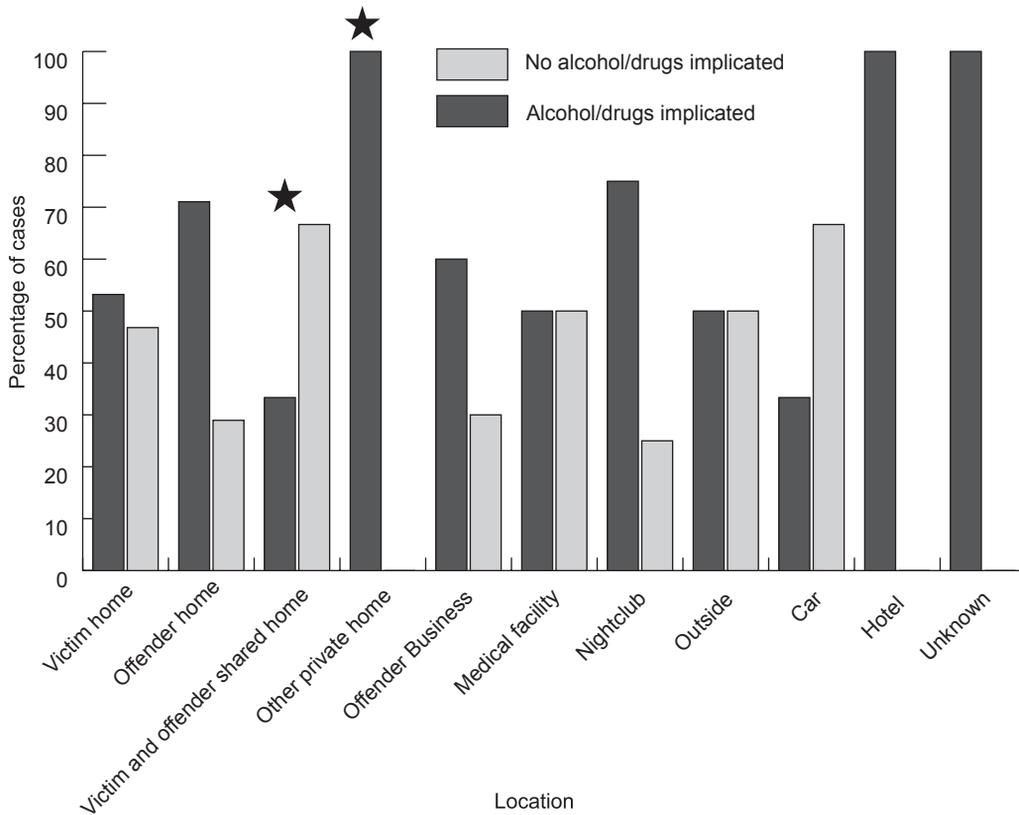


Figure 1. The locations where the ADIR and NADIR rapes took place.

likely to occur in the victim and offender shared home. When this was not the case, offences were more likely to occur in other private homes.

Victim and offender relationship

In non-intoxicant cases (88.15%) victims and offenders were significantly more likely to know each other than in ADIR cases (73.15%, $\chi^2(1,184) = 6.14$ $p < .05$). Further analysis indicates ADIR victims and offenders are significantly more likely to be friends (48.15% vs. 30.26%) and strangers (25% vs. 11.84%) than in non-intoxicant cases. NADIR victims and offenders are more likely to be partners (27.63% vs. 13.89%) or ex-partners (17.11% vs. 4.63%) than in ADIR cases. There were no significant differences between whether the victim and offender were family relatives or had a professional relationship.

Victims

Victims of NADIR are more likely to be married ($\chi^2(1,184) = 6.38$ $p < .05$), remember being assaulted (Fisher exact, $p < .001$) and remember events directly after being assaulted (Fisher exact, $p < .05$) than victims of ADIR. The victims could not be distinguished on any other characteristics.

Offenders and suspects

Offenders and suspects were analysed separately and compared. Offenders are defined as those who were charged with the offence whereas suspects were not charged. There were 100 offenders and 89 suspects. Offenders could only be distinguished on one characteristic. NADIR offenders were significantly more likely to have come to police attention before than ADIR offenders (54.69% vs. 45.31% $\chi^2(1,100) = 5.40$ $p < .05$).

Table I. Results for analysis for the offence location in all four victim/offender groups.

Victim/offender group	Victim's home	Victim and offender shared home	Other private home	Hotel
Victim drunk / offender sober	20.51	0	17.95	2.56
Victim drunk / offender drunk	16.67	9.26	18.52	0
Victim sober / offender drunk	53.33	26.67	6.67	6.67
Victim sober / offender sober	28.95	23.68	0	0
Statistic	$\chi^2(3,184) = 9.31$ $p < .05$	Fisher $p < .005$	Fisher $p < .001$	Fisher $p < .05$

Similarly suspects could only be distinguished on one characteristic. ADIR suspects were more than five times as likely to be unemployed than NADIR suspects (18.52%, Fisher Exact $p < .05$).

Offence behaviour

Twenty-six offence behaviours were coded (see Appendix A). Offence behaviours were chosen from previous research (e.g. Canter and Heritage, 1990). Each case was coded for the presence and absence of each behaviour. ADIR was distinguishable from NADIR on five behaviours: vaginal penetration ($\chi^2(1,184) = 14.13$ $p < .001$), offender masturbating ($\chi^2(1,184) = 7.87$ $p < .05$), binding the victim (Fisher exact, $p < .05$) and physically restraining the victim ($\chi^2(1,184) = 38.74$ $p < .001$) were more likely to occur in NADIR than in ADIR. Sexual fondling was more likely to occur in ADIR than in NADIR (Fisher exact, $p < .05$).

Analysis 2: Who was intoxicated?

Having identified that there are significant differences between ADIR and NADIR cases, a second set of analyses explored who had consumed the alcohol or drugs and whether this is a relevant factor in understanding the offences. To facilitate this analysis, the cases were re-classified according to who had consumed the alcohol and/or drugs resulting in the creation of four groups (Table I):

- victim drunk – offender sober
- victim drunk – offender drunk
- victim sober – offender drunk
- victim sober – offender sober

Location

The significant differences between the groups shown in Table I suggest that it is the victim's state of intoxication which is crucial. The assault is most likely to take place in the victim's home (whether that is a home she shares with the offender or just her home) when the victim is sober. The assault is more likely to take place in another private home when the victim is drunk (possibly in the context of a party).

Victim and offender relationship

There were significant differences between the groups in terms of whether the victim and offender knew each other ($\chi^2(3,184) = 11.16$ $p < .05$). For all groups, more than 50% of the victims and offenders knew each other. When the victim and offender were both sober, 88.16% of them knew each other, followed by 80% when the victim was sober and the offender was drunk and 79.63% when both the victim and offender were drunk. Interestingly, the lowest percentage of 61.54% of victims and offenders knowing each other was found in the group where the victim was drunk and the offender was sober. Significant differences were found between the four groups for whether the victim and offender were partners, ex-partners or friends. Similarly, the results for location of assault showed that the crucial distinguishing factor was the victim's state of intoxication, not the offender's. The majority of rapes between partners and ex-partners occurred when the victim was sober, whereas when the victim and offenders were friends, the majority of the victims were

Table II. Results for the offence behaviours for all four victim/offender groups.

		Victim		Statistic
		Drunk	Sober	
<i>Victim moved from one location to another</i>				
Offender	Drunk	50	6.67	Fisher *
	Sober	46.15	34.21	
<i>Offender physically restrained the victim</i>				
Offender	Drunk	0	60	Fisher***
	Sober	0	46.68	
<i>Vaginal penetration</i>				
Offender	Drunk	77.78	100	$\chi^2(1,184) = 29.68^{***}$
	Sober	56.41	94.74	
<i>Sexual fondling</i>				
Offender	Drunk	37.04	0	Fisher***
	Sober	23.08	2.63	
<i>Offender masturbated</i>				
Offender	Drunk	3.70	13.33	Fisher***
	Sober	2.56	17.11	

Note: *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

drunk. No differences were found between the groups when the victim/offender relationship was family, work colleagues, doctor/patient or strangers.

Victims

The four groups were distinguishable according to three victim characteristics. For each distinguishing characteristic the majority of the victims remembered the events that had happened. All sober victims remembered the assault and directly after the assault. Interestingly, the victim was more likely to remember being approached when both parties were drunk.

Offenders and suspects

It was not possible to distinguish between the four groups according to any offender or suspect characteristics.

Offence behaviour

Confirming the findings from the analysis of victim characteristics and the relationship between the victim and offender, the crucial

variable factor is the victim's intoxication, not the state of the offender. When the victim was drunk she was more likely to have moved from one location to another and been subjected to sexual fondling (see Table II). When the victim is sober the offender is more likely to physically restrain the victim, vaginally penetrate the victim and masturbate themselves.

DISCUSSION

Significant differences were found between rapes where alcohol and drugs were implicated, and rapes where they were not, in all of the areas investigated (location, victim/offender relationship, victim and offender characteristics and offence behaviours). When further analyses were conducted, finding who had consumed the drugs and/or alcohol was also significant except with respect to offender/suspect characteristics. The present results suggest that the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs preceding rape may provide a useful distinguishing factor for understanding the offence.

This study found, as has previous research, that alcohol is less likely to be involved in rapes where the victim and offender are partners or ex-partners but it is more likely to be involved when they are friends or strangers (Abbey et al, 1996; Ullman et al, 1999a; 1999b). It is suggested that the consumption of alcohol between friends may be premised on a sense of trust that is not justified and that there is a greater vulnerability for the victim when alcohol provides the means, the social occasion or the opportunity for the offence to occur. When there is, or has been, a prior or established sexual relationship between the victim and perpetrator, as in the case of ex-partners or partners, alcohol may not be a necessary component for creating the opportunity for the rape to occur.

It is perhaps unsurprising that when no alcohol is involved that the victim is more likely to remember the assault and the events afterwards than when alcohol is involved. This finding supports research which has found that consumption of large amounts of alcohol can produce partial or complete blackouts for events that occurred while the person was drinking and the period afterwards whilst they were intoxicated (White, 2003). The most significant finding to emerge from the analysis of victim and offender characteristics is that there are few distinguishing factors between ADIR and NADIR. This suggests that victim and offender characteristics are not particularly useful for characterising the differences between rapes where alcohol and/or drugs are involved and rapes where they are not. Also, it suggests that rape can occur to all kinds of victims and that a rapist is indistinguishable regardless of whether or not alcohol and/or drugs are involved.

When considering the differences found between ADIR and NADIR offence behaviours it is consistent that in NADIR, the offender is more likely to physically restrain and bind the victim. This may be for the obvious reason that in NADIR the victim is more likely to be able to resist and therefore requires restraining. In the majority of all cases, vaginal penetration occurred although apparently less often in ADIR cases. One plausible

explanation for this difference is that the victim was unable to recall whether penetration had occurred in ADIR. Alternatively, it may be more difficult for offenders to perform vaginal penetration when alcohol or drugs are involved, either because of the effects of the alcohol on themselves or the victim. It is possible that the higher prevalence of sexual fondling in ADIR than in NADIR is a result of the offender simply having more opportunity to perform such acts because of the intoxication of the victim. The higher prevalence of offenders masturbating in NADIRs is more difficult to explain. Perhaps the offender needs this to become aroused. Whereas when the victim is incapacitated offenders have less need to masturbate because they have more opportunity of becoming aroused by other means, for example by sexual fondling, or the power they hold over an unresisting victim.

A consistent finding from the analysis is that the victim's state of sobriety or inebriation appears more significant than that of the offender. Rapes by partners and ex-partners are more likely to occur when the victim is sober, irrespective of the offender's state, suggesting that there are other factors facilitating the rape occurring in this context, perhaps a history of domestic violence. The occurrence of rape between friends and between strangers being more likely when the victim is incapacitated suggests that the offender uses the intoxication rather than the intoxicant as a facilitator for the sexual assault. It is suggested, therefore, that the means by which the victim becomes intoxicated in this situation needs to be explored more fully.

From the analysis of the offence behaviours it appears that it is the state of the victim, which is associated with the occurrence of certain behaviours. As has already been suggested, when the victim is sober, the offender may need to restrain her in order to commit the rape. Force is not necessary when the victim is intoxicated and less able to resist. If force is used this is likely to be fulfilling sexual fantasy needs rather than the functional need to restrain. Furthermore, if a

victim is intoxicated she is likely to be more compliant in moving locations, hence this occurring more often in these cases. The fact that a higher number of completed vaginal penetrations occur when the victim is sober may be as a consequence of the victim's recall of what happened as opposed to it actually occurring more frequently. Sexual fondling occurring more frequently when the victim is intoxicated could be an attempt at normalising behaviour on the part of the offender to facilitate the belief that the victim is a willing participant. It may also be seen as fitting into Canter and Heritage's (1990) idea of intimacy being a behavioural theme in rape. The theme of intimacy, more recently developed by Canter et al. (2003) as involvement, proposes that the primary motivation for rape for some offenders is the desire for social contact. Thus, the offender performs behaviours which demonstrate that he sees the victim as a 'reactive individual' rather than a 'sexual object', and sexual fondling can be seen as such behaviour. However, there could also be a more functional explanation: the victim's intoxication and inability to resist provides the offender with greater opportunity to fondle her. The explanation for the higher prevalence of masturbation is explained in the same way as in the first analysis; in other words, it is functional for the rapist to achieve arousal.

This paper was confined to analysing cases which had been reported to the police. We propose that it presents an important corpus of cases that might usefully be compared with those that are unreported. This may yield some important insights about the differences and similarities between the reported and unreported cases. The findings suggest that there is a need for a change of focus in crime prevention advice. In recent years the focus has been on raising awareness about drink spiking and techniques for preventing it and what people should do if they suspect their drink has been spiked. However, it is suggested that the focus now needs to shift towards raising awareness about the risks from excessive alcohol consumption and suggesting strategies that can be used to allow people to ensure they can get home or to a safe

environment when they are intoxicated. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on the finding that people may actually be at most risk in the situations where they feel safest, for example, when socialising with friends.

It is also proposed that there needs to be a shift away from focusing all the responsibility on to women for protecting themselves and more emphasis placed on changing male attitudes that intoxicated women present opportunities to have sex. Campaigns with a similar focus have already been run in the USA. For example Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women ran a campaign called 'This is not an invitation to rape me' (details can be found at www.lacaaw.org/notinvitation.html). The focus of the campaign was a series of photographs depicting women behaving in ways which typically result in them being blamed for their victimisation, for example giving out their phone number in a bar or wearing a very short skirt. This paper highlights the need to focus attention on challenging the 'cult of scepticism' and 'blame culture' surrounding rapes which occur to intoxicated victims. At present there is no indication that this offence will not increase with the liberalisation of licensing laws in Britain.

In light of the findings of this paper it is suggested that not only is the presence or absence of the use of alcohol and/or drugs in rape a useful distinguishing factor, but it is important to consider who consumed the alcohol and/or drugs. Perhaps the most surprising finding, which has not been identified previously, is that it is the victim's state which is potentially more critical than the offender's state. Future research should focus on cases where the victim is under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol to try and identify whether it is important how they came to be intoxicated, and how much alcohol and/or drugs have been consumed. For example, if the victim is voluntarily intoxicated is she more likely to be targeted and assaulted in a different way to a victim who has had something slipped into her drink and is therefore involuntarily intoxicated?

APPENDIX A**Offence behaviours**

1. Weapon used
2. Crime scene interference
3. Single acts of violence
4. Multiple acts of violence
5. Victim clothing removed (to facilitate sexual assault)
6. Offender identifies victim from personal effects
7. Offender kisses victim
8. Vaginal penetration
9. Anal penetration
10. Oral sex offender to victim
11. Oral sex victim to offender
12. Foreign object insertion
13. Victim comment required
14. Offender comment made
15. Sexual fondling
16. Digital penetration
17. Offender masturbated himself
18. Offender recorded the offence
19. Offender stole from the victim
20. Victim's clothing moved (to facilitate sexual assault)
21. Offender bites victim
22. Victim resists
23. Victim bound
24. Victim participation required
25. Offender physically restrained victim
26. Victim moved from one location to another

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