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Original article ■

Comparative Investigations of the Incidence of Sexual Assault in Three Regions of the Republic of Bulgaria during 1997-2006

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SUMMARY

Sexual abuse is considered as a crime against the person all over the world. Despite the age of victims, it could trigger serious physical and psychological consequences, psychoactive substances and drug abuse, reproductive disorders, suicides and even death. The aim of retrospective investigation was to analyze the incidence of sexual assault in the regions of Varna (V), Silistra (S) and Gabrovo (G) in the period 1998-2006. The material used in the study involved the archive records of the Forensic Medicine Wards in the three studied regions. The comparative study employed inquiries and the documental interpretation method. The data of the investigations are filled in questionnaires in Microsoft Excel and compared. In conclusion, we could state that: 1. The female age group, most affected by sexual assault, was that of 14-17 years. 2. Most commonly, the sexual crimes are performed by persons familiar to the victims (50.10%). 3. Among men, the most affected age group was that under 14 years of age.

Key words: sexual assault, rape, unwanted touching

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse is a crime against the person that is prosecuted by Bulgarian law. The legislation protects the free will of persons in the field of sexual relationships and, therefore, every illegitimate interference in sexual inviolability is considered an act with high social risk, important moral and ethical violation (1). The sexual assault, regardless of the age of the victim, could result in severe physical (2) and psychological (3) consequences including drug abuse in adolescence (4) or adulthood (5), reproductive disorders (6), even death (7). A special attention should be paid on sexual assaults against youngsters as they could not give their informed content about the acts they are involved in. During the last decades, the incidence of sexual assault has been increasing; however, precise evaluation is not possible. On the one hand, the cases of sexual crimes are not declared because of embarrassment; in other cases, because of fearing retaliation etc. In a 1994 survey, 44.8% of African American women, 38% of white women, 25.6% of Latina women and 21.1% of Asian American women had histories of child sexual abuse.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to perform a retrospective investigation of the incidence of sexual assault in three administrative regions in Bulgaria in the period 1997-2006: the Varna region (V) – a sea resort centre, the Silistra region (S) – plain border region and the region of Gabrovo (G) – a mountainous region.

The material contained the archive records of the Department of Forensic Medicine and Deontology, Faculty of Medicine, Medical University, Varna, Forensic Medicine Wards in the Multiprofile Hospitals for Active Treatment in Varna, Silistra and Gabrovo.

The comparative study employed inquiries and the documental interpretation method. The data of the investigations were inserted into the questionnaires in Microsoft Excel and compared (8).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the period 1997-2006, in regions Varna, Silistra and Gabrovo, a total number of 28.124 forensic medical examinations was performed. Out of them, 3.43% (965 examinations) were victims of sexual assault.

Figure 1 presents the incidence of forensic medical examinations on the occasion of reported infringement of the sexual inviolability in the three studied regions. It shows that the incidence of sexual assaults in the regions of Varna and Silistra were similar, whereas for the region Gabrovo it was considerably lower. In more than 95% of cases, the victims were females.

Figure 2 depicts the incidence of sexual assault per 100.000 subjects within the studied period. The highest proportion of sexual violence per 100.000 people was observed in the Varna region - 16.36/100000, and the lowest - in the Gabrovo region (5.85/100000).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of female victims of sexual assault per 100.000 women. This parameter was the highest again in the Varna region - 30/100.000 women and lowest in the Gabrovo region - 10.8/100.000. The data are different from those reported by Armstrong (9). The authors considered that the sexual assault rate in the Varna region was the highest because of geographic location of the region and resorts that attract many visitors from the country and abroad during the active season.

Figure 4 presents the data about the cases of sexual assault against women according to the age. The most vulnerable age was that of 14-17 years (38.73%) followed by the age groups of 18-30 years with 29.32%. Our data are similar to those of AAP (10), but different from the communications of Romero (11). The least registered cases of sexual assaults were in the age groups of 0-6 and over 81 years. The youngest patient, examined on the occasion of sexual assault, was at the age of 1.2 years and the oldest - 86 years old. It should be stated that 3% of examined women underwent the examination with regard to virginity testing.

Figure 5 summarizes the incidence of sexual assault according to the season. Most commonly, sexual crimes are reported in summer - 34.14%, followed by spring - 26.15% and the lowest incidence was in winter - 19.80%.

Figure 6 demonstrates the distribution of female victims of sexual assault according to their place of residence. The highest incidence was that in regional administrative centers (51.97%), followed by villages (25.93%) and municipal centers (13.36%), whereas the smallest number of cases of sexual violence was against foreign citizens (0.87%). The data are presented in absolute values. Presented per 100.000 women, however, the sexual crimes in villages prevailed, just as reported in the literature (12). Njovana and Watts (13) reported an especially high degree of assaults, including sexual, against women in rural regions - up to 55%. In the villages of Ghana, more than 70% of mothers encourage their daughters to have sexual intercourse with men prior to marriage with regard to material gain (14). There are no such data in the present survey.

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of sexual assault cases according to the place of the act of violence. In most cases, the place of the act was not specified - 59.52%, 9.95% of incidents occurred in the open air, 9.41% - in the victim's home, 8.42% - in offender's home and 24.75% in third person's home. Similar data have been reported in the literature, too (15).

Figure 7 depicts the distribution of sexual assault female victims according to the period between the incident and examination. According to literature data (16), the examination in such events should be done within a week after the incriminated act. The data from our survey showed that 72.54% of victims reported for being violated up to the 3rd day, and 1.42% after one year.

Figure 8 presents the distribution of sexual assault acts according to the offender. In 50.10% of cases this was a familiar person, and in 22.09% the offender was unknown to the victim. Similar data are reported by Madu and Peltzer (17). In 3.4% of cases, the offender was a close relative of the victim; in 2.72% this was the father or step-father. These numbers do not correspond to the data of Randall and Haskell (18).

Figure 9 registers the distribution of sexual assaults according to the type of coercion. In 53.17% of cases, there is no information about the coercion, in 8.97% the act was performed after threat, in 15.22% accompanied by battery, in 6.24% by kidnapping, and in 14.11% by a combination of the aforementioned acts of violence.

In our survey, the ratio between men and women with regard to sexual abuse was 1/19. This is con-

siderably different from the data reported by other investigators. In their study, Finkelhor et al., (9) observed that in 27% of the studied cases, the victims of sexual assault were female and in 16% male, i.e. the ratio was about 2:1.

In men that reported sexual assault, the offender was most commonly a familiar person. The distribution of cases with regard to the place of the act was almost equal. The most affected age was that between 7-13 years. The incidence of reported sexual assaults in men was 1.40/100 000 men.

The global tendencies showed an increase of sexual violence and sexual trade (20), especially marked in the Caribbean region and Africa (21). In our investigations, such cases were isolated.

The presented data are based upon the documents, issued after performed forensic medical examinations in three administrative regions of the Republic of Bulgaria. The sexual assault could, however, be visually presented as an iceberg. The cases reported in the forensic medical wards are only the top of the iceberg, as the major part of them remains hidden.

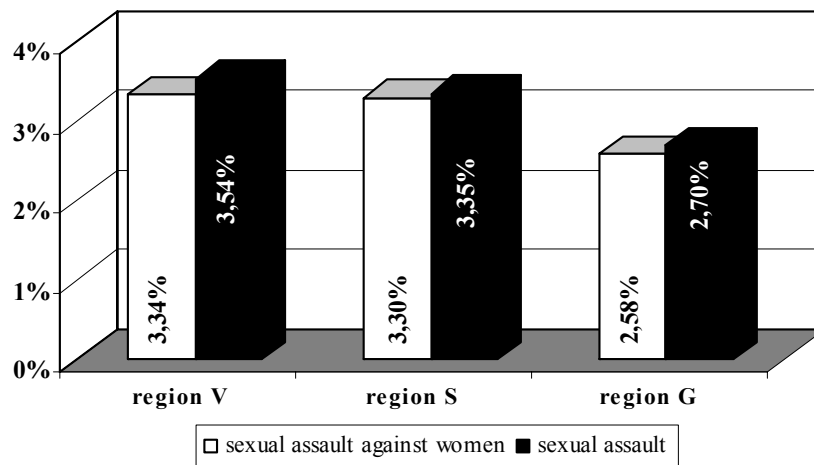


Figure 1. Incidence of sexual assaults according to forensic medical examination

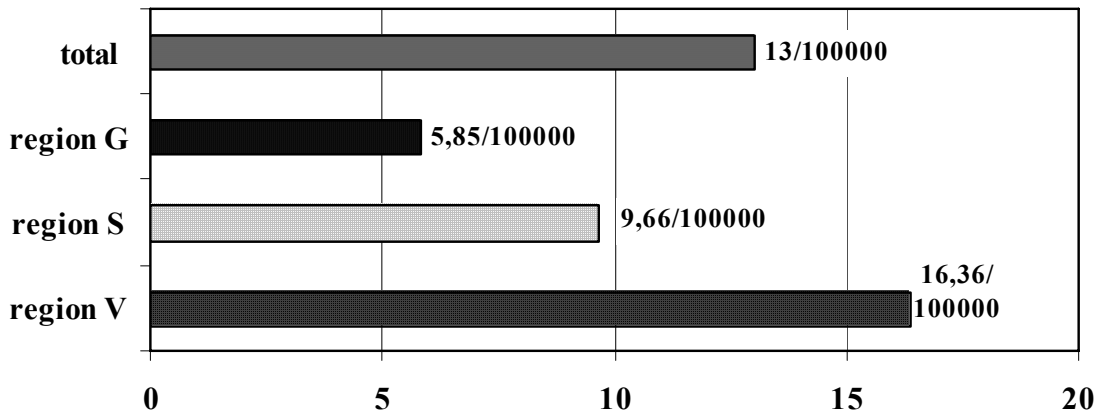


Figure 2. Incidence of claimed sexual assaults per 100.000 people

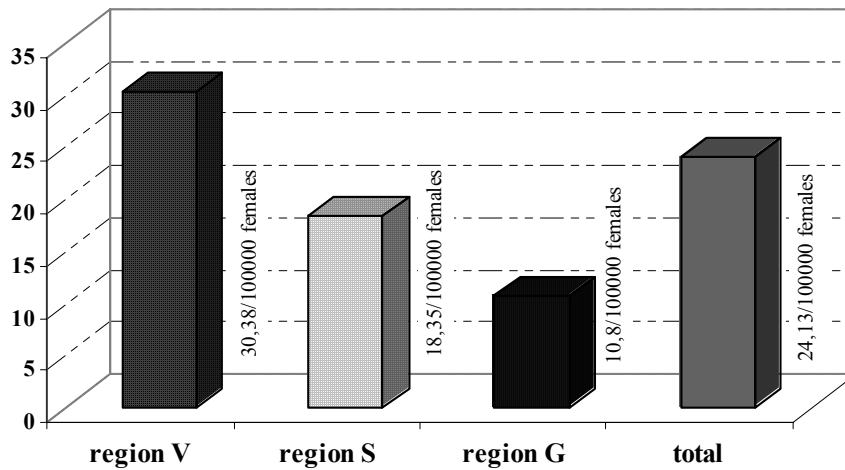


Figure 3. Incidence of reported cases of sexual assault in females

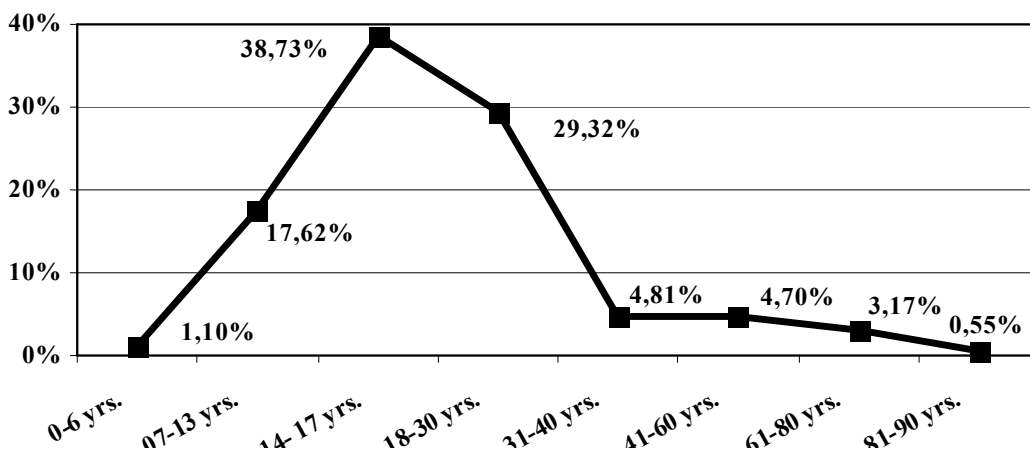


Figure 4. Distribution of the cases of sexual assault against women according to the age

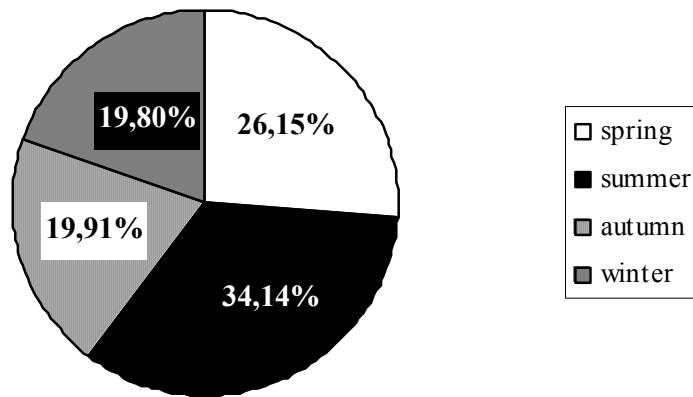


Figure 5. Distribution of cases of sexual assault against women by seasons

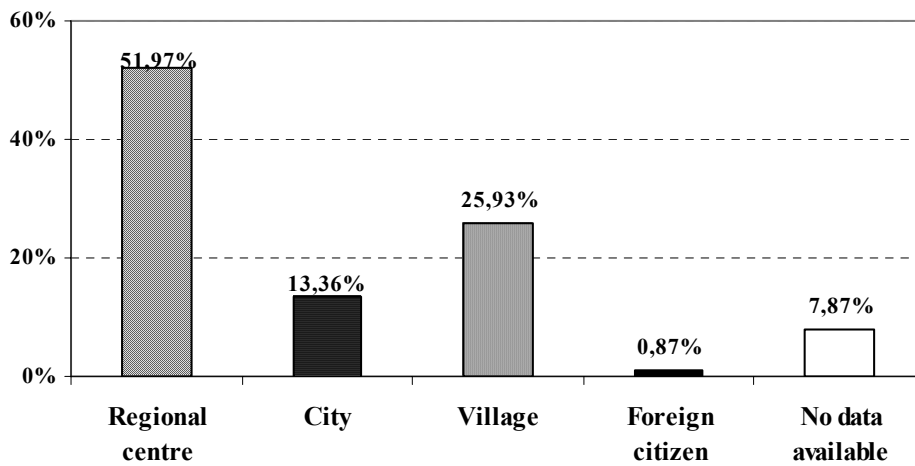


Figure 6. Distribution of cases of sexual assault against women according to the victim's place of residence

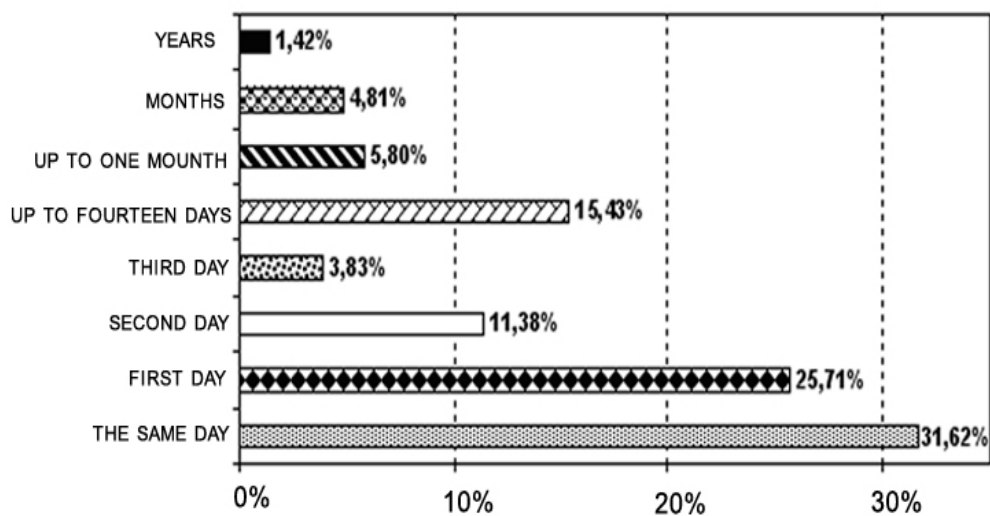


Figure 7. Distribution of cases of sexual assault against women according to the time between the incident and forensic examination

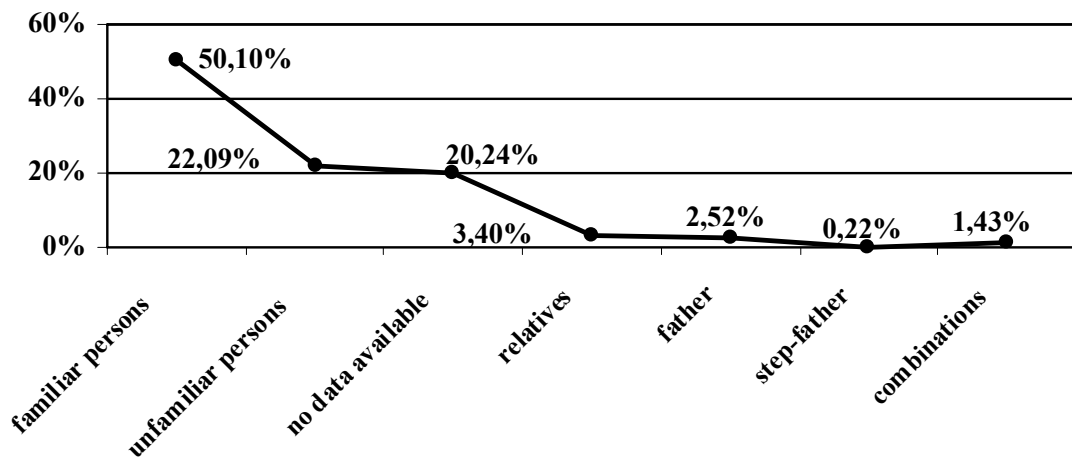
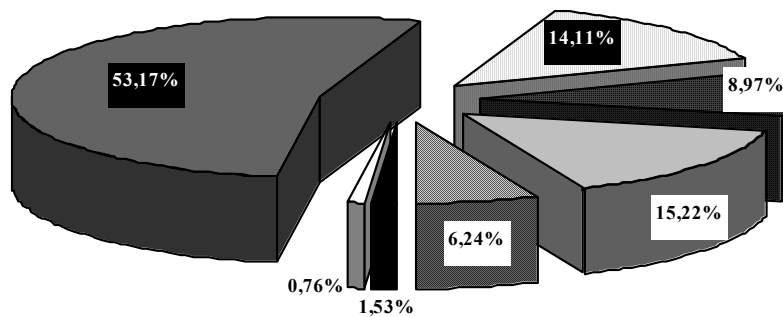


Figure 8. Distribution of female victims that presented the incidence of sexual assault according to the offender



■ threat ■ battery ■ kidnapping ■ strangling □ defenselessness ■ no data available □ combination

Figure 9. Distribution of cases of sexual crimes against women according to the type of coercion

Table 1. Distribution of reported acts of sexual violence according to the place of assault

Place of assault	%	Place of assault	%
victim's home	9.41%	basement, doorway, lift	0.44%
offender's home	8.42%	workplace	0.44%
third person's home	3.39%	site of construction works	0.55%
no data available	59.52%	public place	0.11%
open air	9.95%	nursery	0.33%
car	1.53%	school	0.44%
street	0.11%	beach/sea garden	1.97%
public house	0.66%	military outfit	0.11%
yard	0.87%	garage	0.11%
public building	0.55%	railway station	0.22%
hotel/inn	0.87%		

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative investigation and the presented data led us to the following conclusions:

- The most vulnerable group of female victims of sexual assault was at the age of 14-17 years.
- Most commonly, sexual crimes were performed by persons familiar to the victim (50.10%).
- Among men, the most affected group was under the age of 13 years.
- The incidence of sexual assaults in sea resort settlements was higher - 16.36/100.000 compared to that in the mountainous regions - 5.85/100 000.

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KOMPARATIVNA STUDIJA O SEKSUALNOM NASILJU U TRI OBLASTI REPUBLIKE BUGARSKJE U PERIODU 1997-2006

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Sažetak

Seksualno zlostavljanje je krivično delo protiv osoba širom sveta. Bez obzira na starost žrtve, može da dovede do teških fizičkih i mentalnih posledica, zloupotrebe droga i psihoaktivnih supstanci, reproduktivnih teškoća, pa čak i samoubistva i smrti.

Cilj rada bio je da istraži pojavu seksualnog nasilja u Varni (V), Silistri (S) i Gabrovske (G) područje za period 1997-2006.

Korišćen je arhivski materijal zakonske medicinske jedinice u tri proučavana područja.

U uporednoj studiji, korišćeni su upitnici i metode interpretacije materijala. Podaci istraživanja su uneti u upitnike, zatim u Microsoft Excel a onda su upoređivani.

Seksualnim nasiljem najviše je bila pogođena grupa žena od 14 do 17 godina. Najčešći seksualni zločini počinjeni su od strane poznatih lica (50.10%). Među muškim ispitanicima najpogođenija je bila grupa od 14 godina.

Ključne reči: seksualno zlostavljanje, silovanje, neželjeno dodirivanje