

Predictors of delayed disclosure of rape in female adolescents and young adults

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Background

Delayed disclosure of rape has been associated with impaired mental health; it is, therefore, important to understand which factors are associated with disclosure latency.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to compare various demographics, post-rape characteristics, and psychological functioning of early and delayed disclosers (i.e., more than 1-week post-rape) among rape victims, and to determine predictors for delayed disclosure.

Methods

Data were collected using a structured interview and validated questionnaires in a sample of 323 help-seeking female adolescents and young adults (12–25 years), who were victimized by rape, but had no reported prior chronic child sexual abuse.

Results

In 59% of the cases, disclosure occurred within 1 week. Delayed disclosers were less likely to use medical services and to report to the police than early disclosers. No significant differences were found between delayed and early disclosers in psychological functioning and time to seek professional help. The combination of age category 12–17 years [odds ratio (OR) 2.05, confidence intervals (CI) 1.13–3.73], penetration (OR 2.36, CI 1.25–4.46), and closeness to assailant (OR 2.64, CI 1.52–4.60) contributed significantly to the prediction of delayed disclosure.

Discussion

The results of this study show that, although no differences were found between delayed and early disclosers in psychological functioning and time to seek help, delayed disclosers were less likely to use medical services and to report to the police than early disclosers.

Furthermore, this study identified a number of factors related to the timing of rape disclosure, showing that delayed disclosers represented significantly more adolescents than young adults, significantly more victims of penetration than assault, significantly more victims who were threatened than not threatened, and significantly more victims who were close with the assailant.

Conclusion

The results point to the need of targeted interventions that specifically encourage rape victims to disclose early, thereby increasing options for access to health and police services.