



# FORCED-TO- PENETRATE CASES: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MEN

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Baseline Research Findings

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# CONTEXT

## Forced-to-penetrate cases: lived experiences of men - baseline research findings<sup>1</sup>

Very little is known about the occurrence of forced-to-penetrate cases and the experiences of men who face this type of sexual violence from women. The existing data on this issue is very limited in scope, much of it is out of date, and there is no data within the UK, preceding this study, that concerns this form of sexual violence. The data collected and summarised within this report is the first of its kind collected in the UK.

Forced-to-penetrate cases involve a man being forced to penetrate, with his penis, a female perpetrator, either orally, vaginally, or anally. These cases are not recognised as rape under the existing law in England and Wales.<sup>2</sup> Whilst requiring

non-consensual penile-vaginal/oral/anal penetration, the law only recognises men as capable of being principal offenders. Women are not legally recognised as capable of committing rape, except as accomplices.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, forced-to-penetrate cases are prosecutable as either sexual assault<sup>4</sup> or causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This research project was funded by a Lancaster University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Knowledge Exchange Grant (2016-2017)

<sup>2</sup>Found in Sexual Offences Act, s 1 which defines rape as the intentional, non- consensual penile penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth of another person without consent and without reasonable belief in their consent.

<sup>3</sup>DPP v K&B [1997] 1 Cr. App. R. 36

<sup>4</sup>Sexual Offences Act 2003, s 3 defines sexual assault as intentional, non-consensual sexual touching of another person.

<sup>5</sup>Sexual Offences Act 2003, s 4.



# RESEARCH DESIGN

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The data in this report was collected using an online survey, allowing participant anonymity to be maintained, and participation across the UK to be maximised. The survey was widely publicised by local, national, and international press, as well as across social media. Information about the survey was also distributed nationally via email to organisations working with men who had experienced sexual violence. A project website<sup>6</sup> was set up to provide information to potential participants.

Over 200 men participated in the survey, resulting in a usable dataset involving 154 participants. Depending on their answers, participants could answer up to 36 questions, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, primarily about their most recent experience of being compelled to penetrate a woman. Participants were not required to answer every question and could skip those questions that they did not want to, or were unable to, answer. This was purposeful to minimise potential distress felt by those recounting possibly traumatic experiences. Participants were signposted to support organisations both before and after completing the survey.

This summary report provides initial baseline findings.

<sup>6</sup><http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/forced-to-penetrate-cases/>

# FINDINGS

## SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

### Current Age

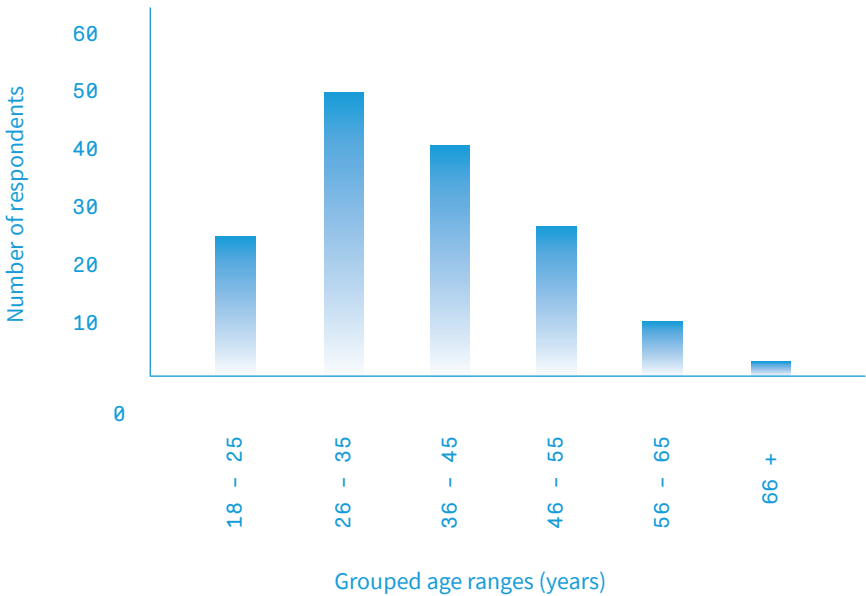
148 men provided this information, with the average current age of participants being 38 years. The youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest was 70 (figure 1).

### Sexual Orientation

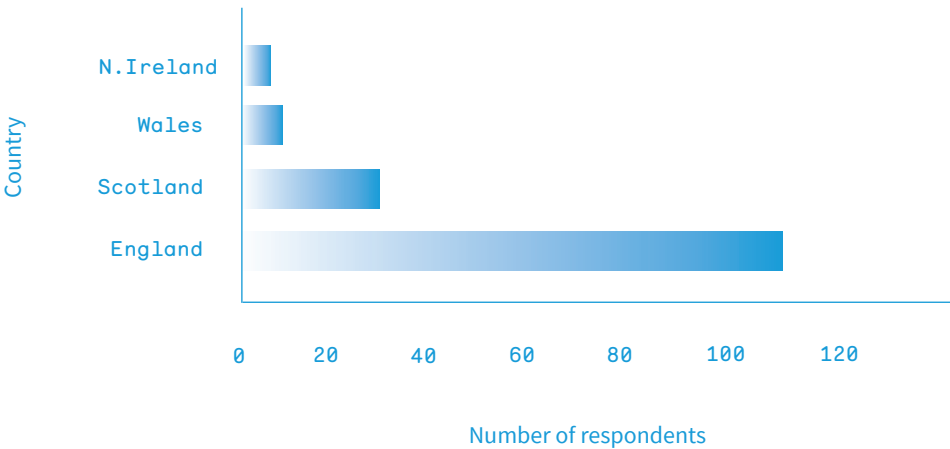
154 men disclosed their sexual orientation. 134 identified as heterosexual; 17 as bisexual/bicurious, and; 3 as homosexual.

### Location

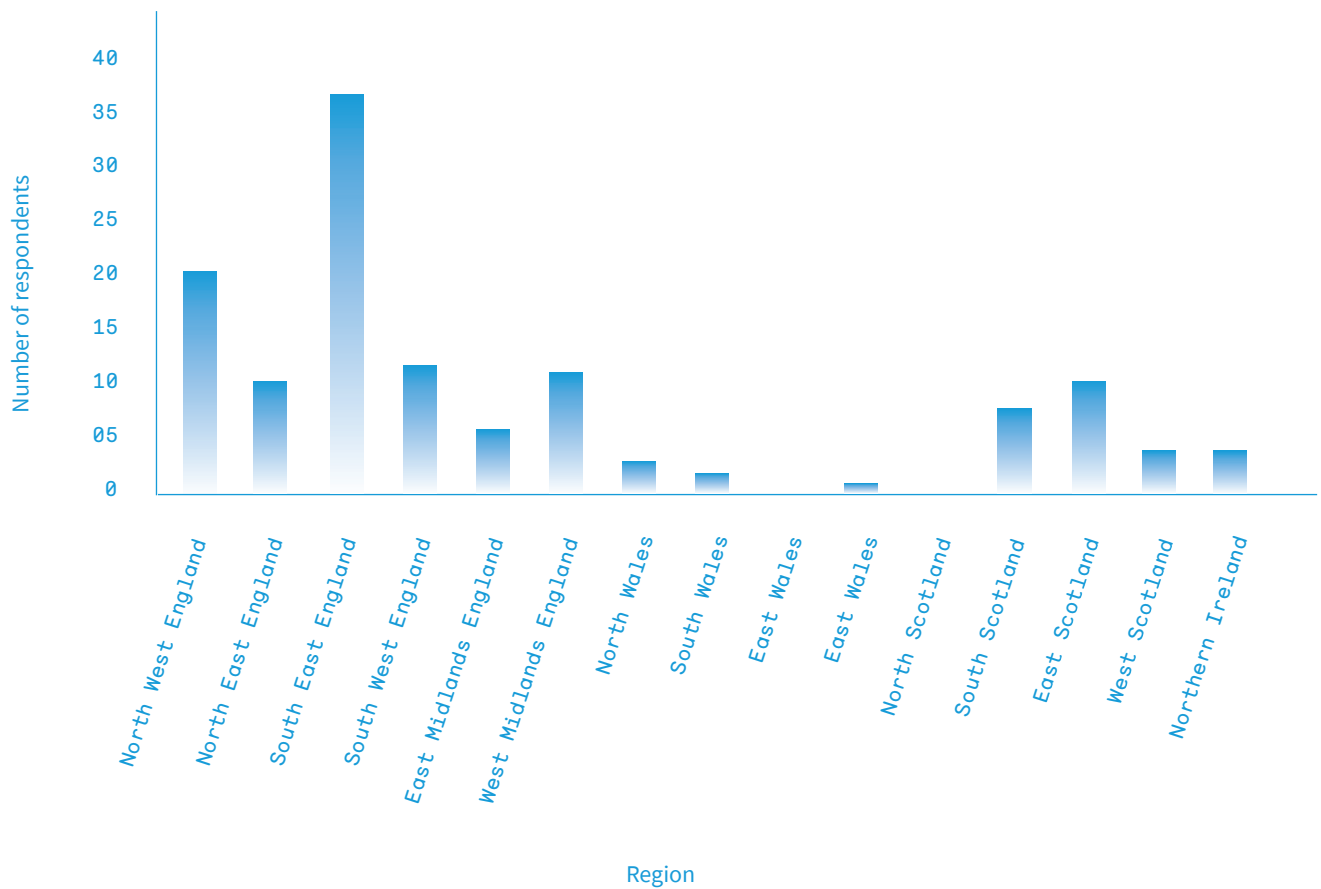
Participants came from across the UK. The highest number of participants lived in England (figure 2), and more specifically the South East (figure 3). The only areas in the UK not identified by participants were East Wales and North Scotland.



**Figure 1:** Grouped age ranges of participants (based on 148 responses)



**Figure 2:** Participants' countries of residence (based on 154 responses)



**Figure 3:** Participants' regions of residence (based on 129 responses)

“Participants came from across the UK.

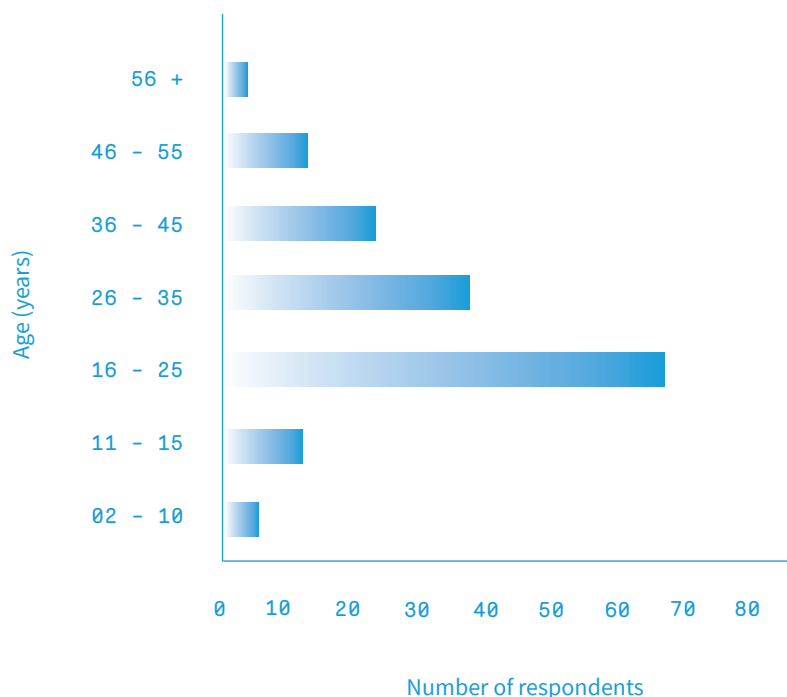
# FINDINGS

## FORCED-TO-PENETRATE EXPERIENCES

### Age at the time of compelled penetration

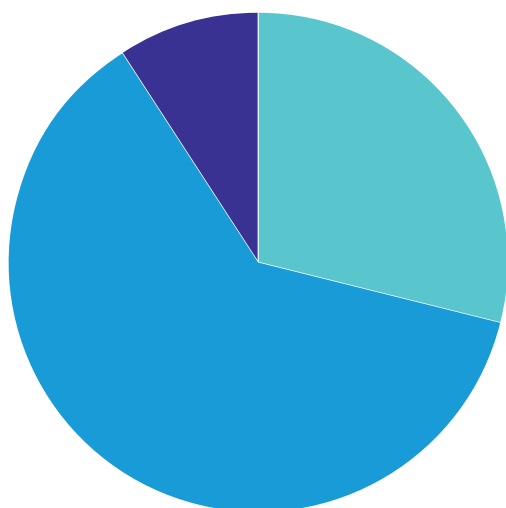
Participants were asked a series of questions in relation to their most recent forced-to-penetrate experience. Based on 153 responses, the average age of participants during their most recent experience was 27 years, with a range of between 2 and 61 years.

- The majority (67 (43.8%)) of respondents were aged 16-25 when their most recent experience occurred.
- 16 (10.5%) of the participants reported that they were between 2 and 15 years old.
- 13 (8.5%) of the respondents were over 45 years old when their most recent experience took place.



**Figure 4:** Grouped age ranges of participants during their most recent compelled penetration experience (based on 153 responses)

### Type of penetration



9% Anal  
29% Oral  
62% Vaginal

**Figure 5:** Type of penetration by frequency based on responses from 154 men.

Participants were asked about the type of penetration that they were compelled to engage in - vaginal, anal, or oral. In answering this question, participants were encouraged to select more than one option if this reflected their most recent experience.

All 154 men answered this question with some indicating that they had experienced multiple different types of penetration.

Compelled vaginal penetration was reported most frequently, followed by oral and then anal penetration (figure 5).

- One participant disclosed that he was forced to only anally penetrate a woman.
- Eight disclosed being forced to engage in only oral penetration.

- For all the other men, compelled vaginal penetration was involved, either solely, or alongside one of the other forms of penetration.

## Strategies of female perpetrators

When detailing their forced-to-penetrate experiences, respondents were asked to identify, from a list, the “context” that most closely matched that of their most recent experience (table 1). This “context” focused on the “strategy” used by the female perpetrator in compelling penetration. 153 men provided information and the results are presented in table 1 below in order of descending frequency.

The most frequent strategy employed by female perpetrators was the use of blackmail and threats, accounting for the experience of over one fifth (34) of the men.

The least frequent strategy was the administration of drugs non-consensually, with only two men reporting this. Other notable results here were the high

frequency with which the use of force featured, with 22 men (14.4%) disclosing this as part of their experience. ‘None of the options present’ was also selected with high frequency by 22 (14.4%) of the respondents.

“The most frequent strategy employed by female perpetrators was the use of blackmail and threats, accounting for the experience of over one fifth of the men.



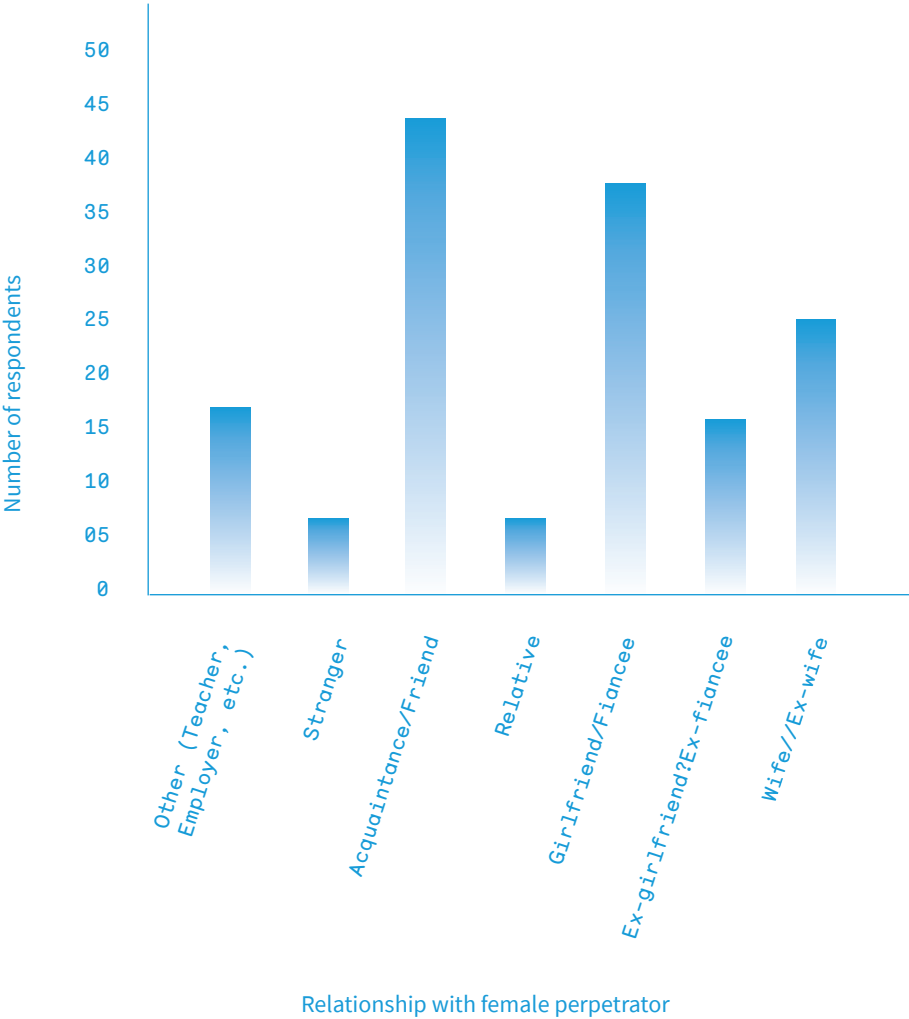
A woman forced you to penetrate her without your consent by:	Frequency	Percentage
Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about you, making promises you knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring you after you said you didn't want to	34	22.20%
Using force, for example holding you down with their body weight, pinning your arms, restraining you, or having a weapon	22	14.40%
None of the options present	22	14.40%
Showing displeasure, criticizing your sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force after you said you didn't want to	17	11.10%
Forcing you to penetrate her when you were asleep or unconscious from consensually drinking alcohol, and when you came to (regained consciousness) you could not give consent to or stop what was happening	17	11.10%
Forcing you to penetrate her when you were asleep or unconscious from using drugs consensually and when you came to (regained consciousness) you could not stop what was happening	13	8.50%
Forcing you to penetrate her after you had been drinking alcohol and were conscious but too intoxicated (drunk) to give her your consent to or stop what was happening	11	7.20%
Threatening to physically harm you or someone close to you	8	5.20%
Acting together with two or more people to force you to penetrate her where you had made it clear that you did not give your consent to what was happening or were unable	4	2.60%
Encouraging or pressuring you to drink alcohol until you were too intoxicated (drunk) to give consent to or stop what was happening	3	2%
Giving you a drug without your knowledge that made you too incapacitated (out of it) to consent to or stop what was happening	2	1.30%

**Table 1:** Strategies used by female perpetrators when forcing men to engage in penetration (based on 153 responses)

### Relationship with female perpetrator

Data was also collected on the relationship between the participants and female perpetrators at the time that the compelled penetration took place (figure 6). All 154 participants answered this question, with the majority of men reporting that they knew the woman,

often as an acquaintance or a friend (43 (27.9%)). As a total across multiple categories, just over half (79 (51.3%)) of the men were in, or had been in, a relationship (e.g. girlfriend or wife) with the female perpetrator.



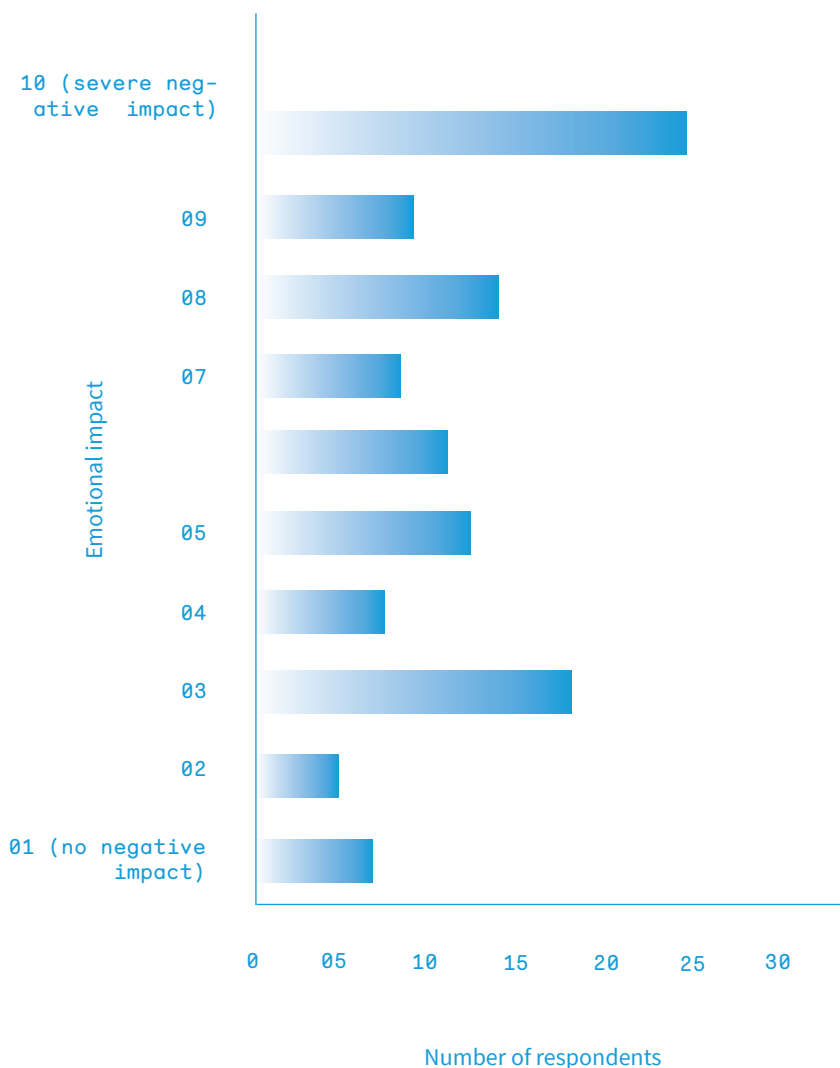
**Figure 6:** Relationship with female perpetrator at the time of compelled penetration (based on 154 responses)

## Physical and emotional harm

Almost three-quarters (84 (70.6%)) of the 119 respondents who answered this question reported that they did not experience any physical injuries, either to their genitalia or any other part of their body, as a result of being forced-to-penetrate a woman.

When exploring the issue of emotional harm, the picture is more complex. The men were asked to rate from 1 (no negative impact) to 10 (severe negative impact) the extent to which their forced-to-penetrate experience had a negative effect on them emotionally or psychologically (figure 7).

- The average impact was 6 on the scale, suggesting that overall, the experience of being compelled to penetrate a woman had negative emotional and psychological impacts for respondents.
- '10' - a severe negative emotional impact - was identified most frequently by the men, (24 (20.9%)) followed by '3' - some (limited) negative impact - as the next most frequent (18 (15.6%)) experience.
- 5.2% of men indicated that they did not experience any negative emotional impact.



**Figure 7:** Emotional/psychological impact of forced-to-penetrate experience (based on 115 responses)

## Seeking support

The men who rated the emotional impact of their experience as being higher than a '1' were also asked whether they had sought support for the negative effects experienced. Of the 102 men who answered this question, the majority (76 (74.5%)) had not sought support for the negative emotional effects of their experience.

## Reporting incidents

### Police

Participants were asked whether they reported their forced-to-penetrate experience to the police. Of the 115 men who answered this question only 2 (1.7%) said 'yes'. For both men who did report to the police, neither case made it to court.

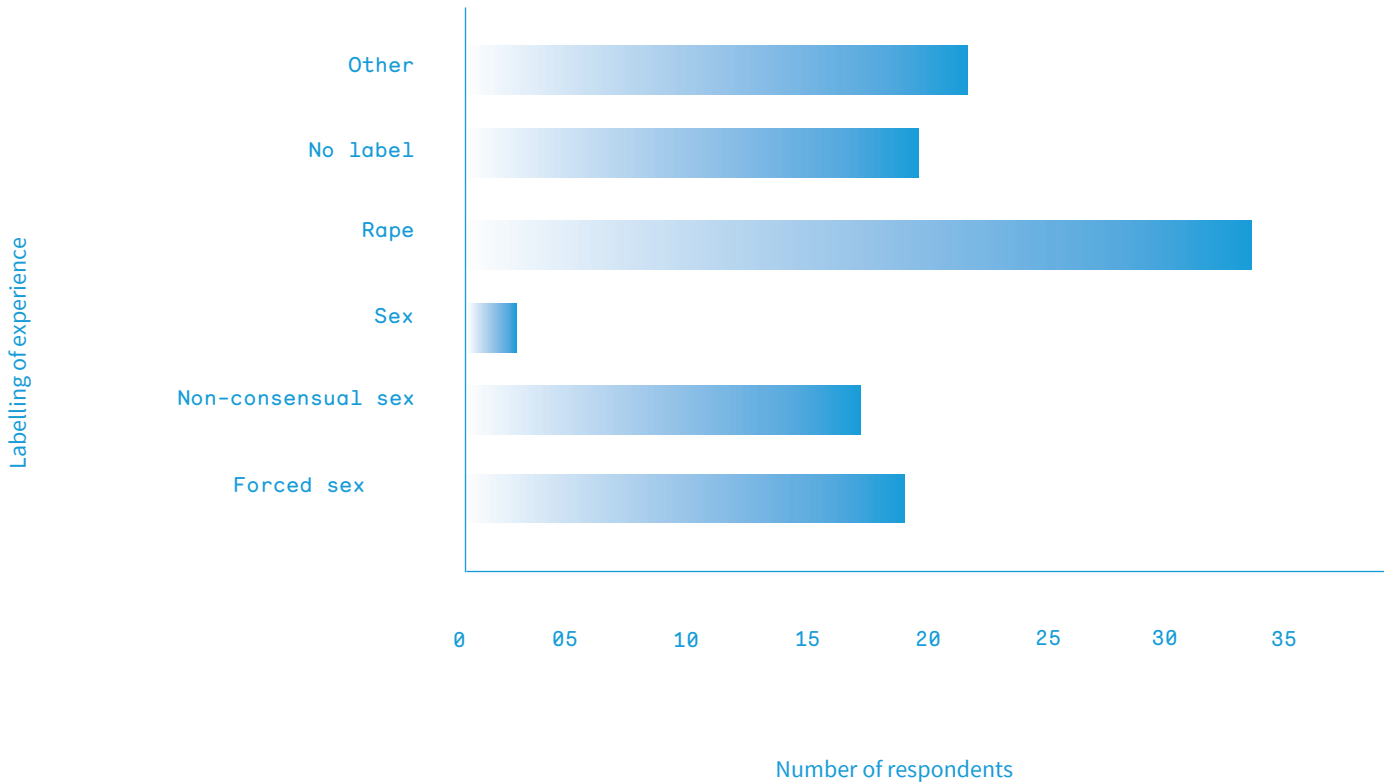
### Friends and family

Reporting to friends and family was much more common than reporting to the police. However, of the 117 men who answered this question, only 22 (18.8%) told friends and family, and 95 (81.2%) did not.

### Labelling their experiences

Respondents were asked how they would label or define their experience of being forced-to-penetrate a woman (figure 8). 111 men answered this question.

- ‘Rape’ was the most frequently used label, with 33 men (29.7%) describing their experience this way.
- The label ‘sex’ was used least frequently by the respondents to describe their experience (selected by only two of the men).



**Figure 8:** the labelling of forced-to-penetrate experiences by male respondents (based on 111 responses)

“Men most frequently labelled what happened to them as rape.

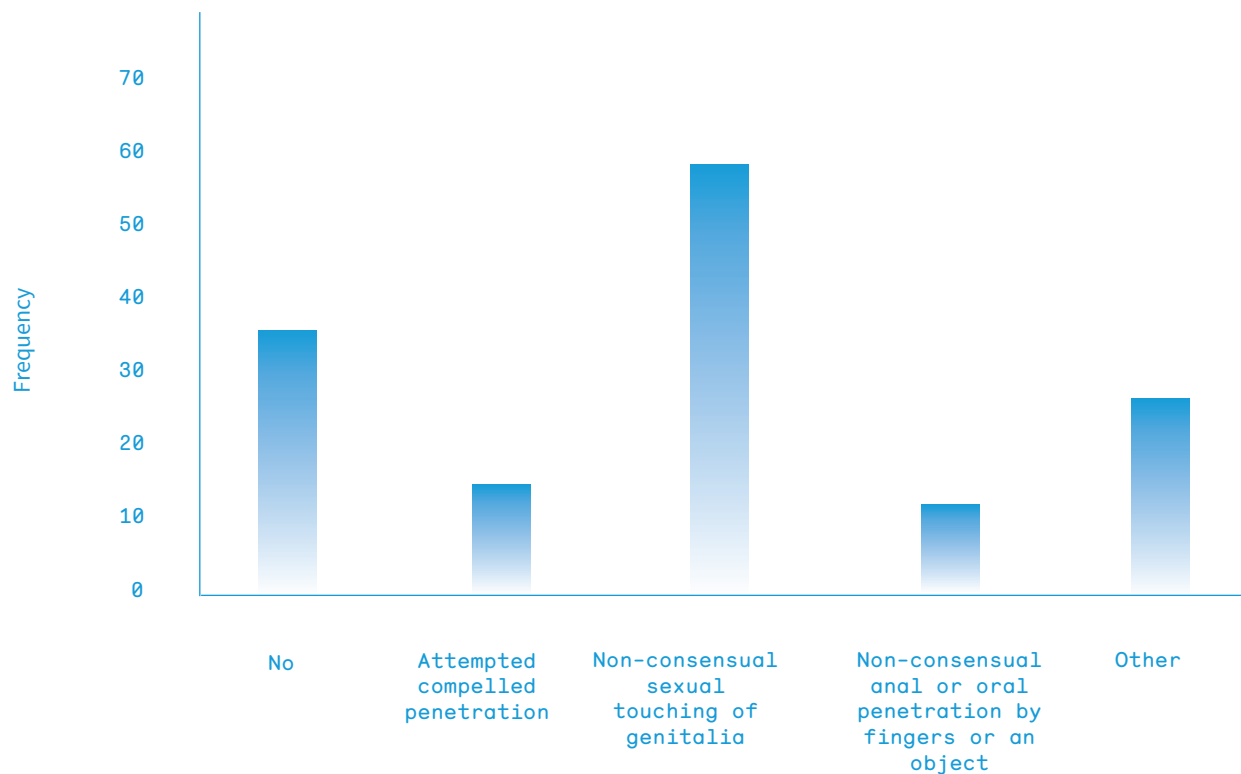
## Other experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by women

The final questions in the survey asked respondents whether they had experienced any other sexual violence perpetrated by women. Participants were asked whether they had had any other experiences of being forced-to-penetrate a woman, before the most recent one focused upon in the survey. 108 men answered this question. Just over half of them (56 (51.8%)) reported that they had not had any additional experiences

of compelled penetration, and just under half (52 (48.2%)) disclosed that they had experienced one or more additional instances.

The respondents were also asked if they had experienced any other forms of non-consensual sexual activity with a woman. They were encouraged to select all of the options that applied to them. Only a third (35 (32.4%)) of the 108 men who answered

this question indicated that they had not experienced any other form of non-consensual activity with a woman. Thus the majority of the men had experienced other forms of sexual violence, the most frequently reported being sexual assault (sexual touching of genitalia without consent), with 58 reports of this by the participants (figure 9).



Other forms of non-consensual sexual activity with a woman

**Figure 9:** Other experiences of non-consensual sexual activity with a woman (based on 108 responses)



“The majority of the men had experienced other forms of sexual violence from women, the most frequently reported being sexual assault (sexual touching of genitalia without consent), with 58 reports of this by the participants.

# IMPLICATIONS

## 01. Two of the most powerful and pervasive stereotypes around men experiencing sexual violence perpetrated by women are wrong.

Gender stereotypes around masculinity, femininity, and sexual violence assume that:

- Women's "weaker" physical stature, and thus presumed inability to overpower men, means compelled penetration cannot or does not take place.<sup>7</sup>
- Men value and enjoy sex and so view all sexual opportunities with women as positive.<sup>8</sup>

These stereotypes can impact upon public perceptions and understanding in relation to men's experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by women, as well as professional policies and practice in responding to such cases.

The data presented in this report provides compelling evidence to rebuff these stereotypes. The participation of over 150 men in the online survey sharing their experiences of compelled penetration evidences empirically, for the first time in the UK, that this form of sexual violence can and does happen.

**"Weaker" physical stature is not a barrier to women being perpetrators, and indeed "use of force" is the second most frequently cited strategy in the experience of respondents (table 1).**

The incorrectness of the myth around male physical strength and dominance is also reinforced by the fact that the strategies typically stereotyped as being needed for a woman to overpower a man, e.g. the involvement of multiple participants

or the non-consensual use of drugs or alcohol, feature least frequently within the results. The strategies used by the female perpetrators were complex and varied, with alcohol having a role to play, most frequently consumed consensually before the compelled penetration took place (table 1).

**The most frequently reported strategy was that of blackmail and coercion. The high frequency with which this appears has implications for considering how the new coercive control offence<sup>9</sup> may be used in the context of such cases.**

So-called "lucky boy" syndrome – where (heterosexual) men are taught to value and enjoy sex and so are stereotyped as viewing all sexual opportunities as positive – means that it is assumed that men do not experience any emotional harm from heterosexual sexual experiences, whether consensual or not.<sup>10</sup> Whilst a small proportion (5.2%) of men in the study indicated that their compelled penetration experience had no negative impact on them, the data in this study suggests that for the majority of men some degree of negative emotional impact was experienced. This is reflected in an average impact rating of 6/10 (with 10 being severe negative impact).

The picture that emerges in relation to emotional harms is a complex and nuanced one, reflecting the fact that everyone who experiences sexual violence does so differently. Perhaps most strikingly

though, men most frequently indicated that they had experienced a severe negative emotional impact because of their compelled penetration experience (figure 7). This directly contravenes stereotypes that all men view all sexual experiences as positive.

**The high frequency with which negative emotional impacts appear has implications for considering the resourcing of professional support for these men, as well as how and where it is provided.**

<sup>7</sup>Struckman-Johnson, C. and Anderson, P.B (1998) "Men Do and Women Don't": Difficulties in Researching Sexual Aggressive Women' in Anderson, P.B and Struckman-Johnson, C. (eds) *Sexually aggressive women: Current perspectives and controversies*, 1st ed. New York: Guildford Press, 9 - 18.

<sup>8</sup>Weare, S. (2017) "Oh you're a guy, how could you be raped by a woman, that makes no sense" - Towards a case for legally recognising and labelling 'forced to penetrate' cases as rape' *International Journal of Law in Context*. DOI: 10.1017/S1744552317000179

<sup>9</sup>Serious Crime Act 2015, s 76

<sup>10</sup>Weare, S. (2017) "Oh you're a guy, how could you be raped by a woman, that makes no sense" - Towards a case for legally recognising and labelling 'forced to penetrate' cases as rape' *International Journal of Law in Context*. DOI: 10.1017/S1744552317000179

## 02 . The majority of men know the female perpetrator.

Most of the men reported that they knew the female perpetrator in some capacity, with only seven men (4.5%) reporting that the woman was a stranger (figure 6). The relationships ranged from being acquaintances or friends through to wives or girlfriends.

**The high frequency with which the men indicated that they were, or had been, in an intimate relationship (e.g. girlfriend or wife) with the female perpetrator highlights a need to consider whether this form of sexual violence is occurring within a wider context of domestic abuse.**

Of the seven men (4.5%) who labelled the female perpetrator as a relative, three of them later disclosed the specific relation; a mother, an aunt, and a sister. Of the 18 men (11.7%), who selected the 'other' option (see figure 6), the women involved were identified as including work colleagues, employers, fellow students, a landlady, a babysitter, and a family friend. Some of these could arguably be categorised under the acquaintance/friend category, but it is interesting in and of itself that the men have chosen to label them differently, and it is important to respect the categorisation that has been chosen by the respondents.

## 03 . Men who have experienced compelled penetration are dealing with their experiences in isolation and without support.

The majority of men did not report being compelled to penetrate a woman, either to the police or to friends and family. The reporting rate to the police of 1.7% is even lower than the reporting rate for women who have experienced serious sexual violence, which stands at around 15%.<sup>11</sup>

The extremely low reporting rate in compelled penetration cases suggests a clear lack of engagement by these men with the police and criminal justice process.

The great majority (80%) of men did not disclose their experience to their family or friends. Lack of disclosure in sexual violence cases is common. However, this finding, combined with the fact that

three-quarters (74.5%) of the men had not sought support for the negative emotional effects of their forced-to-penetrate experience, suggests that men are left isolated and alone when dealing with what has happened.

Initial steps that could be taken to combat this isolation include raising public awareness of the issue of compelled penetration so that it is no longer a "hidden" crime, and clearer signposting to support services available for men who experience sexual violence.

**The lack of knowledge around these cases (due to the previous issue of a lack of empirical evidence) highlights**

**that more training and awareness in relation to compelled penetration cases for groups and organisations likely to encounter these men would be beneficial, including the police, health services, and specialist support organisations.**

<sup>11</sup>Ministry of Justice et al., (2013) 'An overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales - Statistics Bulletin (January 2013) [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf) p.6

## 04 . Men most frequently label their compelled penetration experience as ‘rape’.

33 men (29.7%) labelled their experience as rape (figure 8), highlighting a clear disparity between how these men define what happened to them, versus the legal definition, which currently excludes such cases from recognition as rape.

**The importance of correctly labelling experiences of sexual violence within the criminal law is well recognised,<sup>12</sup> and therefore serious consideration needs to be given to the potential for legal reform in this area.**

Of the options which could be selected by the men in the survey, “sex”, typically denoting a consensual experience, was selected by just two of the 111 men who answered this question (figure 8). This reinforces the overwhelmingly negative experiences of the men who responded to the survey.

22 men (19.8%) chose the option of “other” in the survey when labelling their experience, suggesting that they did not feel that any of the labels offered were appropriate, and 18 (16.2%) were unable

or unwilling to label or define what had happened to them. This may be because the issue of compelled penetration by women against men is something that has received very little attention or public discussion, and therefore they may not feel that there is a “language” that accurately reflects their experience.

**Progress on the issues raised in this report should include developing an appropriate “language” in relation to these cases, so that shared language and associated clarity can be achieved.**

<sup>12</sup>Rumney, P.N (2007) ‘In Defence of Gender Neutrality within Rape’, *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 6(1): 481 - 526, 510

## 05 . Many men have experienced multiple instances of sexual violation from women.

The high frequency with which men reported experiencing additional incidents of compelled penetration (48.2%), as well as other forms of non-consensual sexual activity with a woman (67.6%), raises multiple victimisation as an issue. Acknowledging multiple victimisation is well-recognised as being important in ensuring that appropriate support is provided for those who experience sexual violence, as well as being central to informing policy and practice for those who engage with sexual violence victims.

**The potential for multiple victimisation is an issue that needs to be addressed when considering policy and practice responses to such cases moving forwards.**

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