

# Sexual Violence Victimization among Undergraduates at a Chilean University

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As part of a campus-wide prevention program, the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) implemented a cross-sequential survey on sexual violence. In this article, we report data from the first wave (2018; N = 2,046) from three cohorts of undergraduates (Year 1, n = 792; Year 2, n = 601; Year 3, n = 653). We found an overall twelve-month prevalence for victimization experiences of 18.7 percent (4.3 percent by force or threat of force; 12.9 percent while unable to resist; 7.1 percent by verbal pressure; multiple responses allowed). Women (22.9 percent) were victimized more frequently than men (9.7 percent). Among women, victimization rates were highest for Year 1 students (25.7 percent), intermediate for Year 2 (22.3%), and lowest for Year 3 (19.8 percent). Only 10.9 percent of reported incidents happened in a university context. In most cases, perpetrators were male (88.9 percent) and known to the victim (72.1 percent); 24.4 percent were partners, 35.5 percent were friends. We present additional data on risk factors and attitudinal correlates. We also discuss our findings in relation to previous research suggesting higher prevalence rates at Chilean universities, considering differences in methodology and implications for future research.

Keywords: Chile, prevention, rape, sexual violence, undergraduates

Over the last decades, numerous scandals and debates have brought to light issues related to sexual violence, revealing a discouraging panorama.<sup>\*</sup> In particular the #MeToo movement, launched in 2017 with a statement from US actress Alyssa Milano, has spurred one of the most important debates about sexual violence. Milano's aim was to encourage women (and men) around the world to disclose their experiences with sexual violence, in order to communicate the mag-

nitude of the problem (Khomami 2017). The movement's repercussions were diverse, with consequences on many levels in different countries. In Sweden, for example, it prompted the introduction of new sexual assault legislation, under which engaging in sexual acts without clear affirmative consent (either verbal or non-verbal) constitutes a crime, even in the absence of evidence of physical coercion (BBC News 2018).

In Chile, the #MeToo movement overlapped with the emergence of a strong feminist movement, whose actions included large-scale strikes, occupations of public buildings, and protests against sexual harassment

<sup>\*</sup> This research was conducted by Laura Saldarriaga in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a PhD degree in psychology, which was supervised by Gerd Bohner.

and discrimination within the country's universities (Bartlett 2018; Jiménez-Moya, Manzi, and Cheyre 2018; Sepúlveda-Garrido 2018). Despite persistent economic and social inequalities between men and women in Chile, important changes are taking place. A growing interest in and commitment to scientific research on sexual violence is becoming apparent, which places Chile ahead of other Latin American countries in this regard.

A systematic review of sexual violence research in Chile (Schuster and Krahe 2019) identified twenty-eight studies on the prevalence of sexual aggression victimization among women and men. The reported prevalence rates varied greatly across samples, which may be attributed to differences in definitions, measurement instruments, and time period assessed. Interestingly, however, even studies with similar definitions of sexual violence, with similar samples (university students between 18 and 30 years of age), and addressing identical time periods yielded very different prevalence rates (Lehrer et al. 2007; Lehrer, Lehrer, and Koss 2013; Schuster et al. 2016). For example, Schuster and colleagues found much higher prevalence rates of sexual violence victimization over a twelve-month period (33.4 percent for women, 41.5 percent for men) as well as since the age of 14<sup>1</sup> (51.9 percent for women, 48 percent for men), than the rates found by Lehrer and colleagues (17 percent over the last twelve months and 31 percent since the age of 14 among women; 20 percent since the age of 14 among men).

One possible explanation for these discrepancies may lie in the number of items used to assess victimization (Bolen and Scannapieco 1999; Cook et al. 2011; de Graaf and De Haas 2018; Fisher 2009). Lehrer and colleagues (2007) used five comprehensive items assessing attempted rape, rape using three different coercive strategies (physical force, verbal pressure, taking advantage of the victim being unable to resist), and unwanted sexual contact (such as touching or kissing). For example, one item read "Someone forced me to have sex using physical force", with response options "yes" and "no." By contrast, Schuster and colleagues (2016) used thirty-six highly specific items

that combined three coercive strategies (use or threat of force, verbal pressure, exploitation of an incapacitated state), three relationship constellations (partner, acquaintance, stranger), and four specific sexual acts (touching, attempted intercourse, completed intercourse, other). Specifically, after a lead-in that specified the coercion strategy ("Has a man ever made you – or tried to make you – have sexual contact with him against your will by threatening to use force or by harming you?"), several items specified both the relationship constellation and the specific sexual act ("My current or former partner in a steady relationship ... to engage in sexual touching") with response options "never", "once", "twice", and "three or more times." We will return to the implications of this huge discrepancy in item number and specificity in the discussion section.

## 1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study represents the first wave of data collection (April 2018) within a five-year cross-sequential panel survey on sexual violence at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) in Santiago. It will establish a baseline for the evaluation of future interventions (which are not the subject of the present contribution). For present purposes, the main research questions concerned (1) assessing sexual violence victimization experiences among PUC undergraduates in a differentiated yet economical form, and (2) examining how these experiences correlate with other variables that potentially represent risk factors for or consequences of victimization. Although many analyses were exploratory, we did have a-priori hypotheses regarding some correlations, which are outlined below where applicable.

Established risk factors for sexual violence victimization addressed in the survey include the age of onset of sexual activity, the number of previous sexual partners (Krahe 2009; Leenaars, Dane, and Marini 2008; Mandoki and Burkhart 1989), and short-term mating orientation, which includes a preference for uncommitted sexual encounters (Perilloux, Duntley, and Buss 2011). All of these variables affect the likelihood of getting into high-risk social situations and exposure to potential perpetrators. Thus we hypothesized victimization to be positively correlated with number of

<sup>1</sup> Fourteen years is the legal age of consent for heterosexual activities in Chile.

partners and short-term mating orientation, and negatively correlated with age of onset. Also, based on the majority of prior prevalence studies, we hypothesized that female students would report higher victimization rates than male students.

We also considered a number of possible consequences deriving from sexual violence victimization. Thus, we hypothesized that victimization would be related to increased fear of being victimized, and would negatively impact life in general, academic life, and self-assessed health. Such consequences of victimization have been frequently described (for example, Krug et al. 2002).

Additionally, we examined how attitudinal variables might affect the perception of victimization experiences. Previous research has shown effects of ambivalent sexism and sexual aggression myths on the perception of a victimization experience (LeMaire, Oswald, and Russell 2016). Ambivalent sexism (Glick and Fiske 1996) encompasses both hostile attitudes toward women and benevolent attitudes toward women, which may subjectively appear positive but also reinforce gender inequality (“women are good mothers”) (Jost and Kay 2005). Sexual aggression myths, which are prejudiced beliefs about sexual violence victimization (Burt 1980; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994; Genger et al. 2007), have a wide range of negative consequences for victims of sexual violence, as they deny, downplay, or justify sexually aggressive behavior (Bohner et al. 2009). Indeed, the endorsement of sexual aggression myths may reduce the likelihood that a victim identifies their own victimization experience as rape, and the same has been demonstrated in relation to benevolent sexism (LeMaire, Oswald, and Russell 2016). We therefore hypothesized that both sexist attitudes and the acceptance of sexual aggression myths would be related to a perception that the consequences of victimization experiences are less negative. Further, we assessed two related general inter-group attitude variables, namely right-wing authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer 1998) and social dominance orientation (SDO, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle 1994). These are positively related to a wide range of unfavorable attitudes toward members of disadvantaged groups, including sexism and homophobia (Kugler, Jost, and Noorbaloochi 2014; Süssenbach and

Bohner 2011). It therefore seemed plausible that both RWA and SDO would also be related to a perception that the consequences of victimization experiences are less negative, which we explored in the current study.

## 2 Method

The survey was conducted in April 2018, approximately six weeks into the Chilean academic year, which starts in March. It assessed victimization, perpetration, bystander experiences, and related issues, such as knowledge, risk factors, attitudes, and beliefs regarding sexual violence. All undergraduate students at the university were invited by e-mail to participate. They were fully informed about the purpose of the survey, accessed through the online platform QuestionPro. Students who completed the survey were entered in a raffle of 150 gift cards worth 30,000 Chilean pesos (about 40 euros). To preserve respondents’ anonymity, the e-mail addresses are kept separate and are not accessible to researchers analyzing the data. After completing the survey, respondents received a debriefing message that included information on support for victims and bystanders of sexual violence. All procedures were approved by PUC’s relevant ethics committee.

### 2.1 Respondents

2,046 undergraduate students took part in the survey.<sup>2</sup> They were from three cohorts (Year 1 = 792, Year 2 = 601, Year 3 = 653), and were between the ages of 18 and 51 years ( $M = 19.87$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ , 95 percent between 18 and 23) 67.3 percent identified as female, 32.2 percent as male, and 0.5 percent as non-binary. 87.2 percent identified as heterosexual, 4.5 percent as lesbian or gay, 5.7 percent as bisexual, and 2.5 percent reported other sexual orientations. 98.4 percent of the respondents had Chilean nationality and 78.2 percent were still living with their parents.

<sup>2</sup> In 2018, the total number of undergraduates enrolled at PUC was 26,197 (53.4 percent female). Of these, 5,306 were in Year 1, 4,820 in Year 2, and 4,346 in Year 3.

## 2.2 Materials

### 2.2.1 Victimization Experiences

To avoid overburdening respondents with a long list of items, we adapted the SAV-S (Krahé and Berger 2013), which was also used by Schuster and colleagues (2016), condensing the specific information from their thirty-six items into three main items, each addressing one coercive strategy. We did not at this stage provide specific items for each combination of relationship constellation and sexual act within each coercive strategy. Otherwise, we used the same Spanish wording as Schuster and colleagues (2016).<sup>3</sup> Respondents who reported at least one victimization experience in the three main items were asked to give additional details.<sup>4</sup>

The English wording of the victimization measure read as follows (Spanish text available from the first author):

Please tell us if, during the last twelve months, one or several person/s has/have had sexual contact with you or attempted to do so (for example kissing, touching, coitus, oral sex) against your will or without your consent by ...

(i) ... threatening to use force or hurting you (for example, causing you pain because you were held or threatened).

(ii) ... taking advantage of you being unable to resist (for example, after you had consumed a lot of alcohol or drugs).

(iii) ... verbally pressuring you (for example, threatening to end the relationship or questioning your sexual competence).

For each item there were three response options: “never,” “once,” and “more than once.” Respondents who reported at least one relevant experience were then asked further questions relating to the (latest) incident; all others moved on to the items described in the next section. For victims, eighteen items were used to assess details including the number of perpetrators (“one,” “two,” or “more than two”); perpetrator gender (“male” or “female”); whether the victim already knew the perpetrator (“yes” or “no”); what rela-

tionship the perpetrator had to the victim (for example partner, friend, university member); the level of acquaintance (1 = “not close at all” to 5 = “very close”); whether the incident occurred within a university context (for example on campus, during a student party, during a class assignment or excursion, “yes” or “no”); whether the respondent had told anybody about the incident (“yes,” “no,” or “prefer not to say”); if not, why not (twelve possible reasons such as “I didn’t think it was something serious” could be selected; see Table 1); for those who told someone about the incident, how the support received was perceived (1 = “not satisfactory at all” to 5 = “very satisfactory”); whether victim or perpetrator had consumed drugs or alcohol (“me,” “the other person,” “both,” “nobody”); how serious the incident was for the respondent (1 = “not serious at all” to 5 = “very serious”); whether it had negative consequences on the respondent’s (academic) life (1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very much”); whether the respondent had thought of leaving the university (“yes” or “no”); and whether the respondent had received psychological help related to the incident (“yes” or “no”).

### 2.2.2 Knowledge about and Satisfaction with University Policies and Protocols

To assess how well students were informed about and satisfied with PUC policies relating to sexual violence, ten items addressed respondents’ familiarity with specific action protocols and university contact points, whether they knew whom to contact according to the circumstances (for example if the perpetrator was a fellow student, if the incident happened on campus, if the perpetrator was a professor), and how satisfied they were with support offered by the university. Internal consistency of the policy satisfaction scale was very high (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### 2.2.3 Sexual Experience

Three items addressing sexual experience were adapted from Schuster and colleagues (2016): “Have you ever had sexual intercourse?” (“yes,” “no,” “do not wish to answer”); “At which age did you have your first sexual intercourse?” (drop-down list with options starting at “under 14” and increasing in one-year steps); and “With how many persons have you had

<sup>3</sup> The authors would like to thank Isabell Schuster for providing access to her materials.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the instruments reported in this section, the survey contained questions on well-being, management of stress, empathy, self-esteem, recognition and attitudes condoning sexually aggressive behavior, consent, and bystander behavior. These issues are outside of the scope of the present article.

Unless stated otherwise, response options of scales were from 1 = “totally disagree” to 5 = “totally agree.”

sexual intercourse during the past 12 months?" ("none," "one," "two," "three," "four," "5 to 10," "11 to 20," "21 to 100," "more than 100").

### 2.2.4 Fear of Victimization

On the basis of work by Ferraro (1996) and Merrill (2014), we formulated three items to measure fear of victimization (for example "I fear that a fellow student might sexually assault me"), and three items to measure avoidance behaviors related to this fear (for example, "How often have you done the following? ... Take different paths or routes on campus to avoid being sexually assaulted"; 1 = "never or almost never" to 5 = "always or almost always"). These six items were adapted to the PUC context by incorporating key elements that had come up in pilot discussions with students. Internal consistency for this scale was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

### 2.2.5 Short-Term Mating Orientation

To assess short-term mating orientation, we selected two items from a measure by Jackson and Kirkpatrick (2007): "I can easily imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying 'casual' sex with different partners" and "I could easily imagine myself enjoying one night of sex with someone I would never see again". Internal consistency for this scale was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

### 2.2.6 Health

To explore the possibility that victimization experiences might affect respondents' health status, two items addressing self-assessed health were taken from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Health Related Quality of Life Measure (CDC HRQOL-14, 2000, cited in Khan et al. 2014): "How would you describe your physical health?" and "How would you describe your state of mind?" (1 = "poor" to 5 = "excellent"). Internal consistency for the health condition scale was modest ( $\alpha = .59$ ).

### 2.2.7 Ambivalent Sexism

To assess ambivalent sexism, six items from the Spanish Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Mladinic et al. 1998) were selected on the basis of their factor loadings in a Chilean sample (Jiménez-Moya, Manzi, and Cheyre 2018). Three items each represented hostile sexism

(for example, "Women exaggerate problems at work") and benevolent sexism (for example, "Women should be cherished and protected by men"). Internal consistency for this scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

### 2.2.8 Sexual Aggression Myths

On the basis of expert analysis, six items from the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (Gerger et al. 2007; Spanish version by Megías et al. 2011), were selected and adapted for use with a Chilean sample (for example, "Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence"). Internal consistency for this scale was good ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

### 2.2.9 Conservative Attitudes

Two items from the SDO7 scale (Ho et al. 2012; for example, "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups") and two items from the RWA scale (Funke 2005; for example, "What our country really needs instead of more 'civil rights' is a good stiff dose of law and order") were translated and adapted on the basis of their adequacy for the Chilean context and their fit within the survey, as previous research had shown that they were strongly linked to hostile behavior. Internal consistencies for these scales were acceptable ( $\alpha = .70$  for SDO and  $\alpha = .67$  for RWA).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Prevalence Rates

Overall, 18.7 percent of respondents reported at least one experience of nonconsensual sexual contact over the previous twelve months (4.3 percent by force or threat of force; 12.9 percent while unable to resist; 7.1 percent by verbal pressure; multiple answers were possible). Responses for the three coercive strategies were positively intercorrelated ( $r$ s ranging from .20 to .30; Cronbach's alpha = .46). Women (22.9 percent) were victimized more frequently than men (9.7 percent). Taking sexual orientation into account, victimization was lowest for heterosexual men (8.2 percent), followed by homosexual women (15.2 percent) and homosexual men (17.0 percent). Among the group of males, the highest victimization rate was reported by bisexuals (19.2 percent). Heterosexual (22.6 percent) and bisexual women (30.6 percent) reported the highest rates of victimization.

Among women, victimization rates were highest for Year 1 students (25.7 percent), intermediate for Year 2 (22.3 percent), and lowest for Year 3 (19.8 percent). This is a significant linear decrease from Y1 to Y3,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1367) = 4.71, p = .03$ . Among the men, no comparable trend emerged.

In most cases, the perpetrators were male (88.9 percent) and known to the victim (72.1 percent); 24.4 percent were partners, and 35.5 percent were friends. In 57.1 percent of cases, both parties had consumed alcohol, in 6.4 percent only the victim, and in 6.9 percent only the perpetrator. In 12.3 percent of the cases both parties had consumed other drugs, in 2.9 percent only the victim, and in 13.7 percent only the perpetrator. Alcohol or drugs were almost always involved when the victim was unable to resist (93.9 percent) but less frequently when the perpetrator used (threat of) force (51.2 percent) or verbal pressure (46.7 percent). When intoxication was involved (vs. not involved), the victim was less likely to know the perpetrator (66.7 percent vs. 89.0 percent). Only 10.8 percent of the reported cases occurred in a university context. Of interest, intoxication was involved more frequently in university contexts (97.5 percent) than in other contexts (71.7 percent). At least 18.1 percent of reported perpetrators were university members,<sup>5</sup> of whom 92 percent were fellow undergraduates.

### 3.2 Consequences of Victimization

Although more than half of the victims (53.1 percent) rated the incident as at least “somewhat” severe, many did not perceive major negative consequences (see also Figure 1). A majority reported that the incident had little or no impact on their personal life (57.7 percent) or on their academic life (81.2 percent) (Points 1 and 2 on a scale from 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very much”). 16.2 percent of the victims reported having received psychological help and 19 percent had thought about leaving the university. 58.8 percent of the victims reported having told someone about the incident. In a majority of cases, they talked about the incident with friends (51.2 percent) and/or fellow students (31.4 percent), and the support received was

rated as “rather satisfactory” in most cases. Very few victims had reported the incident to the police (2.4 percent) or to the university (2.9 percent), and those who had done so rated the support received as rather unsatisfactory. Figure 2 shows in detail whom victims told about the incident, and the associated level of satisfaction with the support received.

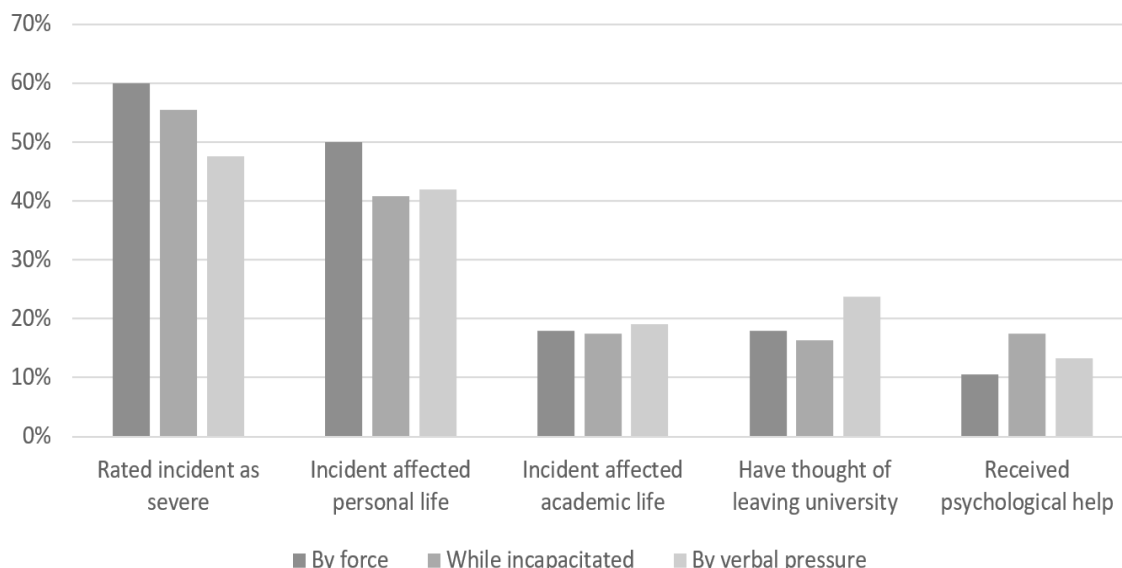
The most common reasons for not reporting the incident were “I didn’t think it was something serious” (51.6 percent), “I didn’t know with whom or how I could talk about what happened” (39.8 percent), and “I couldn’t decide if it was appropriate or not” (39.1 percent). All reasons and their respective percentages are listed in Table 1. An exploratory analysis showed that respondents who had talked about the incident reported more severe consequences ( $M = 2.29$ ) than did respondents who had not talked about it ( $M = 2.01$ ),  $t(315.82) = 2.85, p = .005$ . Further, respondents who had experienced sexual violence ( $M = 2.80$ ) were less satisfied with PUC policies on sexual violence than those who had not ( $M = 3.01$ ),  $t(535.93) = -4.18, p < .001$ . We will return to these findings in the discussion.

### 3.2 Correlation and Regression Analyses on Risk Factors and Consequences

In bivariate correlation analyses (see Table 2), the number of sex partners, short-term mating orientation, age of onset of sexual activity, and the fact of being sexually active were identified as significant correlates of sexual violence victimization, supporting our hypotheses regarding risk factors. Furthermore, as hypothesized, self-assessed health was negatively correlated, and reported fear of victimization was positively correlated with victimization experiences. Attitudinal factors, such as sexist attitudes, acceptance of sexual aggression myths, and conservative attitudes, were all negatively correlated with victimization. As can be seen in Table 2, although significant, all of these correlations were small in magnitude.

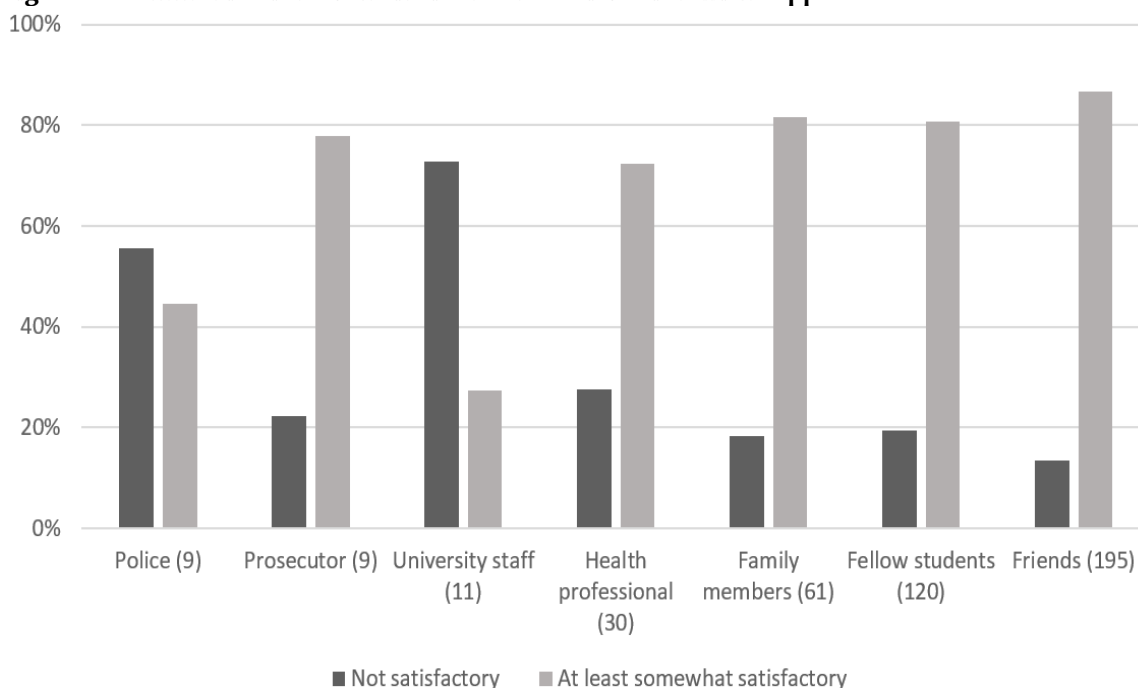
<sup>5</sup> The item format with exclusive response options did not allow us to distinguish if perpetrators reported as friends, family members, etc. might also have been university members.

**Figure 1: Consequences of victimization by type of coercion**



Note: Percentage of victims by type of coercion who (i) rated the incident as at least “somewhat” severe (Points 3 to 5 on a scale from 1 = “not severe” to 5 = “very severe”), (ii) said the incident affected their personal lives at least “somewhat” (Points 3 to 5 on a scale from 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very much”), (iii) said the incident negatively affected their academic lives at least “somewhat” (Points 3 to 5 on a scale from 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very much”), (iv) had thought of leaving the university (“yes” in a yes/no answer format), (v) or received psychological help (“yes” in a yes/no answer format). Type of coercion did not significantly affect the reporting of consequences.

**Figure 2: Communication of the incident and satisfaction with support**



Note: Percentage of victims who are not satisfied (darker bars) and at least somewhat satisfied (lighter bars) with the support offered. The number of victims telling the incident to each specific target is shown in parentheses. For example, 195 victims told friends about the incident, and over 80 percent of these found the support given at least “somewhat” satisfactory (Points 3 to 5 on a scale from 1 = “not at all satisfactory” to 5 = “very satisfactory”).



**Table 1: Reasons for not reporting sexual violence victimization**

Reason	Percentage of victims reporting this reason for not telling anybody
I didn't think it was something serious	51.6%
I didn't know with whom or how I could talk about what happened	39.8%
I couldn't decide if it was appropriate or not	39.1%
I have/had an intimate or close relationship with the person responsible	38.3%
The person responsible was somebody I liked/like	35.9%
I felt that I provoked what happened to me	33.6%
I am/was worried about what other people would think if I reported	32.8%
I didn't/don't think that the perpetrator/s would suffer any kind of consequences	21.1%
What happened to me was something common and accepted among my acquaintances	19.5%
I didn't/don't think that I would receive the support I needed	15.6%
I didn't/don't think that other people would believe me	11.7%
The person responsible was in a powerful position and could have retaliated afterwards	3.9%

Note: The reasons offered were based on previous research (Vanselow 2009; Woodzicka and LaFrance 2001).

**Table 2: Correlates of victimization**

	Correlation with victimization
Potential risk factors	
Number of sex partners	.202**
Short-term mating orientation	.119**
Being sexually active	.063**
Age of onset of sexual activity	-.059*
Potential consequences	
Health status	-.119*
Fear of victimization	.225**
Attitude variables	
Ambivalent sexist attitudes	-.112**
Acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression	-.096**
Right-wing authoritarianism	-.077**
Social dominance orientation	-.058**

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

**Table 3: Correlates of the consequences of victimization**

	Correlation with perceived consequences <sup>a</sup>
Ambivalent sexist attitudes	-.165**
Acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression	-.167**
RWA	-.171**
SDO	-.189**

Note: <sup>a</sup> Perceived severity of the incident, negative consequences on personal life, and negative consequences on academic life averaged into one scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

We also conducted a multiple regression analysis with victimization as the dependent variable and the following predictors: respondent gender and age, number of sex partners, short-term mating orientation, and age of onset of sexual activity (the main risk factors), as well as sexism, sexual aggression myths, RWA, and SDO (the attitudinal variables). This analysis yielded an overall  $R^2$  of .073,  $p < .001$ ; in the same analysis, respondent gender ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), number of sex partners ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and short-term mating orientation ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .030$ ) remained significant individual predictors, all other  $p > .30$ .

Further significant negative correlations were found between the perceived consequences of victimization on the one hand, and ambivalent sexism, acceptance of sexual aggression myths, and conservative attitudes on the other (see Table 3). This means that, as hypothesized, respondents endorsing those attitudes were less likely to perceive experiences of sexual violence as having a severe impact on victims' lives. Again, although significant, all correlations were small. A multiple regression analysis that included all of the predictors listed in Table 3 as well as respondent gender and age yielded an overall  $R^2$  of .121,  $p < .001$ ; in the same analysis, respondent gender ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and age ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .005$ ) were significant individual predictors, but none of the attitudinal variables (all  $p > .08$ ).

#### 4 Discussion

The purpose of the survey was to assess rates of prevalence of sexual violence victimization among undergraduates at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) and to identify correlates in terms of risk

factors and personal consequences. We were also interested in attitudinal correlates that had been previously identified as noteworthy with regard to sexual violence victimization and the perception of its consequences. Our analyses will support the planning of preventive measures at PUC.

In general, the findings of our survey are compatible with previous research. Regarding prevalence, the results resemble those obtained among students in Chile using shorter instruments (Lehrer et al. 2007), but differ considerably from the rates obtained by Schuster and colleagues (2016). As stated in the introduction, Schuster and colleagues used a much longer questionnaire, which could explain the very high rates of victimization reported in their study.

Studies that have analyzed victimization rates in relation to questionnaire length usually report a positive correlation between the two variables (Bolen and Scannapieco 1999; de Graaf and De Haas 2018; Fisher 2009). It has been argued that instruments with multiple behaviorally specific items, such as the SAV-S, which yield the highest prevalence rates, are also the most valid (Cook et al. 2011). This may be true to the extent that such instruments are better at cueing specific memories of incidents that a respondent may otherwise not have recalled or not labeled as sexual violence. However, we should also consider the possibility that a long, multi-item instrument may increase the reporting of false positives, as the content may subtly provide normative information about its topic (Schwarz 2007). Thus, a respondent going through thirty-six items that repeatedly ask if they have been sexually assaulted (combining three coercive strategies, three victim/perpetrator constellations, and four

sexual acts) may get the impression that it is normatively expected to have had such experiences – why else would such similar questions be asked over and over again? This could conceivably lead a respondent to tick a positive response option once or twice to comply with the perceived norm. Given that the true answer to each specific item is more likely to be “no” than “yes,” even random errors in responding (inadvertently ticking the wrong response category) would systematically increase the number of false positives. In light of these considerations, we kept the number of items asking about whether the respondent had been victimized to three, but otherwise used the wording of the SAV-S. Nonetheless, the question of optimal questionnaire length and specificity needs further research.

Our data also revealed important differences to the results of Schuster and colleagues (2016) regarding gender differences in victimization. Whereas they surprisingly found higher twelve-month prevalence rates for men (41.5 percent) than women (33.4 percent), in our study more than twice as many women (22.9 percent) than men (9.7 percent) reported victimization. Our finding is in line with previous studies also reporting higher prevalence rates among females in student samples (Cantor et al. 2015). This highlights the gendered nature of sexual violence, which is widely recognized. The World Health Organization (2013) describes sexual violence as a major public health problem that violates the rights of women, limits their participation in society, and damages their health and well-being. Nevertheless, male college students also report relatively high rates of victimization (Cantor et al. 2015). This could also be observed in our findings.

The most commonly reported coercive strategy was taking advantage of the victim being unable to resist, often facilitated by the use of alcohol or drugs. The use of these substances has been outlined as an important risk factor (Abbey et al. 2004; Krahé and Berger, 2013), and this was also observed in our data: In most of the victimization cases reported, alcohol (and drugs to a lesser degree) was used by both victim and perpetrator. The role of intoxication was particularly pronounced for assaults in a university setting, those perpetrated by strangers, and those where the perpetrator(s) took advantage of the victim’s inability

to resist. This points to the possibility that such incidents happened at parties or student gatherings, which are also the scenarios where sexual advances (especially from men toward women) are encouraged.

As we hypothesized, significant correlations with health status (negative) and fear of victimization (positive) point to consequences of victimization. These results are in line with extensive literature (see Krug et al. 2002 for a review). Correlation and regression analyses also supported our hypotheses regarding risk factors for sexual victimization. Specifically, we identified the number of sexual partners, the age of onset of sexual activity, being sexually active, and a short-term mating orientation as predictors of victimization. All these factors are associated with frequent sexual interactions, which increase the probability of encountering a sexually coercive person and thus the risk of being victimized (see also Perilloux, Duntley, and Buss 2011). It should be noted, however, that in our data only respondent gender, number of sexual partners, and short-term mating orientation remained significant individual predictors when the other variables and age were controlled for in a multiple regression analysis.

Certain groups were identified as being more vulnerable than others. Specifically people with a sexual interest in men (heterosexual and bisexual women, bisexual and homosexual men) appear to be at higher risk than those with no such interest (homosexual women and heterosexual men). This suggests that prejudiced expectations and gender stereotypes might encourage coercive behaviors among men, and that men are more likely to misinterpret, disregard, or ignore cues regarding (non)consent in sexual interactions. According to Reed, Gupta, and Silverman (2014), regardless of the victim’s gender, male-perpetrated sexual violence appears to be linked to gender norms that promote male dominance and control (for a multi-country study supporting this, see Fulu et al. 2013). Previous research has also shown a link between acceptance of sexual aggression myths, traditional gender roles, and hypermasculinity on the one hand, and sexual violence perpetration on the other hand (for a review, see Greathouse et al. 2015).

One possible protective factor that emerged is the fact of being at university. The significant drop in

women's reported victimization from Year 1 (where most of the reported experiences would have happened before entering university) to Year 3 suggests that the university might be a safer environment than where students came from. But other factors could also explain the reported decrease in victimization. The change could reflect maturation and growth, rather than merely the fact of being at the university. Another consideration inconsistent with the idea of the university being a protective environment is that some activities commonly taking place in university contexts (such as parties, student gatherings) are also known as settings where sexual violence is more likely. In any case, it is inadvisable to draw definite conclusions from a trend based only on the first wave of a panel survey. Future waves, and the possibility of analyzing longitudinal data, should bring greater clarity.

Negative correlations were observed between ambivalent sexist attitudes, acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression, RWA, and SDO on the one hand, and victimization experiences on the other. It is possible that victimization experiences change attitudinal dispositions toward sexual violence and may also decrease unfavorable group-related attitudes. The fact of being directly confronted with sexual violence, which is very often counter-stereotypical (for example the perpetrator is not a stranger and the coercive strategy is not physical force), reduces rape-related stereotypes (see Bohner 1998). Conversely, students who have never experienced sexual violence may be more likely to enjoy the "illusion of invulnerability" that comes with high levels of rape myth acceptance and, to a lesser extent, conservative attitudes (Bohner, Siebler, and Raaijmakers 1999; Bohner et al. 1993). This highlights the importance of communicating victimization experiences, in order to give people a sense of how widespread sexual violence really is and what it actually looks like. However, further research is needed to replicate the correlations discussed here, given that their magnitude was small and regression analysis showed that they may be explained by inter-correlations with other variables such as sexual experience, gender, or age.

The attitudinal variables were also negatively correlated with perceived consequences of victimization,

where they jointly (but not individually) predicted a small proportion of variance. Victims who scored higher on sexist attitudes, acceptance of sexual aggression myths, RWA, and SDO reported that they perceived the consequences of victimization as less severe. The endorsement of such attitudes appears to normalize coercive behaviors, reducing the willingness to acknowledge their severity (Papendick and Bohner 2017). This complements results by LeMaire and colleagues (2016), who found that endorsement of benevolent sexism and sexual aggression myths reduces the likelihood that a person will label their victimization experience as rape. Our results point to the possibility that this link between attitudes and labeling a victimization experience as rape might be mediated by a victim's perception of the consequences associated with that experience as less severe. Nonetheless, further research is needed to explore the underlying causal process.

Our results highlight the relevance of identifying factors that may lead victims to underestimate the personal consequences of sexual violence, which seems to occur frequently. Although most victims of sexual violence in our sample reported that the incident did not have much impact on their personal life, we also found that sexual violence experiences were associated with judgments of poorer health and an increased fear of victimization. We suspect that attitudes that legitimate sexual violence and, more generally, conservative attitudes may prevent respondents from consciously linking their experiences of sexual violence with negative consequences, even though these consequences exist.

Furthermore, the perceived consequences of the incident seem to have an effect on the willingness of the victim to talk about it, as respondents who perceived milder consequences were less likely to talk about the incident to others. Indeed, the most common reason for not reporting a victimization experience was thinking that it was not something serious.

Most victims preferred to talk about the incident with friends or family, rather than reporting it to university or public authorities. It should be of special interest for PUC that out of the minority (2.9 percent) who reported a victimization experience to the university, more than two-thirds were dissatisfied with the

support received. One reason for this high level of dissatisfaction could be that university policies were in their first year of implementation when the data were collected, and may have been limited in their effectiveness. Additionally, during data collection, the local feminist movement, in which many female students were participating, was asserting that Chilean universities' efforts to address sexual violence within their institutions were inadequate. This perception may have been especially salient to victims who had had direct experience of the existing institutional support. However, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the satisfaction data, as our data also show that the less severe assault cases were shared mostly with friends, whereas only the more severe cases were reported to authorities, and talking to friends may generally be a more gratifying experience than talking to strangers. Further data on this issue should be gathered in future waves of the panel survey; also, in-depth interviews with service users may provide a clearer picture of future needs.

#### 4.1 Strengths and Limitations

One major strength of the current study is that it was possible to invite all undergraduates at PUC to participate, and a substantial proportion did so (more than 14 percent of students in Years 1 to 3). As the first analysis in a five-year cross-sequential study, it marks the starting point of the largest assessment of sexual violence ever conducted in the Chilean university context.

We note that female students appear to be over-represented in the sample. The same may be true for people who have been victimized: the topic of the survey may have attracted students who felt a need to report their own experience. Another obvious limitation at the current stage is that only cross-sectional, correlational data are available, which means that any causal interpretations must be treated with caution. Also, considerations of research economy demanded that many constructs be assessed with very short versions of existing instruments, which means that reliability may have been compromised. On the other hand, the adequate participation rate suggests that the survey instrument was not too large.

#### 4.2 Open Questions and Outlook

As discussed above, one tricky issue that merits further attention is the optimal length and specificity of the victimization part of the survey. This issue needs to be addressed in order to explain the diverging findings for Chilean prevalence rates (especially between the present study and Schuster et al. 2016). New theorizing and specific methodological studies will be needed to tackle the question of potential under- and over-reporting.

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