

Comparative Criminology: **SEXUAL OFFENSES**

Ranking of Countries According to Sexual Offenses or Incidents Against Women

Sexual assault/rape offenses are some of the most difficult crimes for which to obtain accurate numbers. This is especially problematic when comparing such offenses across various countries. Specifically, “perceptions as to what is unacceptable sexual behavior may differ significantly across countries, even in the current era of increasingly globalized norms and values.”⁷⁷ One question on the International Crime Victimization Survey asked the following:

People sometimes grab, touch, or assault others for sexual reasons in a really offensive way. This can happen either at home or elsewhere, for instance, in a pub, the street, at school, on public transport, in cinemas, on the beach, or at one's workplace. Over the past five years has anyone done this to you?⁷⁸

In terms of victimization, only those incidents that occurred in the previous year were included. It is essential to stress that this item covers a broad range of behaviors; these range from rape and attempted rape to less serious offenses. Table 7.5 summarizes the rates of sexual offenses or incidents against women among the various countries.

Van Dijk (2008) highlighted a few key findings from these analyses. In the group with the highest rates, the first 10 countries are considered to be “low gender equality.” Low gender equality is when the social position of women is rather weak; women are often considered inferior in various social contexts, such as the family and the workplace. When looking at countries such as Finland, Denmark, the United States, the Netherlands, Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Germany, and New Zealand, their rates are relatively high considering that these countries are deemed to have higher gender equality. Citing Kangaspunta's work,⁷⁹ Van Dijk states that this may be because individuals living in countries with a more liberal view of women are more likely to report such sexual incidents or crimes.

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. What are some of the reasons that sexual assault/rape offenses are so difficult to measure and compare across countries/cultures?
2. How do varying levels of gender equality play a role in rates of sexual assault?
3. Did any of the countries in the rankings surprise you by how high (or low) their rates of sexual assault were compared to those of other countries?

TABLE 7.5

Ranking of Countries According to Sexual Offenses or Incidents Against Women

FIFTEEN COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATES					
1	Papua, New Guinea	11.8	6	Swaziland	6.2
2	Colombia	10.2	7	Lesotho	5.7
3	Nigeria	8.8	8	Costa Rica	5.5
4	India	7.0	9	Zambia	5.4
5	Albania	6.7	10	Botswana	5.0
11	Namibia	4.8	12	Peru	4.7
13	Serbia and Montenegro	4.6	14	Finland	4.3
15	Denmark	3.8			
FIFTEEN COUNTRIES WITH MEDIUM-HIGH RATES					
16	United States	3.5	28	Germany	2.5
20	Netherlands	3.2	29	New Zealand	2.4
21	Canada	3.1	36	Bolivia	1.8
22	Switzerland	3.1	39	Mexico	1.7
25	United Kingdom	3.0	40	Japan	1.7
45	Austria	1.3	46	Brazil	1.3
49	Hong Kong, China	1.2	51	Greece	1.1
52	Italy	0.9			

Sources: Van Dijk, J. (2008). *The world of crime: Breaking the silence on problems of security, justice, and development across the world*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, p. 85; ICVS, 1996–2005.