

# KEY MESSAGES

# SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTING

A study to improve prevention, information, and care after sexual assault in emergency care settings

Sara Cottler-Casanova<sup>1</sup>; Véra Lourenço<sup>1</sup>; Cécile Guillot<sup>1</sup>; Antoine Poncet<sup>2</sup>; Patrice Mathevet<sup>3</sup>; Patrick Petignat<sup>1</sup>; Michal Yaron<sup>1</sup>; Tony Fracasso<sup>4</sup>; Jasmine Abdulcadir<sup>1</sup>.

## Contact

Jasmine Abdulcadir, Division of Gynecology, Department of Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), Geneva, Switzerland. Jasmine.abdulcadir@hcuge.ch – +41.22.372.40.49

## Objective

To assess the characteristics of all persons reporting sexual assault at the obstetrics and gynecology emergency departments of Geneva University Hospital and Lausanne University Hospitals (CHUV), between 2018 and 2021.

## Methods

Retrospective analysis of medico-legal reports for all persons reporting sexual assault at the obstetrics and gynecology emergency departments of the HUG and CHUV between 2018 and 2021.

Included: cisgender women, non-binary, queer persons, transgender men with a vulva and vagina and transgender women, regardless of sexual orientation, at least 14 years old or above.

Excluded: Children and adolescents < 14, cisgender men and trans men with a penis (who usually do not consult obstetrics and gynecology emergency departments after a sexual assault) and recurrent patients with more than 3 sexual assaults reported at a participating centre within the study period (the first three assaults were included).

During the study period, the two regional university hospitals used the same forensic sexual assault reporting forms, which allows a uniform description of the socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of patients reporting sexual assault as well as the characteristics of the sexual assault itself.

## Key Findings

Of the 962 sexual assault records during the 48-month study, 740 were retained for the analysis.

- ▶ Median age of victims: 24 years (IQR: 19 to 33 years; range: 14 to 93 years)
- ▶ On weekend days, the number of assaults is twice as high as weekdays (45% of all sexual assaults took place during the weekend, on either a Saturday or Sunday).
- ▶ During the summer, the monthly number of assaults is increased by half. The summer months had the highest number of consultations (34%).
- ▶ 58% of the victims said they knew their assaulter, 28% did not, and 14% did not know whether they knew their attacker or not because of amnesia.
- ▶ 24% of the patients were unable to recall or specify which types of penetration they were subjected to (if any), because of amnesia.
- ▶ 67% of patients reported vaginal penetration, 17% anal, and 21% oral.
- ▶ 63% of victims reported some type of substance use (alcohol, drugs) prior to assault
- ▶ The Police or public prosecutor ordered 40% of the sexual assault medico-legal examinations, while 60% of the victims came to the emergency department seeking care on their own.
- ▶ 56% of assaults take place within the home (victims' home, assailant's home, friend/family member's home, couple's home).
- ▶ 83% of patients were examined within 72 hours of the sexual assault.
- ▶ Ano-genital injuries were found in 28% of patients who underwent a gynecological exam (n=705). 21% of patients who underwent a gynaecological exam and reported anal penetration presented with anal injury. 28% of patients who underwent a gynaecological exam and reported vaginal penetration presented with genital injury.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Such data can inform the general population as well as actors working in this field, including legislators, about the use of services after sexual assault, prevention and health education strategies and improve services for persons who were sexually assaulted. There is no countrywide observatory of persons consulting for sexual assault in Swiss hospitals. We aim to create a national observatory that can inform prevention, care, and education campaigns against sexual assault and its consequences for both men and women.

1. Division of Gynecology, Department of Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), Geneva, Switzerland | 2. CRC and Division of Clinical-Epidemiology, Department of Health and Community Medicine, University of Geneva and Geneva University Hospitals, Geneva, Switzerland | 3. Division of Gynecology, Woman-Mother-Child Department, Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV), Lausanne, Switzerland | 4. The Romandy University Center of Legal Medicine Lausanne-Geneva (CURML), Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), Geneva, Lausanne University Hospitals (CHUV), Lausanne, Switzerland

