

Mortality among the victims of rape – A register-based study from Finland

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We examined a mortality rate and causes of death among clients of the sexual assault centers (SACs) in Finland.

This retrospective register-based study compared the clients of five SACs located in the University Hospitals in Finland (n=1507), and controls (n=1507). Clients' first visit in the SAC following the rape was between June 1st, 2017, and August 31st, 2020. Eligible clients were ≥ 16 years old and they had experienced the sexual assault within one month before the visit. Causes of deaths were collected from the database from Statistics Finland. Data was available until the end of December 2022.

Number of the deaths among the victims of rape was n=27 (1.8%) compared to controls n=2 (0,1%). Median age among the victims at the time of the death was 31 years (range 16-74 years), and 47 years (range 24-70 years) in the control group. Median time from the first visit in the SAC to death was 16 months (range 1-37 months).

Main causes of death in the victim group were diseases (n=10, 37%), suicides (n=7, 26%), accidents (n=4, 15%), accidental poisoning by alcohol (n=2, 7%), and others (n=4, 15%). In the control group one died for disease or accidental poisoning by alcohol, and the other for accident.

These preliminary results from our register-based study strengthen the clinical observations and previous research that victims of rape have an increased risk to die. Further analyzes of the connections between demographics and other register data collected in this research project will increase the knowledge of the Finnish rape victims and will help to improve the support services the victims need to prevent deaths.