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Forced Copulation



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Synonyms

Rape; Sexual coercion

Definitions

Forced copulation occurs when a male forces sexual intercourse on an apparently resistant female. Gang rape occurs when two or more males force copulation on a female at the same time. Sexual coercion refers to unwanted copulations within an established pair-bond. Extra-pair copulations refer to matings that occur outside of a pair-bond.

Introduction

Forced copulation occurs in many species, including birds, insects, and mammals – including humans (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Goetz and Shackelford 2006; McKinney et al. 1983). Gang rape also occurs in many species, including birds, butterflies, and humans (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis

2014/1995; McKinney et al. 1983). Rates of forced copulation typically increase during times of stress, such as during warfare in humans (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995). Forced copulation may have evolved because it increased the coercive male's reproductive success (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Cheng et al. 1982; Goetz and Shackelford 2006; McKinney et al. 1983), or forced copulation may be a by-product of male adaptations that motivate desire for sexual variety and the use of aggression to secure desired resources (Goetz and Shackelford 2006).

Tactics Used in Forced Copulation

Males attempt to force females to copulate using various tactics such as chasing after or confronting the female. For example, in many species of birds, males chase the female before mounting her, apparently against her will (Cheng et al. 1982). Once the male has the female in possession, he grasps part of the female's feathers with his beak and places his wings on both sides of the female's body to prevent her from escaping (McKinney et al. 1983). Male minks that engage in forced copulation initiate physical fighting with the female because pre-copulatory fighting may induce ovulation, increasing the likelihood of conception (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995). In several species of birds, males are more likely to pursue forced copulation with more fertile females that recently produced a healthy clutch

with another male. The male perpetrator typically attacks the female in the mornings, shortly after she lays her eggs and when she is most fertile, and early in the breeding season (Baker 2020/1996; Cheng et al. 1982).

In some species, males may compensate for smaller-than-average body size by utilizing specialized body parts that aid in trapping the female for copulation. Male scorpion flies, for example, use a special hook on their wings to grip and secure the female and then force copulation (Baker 2020/1996). In some species, including ducks, birds, and butterflies, males engage in gang rape when they are unsuccessful at mating without the assistance of other males. Gang rape involves males coordinating different roles and rotating for sexual access to the female. For example, some male ducks chase the female, other males guard her from escaping, and one male forces copulation with the female (Baker 2020/1996).

Reasons for Forced Copulation

Males of some species apparently force copulation as a reproductive strategy. In many species, most males that engage in forced copulation do not fail at consensual copulations and neither are they disadvantaged; rather, these males pursue forced copulation and gang rape as additional copulations and select and pursue females that are attractive and at peak fertility (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995). However, males in other species, such as in scorpion flies, force copulation as a reproductive strategy to compensate for disadvantages such as small size or failed mating success (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995). Reproductively disadvantaged males are more likely to engage in gang rape because the female is less likely to escape than if the male were to attempt to force copulation on his own (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995).

Males are more likely to force copulation via sexual coercion when infidelity occurs or the male suspects his long-term partner's infidelity. Sexual coercion occurs in many socially monogamous species, such as humans, birds, and a few

mammals, in which males force copulation with their regular partner in response to threatened paternity. Females that engage in extra-pair copulations promote sperm competition among the males they mate with, thereby threatening their regular partner's paternity certainty – the degree to which a male is certain that his partner's offspring are genetically his own. Sperm competition occurs when more than one male's sperm is present in a female's reproductive tract and compete to fertilize available ova (Goetz and Shackelford 2006). Thus, a mated human male may force his partner to copulate if he suspects an extra-pair copulation occurred to increase his paternity certainty, punish his partner, or prevent future infidelities (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Goetz and Shackelford 2006).

Costs and Benefits for the Perpetrator

Various types of forced copulation, such as gang rape and sexual coercion, involve sexual conflict and entail costs. For instance, males who force females to copulate risk being injured or killed by the female if she resists (Baker 2020/1996). Furthermore, the male's safety is threatened by other individuals who discover the female is in danger and attack the perpetrator (Baker 2020/1996; McKinney et al. 1983). Regarding gang rape, males risk losing the competition to inseminate and fertilize the female (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; McKinney et al. 1983).

Although forced copulation can be a reproductive strategy, males may fail to reproduce using this tactic. On the other hand, males may successfully produce offspring by forcing copulation. Females may be more likely to conceive via forced copulation than consensual copulation, and considering males typically target victims of higher reproductive value, offspring are more likely to inherit "good" genes, survive, and be successful at mating, thus benefiting the reproductive success of the male that forced copulation (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995; Cheng et al. 1982; McKinney et al. 1983). Considering males often abandon the female after forcing copulation, males who successfully

reproduce via this strategy incur the benefits of not having to invest time or resources in the female and her offspring (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995), thus allowing the male more opportunities to increase his reproductive success.

Costs and Benefits for the Victim

Female victims of forced copulation are at risk for being injured or killed by the perpetrator (Baker 2020/1996; Baker and Bellis 2014/1995) and human victims often suffer negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Goetz and Shackelford 2006). Females may incur the costs of rearing resulting offspring with no paternal investment if the perpetrator abandons her after forcing copulation (Baker 2020/1996), thereby reducing her reproductive success. A female's reproductive success may also be hindered if her offspring inherit low-quality genes (Baker 2020/1996), because the offspring may be less likely to survive or be less successful at producing offspring and thereby fail to transmit the mother's genes. However, females also may benefit reproductively by producing offspring sired by forced copulation, because these offspring may also be successful at transmitting genes through forced copulation (Baker and Bellis 2014/1995).

Conclusion

Among many species, forced copulation by the male is not uncommon and may be used as a reproductive strategy. Tactics for successfully forcing copulation include chasing, holding down, and harming the female. Males that force copulation may be disadvantaged for success in mating, sperm competition, or infidelity. Male

perpetrators risk being physically harmed and not producing offspring by forcing copulation but may sometimes be reproductively successful by producing offspring without the costs of investing time and resources in the female or resulting offspring. Female victims are at risk of harm by being forced into copulation, and then abandoned, but may benefit by producing offspring who are successful at transmitting their genes.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Aggression](#)
- ▶ [Benefits for Aggression in Humans](#)
- ▶ [Conflict](#)
- ▶ [Extra-Pair Copulation](#)
- ▶ [Mate Guarding](#)
- ▶ [Reproduction](#)
- ▶ [Reproductive Strategy](#)

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