

SOCIAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS

FINDINGS IN 732 CASES OF RAPE

PAUL SCHRANK AND KARL-HEINZ KOCH

Woman's Clinic, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

Ztschr. f. Geburtsh. u. Gynäk., 1950, **132**: 200

The disorders associated with the closing months of World War II and the two years following resulted in a large number of cases of rape in Germany. Thus, in Heidelberg alone during this period 732 cases were observed up to April 15, 1947. In view of the fact that such a huge number of instances of this crime have never heretofore been reported over such a brief period, the authors have deemed it desirable to analyze the 732 cases from several aspects.

The authors are fully cognizant of the errors which may insinuate themselves into studies of this kind and take pains to document the fact that the vast majority of their cases, if not all, did represent actual rape and that the menstrual and other data cited were reasonably accurate. They point out, for instance, that the validity of the claims of these women and girls in regard to rape were established not by the authors of this paper but by courts of law which had investigated each case with searching rigor before the victims were sent to the clinic for examination.

The great majority of the 732 cases of rape occurred in 1945, namely 595, or 81.5 per cent. One hundred-thirty-three cases, or 18.0 per cent of the total, were seen in 1946 and in 1947 only four cases. The ages of the patients ranged between 12 and 53 years, the peak age lying between 27 and 37. Four of the women had passed the menopause. Eleven of the women were already pregnant at the time of the assault.

The percentage of cases in which pregnancy eventuated as the result of the attack was very large as shown by the fact that in 469 instances, or 64.1 per cent, pregnancy resulted. In 242 of these it was a first pregnancy. The incidence of conception following rape was about the same whether the patient had been pregnant before or not.

Artificial interruption of pregnancy was carried out in 146 cases, or in 31.0 per cent of the patients who became pregnant as the result of the assault. The indications for these abortions were almost altogether juristic in origin, the clinic serving merely as the agent of the court of law in most cases. In multiparae the procedure was carried out vaginally in one sitting, while in gravidae I a laminaria tent was first inserted in the cervix and the uterus emptied at a second sitting. In a few advanced pregnancies (five lunar months) abdominal hysterotomy was performed. There was only one major accident, namely, perforation of the uterus by a laminaria tent necessitating hysterectomy.

One of the most informative and provocative findings in the study had to do

with the day in the menstrual cycle on which conception took place. There were 216 of the gravidae who had had regular 26–30 day cycles and who presumably knew the exact time of the last menstrual period and also, of course, the exact day of the rape. With these data available it was possible to plot the curve shown in Figure 1. From this graph it is plain that conception occurred on all days of the cycle and that a substantial proportion occurred during the so-called “safe period.” Indeed, 51.9 per cent of the conceptions took place before or after days 9 to 17 of the cycle inclusive, the interval which Knaus regarded as the period when almost all conceptions occur in women with 26–30 day cycles. In 65 cases, or 30.4 per cent, conception occurred after the seventeenth day right up to the premenstruum. The authors, however, do not regard this deviation from the Knaus doctrine as necessarily a contradiction of it. They are more inclined to

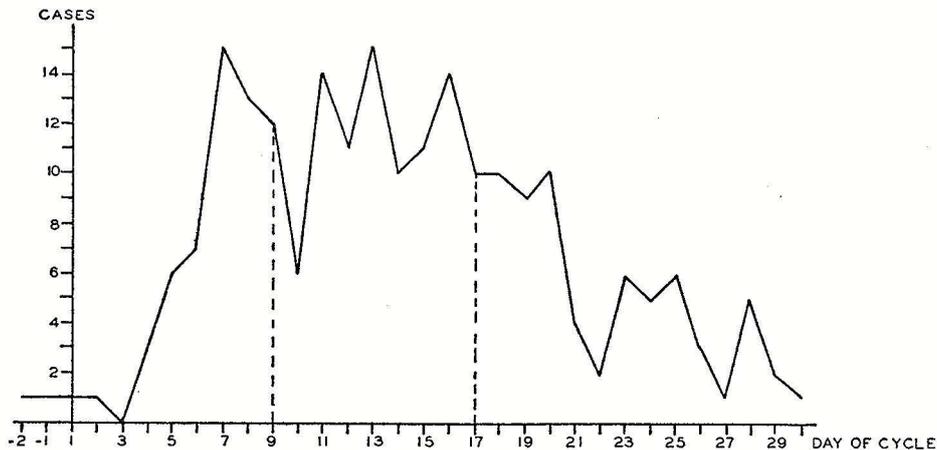


FIG. 1. Date of conception in 216 pregnancies resulting from rape in women with regular 26–30 day cycles. The area between the broken lines indicates the period of conception according to Knaus.

believe that the extraordinary conditions in which these cases of rape took place—in flight, in concentration camps, etc.—may have interfered with the normal ovulatory process and, moreover, that these same circumstances may have served to confuse the women about the exact dates of their last menstruation.

(This paper has been abstracted because it is a remarkable commentary on the social conditions in Germany after World War II. Just how much further than that we can go, it is difficult to say. Despite the authors' earnest attempts to establish the validity of their data, errors of various sorts inevitably creep into studies of this kind. Thus, in regard to the high incidence of pregnancy in this series, it would seem only common sense to believe that the significance of this figure would be greatly vitiated by the fact that women who were raped but escaped impregnation, would be less prone to report the assault than those who conceived. This circumstance, of course, would not invalidate the data shown in Figure 1, but whether these women, amidst the chaos of bombings, flight, destruction and death, really could remember with any accuracy the date of their last menstrual period, might seem open to question as the authors themselves avow.—Ed.)