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# Power, romance, and aggression in statutory rape: comparing between male adolescent perpetrators with adult perpetrators and sexually inactive adolescents

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## Abstract

Enforcing statutory rape laws on adolescents exhibiting normative sexual behaviour with underage peers has been standard practice in many countries, including Malaysia. The enforcement of the laws on adolescent perpetrators implies that the assumption of deviance associated with adult perpetrators of statutory rape is also shared with those of adolescents. This exploratory study drew comparative data from 112 male adolescents and adults in juvenile detention centres and prisons around Malaysia pertaining to the characteristics of their sexual behaviour with underage partners. Results indicated that adolescent perpetrators were shown to have a lower perceived relative power in sexual relationships compared to their adult counterparts, but a higher level of perceived

romantic love and aggression. In addition, the results did not support the model differentiating adolescents who had sex with underage partners and adolescents who did not have sex. The implications of the study are discussed. **PRACTICE IMPACT STATEMENT:** The current enforcement of statutory rape laws reflects the presumption that having sex with underage females entails manipulation and exploitation, even when the perpetrators are adolescents themselves. This study challenges the current assumption that male adolescents who engage in sexual relationships with underage partners should be automatically assumed as deviant. Instead, this study calls for a more developmentally positive approach to regulating adolescent sexual behaviour. © 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

## Author keywords

Adolescents; aggression; relative power; romantic love; sexual behaviour; statutory rape laws

## Indexed keywords

### EMTREE medical terms

adolescent; adolescent sexual behavior; adult; aggression; article; correctional facility; diagnosis; female; human; law; love; Malaysia; male; offender; sexual behavior; sexual relationship; special situation for pharmacovigilance; statutory rape

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### Abstract

Author keywords