

Sexual Violence and Alcohol and Other Drug Use on Campus

This *Infacts/Resources* describes the scope of the problem of sexual assault on campus, perpetrator characteristics and situational circumstances that may make assaults more likely to happen, and the role alcohol and other drugs, including rape-facilitating drugs, play in sexual assault. This publication also provides an overview of sexual harassment and a sidebar on stalking on campus. While these are complex problems, campuses fortunately can take positive steps to address these issues. This publication outlines a set of principles and processes that institutions of higher education can implement to prevent and mitigate sexual violence on campus.

Scope of the Problem: Sexual Assault on Campus

The term *sexual assault* encompasses a continuum of behaviors from unwanted touching to rape. Definitions of rape and sexual assault vary, with each state having its own legal definitions. The National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study, a 1997 telephone survey of 4,446 women sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice, defined *rape* as follows:

Forced sexual intercourse including both psychological coercion as well as physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s). This category also includes incidents where the penetration is from a

foreign object such as a bottle. Includes attempted rapes, [female and male] victims, and [rape by individuals of the opposite sex and same sex]. Attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape.¹

The NCWSV study found that 1.7 percent of college women had experienced a completed rape and 1.1 percent an attempted rape in the seven months prior to the study. Projecting these figures over an entire calendar year, the survey's authors concluded that nearly 5 percent of college women might be victimized annually and that up to 25 percent might be assaulted during their college years.¹

Sexual assault is defined more broadly than rape, as "the full range of forced sexual acts, including forced touching or kissing; verbally coerced intercourse; and vaginal, oral, or anal penetration."² Because sexual assault encompasses many behaviors and is widely underreported, the actual number of sexual assaults on campus in a year is unknown, but the number is believed to be large.

Sexual assault does not affect victims only physically but also may leave lasting psychological and emotional scars. Moreover, assaults affect the entire campus, not just individual students. Sexual violence compromises the integrity of the safe, welcoming environment campuses are supposed to provide, impinging on the academic and social success of all students.

Characteristics of Sexual Assault Incidents

In 9 out of 10 cases reported in the NCWSV survey, the victims knew the perpetrators. According to the survey, 12.8 percent of completed rapes, 35.0 percent of attempted rapes, and 22.9 percent of threatened rapes took place during a date.¹ Nearly 60.0 percent of on-campus rapes took place in the victim's residence, 31.0 percent occurred in other housing areas, and 10.3 percent happened at a fraternity.¹

Causes and Contributors

Sexual aggression is a complex behavior resulting from multiple causes. Many of those who are victims of sexual assault are made to feel that they were somehow responsible for the assault, either through their behavior or appearance or by somehow inviting an assault to occur. In fact, the only victim characteristic that predicts sexual assault is a previous assault. The victim-blaming mentality is unjustified and stands in the way of understanding the true antecedents and determinants of sexual assault.

Sexual violence is a complicated interplay of individual, relationship, social, political, and cultural factors. Researcher Alan Berkowitz proposed an integrated conceptual model of sexual assault that suggests that these incidents result from a combination of perpetrator and victim socialization experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward sexuality, the characteristics of the situation, and the perpetrator's misperceptions of the victim's intent.³

Research finds that men's likelihood of committing sexual assault is associated with

For additional information

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several individual-level factors.³⁻⁶ Personality correlates include higher levels of general aggression and impulsivity, and lower empathy. Attitudinal factors include more traditional attitudes toward gender roles, higher levels of hostility toward women, greater acceptance of using force in relationships, beliefs that relationships are based on exploitation and manipulation, and greater acceptance of “rape myths,” that is, false beliefs that victims enjoy assault, ask for or deserve rape, and lie or exaggerate about victimization.

Interpersonal and situational dynamics also play a role. For example, men and women frequently interpret verbal and nonverbal cues of sexual intent differently. Men overestimate women’s interest in them as sexual partners based on outward signs, such as friendliness, attentiveness, and dress.⁷ Gender role socialization contributes to these dynamics. For example, men may be socialized to believe that women initially offer “token resistance” to protect their reputations but actually want to be overcome sexually.^{3,8}

In addition, research suggests that the dynamics of all-male groups can contribute to sexual assault by creating a “groupthink” environment that reinforces rape-supportive attitudes and fosters conformity.^{7,9} For example, studies have identified peer pressure to perform sexually and fear of “losing face” as factors that encourage participation in gang rapes.^{9,10} While misinterpretation, socialization, and group dynamics *contribute* to sexual violence, they *do not cause* assault. Ultimately, the perpetrator makes the decision to behave violently.

Alcohol Use

Alcohol is a frequently cited situational contributor to sexual violence. More than 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 experience alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape each year in the United States.¹¹

Researcher Antonia Abbey reports that, on

average, at least 50 percent of sexual assaults among college students involve alcohol use, with exact estimates varying based on the study sample and methods.⁷ While alcohol and other drug use may

perceive drinking women as more sexually available, for example, believing that women who have two or more drinks are more interested than other women in having sex.⁷ Intoxication by the victim can decrease her ability to resist assault effectively. This is especially true if a

victim becomes unconscious after drinking.⁷ Additionally, alcohol use sometimes fosters a double standard in which women are held more responsible, and men held less responsible, if an assault occurs.

While the extent of campus sexual assault is alarming, recent research also finds that most college men are not coercive, do not want to victimize others, and are willing to be part of the solution to sexual assault. In surveys across several campuses, for example, a majority of men agreed with various statements about gaining consent for sex, such as “I stop the first time my date says ‘no’ to sexual activity.” Similarly, the majority of men surveyed indicated their willingness to intervene in potential sexual assault situations. The exact percentage varied based on the nature of the scenario.¹³

Rape-Facilitating Drugs

In addition to alcohol, various other drugs are used to facilitate rape. These include marijuana, cocaine, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), benzodiazepines (including Rohypnol), ketamine, barbiturates, chloral hydrate, methaqualone, heroin, morphine, LSD, and other hallucinogens. Sometimes referred to as “date rape drugs,” these substances may be taken knowingly or may be slipped surreptitiously into someone’s drink or otherwise given to an unsuspecting person who is then assaulted. When combined with alcohol, as is frequently the case, these drugs can lead to blackout.¹⁴

While alcohol is by far the most commonly used rape-facilitating drug, Rohypnol and GHB also are well known for their incapacitating effects.¹⁵ Rohypnol, the trade name for flunitrazepam, is used in some countries to treat insomnia but is illegal in the United States.¹⁵

Stalking

The NCWSV survey asked students the following question: “Has anyone—from a stranger to an ex-boyfriend—repeatedly followed you, watched you, phoned, written, e-mailed, or communicated with you in other ways that seemed obsessive and made you afraid or concerned for your safety?”¹

The study found that 13.1 percent of the female students had been stalked since the beginning of the school year.

In 10.3 percent of the incidents, the stalker “forced or attempted sexual contact.”

The NCWSV found that four in five victims knew their stalkers. Known perpetrators were most frequently a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, classmate, acquaintance, friend, or coworker.¹

Because stalking is not one event, but rather a series of behaviors, campus stalking may be difficult to identify. What may appear to be simply bothersome attention, such as repeatedly asking for dates or frequently making unwanted phone calls, may escalate into physical or sexual violence. Stalking may cause victims to feel that they have lost control of their lives and to become extremely fearful.²² Surprisingly, many victims may not realize the unwanted or threatening behavior may constitute stalking, and the majority of these incidents are not reported to campus or local law enforcement.¹

be present in violent incidents, it does not justify or excuse assault.

Alcohol use may increase the risk of sexual assault through several pathways. For example, drinkers may use alcohol as an excuse to engage in sexually aggressive behavior or as a coercive tactic to obtain sex. In addition, alcohol may result in increased misperceptions of the woman’s sexual interest, decreased concern about her experience, or decreased ability to evaluate accurately whether consent has been obtained.^{7,12} Many men falsely believe that alcohol increases sexual arousal and legitimates nonconsensual sexual aggression.⁷ Perpetrators

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Rohypnol has many street names, such as “roofies.”¹⁵ The drug is inexpensive and widely available through illicit sources.¹⁶

Rohypnol makes users look and act as though they are intoxicated. Adverse effects include disorientation, confusion, dizziness, drowsiness, impaired motor skills, impaired judgment, and unconsciousness.¹⁵ The result is that victims may be incapacitated and unable to resist a sexual assault.

Since 1999, the manufacturer of Rohypnol has added blue dye to the tablets so the drug is visible when dissolved in drinks. However, the clear-dissolving tablets are still available on the black market.

The effects of Rohypnol are felt within 30 minutes after use and may persist for many hours. Rohypnol is very dangerous when mixed with alcohol or other depressants. Possible adverse outcomes include difficulty breathing, coma, and even death.¹⁵

Victims who were given Rohypnol are often uncertain whether they were assaulted. In addition to causing amnesia, the drug metabolizes quickly and is undetectable 72 hours after ingestion.¹⁷ Therefore, law enforcement officials may not be able to trace the drug in those who were assaulted.

Available through illicit channels, GHB also is known as “liquid ecstasy” and “liquid x.”^{15, 18} GHB may cause severe memory loss, disorientation, dizziness, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulty, seizure, unconsciousness, and coma. As with Rohypnol, the drug takes effect shortly after ingestion.¹⁵

Sexual Harassment

As with rape and sexual assault, legal definitions of sexual harassment vary from state to state, as do campus policies addressing the problem. Sexual harassment, like sexual assault, can involve many types of behavior, including unwanted displays of sexually explicit material, suggestive looks or gestures, sexual teasing or comments, exposure, and deliberate touching or physical closeness.¹⁸

One study of campus housing asked whether students had experienced unwanted looks and gestures, sexual teasing, or deliberate touching

while in coed residence halls. About 50 percent of women residents answered “yes” for at least one of these three categories. In addition, nearly 40 percent had experienced unwanted social contact and 30 percent unwanted kissing or fondling.¹⁸

Men living in residence halls also suffered harassment. Almost half reported unwanted sexual teasing and more than 20 percent experienced unwanted deliberate touching.¹⁸

A common characteristic of offenders is a tendency to underestimate the impact of their harassment. The same study found that over 50 percent of these offenders believed that their behavior caused their victims no upset or distress, yet studies show that sexual harassment has high costs for both individuals and organizations.¹⁸ Sexual harassment exists on the same continuum of violence as sexual assault, and has similar root causes. Research finds that sexual harassment is a result of the interaction of individual, organizational, and sociocultural factors. This underscores the need to address these problems through a combination of efforts, including education, training, policies, and procedures.¹⁹

Strategies for Institutions of Higher Education

Sexual violence is a complex problem that cannot be solved by a one-time program or a single department, nor is there a one-size-fits-all blueprint for successful efforts. Instead, prevention science suggests a set of *principles* and a *process* that campus and community stakeholders can use to guide their work.²⁰

Specifically, campus administrators should establish and support an ongoing, collaborative process that brings together campus stakeholders to examine local data; identify and set priorities among local problems; target those problems with a mix of strategies; and evaluate those efforts. Strategies should include a combination of programs, policies, and services that are coordinated and mutually reinforcing. Research shows that coordinated and sustained activities are more effective than one-time programs. Ensuring that multiple efforts are coordinated and synergistic is the most important way campus practitioners can improve their initiatives against violence.

In addition to a strong response to incidents, which is critical, a comprehensive approach also will include complementary measures designed to prevent violence by decreasing the broad array of factors that contribute to violence. Finally, violence prevention approaches can be linked with other prevention efforts on campus, working in concert to create a healthy, safe environment.

The following are examples of available strategies across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response, and advocacy. As noted above, strategies should be selected based on a detailed analysis of local conditions and problems.

Examples of Strategies for Campus Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention

Efforts to Prevent Sexual Violence and Harassment

- Conduct education programs that convey accurate information, challenge unhealthy beliefs and attitudes, teach skills, and encourage students to form healthy behavioral intentions.²¹ To be effective, these programs should include multiple sessions and should encourage active participation. Because research finds that separate gender programs are more effective, sessions ideally should be held for separate genders, or, if coed, take gender differences into account. Teach critical thinking and media literacy regarding cultural and media images that objectify women and glamorize violence against women.
- Create systems for investigating and addressing complaints of prohibited behaviors; create and disseminate materials explaining to students, parents, and employees how to use the complaint procedures.
- Implement programs and policies to support healthy group norms, correct misperceived norms, and promote safe and productive bystander intervention.
- Create and enforce policies and laws that convey a clear institutional stance against violence. Policies should comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and

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regulations, including *Title IX* and the *Clery Act*. Support these efforts by training those charged with enforcing these policies.

- Reduce vulnerability to victimization. Note that these types of efforts, unlike the other strategies listed, largely address stranger rather than acquaintance rape and therefore by themselves are insufficient to address campus sexual violence. Examples include:
 - ✓ Changing the physical environment, including installing lighting, surveillance cameras, and emergency call boxes; cutting bushes; and increasing patrols in high-risk areas
 - ✓ Implementing escort services and self-defense classes
- Implement comprehensive alcohol and other drug (AOD) prevention programs, including individual and environmental strategies, and ensure they are integrated with violence prevention efforts. While alcohol and other drug use alone *do not cause* violence, they can interact with other risk factors to increase the likelihood of violent incidents. Therefore AOD prevention efforts are an important complement to sexual violence prevention efforts. Additionally, much of what has been learned from AOD prevention efforts can be applied to violence prevention. Examples include:
 - ✓ Educational programs that describe the links between violence and alcohol and other drugs
 - ✓ Comprehensive campus policies addressing alcohol and other drug use and AOD-related violence
 - ✓ Policies and practices prohibiting alcohol and other drug use as a justification or excuse for violence
 - ✓ Identification and targeting of on- and off-campus environmental contributors to high-risk alcohol and other drug use, including high levels of AOD availability, failure to enforce laws and policies, aggressive alcohol marketing and promotion, and misperceived norms regarding alcohol consumption
 - ✓ AOD-free residence halls
 - ✓ Programs to correct student misperceptions of peer support of alcohol-related violence and vandalism

Efforts to Respond to Violence

- Develop and disseminate comprehensive response protocols that clearly delineate available channels for reporting incidents and each responder's responsibilities.
- Provide appropriate medical attention for sexual assault victims, including the use of sound evidence-collection techniques.
- Provide confidential crisis response and ongoing victim advocacy services, including support for decisions regarding legal and disciplinary actions; accompaniment to hospital, law enforcement, and court appointments; assistance with housing and academic issues; and referrals to on-campus and community resources.
- Provide strong sanctions for offenders and, if appropriate, bystanders.
 - ✓ Create, disseminate, and follow through on clear conduct policies and disciplinary processes.
 - ✓ Consistently enforce policies.



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Resources

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS)

U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/osdfs>; 202-245-7896

OSDFS supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent alcohol and other drug abuse, ensure the health and well-being of students, and teach students good character and citizenship. The agency provides financial assistance for drug abuse and violence prevention programs and activities that promote the health and well-being of students in elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

<http://www.higheredcenter.org>; 1-800-676-1730; TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711

The Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help campuses and communities come together to identify problems; assess needs; and plan, implement, and evaluate alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention programs. Services include training; technical assistance; publications; support for the Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues; and evaluation activities. The Higher Education Center's publications are free and can be downloaded from its Web site.

The Center offers resources for violence prevention on campus at <http://www.higheredcenter.org/high-risk/violence>. The Center's Campuses and Other Drugs Web page includes resources on date rape and club drugs, found at <http://www.higheredcenter.org/high-risk/drugs>.



Other Organizations and Internet Resources

Arizona Rape Prevention and Education Web Site

<http://www.azrapeprevention.org>; 602-364-1495

The site includes rape and sexual assault statistics, citations for evaluation tools, research materials on more than 30 rape-related topics, lists of books and films related to sexual violence and prevention, contact information for state sexual assault coalitions, and basic information to help survivors of sexual violence access services.

Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html;
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/archives.html;
1-800-421-3481

These sites offer resources on sexual harassment and hate crimes, and includes the publication *Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime: A Guide for Schools*.

Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse

<http://www.mincava.umn.edu>; 612-624-0721

This organization maintains an electronic clearinghouse on the World Wide Web, with access to thousands of Gopher servers, interactive discussion groups, newsgroups, Web sites, and a directory of federal and private funding sources that support violence prevention programs.

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<http://www.nsvrc.org>; 717-909-0710

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center is a comprehensive collection and distribution center for information, statistics, and resources related to sexual violence useful for anti-sexual assault coalitions, rape crisis centers, allied organizations, community projects, policy-makers, government entities, media, educators, health care providers, and others working to address and eliminate sexual assault.

Security On Campus, Inc.

<http://www.securityoncampus.org>;
1-888-251-7959

Security On Campus, Inc. (SOC), a nonprofit grassroots organization, educates students, parents, and the campus community about the prevalence of crime on campus and assists victims and their families with guidance pertaining to laws, victims' organizations, legal counsel, and access to information. SOC also fosters security improvements through campus community initiatives and provides effective procedures and programs to reduce alcohol and other drug abuse.



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Our Mission

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention is to assist institutions of higher education in developing, implementing, and evaluating alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention policies and programs that will foster students' academic and social development and promote campus and community safety.

How We Can Help

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help people at colleges and universities adopt effective prevention strategies:

- Resources, referrals, and consultations
- Training and professional development activities
- Publication and dissemination of prevention materials
- Assessment, evaluation, and analysis activities
- Web site featuring online resources, news, and information
- Support for The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues

Get in Touch

Additional information can be obtained by contacting:

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