

## Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment, is a difficult topic to understand and discuss. Although we may not hear a lot about it, sexual violence is perpetrated on campus towards and by our fellow students. National studies have estimated that one in four college women will experience actual or attempted sexual assault during her undergraduate years.<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence is perpetuated, in part, through silence and misinformation. Therefore, it is critical that we are clear on what sexual violence is and how it occurs in order to appropriately respond within our campus community.

### DEFINITIONS AND STATISTICS

**Sexual violence:** Sexual violence is an umbrella term that encompasses all forms of violations that are sexual in nature. It is important to understand that while these crimes are acted out in a sexual way, they are not about sexual gratification. At its root, sexual violence is about a perpetrator exerting power and control over another person.

**Sexual assault & abuse:** The Illinois Criminal Sexual Assault Law defines sexual assault as any type of sexual penetration which involves force or threat of force. Similarly, sexual abuse is sexual touch or conduct involving force or threat of force. Some examples of force or threat of force include: preventing someone from leaving, holding someone down, restraining someone, using superior size or strength against another, verbal threats of harm, taking sexual advantage when someone is intoxicated or drunk, or the presence of a weapon. Despite what we may like to believe, people do not commit sexual assault because they are “horny”, sexually frustrated or cannot find a sexual partner.

**Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual gestures, physical contact or statement that would reasonably be found offensive, humiliating, or any interference with a person’s required tasks or career opportunities at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The U of I will not tolerate sexual harassment of students or employees and will take action to provide remedies when such harassment is discovered. In order to ensure that the U of I is free of sexual harassment, appropriate sanctions will be imposed on offenders in a case-by-case manner.

**Sexual Violence on Our Campus:** Studies have shown that one in six female U of I students will survive a sexual assault during their college years. While the numbers of male survivors are not known, it is clear men and women can be either victims or perpetrators of sexual assault. However, the majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are men. Additionally, the majority of sexual assaults are NOT perpetrated by strangers, but by men that the survivor knows, such as a friend, classmate, or acquaintance. In a survey at the U of I, only 2.6% of the women who had experienced sexual assault described the offender as a “complete stranger.” In this same survey it was found that 1/3 of offenders were nonromantic friends or classmates, 1/3 were dates, partners or ex-partners and 1/3 were first time dates or someone met at a party or bar the same day/night of the assault.<sup>2</sup> While taking measures to protect our personal safety is important, we must also realize that the majority of cases of sexual assault are committed by someone that the survivor trusted would not hurt them.

Men can also experience sexual assault. The number of sexual assaults perpetrated against men attending college is not known, but most male survivors were assaulted by other men, and these men often identify as heterosexual.<sup>3</sup> Despite what the media and stereotypical gender roles may tell us, men also can be sexually assaulted by females. Remember, sexual violence is about power, not sexual gratification.

### THE ROLE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol plays a role in many cases of sexual assault. On this campus, 8.1% of students reported having been “taken advantage of sexually” while they were drinking during the past year. In addition, 58% of U of I students report that alcohol “facilitates sexual opportunities.” Although we cannot know whether these instances rise to the level of sexual assault, it is clear that sexual violence is related to alcohol use in complex ways.

At least 50% of college students' sexual assaults are associated with alcohol use.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7, and 8</sup> We must also remember that whether drugs or alcohol are involved or not, sexual assault is about a person who commits a crime against another person. Alcohol does not excuse this crime, nor does it mean that a victim "deserved it" or could have prevented it.

National studies reveal that most survivors of sexual assault attempted to stop the assault from happening.

In 81% of the alcohol related sexual assaults both victim and the perpetrator had consumed alcohol.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when alcohol is involved, survivors are less likely to name the experience "rape"<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we must be vigilant in the campus-community to the ways that alcohol may increase the chances of a sexual assault.

Unfortunately men and women are often treated differently when it comes to alcohol consumption. For men, alcohol often serves as an excuse for behavior, and allows them to get out of responsibility for the things they do. ("He was so trashed!") For women however, alcohol use actually increases blame placed on women's behavior, instead of removing blame as with men. ("Well, what did she expect?" or "If these young women wouldn't go out and get drunk...")

If someone has been drinking, that does not give them the right to ignore someone who says "no", nor does it give someone else the right to sexually assault them.

### **BYSTANDERS ARE STANDING BY: PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Sexual violence is always the fault of the perpetrator. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, you (or they) are not to blame. Sometimes people try to blame the survivor, because the survivor had been drinking, walking alone, or wearing certain clothing. None of these behaviors gives anyone the right to act violently toward us. When someone is sexually assaulted, it is because the perpetrator made the choice to commit a crime-sexual assault. The perpetrator did something wrong, not the survivor.

Both survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence are people we know. So, we all have a responsibility to watch out for the safety of members of our campus community. This means we must:

- recognize the problem
- know how we might respond
- feel like we have the support of others in responding.

Without these, we may not know how to react. Especially because sexual violence is subtly allowed (through jokes, comments, and harassing behaviors, etc.) and barriers may exist to challenging these behaviors, it can be really confusing to know how to react in meaningful ways. We must work to educate ourselves about how to support survivors and challenge rape-supportive behaviors, while also challenging ourselves.

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If you would like to consider **Personal Counseling** please contact:

Annamaria Silveri, PhD (313) 993-1459  
Rachel Bennett, LMSW (313) 993-1170

If you would like to make an appointment with the **Health Clinic** please contact:  
Olga Parfenov, FNP-BC (313) 993-1185

In case of **Emergency** contact:  
UDM Public Safety (313) 993-1123 or 911  
or

Henry Ford Hospital Emergency Room – 2799 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, MI 48202

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher BS, Cullen FT, Turner MG. *The sexual victimization of college women*. Washington: Department of Justice (US), National Institute of Justice; 2000.

<sup>2</sup> O'Shaughnessy, M.E. & Palmer, C.J. (1990). *Sexually stressful events survey: Summary Report*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Office of the Dean of Students.

<sup>3</sup> Scarce, M. (1997). *Male-on-male rape: The hidden toll of stigma and shame*. New York: Insight Books.

<sup>4</sup> Abbey, A., Ross, L. T., McDuffie, D., & McAuslan, P. (1996). Alcohol, misperception, and sexual assault: How and why are they linked? (pp. 138-161.) In: Buss, D. M., & Malamuth, N. M. (Eds.) *Sex, Power, Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Abbey, A., McAuslan, P., & Ross, L. T. (1998). Sexual assault perpetration by college men: The role of alcohol, misperception of sexual intent, and sexual beliefs and experiences. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17, 167-195.

<sup>6</sup> Copenhagen, S., & Grauerholz, E. (1991). Sexual victimization among sorority women: Exploring the links between sexual violence and institutional practices. *Sex Roles*, 24 (1-2), 31-41.

<sup>7</sup> Harrington, N. T., & Leitenberg, H. (1994). Relationship between alcohol consumption and victim behaviors immediately preceding sexual aggression by an acquaintance. *Violence Victim*, 9, 315-324.

<sup>8</sup> Presley, C. A., Meilman, P.W., Cashin, J. R., & Leichter, J. S. (1997). *Alcohol and Drugs on American College Campuses: Issues of Violence and Harassment*. Carbondale, IL: Core Institute, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

<sup>9</sup> Kahn, A., Jackson, J., Kully, C., Badger, & K., Halvorsen, J. (2003) Calling it rape: Differences in experiences of women who do or do not label their sexual assault as rape. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 27(3), 233-242.