

The Campus Sexual Assault Study



RTI International has conducted research on crime, violence, justice systems, and behavioral health for over 30 years. Using rigorous multidisciplinary approaches, RTI research advances knowledge; informs policy, practice, and programs nationally and internationally; and improves the human condition.

Overview

RTI was funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to conduct the Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study. The CSA Study was undertaken to examine the prevalence, nature, and reporting of sexual assault on college campuses in an effort to inform the development of targeted intervention strategies.

Specifically, we documented the prevalence as well as the context, consequences, and reporting of distinct types of sexual assault among a large sample of undergraduate women from two large universities. Type of assault is defined by how the assault was achieved by the perpetrator, such as the use of physical force or incapacitation of the victim due to drugs or alcohol.

Study Population

Of the 5,446 undergraduate women who participated in the CSA Study, 66.9% were white, 16.2% were black, and 14.0% were classified as “other,” which includes Asians, Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and respondents of multiple races. Only 3.0% of the women were Hispanic.

Most of those who participated were 18 to 20 years old (63%), with more freshmen (29.9%) and seniors (26.6%) in the sample than sophomores (22.8%) and juniors (20.7%). This distribution reflected the distribution of students at the participating universities.

Results

Of the 5,446 participants, 19% reported experiencing completed or attempted sexual assault since entering college. Of those, slightly more women experienced completed sexual assault (13.7%) than attempted sexual assault (12.6%), with 7.2% of the women experiencing both completed sexual assault and attempted sexual assault during college. Almost 5% of the total sample experienced a completed physically forced sexual assault since entering college. Approximately 11% of the women experienced a completed sexual assault while incapacitated, 7.8% reported alcohol and/or other drug-enabled sexual assault,¹ and smaller percentages reported drug-facilitated sexual assault² that they were certain happened (0.6%) or that they suspected happened (1.7%).

Multivariate regression models were used to identify factors associated with women’s risk of experiencing physically forced sexual assault only, incapacitated sexual assault only, or both physically forced and incapacitated

¹ Unwanted sexual contact occurring when the victim is incapacitated and unable to provide consent after voluntarily consuming alcohol or other drugs.

² Unwanted sexual contact occurring when the victim is incapacitated and unable to provide consent after being given a drug without her knowledge or consent.

(continued)



sexual assault since entering college. Some of the factors associated with experiencing the various types of sexual assault included prior sexual victimization, substance use, lifestyle activities, and demographic characteristics. Overall, the findings suggest that several risk factors were consistently associated with all types of sexual assault, although there were also some clear differences by type of sexual assault.

The CSA data also indicate that most sexual assault perpetrators were acquaintances or friends of the victims and that the majority of the incidents occurred after both the victim and perpetrator had been drinking. This is particularly true for victims who reported being incapacitated, 83% of whom reported being drunk during the incident. Very few victims reported experiencing physical injuries as a result of the sexual assault. Although most victims told someone close to them about the incident, only 8.5% contacted someone at a crisis or health center, and less than 7% reported the incident to law enforcement.

Conclusions

Sexual assault is a serious social, public safety, and public health problem that affects men and women across the country. The CSA Study data suggest that women at universities are at considerable risk for experiencing sexual assault—especially sexual assault occurring after the consumption of alcohol—and that a number of personal and behavioral factors are associated with increased risk for sexual assault. It is our hope that universities can use the information produced by the CSA Study to reduce the prevalence of

Program Support Expertise

In the process of conducting the CSA Study, we were also able to educate students about

- Sexual assault
- How they can maximize their safety
- What they can do if they or someone they know has been victimized.

We also provided students with information about campus and community resources available to them should they need assistance or have concerns or questions.

sexual assault and improve the resources for, and responses to, sexual assault victims. It is critical to mention, however, that the prevention of sexual assault is dependent on our ability to change the behavior of perpetrators, toward whom not enough attention or prevention programming has been directed.

More Information

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