

# A SAFE JOURNEY AHEAD

## *Personal Safety*



### **SECTION I: THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY**

You may be away from home with lots of freedom, no curfew, and no one to tell you what to do. Sounds great, right? Most freshmen think so, that is, until something happens. Unfortunately, it is now up to the student to think about his/her own safety.

College brings up a variety of issues for students to face such as safety, relationship conflicts and sexual assault to name a few.

#### **The statistics are alarming for what students today must be prepared for:**

- It is estimated that 1 in 3 American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.
- 89% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows.
- Approximately 1 in 10 high school students have experienced physical violence in dating relationships. Among college students, the figure rises to 22%.
- Intimate partner violence made up 20% of all nonfatal violent crime experienced by women in 2001.
- 59% of female victims and 30% of male victims are stalked by an intimate partner.
- 77% of female and 64% of male victims know their stalker.

### **SEXUAL ASSAULT: THE ACADEMIC IMPACT**

Due to the lack of reliable victimization research, we don't know if the number of sexual assaults on campus is actually increasing or decreasing. We do know that because



sexual assault is being more talked about more frequently among students, and because educational programming has increased, on-campus sexual assaults are being reported more often.

**There are certainly many reasons the numbers are more likely to be on the rise:**

- Student enrollments have increased – thus, there are more opportunities for sexual assault to occur.
- Recreational use of alcohol and other chemical substances on campus remains high (75% of men and 55% of women involved in acquaintance rape had been drinking or using drugs just before the attack).
- Increasing portrayal of sexual stimuli and sexual violence in the media.
- Liberalized visitation policies in on-campus residence halls. (The most frequent sites of acquaintance rapes are the assailant's or victim's room.)

A Fall 1994 nationwide survey re-affirmed the nearly unbelievable statistic that one in four females has been sexually victimized. Another study completed by the National Victim Center in 1992 concluded that a female's first sexual assault most often occurs prior to the age of eighteen. The impact on these victims can be great. The plight of the victim is enough to anger anyone with a concern for individual life and liberty. It is impossible to undo victimization.

Violent crimes usually provoke some type of reaction or loss – physical, financial, social, psychological, and, in the case of students, academic. The first two are described in newspapers and other forums and are recorded by police and other official reports. The other resulting traumas, however, are not so easily identified but may harm the victim even more. The psychological wound is often severe or permanent. After crimes occur, strong feelings remain. Emotional distress can include feelings of fear, anger, shame, helplessness, guilt, and/or depression. Sometimes interruptions from normal life linger: sleeplessness, nightmares, social isolation, flashbacks, intense insecurity.

College students who have been sexually assaulted most often experience effects on their academic functioning. In nearly every case, the victim cannot perform at the usual level. The academic impact may be felt immediately following the incident or may not be recognized until sometime later. But the negative impact is powerful, and, at times, prohibitive of continuation of the normal class load. As a victim/survivor attempts to return to a normal lifestyle, there may be great difficulty in concentrating. Missing classes becomes commonplace, either as a result of increased general social withdrawal



or in an attempt to avoid seeing the perpetrator. Sleeplessness at night due to anxiety may translate to decreased energy and academic motivation by day.

Rather than risk exposure of the nature of the trauma, the victim may avoid communication needs and feelings to instructors or others who might help. Student victims often must withdraw completely from the university, at least for a semester, until their composure is regained. At the far end of the continuum are those cases in which victims transfer to another university rather than continue in the same environment where the assault occurred.

Since the educational mission of the college or university is to foster an open learning and working environment, it has an ethical obligation to provide an environment free from sexual assault and from the fear that sexual assault may occur. The entire campus community suffers when sexual assault invades the academic atmosphere; thus, the college condemns such unacceptable behavior and provides services to victims of such incidents.

Being alert to changes in a student's behavior or to a rapid decline in academic functioning is key to assisting the victim. Reaching out to the student with supportive words and willingness to listen may provide the sexual assault victim the opportunity to ask for help.

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## **SECTION II: SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Just what is "sexual assault"? Most people think immediately of rape. Rape, both by strangers and acquaintances, is widely recognized but there are other acts of violence committed without the consent of the victim that are sexual assault as well. Sexual assault is a general term that is gender neutral, to include many different crimes involving any forced or unwanted sexual conduct.

### **Sexual Assault includes, but is not limited to, the following:**

- Acquaintance rape/non-stranger rape
- Date rape
- Drug/alcohol facilitated sexual assault



- Indecent exposure, or “flashing”
- Forced sodomy (oral or anal)
- Gang rape/multiple rape
- Marital rape or marital sexual assault
- Object penetration (foreign object or digital)
- Same sex sexual assault
- Sexual battery
- Stranger rape
- Voyeurism, or “peeping tom”

## **MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT RAPE**

**Myth:** *Only certain “types” of women are raped.*

**Fact:** No woman is safe from a rape attempt. Any woman of any age, race, class, religion, occupation, physical disability, sexual identity, or appearance can be raped; rape is a very “democratic” form of violence. Four-month old infants and women in their 90's, women heavily dressed for arctic chill or lightly dressed for summer, have been sexually assaulted. Recent studies indicate one in four women will be sexually assaulted in this country. Current statistics also indicate one in four college women may be sexually assaulted before graduation.

**Myth:** *Men can't be sexually assaulted.*

**Fact:** Between one in six and one in ten males are sexually assaulted - mostly by heterosexual men. A majority of male survivors were assaulted when they were children or teenagers, yet adult men can be assaulted as well. Another misconception is that male victims must be gay. Most male survivors are heterosexual, although gay men are assaulted on dates as well. Also, hate violence against gays is on the rise. Like assaults against women, this is a crime of power and violence.

**Myth:** *Most rapes are unplanned, spontaneous acts.*

**Fact:** Most rapes (approximately 80%) are wholly or partially planned. About 50% occur in either the victim's or assailant's home. Assailants often “stake out” areas they visit regularly, such as grocery store parking lots, offices, libraries, jogging trails, and laundry rooms. In other words, wherever women or men are in the world, they are vulnerable. As more survivors speak out about their assaults, we are also learning that 60-80% of all



sexual assaults are committed by those known to them. This can range from someone known to them only by sight to individuals with whom they are very close: a best friend, lover or husband. Most assaults of young women and men are known as "acquaintance or non-stranger rapes."

**Myth:** *Most rapists commit rape because they can't have sex any other way.*

**Fact:** Most rapists, according to recent studies, also have "normal" relationships with a partner. They are often in long-term relationships, may be married and may have children.

**Myth:** *People who party hard, drink and do drugs are setting themselves up to be raped.*

**Fact:** Nobody deliberately "sets up" oneself to be raped. Because alcohol and drugs may affect judgment, feelings, perceptions, and lower inhibitions, one may be in a more vulnerable position when they drink. Wearing particular clothes, naiveté, poor judgment, shyness, even reckless behavior, is not a crime: rape is.

**Myth:** *If a person just relaxes, it will all be over with soon. She/he might even find it isn't so bad after all.*

**Fact:** No one asks a robbery victim to "relax and enjoy it." Rape is violence using sex as a weapon. Survivors of sexual violence feel very clearly that rape and consensual sex are worlds apart. Rape involves persistent pressure, taking advantage of a person's inability to say "no", calculated drugging with alcohol or other substances, and/or threats, sometimes against the person's life, or her/his livelihood, or academic career, or even family members or friends. Many survivors recall being in fear for their lives, even if a weapon was not present.

**Myth:** *A rapist is easy to spot in a crowd.*

**Fact:** There is nothing about individuals who rape which distinguishes them from others, including their psychological profiles. Rapists come from all races, ethnic or socioeconomic groups. They can be large or small, able-bodied or disabled, married or single. What we do know is that most rapists identify as heterosexual, even if their victims are male, and they rarely go to jail for their first offense; in fact, studies of adolescent offenders indicate that most began committing sexual assaults when they were very young. Some studies show that a person has committed twelve sexual assaults before being identified by law enforcement as a perpetrator.



**Myth:** *People lie about rape as an act of revenge or guilt.*

**Fact:** A justice of the New York State Supreme Court has said, "False rape charges are not frequently made; only about 2% of all rape and related sex charges are determined to be false-the same as other felonies." FBI statistics support this as well. False claims of auto theft are reported more frequently than those of rape.

**Myth:** *Fighting back incites a rapist to violence.*

**Fact:** Most rapists pick out potential victims they believe may be good targets without a fight. They actually may even test these women nonverbally or verbally before determining whether or not to attack. Studies of rape avoidance behavior have shown that the more options a woman knows, the more psychologically ready she is to resist. Both verbal and physical resistance may actually lessen the severity of injury in some instances. What is most important to remember is that no one can tell another person what is right or wrong in a dangerous situation. Only she/he knows her/his own abilities, can assess the assailant's behavior, and can determine what the possibilities are. Knowing options may prevent feeling paralyzed by fear and may also help the survivor understand that submission is also a viable form of self-protection.

**Myth:** *People who don't fight back haven't been raped.*

**Fact:** A person has been raped when forced to have sex against their will, whether they fight back or not.

**Myth:** *If there's no gun or knife, you haven't been raped.*

**Fact:** It's rape whether the rapist uses a weapon or fists, verbal threats, drugs or alcohol, physical isolation, your own diminished physical or mental state, or simply the weight of the body to overcome you.

**Myth:** *It's not really rape if the victim isn't a virgin.*

**Fact:** Rape is rape, even if the woman or man is not a virgin and even if she or he willingly had sex with the perpetrator at another time.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:**



- Submission to such conduct is made an implicit or explicit term or condition of an individual's academic performance or employment; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for decisions about academic evaluations, employment, promotion, transfer, selection for training, performance evaluation, etc.; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational or work environment or substantially interferes with a student's academic performance or an employee's work performance.

## **RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE**

Relationship violence is the verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse of one partner by the other, in an intimate relationship, which has the potential of developing into a long lasting relationship.

### **Examples of relationship violence are:**

- Physical abuse which may involve pushing, shoving, hitting, choking, confining, or assaulting with an object or weapon.
- Emotional abuse which may involve intimidation, threats, humiliation, insults, pressure, destruction of property, control over a partner's movements, isolation.
- Sexual abuse which may involve sexual relations without consent, unwanted sexual touching or pressure to engage in humiliating or degrading sexual activity.

## **STALKING**

Stalking is one person's harassing, obsessive or threatening behavior towards another person. Basically, any repetitive, unwanted contact between a stalker and a victim, or any behavior that threatens or places fear in that person constitutes stalking.

### **Examples of stalking are:**

Non-consensual (unwanted) communication or contact, including face-to-face, telephone calls, voice messages, electronic mail, instant messaging, written letters, unwanted gifts, etc.

- Harassment, either by the individual or through a third party
- Use of threatening gestures



- Pursuing or following
- Surveillance or other types of observation
- Use of electronic devices or software to track or obtain private information
- Trespassing
- Vandalism
- Non-consensual (unwanted) touching

## **ENDNOTE**

Sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence and stalking can be difficult topics for students to absorb and can, at times, be overwhelming. There are steps that someone could take to reduce their risk of becoming a victim.

### **Some of the risk-reducing measure that could be taken are:**

- Watch out for your friends. If someone appears disproportionately drunk for the amount of alcohol consumed, be concerned and closely monitor the person's behavior.
- Try not to walk alone at night. If you must do so, walk in lighted areas and at a steady pace, looking confident. If you're on campus, call university police for an escort.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times; even in areas that you consider "safe."
- It is not necessary to stop and be polite when a stranger or slight acquaintance asks a question in a public place.
- Keep one hand free when carrying packages.
- Avoid dark, empty places.
- Listen for footsteps. Turn around if you think you are being followed and check. If you think you are, cross the street and go quickly to the nearest area where there are other people.
- Have door and car keys ready before you get home.
- Avoid walking alone if you are distracted, upset, or under the influence of any substance which may impair your action.



- Never accept beverages, including non-alcoholic ones, from someone not known or trusted well.
- Keep track of your drink wherever you might be at the time.
- Never leave your drink unattended; get a new one if you do.
- Never drink from open beverage containers, including punch bowls at parties.
- In a bar or restaurant, accept drinks only from the bartender or wait-staff.

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