

# Violence Against Women on College Campuses

**Violence against women is a major health and human rights issue. The United Nation's *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." This violence is systematically perpetrated against an entire class of people – women.**

## **Sexual Assault**

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, young women (ages 16-24) are the most at risk of being raped. In fact, more than 52 % of all rape/sexual assault victims were females younger than 25<sup>1</sup>. Most sexual assaults take place between people who know each other. A survey conducted on 32 colleges and universities found that 84% of women raped knew their attacker and 57% of the those rapes happened on dates<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, women often feel emotionally and psychologically coerced into sex, not just physically. Due to fears of not being believed, being blamed for the rape, or concerns about privacy, almost 81% of on-campus and 84% of off-campus sexual assaults are not reported to the police<sup>3</sup>. This is mostly due to the fact that we live in a society that often blames women for the violence that is perpetuated against them. For instance, they are often told they wore, drank, or said the "wrong thing". We also know that 42% of rape victims told no one about the assault, and only 5% reported it to the police<sup>4</sup>. However, over 50% of sexual assault survivors do talk to someone about their experience. Most often it is a friend or family member. For this reason, college students need to be educated on ways to be a supportive to survivors of sexual assault and the dynamics of victim blaming attitudes.

## **Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence)**

The highest rate of intimate partner violence is among women ages 16-24<sup>5</sup>. Approximately 32% of college students are victims of domestic violence<sup>6</sup>. For many young people, this is their first encounter with a "real" relationship and they are unsure as to what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships. Intimate partner violence does not just happen to married or heterosexual couples. The 1998 annual report for GLBT Domestic Violence from the US Department of Justice suggests that the domestic violence prevalence rate for same-sex couples is between 25% and 33%, comparable to the findings on prevalence in heterosexual couples<sup>7</sup>. At these rates, intimate partner violence (IPV) is and has been an epidemic that threatens the safety of all women. IPV accounts for as many as half of 911 calls<sup>8</sup>, and battered women account for 15-30% of emergency room visits<sup>9</sup>. With this high rate of injury, it is often assumed that a woman will not think twice about leaving her batterer. However, women stay for a number of reasons such as emotional, physical, or psychological coercion, financial stability, and love. Women are often turned away from loved ones when they are unable to make a choice that appears to be obvious and easy. Friends and family members of women in violent relationships need to be there for their loved ones regardless of their decisions.

*\*\*Legal definitions of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence are state specific. Please consult your local police department for legal definitions.\*\**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice

<sup>2</sup> Robin Warshaw. 1994. I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Justice "Final Report: Understanding Crime Victimization Among College Students: Implications for Crime Prevention

<sup>4</sup> Robin Warshaw. 1994. I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics

<sup>6</sup> Youth Violence & Suicide Prevention

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice . Annual Report on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Domestic Violence, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Feminist Majority Foundation

<sup>9</sup> Feminist Majority Foundation

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## **Stalking**

Stalking can be defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Over one million women are stalked annually in the United States, and 59% of these cases involve an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup> Stalking is particularly prevalent on college campuses; in fact, more than half of all stalking victims are between 18-29 years old<sup>2</sup>, and 13% of college women have been stalked<sup>3</sup>. Often, women do not report a stalking incident because they do not think it is serious enough or worry that the police will not take it seriously. However, one study reported that 76%<sup>4</sup> of women killed by an intimate partner had been stalked by the person who killed them. This crime should be taken more seriously. The best way for this to happen is by educating students about the ways they can respond to stalking incidents. For instance, a victim of stalking should document all incidents from harassing phone calls to sightings of the stalker.

## **Sexual Harassment**

While in college, 50 - 75% of women are sexually harassed, and 20 to 30% of college women report being sexually harassed by a professor<sup>5</sup>. Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments to the Higher Education Act states: *No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.* Since sexual harassment is considered sex-based discrimination, colleges and universities are required to provide accessible resources and support as well as appropriate and timely response to victims of sexual harassment.

## **Know Your Rights!**

- *The Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990*  
The Campus Security Act requires all colleges and universities that receive federal funding to publish and distribute an annual report that describes security and law enforcement policies, crime prevention activities, procedures for reporting crimes on campus, and certain campus crime statistics.
- *The Campus Sexual Assault Victims Bill of Rights of 1992*  
This law requires that all colleges and universities participating in federal student aid programs afford sexual assault victims certain basic rights. Schools are required to notify victims of their option to report their assault to the proper law enforcement authorities. A college or university found to have violated this law can be fined up to \$25,000 or lose their eligibility to participate in federal student aid programs. The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for implementing and enforcing this law.
- *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998*  
This act amends the 1990 Campus Security Act to eliminate loopholes and expand reporting requirements. Statistics for certain off-campus areas have to be disclosed and schools with a security department must maintain a daily crime log.

For more information on these laws and much more, check out Security on Campus, Inc. at <http://campussafety.org>.

<sup>1</sup> Stalking Resource Center, National Center for Victims of Crime

<sup>2</sup> National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, "Final Report: Understanding Crime Victimization Among College Students: Implications for Crime Prevention"

<sup>4</sup> Stalking Resource Center, National Center for Victims of Crime

<sup>5</sup> Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Higher Education, "Sexual Harassment in Higher Education: From Conflict to Community," 1993

# Take Action!

## Educating About Violence Against Women on College Campuses

### **Conduct a Violence Against Women “Know Your Campus Survey”**

- Investigate safety provisions, sexual assault policies, and police response to violence against women on your campus. Publicize your most impressive and startling findings through letters to the editor, an editorial, or an investigative article in the campus paper. Conduct visibility campaigns including chalking, flyering, and posterage, to further publicize your results. Arrange meetings with appropriate administrative personnel, start a petition, or organize a rally to bring about concrete change. Utilize Unit 1 of the Feminist Majority Foundation’s *Choices: Study and Action Manual* for a sample “Know Your Campus” Survey.

### **Bring the Clothesline Project to Your Campus**

- The Clothesline Project is a visual display that bears witness to violence against women and children. Decorated t-shirts are displayed representing particular women’s or children’s experiences with violence. To organize a Clothesline Project display on your campus, contact your local rape crisis center or the Clothesline Project’s national office at Box 727, East Dennis, MA 02641, 508-385-7004.
- This format can also be used with quilt squares. Each quilt square is decorated and then they are sewn together to create a reusable tapestry.

### **The Handprint Project**

- The handprint project is a way for men to join the dialogue about violence against women. This project allows men to take a pledge to not commit or condone violence and to seal the pledge by placing their painted or cut-out handprint and name on a display board. After they do this, they should be giving a fact sheet on what they have pledged and information on violence against women.

### **Educate with Candy**

- Hand out vagina lollipops or other sweets with facts about violence against women. Create a catchy slogan such as “Vagina Not-So-Happy Facts” and add statistics such as those seen on the info sheet. You can hand these out for free or donations that can be used for local shelters or crisis lines.

### **Volunteer in the Community**

- Volunteer at a local domestic violence shelter, sexual assault hotline, or abortion clinic. For information on how to “Adopt a Clinic” in your community, utilize Unit 3 of the Feminist Majority Foundation’s *Choices: Study and Action Manual*.

### **For more information on violence against women we recommend the following websites:**

- Feminist Majority Foundation: [www.feminist.org](http://www.feminist.org) and [www.feministcampus.org](http://www.feministcampus.org)
- Students Active for Ending Rape: [www.safercampus.org](http://www.safercampus.org)
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network): [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Center: [www.dvirc.org.au](http://www.dvirc.org.au)
- National Center Victims of Crime -Stalking Resource Center: [www.ncvc.org/src/main.aspx?dbID=dash\\_Home](http://www.ncvc.org/src/main.aspx?dbID=dash_Home)

### **Videos we recommend showing on your campus:**

- Documentaries: *No Safe Place: A Matter of Violence*, *Transforming A Rape Culture*, *Dreamworlds II*, *Tough Guise*, *Wrestling with Manhood*, and *Rape Is* (with Eve Ensler)
- Films: *Sleeping with the Enemy*, *The Burning Bed*, *What’s Love Got To Do With It*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Boys Don’t Cry*, *The Accused*, *The Color Purple*, and *Bastard out of Carolina*