

INSIGHT REPORT
Winter 2015

Sexual Victimization and Social Norms on the College Campus

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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH – WINTER 2015

At the start of the 2014-2015 academic year, Haven, EverFi's sexual assault education and prevention course and relevant surveys, were provided to more than 530,000 students on over 400 college campuses across the United States. Sixty-six percent of these students were freshmen who were required to take the course prior to matriculating on campus.

INCOMING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Prior to receiving the course content, every student was presented with a survey to gather insights into their attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to sexual assault and relationship violence. The same survey was administered after a four to six week intersession once students had successfully completed the course. The second survey was optional, with 53% of our original student base responding to the same set of questions. Between September 21, 2014 and November 17, 2014, 281,000 post-survey responses were collected.

Based on the full pre-course sample of attitudinal and behavioral responses, students were found to fall into either a **Healthy profile (65%)** or an **Unhealthy profile (35%)**. In addition to having substantially less positive responses to survey questions, students in the Unhealthy profile were more likely to indicate having pressured or forced someone into sexual contact without their explicit consent. These students also tend to engage in more high-risk alcohol use.

Members of the **Unhealthy minority** were more likely to be:

- Male¹
- Younger
- Greek members (current or intended)
- Athletes (intercollegiate and/or intramural)
- Less likely to be volunteers

The existence of these two distinct groups is significant in its ability to inform campus programming and intervention efforts, as several of the unhealthy group characteristics (e.g., male, Greek, athlete) corroborate previous research demonstrating heightened risk for sexual violence perpetration among specific student groups. Practitioners and administrators can draw upon these findings to inform their work with students, offering additional programming and intervention to these groups in light of their increased risk.

REPORTED VICTIMIZATION RATES

Students were asked if they had ever *"been pressured or forced into sexual contact without their consent"* with *"Yes, before I arrived on campus"*, *"Yes, after I arrived on campus"*, and *"Yes, before and after I arrived on campus"* as separate response options. In Table 1, victimization rates before and/or after arriving on campus are broken down across several categories for male and female students.

Based on the full pre-course sample of attitudinal and behavioral responses, students were found to fall into either a **Healthy profile (65%)** or an **Unhealthy profile (35%)**. Members of the Unhealthy minority were more likely to be: Male, Younger, Greek members, and Athletes.



Special attention should be paid to the increased victimization rates among LGBTQ students, Native American students, and both male and female transfer students. It is also clear that post-matriculation assault rates for females increase based on their reported academic school year, suggesting that time spent in college is a risk factor for victimization.

These stats on self-reported sexual victimization while in college are higher than the recent rates released by the Justice Department² (6.1 per 1000 female students 18-24), but lower than the oft-cited “1 in 5” statistic reported in The Campus Sexual Assault Study³ (14% of female students age 18-25 report being victimized since starting school). The unique value of this analysis comes not only from the vast sample size, but also from the focus on victimization during the first months following matriculation onto campus.

Given the intense national discussion on measuring sexual assault among college women, it is notable that our data suggest that nearly 1 in every 30 first-year female students have indicated being victimized before taking their first midterm exam.

Table 1. Sexual Assault Victimization Rates Before and After arriving on Campus

School Year	Female		Male	
	Before	After	Before	After
Freshman (First-year)	13%	3%	3%	1%
Sophomore (Second-year)	19%	4%	4%	1%
Junior (Third-year)	19%	4%	4%	3%
Senior (Fourth-year+)	17%	9%	4%	1%
Graduate/professional	21%	3%	4%	<1%
Ethnicity				
Black/African American	12%	3%	3%	1%
White/Caucasian	16%	4%	3%	1%
Hispanic/Latino	14%	3%	4%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8%	2%	2%	1%
Native American/Alaskan	24%	4%	6%	3%
Other	15%	3%	4%	2%
Sexual Orientation				
Lesbian	25%	3%	-	-
Gay	-	-	12%	4%
Bisexual	31%	6%	10%	3%
Heterosexual/Straight	14%	3%	3%	1%
Questioning	21%	6%	8%	2%
Other (please specify)	24%	4%	7%	3%
Student Type				
Transfer students	21%	2%	4%	1%
Greek	13%	5%	4%	3%
Healthy Majority	16%	4%	3%	1%
Unhealthy Minority	11%	3%	3%	2%
School Type				
Public	15%	3%	3%	1%
Private - Secular	13%	4%	3%	1%
Private - Religious	13%	4%	3%	1%
Total Enrollment				
<5,000 Students	15%	4%	3%	1%
5 - 15K	15%	4%	3%	1%
Over 15K	14%	4%	3%	1%

These data provide important insights for practitioners and administrators to intervene and support students who may have been previously victimized prior to their college experience, and those who have been recently victimized upon entering college. Additionally, the degree of victimization among female transfer students is about 50% higher than those in the aggregate, speaking to the greater likelihood among victims to transfer out of the campus where they were victimized.

Our data suggest that nearly 1 in every 30 first-year female students have indicated being victimized before taking their first midterm exam.



BYSTANDER BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL NORMS

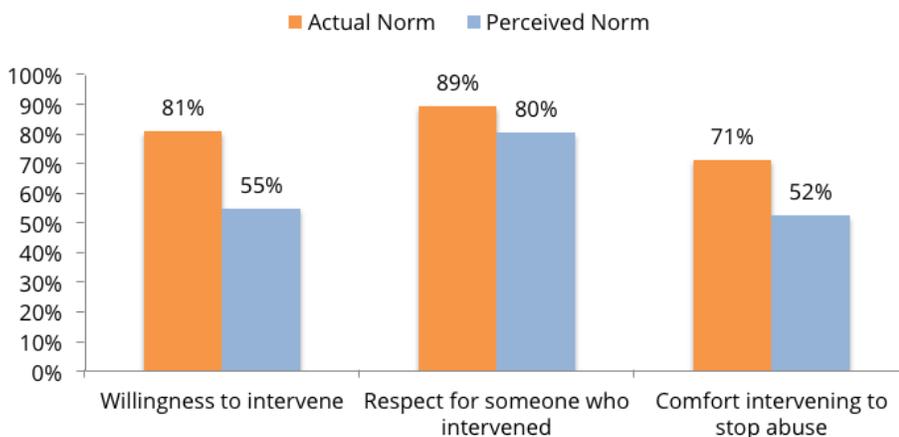
With sexual victimization of college students becoming increasingly recognized as a community health issue, a great resource in prevention becomes the community itself. As seen in the Haven data, the majority of campus community members have overwhelmingly healthy and positive responses to sexual assault survey questions. These students ultimately have the greatest opportunity to create the safe campus communities they want to live in, but they often do not recognize that they are part of a healthy majority and are therefore less inclined to act on their healthy beliefs and values.

In the *Haven* surveys, students were asked about their likelihood and comfort in intervening to prevent sexual and relationship violence, and respect for those who intervene. They were also asked how they thought most students on their campus would respond. All students felt that they were drastically more likely to be an active bystander than their peers. These inaccurate perceptions of campus norms can present substantial barriers to bystander action and intervention.

While student stratifications varied greatly in the size of their misperception, the largest gaps between perceived and actual norms were associated with the highest levels of sexual victimization. Given these findings, campuses should work to overcome student barriers to bystander action by better aligning student perceptions of peers to actual campus norms. Comparing responses of students before and after taking Haven, students' misperceptions of norms were reduced by 20-30%. This promising finding indicates that students were becoming more aware that positive bystander behavior is normative, acceptable, and encouraged on their campuses, thus reducing social barriers they may face in situations where they can step in and make a difference⁴.

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Graph 1. Actual and Perceived Norms Regarding Bystander Intervention (post-matriculation)



CONCLUSION

EverFi continues to analyze the data we collect on student attitudes and behaviors towards sexual assault and relationship violence with the goal of helping campuses better understand the current student culture around this critically important topic. We hope to inform institutions so that they may develop focused approaches to address their specific campus needs and targeted, effective efforts to educate and support students regarding sexual assault and bystander intervention. For additional information or questions about this data, please contact EverFi's Director of Research, Dr. Dan Zapp, Ph.D at dr.dan@everfi.com.

References

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