

**University Safety Report:
Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking and Sexual Coercion Among Students
at Washington State University**

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BACKGROUND

Research in the area of sexual aggression suggests that university campuses across the United States pose a number of safety risks for students, particularly those involving interpersonal aggression. In 1994, the WSU Sexual Assault Task Force Research Sub-Committee investigated the incidence of various forms of sexual coercion for female students using a survey modeled after Mary Koss' *Sexual Experiences Survey* (Koss & Oros, 1982). This study resulted in valuable information about the incidence and conditions of sexual coercion at WSU, but it was limited in scope (i.e., sampled only female victims; examined only sexual violence; was heterosexually biased) and is now more than 10 years old. At the request of the Office of the President, we designed a new survey to address these potential problems. The specific objectives of this study were to:

- 1) Determine the incidence of a variety of coercive experiences, both sexual and nonsexual, among WSU students, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.
- 2) Identify specific situational factors associated with coercive experiences.
- 3) Determine how victims respond behaviorally to these coercive experiences.
- 4) Compare all of the aforementioned findings to those reported in the 1994 WSU study and comparable studies conducted on other campuses.

METHOD

Subjects: A total of 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students were selected for participation in the current study. This sample was generated by staff members of the Social and Economic Science Research Center (SESRC) using the WSU database of students currently enrolled at the Pullman campus.

Materials and Procedures: The online questionnaire used in the current study included a variety of questions addressing attitudes about interpersonal safety on campus and experiences with various forms of sexual and nonsexual emotional and/or physical coercion (i.e., intimate partner violence). The content and wording of the instrument was developed by the principal investigators and transformed into an online format with the assistance of SESRC staff.

Participants were initially contacted in Spring 2005 using a standard letter that explained the nature of the study and invited participants to complete the survey online using a personalized access code. As many as three additional contacts were made at one week intervals to either thank those that responded or to encourage those that had responded to still do so.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics: A total of 2,551 participants completed the entire survey (36.4% completion rate). An additional 117 participants completed part of the survey and those data were included in the final analysis. The final sample was 57.1% female, 42.8% male, and 0.001% transgender. Participants were distributed across class standing in the following manner: 19.8% freshman; 27.1% sophomore; 23.1% junior; 21.9% senior; 16.2% graduate/professional; and 1.7% other. The majority of the sample identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual (96.0%) with equal percentages self-identifying as homosexual and bisexual (2%). Consistent with racial/ethnic composition of the WSU Pullman campus, our sample was predominately Caucasian/White (72.9%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (5.0%),

Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Hispanic (3.9%), African American/Black (1.6%) and American Indian/Alaskan Native/Aleut (1.1%). Approximately 15% did not indicate their race/ethnicity.

Intimate Partner Violence: Participants were asked if they had experienced specific forms of verbal or physical coercion/abuse within the context of a romantic relationship while at WSU. Those results (presented as percentages) appear in Table 1.

Type of Intimate Partner Abuse	<i>Females</i>			<i>Males</i>		
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>>1</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>>1</i>
Verbal Abuse (<i>e.g. insulting, blaming, etc</i>)	31.7	43.4	24.9	32.2	43.3	24.6
Threats of Abuse/Indirect Violence (<i>e.g., threatening to damage property; punching wall, etc</i>)	54.9	39.1	6.0	58.3	38.6	3.0
Physical Abuse (<i>e.g., hitting, pushing, kicking, etc</i>)	56.2	41.7	2.1	55.4	43.8	0.8

Overall, the results for females and males were similar for all types of intimate partner violence. Approximately one third to one half of participants indicated that they had never experienced any form of intimate partner violence. When abuse did occur, verbal abuse was more common than threats of abuse or indirect violence, which were more common than physical abuse. Additionally, the smallest percentages of participants indicated that they had experienced various forms of abuse on more than one occasion.

Sexual Coercion/Stalking. Table 2 presents the number of acts for various types of sexual coercion (and stalking) and the percentage of females and males that reported those acts while enrolled at WSU.

Type of Sexual Coercion	Females		Males	
	<i># of Acts</i>	<i>%</i>	<i># of Acts</i>	<i>%</i>
Forced/Attempted Unwanted Sexual Touching	837	37.1	178	11.5
Verbal Coercion for Sex (Pester, Reward, Punish)	400	22.1	102	7.1
Stalking (<i>e.g., repeatedly followed, watched, etc</i>)	264	17.9	50	4.5
Attempted Penetration (Oral, Vaginal or Anal)	144	9.7	13	1.2
Forced Penetration (Oral, Vaginal, or Anal)	167	8.5	27	1.8

Consistent with other research (See Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), a higher percentage of females than males reported instances of sexual coercion. Both genders reported more instances of sexual touching than instances of verbal coercion or forced penetration. The results for females are somewhat similar to those reported in the 1994 WSU study (see Table 3) despite the fact that different questions were used to examine various forms of coercion. One exception may be the results for forced sexual touching in which the current study found a higher percentage (31.9%) than the 1994 study (10.8%). This difference will require additional study.

1994 Study (n = 638)	2005 Study (n = 1483)
14.6% reported having intercourse when they did not want to because a male became too aroused.	21.0% reported having intercourse because the person overwhelmed them with constant pestering.
4.7% reported having intercourse because a male used emotional pressure.	4.8% reported having intercourse because the person used verbal pressure (i.e., promised rewards or threatened nonphysical punishment).
10.8% reported that a male used physical force to make them engage in kissing or petting (but intercourse did not occur).	31.9% reported that a person used physical force to make them engage in unwanted/uninvited sexual touching.
6.1% reported a male attempted to force them to have vaginal intercourse (but intercourse	9.7% reported that a person attempted to make them have oral, anal or vaginal intercourse (but intercourse

did not occur).	did not occur).
4.4% reported a male forced them to have vaginal intercourse.	6.8% reported a person forced them to have vaginal intercourse.
1.6% reported a male forced them to have oral or anal intercourse.	4.2% reported that a person forced them to have oral or anal intercourse.

Both studies investigated the conditions and factors associated with sexual coercion. A comparison of those findings is presented in Table 4. Similar to the 1994 study and other research (Baum & Klaus, 2005), the present study found that most acts of sexual coercion occurred between “non-strangers.” These acts took place at similar locations on campus. One potentially important finding in the current study, however, was that acts of sexual coercion committed against females were associated with the perpetrator’s residence, but those committed against males were associated with the victim’s residence. Additionally, the current study found that between 46-54% of all acts of sexual coercion were associated with alcohol use by either the victim or perpetrator. This is higher than the 1994 findings, but very similar to the results of other studies (Koss, 1988; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Although Table 4 does not include the data for stalking (since the 1994 study did not examine it), the results for stalking were very similar to the data for other forms of sexual coercion with the exception of the role of alcohol and drugs. Incidences of stalking were very unlikely to involve the use of alcohol and/or drugs by either the victim (6.0%) or perpetrator (10.7%).

		1994 Females	2005 Females	2005 Males
Perpetrator	<i>Stranger</i>	20.0%	25.8%	18.5%
	<i>Non-stranger</i>	80.0%	74.2%	81.5%
Timing of Event		64% occurred within first 2 semesters at WSU.	39.7% occurred during freshman year.	27.6% occurred during freshman year.
Location	<i>Local Apartment</i>	29.0%	18.8%	18.1%
	<i>Residence Hall</i>	16.0%	15.3%	23.1%
	<i>Fraternity</i>	13.0%	20.2%	5.8%
	<i>Sorority</i>	0.03%	0.0%	0.2%
Victim Using	<i>Alcohol</i>	36.0%	47.5%	46.1%
	<i>Drugs</i>	3.0%	0.2%	1.4%
	<i>Both</i>		2.0%	2.8%
Perpetrator Using	<i>Alcohol</i>	38.0%	53.5%	52.1%
	<i>Drugs</i>	6.0%	0.4%	1.4%
	<i>Both</i>		4.1%	1.4%

Labeling & The Tendency to Tell. The vast majority of both females (92.3%) and males (79.5%) told someone about their experience with stalking and more than half told someone about their experience with sexual coercion/assault (68.8% for females; 58.2% of males). Identical to the 1994 study, the most common confidants were friends, room/housemates, and relatives. Also consistent with the 1994 WSU study and other research (Bachar & Koss, 2001; Boeschen, Sales & Koss, 1998; Shaw & Lee, 2001; White, Donat & Bondurant, 2001), a very small percentage of females reported sexual coercion to law enforcement (4.6%) or counselors (9.5%). No male participants in the current study reported their experiences to law enforcement and only 3.7% talked to counselors. Reasons commonly given for not telling included thinking that the experience was “no big deal” as well as fear that the victim would be blamed.

In the 1994 WSU study, only 47% of those whose experiences met the legal definition of rape labeled their experience as “rape.” In the present study, only 24.7% of the females and 12.5% of males who experienced forced oral, vaginal or anal intercourse labeled their experience as “rape.” The most common label assigned to such experiences by either gender was “unwanted experience” (33.8% of females; 25.0% of males).

Attitudes, Personal Safety & WSU’s Programming: The current study also asked participants about their concerns regarding personal safety on campus and their level of satisfaction with WSU’s current programming/resources for sexual coercion & abuse. These data are presented in Tables 5 & 6. Overall, 58.4% of participants reported some degree of

concern for their personal safety and females were more concerned than males. Additionally, between 20-30% of participants indicated some degree of satisfaction with WSU's current programming/resources. The majority indicated, however, that they were unfamiliar with such programs.

<i>At WSU, how concerned are you about your personal safety?</i>	Females	Males	Total
Very Concerned	7.5	2.6	5.4
Somewhat Concerned	27.3	6.8	18.6
Just A Little Concerned	44.6	20.9	34.4
Not Concerned	20.2	69.4	41.3
Don't Know	0.3	0.3	0.3

<i>How satisfied are you with WSU's current programming and resources for . . . ?</i>	Verbal/Physical Abuse			Sexual Coercion		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Very Satisfied	6.0	9.2	7.4	8.1	11.2	9.5
Somewhat Satisfied	15.3	12.6	14.1	21.0	16.1	18.9
Somewhat Dissatisfied	5.3	3.6	4.5	7.2	5.5	6.5
Very Dissatisfied	1.9	0.9	1.5	3.1	1.9	2.6
Not Familiar with Programming	71.6	73.7	72.5	60.5	65.2	62.6

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results of the current study confirmed many of the findings reported for females in 1994. Relatively similar incidence rates were found for various forms of sexual coercion despite the fact that different questions were used to investigate these acts. Likewise, incidence rates of sexual coercion for both females and males reported here are similar to those reported on other campuses across the country (See Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000; Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). Additionally, the current study and 1994 study reported similar conditions and contextual factors for sexual coercion (e.g., the location of coercive acts, the use of alcohol and/or drugs, and the relationship between the participants) as well as the likelihood to report these experiences to authorities. Again, these data are consistent with other research. Nationally, alcohol and other drugs are thought to play a role in approximately 55-74% of the sexual assaults that occur on college campuses (Lisak & Roth, 1990; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Carr (2005) has reported that 79% of rapes/sexual assaults occur between non-strangers. Finally, Fisher et al. (2000) estimated that only 5% of completed and attempted rapes involving college students are reported to the police.

In addition to the findings for sexual coercion, the current study provides information about the incidence of verbal abuse, physical abuse and stalking. For intimate partner violence, the results of the current study are somewhat similar to other work reported for college students (Makepeace, 1981; White & Koss, 1991). The incidence of stalking found in the current study appears somewhat higher than what has been reported in research using a similar operational definition of stalking, but sampling the general population (i.e., 4.8% of females; 0.6% of males) (see Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In light of these findings, it is not surprising that over half of those sampled indicated some degree of concern about their personal safety at WSU. However, when asked about their satisfaction with WSU's current programming and resources for these issues, only 20-30% of participants indicated some degree of satisfaction. In fact, the majority of both the female and male participants indicated that they were unfamiliar with the university's current attempts to address these issues.

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