

## **A Survey of Unwanted Sexual Experience Among University of Alberta Students**

A campus-wide survey of unwanted sexual experiences was conducted at the University of Alberta in the spring of 2000. Twelve hundred and ninety-seven undergraduates were surveyed during class time, and 101 Lister residents were surveyed during evening administration sessions particularly for the survey. The sample was representative of the typical University of Alberta undergraduate population (the median age was 20, the vast majority were full-time students, and they were from a large array of faculties).

Of all of the participants, 20.8% reported having at least one unwanted sexual experience at some point in their life up until now. 11.7% reported having an unwanted sexual experience before age fourteen, and 14.7% reported having one after age fourteen. Those participants who reported an unwanted sexual experience prior to age fourteen were three times more likely to be revictimized after age fourteen than those participants who had not had an unwanted sexual experience prior to age fourteen.

Almost half, 42.0% (163), of the reported unwanted sexual experiences after age fourteen took place while the participants were registered at the University of Alberta. Of those participants who reported that their most serious unwanted sexual experience took place while registered at the U of A, 54% reported that it occurred in their first year of university, and 26% occurred in their second year.

These results are an indication of the need for education for first-year university students on sexual assault. The need for more education was also illustrated by the participants' responses to various sexual assault myths. Their responses indicated a significant amount of agreement and uncertainty to several of these myths.

Encouragingly, the results also indicated that those participants who had seen an education presentation by the Sexual Assault Centre prior to completing the survey adhered to the myths to a lesser degree than those who had not. Thus, while more education is needed, an efficient education program is already in place on campus.

The purpose of this survey was to identify areas of education concerning sexual violence that should be addressed, what forms of unwanted sexual encounters U of A students have experienced, and how these experiences are affecting them. Below, you will find the executive summary of this survey. A copy of the complete report is available at the University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre.

## Executive Summary

1. This study was commissioned by the University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre and funded by the Dean of Students Office, the Sexual Assault Centre, and Lister Hall Residence Life.
2. The goal of the study was to see how the University of Alberta campus climate has changed regarding sexual assault since the 1991 Unwanted Sexual Experiences Study.
3. Self-administered questionnaires were completed during class time by 1297 students enrolled in undergraduate courses at the University of Alberta during the winter term and by 101 students living in Lister Hall residence. Due to time and administrative constraints, the sample was not randomly selected, but a broad sample was obtained. Participants were not required to participate in the study, and they were instructed to leave blank any question that they felt uncomfortable answering.
4. The median age of the participants was 20 years of age. Sixty-one percent of the participants were female and 39% were male. The largest group of participants (35.1%) were in their first year of their university program. Almost all (98.9%) of the participants were registered as full-time students. Thus, although this sample was not randomly selected, the sample was fairly representative of the University of Alberta undergraduate student population.
5. Thirty participants reported knowing someone who has left the University of Alberta because of an unwanted sexual experience.
6. Over 29% of the participants reported that someone had tried to have an unwanted sexual experience with them since they have turned fourteen. Of those attempts, 51% led to an unwanted sexual experience; thus 14.7% of the participants reported at least one unwanted sexual experience since they have turned fourteen. Yet, this 14.7% was unevenly divided between the genders, with 21% of the female participants and 5% of the males reporting at least one unwanted sexual experience after the age of fourteen. These 206 participants reported at least 390 separate incidents.
7. Thirty-seven percent of the participants' most serious unwanted sexual experiences happened while they were registered at the University of Alberta.
8. Over 90% of the most serious unwanted sexual experiences were perpetrated by men. The largest category of perpetrators was non-romantic acquaintances (41.8%), and the second largest group was romantic acquaintances (27.9%). Almost 36% of the survivors felt that they knew their perpetrator very or extremely well, and only 8% of the perpetrators were strangers to the survivors.

9. Physical force was used in 23.5% of the most serious unwanted sexual experiences reported, whereas the majority of experiences involved some form of coercion and pressure.

10. Over half (54.2%) of the survivors and at least 54.4% of the perpetrators were under the influence of some form of intoxicant (alcohol and/or drugs) when their most serious unwanted sexual experience took place.

11. The great majority (92.1%) of the participants' most serious unwanted sexual experiences happened off campus, with the majority, 77%, happening in someone's home (the survivor's 48.0%, the perpetrator's 35.0%, or another person's 24.0%). Of those that did take place on campus, 73.7% took place in or near a university residence.

12. About one half (49.4%) of the survivors of unwanted sexual experiences reported that they "turned cold or froze" during their most serious unwanted sexual experience, and over half (55.2%) reported that they "zoned out or disassociated." Many (41.5%) of the survivors reported that they did nothing during the experience, and 48.8% of them reported physically struggling. When asked what effect their reactions had on the actions of their perpetrator, 39.3% reported that their reactions had no effect, and 22.4% reported that their reactions made the perpetrator more aggressive.

13. Over 86% of the survivors considered their most serious unwanted sexual experience to be traumatic, and 77% reported being scared during the experience.

14. Eighty percent of the participants who had an unwanted sexual experience reported that the experience negatively affected their ability to trust others, and 85% of them felt depressed or unhappy after the experience. Over 7% of these respondents considered suicide because of the experience.

15. Forty percent of the participants who reported an unwanted sexual experience after the age of fourteen, and 25% of the participants who reported an unwanted sexual experience before the age of fourteen reported that the experience has negatively affected their marks or school performance.

16. Almost 19% of all participants reported that someone had tried to have a sexual experience with them when they did not want one when they were under the age of fourteen. Of those attempts, 63% resulted in an unwanted sexual experience; thus, 11.7% of all participants reported that they did have at least one unwanted sexual experience before the age of fourteen (14.6% of the female participants and 6.4% of the males). These 159 participants reported a total of 359 incidences of unwanted sexual experiences.

17. Almost 86% of the unwanted sexual experiences under the age of fourteen were perpetrated by males. The largest category of perpetrators of these

experiences was acquaintances (55.6%), and the second largest group was family (35.7%). Most (73.9%) of the survivors of unwanted sexual experiences under the age of fourteen felt that they knew their perpetrator well to very well, and only 8.8% of their perpetrators were strangers to them.

18. Sixty-one percent of respondents who had an unwanted sexual experience before age fourteen reported that the experience still affects them now.

19. Participants who reported an unwanted sexual experience before age fourteen were three times more likely to report one after fourteen than those participants who had not had one before age fourteen.

20. Over 88% of respondents reported having previous knowledge of the campus Sexual Assault Centre. Of those who went to the Centre because of an unwanted sexual experience, 85.7% rated the service as very good or excellent.

21. The majority of all of the ratings of the various services provided by the University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre were either 'very good' or 'excellent.'

22. Overall, male respondents agreed with sexual assault myths more than female respondents did. The myth construct that was most adhered to involves the idea that perpetrators of sexual assault "didn't really mean to," and the second most agreed with myth construct was "she [the victim] asked for it."

23. In general, participants from faculties which are more likely to discuss issues such as sexual assault (Arts and Nursing) adhered to the rape myths to a lesser degree than those in faculties which do not usually discuss such topics (Business, Engineering, and Science).

24. Those participants who had seen an education presentation by the Sexual Assault Centre adhered to the myths to a lesser degree than those who had not seen one.

25. The participants surveyed from Lister Hall residence reported higher numbers of unwanted sexual experiences both before and after age fourteen than the general University sample (15.8% and 22.8% respectively.)

26. More of the survivors from Lister Hall residence (73.9%) reported being under the influence of some form of intoxicant (alcohol and/or drugs) when their most serious unwanted sexual experience took place than did the survivors from the general University sample (54.2%). In addition, the survivors from the Lister Hall sample reported that at least 63.6% of their perpetrators were under the influence of some form of intoxicant (alcohol and/or drugs), whereas 54.4% of the general sample's perpetrators were.