

POWER-BASED PERSONAL VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a consortium of 21 college and university campuses across Missouri devoted to improving the health and safety of Missouri college students. **This is the third in a series of briefs on the most critical public health issues in Missouri higher education.** We define critical issues as the behaviors on campus which cause threats to the safety of our students on a daily or weekly basis. Power-based personal violence (PBPV), defined as any violence motivated by the desire to assert power, to control, and/or to intimidate in order to harm another person, is a problem on campuses nationwide. PBPV includes relationship/partner violence, rape/sexual assault, stalking and other harassment, as well as the use of predatory drugs. While not all aspects of PBPV are captured in our statewide data, the annual Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) gathers data about non-consensual sexual contact and has expanded questions on stalking behaviors and tactics on the 2016 survey.

DISCUSSION

The more inclusive term PBPV is used to recognize that violence happens to persons of all genders and sexual orientations; however, MCHBS and national data demonstrate that marginalized groups, including women, people of color, and people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, are more likely to be victims of PBPV than majority groups, like men or persons who identify as heterosexual. A report by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men will experience non-consensual sexual contact during their college careers*. In 2015, 17% of Missouri college students reported having experienced “non-consensual sexual contact” at some point in their lives, and approximately 4% of students reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact within the last year. Given that the majority of students do not report PBPV, more Missouri students likely experienced assaults than MCHBS data indicates; however, even using our more conservative frequency of 4% yields alarming results. With a combined enrollment of over 204,000 students at the 21 campuses, Missouri college students were assaulted at a rate of about **one student every hour of every day** in 2015.

SUMMARY

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, survivors are less likely to report PBPV if they know their

perpetrators, and perpetrators are statistically more likely to be acquaintances than strangers. As reporting systems and requirements, such as the Clery Act and Title IX, continue to improve, we are better informed about stranger violence, as reflected by the majority of Clery reports describing unknown perpetrators and asking for assistance in identifying them. However, other PBPV still happens. The best way to learn more about acquaintance violence happening to college students is to provide confidential resources that students can easily access without launching investigations or mandatory reporting, in addition to providing Title IX resources, either on campus or in the local community. Additionally, many schools are implementing evidence-based bystander violence prevention programs, such as Green Dot or STEP UP, to



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reduce instances of PBPV on their campuses. Making it clear that PBPV will not be tolerated on campus also creates a more supportive environment for survivors, which may positively impact reporting rates.

THE IMPACT OF PBPV ON SURVIVORS

Survivors are more likely to experience:

- post-traumatic stress disorder
- depression
- self-harm
- substance abuse
- suicidal ideation

Educating against common misperceptions is important; however, we must be careful not to invalidate the experiences of survivors of stranger

violence. For example, while data tells us that about 80% of rapes and sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances, messaging such as “the rapist isn’t a masked stranger” or “the perpetrator’s not hiding in the bushes”** could be interpreted as making light of or ignoring that stranger violence does still happen. In order to educate about, respond to and prevent non-consensual sexual contact, campuses need to train staff to respond in a trauma-informed way.

*US Department of Justice. (October, 2007). *The Campus Sexual Assault Study*. Retrieved from www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf

** Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.(n.d.). *Statistics: The offenders*. Retrieved from www.rainn.org

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