

Incidences of Stalking and Physical Relationship Violence Experiences at UNH

• 2012 •

Introduction

National studies have found that college-age women are the highest risk group for sexual assault, and that the incidences of physical relationship violence, and stalking are high, if not the highest among college-age students (e. g., Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000, 2002; Shook, Gerrity, Jurich, & Segrist, 2000). There has been variability in these figures, and men also have reported unwanted relationship and stalking experiences. Thus, there is a need for estimates of the extent of these problems to inform prevention and policy initiatives on university campuses. This current study was an extended version of an earlier research collaboration at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) funded by the UNH Office of the President and conducted in 1988, 2000, and 2006. The original three panels of the study focused on unwanted sexual experiences at UNH. For the current study, researchers gathered data on a wider range of unwanted experiences (sexual contact and intercourse, stalking, and physical relationship violence) among undergraduates on the eight New England campuses sampled, which included UNH. The main aim of this study was to examine the incidences of these unwanted experiences among undergraduate students in New England. Incidence was defined as the number of individuals who self-reported unwanted experiences during a six-month period. Data were reported for the 2011-2012 academic year from the start of the fall term to the end of February. This report focuses on the unwanted pursuit (e.g., stalking) and physical relationship violence data specific to UNH. The unwanted sexual experiences data specific to UNH as well as the aggregated data across all New England colleges are presented in other reports.

Methods

Approval to conduct the study was granted by the UNH institutional review board for the protection of human

subjects. Approximately 48% of the participants completed paper surveys in a random sample of UNH undergraduate courses across colleges, and the other 52% completed a web-based survey. Students were told that the study was being conducted by researchers at UNH. In both versions of the survey, students were first presented with a brief statement informing them about the survey on incidence of certain types of sexual and physical experiences in relationships on campus (results specific to sexual experiences are covered in a report separate from this one), about informed consent, and about the guarantee of anonymity of their answers. Students were also told that their participation was voluntary and that they could enter their name into a lottery drawing for one of five \$100 amazon.com gift cards. Participants who completed the paper surveys in class then filled out and put in a separate box their name and email address when they returned their surveys to enter the lottery. Those who completed the survey online were directed to a separate webpage to register their name into the same lottery.

Sample

Participants included in the analyses presented herein were 4,406 UNH undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 24 (mean age=19.96, $SD=1.38$). This represents approximately 40% of the entire undergraduate UNH student body. Women made up 65% of the sample, and men made up 35% of the sample. Participants were roughly evenly dispersed by year in school (29% freshmen, 23% sophomores, 24% juniors, 24% seniors). The vast majority (93%) of the sample identified as Caucasian/White.

Incidence of Unwanted Pursuit Experiences

Stalking is defined as “a course of conduct directed at a specific person involving repeated visual or physical proximity; nonconsensual communication; verbal, written,

or implied threats; or a combination thereof that would cause fear in a reasonable person, with 'repeated' meaning on two or more occasions" (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. 2). A number of other terms—unwanted pursuit behavior, obsessional following, obsessive relational intrusion, harassment—have been used to describe the constellation of stalking behaviors as well as other intrusive behaviors that may not meet legal definitions for stalking (see Mechanic, 2004 for a review). We chose to utilize a more inclusive measure of stalking and other intrusive behaviors, which we refer to as unwanted pursuit. Participants were presented with the following instructions:

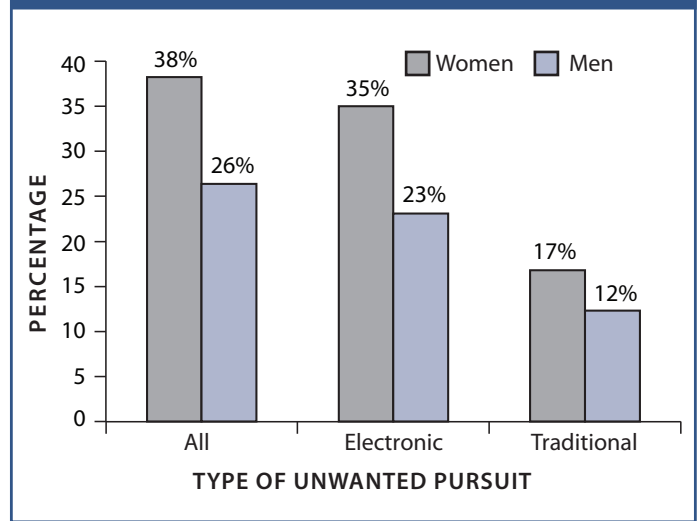
This section will ask about experiences of unwanted behaviors that you may have experienced on one or more occasions by strangers, friends, relatives, or partners, male or female. Not including bill collectors, telephone solicitors, or other sales people, how many times during this school year (since the start of the fall 2011 term) has someone...

Participants were presented with fourteen items that measured both electronic (e.g., unwanted emails, voicemails, text messages, posting on social media websites) and traditional (e.g., being spied on or followed, receiving unwanted gifts or items) forms of unwanted pursuit during the past six months. The items were adapted from the National Violence against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al., 2011). For the purposes of analyses presented below, responses were dichotomized such that participants were scored as having experienced any of the unwanted pursuit behaviors or not.

Overall, 34% of UNH students reported some type of unwanted pursuit during the past six months. Over one third (38%) of UNH women reported some type of unwanted pursuit during the past six months. The figure for UNH men was lower (26%). These incidence rates were consistent across year in school, and women reported consistently higher rates of unwanted pursuit than men.

In addition to exploring overall incidence rates of unwanted pursuit, we also explored rates specific to electronic forms of unwanted pursuit and traditional, non-electronic forms of unwanted pursuit. Electronic forms of unwanted pursuit were reported more

FIGURE 1. Incidence of Unwanted Pursuit by Sex



frequently (women: 35%; men: 23%) than traditional, non-electronic forms of unwanted pursuit (women: 17%; men: 12%). Women reported consistently higher rates of both types of unwanted pursuit than men across all years in college. Of note, the percentages for electronic unwanted pursuit and traditional unwanted pursuit exceed the total rates of unwanted pursuit given that 34% of students who experienced some type of unwanted pursuit, reported both electronic and traditional unwanted pursuit experiences within the past six months.

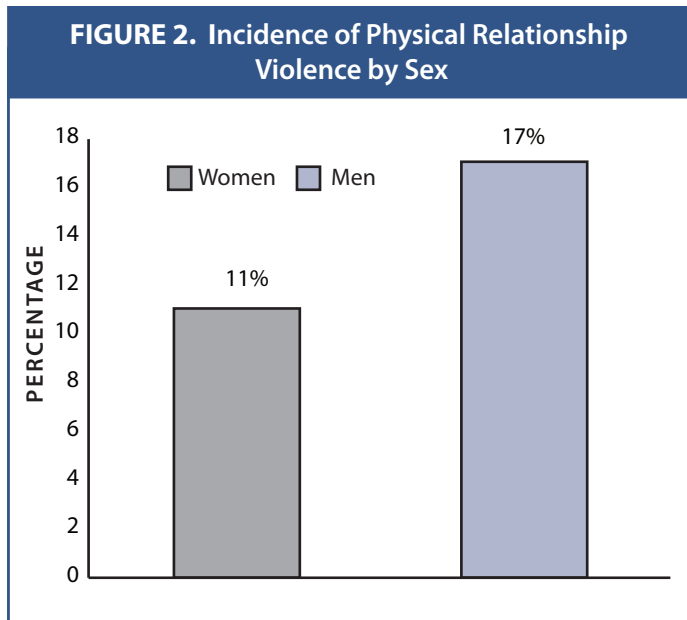
Incidence of Physical Relationship Violence

Relationship violence was introduced in the survey as follows:

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. How many times has a casual, steady, or serious dating or intimate partner done the following to you this school year?

Participants were then asked to indicate how many times each of 14 behaviors had occurred, ranging from slapped me to assaulted with a knife or gun. Items were adapted from Foshee et al. (1998). For the purposes of analyses presented below, responses were dichotomized such that

participants were scored as having experienced any of the forms of violence or not. Results are presented in Figure 2.



During half of one academic year, 13% of UNH students reported experiencing physical relationship violence (PRV) from a partner. A greater percentage of men reported any PRV (17%) than women (11%). Experiences of relationship violence were fairly consistent across years in school, ranging from 12% (first year students) to about 15% (seniors). This means that more than one in ten undergraduate students had experienced physical relationship violence in the context of partner arguments. More severe forms of violence were also examined separately (6 items indicating being dumped out of a car, hit with fist or something hard, burned, beaten up, assaulted with knife or gun). One hundred eighteen participants reported at least one of these incidents (5% of men in the sample and 1% of women). Further, an additional item asked victims how afraid they were during the most serious incident of PRV they experienced. Consistent with research that shows the PRV is different for men and women, women reported significantly more fear than men regarding the most severe PRV experience.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, these results underscore the alarmingly high rates of unwanted pursuit and physical relationship violence among UNH college students. Indeed, one third of UNH students reported some type of unwanted pursuit victimization during a six month interim. Moreover, women were significantly more likely than men to experience all types of unwanted pursuit. The

findings from this study are consistent with other research, providing further evidence of the endemic nature of unwanted pursuit experiences among college students, especially electronic forms of this type of victimization.

The incidence of experiences with physical relationship violence was also high, although lower than unwanted pursuit. PRV is an area of interpersonal experiences where men were more likely than women to report such experiences, which is consistent with other published research. It is important to note, however, that the finding that men report higher rates of PRV than women refers only to the actual act of PRV and not the outcomes associated with this type of victimization. This is important to keep in mind given that research shows that although men report equal or higher rates of PRV than women, women report greater injury, fear, and psychological consequences associated with PRV than do men (Archer, 2000; Foshee, 1996). In our data, we found gender differences in fear, with women reporting greater fear than men associated with PRV experiences. There is also some research suggesting that men may over-report victimization, whereas women may under-report victimization (Magdol et al., 1997) as well as research indicating some gender differences in motives for perpetrating PRV (Flynn & Graham, 2010; Follingstad et al., 1991; Harned, 2001). Clearly this is a complex issue that needs to be unpacked through further research. It should also be noted that variables related to psychological abuse or coercive control were not measured in the current study; these are facets of relationship abuse that can have particularly detrimental effects on victims.

Whereas much attention has been devoted to unwanted sexual experiences, less has been paid to unwanted pursuit and physical relationship violence on campuses. The results of this study are a reminder of the importance of campus based safety nets for victims of all forms of interpersonal violence. These safety nets include confidential crisis and advocacy services that victims can contact, safety and academic intervention protocols, and coordinated communication among all campus professionals whose offices come in contact with victims. The results reported here point to the need for a broad and comprehensive approach to promoting healthy interpersonal relationships among young adults. While true primary prevention must happen before the onset of adolescence and young adulthood, which are particularly high risk periods, there is still much that can be done to improve college communities. We are fortunate at

UNH that we have the Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP) on our campus. SHARPP provides many aspects of this comprehensive model and their work in this regard should continue to be supported. Indeed, finding further mechanisms for effectively delivering prevention messages on the UNH campus should be a priority and such efforts should be well resourced. This could include training for administrators, staff, students and faculty who may have the chance to help as active bystanders in risky situations and to support victims of unwanted pursuit and PRV. Ultimately, these efforts will improve the safety and campus climate at UNH.

Local data like those obtained in the current study can help in the allocation of resources for the above needed efforts and they are a powerful source of information to raise community awareness of the importance of these problems for campuses. Future studies like this one will enable UNH to examine how rates of these problems change over time.

Project Collaborators

Victoria Banyard, Psychology, Justice Studies, Carsey Institute, and Prevention Innovations; Ellen Cohn, Psychology and Justice Studies; Katie Edwards, Psychology, Women's Studies, Carsey Institute, and Prevention Innovations; Mary M. Moynihan, Women's Studies, Justice Studies, and Prevention Innovations; Wendy Walsh, Crimes Against Children Research Center, Justice Studies, and Sociology; Sally Ward, Sociology and Carsey Institute.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the UNH Office of the President for funding for this study and the work of Johanna Barry and numerous UNH graduate students for helping with project management. We also thank the many faculty members who gave us access to their classrooms and the over 4400 research participants who were willing to give time to share their experiences..

References

Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 651-680.

Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M. R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). *The Sexual Victimization of College Women. Research Report to National Institute of Justice* (NIJ 182369), Washington, D.C.

Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2002). Being pursued: Stalking victimization in a national study of college women. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 1, 257-308.

Flynn, A. & Graham, K. (2010). "Why did it happen?" A review and conceptual framework for research on perpetrators' and victims' explanations for intimate partner violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 15(3), 239-251.

Follingstad, D.R., Wright, S., Lloyd, S., & Sebastian, J.A. (1991). Sex differences in motivations and effects in dating violence. *Family Relations*, 40, 51-57.

Foshee, V. A. (1996). Gender differences in adolescent dating abuse prevalence, types and injuries. *Health Education Research*, 11, 275-286.

Foshee V. A., Bauman, K. E., Arriaga, X. B., Helms, R. W., Koch, G. G., Linder, G. F. (1998). An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence program. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88, 45-50.

Harned, M. (2001). Abused women or abused men? An examination of the context and outcomes of dating violence. *Violence and Victims*, 16, 269-285.

Magdol, L. Moffitt, T.E., Caspi, A., Newman, D.L., Fagan, J. & Silva, P.A. (1997). Gender differences in partner violence in a birth cohort of 21-year-olds: Bridging the gap between clinical and epidemiological approaches. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 65, 68-78.

Mechanic, M. B. (2004). *Stalking victimization and intimate partner abuse*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press/Professional Resource Exchange.

Shook, N. J., Gerrity, D. A., Jurich, J., & Segrist, A. E. (2000). Courtship violence among college students: A comparison of verbally and physically abusive couples. *Journal of Family Violence*, 15, 1-22.

Tjaden P. & Thoennes N. (1998). *Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington (DC): Dept. of Justice (US), National Institute of Justice; Report No.: NCJ 169592.

Tjaden P. & Thoennes N. (2000). *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey*. National Institute of Justice Research Report; Report No.: NCJ 183781. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=183781>