

# Understanding the Facts on Campus Sexual Assaults

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California became the first state in the country to describe what is meant by “yes means yes” during sexual encounters when Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill into law on Monday.

And it also puts the onus on California higher education institutions to reshape their sexual assault policies and reporting practices, as The Associated Press reported.

While California is the first to codify “affirmative consent,” several colleges and schools have already put similar policies into place. Still, experts are uncertain of the impact of such measures, according to an article in The New York Times.

Those experts say the only tool with research behind it is bystander training. It was a topic explored at EWA’s higher education conference, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Covering the College Experience,” in September. And training and awareness is needed, the panel showed.

In fact, the litany of statistics about sexual assault on college campuses compiled by John Foubert, founder and president of One in Four and a professor at Oklahoma State University, is staggering.

Even one such stat that might sound less dramatic – 5 percent of women on college campuses experience rape or an attempted rape every year – quickly adds up when you think about the total population. And then when you think about those numbers, the low numbers of assaults reported by colleges seem questionable, he noted. The numbers of reports are in fact slowly increasing, according to a recent analysis by the Washington Post.

If a campus has 10,000 students and 5,000 are women, that means 250 women a year experience some sort of sexual assault, Foubert told the audience of higher education reporters. “When I see reports that say there were three rapes on a campus, my reaction is

Really?" he said.

Some examples of the litany:

- A woman who is raped is 74 percent more likely to be raped again, and women who live in sorority houses are three times more likely to be raped.
- Nearly two-thirds of men who raped women were using alcohol or other drugs.
- Fraternity men are three times more likely to rape.
- And nearly 10 percent of college men admit to acts that meet the legal definition of sexual assault.

What activities produce a 10-fold increase in the odds of a male college student committing rape? Binge drinking two times a week and hanging out with friends who encourage violence against women.

And sometimes statistics are misused or misstated. Journalists should be cautious and clear in reporting statistics or citing research, the panelists warned. And don't just depend on anecdotes from survivors, as compelling as they are.

"I would implore you that you include a focus on data that has been well-vetted and peer-reviewed" Foubert said. An example he cites: One in four college women reports surviving a rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. Yet too many news organizations have cited the stat as a one-in-four chance of getting raped while in college.

Another example: When sexual assault reports climb at a college campus you cover, don't treat the increase as a bad thing. In fact, there can be a positive aspect to the development. It often means the campus is encouraging students to make reports and making them feel supported when they do, noted Huffington Post senior editor Tyler Kingkade, who has written about the topic extensively.

For instance, the University of New Hampshire revamped its procedures for reporting rapes, and its statistics increased exponentially.

"No one ever writes that story — why should a school be open about this?" Kingkade said, also asking participants to avoid using sexual assault statistics to rank schools.

Journalists also should be careful on how they report on the details of complaints and campus procedures, said Ada Meloy, general counsel for the American Council on Education. For example, grievance and discipline procedures differ, and neither involves the criminal justice system. Grievances are filed against institutions; discipline procedures kick in when someone

is accused of violating rules and codes of conduct. And Title IX complaints are not lawsuits.

What are solutions to curb the numbers of sexual assaults on campuses?

Programs that help college students understand and avoid the circumstances that can lead to sexual assault are proliferating, but Foubert warns that while some are well-intentioned, they typically aren't very effective. Journalists should investigate whether the programs that arrive on campus have solid research and statistics behind them.

Foubert's own program at One in Four has separate offerings for men and women. The Men's Program tries to build empathy among male college students by educating them through scenarios of male-on-male rape to put them in the role of a survivor. It's also important to encourage bystanders to intervene. "Research broadly shows you need to do programs that are single-sex, empathy-based, teach them how horrible sex violence is," Foubert said.

And in The Women's Program, women are encouraged to think about friends and helping them avoid getting raped, rather than asking them to think of themselves as potential victims, Foubert said. It's also important that women avoid blaming themselves for an assault: Women who do blame themselves are four times more likely to be raped again, Foubert noted.

The story will continue to be an important one in 2015, pointed out Kingkade. "Sexual assault is not just a 2014 issue. It's not going away," he said, pointing out that 77 schools are under U.S. Department of Education scrutiny.

Here are some resources for journalists covering the topic:

- EWA offers a backgrounder on sexual assault on campus, including the latest resources, reports and stories.
  - Notable sexual assault statistics from John Foubert.
  - Tyler Kingkade and other Huffington Post staff regularly post to [Breaking the Silence: Addressing Sexual Assault on Campus](#).
  - The Center for Public Integrity led the charge in 2010 with its investigation.
  - The Washington Post's higher education reporter Nick Anderson looked at how men accused of sexual misconduct on college campuses are fighting back.
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