

Practice Profile – Alcohol and Sexual Assault

Practice Definition

When discussing alcohol use and sexual assault, our goal is to shift the focus away from victims or potential victims and towards perpetrators and predatory behavior. Facts we know about alcohol and sexual assault:

- Most (93-98%) attempted and completed rapes are committed by men (Black, et al., 2011), however,
- A minority of men (4-10%) perpetrate the vast majority of sexual assaults, with each perpetrator committing an average of six assaults (Lisak and Miller, 2002).
- The majority of sexual assaults involve alcohol (Abbey, McAuslan, and Ross, 1998 & Crowell and Burgess, 1996),
- The majority (70%) of repeat perpetrators of sexual assault intentionally use alcohol as a weapon to commit these crimes (Lisak and Miller, 2002).

Literature

- Abbey, A., McAuslan, P., and Ross, L. T. (1998). Sexual assault perpetration by college men: The role of alcohol, misperception of sexual intent, and sexual beliefs and experiences. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* (17).
- Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., Chen, J., and 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.
- Crowell, N. A., and Burgess, A. W. (1996). *Understanding Violence Against Women*. Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press.
- Lisak, D., and Miller, P. M. (2002). Repeat rape and multiple offending among undetected rapists. *Violence and Victims* (17, 1).
- McWhorter, S. K., Stander, V. A., Merrill, L. L. Thomsen, C. J., and Milner, J. S. (2009). Reports of rape perpetration by newly enlisted male navy personnel. *Violence and Victims* (24, 2).

Resources

Rape Victim Advocacy Program - 24 hour crisis line: 335-6000

Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator – 335-6200

Key Points – Alcohol and Sexual Assault

When discussing alcohol and sexual assault the goal is to shift the focus away from the victim and towards the perpetrator. This is a difficult paradigm shift for many people to make. Below are some talking points and places of pushback you might encounter.

1. Although most perpetrators are men, most men do not commit sexual assault
 - a. Over 90% of assaults are perpetrated by males, however only 4-10% of males commit sexual assault
 - b. Women and people of other genders can be perpetrators, but are much more likely to be victims
2. Of men who do commit sexual assault, most are repeat offenders. About 5% of men commit about 95% of all assaults
 - a. The typical perpetrator commits an average of 6 sexual assaults. Many perpetrators also commit other forms of intimate partner violence (eg. Domestic violence).
3. Studies of perpetrators show that they are very deliberate in their choice to commit assault and ignore lack of consent.
 - a. Oftentimes, students (especially males) are defensive when talking about sexual assault due to the misperception that they, too, might accidentally commit sexual assault. Sexual assault is not the result of a miscommunication by otherwise “good guys” who make a mistake.
4. There is a correlation between alcohol use and sexual assault. There is not a causal link between the two.
 - a. Alcohol doesn’t cause someone to commit sexual assault—the motivation is already there, alcohol lowers the perpetrator’s inhibition to commit the crime.
5. Men who commit sexual assault frequently target women they know who are drinking
 - a. Perpetrators know women who have been drinking are less likely to fight back and more likely to blame themselves. An intoxicated victim is less likely to be believed.
6. Men who commit sexual assault intentionally seek out and create situations where they are unlikely to be caught or held accountable for their actions
 - a. Perpetrators seek out circumstances such as high-risk drinking, targeting people they know (85% of assaults are non-strangers), and using little to no force are situations that make reporting, arrests, and convictions less likely.
7. Men who commit sexual assault are counting on the rest of the population for letting them off the hook by focusing on the victim’s choices around alcohol
8. Focusing education efforts on risk reduction (eg. Watch your drink, don’t drink to excess, etc.) places the focus on the victim of sexual assault.
9. At The University of Iowa, if a student is making a good faith report of sexual misconduct, the Dean of Students will not pursue disciplinary violations against the student or witnesses for use of alcohol or drugs.
 - a. Many students are afraid to come forward and report what happened to them if they were using alcohol at the time of the assault, but they will not be charged.
 - b. Similarly, law enforcement agencies in the Johnson County area agree to not pursue charges against someone for using alcohol underage when an assault occurs.
10. Someone who is incapacitated by alcohol or other drugs is not capable of giving consent, according to University policy. (***See Affirmative Consent Practice Profile and Key Points***)
 - a. Coming back to someone’s apartment after drinking is not consent