

## Sexual Assault – FAQs

Sexual assault on college campuses is unfortunately more common than you may think. It is more prevalent in the traditional college-aged population than in any other age group, making college years higher risk periods, especially for female students. Many victims do not report the assault for many reasons including lack of education about the topic or the available options; however, if you or someone you know was assaulted, know that you are not alone and there are resources available for you.

### **What is sexual assault?**

Sexual assault is any sexual activity that is perpetrated against someone's will or without explicit consent of the individual. It can happen in a continuum including indecent exposure, sexual battery, attempted rape, and rape (which includes digital penetration and forced oral or anal sodomy). All parties involved in a sexual relationship must give consent. Consent can be withheld at any point and must be given for each act along the path. Individuals who are intoxicated cannot give consent.

### **What constitutes sexual assault and who can become an offender?**

Respecting each other's boundaries especially in intimate relationships and asking for and giving consent at every step will reduce the risk of sexual assault. Perpetrators often know their victims and befriend them on college campuses. In fact, anywhere from 85 to 90% of sexual assaults reported by college women are perpetrated by someone they know.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual assault is an umbrella term used to describe many nonconsensual sexual behaviors. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities such as forced sexual intercourse, forced sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.<sup>2</sup> These acts are considered sexual assault because they lack the explicit consent of one person involved. Even if permission to have sexual activity is gained through force, an imbalance of power, use of coercion, the threat of violence or is perpetrated against someone who is not able to give consent, because that individual is asleep, incapacitated, unconscious, legally intoxicated or a minor, consent is not actually given.<sup>3</sup> Consent is a voluntary and sober agreement to engage in every step of a sexual activity. The absence of a verbal "no" does not indicate consent. If consent is not present, then a sexual assault has been committed.

### **Some types of inappropriate sexual activity include:**

- **Non-Contact Sexual Offenses:** include unwanted or non-consensual sexual behaviors that do not involve touch, such as threats of sexual assault, exposing someone to or creating pornography, taking non-consensual sexual photography, or exposing someone to nudity.
- **Sexual Harassment:** encompasses any unwanted or unwelcome sexual advances or obscene remarks in the workplace or other professional or social situation such as the school setting.
- **Sexual Battery:** is the non-consensual touching, without penetration, of the intimate parts of another.
- **Rape:** includes any sexual intercourse or completed penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth through psychological coercion, intimidation, force, or the victim's inability to consent. Any attempts to commit these acts are considered attempted rape.
- **Childhood Sexual Abuse:** Any of the acts described above against a child, someone younger than 18 years of age by an adult. Childhood sexual abuse is sometimes referred to as child molestation.

## Who can be a victim of sexual assault?

1 in 4 adult women and 1 in 9 adult men have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Most female victims of completed rape experienced their first rape before the age of 25, while over 40% of experienced their first completed rape before the age of 18 years.<sup>5</sup> On college campuses the rates of sexual assault may be shocking, but 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted in their college career.<sup>6</sup>

## What can you do if you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault?

- It is important to seek support to understand what your options mean and seek accompaniment through the process. Being violated sexually is a crime and against NOVA student conduct policy. For more information on NOVA's sexual misconduct policy, visit the [Title IX](#) webpage. NOVA's Office of Wellness and Mental Health can help you think about your options and talk about how the incident(s) has impacted you.
- In case of an emergency, first call 911 or notify campus police at 703-764-5000.
- If you are a victim of sexual assault, know that such abuse is never your fault and there are resources available for you.

## References

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5. Ibid., 2.
6. The White House. (2014). Not alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. p.2. Retrieved from [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/report\\_0.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/report_0.pdf)