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What the Evidence Reveals About Repeat Sexual Offending by Young Men

November 11th, 2025 RaeAnn E. Anderson, PhD

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Outline

- Who we are and why are we here
- Terms and Basic facts
- Methodology: How do we know what we think we know
- Rates of repeated perpetration from multiple literatures
- Review prior, high impact research?
- Implications for prevention on campuses and in communities
- Conclusions

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Who are we and why are we here?

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Who are we and why are we here

Who are we

- People who care
- People who believe those who have perpetrated/caused sexual harms can change their behavior
- People who believe these harmful behaviors can be prevented

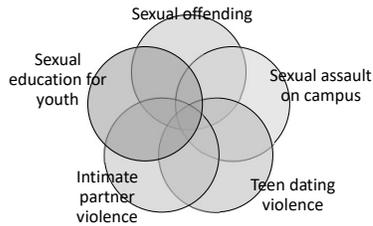
Why are we here

- We are curious
- We are out there doing the work

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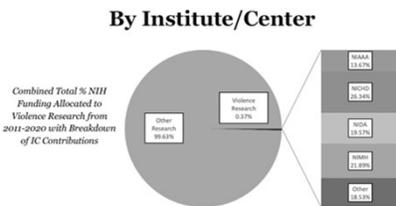
All trying to solve the same problem



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Why are we here: challenges to doing the work



Data from: Williams, Burton, Anderson, & Draughon Moret (2022) in JAMA

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Why are we here: challenges to doing the work

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Big feelings about repeat perpetration

- Why big feelings?
 - Both cultural and practical
- Cultural level.....want to believe certain things about rape
- Practical level.....many implications for how to go about prevention and intervention

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My research and perspective

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Terms and basic facts

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Terms and basic facts

- Sexual perpetration – instigating sexual activity without freely given consent
- Repeat perpetration – people who have perpetrated more than once
- Sexual offending – sexual perpetration, but in a legal context or population
- Sexual victimization – experiencing sexual activity without freely given consent; the experience of the person who was targeted, harmed
- Contact sexual victimization affects approximately 50% of American women; 30% American men
 - For a little more than half of these women, this occurs before age 18
 - Risk takes a big JUMP around age 15
- Approximately 30% of American college men report perpetration
- -> Today, most of the data I will be discussing is on the topic of sexual perpetration and collected from men



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How do we know these basic statistics?

- Large scale survey research
- Epidemiological research
- Surveys that use behaviorally specific terms
- ->but notice an important difference from our topic to the data I just detailed



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Behaviorally-specific items/questionnaires

Behaviorally-specific	Face-valid																														
<p>3. I put my penis (men only), or I put my fingers or objects (all respondents) into a woman's vagina without her consent by:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 80%;"></th> <th style="width: 5%;">0</th> <th style="width: 5%;">1</th> <th style="width: 5%;">2</th> <th style="width: 5%;">3+</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about them, making promises about the future I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring them after they said they didn't want to.</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>b. Showing displeasure, criticizing their sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force after they said they didn't want to.</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>c. Taking advantage when they were too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>d. Threatening to physically harm them or someone close to them.</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>e. Using force, for example holding them down with my body weight, pinning their arms, or having a weapon.</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		0	1	2	3+	a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about them, making promises about the future I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring them after they said they didn't want to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	b. Showing displeasure, criticizing their sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force after they said they didn't want to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	c. Taking advantage when they were too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. Threatening to physically harm them or someone close to them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	e. Using force, for example holding them down with my body weight, pinning their arms, or having a weapon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>• Do you think you have ever raped someone? Yes/No</p>
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Behaviorally specific items

- The difference between these two approaches is HUGE



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Behaviorally specific items

- Best estimates of prevalence of sexual perpetration comes from a systematic review of 78 studies with 25,000+ college men
 - Any sexual perpetration: 29.3%
 - Any verbal pressure/coercion: 19.0%
 - Rape: 6.5%
 - Face-valid/acknowledged rape: 0.9%

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Behaviorally specific items

- This same systematic review demonstrated that the measurement of perpetration is really sensitive to small wording changes
 - Some questionnaires produced higher rates than others
 - Things like using a scaled response format (0, 1, 2-5, 6-9, 10+ times) vs. yes/no increases prevalence rates
 - Asking about more forms of sexual behaviors increases prevalence rates
 - And many other nuances

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Methodology:

How do we know what we think we know?

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How does this relate to repeat sexual perpetration?

- Have to measure sexual perpetration behaviors accurately
- &
- Place these behaviors in time



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How does this relate to repeat sexual perpetration?

- Have to measure sexual perpetration behaviors accurately
- &
- Place these behaviors in time



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Example different studies, different numbers

Citation	Population	Time scale	Prevalence rate of Repeated Perpetration	Measurement of Repeated perpetration
Hanson et al., (2018)	7225 men with sexual offenses	6 mo. To 31 years	11.1%	Recidivism (new charge or conviction)
Lisak & Miller, 2002	1882 community men	Once	63.3%	One time survey
Swartout et al., 2015	1645 college men	Annually for 4 years	25%	If reported perpetration in more than one year
Foubert et al., 2019	12624 college men	once	56.8%	One time survey

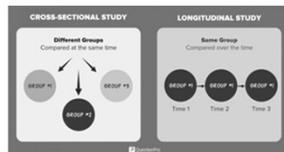
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Answering this question is not easy

Longitudinal data

- Need ask same people over time, while maintaining anonymity
- And each level of analysis is going to have a different level of precision, but also trade-offs



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Answering this question is not easy

Levels of analysis:

- Day
- Week
- Month
- Quarter
- Year



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How do we measure sexual perpetration behaviors?

Levels of analysis:

- Day
- Week
- Month
- Quarter
- Year

	How many times in the past 12 months?
3. I put my penis (men only) or I put my fingers or objects (all respondents) into a woman's vagina without her consent by:	0 1 2 3+
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about them, making promises about the future I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring them after they said they didn't want to.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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How do we measure sexual perpetration behaviors?

Levels of analysis:

- Day
- Week
- Month
- Quarter
- Year

Since age 14, which of the following strategies have you used to convince or try to convince a person to have sex (making out, sexual touching, oral sex, anal sex, or sexual intercourse) after they initially indicated "no"?

	How many times?
Contributing to touch and kiss them in the hopes that they will give in to sex.	0 1 2-5 6-9 10+
Telling them lies (e.g. saying "I love you" when you don't).	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Using your older age to convince them.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Getting them drunk or high in order to convince them to have sex.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Threatening to tell others a secret or lie about them if they don't have sex (i.e., blackmail).	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Asking them repeatedly to have sex.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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How do we measure sexual perpetration behaviors?

Levels of analysis:

- Day
- Week
- Month
- Quarter
- Year

	Once	Twice	3-5 times	6-10 times	11-20 times	More than 20 times	This has never happened
I pushed or shoved my partner.	<input type="radio"/>						
My partner did this to me.	<input type="radio"/>						
I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	<input type="radio"/>						
My partner did this to me.	<input type="radio"/>						
I used a knife or gun on my partner.	<input type="radio"/>						
My partner did this to me.	<input type="radio"/>						

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Rates of repeated perpetration

From multiple literatures

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Longitudinal studies using behaviorally-specific measures

	Study/cite	Sample	Follow-up period	% any	of any % repeated	Summary by section
Teen dating vio.	Temple studies	817 teens	Yearly for 12 years	38.4%	54.1%	4-12 years 54.1-60%
	Ybarra & Petras 2021	1129 youth	Yearly for 4 years	3.5%	60%	
Campus sex.	Abbey & McAuslan	197 men	Yearly for 2 years	35.0%	24.6%	2.5 to 4 years 25- 57.5%
	Thompson et al., 2013	795 men	Yearly for 4 years	29.1%	57.5%	
	Swartout et al., 2015	1500+ men	Yearly for 4 years	10.8%	25%	
	Testa & Cleveland, 2016	1043 men	Semesterly for 2.5 yrs.	19.6%	41.4%	
Comm.	Garner et al., 2025	99 men drinkers+	90 days	52.5%	46%	90 days 38.1 – 46%
	Davis et al., 2015	217 drinkers+	90 days	7.3%	38.1%	
	Hammet et al., 2025	565	90 days	8.8%	46%	
Sex. Offend.*	Hanson et al., 2018	7225	6 mo. To 31 years	100%	11.1%	3 mo. to 31 yrs. 0 – 68%
	Lussier et al., 2024	30396 youth	1 to 73+ months	100%	8.0%	
	Lussier et al., 2024	23632 studies	3 mo. to 25 years	100%	0 to 68%	

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Closer look: teen dating violence data

Temple studies	817 teens	Yearly for 12 years	38.4%	54.1%
Ybarra & Petras 2021	1129 youth	Yearly for 4 years	3.5%	60%

- Both studies reported relatively high rates
- And...
 - Only used 3-4 items
 - Less behaviorally-specific questions
 - Ybarra & Petras prevalence rate very low
- Both studies ask about victimization as well as perpetration
- **Are these underestimates?**

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Closer look college data

- Tight range of follow-up periods (2.5 to 4 years) makes more comparable; range 25-57.5%
- Swartout et al figure:
 - In text reported differently; 8.1% - increasing; 8.6% - consistently high; 12.4% decreasing
 - That's 57.5% repeating perpetration across trajectories
- **But how many perpetrated more than once within a year?**
- **None asked about intimate partner perpetration**
- **Are these underestimates?**

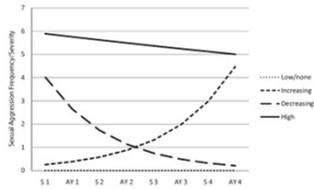


Figure 1. Plot of estimated latent sexual aggression trajectories. Note: S1 = prior to college; AY1 = first academic year; S2 = summer between first and second academic years; AY2 = second academic year; S3 = summer between second and third academic years; AY3 = third academic year; S4 = summer between third and fourth academic years; AY4 = fourth academic year.

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Closer look quarterly/monthly data

Garner et al., 2025	99 men drinkers+	90 days	52.5%	46%
Davis et al., 2015	217 drinkers+	90 days	7.3%	38.1%
Hammet et al., 2025	565	90 days	8.8%	46%

- Range 38.1 to 46%, but some of these samples were ppl more likely to report perpetration (like ppl who binge drink)
- Ranges of number of episodes of perpetration in 90 days:
 - Garner: 1-13; Davis: 1-6; Hammet: 1-29
- **Rarely reported crossover between 90 days and since age 14 perpetration**
 - **So are these underestimates?**

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Closer look at sexual offending data

Hanson et al., 2018	7225	6 mo. To 31 years	100%	11.1%
Lussier et al., 2024	30396 youth	1 to 73+ months	100%	8.0%
Lussier et al., 2024	23632 studies	3 mo. to 25 years	100%	0 to 68%

- Some of lowest ranges
 - Legal-involvement probably highly effective influence on behavior; very motivating factor to not perpetrate again
 - And, none of these studies used behaviorally-specific measures
 - None were anonymous
 - We don't really know why some people get reported/arrested and others do not
 - So are these underestimates?

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Summary of the data

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Summary

- Overall, this suggests repeated perpetration definitely exists and is not rare
 - But what else can we say???
 - Only 1 study on predictors of trajectories/repeatedness over time (Thompson et al., 2015) in non-justice research
 - Justice research: age, gender, neighborhood, geography (Lussier et al., 2024); risk level

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Summary

- Median/mode across studies probably in the 40s.....in spite of all that variation in methods and populations!
 - Yet, 9/12 studies measured perpetration as present/absent within the set study intervals
 - But, 90-day studies suggest repeat perpetration within 90s is in the 30/40s...
 - Studies either asked about intimate partners or asked about partners generally; not both
 - So many of these estimates **may be under-estimates. We don't know.**

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Implications for prevention

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Implications for prevention

- Even though the data cannot give us exact estimates, obviously perpetration behaviors repeat for some people
 - People who perpetrate are heterogenous like any other people
 - Different people may need different things or different doses of things
- Think big and look upstream. What are upstream behaviors we can prevent or promote?
 - Family cohesion, disclosure training, sex ed., abuse prevention
 - What is a key target that can change multiple outcomes?
 - New theory/models: resilience portfolio (Hamby et al., 2018)
 - This includes policy and advocacy
 - How do we get more research funding?

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Implications for prevention

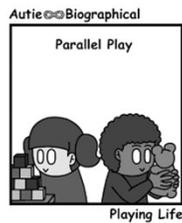
- Acceptability/implementation science perspectives:
 - How do we get people in the door?
 - Vary a ton based on age, community, et cetera
 - Family wellbeing for kids vs. best sex for college men
- Prevention is essentially non-existent for college men....how can we translate what we know works in sex offending treatment to prevention?
 - What aspects of the risk-need-responsivity model can we incorporate to prevention? Good lives model?
 - Are we underselling behaviorist principals?
 - But take care: limited ability to just try stuff out for practical and legal reasons

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Implications for prevention

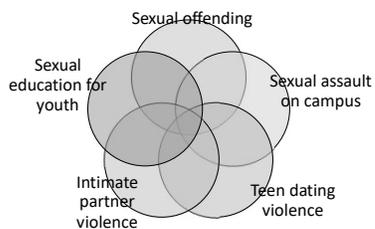
- Let's learn more from each other
- How do we get out of the parallel play paradigm?
- Read more in other literatures/mix up those keywords
- Change up which conferences you attend
- Call folks in your community
 - Example in my state



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All trying to solve the same problem



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All trying to solve the same problem

Sexual offending

Sexual education for youth

Sexual assault on campus

Intimate partner violence

Teen dating violence

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Thank you!

RaeAnn Anderson – raeann.anderson@umkc.edu
Instagram: [umkcsexualviolenceprevention](https://www.instagram.com/umkcsexualviolenceprevention)
Osf.io : search my name for open access papers

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Key references

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