



Building Prevention: Sexual Violence, Youth and Drinking Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of an Ottawa-based study that explores the connections between sexual violence and drinking among young people. Along with a review of programs aiming to reduce alcohol-related sexual violence, this study profiles some Ottawa-based prevention programs, and presents the results of focus group discussions with local service providers, youth workers, and young women and men recruited from high schools and universities. The objective of this project is to stimulate broader discussion about prevention strategies for the Ottawa community.

Effective sexual violence prevention requires an understanding of the context in which it is most likely to occur. Young women experience the highest rates of sexual violence and young men are most often the perpetrators. Most sexual violence takes place between people who know each other, typically in the context of social events such as parties and bars or in dating situations.

Alcohol is so common in sexual violence that it is considered by many to be *the* “date rape drug”. A study of women using sexual assault treatment centres in Ontario found that two-thirds had consumed alcohol immediately prior to the assault and 21% (25% in Ottawa) were thought to have been drugged.¹ In fact, alcohol is often used as a deliberate strategy to increase the vulnerability of victims and to reduce resistance to sexual violence. Very often young men receive approval from friends to use these tactics. In one study in the United States, one-third of male university students said their friends approve of getting a woman drunk to have sex with her.²

When alcohol is involved, a societal double standard arises. Intoxicated women are held responsible for their own victimization whereas intoxication is considered to reduce the responsibility of male perpetrators. Thus, although alcohol is not a direct cause of sexual violence, alcohol adds a particular complexity to the topic of sexual violence prevention.

A broad health promotion strategy is important for youth violence prevention as numerous high risk and harmful behaviours among youth are inter-related. Research suggests that the following are important elements of successful sexual violence prevention programs:

¹ Du Mont, J., Macdonald, S., Rotbard, N., Asllani, E., Bainbridge, D., & Cohen, M. (2009) Factors associated with suspected drug-facilitated sexual assault. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 180(5): 513-519.

² Carr, J. L. & VanDeusen, K. M. (2004). Risk factors for male sexual aggression on college campuses. *Journal of Family Violence*. 19: 279-289.

- Focusing on positive youth development and building overall capacity
- Focusing on preventing sexual violence and drug and alcohol abuse together rather than targeting just one of these behaviours
- Changing attitudes and beliefs among young people, their peer networks, and the broader community that provide a climate where sexual violence is tolerated
- Engaging peers or young adults to deliver prevention messages
- Approaching men as allies and inviting them to take an active role in preventing violence against women
- Including a gender component and discussions about gender roles and peer pressure
- Providing plenty of opportunities to practice and build confidence with new behaviours
- Providing repeated and sustained messages

Research also identifies what has *not* worked to prevent sexual violence:

- Educating young women on avoiding high-risk situations such as drinking or travelling alone – while this may be good advice and may protect individual women in specific situations, it does not reduce sexual violence
- Painting all young men as potential rapists – young men resist these messages as they tend to think this is irrelevant to them personally
- Simply providing information about rape myths
- Instructing young people on how to change their behaviour without providing opportunities to practice new behaviours in different situations

An innovative new “bystander approach” holds great promise as it broadens responsibility for preventing sexual violence and enlists men and women as positive agents of change. This approach encourages men and women to get involved as bystanders by learning to detect risky situations in social contexts, challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours, and intervene and provide support to a woman at risk of assault. The primary goal is to have a lasting effect on changing social norms.

Ottawa-based prevention initiatives

A sample of sexual violence prevention initiatives is profiled in the report to stimulate discussion concerning gaps and effective ways to address them.

The Fourth R

A relatively new initiative in Ottawa is *The Fourth R*, is a comprehensive, school-based program designed to involve students, teachers, parents, and the community in reducing violence and risk behaviours, including alcohol-related sexual assault. Over 100 teachers have been trained to deliver *The Fourth R*, covering all 50 English language high schools in Ottawa. The two French school boards are working towards implementation of *The Fourth R* for the 2011-2012 academic year. The program meets the curriculum requirements of the Ontario Ministry of Education and is taught as part of the regular health and physical education curriculum without the requirement of additional class time.

In Love and In Danger

This is a student-led sexual violence prevention program that was developed in collaboration with Family Services à la famille Ottawa, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and the Ottawa Catholic School Board to raise awareness and prevent dating violence among young people. This interactive program challenges students to get involved by developing their own anti-violence projects and becoming agents of change in their schools.

Sexual Abuse Support Program at Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre

This program offers group support to women as they heal from the trauma of sexual abuse while resisting the use of alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism. The program is unique in that it addresses the issues of sexual abuse and substance abuse simultaneously.

Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y)

The purpose of this one-day program at the Ottawa Hospital is to provide relevant information to young people that will enable them to recognize potential injury-producing situations, to make informed choices, and to adopt behaviours and actions that minimize risk. Police, paramedics, emergency departments physicians, and injury survivors talk to young people about the impacts of risky behaviours. There is a particular focus on alcohol misuse and alcohol-related injuries and information about preventing drug-facilitated sexual assault, but no direct messages about preventing sexual violence in the context of alcohol use.

Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC)

The ORCC, under its public education program, conducts workshops, presentations and discussion groups and provides resource material to youth in high schools, universities and colleges. The objective is to raise awareness and change attitudes about sexual violence among young men and women. The program provides opportunities for thoughtful discussion and self-reflection, and opportunities to apply new information. A primary component of the public education work of ORCC is to identify and challenge rape myths and stereotypes that contribute to a culture that condones and tolerates sexual violence.

Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa (SASC)

SASC provides public awareness and education information and workshops in high schools, universities and colleges, places of business, and other community locations.

CALACS francophone d'Ottawa

Centre d'aide et de lute contre les agressions à caractère sexuel (CALACS) is an Ottawa agency that offers diverse services to survivors. CALACS works to end sexual violence against women by offering prevention and public education resources to the community as an integral part of their mandate.

Right to Respect Campaign, University of Ottawa

This campaign was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa, the Graduate Students' Association, Protection Services, a faculty member, and the University of Ottawa administration. The goals of the campaign are to bring about lasting change in behaviour on campus through positive messaging presented on posters and short video clips, to educate the University community on harassment, discrimination and sexual

violence, to encourage individuals to speak out against these acts, and to inform the university community about the resources available on campus and off. The tag line “I am making a difference when.../Je change les choses quand...” encourages everyone to see that they have a part to play. The campaign message specifically related to prevention of sexual violence is “I am making a difference when I ask her how far she wants to go”. The posters and videos are shown at specific campus events and specific times throughout the academic year.

Carleton University

Students at Carleton University receive sexual assault prevention messages throughout the academic year and specifically at fall orientation and during Sexual Assault Awareness Week. The objective is to promote sexual assault awareness to students, student leaders, and student organizations with a focus on defining sexual assault and harassment, consent and coercion, and challenging myths and stereotypes.

Results of the focus groups

The results of the focus group discussions reinforce the need for broader preventive efforts for alcohol-related sexual violence in Ottawa. In analyzing discussions with youth, two general themes emerged: (1) *Blurry Lines*, where youth demonstrated confusion and contradictions in their attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, and (2) *Roles*, where participants described stereotyped role expectations of the “victim”, whereas the role of the perpetrator was less often discussed or defined. Furthermore:

- According to young people and service providers, there is confusion among young people as to what behaviours constitute sexual assault when someone has “crossed the line”. Consent, in particular, is not well understood among youth.
- Young women who were drinking while assaulted tend to minimize the severity and impact of the assault.
- It is difficult for women to report sexual violence, especially if alcohol was involved.
- Rape myths are prevalent among youth, although not consistently recognized as myths. Young men admit to joking about sexual violence amongst their friends.

A number of important recommendations for preventing alcohol-related sexual violence emerged from the focus group discussions with young people and service providers relating to education for youth, responsibilities of bars and clubs, and improving the response of the criminal justice system. Strategies for preventing alcohol-related sexual violence were also highlighted.

Collaboration among multiple partners

1. Prevention of sexual violence is the responsibility of a wide range of stakeholders including school boards, universities, colleges, community agencies, bar and club owners, youth-serving organizations, and others. A multi-pronged approach is needed, with partnerships among all stakeholders.

Sexual and alcohol-related education for youth

2. Youth should receive education that examines gender role expectations, dating scripts, sexual scripts, and explicit information concerning consent.
3. Prevention efforts must take account of the reality of young people's lives which includes drinking and sexual behaviours. Alcohol and drug prevention education should be linked with sexual education in school curricula and should employ a harm reduction approach.
4. Youth recommend that the "no means no" campaign, developed by the Canadian Federation of Students, be continued. They also state that the concept of "no" needs to be clarified so that youth understand that "no" does not need to be verbal, explicit, or the responsibility of the woman to communicate.
5. Youth should receive alcohol education on how to drink responsibly and universities should work to challenge the cultural norms of student life that include binge drinking.
6. The stigma of being a victim of sexual assault should be reduced through educational initiatives.

Bars and clubs

7. Bartenders should follow guidelines stipulating that intoxicated individuals are not served.
8. Bars and clubs should take some responsibility for intoxicated female patrons to ensure their safety.

Criminal justice system

9. There continues to be barriers to reporting sexual assault to police which should be addressed.
10. The criminal justice system should treat sexual assault more seriously, resulting in harsher outcomes to help shift public perceptions about the seriousness of this crime.
11. Legal reform is needed as the court process continues to perpetuate myths and re-traumatizes victims.

Prevention messages

12. Prevention initiatives should continue to work to debunk rape myths and stereotypes that place the blame and responsibility on women and prevent victims from coming forward.
13. Poster campaigns should engage both men and women yet be clear on the gendered nature of sexual violence.
14. Promote an accurate definition of sexual assault which incorporates the concept of a continuum from unwanted sexual touching to rape.
15. Define consent and coercion within and outside the context of relationships.
16. Educate young women to take precautions to avoid sexual assault alongside the message that despite a woman's actions or inactions she is never responsible for sexual assault. The responsibility of perpetrators needs to be a visible component of sexual assault prevention.
17. Promote the message that sexual assault is not just a woman's issue, it is a community issue.

18. Produce anti-violence initiatives that men can relate to and encourage young men to become leaders in anti-violence initiatives. Male-focused initiatives should be male-driven and include male-to-male and peer-to-peer education.
19. Involve youth in the development and implementation of prevention initiatives.
20. Use contemporary social media and technologies to disseminate prevention messages.
21. Prevention efforts need to be culturally competent so that all young people can relate to them.

The objective of this project is to stimulate discussion among young people, youth workers, service providers, educators, and health care providers and to work collaboratively toward developing effective strategies for reducing sexual violence in the context of alcohol use.

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