

Male Attitudes Regarding Domestic and Sexual Violence

Survey Data Report

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Prepared for the Vermont Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task
Force

CASTLETON POLLING INSTITUTE

Amplifying the Voices of Vermont



Overview of Survey

Domestic and sexual violence is a prevalent and pernicious reality in our society. Occurrences of domestic and sexual violence can be found in all demographics and regions throughout America, and Vermont is by no means less susceptible to this social ill. While perpetrators and victims of domestic and sexual violence can be either gender, the majority of cases have a male perpetrator and a female victim. With that in mind, the Male Attitudes Survey was proposed to address the attitudes of men about domestic and sexual violence, mostly as it victimizes women.

This survey and report was initiated by the Vermont Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force (GPDSVTF) and supported by the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Vermont Department of Health with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rape Prevention and Education cooperative agreement. The goals of this project (as stated in the Request for Proposals) are as follows:

1. "To provide guidance for service providers to develop future training and education programs;
2. To provide a benchmark to measure improvements/declines over time in male attitudes in Vermont towards the prevention of domestic and sexual violence against women;
3. To provide a tool for local and state-wide non-profits for fundraising, grant-writing and other purposes." (GPDSVTF RFP, May23, 2012).

To this end, the Castleton Polling Institute surveyed 341 adult males in Vermont by telephone. The households were selected through random digit dialing, using a sample frame that only included landlines. Once a sampled household was reached, the respondents were selected by asking for the youngest adult (over 17 years of age) male in the household. The average length of the survey was about 19 minutes.

The results of this study create a better understanding of the independent variables associated with various attitudes. We hope this information helps the GPDSVTF to better understand how to target messages and education around these issues in Vermont.

Respondent Demographics:

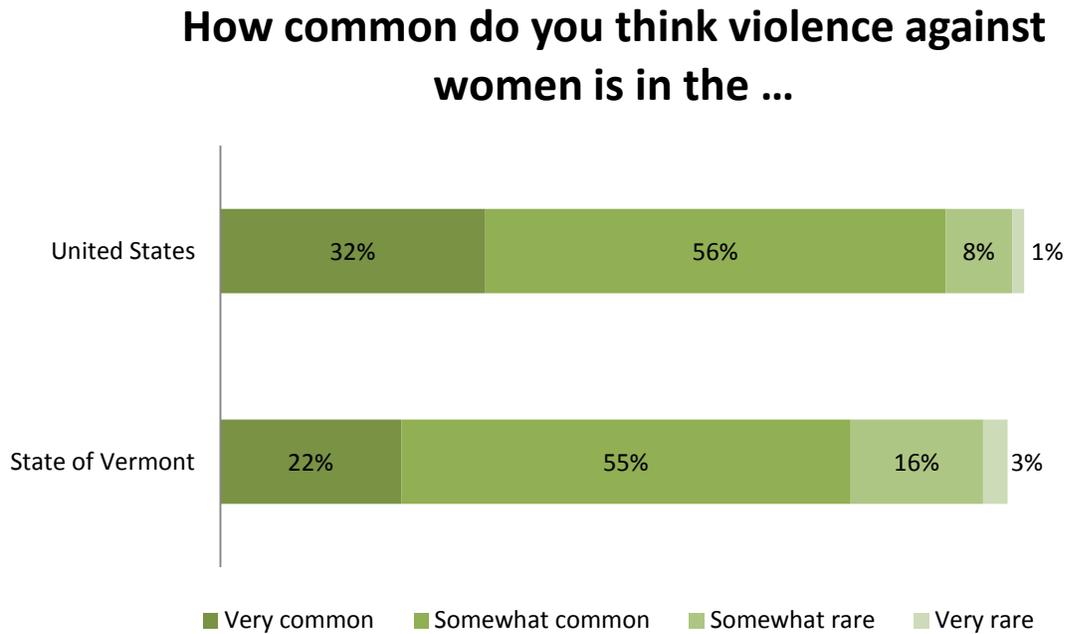
The Male Attitude Survey measured the responses of Vermont adult males on a wide array of topics, all related to domestic and sexual violence. The sample of respondents are largely representative of the Vermont male adult population.

- The age range of respondents is from 18 years old to 90 years old. The average age for all respondents is 47 years old.
- The survey was stratified to assure that there is representation from all 14 counties in Vermont.
- The percentage of respondents married or living with a partner is 65 percent.
- 39 percent have at least one child under 18 years of age living at home (higher than the expected 28 percent).
- 51 percent (56% above age 25) have a college degree (higher than the expected 33 percent).
- 35 percent of respondents belong to a church or faith community.
- 19 percent are active military or veterans.

Survey Data

The survey began by asking how common is violence against women in the United States and in the State of Vermont. This question sets a baseline of how big of a problem men think this issue is, and they help us understand to what extent Vermont males see the issue as less relevant in our state as opposed to the rest of the nation. Figure 1 shows that while a majority of men think that violence against women is common in both the nation and in the state, the perception is that the problem is greater in the nation as a whole than it is in Vermont.

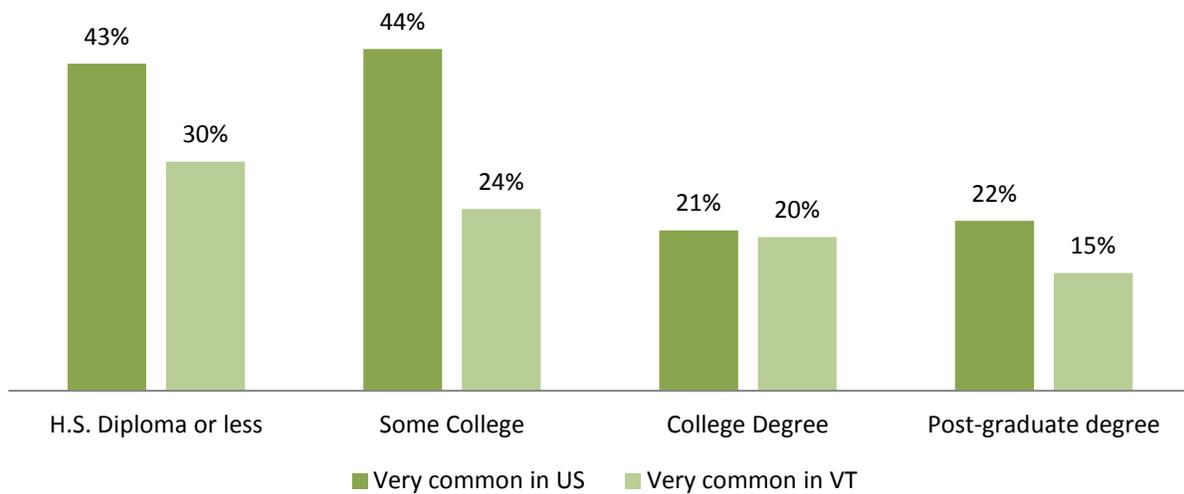
Figure 1. Extent of the problem nationally and statewide



Additionally, Figure 2 demonstrates that those with lower levels of formal education are more likely to think that the problem of violence against women in the United States as a whole exceeds that in Vermont.

Figure 2. Perception of the extent of violence against women, by education

Percent saying that violence against women is very common in the U.S. and Vermont

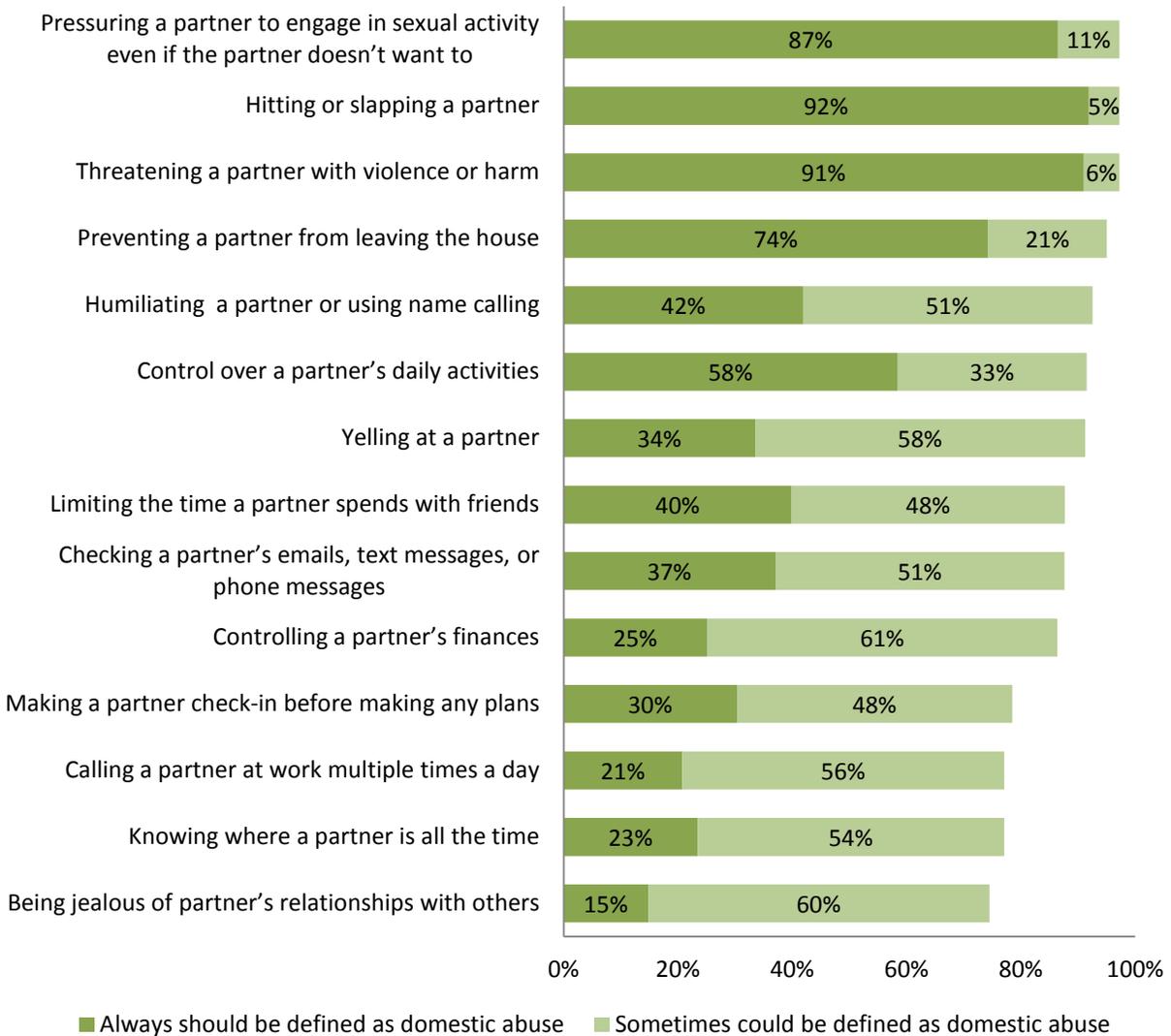


A majority of respondents defined domestic abuse broadly to include behaviors beyond physical violence. They were asked about various behaviors and asked to respond to them as being always domestic abuse, sometimes domestic abuse, or rarely or never domestic abuse. Some standout statistics are 86.5 percent of men believed pressuring a partner to engage in sex is **always** defined as abuse. 73 percent believe preventing a partner from leaving the house is **always** defined as abuse. And 58 percent believe controlling a partner's daily activities is **always** defined as abuse.

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Figure 3 illustrates the percentages of respondents who define a list of behaviors as either always or sometimes abusive.

Figure 3. Defining behavior as “always” or “sometimes” abusive (responses of “never” or “no opinion” are not shown)



A significant percentage of respondents found some of the behaviors that we listed rarely or never rise to the level of being abusive. As Table 1 shows, these are behaviors that may be understood as keeping in contact with a partner (maybe prying) but not likely to be understood as violent. Still, it is important to note that a majority of respondents recognize that this behavior can rise to the level of being abusive.

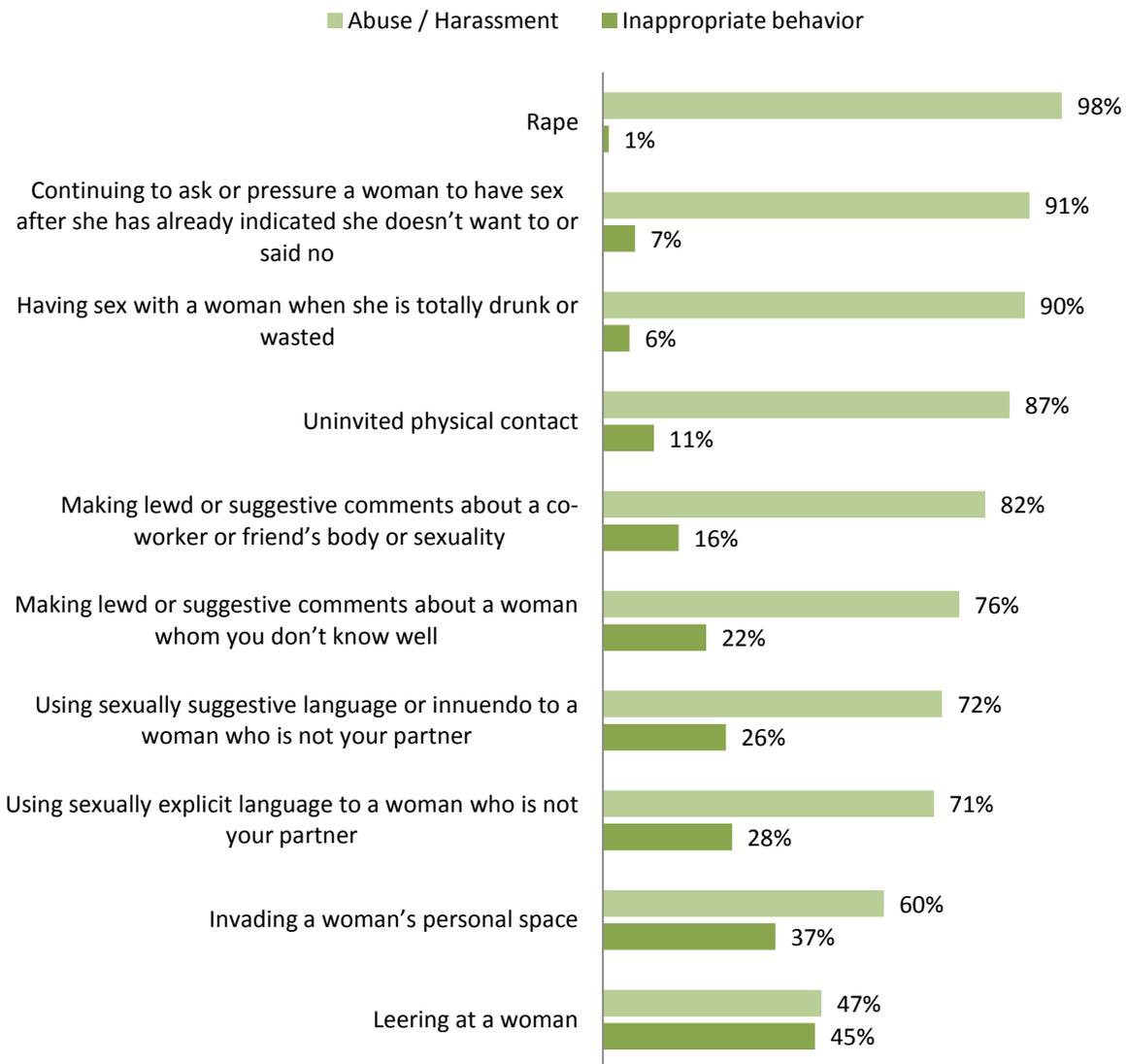
Table 1. Defining behavior as never or rarely abusive

Behavior	Pct
Being jealous of partner's relationships with others	22.4%
Calling a partner at work multiple times a day	19.0%
Knowing where a partner is all the time	18.3%
Making a partner check-in before making any plans	18.3%
Controlling a partner's finances	10.6%
Limiting the time a partner spends with friends	9.0%
Checking a partner's emails, text messages, or phone messages	9.8%

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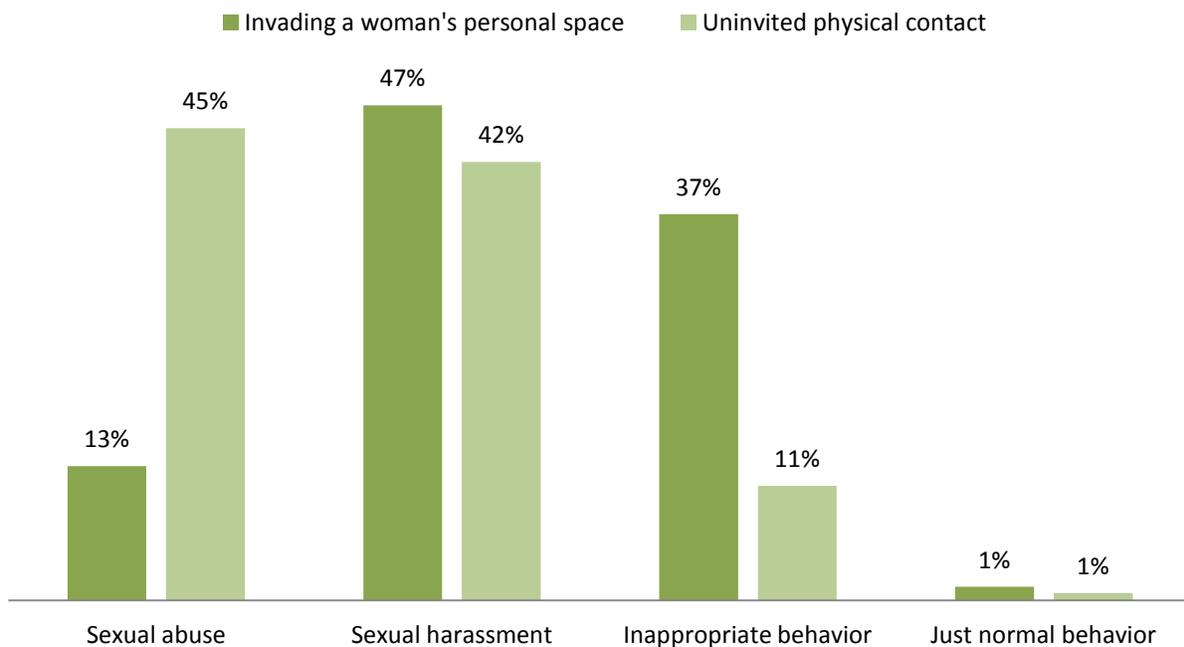
The Male Attitudes Survey asked respondents to distinguish among sexual abuse, sexual harassment, inappropriate behavior, and normal behavior by reading a list of behaviors and asking respondents to categorize each. The list of behaviors was randomly ordered to avoid question-order biases. As Figure 4 clearly illustrates, every item of behavior is more likely to be seen as either abuse or harassment than as simply inappropriate behavior.

Figure 4. Defining behavior as abuse, harassment, or inappropriate (responses of “no opinion” are not shown)



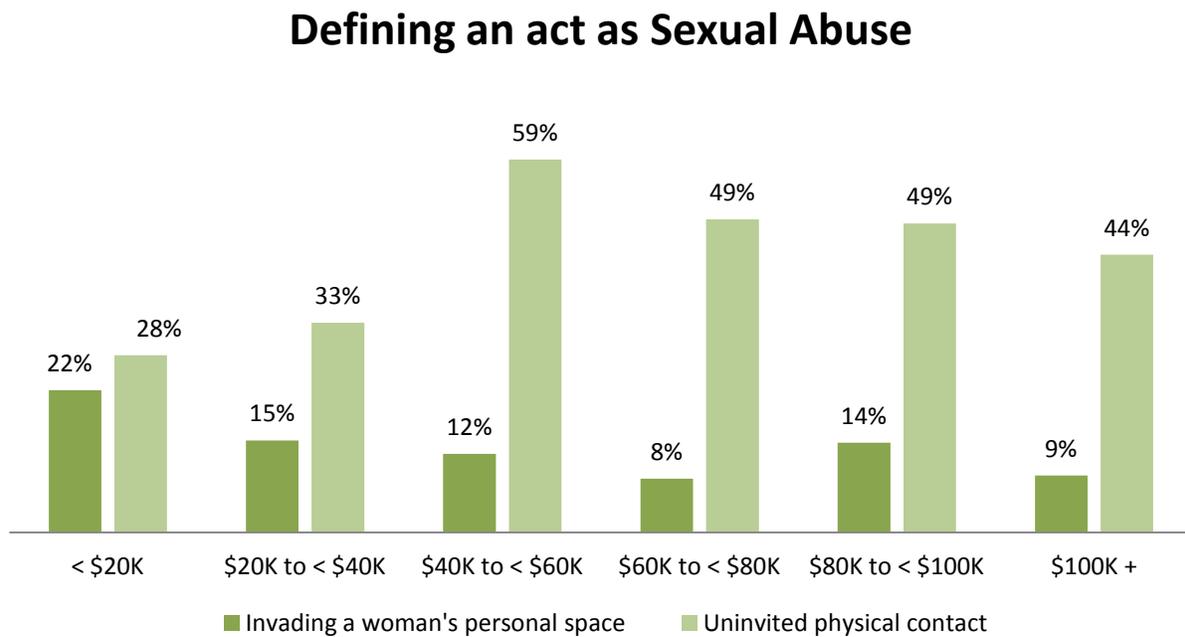
Contact is shown to be a greater offense than proximity, as Figure 5 illustrates. While a plurality of respondents (45 percent) define uninvited contact (such as slapping a woman’s behind, or an uninvited kiss or hug) as sexual abuse, only 13 percent of respondents would consider invading a woman’s personal space as abuse.

Figure 5. Differentiating between contact and proximity



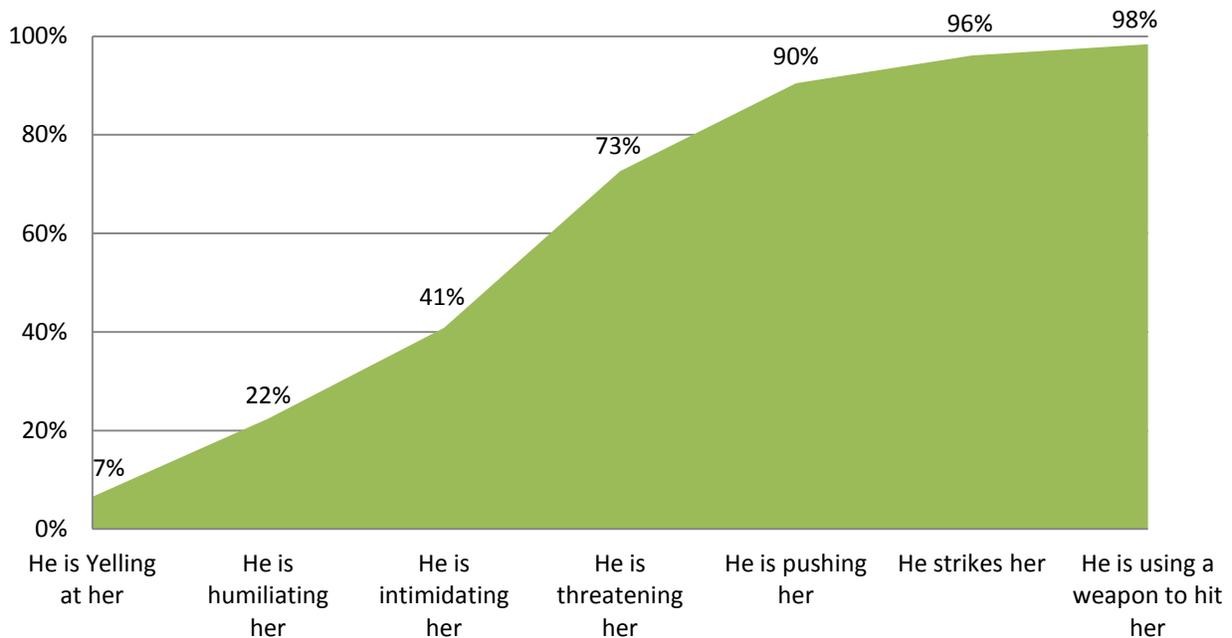
The distinction between contact and proximity increases appears to be influenced by income (see Figure 6). As income increases, the percent of men who think invading a woman's personal space is sexual abuse declines, while those who think uninvited physical contact is sexual abuse increases until the \$40-\$60 range then drops and seems to plateau.

Figure 6. Differentiating between contact and proximity, by income level



The respondents were read a hypothetical situation where a man and a woman who were in a public area got into an argument. The interviewer read escalating behaviors, and the respondents were asked to stop the interviewer at the point they feel they would intervene, if they would have intervened at all. The first behavior was the man yelling at the women. Only 7 percent of men would intervene at this point, even though 33 percent reported in a prior question that this was always domestic abuse, and 57 percent said this could sometimes be defined as domestic abuse. Another interesting point to look at is 73 percent of respondents said they would intervene at the point of hearing the man threaten the women, even though 91 percent of the men interviewed said this behavior should always be defined as domestic abuse. At the point in the hypothetical scenario where a man is using a weapon to hit the woman, 98 percent of men interviewed said they would get involved at this point. Figure 7 illustrates the points where respondents say that they would intervene; only 2 percent do not intervene at any point.

Figure 7. Point at which respondents say that they would intervene in a hypothetical situation



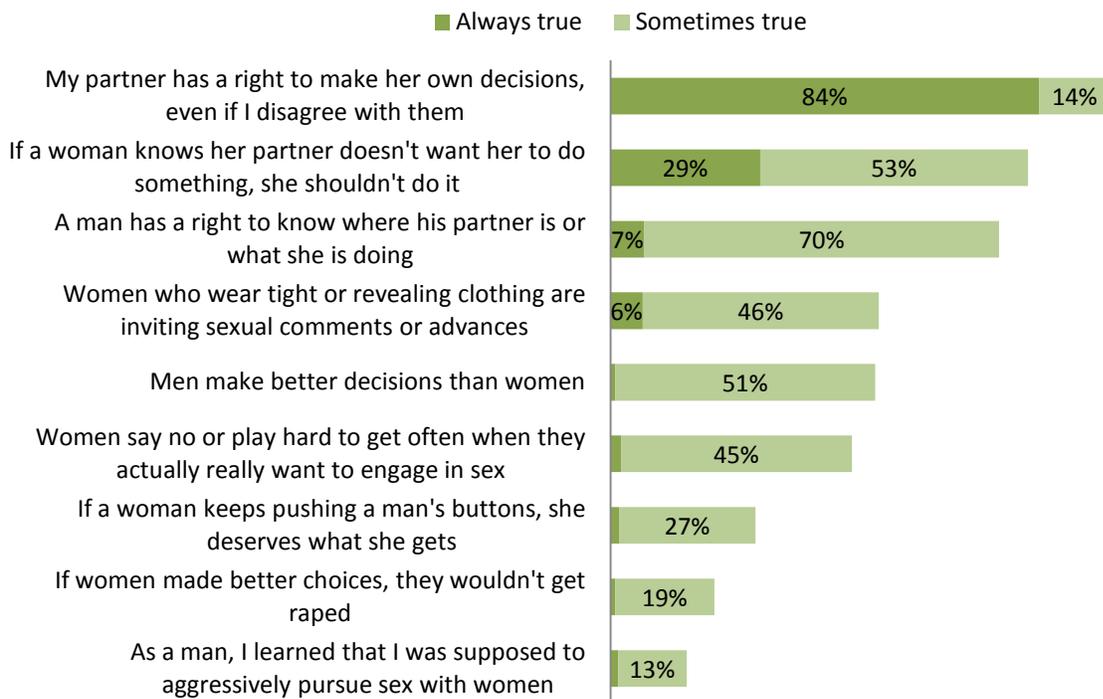
Respondents were read a list of situations and asked if they thought it was always, sometimes, or never their responsibility to do something. Table 2 shows some of the situations in which the men said it was **always** their responsibility to do something. Only 16.5 percent of men think it is always their responsibility to do something when a friend is talking about his partner in a very negative way. And only 28 percent think it is their responsibility to do something when a friend tells a sexist or anti-gay joke.

Table 2. Percent saying it is "always" their responsibility to act

It is always your responsibility to act ...	Pct
When you think your friend is committing domestic or sexual violence	89.2%
When you witness domestic or sexual violence happening to a stranger	85.0%
When you know a friend is scared of being hurt by their partner	83.2%
When a coworker or employee is scared of being hurt by their partner	73.2%
When you see someone harassing a woman in a public space by cat calling or making sexual comments	39.7%
When you see someone at the bar trying to hook up with someone who appears extremely drunk	35.6%
When a friend tells a sexist or anti-gay joke	28.8%
When a friend is talking about his partner in a very negative way	16.5%

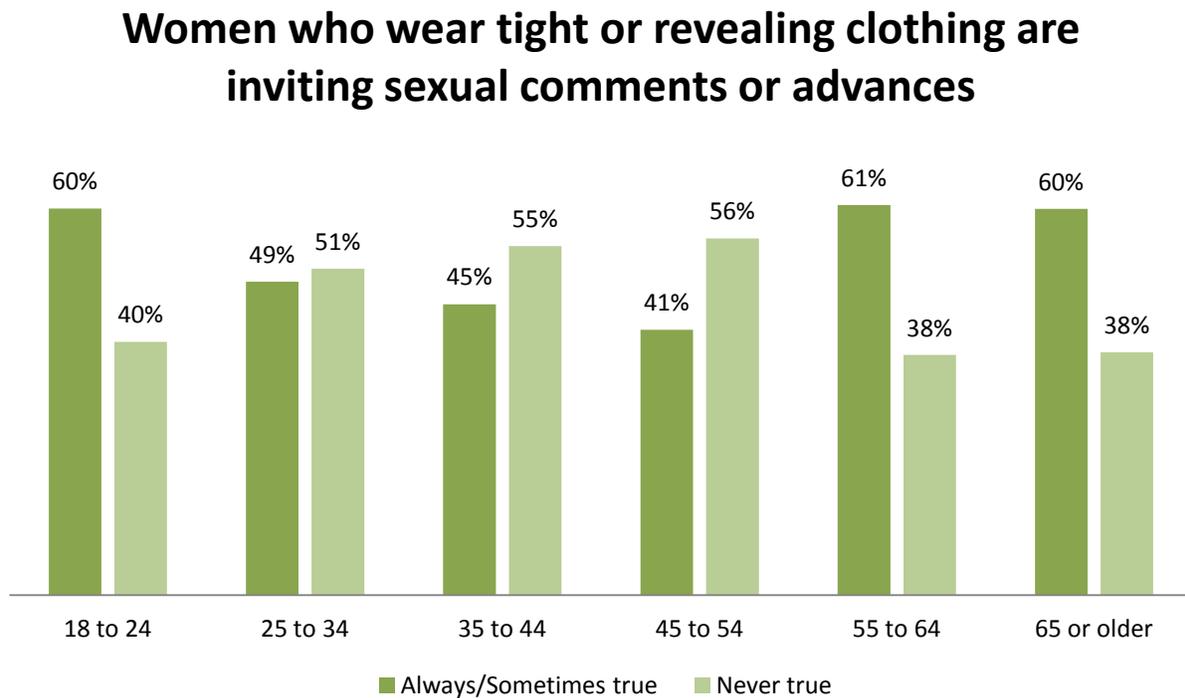
Respondents were asked to evaluate the truth of a series of statements related to women or to relationships between men and women. Responses to these statements reflect upon male attitudes about the proper relationships between partners of opposite sexes. While 98 percent of respondents acknowledged as always true (84 percent) or sometimes true (14 percent) that their partner has a right to make her own decisions, 52 percent said that it is always true (6 percent) or sometimes true (46 percent) that a woman wearing revealing clothing is inviting sexual comments or advances. Figure 8 illustrates the relative assessment of the statements given. Like all other sets of statements or lists of behaviors, these were randomly ordered to eliminate any order bias.

Figure 8. Assessing the relative truth of a statement about women and relations between men and women



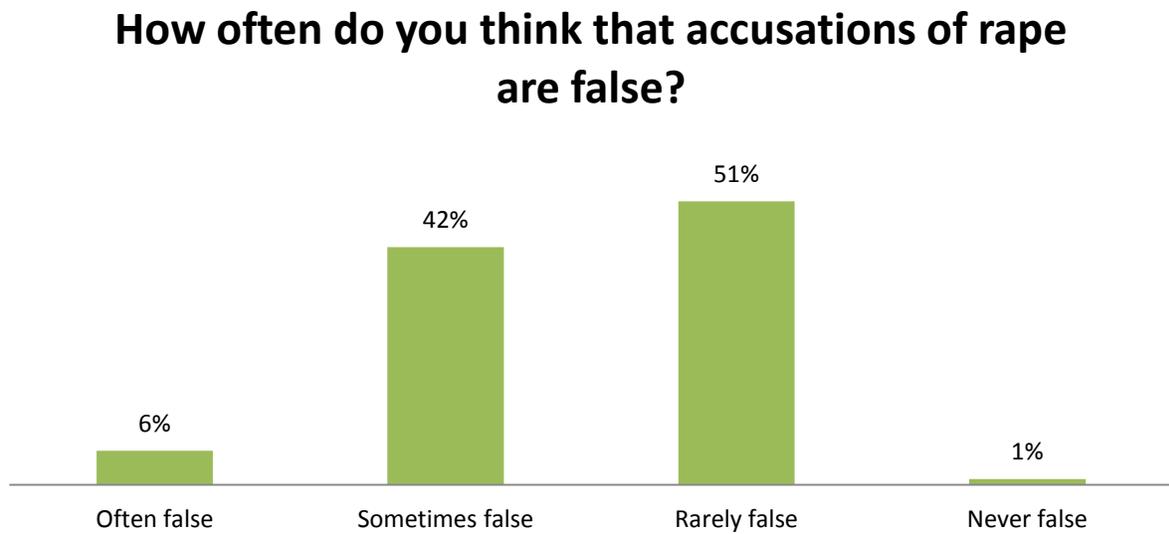
The relationship between age of the respondent and attitudes about women who wear revealing clothing is comparable to many differences we see by age. The survey's youngest and oldest respondents tend, throughout the survey, to have the less progressive attitudes, as they pertain to women and relationships, while men between 25 and 54 have more progressive views. Figure 9 illustrates this persistent finding.

Figure 9. Attitudes about women who wear revealing clothing, by age



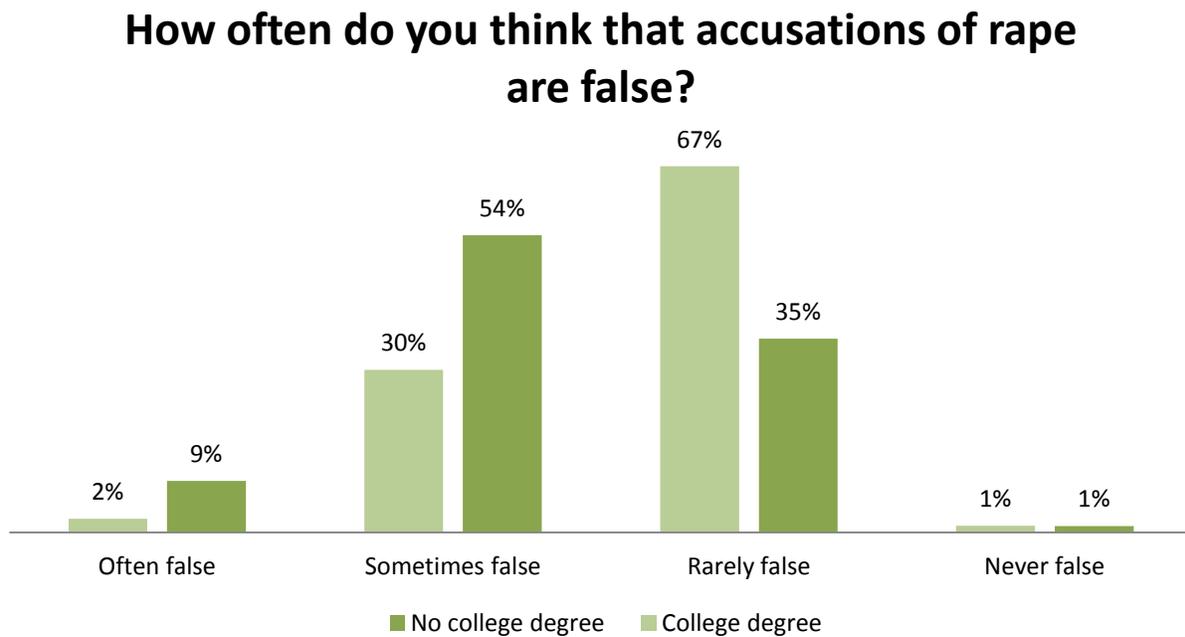
To measure the extent to which men think that accusations of rape are false, the survey used two independent measures. The sample was randomly assigned to receive either a closed-ended question—which asked how often accusations are false with the options of either often, sometimes, rarely or never—or respondents were asked what percent of accusations of rape they believe are false. Six percent of the respondents said that rape accusations are often false, with another 42 percent saying that they are sometimes false. Figure 10 illustrates these data.

Figure 10. Perception of the degree to which rape allegations are false



A slim majority (52 percent) said that rape accusations were either rarely (51 percent) or never (1 percent) false. Figure 11 illustrates the finding that the degree to which men believe rape accusations are false is influenced by their level of education; men with a college degree have a tendency to believe that the frequency of false rape accusations is lower than men without a college degree.

Figure 11. Perception of the degree to which rape allegations are false, by education



For the randomly selected sample that was asked what percent of rape accusations are false, the average response was 20 percent, and the median response was 15 percent. Three percent of respondents said that 0 percent of rape accusations were false and an additional 6 percent said that 1 percent are false. The modal response in the closed-ended question was rarely (51 percent), and the modal response in the open-ended question was 10 percent are false (offered by 21 percent of all respondents in this half of the sample). It is difficult to reconcile 10 percent with rarely, but it is reasonable to surmise either (a) that males think that the prevalence of false rape accusations are not rare, or (b) that males think that 10 percent of all rape accusations being false amounts to a rare occurrence.

In an open-ended question, we asked men to say where they learned what they know about sexual and domestic violence. Many respondents gave multiple sources from which they learned. A majority of respondents (52 percent) said that they learned what they know from social organizations such as

church, school, and family. Nearly as many (47 percent) said that they learned what they know through reading and the media. It was common for military members and vets to say that they learned what they know from their military service. Twenty-five percent said that their knowledge was derived from professional experience, and about the same number (24 percent) said that they learned what they know through direct, personal experience. The responses from this latter group bear special scrutiny.

As an example of personal experience, one respondent said, “When I was a kid my father used to abuse my mother, and I had friends in the same situation and one of my teachers used to come to school with black eyes and my sister had a boyfriend who was abusive. I went to a place that had classes for women where they teach you to fight back.” While several respondents did not give details of personal experience, some offered the clarification that they had a sister or girlfriend who had experienced abuse. One respondent opened up about his own experiences to our interviewer, saying he had “first-hand experience as a victim, (and) watching others.”

While many respondents cited their upbringing and being raised by women, one put it succinctly as such: “I was raised by my mother...I learned from women. It's just common sense.”

In a second open-ended question, respondents were asked what resources they could name to assist people who face domestic or sexual violence. Two-thirds of all respondents gave non-specific, non-government resources, such as women’s shelters or churches, although 24 percent cited specific resources, such as Lorrie’s House, PAVE, and the Howard Center. Forty percent cited law enforcement or 911 as a resource. Half of all respondents listed more than one resource. Finally, 12 percent could not or refused to name any resources at all.

As far as who has the responsibility to teach about domestic and sexual violence, respondents cite many groups or organizations, with colleges, high schools, and middle schools being the most cited. It is important to note, however, that only 64 percent (still a sound majority) believe that these issues should be taught in elementary school; presumably, respondents think it is a conversation for adolescents and adults but less so for children. Figure 12 illustrates the relative differences in responsibility.

Figure 12. Percent of respondents who believe that an institution has the responsibility to teach about domestic and sexual violence

Responsibility to teach about domestic and sexual violence



Conclusions

Generally, we find the attitudes of Vermont male adults, as they pertain to domestic and sexual violence, largely progressive and supportive of fighting this social ill; however, it is important to recognize that attitudes are not always borne out by behaviors.

Throughout the data, three factors seem to be related to attitudes about domestic and sexual violence: age, education, and relationship status.

The relationship between age and attitudes is non-linear. Throughout the data, we find the more progressive views among men in their 30's, 40's, and 50's. Young men (under age 30) and older men share similar attitudes that put more of the responsibility for violence, abuse, or harassment on women rather than on men.

Education appears to have a positive factor on male attitudes, although it is not a huge factor. While we find consistent differences between those with higher levels of education and those with less formal education, those differences are rarely large, but they are consistent.

Lastly, in a linear regression model, where an indexed score of attitudes was assessed, the greatest predictor of attitudes is whether the man is in a committed relationship or not. Males in relationships generally express more progressive attitudes, while single, divorced, and separated men express attitudes that are more likely to define behavior less stringently and are more likely to put the responsibility for behavior on the women involved.