

MALE ATTITUDES REGARDING DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
SURVEY DATA REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the fall of 2012, the Castleton Polling Institute was engaged by the Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force to conduct a survey of Vermont adult men regarding their attitudes towards sexual and domestic violence.

The goals of the survey were to provide:

- guidance for service providers to develop future training and education programs;
- a benchmark to measure improvements/declines over time in male attitudes in Vermont towards the prevention of domestic and sexual violence against women;
- a tool for local and statewide non-profits for fundraising, grant-writing and other purposes.

The Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force is pleased to officially release the findings from this survey to the State and our communities.

SURVEY RESULTS:

The full report is available for download at <http://www.vtnetwork.org/publications/>
You can also request an electronic copy via email from prevent@vtnetwork.org

Key informants

The Castleton Polling Institute surveyed 341 adult males in Vermont by telephone ranging in age from 18 to 90 years old and representing all 14 counties in the state.

- 65 % of respondents were married or living with a partner
- 39 % have at least one child less than 18 years of age living at home
- 51% (56% above age 25) have a college degree
- 35 % of respondents belong to a church or faith community
- 19 % are active military or veterans

Key findings

While there are many areas indicated for increased education, awareness and male responsibility within the results, it is clear that men do care about the issues of domestic and sexual violence. Many men talked about the need for more education around the issue. Many men shared their own experiences of witnessing or experiencing violence. Clearly this was an issue that touched their lives. However, the survey also identified conflicts in awareness versus behavior. To overcome the epidemic of violence in our communities, these conflicts must be addressed and males encouraged to hold each other accountable for perpetration of all forms of sexual and domestic violence.

A majority of respondents defined domestic and sexual violence broadly to include behaviors beyond physical violence. Yet when presented with a hypothetical situation asking them at which point they would intervene, their response rate was much lower than what might be expected based upon the rate that they defined specific behavior as domestic or sexual violence. Respondents generally reported that the imminent threat of or actual physical harm would need to be present before they became engaged bystanders.

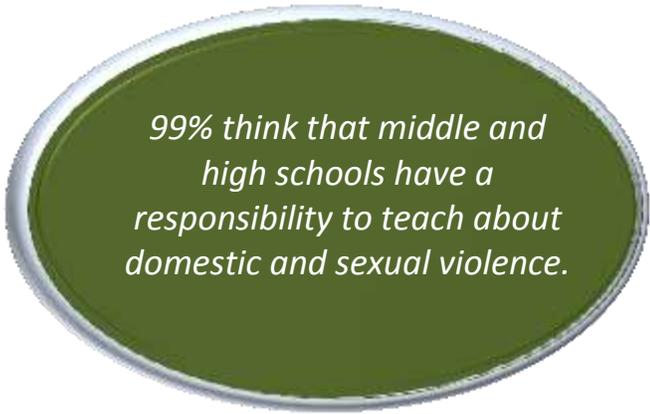
48% of the men surveyed reported that they think accusations of rape are often false (6%) or sometimes false (42%). Comparatively, 51% reported that they think that accusations of rape are rarely false and 1% that they are never false. National research shows us that only an estimated 2- 8% of rape reports nation-wide are actual false reports, and that these reports are often cases where no perpetrator was named or accused^{1,2}. Therefore, the “correct answer” would be that accusations are rarely false. The fact that almost half the respondents did not gravitate to the “rarely false” category is concerning. Additionally, it was found that men with no college degree were most likely to believe that rape accusations are more frequently false.



Another revealing finding was that 88% of respondents reported that violence against women is either very common or somewhat common in the United States while only 77% thought the same of violence against women in Vermont. While we do not have the data to support whether violence against women is more or less prevalent in Vermont than in the nation as a

¹ McDowell, C.P. & Hibler, N.S. (1987). False allegations (Chapter 11, p.275-299). In R.R. Hazelwood & A.W. Burgess (Eds.), Practical Aspects of Rape Investigation: A Multidisciplinary Approach. New York: Elsevier.

² Lonsway, Archambault, Lisak (2009). False Reports: Moving Beyond the Issue to Successfully Investigate and Prosecute non-Stranger Sexual Assault. In the Voice, Vol. 3, No. 1. The National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women.



99% think that middle and high schools have a responsibility to teach about domestic and sexual violence.

whole, the fact that men believe that it is less of a problem in Vermont than elsewhere is problematic and may lead to the reduction of the issue being a priority to address.

The survey also revealed that 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 to each other, attitudes which put more of the responsibility for violence, abuse, or

harassment on women rather than on men who perpetrate.

Men who were between the ages of 18-24 (60%) and above 55 (60-61%) had a dramatic increase over men of other ages (average 45%) in believing that women who wear tight or revealing clothing are always inviting sexual comments or other advances.

We can also see the responses for the percentages of men reporting on their personal responsibility to act. Only 16.5% reported feeling it was their responsibility to act when a friend is talking about his partner in a very negative way, only 35.6% would feel the need to intervene if they saw another man trying to hook up with someone in the bar who appeared extremely drunk, and less than half of respondents (39.7%) would intervene when a woman was being harassed in a public space. However, if the immediate threat or actual threat of physical danger exists, between 73-90% of men would act. Additionally, 89.2% say that they would act if they thought their friend was committing domestic or sexual violence, but we must infer from other results that they really mean that they would act only if the threat of bodily harm was present.



89.2% say that they would act if they thought their friend was committing domestic or sexual violence.

Many men who were surveyed saw the responsibility of education around domestic and sexual violence falling on a number of community institutions including middle and high schools (99%), families (93%), businesses and employers (85%) and government (80%). Nearly three-fourths (72%) saw peers as having a responsibility to teach about domestic and sexual violence. These results hearten us, the ground is fertile for an increase in bystander education through which we encourage peers to hold each other accountable for aggressive, hurtful and abusive actions.

Overall, the attitudes of Vermont male adults are largely progressive and supportive of the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, but it is important to note that attitudes are not always borne out by behaviors. There is still much work to be done to broaden the understanding of the impacts of types of violence that are not physical, like harassment and name calling; and to give men tools to address domestic and sexual violence when they see it, encouraging earlier intervention.

The Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force would like to thank the male respondents who took the time to answer the survey questions and the Castleton Polling Institute for their many hours of in-kind work they donated to the project, as well as the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Vermont Department of Health for financial support.