

Coerced sex not uncommon for young men, teenage boys, study finds

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A large proportion of teenage boys and college men report having been coerced into sex or sexual behavior, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

A total of 43 percent of high school boys and young college men reported they had an unwanted sexual experience and of those, 95 percent said a female acquaintance was the aggressor, according to a study published online in the APA journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*.

"Sexual victimization continues to be a pervasive problem in the United States, but the victimization of men is rarely explored," said lead author Bryana H. French, PhD, of the University of Missouri. "Our findings can help lead to better prevention by identifying the various types of coercion that men face and by acknowledging women as perpetrators against men."

Of 284 U.S. high school and college students who responded to a survey about unwanted sexual encounters, 18 percent reported sexual coercion by physical force; 31 percent said they were verbally coerced; 26 percent described unwanted seduction by sexual behaviors; and 7 percent said they were compelled after being given alcohol or drugs, according to the study. Half of the students said they ended up having intercourse, 10 percent reported an attempt to have intercourse and 40 percent said the result was kissing or fondling.

Being coerced into having sexual intercourse was related to [risky sexual behaviors](#) and more drinking among the victims, and students who were sexually coerced while drunk or drugged showed significant distress, according to the findings. However, having unwanted sex did not appear to affect the victims' self-esteem. "It may be the case that sexual coercion by women doesn't affect males' self-perceptions in the same way that it does when women are coerced. Instead it may inadvertently be consistent with expectations of

masculinity and sexual desire, though more research is needed to better understand this relationship," French said.

The type and frequency of sexual coercion varied according to the victims' ethnicity. Asian-American students reported significantly fewer sexual coercion experiences compared with the other groups. Whites reported a significantly greater proportion of coercion that resulted in attempted sex compared to multiracial victims. In the written descriptions, significantly more Latinos reported sexual coercion, at 40 percent compared with 8 percent of Asian-Americans, 19 percent of whites and 22 percent of African-American students.

The study participants consisted of 54 high school teens and 230 college students, ages 14 to 26. High school students completed the surveys on paper in the classroom. College students completed them electronically or in the classroom. Among the [high school](#) students, 42 percent were white, 17 percent black, 15 percent Asian-American, 15 percent Latino and 11 percent multiracial. The [college students](#) were 46 percent white, 21 percent black, 18 percent Asian-American, 10 percent Latino and 5 percent multiracial.

To differentiate sexual coercion from possible incidents of child abuse, the survey instructed [students](#) not to include experiences with family members. Examples of coercion included "My partner threatened to stop seeing me" for verbal; "My partner encouraged me to drink alcohol and then took advantage of me" for substance; "My partner threatened to use or did use a weapon" for physical; and "My partner has tried to interest me by sexually touching but I was not interested" for seduction. For additional information, researchers also asked participants to describe in writing a time they felt sexually coerced. The participants also responded to several commonly used psychological assessments to measure their psychological

functioning, distress and risky behaviors.

The findings revealed a need for more scientific study of the thin line between sexual seduction and sexual coercion, the authors wrote. "While not typically addressed in sexual violence research, unwanted seduction was a particularly pervasive form of [sexual coercion](#) in this study, as well as peer pressure and a victim's own sense of an obligation. Seduction was a particularly salient and potentially unique form of coercion for teenage boys and young men when compared to their female counterparts," French said.

More information: "Sexual Coercion Context and Psychosocial Correlates Among Diverse Males," Bryana H. French, PhD, Jasmine D. Tilghman, MEd, and Dominique A. Malebranche, BS, University of Missouri; *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*; online March, 2014.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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