

Rape prevention training works, cuts sex assault risk

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In this Wednesday, Oct. 1, 2014 file photo, Texas Tech freshman Regan Elder helps drape a bed sheet with the message "No Means No" over the university's seal at the Lubbock, Texas campus to protest what students say is a "rape culture" on campus. A picture of a banner at a Sept. 20 Phi Delta Theta fraternity gathering, briefly posted online, read, "No Means Yes," followed by a graphic sexual remark. A study by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the University of Windsor published on Wednesday, June 10, 2015 found that a program that taught college women ways to prevent sexual assault cut in half the chances they would be raped over the next year. It was the first large, scientific test of resistance training, and the strong results should spur more universities to offer it, experts say. (AP Photo/Betsy Blaney)

A program that taught college women ways to prevent sexual assault cut in half the chances they would be raped over the next year, a Canadian study found. It was the first large, scientific test of resistance training, and the strong results should spur more universities to offer it, experts say.

Five percent of freshman women who went through the four-session program said they had been raped during the following year, compared to 10 percent of others who were just given brochures on assault prevention. Attempted rapes also were lower—about 3 percent in the [training](#) group versus more than 9 percent of the others.

The results are "startling," said a prominent researcher on sex assault with no role in the study, University of Arizona psychologist Mary Koss.

"Universities should move right away to figure out how they can implement a program like this," she said. "We don't have to look at women as being so helpless and vulnerable. There are tools to empower women that can dramatically cut their risk of rape."

The study involved about 900 students, ages 17 to 24, at the universities of Windsor, Guelph and Calgary. It was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the University of Windsor. Results are in Thursday's *New England Journal of Medicine*.

THE PROBLEM

Researchers say as many as 20 percent of women are sexually assaulted during their college years with the risk greatest the first year. Women who have been assaulted in the past are more likely to be again, and about a third of the women in this study had such a history, partly accounting for the high rate of rape at one year.

Some universities try various rape prevention or self-defense programs, but many have not been tested and some that were tested didn't help.

THE TRAINING

The study's leader, psychologist Charlene Senn at the University of Windsor, developed the program—four, three-hour sessions on recognizing danger, resisting pressure to have sex, and physical self-defense.

As opposed to strangers, "known men are responsible for 90 percent of the rapes on campus," from dates to casual acquaintances, she said.

Women were randomly assigned to get either training or the kind of advice and brochures many colleges provide.

MEASURING SUCCESS

One year after training ended, participants took an online survey largely developed by Koss, the Arizona researcher, and widely used by other researchers.

"It's the best measure because it doesn't label, it doesn't say, 'have you been raped,' but asks about experiences such as penetration against the person's will," Senn said.

Responses were grouped as completed rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, attempted coercion or nonconsensual sexual contact.

RESULTS

All types except coercion were lower in the group given training. Only 22 women would need to take the program to prevent one additional

rape within a year, the researchers calculated.

WHAT WOMEN IN THE STUDY SAY

Bonita Loki Teixeira, 24, now a senior at the University of Windsor, said "knowing the cues, how to avoid being in situations where there can be the possibility of harm," and tips like keeping a close eye on any drinks she has at a party, were helpful. The program also stressed "it's OK to say 'no,'" and that sex isn't owed if a date buys dinner.

Jenna Harris, 21, a senior at the same school, said parents and others warn about assault, "but it's not really something you think about. This program was in your face, like, 'this is real. This stuff does happen,'" she said.

NOT THE WHOLE ANSWER

Recent data show that among [women](#) who were raped, 40 percent were raped before age 18, Kathleen Basile of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention writes in a commentary in the journal.

"We must start younger," and target prevention efforts at men, too, she wrote.

More information: *New England Journal of Medicine*,
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