

## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of interpersonal violence has gained growing attention as a major problem at colleges and universities throughout the country. In order to address this issue, in the 2014-2015 academic year, Rutgers–New Brunswick administered a campus climate survey, iSPEAK, as part of a comprehensive assessment process to examine students’ experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to sexual violence. *A follow up survey was conducted in 2018, which is the basis for this report.*<sup>1</sup> Many of the same questions asked in 2014-2015 are included in the current survey (for more information on the survey tool and background, [click here](#)). A dating violence module was added to the 2018 version to assess students’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs regarding dating violence at the university.

The following report presents results on the characteristics of those who committed sexual violence and dating violence as reported by victims/survivors. For the purposes of this report, the term ‘interpersonal violence’ is used to describe various forms of abuse, violence and harm experienced by our students. The two main types measured in this survey include sexual violence (any form of unwanted, unwelcome, forceful or coercive sexual contact) and dating violence (a pattern of controlling or coercive behavior by one individual to maintain power and control over another in an intimate relationship; it can be physical, sexual, economic, technological or emotional).<sup>2</sup>

## **METHODS**

All students enrolled at Rutgers-New Brunswick during the spring semester of 2018 were invited to participate in the survey. Students were notified about the survey through a range of outreach measures, including direct e-mails, a social media campaign, and informational tables in dining halls and libraries. The iSPEAK survey opened on April 4, 2018 and closed on May 7, 2018. Participants were recruited over email and were entered into raffles to receive several cash prizes.

The iSPEAK survey was based on the tool provided by the White House Task Force To Protect Students From Sexual Assault (2014) and contained six sections: 1) basic demographics (e.g., gender identity, place of residence on campus); 2) victimization; 3) perceptions of the university and fellow students response to sexual violence; 4) knowledge of what to do in the event of sexual/dating violence; 5) exposure to information about sexual or dating violence before coming to Rutgers and since coming to Rutgers, and awareness of resources on campus; and, 6) bystander intentions.

Surveys were administered by Rutgers University’s Office of Institutional Research in order to match student IDs to their administrative records. A total of 7,248 out of 42,317 eligible students (17.1%) accessed the survey. Institutional Research removed 157 responses from students who declined informed consent, 102 students who were under 18 years old, and 62 cases with duplicate student IDs; the official response rate was 14.2% (6,025 out of 42,317 eligible students).

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<sup>1</sup> The survey tool is based on the *Not Alone* toolkit from The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>

<sup>2</sup> Definition and typology of violence. (2020, March 19). Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA). <http://vpva.rutgers.edu/sexual-violence/>

All identifying information was removed before Institutional Research turned over the data to the research team. The research team removed another 114 participants who did not respond to the survey questions. The final analytic sample was 5,911 (14.0% of the eligible student population).

In order to reduce response burden, all participants were randomized to complete either the dating violence module or the sexual violence module. Of the 5,911 participants in the basic analytic sample, 2,976 (50.3%) completed the dating violence module and 2,935 (49.7%) completed the sexual violence module.

### **Key Findings:**

#### **1. Victims reported that most people who committed both sexual and dating violence were men.**

##### *Those who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence*

Sexual violence was categorized as six types of unwanted sexual contact: 1) unwanted sexual contact by physical force, 2) unwanted sexual contact by coercion/threats of force, 3) attempted unwanted sexual contact by physical force, 4) attempted unwanted sexual contact by coercion/threats of force, 5) unwanted sexual contact when incapacitated that the victim is uncertain occurred, and 6) unwanted sexual contact when incapacitated that the victim is certain occurred. Participants who affirmed any of the six types of unwanted sexual contact, either before or while attending Rutgers–New Brunswick, were asked a series of follow-up questions regarding the nature of the most serious incident.

18% of survey respondents reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact since coming to Rutgers. A majority of students who experienced sexual violence since coming to Rutgers–New Brunswick reported that the individual who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was a man. A closer examination of the data reveals that a man committed the most serious incident of sexual violence against nearly all female victims (98%) and more than 1/3 of all male victims. Slightly less than half of men who experienced sexual violence since coming to campus (49%) reported that the person who committed the most serious incident was a woman.

##### *Those who committed the most serious incident of dating violence*

Additionally, students who reported ever having been in a romantic relationship since coming to Rutgers–New Brunswick were asked how frequently they had experienced any of 52 different unhealthy dating behaviors. These 52 behaviors were then collapsed into four general categories of dating abuse: physical (e.g., pushing, shoving, or grabbing partner), psychological (e.g., saying things to hurt partner's feelings on purpose), digital (e.g., pressuring partner to respond quickly to calls, texts, or other messages), and financial (e.g., doing things to keep partner from going to job or classes). Participants who affirmed any of the types of dating violence were asked a series of follow-up questions regarding the nature of the most serious incident.

52% of survey respondents reported at least one experience of dating violence since coming to Rutgers. The majority of students who experienced dating violence since coming to Rutgers–New Brunswick reported that the person who committed the most serious incident of dating violence was a man (72% of all survivors). Nearly all female students who experienced dating violence since coming to campus (94%) reported that the individual who committed the incident was a man. A majority of men who experienced dating violence since coming to campus (82%) reported that the person who committed the most serious incident of dating violence was a woman, although 13% of men who experienced dating violence since coming to campus reported that the individual was a man.

**2. Victims reported that most people who committed sexual violence were students at Rutgers, while the student status of those that committed dating violence was evenly distributed among students and nonstudents.**

*Those who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence*

Students who experienced sexual violence since coming to campus were also asked whether the person who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was a current Rutgers student. The data shows that more than half of all student survivors reported the individual who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was a current Rutgers student (58%).<sup>3</sup> This number is even greater for male students who experienced sexual violence since coming to campus (76% of male survivors reported this).

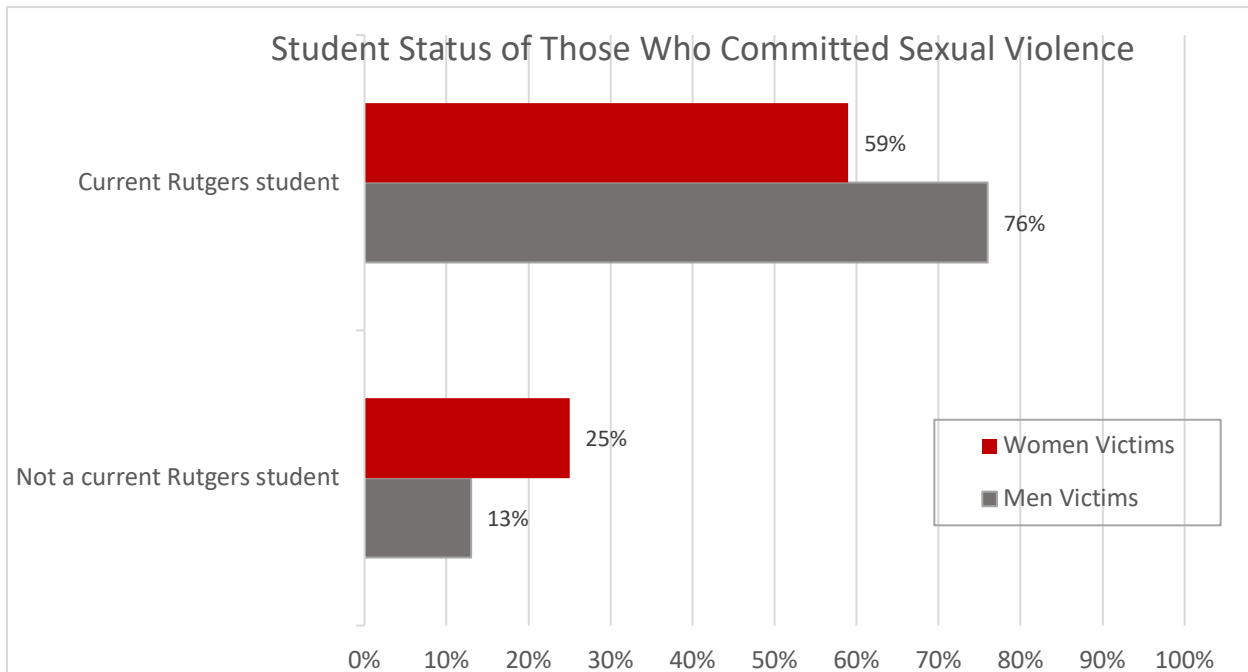


Figure 1. Student status of those who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence

<sup>3</sup> 15% of all survivors did not know the student status of those that committed sexual violence.

*Those who committed the most serious incident of dating violence*

Students who experienced dating violence since coming to campus were also asked about the student status of the person that committed the most serious incident of dating violence. The data reveals that those who committed dating violence were fairly evenly distributed among current Rutgers students and not current Rutgers students.

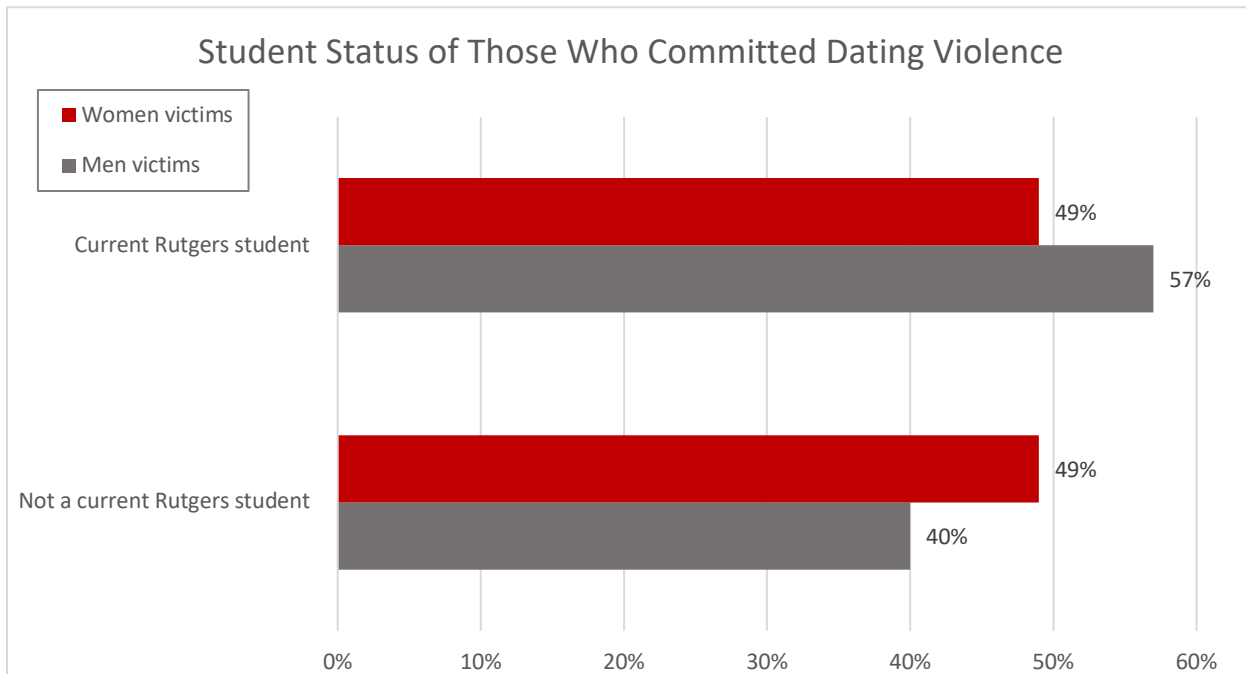


Figure 2. Student status of those who committed the most serious incident of dating violence

**3. Most victims of sexual violence reported that the person who committed the most serious incident was known to them.**

For most students who experienced sexual violence since coming to Rutgers–New Brunswick, the person who committed the most serious incident was known to the survivor (62% of all survivors).<sup>4</sup> Almost half of all male survivors reported that the person was a friend. More than 1/3 of female survivors (38%), however, reported that the person that committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was a “stranger.”

<sup>4</sup> Relationship to person who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence (stranger versus someone known to the survivor) is significantly different based on survivor’s gender,  $X^2(2) = 11.49, p = .003$

This finding is inconsistent with previous research that shows most victims know the person that committed the sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> We suspect that students may use the term “stranger” to refer to someone they met the night of the incident but did not know previously. To support this hypothesis, we examined the location of the incident. Among students who reported the person who committed the sexual violence was a stranger, 36% said the incident happened in an off-campus apartment/house and 31% said the incident happened at a fraternity house. Only 5% said the incident happened outside/on the street and 4% said the incident happened at a bar or party. These findings suggest that although a sizeable minority of students reported a stranger committed the violence, many were likely not referring to true strangers, such as someone on the street that the victim had never seen before.

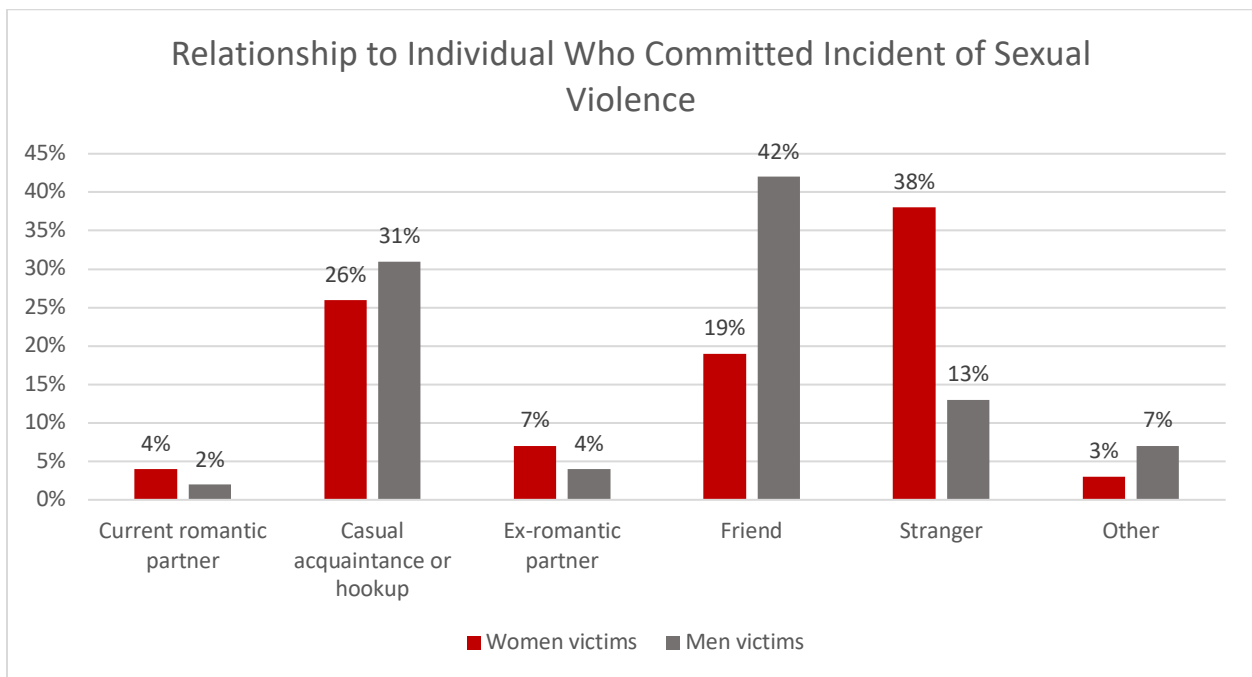


Figure 3. Reported relationship between victims and individual who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). The sexual victimization of college women: Research report. Retrieved from Washington, D.C.: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>

**4. Most victims of dating violence reported that the person who committed the most serious incident was a current romantic partner.**

The data reveals that for students who experienced dating violence since coming to Rutgers–New Brunswick, most often the person who committed the most serious incident of dating violence was a current romantic partner, with 39% of all student survivors reporting this (see Figure 4).

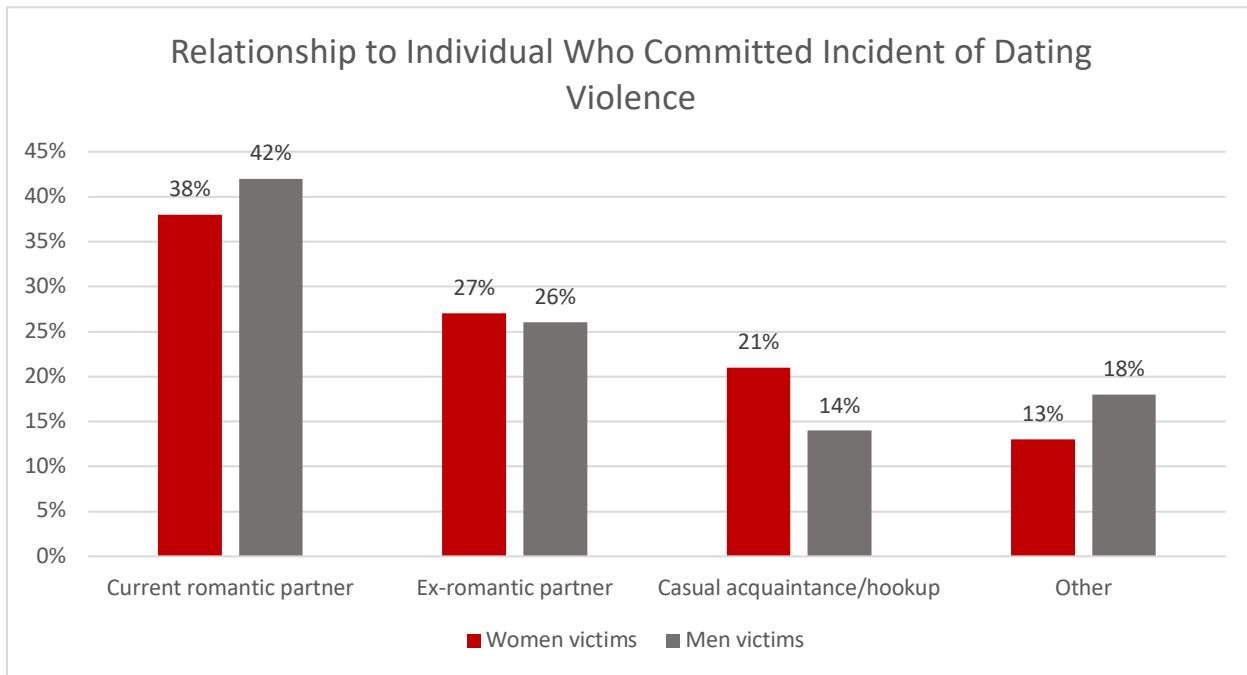


Figure 4. Relationship between survivor and the individual who committed the most serious incident of dating violence

**5. Most victims of sexual violence reported that people who committed sexual violence were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol during the incident.**

Students who experienced sexual violence since coming to campus were also asked if they thought the person who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time. The data reveals that almost all survivors reported that the person who committed the sexual violence was more often than not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the incident. A majority of survivors reported that the individual who committed the sexual violence was under the influence of alcohol only (56% of all survivors).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 29% of all survivors did not know whether the person that committed the sexual violence was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the incident.



One-third of female survivors reported that the person who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was under the influence of drugs, and 15% were on drugs and alcohol. Nearly half of all male survivors (44%) reported that the person who committed the most serious incident of sexual violence was under the influence of alcohol at the time, compared to about 13% who reported that the person was under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

## **CONCLUSION**

Results of the 2018 iSpeak campus climate survey revealed that for both sexual and dating violence, victims reported that the person who committed the most serious incident was most often a man. Most students who experienced sexual violence reported knowing the person that committed the incident, and most students who experienced dating violence reported being either currently or previously in a relationship with the person who committed the most serious incident. Also, a majority of those who experienced sexual violence reported that the person who committed the most serious incident was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time. Results seem to suggest the need for increased education programming on healthy relationships, and the need to help broaden students' preconceived notions of sexual violence to include education on both sexual and dating violence that is committed by someone known to the victim, and most often includes current or ex-partners as well as friends.

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