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Alcohol-Related Sexual Assault Victimization Among Adolescents: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Correlates*

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Abstract

Objective—The purpose of this study was to document the prevalence and describe the characteristics of alcohol-related sexual assault among middle and high school students.

Method—A Web-based, self-administered survey was used to collect data on 7th- through 12th-grade students ($n = 1,037$) in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. A modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey was used to ask students about their sexual victimization experiences so as to examine the involvement of alcohol within specific assault events. The sample was equally distributed by biological gender and ethnicity (white vs black) and was, on average (SD), 14 (2) years of age.

Results—Findings from the study indicate that alcohol was involved in approximately 12%–20% of the assault cases, depending on age and gender of the respondent. For females, the presence of alcohol during assault differed significantly based on the location at which the assault occurred, ranging from 6% (at the survivor's home) to 29% (at parties or someone else's home). Furthermore, alcohol-related assault among females was more likely to involve physical force than non-alcohol-related assault.

Conclusions—Results are discussed in light of the risk factors of alcohol-related assault among adolescents as well as the nature of social contexts that fosters alcohol-related sexual assault among both adolescents and college students.

Sexual assault, which refers to any form of unwanted sexual contact obtained through violent or nonviolent means, has profound ramification in the lives of its victims in terms of their psychological and physical well-being (see Neville and Heppner, 1999, for a review). Previous research based on college students has documented a strong relationship between alcohol and sexual assault. To date, however, there has been limited research on the association between alcohol and sexual assault among adolescents. Although adolescents report lower rates of alcohol consumption than do college students, adolescents have the highest rate of sexual assault among all age groups, according to the National Crime Victim Survey (Rennison, 2002), suggesting that research in this area is warranted. Thus, the purpose of this study was to document the prevalence and describe the characteristics of alcohol-related sexual assault among middle and high school students. Given the limited research on alcohol-related assault among adolescents, we draw on the wealth of data on alcohol-related assault among college

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students. However, the notable developmental differences among adolescents and college students limit the generalizability of this body of work to this younger group. Thus, we also provide a review of research on adolescent early heterosexual encounters and acquaintance assault to better contextualize our research within this developmental stage.

Alcohol-related assault among college students

Although the presence and impact of alcohol in sexual assault encounters among adolescents has received little attention, there is a wealth of research pertaining to alcohol and sexual assault based on community and college student samples. It is estimated that in half of assault cases, the perpetrator had consumed alcohol (Coid, 1986; Johnson et al., 1978) or that victims had consumed alcohol (Abbey et al., 1998; Harrington and Leitenberg, 1994; Presley et al., 1997). Among community and college student samples, there are few distinctions between alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related assault; however, these distinctions suggest that alcohol-related assault is more likely to occur during particular social and environmental contexts and conditions. For example, alcohol-related assault is more likely to occur at parties or bars as opposed to homes (Abbey et al., 1996) or during social situations rather than when the victim is alone (Norris et al., 1998). More specifically, Ullman et al., (1999a, b) found that alcohol-related assault is more likely to be associated with unplanned social events (e.g., meeting at a party) rather than planned events (e.g., going on a date).

Alcohol-related assault is more likely than non-alcohol-related assault to occur when there is some social or sexual consensual activity among individuals who know each other but not well. Among college students, victims of alcohol-related assault are more likely to be casually acquainted with the perpetrators than in dating situations (Abbey et al., 1996). Likewise, victims of alcohol-related assaults are less likely to be romantically involved with the perpetrator (Harrington and Leitenberg, 1994) and know the perpetrator for a shorter period of time (Norris et al., 1998) than in non-alcohol-related assaults. Furthermore, a higher level of consensual sexual activity occurs during alcohol-related assault than in non-alcohol-related assault (Harrington and Leitenberg, 1994).

Research suggests that there are several reasons why alcohol-related assault is more likely to occur within these particular social and environmental contexts. For example, a false sense of trust can occur when the victim knows the perpetrator but not well. At parties or bars, victims are in a social context in which they are expected to be sociable and expect others to be sociable. Indeed, victims of alcohol assault feel less guarded and less likely to perceive ill-intent of the perpetrator at the beginning of an alcohol-related assault than at the beginning of a non-alcohol-related assault (Nurius et al., 1996). Another explanation for why such conditions increase the likelihood of alcohol-related assault pertains to misperceptions of women's intentions. Men commonly hold the misperception that female peers' friendly intentions are sexual in nature, and these misperceptions are exacerbated by the presence of alcohol (Abbey, 1982; Johnson et al., 1991; Saal et al., 1989). Thus, in ambiguous situations, in which sexual or friendly intentions are plausible, the possibility of alcohol-induced misperceptions is heightened.

There are conflicting findings as to whether alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related assault differ in the perpetrator's use of force and the severity of the assault. Based on victims' reports, the perpetrator's use of alcohol is positively associated with his aggressiveness (Ullman et al., 1999b), which coincides with laboratory studies of alcohol and aggression showing that intoxicated males are more likely to behave aggressively than nonintoxicated males when provoked (Taylor and Chermack, 1993). Moreover, according to victims' reports, their drinking was negatively related to the perpetrator's aggression, supporting the notion that alcohol-induced impairments on the part of the victim may reduce the need for physical force on the part of perpetrators (Ullman et al., 1999b). However, data based on perpetrators' reports

suggest that their alcohol consumption is positively related to aggression during assaults (Ullman et al., 1999a). Other findings suggest that perpetrators' alcohol consumption interferes with the completion of rape (Martin and Bachman, 1998) and victims' alcohol consumption interferes with effectively escaping from rape (Ullman and Knight, 1993). These conflicting findings may be, in part, because most studies to date have been based on a dichotomous variable and, thus, are not capturing relevant information on the amount of alcohol consumed. Because extreme levels of intoxication impair both cognitive and physical abilities (e.g., Steele and Josephs, 1990), such distinctions in the amount of alcohol consumed on the part of the perpetrator and victim may influence the degree of force and resistance present during the assault (Koss and Dinero, 1989).

Romantic relationships and acquaintance assault among adolescents

Although there is a wide body of literature on alcohol and acquaintance assault among college students, there is limited work in this area that focuses on adolescents. Before reviewing this literature, it is necessary to recognize that significant changes in the nature of heterosexual encounters and aggression occur as youth progress through adolescence. Toward the beginning of adolescence, many social encounters occur within a larger group of mixed-gender peers and provide youth opportunities to broaden their ability to relate to members of the opposite gender in a nonromantic manner (Connolly et al., 2000). As youth progress through early adolescence (roughly ages 13–14), these group encounters begin to develop a romantic flair (Brown, 1999). Although dating may occur, most often such relationships are short term (e.g., approximately 4 months; Feiring, 1996). These relationships are typically characterized as providing companionship more than trust and intimacy and are used as a means of establishing peer approval and social standing (Shulman and Scharf, 2000). Beginning in middle adolescence (roughly ages 15 and 16), adolescents engage in more exclusive, intimate, and serious relationships. By late adolescence, heterosexual contact still occurs within a large mixed-gender group format; however, more long-lasting and committed romantic relationships become common. Sexual relationships without romantic commitments become more widespread too, with as many as one third of high school students engaging in at least one sexual “hook-up” encounter (Fortunato et al., submitted for publication).

Sexual aggression during adolescence appears to reflect the changes that occur in the nature of heterosexual contacts during adolescence. Heterosexual peer aggression during early adolescence typically takes the form of teasing and harassment of one individual by the larger peer group and is equally committed by boys and girls (Cascardi et al., 1999). Research documenting the prevalence of sexual harassment (sexual aggression not involving physical contact) among peers suggests that such aggression is widespread, with most adolescent girls (83%–92%) and a large percentage of adolescent boys (57%–60%) reporting some form of unwanted sexual attention (Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, 1998). Same-gender sexual harassment remains stable during adolescence, whereas cross-gender harassment increases during adolescence and is associated with puberty maturation and participation in mixed-gender peer groups (McMaster et al., 2002). The fact that adolescents have greater difficulty than adults in determining what constitutes consensual and nonconsensual sexual activity (Ageton, 1983) may contribute to the high rates of sexual harassment during this age. Although sexual harassment during adolescence, and particularly during early adolescence, might be used to express romantic interest, being the recipient of such aggression has been associated with feeling afraid or embarrassed (American Association of University Women, 1993).

Research on adolescent acquaintance assault (i.e., involving physical contact) is scarce. Furthermore, within this small body of work, there is considerable heterogeneity in terms of definitions of acquaintance relationships and instruments used to measure assault. Moreover,

a significant proportion of studies on adolescent assault ask respondents about lifetime assault, which includes childhood sexual assault as well as assault experienced during adolescent years. All of the aforementioned factors can have a significant impact on prevalence rates and correlates of sexual assault victimization, making summaries of this literature tenuous and in need of clarification from future research.

The majority of the research that explicitly focuses on sexual assault victimization occurring during adolescence pertains to assault within dating relationships; this body of literature typically examines emotional, physical, and sexual assault together under a broader rubric of “dating violence.” Prevalence rates for adolescent dating violence vary from 9%–77% for girls and 6%–67% for boys (Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Bergman, 1992; Schubot, 2001; Vicary et al., 1995); the wide range of estimates is likely the result of variation in the definition of violence, with some studies measuring personal insults (e.g., “put down my looks”), and others measuring only the most serious forms of violence, such as physical or forced sex. It is important to note that adolescent girls engage in aggressive behaviors toward dating partners at rates that are comparable to, or exceed, those for boys when considering verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual aggression in conjunction (Chase et al., 2002). When examining just sexual victimization, however, adolescent girls are more likely than their male counterparts to be the recipient rather than the aggressor of violence in dating relationships (Foshee et al., 1996).

There are many other types of peer acquaintance relationships, besides dating relationships, in which sexual assault occurs. The few studies differentiating among types of acquaintance relationships indicate that only 31%–62% of adolescent girls’ acquaintance assault is committed by a boyfriend; acquaintance sexual assault is also committed by friends, friends of friends, and peers just met by girls in a social context (e.g., Just met at a party). Although there is a common feature among all of these relationships—specifically, consenting social interaction occurs before assault—the victim’s knowledge of the perpetrator can vary significantly among these acquaintance relationships. A long-term romantic relationship can provide considerable information about the nature and disposition of a potential perpetrator; however, trust of a peer one just met at a party is simply based on the assumption that a member of one’s peer group is trustworthy.

Alcohol-related sexual assault among adolescents

In contrast to the body of research on alcohol and sexual assault among community and college student populations, research on alcohol-related sexual assault among adolescents is practically nonexistent. The few studies based on sexual assault victims seeking treatment suggest that alcohol use among victims or perpetrators occurs in approximately half of all cases of sexual assault among adolescent victims. Seifert (1999) found that 49% of the adolescent sexual assault victims seeking treatment in an emergency department reported that alcohol and/or illegal substances were used by the perpetrator and/or victim immediately before assault. Moreover, adolescent victims of alcohol-related sexual assault in this study were more likely than their older counterparts to report acquaintance assaults. Likewise, 47% of adolescent sexual assault victims seeking treatment from a Sexual Assault Crisis Intervention Center reported that alcohol and/or drugs were used just before the assault (Muram et al., 1995). In both of these studies, the presence of alcohol was just as common in adolescent cases of sexual assault as in adult cases. It is important to emphasize that sexual assault victims seeking treatment are not likely to be representative of all sexual assault victims; victims seeking treatment may be more likely than non-treatment-seeking victims to suffer physical injuries from the assault (and therefore be in need of medical treatment) and more likely to not have known their perpetrator (and therefore more likely to think of the event as assault than if they knew the perpetrator). The one community-based study to report on the presence of alcohol

during adolescent sexual assault found that 15%–23% of assault cases involved the victim being drugged or drunk, with an increase in percentage associated for older adolescents than for younger adolescents (Ageton, 1983). Such findings suggest that the presence of alcohol during sexual assault is lower for adolescents than college students, but its presence may increase as youth transition from early adolescence to late adolescence.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to document the rates of alcohol-related sexual assault among adolescents using a community, school-based sample and to examine the distinctions between alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related assault. Based on previous research of alcohol and non-alcohol-related assault among community and college student samples and the limited work on adolescent samples, the following predictions were made:

1. The rate of alcohol-related assault will be lower for secondary students than for college students. Furthermore, the rate of alcohol-related assault will be lower for young adolescents than for older adolescents.
2. Alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related assault among adolescents will differ in terms of the social and environmental contexts and conditions in which the assault takes place: specifically, alcohol-related assault will be more likely to occur during social situations in which adult supervision is minimal, such as parties.
3. Alcohol-related assault is more likely to take place between adolescents who are casual acquaintances, rather than adolescents who are friends or who are boy/girlfriends.

Based on the conflicting evidence regarding alcohol and the severity of assault, no a priori hypotheses were made regarding the differences in the level of force used in alcohol and non-alcohol-related assaults.

Method

The study used a cross-sectional Web-based, self-administered survey of students from a school district in southeastern Michigan. All students in the school district between the 7th and 12th grades during 2005 were recruited to participate. The survey included 418 questions that asked about students' alcohol, tobacco, and illicit and prescription drug use; their academic performance; and instances of interpersonal violence. Of the 1,594 7th- through 12th-grade students within the school district, 1,160 (72.8%) returned consent forms in which parents provided permission for their children to participate. Ultimately, 93.6% ($n = 1,086$) of students given permission to participate completed the survey, with absenteeism being the primary reason for not completing the survey. The final response rate of 68.1% was calculated using Guideline No. 2 of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (2006) in which the number of partial and completed surveys (1,086) was divided by the number of all eligible respondents (1,594).

The population has been described previously elsewhere (Ross-Durow, 2007) and will be summarized briefly here. The school district is located near a large Midwest metropolitan area and draws from four distinct communities: an upper middle-class community (median income = \$81,000), two middle-class communities (median incomes = \$46,000 and \$49,000), and an economically impoverished community (median income = \$22,000). Approximately 46% of the students received free/reduced-price lunch. The majority of the students in the school were black (58%), with a large minority of white (39%), and a few from other racial/ethnic groups (3%).

Students and their parents were notified about the upcoming study in a letter sent from their school via U.S. mail. Because most of the respondents were not older than 18 years of age,

active parental consent was obtained for all minors who participated. Students returned consent forms to their teachers, who in turn, returned the consent forms to the research team. During a 1-week period before the administration of the survey, parents were invited to view the survey via the Web on their own or school computers.

The survey was conducted over the Internet from computer laboratories at the respective schools. Students were excused from one class period to report to the computer laboratory for the survey session. The school administrators scheduled survey sessions on a class-by-class basis over the data-collection period, although make-up sessions were provided. The Web-based survey was maintained on a hosted, secure Internet site running under the secure sockets layer protocol to ensure respondent data were safely transmitted between the respondent's browser and the server. Students were given a piece of paper with a unique pre-assigned personal identification number; these numbers allowed students access to the survey without any identifying information. Following the completion of the survey, students were provided with the contact information for counseling services provided within the school as well as community-based organizations. School officials and parents were unable to access any personally identifiable information connected with the data. This Web-based survey method was selected as a means to collect data, because similar computer-based surveys have been shown to increase reporting of highly sensitive and illegal behaviors relative to hardcopy surveys (Lessler et al., 2000; Turner et al., 1998) and because it provides an easy way to test large groups of students in a relatively short period.

Sample

The sample used for this study included 7th through 12th graders. The demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1 for the district students who were and were not included in the study; comparisons between the two groups were made when such information was provided by the school. Some significant differences between the respondents and nonrespondents are present, with higher numbers of female white students represented in the sample. There were no significant differences between the groups in terms of age, with both groups (SD) 14 (2) years (range: 12–20 years). Approximately one third of respondents' parents had some high school or had completed high school (mothers = 30%; fathers = 35%), one fourth had attended some college (mothers = 26%; fathers = 21%), and more than one third had completed college or an advanced degree (mothers = 39%; fathers = 33%). In terms of alcohol consumption, 51% of 8th graders, 69% of 10th graders, and 75% of 12th graders had consumed alcohol (more than a couple of sips) in their lifetime; these percentages are similar to rates reported by Monitoring the Future (Johnston et al., 2006) for 2005 (8th = 41%, 10th = 63%, 12th = 75%), except that 8th graders in this sample were more likely to have consumed alcohol than the Monitoring the Future sample.

Instruments

Respondents were asked about basic demographic information, including gender, race, age, and grade level.

Sexual harassment and assault—Information on sexual assault, including alcohol-related sexual assault, was measured with a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss and Gidycz, 1985; Koss and Oros, 1982). The SES is a self-report survey instrument consisting of 10 items designed to obtain information about degrees of sexual aggression, ranging from sexual harassment through sexual acts involving physical contact, including penetration. Modifications were made to the SES in terms of reducing the number of items, simplifying the language, and specifying that respondents were to report on acts that occurred with peers of the opposite gender and approximately the same age; the modified version has been used previously with adolescents (Abbey et al., 2006). Respondents also were asked to

indicate the type of coercion used by the perpetrator, ranging from verbal pressure to physical force (see Table 2 for a list of items). Adolescents who were 16 years of age or older were asked about oral sex and sexual intercourse; adolescents younger than the age of 16 were asked whether “something else” happened, which immediately followed the item asking whether they had been kissing, hugged, or sexually touched by a peer. Items that did not involve physical contact were defined as sexual harassment, whereas items involving physical contact were defined as sexual assault. If respondents indicated that they were assaulted, they were then asked if alcohol had been consumed at the time of the assault for each incident and, if so, by whom.

Moreover, students who reported sexual assault were asked to select the most upsetting assault experience and were given additional questions pertaining to that event. Specifically, respondents were asked how upsetting the event was, whether alcohol was involved in this event, where the event took place, their relationship to the perpetrator, and the type of force used during the assault.

Alcohol use—Respondents were asked about their monthly, annual, and lifetime alcohol use, defined as having more than just a few sips of beer, wine, wine coolers, or distilled spirits. These questions are based on a national survey study of adolescents’ alcohol use (Johnston et al., 2006).

Dating and sexual activity history—Information regarding the respondents’ consensual sexual activity was obtained through a seven-item scale. Each item asks about whether the respondent had ever engaged in various sexual activities, ranging from kissing to various stages of petting and sexual intercourse. Coefficients of reliability were .94 or higher in a sample of male and female adolescents (Smith et al., 1985). Moreover, respondents were asked whether they had been in a romantic relationship. Response options for the romantic relationship variable were never, once, twice, and three or more times.

Results

Table 2 presents the rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault for females and males. The rate of sexual harassment and assault was alarmingly high for males and females, although significantly higher and therefore more disturbing for females. More than half of the female participants reported having been stared at in a sexual way or having sexual jokes made about them. Other forms of harassment were present; female respondents also reported having received sexual or obscene phone calls and having been sent sexual or obscene messages through electronic mail. Almost half of the female respondents reported having been kissed, hugged, or sexually touched despite the fact that they had made it clear they did not want it. Female respondents also reported more invasive forms of sexual assault, including being made to have sexual intercourse or being made to do something else sexual. The percentage of female students who reported any form of sexual harassment was 67.3% and those who reported any form of sexual assault was 48.4%.

Sexual harassment and assault was also reported by male respondents; however, these reports were at lower rates than for the female respondents. One third of male respondents indicated that they had been stared at in a sexual way, and one fourth of the male respondents reported that they were the recipients of sexual jokes. Other forms of sexual harassment of male respondents included receiving sexual or obscene phone calls. Approximately one fourth of male respondents reported sexual assault in terms of being kissed, hugged, or sexually touched. More invasive forms of sexual assault were reported by male respondents; however, such reports were infrequent. The percentages of male students reporting any form of sexual harassment was 40.9% and who reported any form of sexual assault was 26.6%.

The presence of alcohol during sexual assault was examined separately for respondents younger than 16 years of age and for respondents 16 years of age or older, because these groups have different rates of alcohol consumption. Alcohol was involved in 12.7% of assaults among young adolescent girls (younger than the age of 16) in contrast to 19.8% of older adolescent girls (16 years or older; Table 3). These rates were slightly lower for boys: alcohol was involved in 11.8% of assaults among young adolescent boys in contrast to 16.3% of older adolescent boys. There was a significant gender difference in who was drinking at the time of assault ($\chi^2 = 11.84, 2 \text{ df}, p < .001$). For females, it was most common for perpetrators only (48%, $n = 16$) or both (43%, $n = 14$) to have consumed alcohol; there were only a few cases in which only the victim had consumed alcohol (9%, $n = 3$). In contrast, male victims reported that either both had consumed alcohol (63%, $n = 9$) or only the victim had (36%, $n = 5$); there were no cases in which the perpetrator only had consumed alcohol.

Most victim characteristics did not distinguish those who experienced alcohol-related compared with non-alcohol-related assault (Table 4). The respondents' history of alcohol use and sexual and romantic relationship experiences did not differ for those who reported alcohol-related assault compared with non-alcohol-related assault. However, for male respondents only, white students were more likely than black students to be involved in alcohol-related assault.

Table 5 displays differences in the assault characteristics for alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related assaults, including the victim's relationship to the perpetrator, where the event happened, and the types of force used by the perpetrator. For females, alcohol and non-alcohol-related assaults differed in the type of relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Although most victims were assaulted by a friend regardless of whether alcohol was involved, alcohol-related assaults were more likely to occur when the victim had just met or knew the perpetrator before but not well. Although half of all non-alcohol-related assaults reported by females occurred on school grounds, alcohol-related sexual assault was most likely to occur at someone else's house or apartment or at a party. Moreover, alcohol-related sexual assault among females was more likely than non-alcohol-related assault to involve physical force or the use of drugs and alcohol to restrain the victim. For males, the only significant difference between alcohol and non-alcohol-related sexual assault was the use of alcohol or drugs to restrain the victim.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to document the rates and characteristics of alcohol-related sexual assault among adolescents using a community, school-based sample. Alarming high rates of sexual harassment and assault were found among these middle and high school students. Approximately two thirds of the female respondents reported having been sexually harassed by their peers, and half of the female respondents reported having been sexually assaulted by their peers. Sexual harassment and assault also was present among the male respondents, although with less frequency; slightly less than half of the male respondents reported having been sexually harassed, and one third of the male respondents reported having been sexually assaulted.

As anticipated, the presence of alcohol during the assault event was lower than the approximate 50% previously reported for college students (Abbey et al., 1998), and the presence of alcohol increased with age within this sample. Alcohol was present in slightly more than 10% of assault cases among young adolescents (younger than 16 years of age), whereas alcohol was present in approximately 20% of assault cases among older adolescents. The consumption of alcohol during sexual assault encounters varied depending on the context in which the assault took place. For example, the percentage of alcohol-related assault ranged from a few cases (in school) to almost one third (at parties or someone else's house or apartment). Similar results

were found for male respondents. Such findings are in line with previous research indicating that high school students are most likely to consume alcohol when they are away from home, with peers, and in large groups of underage drinkers (Mayer et al., 1998) and that there is an increased risk for dating violence among adolescents during peer drinking social events with the lack of parental monitoring (Howard et al., 2003). Likewise, these findings are similar to research based on community and college students that alcohol-related assault is more likely to take place at peer-centered social gatherings, such as campus parties (Abbey et al., 1996).

Notable differences also were found between non-alcohol-related and alcohol-related assault among female victims in terms of the use of physical force and the relationship the victim had with the perpetrator. In terms of physical force, the perpetrator used physical force to restrain the victim in one third of the alcohol-related assault cases, which was double the rate for non-alcohol-related assault cases. Again, these findings are similar to what is known about alcohol and sexual assault among college students in that alcohol-related assault is more likely than non-alcohol-related assault to occur among acquaintances (Abbey et al., 1996).

In terms of non-alcohol-related assault reported by females, almost half of the cases involved perpetration by a friend. Female victims of non-alcohol-related assault also reported being assaulted by a casual date, a boyfriend, or someone they knew previously but not well. Although assault by a friend was most common in alcohol-related assault, these assault experiences were more likely to involve casual acquaintances, such as perpetration by someone they knew previously but not well or by someone they just met. Such findings suggest that future research is needed on sexual assault occurring in all types of adolescent acquaintance relationships, and not just within romantic or dating relationships.

Collectively, findings from this study suggest that alcohol-related sexual assault among adolescents is similar to alcohol-related assault among college students, although it occurs less frequently for high school students than for their older counterparts. However, when high school students are in a social context more typical of college life—one in which alcohol is present in an unsupervised party setting in which partygoers are vaguely familiar with each other—the prominence of alcohol in sexual assault cases increases dramatically. Given that alcohol expectancies and sexual inferences about women have been found to explain the relationship between alcohol and sexual assault (Norris et al., 2002), it is not surprising that these social contextual factors increase the likelihood of assault. Social contexts in which sexual encounters are plausible and partygoers do not know each other well creates an environment in which adolescents will be more likely to use stereotypes and/or expectancies to make judgments about others, given the little factual information available in such situations.

There are limitations to this study that should be noted. Generalizations should be constrained, because the sample was drawn from one school district and the survey relied on the self-report of students. Moreover, students who participated in this study were more likely to be white females, when contrasted with students in the school district who did not participate. Also, students with poor school attendance were likely underrepresented in this sample, because the administration of the survey took place during school and active consent was required for participation. Thus, findings from this study need to be replicated with other student populations.

Furthermore, this study was limited in the number of questions asked about the assault. Among the younger adolescent group, we were able to ask only about other forms of sexual assault instead of asking explicitly about oral sex or sexual intercourse. Thus, although our study was able to measure when a contact assault took place (above and beyond kissing, petting, and touching), the specific type of violation is unknown among this younger group. We were unable to ask about more in-depth questions about assault experiences, such as whether multiple

perpetrators or spectators were involved in the assault. Future research should address these limitations and also consider the impact of other drugs, besides alcohol, that could impact prevalence and characteristics of sexual assault victimization. Finally, it is critical for future research to include other factors that are associated with sexual assault, such as history of childhood sexual victimization and family-of-origin substance abuse, to determine the complex relationships these respondent characteristics have with alcohol and acquaintance assault among adolescents.

Finally, this study points to the importance of parental monitoring of adolescents' social events that might potentially involve alcohol consumption. Although previous studies have documented the importance of parental monitoring in decreasing alcohol consumption during adolescent peer social gatherings (Ary et al., 1999; Barnes and Farrell, 1992; Beck et al., 1999), our study suggests that parental monitoring during such events can have the secondary effect of reducing the risk of sexual assault for adolescents and thus reduce threats to adolescents' psychological and physical health.

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Table 1

Comparison of population members who were and were not included in the sample

Characteristics	Sample % (n)	Not in sample % (n)	χ^2
Gender			12.65 [‡]
Female	54.5% (554)	45.2% (257)	
Male	45.5% (463)	54.8% (312)	
Total	100% (1,017)	100% (569)	
Race			28.94 [‡]
White	52.8% (537)	40.2% (229)	
Black	44.1% (448)	57.6% (328)	
Asian American	1.4% (14)	1.1% (6)	
Hispanic or Latino/a	1.3% (13)	1.1% (6)	
Other	0.5% (5)	0	
Total	100% (1,017)	100% (994)	
Mother's education			
Less than high school	6.6% (66)		
Completed high school	23.1% (230)		
Some college	25.5% (254)		
Completed college	27.7% (276)		
Grad./professional school	11.6% (116)		
Does not apply/know	5.4% (54)		
Total	100% (996)		
Father's education			
Less than high school	8.1% (80)		
Completed high school	27.3% (270)		
Some college	21.3% (210)		
Completed college	22.8% (225)		
Grad./professional school	9.8% (97)		
Does not apply/know	10.7% (106)		
Total	100% (988)		

Note: Grad. = graduate.

[‡] $p < .001$.

Table 2
Prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault for female and male adolescents

Sexual victimization	Females % (n)	Males % (n)	χ^2
Sexual harassment			
Stared at in a sexual way	59.6% (328)	3.3% (153)	71.75 [†]
Made sexual jokes	51.7% (287)	24.6% (115)	77.97 [†]
Made sexual or obscene phone calls	19% (106)	12.4% (58)	8.11 [†]
Sent you sexual or obscene messages via computer	14.3% (80)	12% (56)	1.14
Any sexual harassment	67.3% (370)	40.9% (190)	70.53 [†]
Sexual assault			
Kissed, hugged, or sexually touched	46.2% (256)	26.2% (122)	43.22 [†]
Made you have oral sex	5.4% (6)	6.1% (6)	0.05
Made you have sexual intercourse	11.5% (13)	4% (4)	3.99*
Made you do something else sexual	11% (49)	5.2% (19)	8.79 [†]
Any sexual assault	48.4% (268)	26.6% (123)	50.69 [†]

*
 $p < .05$;

[†]
 $p < .01$.

Table 3
Frequencies of alcohol-related sexual assault, by gender and age groups

Characteristics	Entire sample		Sexually assaulted only	
	Female % (n)	Male % (n)	Female % (n)	Male % (n)
Less than 16 years				
No assault	53.3% (188)	75% (228)	—	—
Nonalcohol assault	40.8% (144)	22% (67)	87.3% (144)	88.2% (67)
Alcohol assault	5.9% (21)	3% (9)	12.7% (21)	11.8% (9)
Total	100% (353)	100% (304)	100% (165)	100% (76)
16 years or older				
No assault	49.5% (99)	69.4% (111)	—	—
Nonalcohol assault	40.5% (81)	25.6% (41)	80.2% (81)	83.7% (41)
Alcohol assault	10% (20)	5% (8)	19.8% (20)	16.3% (8)
Total	100% (200)	100% (160)	100% (101)	100% (49)

Table 4
Sexual assault and alcohol involvement, by respondent characteristics for female and male adolescents

Characteristics	Females			Males		
	No alcohol %(<i>n</i>)	Alcohol %(<i>n</i>)	Significance	No alcohol % (<i>n</i>)	Alcohol %(<i>n</i>)	Significance
Race			$\chi^2 = 0.37$			$\chi^2 = 6.28^*$
White	82.8% (111)	17.2% (23)		77.6% (45)	22.4% (13)	
Black	85.6% (107)	14.4% (18)		93.5% (58)	6.5% (4)	
Ever drank alcohol			$\chi^2 = 2.92$			$\chi^2 = 1.62$
No	91% (61)	9% (6)		90.9% (40)	9.1% (4)	
Yes	82.3% (153)	17.7% (33)		82.5% (66)	17.5% (14)	
Romantic relationships			$\chi^2 = 4.61$			$\chi^2 = 1.82$
None	90.5% (67)	9.5% (7)		82.9% (29)	7.1% (6)	
1	82.1% (96)	17.9% (21)		91.1% (41)	8.9% (4)	
2	86.1% (31)	3.9% (5)		80% (12)	20% (3)	
3 or more	73.9% (17)	6.1% (6)		83.3% (20)	6.7% (4)	
Sexual activity ^a	4.93 (2.35)	5.32(2.82)	$F = 0.89, 1/263$ df	5.13(2.45)	5.82 (2.9)	$F = 1.12, 1/124$ df

^aSexual activity is a count of activities, ranging from 0 to 9. Values represent means and standard deviations.

* $p < .05$.

Table 5
Sexual assault and alcohol involvement, by assault event characteristics for female and male adolescents

Characteristics	Females			Males			Significance
	No alcohol % (n)	Alcohol % (n)	Significance	No alcohol % (n)	Alcohol % (n)	Significance	
Relationship to perpetrator			$\chi^2 = 11.61^*$				
Just met	6.4% (13)	13.9% (5)		9.5% (7)	20% (3)		
Knew, not well	15.3% (31)	27.8% (10)		24.3% (18)	20% (3)		
Friend	48% (97)	38.9% (14)		40.5% (30)	33.3% (5)		
Casual date	2% (4)	5.6% (2)		2.7% (2)	0		
Girl/boyfriend	15.8% (32)	13.9% (5)		17.6% (13)	13.3% (2)		
Other	12.4% (25)	0		5.4% (4)	13.3% (2)		$\chi^2 = 2.45$
Where happened			$\chi^2 = 25.73^\dagger$				
House/apt.	10.4% (20)	5.9% (2)		11.9% (8)	13.3% (2)		
Another's house/apt.	19.2% (37)	29.4% (10)		26.9% (18)	20% (3)		
Party	6.2% (12)	29.4% (10)		6% (4)	13.3% (2)		
School	47.7% (92)	14.7% (5)		44.8% (30)	33.3% (5)		
Other	16.6% (32)	20.6% (7)		10.4% (7)	20% (3)		
Type of force							
Arguments			$\chi^2 = 2.03$				$\chi^2 = 1.9$
Yes	26.4% (53)	38.2% (13)		26.4% (19)	43.8% (7)		
No	73.6% (148)	61.8% (21)		73.6% (53)	56.3% (9)		
Displeasure			$\chi^2 = 0.003$				$\chi^2 = 0.11$
Yes	31.9% (65)	31.4% (11)		35.6% (26)	31.3% (5)		
No	68.1% (139)	68.6% (24)		64.4% (47)	68.8% (11)		
Drugs			$\chi^2 = 45.06^\ddagger$				$\chi^2 = 14.02^\ddagger$
Yes	2.4% (5)	33.3% (12)		1.4% (1)	25% (4)		
No	97.6% (202)	66.7% (36)		98.6% (73)	75% (12)		
Physical force			$\chi^2 = 6.56^*$				$\chi = 1.15$
Yes	15.6% (32)	34.4% (11)		9.5% (7)	18.8% (3)		
No	84.4% (173)	65.6% (21)		90.5% (67)	81.3% (13)		
How upsetting ^d	2.53(0.97)	2.79(1.21)	$t = 1.43$	2.53 (0.97)	2.79 (1.21)		$t = 1.43$

Notes: Apt. = apartment.

^aHow upsetting ranges from 1–4. Values represent means and standard deviations.

* $p < .05$;

[†] $p < .01$.