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New Data Reveals High Awareness Among U.S. Adults on What Constitutes Sexual Assault

Lower Levels of Awareness About Sexual Assault Among Men and Young Adults as April's Sexual Assault Awareness Month Kicks Off

Enola, PA — As Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) kicks off, new research conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center in partnership with YouGov reveals a strong level of awareness about what acts constitute sexual violence or assault among U.S. adults. Despite higher levels of awareness, men and young adults show lower levels of awareness across all categories of assault, underscoring the need for broader education and awareness around sexual violence.

Among the listed categories of sexual assault, a majority recognize acts such as sexual intercourse without a partner's consent (84%); unwanted touching, groping or fondling (83%); sex trafficking (77%); internet activities such as child pornography (77%); incest (78%) and masturbation (74%) as sexual assault.

Despite high awareness for most categories, adults are less likely to view voyeurism and verbal harassment as assault (64% say "watching someone in a private act without their knowledge or permission" is assault, while 54% say "unwanted verbal remarks that are provocative or unsolicited" is assault). Awareness of verbal harassment is particularly low among men and younger adults; less than half view it as assault (48% of men and 46% of 18-34-year-olds).

These gender and age-group differences emerge across all types of sexual assault. Within each category, 18-34-year-olds are less likely than older adults, and men are less likely than women, to view an action as sexual assault. The gap in awareness between men and women is largest for voyeurism, sexual coercion and verbal harassment:

- 56% of men vs. 72% of women say "watching someone in a private act without their knowledge or permission" is assault;
- 67% of men vs. 79% of women say "sexual intercourse where one of the partners is pressured to give their consent" is assault;
- And 48% of men vs. 60% of women say "unwanted verbal remarks that are provocative or unsolicited" is assault.

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The National Sexual Violence Resource Center's (NSVRC) annual SAAM campaign will demonstrate how all individuals and communities have a role to play in preventing sexual assault. This year's theme, "Engaging New Voices," is aimed at increasing engagement from faith leaders, parents, members of Greek life, coaches, men and the general public to combat this widespread public health issue. Nearly one in five women in the United States have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lives, and one in 71 men have experienced rape or attempted rape.¹

"Sexual Assault Awareness Month is an opportunity to broaden the national conversation on sexual violence through engaging new voices, and we are heartened our survey reveals high levels of awareness around the serious and widespread problem of sexual assault," said Delilah Rumburg, CEO, NSVRC. "However, the survey also pinpoints where our efforts must expand, namely among young adults and men, to foster an inclusive and productive conversation on sexual violence that will lead to better education, prevention efforts and outcomes."

"Broadening the national conversation on sexual violence helps to build a culture of respect, foster healthy relationships, support survivors and prevent sexual violence in every community," said Laura Palumbo, Communications Director, NSVRC. "Adults of all ages should be able to identify sexual assault in its many forms, whether verbal assault, intercourse where one partner does not give consent, or unwanted touching, such as groping or fondling. The greater the awareness, the more likely individuals will be empowered to engage as bystanders and intervene to prevent sexual assault before or during an act."

SAAM will be observed in communities around the country through the Day of Action on Tuesday, April 4. This nationally recognized day provides an opportunity for advocates to engage with their communities and kick off SAAM events that are planned throughout April.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

NSVRC conducted the research on sexual assault awareness in partnership with YouGov through its online omnibus survey. The survey was fielded to 1,221 U.S. adults between March 14 and March 15, 2017. Figures have been weighted and are representative of all US adults (18+).

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is an awareness and prevention campaign observed every April. This year's theme is "Engaging New Voices." Join the campaign by accessing free resources at nsvrc.org/saam. Resources are available in Spanish at nsvrc.org/es/saam.

ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation. The organization was chartered in 2000 by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape.

¹ Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., ... Stevens, M. R. (2011). National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 summary report. Retrieved from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf