



U.S. CENTER FOR
SAFESPORT

EVERFI



Championing Sexual Assault Prevention:

Harnessing what we know about student athletes
to create effective prevention programs



Our Authors



Holly Rider-Milkovich

Senior Director for Prevention Education

EVERFI



Katie Hanna

Director of Education and Outreach

U.S. Center for SafeSport

We've all seen the headlines: abuse in sport, at the Olympic level, on college campuses, in Hollywood. Abuse happens everywhere. And we all have a role in preventing it.

Why talk about sports?

Sports are a powerful driver of change.

Sports bring communities together: they link generations of alumni, current and future students; foster critical social justice dialogue; and can even spark global collaboration.

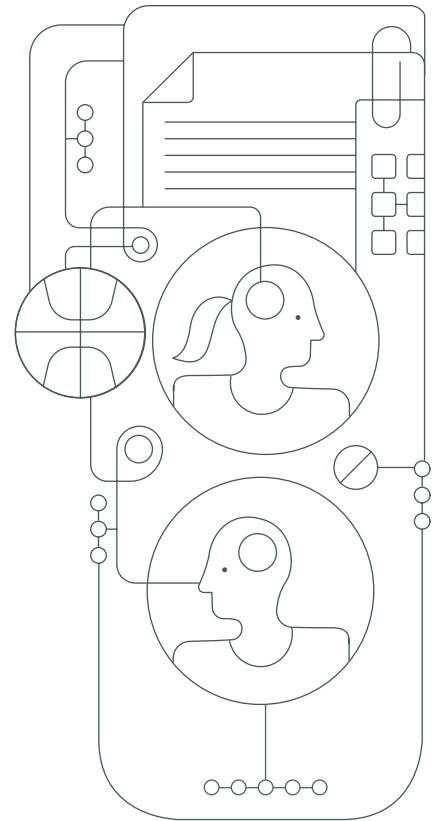
The sports community starts with the athlete at the center, and spans out to include coaches, administrators, trainers, parents of athletes, and fans. Sport leaders--both athletes and athletic staff--can act as catalysts to prevent abuse and bring about cultural shifts, when provided the knowledge, skills, and support they need. And when it comes to sexual violence and abuse, prevention matters and sport matters.

What is at stake for youth and young adults?

For many, being involved in organized athletics is a defining childhood experience. A study by the Aspen Institute, Project Play, found that 71.5% of American households have at least one school-aged child playing sports.¹

Youth involvement in sports serves as a protective factor to prevent victimization and perpetration of violence. It also reduces the likelihood that a young person will smoke, engage in risky sexual behaviors, or experience an unplanned pregnancy as a teen.² The benefits of being involved in sport continue to accrue as a person ages. Those involved in intramural sports or campus recreation while in college report increased feelings of well-being and overall health, confidence, and ability to concentrate. Individuals who participate in intercollegiate sport report that their experience on the teams led to increased leadership skills, time management skills, study skills, understanding of diverse cultures, and commitment to volunteerism.³

While participating in sport in college--either recreationally or as a part of an intercollegiate team--conveys positive benefits for the majority of student athletes, it is important that we also confront the reality that many student athletes come to campus having already experienced or committed sexual or gender-based violence; in addition to the child sexual abuse that is perpetrated by adults, as many as 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, or more powerful children.⁴ Some student athletes will also experience or commit harm while on campus, and many will experience or commit gender-based or other forms of bullying, harassment and discrimination as a part of their team experience. Our sexual and gender-based violence prevention work with student athletes must, therefore, consider the range of previous experiences that students bring with them to their collegiate athletic career.



What We Know About Student Athlete Experiences

Data from over two thousand learners who responded to surveys in EVERFI's Sexual Assault Prevention for Student Athletes course offers helpful insight into the experiences of student athletes across a variety of institutional contexts.⁵ Nearly half of the students in this data set belong to Division III schools (45.7%), and the remaining athletes split nearly evenly between Division I (27%) and Division II (26.2%). Student-athletes within this data set are split proportionately between classes as well, with first-year students constituting 31.6% of the data set, sophomores 26.4%, and juniors and seniors representing 22.5% and 16.9% respectively. The majority of students (87.8%) are between 18 and 21 years of age. The gender breakdown of this data set, with 43.5% of female athletes and 54.7% of male athletes responding, closely mirrors the gender breakdown of all NCAA athletes (43.9% female and 56.1% male).⁶ Racial diversity within this data set also roughly reflects the racial composition for all NCAA athletes.⁷

Nearly 13% of female and almost 3% of male intercollegiate student athletes report experiencing sexual assault prior to arrival at their school. Overall, 17.3% of female athletes and 3.9% of male athletes report “yes” to experiencing some form of unwanted sexual contact before, during, or after their arrival on campus. There is, of course, good news here as well - intercollegiate student athletes are **not** more likely than their non-athlete peers to experience sexual assault. Additionally, the majority of both male and female student athletes, 76% and 89% respectively, do not report experiencing sexual assault (Fig 1).

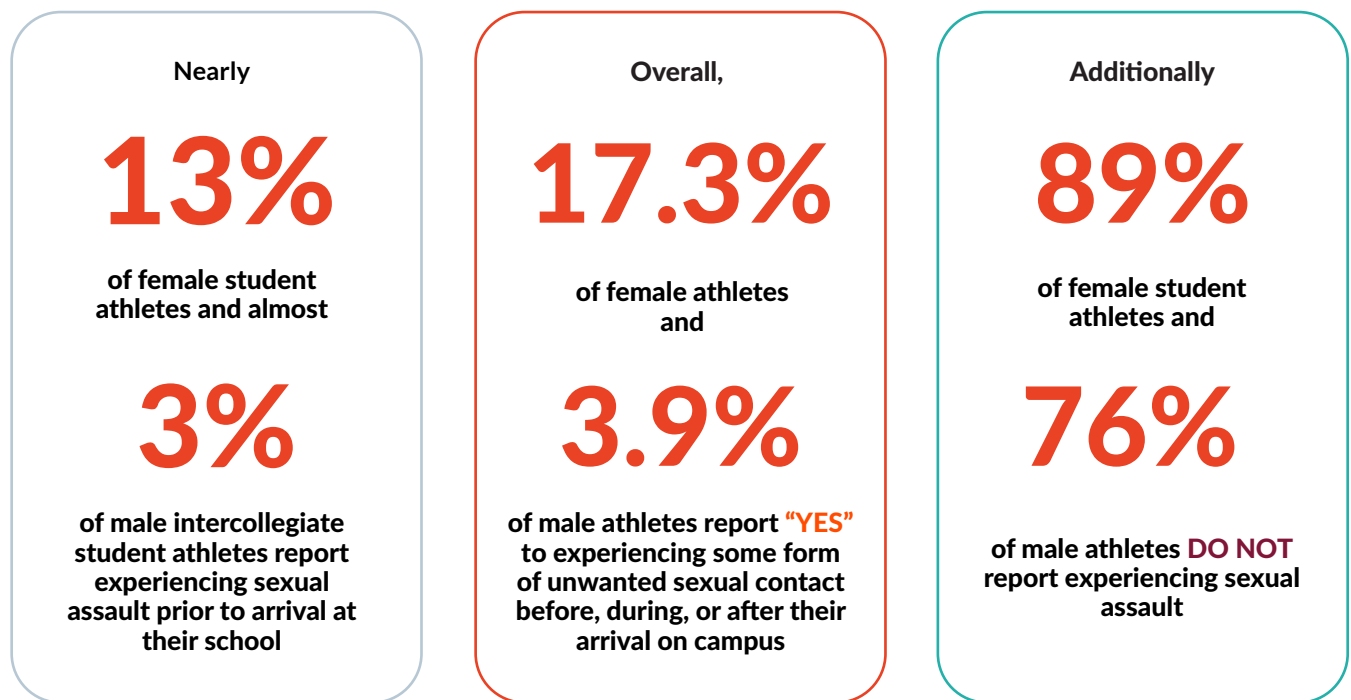


fig. 1

When the lens is pulled back to focus on broader climate issues, the data reveal that student athletes report experiencing a variety of forms of harmful language and/or bullying. A quarter of student athletes reported experiences of bullying related to body size and image, followed closely by bullying related to race and ethnicity (22.4%), and sex, gender, and gender identity (19.5%). These findings are critical because they point

to the need for athletic programs to focus efforts on establishing a culture of respect within their programs by addressing a spectrum of disrespectful or harmful words or behaviors that includes, but is not limited to, sex- or gender-based harassment and discrimination.

It is now well-established that students of color and students who identify as a sexual or gender minority are more vulnerable to experiencing sexual victimization. However, recent research by Robert Coulter and colleagues outlines a correlational relationship wherein students of color and LGBTQ students who perceive their campuses as being more inclusive experience less victimization on those campuses.⁸ Working to create a more inclusive, more respectful culture related to race and ethnicity as well as gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation is an important step in reducing these students' risk of experiencing violence.⁹

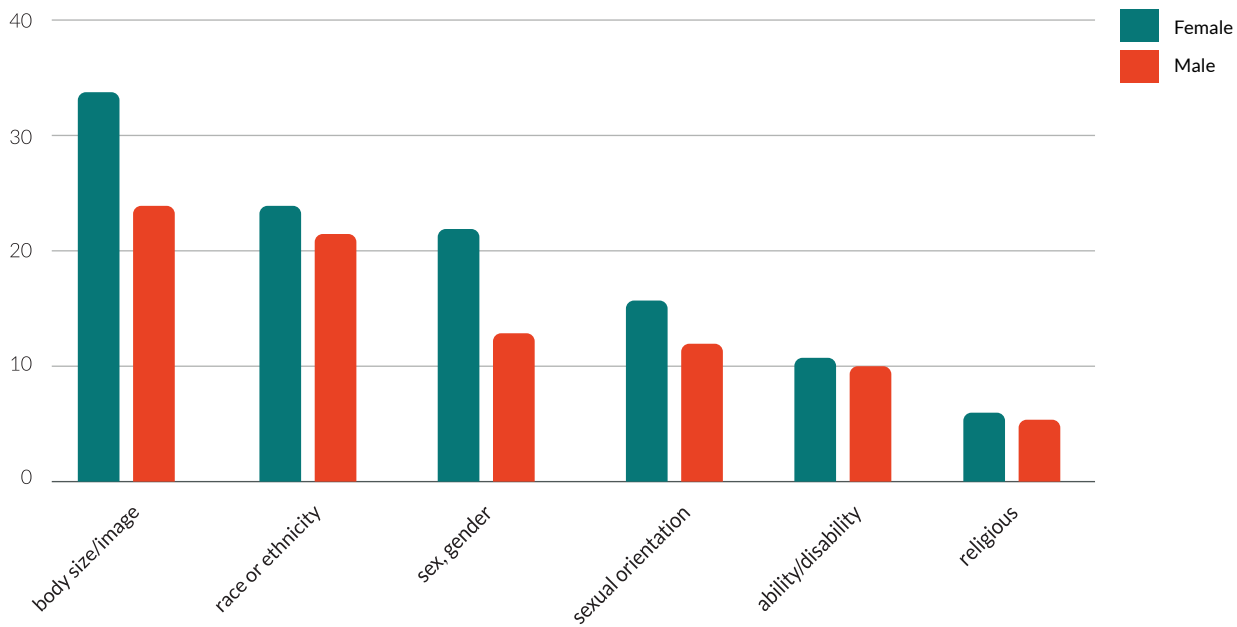
When we look at harmful language related to harassment and bullying by gender, an even more nuanced and troubling picture emerges related to students' experiences that may inform sexual assault prevention efforts (Fig. 2).

Our data reveals that, overall, nearly twice as many female student athletes report experiencing bullying than male students, and that one-fifth of these students report experiencing bullying prior to coming to their institution.

While male and female students report similar rates of experiencing harmful language and/or bullying related to race and ethnicity, ability or disability, and religious affiliation, women are significantly more likely than men to report harmful language related to: body size or image; sex, gender, or gender identity; and sexual orientation. It is possible that female athletes are more likely to recognize, and therefore report, instances of harmful language. However, prior research on this topic suggests that the more probable reason for this gender difference is that female athletes experience sexism and are subjected to gender norms and expectations related to their bodies. Unfortunately, most women in our society face gendered body policing or scrutiny, but women involved in intercollegiate sports may be experiencing it even more acutely than their non-athlete peers.¹⁰

-
1. The Aspen Institute (Ed.). (2017). *The State of Play*. Retrieved from <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/12/FINAL-SOP2017-report.pdf>. It is important to note that this percentage of households only includes 56.3% of American children. The difference is due primarily due to financial factors inhibiting some children from being able to be involved in sport.
 2. *ibid.*
 3. Forrester, S. A. (2014). *The Benefits of Campus Recreation*. NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation. Retrieved from http://nirsa.net/nirsa/wp-content/uploads/Forrester_2014-Report.pdf; NCAA. (2016, January). *NCAA GOALS Study of the Student-Athlete Experience Initial Summary of Findings*. Retrieved from https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/GOALS_2015_summary_jan2016_final_20160627.pdf pg. 6.
 4. Finkelhor, D. (2012). *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
 5. EVERFI. (2018) *Sexual Assault Prevention Student Athletes data*. n=2302.
 6. Lapchick, R. E. (2017). *College Sport Racial & Gender Report Card*. Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports. Retrieved from <http://www.tidesport.org/>. In the SAPSA data set, 1.1% of students responded as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or not listed.
 7. *ibid.*
 8. Coulter, R. et al (2017). *Prevalence of Past-Year Sexual Assault Victimization Among Undergraduate Students: Exploring Differences by and Intersections of Gender Identity, Sexual Identity, and Race/Ethnicity*. *Prevention Science*, 18(6), 726-736. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11121-017-0762-8>.
 9. We also need to note that, within our data set, student-athletes were less likely to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, queer or questioning than non-athlete students. This gap suggests that sexual minority students may either choose not to participate in intercollegiate athletics at higher rates than heterosexual students or may not feel comfortable (even on an anonymous survey) identifying as a sexual minority. This is an area for further exploration.
 10. Kane, M., LaVoi, N. M., & Fink, J. S. (2013). *Exploring Elite Female Athletes' Interpretations of Sport Media Images: A Window Into the Construction of Social Identity and "Selling Sex" in Women's Sports*. *Communication and Sport*, 1(3), 269-298. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2167479512473585>; Coulter, R. (2017). *Prevalence of Past-Year Sexual Assault Victimization Among Undergraduate Students: Exploring Differences by and Intersections of Gender Identity, Sexual Identity, and Race/Ethnicity*. *Prevention Science*, 18(6), 726-736. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11121-017-0762-8>.

Experience of Bullying by Gender *fig. 2*



Student-athlete Attitudes, Beliefs, and Training Related to Sexual Assault Prevention

When it comes to changing behavior, how a student-athlete believes their peers think and act has a powerful influence on that student's behavior. Student athletes, like most of us, are more influenced by peer perception than by their individual beliefs. Over a decade of prevention research has affirmed that a powerful strategy for promoting positive behavior in student groups is to close the gap between what are often the positive, healthy, pro-social values students personally believe, and what they think their peers believe.¹¹ It is of particular importance, therefore, to gather data both on students' personal perceptions and actions related to sexual violence, and on their perception of their peers' beliefs and behaviors. In examining this data (Fig. 3-5) for student athletes, several striking patterns emerge.

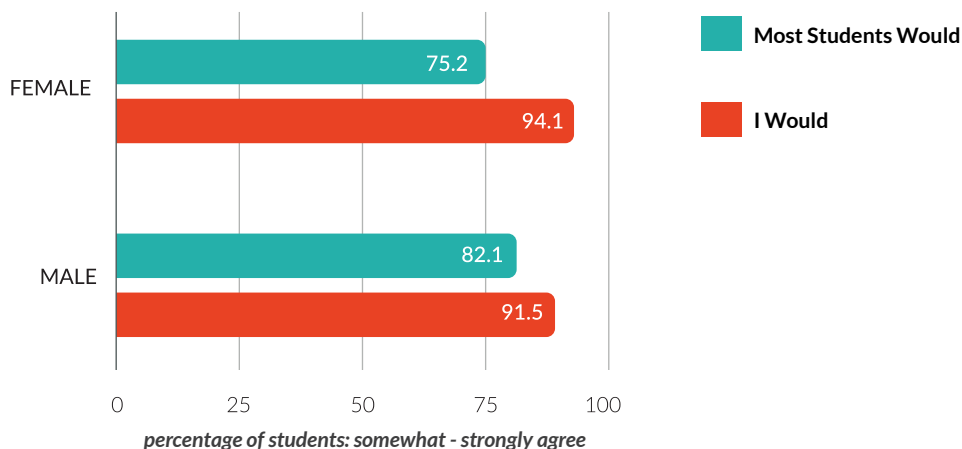
First, both male and female student athletes hold much healthier personal beliefs than they perceive their peers to believe. This gap indicates that there is an opportunity to shift student behavior in supporting survivors, and intervening in situations of harm by correcting the misperceptions and sharing that, like them, most student athletes would intervene in situations of harm and support a person who had experienced a sexual assault.

Examining this data by gender sheds additional light on potential cultural concerns within athletic departments for female athletes. While there is a gap in social norms for BOTH male and female athletes across these areas, female student athletes are even less likely than male student athletes (75.2 vs. 82.1 respectively) to believe their peers would take action to stop a sexual assault even though both male and female athletes agree that they personally would take action at about

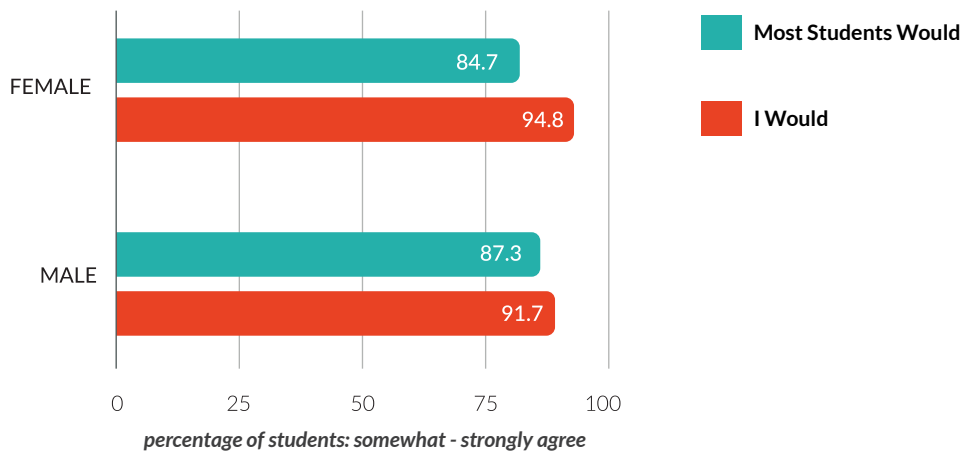
11. Jacqueline, D. (2015). The Influence of Social Norms on Advancement Through Bystander Stages for Preventing Interpersonal Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 1-24. Retrieved from [http://www.alanberkowitz.com/articles/Violence Against Women-2015-Deitch-Stackhouse-1077801215592720-1.pdf](http://www.alanberkowitz.com/articles/Violence%20Against%20Women-2015-Deitch-Stackhouse-1077801215592720-1.pdf)

the same rates. Though not as wide, there is also a significant difference between how male and female student athletes believe their peers would respond related to supporting survivors and taking action related to dating or intimate partner violence. And indeed, perhaps this data regarding low peer perception for survivor support has at least some grounding in truth when it comes to male athletes; after all, nearly 20% of male student athletes disagree that they personally would **not** blame a survivor for her or his victimization.

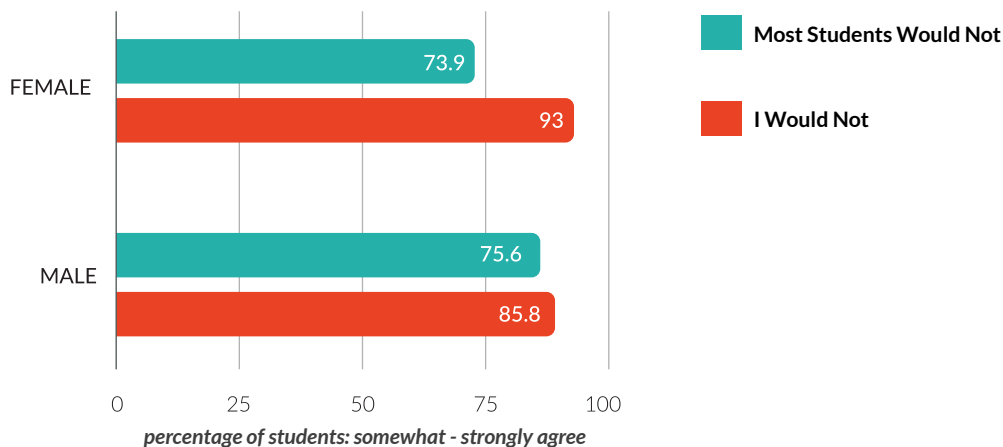
Take Action to Prevent Sexual Assault *fig. 3*



Express Concern *fig. 4*



Blame Sexual Assault Survivors *fig. 5*



How Do We Create Effective Prevention Efforts for Student Athletes?

Effective prevention approaches include addressing both perpetration and victimization. According to the CDC, community- and societal-level risk factors for engaging in harmful sexual behavior include a general tolerance of sexual violence within the community, inadequate community sanctions against sexual violence perpetrators, and weak laws and policies related to sexual violence and gender equity.

Conversely, while the CDC has not identified community- or societal-level protective factors, there is evidence that we may make it more likely that individuals will engage in healthy behavior and not commit harm by: fostering emotional health and connectedness to others and to community; supporting academic achievement; and developing empathy and concern for how one’s actions affect others. As we discuss findings related to these issues and recommended practices in developing prevention efforts for student athletes, the focus will be on reducing these risk factors at the organizational (team and athletic department) level, and increasing protective factors at the individual level. 12

In the course pre-survey, 84.8% of student athletes report that “acts of bullying are not in line with my personal values.” This finding suggests an opportunity to call upon the healthy, self-identified values of the majority of student athletes when it comes to bullying behavior. As fig. 6 demonstrates, student athletes as a whole also report that when they recognize harmful behavior, they do take action - between 88% and 94% of athletes agree or strongly agree that they would take some form of action, from addressing bullying language and behavior to intervening in a situation that may lead to sexual violence. This is a positive sign that student athletes do feel connected to their community and see themselves as having a role to play in protecting the safety and well-being of others.

What this data also reveals is that there may be prevention benefits gained by focusing training on increasing students’ skills in recognizing harmful language and other bullying or abusive behavior. In the post-survey delivered typically six weeks following the initial course, over 90% of student-athletes who identified instances of abusive language and behavior took action to intervene in the situation; however, across the board, only fewer than half of student athletes reported recognizing a potentially harmful situation.

Type of intervention	% Of students that witnessed this situation	% Of those students who intervened
<i>I spoke up when I heard someone say something I found offensive or demeaning</i>	43.4%	91%
<i>I stepped in to stop behavior that promoted bullying or hazing</i>	28.7%	91%
<i>I expressed concern when I saw a person exhibiting abusive behavior toward another person</i>	25.2%	94%
<i>I intervened when I saw someone trying to take advantage of someone else sexually</i>	13.6%	88%

fig. 6

Additionally, as any coach or athletic administrator will affirm, student athletes are very often those high-achieving, driven individuals that have been trained to be leaders on the field and also often excel in the classroom. The majority of these students, as Fig. 7 illustrates, recognize that sexual assault is a problem on their campus and nearly half feel a responsibility to help create a safe and supportive environment for other students - a particularly striking finding for student-athletes, given the demanding schedules they juggle.¹³ However, with only 6% of athletes identifying that they are, or plan to actually play a role in sexual assault prevention, it is also clear that student-athletes need support in getting involved on campus in manageable and role-appropriate ways. The question is not whether student-athletes are interested in working to end sexual assault on campus, but rather how athletic departments can provide them with the tools and opportunities they need to be effective leaders off the field.

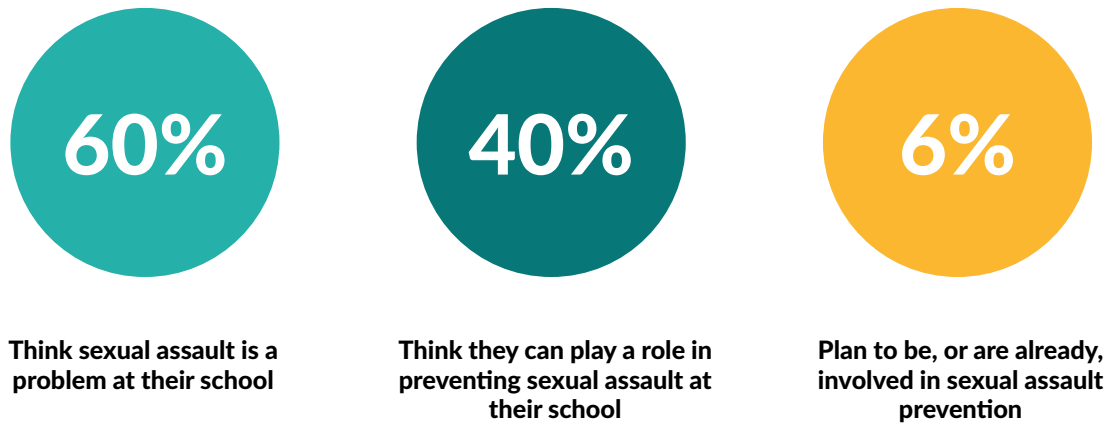


fig. 7

Institutionalization: Recommended Practices

Fundamentally, institutionalization focuses on resource allocation and staffing, accountability, and visible prioritization of prevention across the greater campus community. Supportive environments where student athletes thrive as a part of the fabric of the institution are a key indicator of successful sexual assault prevention institutionalization. Campuses that seek to focus on increasing their institutionalization strengths may adopt these practices:

Demonstrate Visible Executive Leadership. Effective prevention starts at the top with both institutional and athletic department leadership: making it a priority; investing sustained, long-term resources; and messaging out to the campus community that the institution doesn't condone abuse and is committed to supporting culture change. Consider the range of options for making senior leadership commitment visible:

- speaking to student athletes and coaches as a part of in-person training
- embedding custom messages or videos in online courses
- using social media through callouts and posts
- electronic board messaging at athletic events
- sharing messages of commitment and support on event tickets or programs
- sharing prevention messages with alumni and new recruits

12. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

13. Additionally, data from EVERFI courses for athletic staff note that 80% of course participants see themselves playing an active role in sexual assault prevention.

Increase Transparency and Accountability. Unfortunately, as high-profile media stories have revealed, some university athletic departments have engaged in questionable, unethical, or even illegal behavior when it comes to addressing sexual misconduct committed by athletes in their programs, athletic staff, or others affiliated with the athletic department. We believe that these programs represent the minority and that the significant majority of athletic programs at colleges and universities are committed to supporting their student athletes who experience harm, and holding accountable those individuals who engage in harmful behavior towards others. One means to demonstrate this commitment is to broadly share the department's efforts to hold those who cause harm accountable and to support survivors. Colleges and universities should also engage in efforts to increase student athlete reporting rates, both to the college or university, as well as to other organizations focused on athlete safety and well-being, such as the U.S. Center for SafeSport.

On February 14, 2018 a new federal law went into effect, providing increased protections to child and youth athletes. Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 extends the duty to report suspected child abuse to additional adults within U.S. Olympic National Governing Bodies.¹⁴ It also designates the U.S. Center for SafeSport to serve as the independent national safe sport organization, with the responsibility for developing policies and procedures to prevent the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of amateur athletes, in addition to other important provisions. The U.S. Center for SafeSport also is charged with developing oversight procedures, including audits, to ensure the policies and procedures are followed correctly and that consistent training is offered.

The U.S. Center for SafeSport investigates all reported cases of sexual misconduct within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movements. In the first year of its operation, the Center received over 500 reports. These reports inform prevention strategies that address the coach-athlete relationship, appropriate and inappropriate physical contact in sport, and travel policies focused on situational prevention.

Critical Processes: Recommended Practices

Critical processes focus on translating an institution's resources and commitments into an effective, comprehensive prevention strategy. This includes data collection and evaluation, goal-setting and strategic planning within Athletic Departments, as well as capacity-building and collaboration across the institution.

Coordinate athletic department efforts across the institution. Ensure that the athletic department's sexual and gender-based violence prevention efforts are aligned and coordinated with the institution's campus-wide sexual assault strategic plan, and that these efforts are also integrated into the other life skills programming offered by the athletic department. This integration reinforces two important ideas: first, student athletes are a core part of the campus community and should not be isolated or set apart from other students; second, sexual violence is not a standalone issue, but is woven into the other critical areas of a student's life.

Align prevention and response practices with governing sports organization recommendations and requirements.

As of August 2017, NCAA now requires all intercollegiate athletes and athletic staff to receive yearly sexual assault prevention education. This policy change is the culmination of significant investment from the NCAA in developing significant, credible, and well-researched prevention guidance for college athletic departments to follow in the [NCAA Sexual Violence Prevention Tool Kit](#). While the guidance contained within the toolkit is not required under the NCAA policy, the resources offer an important prevention perspective. Additionally, while some college athletes have their eyes set on the pro-leagues, other college athletes are also in training for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Developing effective prevention programs at the collegiate athletic level requires collaboration and coordination with other athletic systems and levels--such as the US Olympic National Governing Bodies and the Center for SafeSport--to coordinate a comprehensive sexual violence prevention approach that seeks to educate and protect athletes across the span of their competitive careers.

Evaluate effectiveness of prevention efforts for student athletes and athletic staff. Current NCAA policy requires that athletic programs attest that all student-athletes and athletic staff receive training, but does not require additional evaluation or assessment to ensure that these prevention efforts align with the prevention best practices their Tool Kit and the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommend. As CDC prevention experts Jenny Dills and colleagues note, evaluation is essential to sexual violence prevention on campus, because it “lets practitioners know what is working and what is not working in their policies and programs.”¹⁵ Included in effective evaluation practices are activities such as gathering and using program-specific data to develop and refine prevention efforts focused on student-athletes; basing prevention efforts on theories of change; and developing logic models to identify how the intended intervention will achieve its impact.

While we hope that athletic staff use the data findings in this report to help craft their prevention plans, these national data highlights should supplement, not supplant, equally rich data that is institution- or team-specific. Indeed, many of the most promising campus-based approaches, such as social norms campaigns, require institution-specific data. Data from EVERFI’s Sexual Assault Diagnostic Inventory (SADI) show that logic models and identifying theories of change are still not widespread practices across college campuses - fewer than 40% reported utilizing them. However, all of the institutions that were designated as advanced through SADI used these critical evaluations tools. Lastly, evaluation efforts should not be limited to the student context. Institutions should ensure that all staff are fully trained to execute their roles and responsibilities by gathering athletic staff pre/post course data on the training they receive.

Develop and distribute strong policies related to clear reporting mechanisms. A strong, well-written policy or the most effective procedures are useless if they are not shared widely with those who have a responsibility to enforce or enact them, or with those who are intended to benefit from them. This includes developing and distributing policies and protocols related to recruitment and hosting that support respectful behavior. Athletic staff should also be trained on institutional policies and protocols related to minors on campus that affect hosting youth athletic events such as tournaments, camps, or clinics. One important first step in this effort is to require that all Athletic staff complete Center for SafeSport training to prepare them for interacting with student-athletes across a wide variety of contexts, from youth summer camps, to the recruitment process, to coaching and training at the collegiate level.

14. Fact Sheet: Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 (2018, February). Retrieved from <https://safesport.org/files/index/category/response-resolution>.

15. Dills J., Fowler D., Payne G. (2016). *Sexual Violence on Campus: Strategies for Prevention*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pg 15.

Programming: Recommended Practices

Programming consists of the focus and frequency of primary prevention programs, what community groups they have been adapted for, and to what extent they are theory-driven and evidence-informed. These recommendations are directed towards the sexual and gender-based violence prevention programs and strategies that are currently being implemented within an Athletic Department.

Ensure that prevention efforts are trauma-informed. Athletic departments can support students who have already experienced harm by adopting trauma-informed practices. These practices include providing information about the content of programs that address sexual assault in advance so that students are informed and can prepare ahead of time through practicing self-care strategies, and creating options for students who have experienced sexual or gender-based violence to participate in an alternative program when appropriate. Athletic departments should also ensure that all facilitators of sexual assault prevention programs (including coaches, trainers, athletic administrators, or peer educators or other trainers) are skilled in managing discussions and challenging any unhealthy or victim-blaming comments that may create discomfort for other participants. Additionally, student athletes and athletic staff should be trained on effectively supporting other athletes who may have experienced a sexual assault. All sexual violence prevention programs should include contact information and resources for confidential survivor support.

Adapt prevention education to engage athlete strengths and sustain these efforts over time. One-size-fits-all, one-and-done prevention programs often fail to achieve long-term impact. Preventing sexual violence requires moving beyond checking a box. It is critical that speakers and other educational programs are based on credible prevention research, assessed for effectiveness, and customized to meet specific audience needs. Adapting prevention programs for student athletes should also include tailoring prevention efforts to fit the specific needs of a particular sport. The culture of different sports--the language athletes use, or the situations they may encounter--varies significantly. Additionally, what's considered appropriate physical contact in one sport may be considered inappropriate in another. Prevention programming should address these sport-specific issues.

Craft developmentally-appropriate programs that address student athlete needs and concerns across their time on campus. As EVERFI's data demonstrates, when it comes to bystander intervention, for example, possible concerns that first year students recognize, and their preferred strategies for intervening, are different from those of upper class student athletes. As another example, the U.S. Center for SafeSport is currently developing age-appropriate child and youth athlete prevention resources. Athletic departments should collaborate with stakeholders, including youth sport organizations, to identify skills and perspectives learned in adolescence, and build upon these attitudes and abilities to provide avenues for learning new content, into the growing repertoire of athlete prevention education competencies.

Engage parents and caregivers in sexual assault prevention. Sexual abuse prevention must start at a young age, with developmentally-appropriate messages delivered by parents and schools, and continue with educational messages infused over the lifespan of a student athlete as they participate in the recruiting process and compete at the college level and beyond. The Center for SafeSport has developed [a toolkit](#) to support parents and caregivers in engaging in these conversations.

Conclusion

The U.S. Center for SafeSport and EVERFI are committed to collaborating with partners to develop the sport-prevention pipeline to create safe, sustainable environments where athletes thrive.

Who We Are

EVERFI is the country's leading digital education provider--engaging over 16 million learners through 4,300 partner organizations across the United States and Canada. We are committed to using technology to help solve some of the world's most critical challenges, and to empowering learners from the elementary school classrooms to college campuses to the global workforce with the critical skills they need to succeed. In higher education, EVERFI works with over 1700 campuses across the country and reaches more than ten million students, staff, and faculty each year through online prevention and compliance trainings--including through our Sexual Assault Prevention for Student Athletes, and Sexual Assault Prevention Athletic Staff courses.

Beyond the scope of our work in higher education, EVERFI has partnered with the major professional sports leagues--such as the National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, the National Football League, and the National Basketball Association--to address topics like healthy relationships, summer learning loss, and STEM education in franchise communities

The U.S. Center for SafeSport (The Center) envisions that every athlete will be safe, supported and strengthened through sport. All athletes deserve to participate in sports free from bullying, hazing, sexual misconduct or any form of emotional or physical abuse.

The Center is the first and only national organization of its kind focused on ending all forms of abuse in sport. As an independent non-profit headquartered in Denver, CO, the Center provides consultation to sport entities on prevention programs and policies, while developing best practices and educational programs focused on promoting athlete well-being and putting an end to sexual, emotional and physical abuse in sports. The Center also provides a safe, professional and confidential place for individuals to report sexual abuse within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movements.

Learn more at everfi.com/higher-ed

