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ABSTRACT

A survey of 706 randomly sampled students at institutions of postsecondary education in Minnesota examined students' perceptions of violence and safety at their schools. Overall findings indicated that the majority of students had not been victims of violent acts and generally felt safe at their institutions. However, many respondents indicated they believed that the amount of effort spent addressing issues of violence at their institutions was inadequate. Date rape, dating violence, the relationship between acts of violence and alcohol, and theft were the major areas of concern identified by respondents. Specific findings indicated: (1) 72 percent of students believed the level of violence was unchanged over the past year; (2) 77 percent reported they felt safe on campus; (3) 42 percent believed that most violence is related to drug or alcohol use; (4) 51 percent reported they knew a victim of violence on a date; (5) 42 percent knew a victim of date rape; (6) 61 percent identified "women" as likely victims; and (7) 60 percent indicated they felt that students who carry weapons do so for self-defense. Most of the students surveyed were Caucasian. (CK)

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SAFE SCHOOLS SURVEY

POST-SECONDARY STUDENT SURVEY

Preliminary Results



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Office of Minnesota Attorney General
Hubert H. Humphrey III
January 15, 1996

HE 029 301

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Executive Summary

This is a preliminary report developed by the Attorney General's Office on school safety in Minnesota's post-secondary institutions. The report was prepared pursuant to the 1995 Minnesota Session Laws, Chapter 226, Article 3, Section 1, which provides:

On or before January 15 of each year, the attorney general shall prepare a report on safety in secondary and post-secondary schools. The report must include an assessment and evaluation of the impact of existing laws and programs on school safety and anti-violence and include recommendations for changes in law or policy that would increase the safety of schools and curb violence. The report must be submitted to the chairs of the senate and house of representatives committees with jurisdiction over education and crime issues.

The report is based upon the survey results from 706 randomly sampled students across Minnesota and reflects their perceptions of violence and safety at the learning institutions they attend.

The problem of school violence is a growing concern for many Minnesotans, but especially students. This study, conducted by the Office of the Attorney General, attempts to gain a perspective on the extent of violence in Minnesota post-secondary institutions and to make recommendations for further actions to reduce school violence.

Key preliminary findings include the following:

- 72% of students surveyed believe that the level of violence has stayed the same at their school over the past year.
- 77% of students feel safe or very safe while they are on campus.
- 42% of students believe that many or all of the violent acts that occur at their institution are directly related to the use of drugs and alcohol.
- 51% of the students know someone who has been the victim of violence on a date.
- 42% of respondents know someone who has been the victim of date rape.
- 61% of students identified "women" as likely victims of violence.
- 60% of respondents feel that when students carry weapons on campus it is for protection/self-defense/fear of going to and from campus.

The preliminary findings of the survey indicate that the majority of students on college campuses are not victims of violent acts and generally feel safe at their institutions. **However, many**

respondents still believe that the amount of effort spent addressing the issues of violence at their institutions has been inadequate. Date rape, dating violence, the relationship between acts of violence and alcohol, and theft were the major areas of concern identified by respondents. These findings point to a continuing need for administrators, educators and student organizations to continue to expand educational and training initiatives at post-secondary institutions focused on sexual assault, date rape and sexual harassment. These efforts, combined with continued implementation and improvement of legislatively mandated campus security plans, are key elements in providing safe learning, working, and living environments for post-secondary students.

This survey can be used as one of several tools for identifying the areas of concern and developing solutions at post-secondary institutions. These results should not be the only basis for forming policies to prevent violence on college campuses. More scientific research needs to be conducted in order to develop sound policies that can effectively address violence at post-secondary institutions. However, these preliminary results are consistent with the results of several national studies examining safety and violence at post-secondary institutions.

Survey Distribution

Between October, 1995, and January, 1996, the Attorney General sampled 3,000 Minnesota post-secondary students to obtain their perception of the levels of violence on the campuses where they live, learn and work.

The Minnesota Attorney General's survey was partially based upon questions from the national model, "The American Teacher, Violence In America's Public Schools," copyright 1993, Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. for Metropolitan Life. The questions were modified for the post-secondary level, based upon suggestions of a survey task force comprised of college students, post-secondary security personnel, campus administrators and a representative from the Minnesota Private College Council. The format was further modified after consultation with the University of Minnesota Survey Research Service, and a polling expert from the University of St. Thomas.

To ensure that a random sample of students would respond to the survey, the Attorney General's Office again sought advice from the University of Minnesota and an expert in the field of surveys and polling to create an acceptable distribution process.

Based on the suggestions of these research experts, a total of 3,000 surveys were distributed directly to randomly selected post-secondary students. The survey distribution was designed to accurately reflect the demographics of the students in two ways: (1) geographic location of the students (urban, suburban, rural); and (2) type of school the students attend (4-year public or private institutions, community colleges and technical colleges). The overall population of full-time undergraduate students in each category was estimated, based upon figures obtained from individual institutions: 45% of post-secondary students attend rural institutions; 17% attend suburban schools; and 37% of students attend urban institutions, including the University of Minnesota. The percentage of students attending the various types of post-secondary institutions are as follows: 34% of Minnesota post-secondary students attend technical or community colleges; 17% of the students attend private 4-year colleges or universities; and 47% of post-secondary students in Minnesota attend public 4-year colleges and universities. (2% attend "other" schools including Minnesota College of Art and Design and seminaries.)

By distributing a large volume of surveys and adhering to the demographic characteristics of Minnesota's student population, the results of this survey can serve as one tool for measuring the climate of safety at Minnesota's post-secondary institutions. All studies have their limitations; therefore, to gain a more complete picture of the environment on college campuses, studies like this need to be expanded and given the proper financial support to be completed

In addition, the results should be measured and analyzed along with quantitative information such as data from the Student Right To Know Act and other studies concerning campus crime. By taking these steps, government leaders, post-secondary administrators, law enforcement and students can better understand public safety and security concerns at post-secondary campuses.

Student Profile

The 706 randomly sampled students responding to this survey account for a 24% return rate. Of the students responding, 12% are from urban institutions, 14% are from suburban institutions, 49% are from rural institutions, and 25% are University of Minnesota students who were placed in a separate category because of the institution's size. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were male and 61% percent were female.

Thirty-eight percent of students indicated they were between 17 and 18 years old, 47% chose the 19-21 year old category, 21% indicated they were between 22 and 25 years old and 19% said they were over 26 years of age.

The survey also asked students to identify their race. Ninety-one percent of the students identified themselves as Caucasian/white, 2.3% of students identified themselves as Asian, 1.4% of students identified themselves as Native Americans, 0.6% of students identified themselves as Hispanic, 0.3% of students identified themselves as African-American, 1.6% of students indicated that they considered themselves to be of mixed race, and 3.3% of students did not respond to the question.

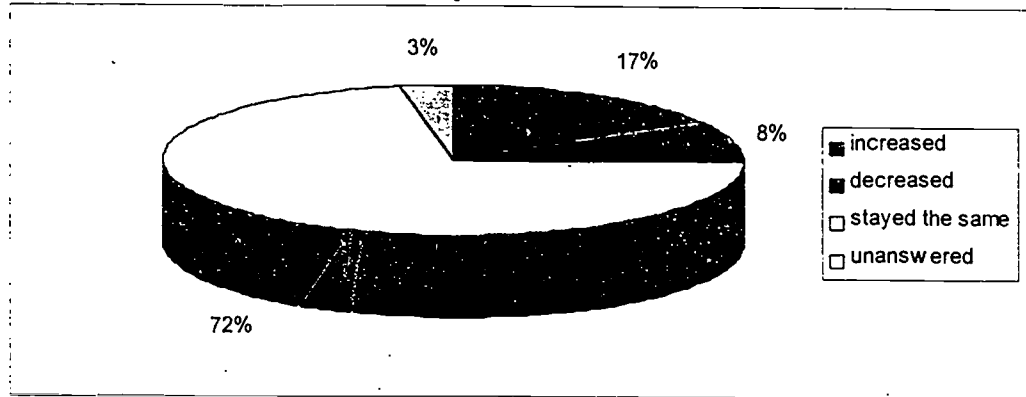
Thirty-three percent of the students completing this survey live on their campus while 65% live off-campus.

Survey Results

Level of Violence

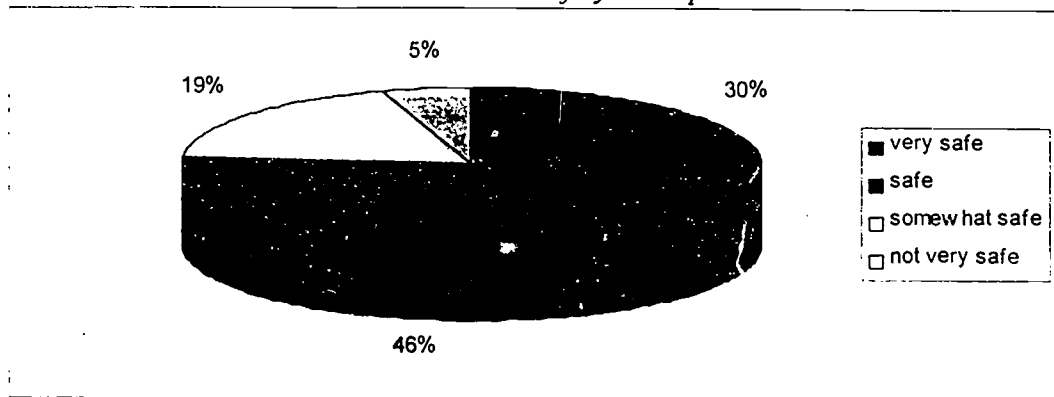
When students were asked if the level of violence on their campus had increased, decreased or stayed the same, 17% believed the level of violence had increased over the last year, 8% believed the level of violence had decreased, 72% believed the level of violence had stayed the same, and 3% did not answer.

Student Perceptions - Violence Trends



Students were also asked to indicate how safe they feel on campus. Thirty percent of students indicated they feel very safe, 46% said they feel safe, 19% said somewhat safe, and 5% indicated they did not feel very safe.

Student Personal Safety Perceptions

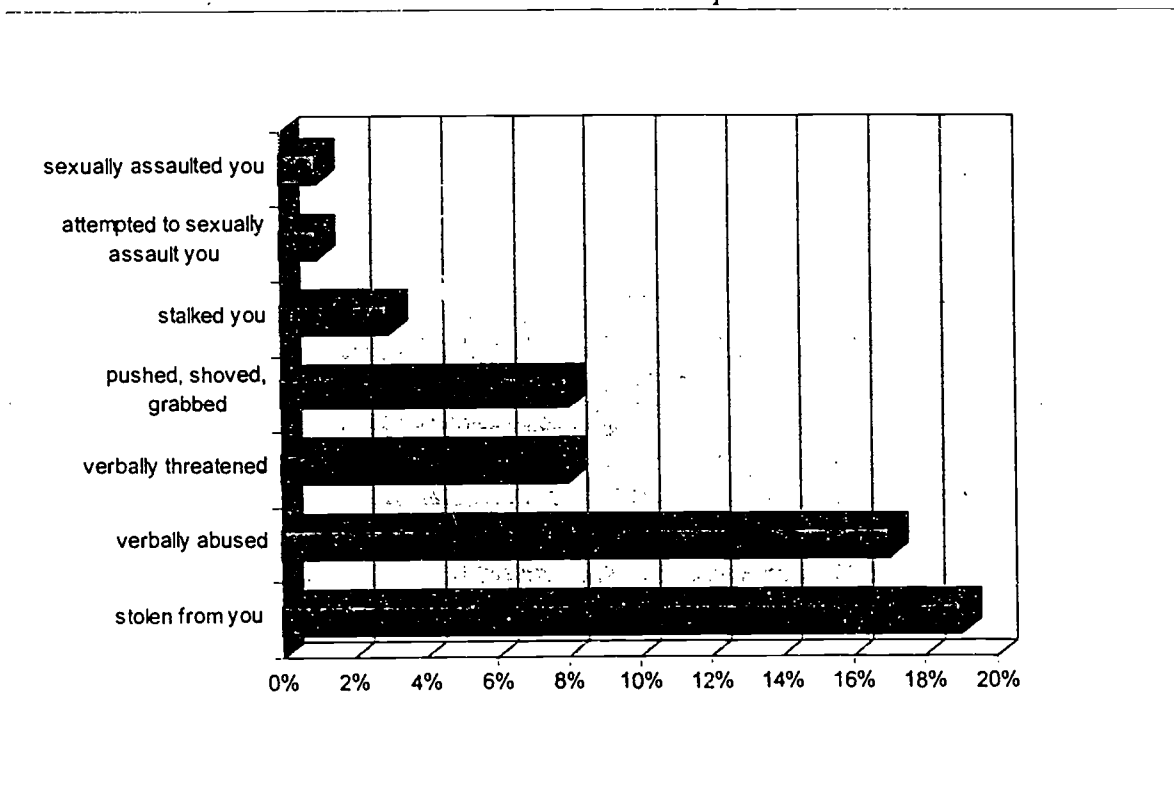


Although the majority of respondents feel safe on their campus, it is a concern that 24% feel only "somewhat safe" or "not very safe." Post-secondary institutions must strive to ensure all students feel safe on their campus.

Incidents of Violence

Only a low level of respondents reported that they were the actual victims of violence. Most of the "violent incidents" students experienced on college campuses were theft (19%) and verbal assaults (17%). The next two most common incidents students reported were verbal threats (8%) and being pushed, shoved or grabbed (8%). Other incidents such as being kicked, punched, sexually assaulted, stalked, threaten with a weapon, or assaulted with a weapon were all reported by less than 3% of the respondents.

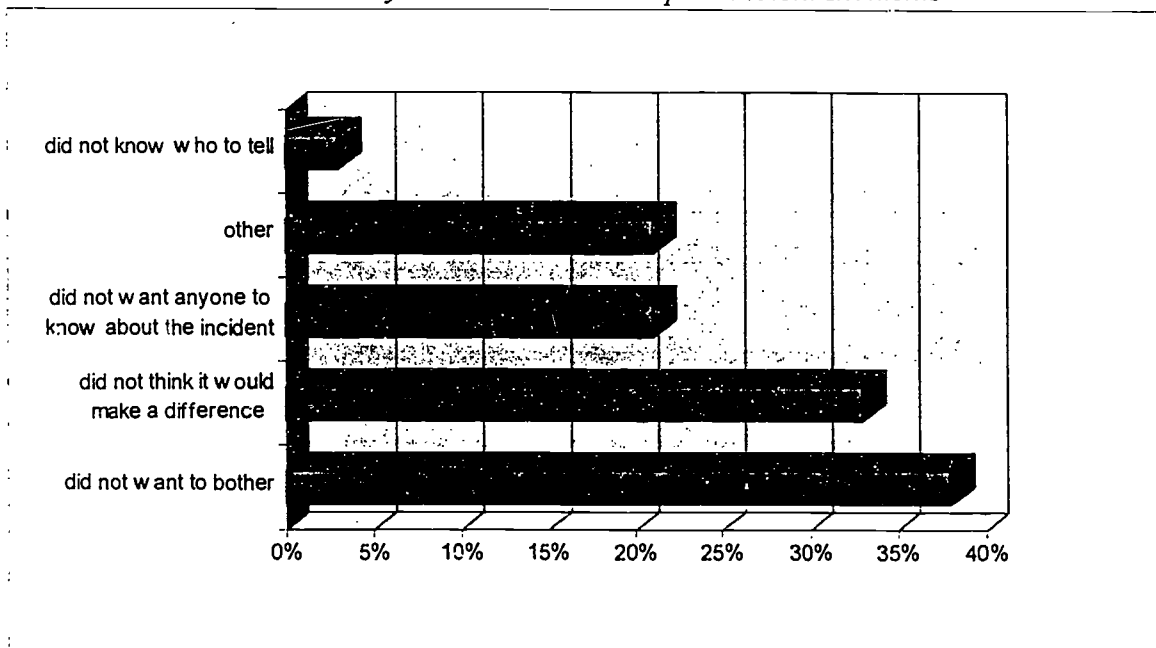
Violent Incidents Students Experienced



Reporting the Violent Incident

Seventy-seven percent of the students experiencing violence did not report the violent act committed against them to college or law enforcement officials; 23% reported the incident. Of those students who did not report the incident, 38% indicated that they did not want to bother, 33% indicated that they did not think it would make a difference, 21% said that they did not want anyone to know about the incident, 3% did not know who to tell and 21% of students checked the "other" category.

Reasons Why Students Did Not Report Violent Incidents



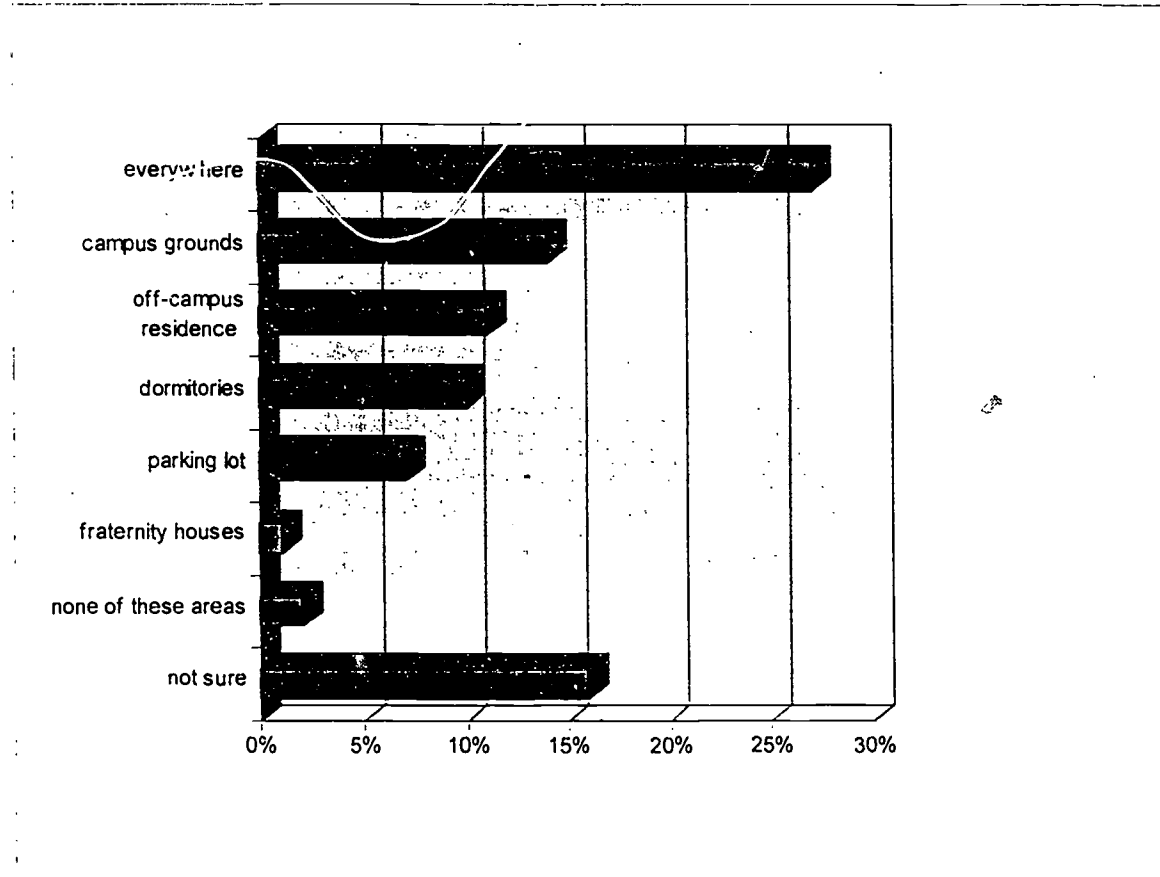
Although respondents did not report being the victims of violent acts, they perceive several types of violence to be major or minor problems on their campus. For example, 19% of students reported having something stolen from them, but 29% feel stealing is a major problem and 42% identified it as a minor problem. In addition, 3% of students said they had been stalked, 1% of students reported that someone attempted to sexually assault them and less than one percent reported being sexually assaulted. In contrast, 22% of students indicated they believe date rape is a major problem, 26% said it was a minor problem; 20% of respondents feel that sexual assault is a major problem, 30% feel it is a minor problem; and 19% said sexual harassment is a major problem and 38% said it is a minor problem.

This contrast reveals the importance of measuring perceptions and the impact they can have on attitudes and actions of people. It is clear that one does not have to be the victim of a crime in order to perceive its incidence to be a problem.

Where Violence Occurs

When students were asked where they thought violence occurs on campus, the most common answer was “everywhere” (28 percent). This indicates that no single location (i.e. academic buildings, dormitories, or parking lots) is the focal point for violence on campus.

Locations Students Believe Violent Incidents Occur



Factors Contributing to Violence

The survey results showed that 39% of the students felt that many of the violent incidents on campus were directly related to drugs and alcohol use. Additionally, 31% of the students believed that students commit acts of violence because they had been drinking heavily. These figures agree with other studies that have been completed to assess the relationship between acts of violence (specifically sexual violence) and alcohol and/or drug consumption. A study conducted in 1994 by the Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that an estimated 90% of all campus rapes involve drinking on the part of the assailant, the victim or both. In 1990, the Campus Violence Prevention Center of Townson State University conducted a study to determine if a relationship existed between student alcohol and/or drugs and student crime. The study found that there was “a clear and incontrovertible link between student crime and alcohol use, a finding which is consonant with the overwhelming consensus of the

general criminology literature.” The study also concluded that both victims and perpetrators of crime were more frequent drug, alcohol and cigarette users.

It is obvious from the data in this and other surveys that the use of alcohol and drugs and crime are intricately connected. Post-secondary institutions need to continue to educate students on this relationship and the risks associated with it.

The other reasons respondents believe students commit acts of violence: they want another person’s possessions (18 percent), they are provoked by others (17 percent) and to impress their friends (13 percent).

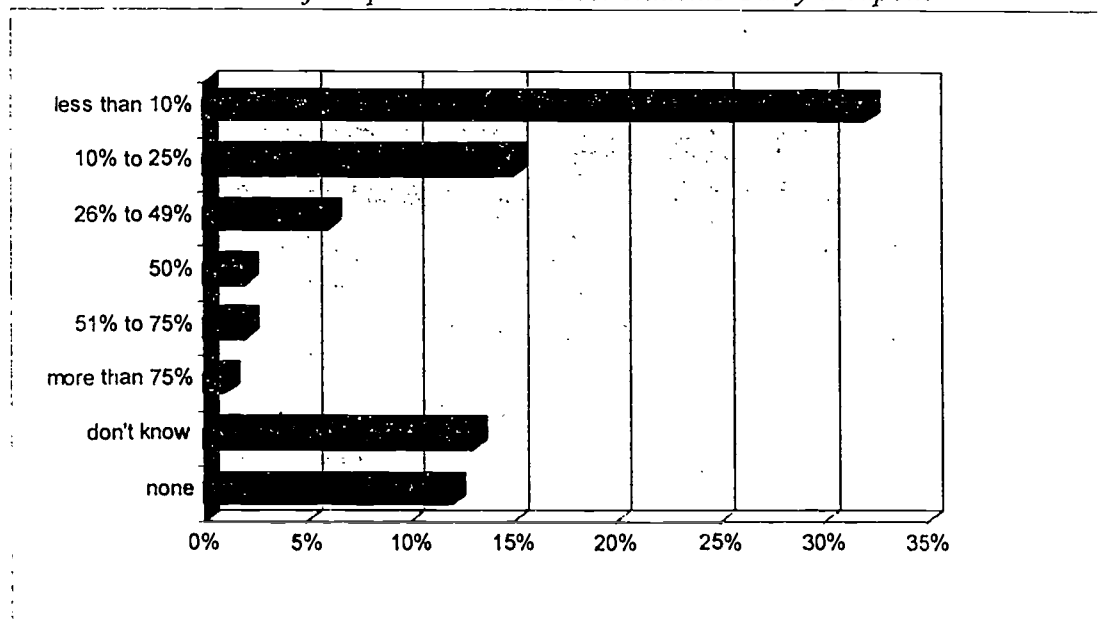
Likely Victims

The group that respondents identified most frequently to be the likely victims of violence was women (61%). Sixteen percent of students believe men are likely victims of violence and 14% of students believed that no groups in particular were more likely to be victims of violence. Only 6% of students felt that gay/lesbian students were more likely to be victims of violence, 3% felt that students from racial or ethnic minorities were more likely to be victims and 3% identified students with low self-esteem as likely victims of violence. It is clear that violence at the post-secondary level is strongly driven by gender issues.

Weapons

Thirty two percent of respondents feel that less than 10% of students carry weapons on their campuses, 15% believed that 10-25% of students carry weapons, and only 2% believe that over 50% of students carry weapons on campus.

Percent of Respondents Who Feel Students Carry Weapons



When students were asked about the types of weapons students carry on campus, mace was the most frequent answer (5%) and knives were the next most common answer (10%). Twenty seven percent of the students believe no students carry weapons on their campus.

Respondents were also asked to identify why students carry weapons. The most common response by a large margin was “for protection/self-defense/fear of going to and from school” (60%), the next most common answer was “students do not carry weapons at my school” (21%).

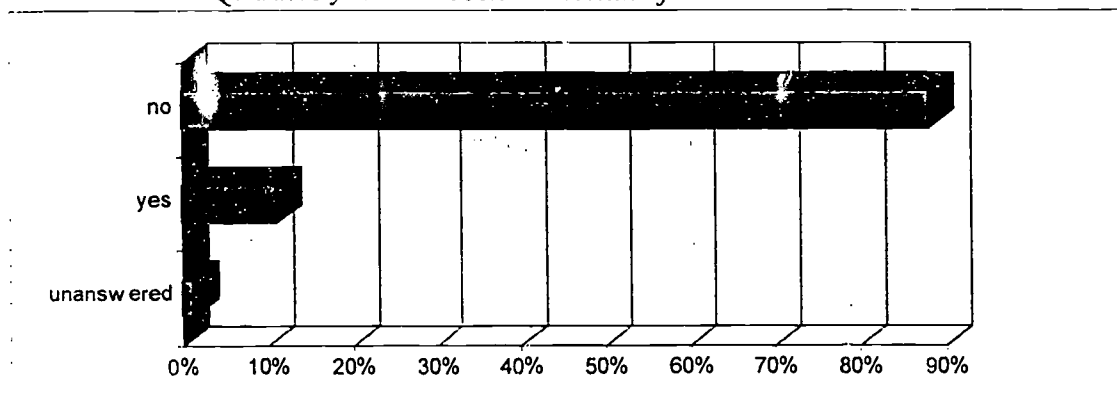
Prevention

When asked if they felt their institution’s efforts to address violence was more than adequate, adequate or less than adequate, nine percent of students said more than adequate, 48% said adequate, 28% felt that their institution’s efforts at addressing violence are less than adequate and 14% were not sure. Institutions need to make sure that the violence prevention programs they are designing are adequate and appropriate in their students’ opinions.

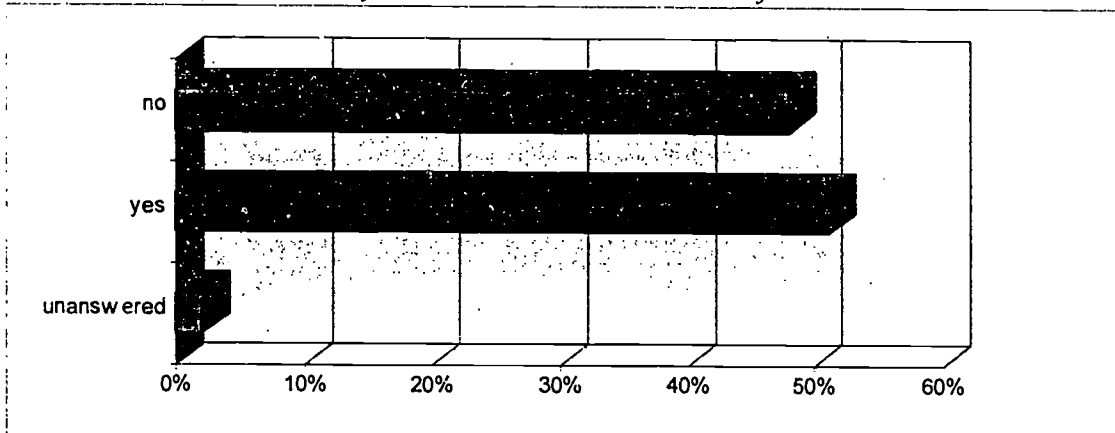
Dating Violence

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to dating violence. The charts below illustrate the respondents’ answers:

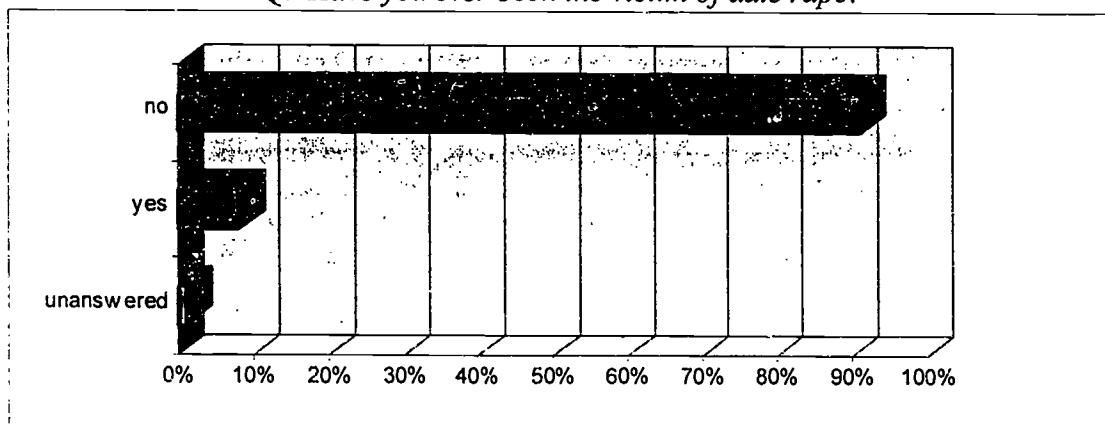
Q: *Have you ever been the victim of violence on a date?*



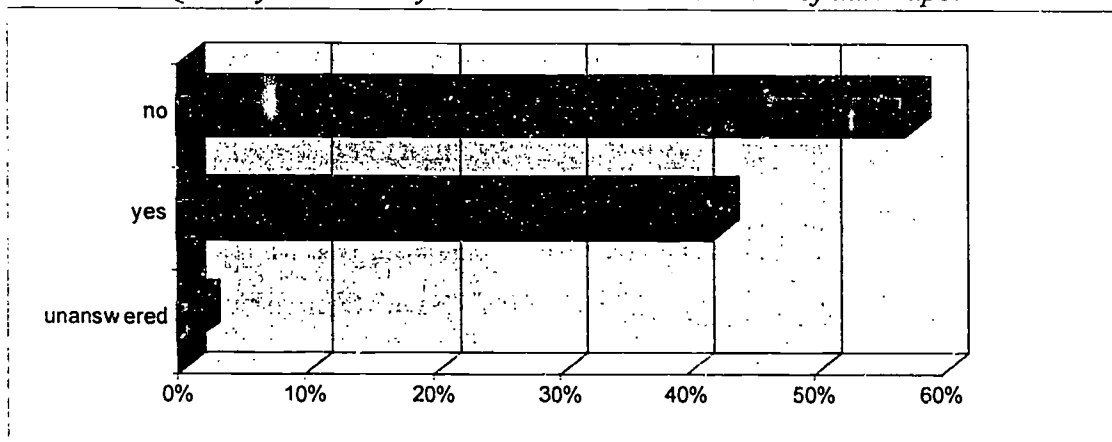
Q: Do you know anyone who had been the victim of violence on a date?



Q: Have you ever been the victim of date rape?



Q: Do you know anyone who had been the victim of date rape?



Although many of the respondents did not report being the victims of dating violence or date rape, over half know someone who had been a victim of dating violence and over 40 percent know someone who has been the victim of date rape. It is clear that dating violence and date rape are still major problems in our society. Dating violence and date rape changes not only a

victim's life forever, but the lives of their family and friend as well. We all must take these problems very seriously and work together toward solutions.

Conclusion

This preliminary data shows that, although the majority of respondents feel safe on campus and most are not the victims of violent crime, campus violence, especially sexual assault, dating violence and the use of alcohol and drugs in connection with criminal activity are ongoing problems in post-secondary institutions. These findings point to a continuing need for administrators, educators and student organizations to continue to expand educational and training initiatives. These survey results should be used in conjunction with other studies on campus violence as well as the Student Right to Know Data in Minnesota to strengthen and create policies that will ensure the safety of Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

In the 1992 Omnibus Crime Bill, Minnesota post-secondary institutions were required to create violence prevention plans for their campuses. These plans should be continually strengthened and improved so that all students feel safe and secure on campus. Students should also have confidence in their institutions' reporting and follow-up procedures and know that their case will be handled professionally and confidentially. Institutions should involve students in violence prevention planning. When there are reductions in the number of violent incidents on campus administrators should communicate this success to students so that they may feel a part of the solution. By continuing to work together, school administrators, educators and students can reduce the number of violent incidents on campus