

# Transparency, amnesty may boost reporting of sexual violence

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College athletes—about 30% of whom experience sexual violence during college—want more certainty about receiving a policy violation finding in their favor, as well as policies that protect them if they happen

to have been using alcohol or other substances at the time of the assault, according to a new UW Medicine study published today in the journal *The Patient—Patient-Centered Outcomes Research*.

While there has been intense publicity around sexual assault in collegiate sports, there has been little research into what mechanisms need to be in place for more reporting to occur among [college athletes](#), said lead author, Alice Ellyson, acting assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine.

"There has obviously been coverage on many athlete-involved incidents when they occur in media and press," Ellyson said. "But there has been very little research on reporting preferences, and what systems or structures need to be in place to encourage or enable reporting."

The study gathered data by conducting a survey with 1,004 athletes in ten Division 1 universities to look into what attributes of reporting should be available to influence or encourage athletes to report sexual violence, including stalking, assault, or rape. Ellyson said that before the research began, she thought that the top priority of [student-athletes](#) would be anonymity. But that proved not to be the case.

College students rarely report sexual violence. Estimates vary from zero to 25%. Ellyson's study found a similarly low rate of reporting among student-athletes, only 9%. The report noted 1 in 3 women college athletes and 1 in 10 men report having experienced sexual violence during [college](#).

"We wanted to look at 'why' that might be, aside from factors facing most survivors like fear of blame, wanting to move on, and other pressures not to [report](#)," she noted.

"We worried that the reporting structures in many institutions were not

aligned with the preferences of the people who want or need to use them," she said

Amnesty policies, which protect the athletes from being punished for being at a party or using drugs or alcohol are important and already in place at some colleges and universities, the study noted.

"Athletes often agree to season or game-day rules about [substance use](#) that can be more strict than state or local policies," Ellyson noted.

"Concerns about team dynamics or athletic pressure to perform can be pretty intense, and these sport-specific factors may be unique barriers for [student-athletes](#)."

Students didn't mention punishments or certain results, but wanted more certainty that their experience would be acknowledged, according to Ellyson.

Among those surveyed, 67% were athletes in women's sports, and 62% of those who took the survey noted they were on first-string status. About 28.7% of student athletes in the sample experienced sexual violence since enrolling in their institution, but only 9% of these athletes had reported the violence to their institution, the study stated.

Student athletes live, study, and work in close-knit communities, she said, and have unique pressures.

Sexual violence among student athletes is highly publicized, and may be perpetrated by a peer [athlete](#), coach or a mentor in their sport, the study noted. Student athletes may also have concerns about the impact of impact of reporting on their team's dynamics, performance and standing, the authors added.

While it is important to have reporting policies and procedures that the

athletes feel comfortable with, the ultimate goal is preventing sexual violence from happening in the first place, she said.

"Effective sexual [violence](#) prevention and response are both vital to addressing the long-standing problem of [sexual violence](#) that is far too common," she said.

On Monday, Ellyson spoke about her research at an International Health Economics Association [webcast](#).

More resources on reporting [sexual assault](#) can be found on this University of Washington [website](#), as well as the [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#).

**More information:** Alice M. Ellyson et al, Student-Athlete Preferences for Sexual Violence Reporting: A Discrete Choice Experiment, *The Patient—Patient-Centered Outcomes Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s40271-022-00600-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40271-022-00600-z)

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