

New gold standard survey shows alarmingly high rate of sexual exploitation across the US

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Victimization (SES-V), the gold standard measurement of sexual exploitation designed for adults over age 18, has been [released](#) in a special issue of the *Journal of Sex Research*.

As the first revision since 2007, the new SES-V is an interdisciplinary collaboration among experts across more than 10 U.S. universities and the Kinsey Institute, led and coordinated by Dr. Mary Koss from the University of Arizona. It adopts more inclusive language and incorporates additional tactics and actions victims experience today, such as being sexually targeted online, being made to penetrate someone, or being lied to about contraception.

"Sexual exploitation research must keep pace with the real-life experiences of victims," said Dr. Koss. "Better solutions will come from the more comprehensive and accurate measurement of sexual exploitation that the updated SES-V captures."

The special issue also features preliminary data collected using the revised SES-V, one of the first national studies published since the #MeToo movement began. Among this nationally representative sample of 347 adults aged 18 to 83, 90% of [survey respondents](#) experienced some degree of sexual exploitation. Further, 60% of women and 29% of men recorded experiences that met the Federal Bureau of Investigation definition of rape or attempted rape.

"Although preliminary, these findings reveal a fuller—and more alarming—picture," said Dr. Zoe Peterson, Director of the Kinsey Institute's Sexual Assault Research Initiative and lead author on this study. "We urgently need to expand how we fight sexual exploitation to address the array of experiences—from [unwanted sexual attention](#) online to physically forced sexual penetration—that SES-V brings to light."

SES-V has been made freely available in English and Spanish to enable other scientists to contribute data in a standardized way. Other preliminary findings indicate:

- Across all categories, women were more likely than men to

report experiencing sexual exploitation, except technology-facilitated exploitation.

- 67% of respondents experienced technology-facilitated exploitation, such as receiving unwanted sexual materials or threats about sharing intimate photos online.
- 18% of respondents experienced reproductive coercion, including someone lying about or tampering with contraception or "stealth" (removing a condom without permission).
- 17% of respondents reported being made to penetrate another person by someone who used illegal tactics; this category was particularly important for capturing men's experiences of sexual victimization.
- Experiencing lower-level sexual exploitation such as non-contact voyeurism or flashing was associated with experiencing more severe [sexual exploitation](#) such as illegal sexual assault.
- When asked to describe the incident they remembered most clearly, the most common exploitative tactic reported was victims having their refusal ignored.

According to RAINN, every 68 seconds an American is sexually assaulted. The CDC estimates the annual economic cost of rape in the United States at nearly \$3.1 trillion, although the actual cost could be much higher.

Despite increased government funding promised in recent years—such as \$1 billion in supplemental funding for the bipartisan Violence Against Women Act—these latest SES-V data show that more comprehensive measures are urgently needed to meaningfully address this health and social crisis.

More information: Zoë D. Peterson et al, Preliminary Prevalence Estimates of Sexual Exploitation as Measured by the Sexual Experiences Survey-Victimization (SES-V) in a National US Sample, *The Journal of*

Sex Research (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2024.2359639](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2024.2359639)

Provided by Kinsey Institute

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