



**Report to  
President Lee T. Todd, Jr.**

# **2007 WOMEN'S SAFETY STUDY**

**UK**

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY  
Center for Research  
on Violence Against Women

**October 22, 2007**

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# REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT 2007 Women's Safety Study

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## Executive Summary

Over the past four years, the University of Kentucky has undertaken a significant initiative to improve the status of women's safety. With a belief that improving the protection of women at the University would best be achieved with UK-specific data regarding the prevalence of the problem and the unique experiences of this university's students, in 2004 the University laid the foundation for improving campus safety with a research study. This first step signaled that UK's response to violence against women would integrate research into the advancement of effective practice. In the spring semester of 2007, after three years of targeted intervention and prevention programming, the university undertook to measure its improvement through a replication of the 2004 study. The Center for Research on Violence Against Women put the 2007 Women's Safety Study in the field during the spring semester of this year.

As results of the survey were analyzed and findings of the two studies compared, the research team focused attention in four major areas: what do women experience (victimization prevalence); what do women do (helpseeking and reporting rates); what do women believe (accuracy of risk appraisal); and what do women perceive (rates of fear of crime and perceived safety).

This report answers those questions with reportage on a selection of the findings from the 2007 Women's Safety Study conducted by the Center for Research on Violence Against Women. The report reveals great progress in some areas, slow growth in others, and major challenges yet to overcome. In all it should give reason for optimism and objective support for continuing the effort begun at UK in 2004 under the name *The President's Safety Imperative*, to improve safety on campus.



In the spring semester of 2004, the Center for Research on Violence Against Women<sup>1</sup> conducted the first study on victimization experiences and fear of crime among female students at UK (Jordan, Wilcox & Prichard, 2007; Wilcox, Jordan & Pritchard, 2007; Wilcox, Jordan & Pritchard, 2006). The study had five objectives: 1) to collect data concerning the prevalence of physical, sexual, and stalking victimization among female students at UK; 2) to analyze context-specific correlates delineating the heterogeneity of violence patterns and consequences of victimization; 3) to assess the fear of victimization among female students; 4) to assess attitudes regarding the availability and viability of campus resources to respond to victimization; and 5) to inform university policy, training and education/prevention programs at UK.

#### Select Findings: 2004 Women's Safety Study

The 2004 Women's Safety Study found a substantial rate of victimization among college women at UK, and a very low rate of helpseeking among those whose time at the university was marred in this way. It also found a lack of understanding of the realities of violence against women and of safety services available at UK. Select examples include:

*Prevalence:* In 2004, fully 36.5% of the 1010 female graduate and undergraduate students reporting experiencing one or more of the forms of abuse screened for in the study, specifically including:

- 20.8% sexual victimization (including coercion, sexual assault, rape)
- 18% stalking
- 10.4% physical assault

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<sup>1</sup> The Women's Safety Study (Jordan, Wilcox & Prichard, 2004) was jointly funded by President Lee T. Todd, Jr. and the CRVAW. The Office of the Provost and the Graduate School provided funds to support the time of a Research Assistant for the study.

*Helpseeking and Reporting:* Of significant concern was the low percentage of women with victimization experiences who reported the crime or reached out for assistance to university or other community resources. Specifically:

- 2.5% of forcible rape victims reported to police
- No rape victims in the study reporting having received a forensic rape exam
- 25% of stalking victims never told anyone
- Less than 1% talked to a faculty or staff member

*Attitudes and Awareness:* The 2004 study found a significant percentage of women reporting fear of certain areas of campus, a misunderstanding of the actual dynamics of violence against women, and an underutilization of safety services provided by the university. For example:

- Lack of understanding of the dynamics of victimization
  - More than three-fourths of women students believed strangers posed more risk than known offenders when over 82% of actual offenders were known to the victim
- Underutilization of Safety Services
  - 80% of women students had never used a safety service at the university

*Perceptions of Safety:* The 2004 study found that the largest percentage of women felt safe on UK's campus but the vast majority also believed there were locations on campus that were unsafe.

- Fear of crime on campus
  - 81.3% said there were places on campus they avoided due to fear
  - 84.4% of women described the campus as very or somewhat safe, while 15.5% viewed the campus as somewhat or very unsafe

#### The University Response to the 2004 Data

In the fall 2004, President Lee T. Todd, Jr., convened a President's Women's Safety Advisory Council and charged it with reviewing the data and further assessing the status of women's safety at UK in order to identify ways to improve the university's response. One year later,

based on recommendations from the Council, the President announced plans to implement the *President's Safety Imperative*, a comprehensive plan to increase women's safety, committing \$1.25 million toward that effort. With the onset of the 2005 fall semester, the *Safety Imperative* began.

*The UK Safety Imperative*, announced in the fall of 2005, encompassed five key areas. First, the Council prioritized sweeping education and prevention efforts targeting students, staff and faculty. That effort has been spearheaded over the past three years by the Violence Intervention & Prevention Center (formerly called Women's Place). Significant focus was also given to improving intervention with victims by ensuring that when student victims come forward the university response would be a welcoming and effective one. Third, the university strategically addressed contextual factors that impact both the perception and reality of safety for our students by improving landscaping and lighting and by creating a marked pathway across campus called Cat's Path. Fourth, the Council identified needs to improve UK policies and compliance with state and federal law. And, finally, the Council recommitted to the value of implementing an empirically-based program by utilizing survey research and evaluation.

Among the greatest strengths of this five pronged plan implemented by UK was the widespread involvement of students, staff, faculty and administrators across campus. The response was created and owned by all. The energetic contributions of staff within Student Affairs, the University of Kentucky Police Department, UK HealthCare, Campus Services, Facilities Management, Information Technology, Athletics; researchers in Centers and Departments; faculty across Departments; hundreds of students; and the university's top administrators emphasized the importance of a collaborative approach to successfully building a non-violent and safe campus.



The 2007 Women's Safety Study<sup>2</sup> served as a replication of the 2004 study and was conducted in the spring semester. The replication survey interviewed 2001 female undergraduate, graduate and professional students about their experiences with sexual, physical, and stalking victimization, specifically assessing for any experiences these women had with these crimes during their time as students at the university (the 2004 study surveyed 1010 students). For women with victimization experiences, the survey posed questions to assess the detail of those experiences: what happened, who harmed them, did they tell, were they injured, and related contextual facts. In addition to examining victimization experiences, the study also drew information from the study respondents about their feelings of safety on campus, their knowledge regarding violence against women, and their awareness of campus and community resources to which they could turn in the event of victimization.

Based on the 2004 study findings noted above and the substantial efforts to improve safety undertaken in the past three years, the following areas were of particular interest to the research team as the 2007 study was put in the field:

- *Fear of Crime*
  - Do students feel any safer?
  - Are they more comfortable on our campus?
- *Attitudes and Awareness*
  - Do they more accurately understand their risk?
  - Do they know what services we have here?
- *Prevalence*
  - How many UK women?
- *Victim Helpseeking*
  - Do they tell?
  - Who do they tell?

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<sup>2</sup> The 2007 Women's Safety Study was financially supported by the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, Student Government, and the Center for Research on Violence Against Women.

The logo features the text "Summary and Implications" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. Below it, "2007 Findings" is written in a smaller, lighter blue font. To the left of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of two overlapping, curved lines in shades of blue and green, resembling a swoosh or a partial circle.

# Summary and Implications

## 2007 Findings

As results of the survey were analyzed and the findings of the two studies compared, the research team focused attention in four major areas: what do women perceive (rates of fear of crime and perceived safety); what do women believe (accuracy of risk appraisal); what do women experience (victimization prevalence); and what do women do (helpseeking and reporting rates). Seen in that light, a summary of the studies major findings are outlined below:

- *What Do Women Perceive: Fear of Crime*
  - How safe do you think you are from crime on UK's campus?
    - The perception of safety on UK's campus is very high. 92.6% of women surveyed felt that the campus was somewhat or very safe. This is a significant improvement from 2004, where 84.5% felt safe on campus. In fact, those women who feel UK's campus is "very safe" nearly doubled from only 16.4% in 2004, to 31.7% in 2007.
    - Women feel much less safe in the neighborhoods surrounding campus, approximately four times as many women report feeling unsafe around campus as compared to on campus.
    - While a goal to facilitate the ability of women students to feel safe on campus is laudable, care must be given not to create a campus of women who feel invulnerable to victimization. Education and prevention programs that target realistic risk appraisals are currently being done and are encouraged.
    - Coordination of safety efforts with the urban county government and the Town & Gown Commission are warranted as not only do women feel less safe off campus, the majority of assaults occur in these neighborhoods.

- Do you avoid places on or around UK's campus due to safety concerns?
  - 77% said yes. This is a statistically significant decrease from the 81.3% reported in 2004, giving support to maintaining the improvements in the physical space of the campus as they appear to be having a positive effect. This specifically includes the CATS Path and the investment made by the university in landscaping and lighting improvements.
  - This is trending in the right direction, but over three-fourths of women still believe there are places on UK's campus that are frightening.
  - 40% of female students carry something with them to feel more comfortable, usually mace.
  
- *What Do Women Believe: Attitudes and Awareness*
  - Do they more accurately understand their risk?
    - We have an improvement in accurate perceptions of risk: a non-significant increase in the percentage of victims who fear known offenders more and a decrease in those who fear strangers more.
    - Continued work and support for expansion of education and prevention efforts appears to be warranted by these data.
  - Do they know what services we have here?
    - Yes, the majority of women students now know that we have safety services and victim services at UK. While this is an increase from 2004, number of women students who know about safety services is still low and only 34.5% use them.
    - The type of safety services known by women students is very limited: they tend to be knowledgeable only about bus and escort services.
    - The study found a decrease in the use of cell phones as safety tools and in knowledge of the UK cell phone donation program. This finding may have implications for the new alert system which is cell phone based.

- *What Do Women Experience: Victimization Prevalence*
  - 34.1% of women in the study this year reported at least one experience of victimization as defined by the study, a rate down from 36.5% in 2004.
    - sexual victimization – 19% (20.8% in 2004)
    - stalking victimization – 15.1% (18% in 2004)
    - physical victimization – 10.3% (10.4% in 2004)
  - We are trending in the right direction, but this does not yet represent a significant reduction in actual prevalence of victimization.
  - In 2007, more sexual assault victims reported physical injury from the offense
  - Of sexual offense cases, 27% involved forced penetration
  - 26.7% of physical assault victims were physically injured during the attack, 10% of those reported head injuries
  - With a new question, we documented that UK students are often the offenders (51% of sex offenders, 32.3% of stalkers, 49% of physical assault offenders)
  - An increased number of sexual offenses occurred in fraternities between 2004 and 2007, calling for specific interdiction aimed at this population of male students
  - A substantial number of sexual offense cases involved the use of alcohol by the victim and the offender (56.7% offenders; 50.4% victims)
  - Almost half of stalking cases occurred on campus. We also had significant increase in the use of electronic means to stalk (email and the internet)
  - Over one-third (30.8%) of women victims experienced multiple forms of abuse
  
- *What Do Women Do: Reportage and Helpseeking*
  - Do they tell?
    - The study found a significant increase in reporting to police by rape victims. For forcible rapes, reportage rates increased from 2.5% to 9.1%.
    - We saw a slight increase in reporting across types of victimization. That increase would have been statistically significant were it not for a reduction in physical assault reportage to UKPD.
    - Bystanders are also telling more in sex offense cases.

- Who do they tell?
  - The study found a slight increase in the number of victims who reach out to other UK services or to UK faculty or staff, but the vast majority of victims who tell the police do not tell others (e.g.: 97.4% of stalking victims got no other services).
  - Only 1.3% of students report to Dean of Students
  - In every case reported in the study where a victim sought medical care, the provider asked her the cause of the injury. This appears to represent a success of the universal screening effort implemented in campus health and mental health settings.

## Conclusion

This report reflects a selection of the findings from the 2007 Women's Safety Study conducted by the Center for Research on Violence Against Women. It reveals great progress in some areas, slow growth in others, and major challenges yet to overcome. In all it should give reason for optimism and objective support for continuing the effort begun at UK in 2004 under the name *The President's Safety Imperative*, to improve safety on campus.

We saw the biggest improvements in the perceptions of women as to their safety and in decreasing places on campus that caused women to feel afraid. These types of perceptual changes likely result from the improvements to the physical space on campus (e.g.: CATS Path, landscaping and lighting improvements) and not surprisingly were the first efforts to witness improvements. Successes here call for maintenance of effort. Percent changes at such dramatic levels are also cause for caution, however, as we do not wish to inadvertently create a sense of invulnerability among women at UK who do actually incur risk on the physical space of the campus.

One of the more dramatic changes in three years is in reportage rate among rape survivors. Here the university achieved more than just what women perceive, we changed what they do. We increased having them take one of the most difficult steps for a survivor to take,

that being to tell the police. That is a great success (although a tentative one given the small sample size represented in this case). The study also showed, however, that this improvement needs to be expanded significantly, as women are reaching out more to police, but not reaching out in the numbers we would like to advocates, therapists, doctors and other resources. These data underscore the need to support and expand intervention efforts being made by Student Affairs, the UKPD and the Chandler Medical Center. With an eye toward strengthening our centralized effort, these data emphasize the importance of the Violence Intervention and Prevention Center (VIP) within Student Affairs as too few women knew of their services or reached out to that office at a point of crisis.

Finally, the smallest change we saw in the 2007 study replication may tell the biggest story of all. While the drop in actual prevalence from 36.5% to 34.1% was not statistically significant, these numbers give a hint at beginning to change the hardest thing of all: Offender behavior. Optimistically we believe these data portend future success in ending this complex, intractable problem. This is the story of our prevention/education efforts with young men and women, and this is where our university's largest future investment must be.