

# Sexual Assault

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

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### INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2023, Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers conducted a statewide study to establish a baseline for public perceptions related to the awareness, understanding, and attitudes about challenges that Utah women and girls face (see [Background & Methods](#) for details). The study was created to support the work of 18 areas of focus (spokes) within the movement called [A Bolder Way Forward](#), which is dedicated to helping more Utah girls and women thrive. One of the 18 areas of focus is sexual assault, and this summary shares findings that illuminate present perspectives and establishes a baseline to track progress in a few key areas.

### BACKGROUND

In 2022, the UWLP released a research snapshot titled "[Sexual Assault Among Utah Women: A 2022 Update](#)." This report captured the available data on sexual assault from various sources. We know that sexual assault is a significant social, criminal justice, and healthcare issue in Utah. In fact, a seminal study in 2007 reported that one in three Utah women experienced sexual assault in their lifetimes, and one in six Utah women experienced rape. Sadly, Utah is ranked 9th out of 50 states for the number of rapes per capita. Yet, it has been difficult to track the current status and progress in Utah with the available data. The four sexual assault survey items asked in this new study provide additional insight that will guide changes to improve support for more Utah women, children, and families.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participants responded to each survey item using a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=some-what disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree). For Sample 1 (non-probability), 2,528 Utahns responded to the four questions, and for Sample 2 (representative), there were 650 participants (Total=3,178).

**1. Problem:** The first survey item was "I don't think sexual assault is a big problem in Utah." The statistical mean was 1.88 (SD 1.11) for the non-probability sample and 2.60 (SD 1.49) for the representative sample. Although there was a significant difference between samples, 85.2% of respondents disagreed at some level, with 48.9% strongly disagreeing in Sample 1 and 30.0% in Sample 2. Thus, many Utahns are aware of this disturbing trend.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

*\*Gender:* Women's disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men's (2.00 and 2.65, resp.).

*Age:* There were no significant differences among age categories.

*\*Education:* Participants with bachelor's and master's degrees had significantly stronger disagreement.

*\*Marital Status:* Divorced people and those living with partner/cohabiting had stronger disagreement than others.

*Income:* There were no significant differences among income ranges.

*\*Children:* There was no significant difference between parents and non-parents, but those with more children disagreed slightly less.

*\*Race & Ethnicity:* Although all disagreed, those in the White and American Indian categories disagreed most strongly.

*\*Religion:* The strongest disagreement came from those who selected atheist, agnostic, and spiritual but no affiliation.

*\*Employment:* Full-time students had the strongest disagreement, while retirees' disagreement was the weakest.

*\*Residency:* The longer respondents had lived in Utah, the more strongly they disagreed.

*Counties:* Cache, Weber, and Iron counties had the strongest disagreement, while the central rural region (Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute) had the least.

**2. Unwanted Behavior:** The second survey item was "Any unwanted sexual contact or behavior is sexual assault." There is strong agreement with this statement. The statistical mean was 5.88 (SD 1.53) for the non-probability sample and 5.86 (SD 1.43) for the representative sample, which is similar. In combining the results of both samples, 2,699 Utahns (85.0%) responded that they agreed with this statement at some level, while 4.5% selected "neither agree nor disagree" and 10.6% "disagree." See the combined demographic findings below.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

*\*Gender:* Women's agreement levels were significantly higher than men's (5.95 and 5.69, resp.).

*\*Age:* Respondents between 18 and 39 had the strongest agreement levels.

*\*Education:* Those in the "some high school" category selected lower levels of agreement than all others.

*Marital Status:* There were no significant differences among categories.

*\*Income:* Respondents in the income range less than \$34,999 had the highest agreement (possibly full-time students).

*\*Children:* The nonparents had highest agreement, and parents with teens more strongly agreed.

*Race & Ethnicity:* There were no significant differences among race and ethnic categories, but Hispanics had the highest statistical mean.

*\*Religion:* Agnostics had the strongest agreement, while the Protestants' agreement was the weakest.

*Employment:* There were no significant differences in agreement among employment categories.

*\*Residency:* Respondents who had lived in Utah fewer than 2 years had less agreement, while residents of 2–5 years had the highest agreement level.

*\*Denotes statistically significant differences within the demographic categories.*

*Counties:* The highest agreement came from respondents in Iron, Utah, Davis, and Salt Lake, while the lowest agreement came from respondents in Summit/Wasatch and the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute area.

**3. Taking Action:** The third survey item was “I don’t think there is much I can do about sexual assault in my community.” The statistical mean was 3.09 (SD 1.44) for Sample 1 and 3.49 (SD 1.51) for Sample 2; these hover around “somewhat disagree.” For the samples combined, 58.9% disagreed at some level, while 21.3% were not sure. Sadly, 627 respondents (19.7%) felt they could do nothing to help change the situation in their communities. See the combined demographic findings below.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

*\*Gender:* Women’s disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (3.18 and 3.41, resp.).

*\*Age:* Those whose ages ranged from 45 to 64 disagreed most strongly, but the statistical means were moderate at “somewhat disagree.”

*\*Education:* The strongest disagreement came from those with graduate degrees and the weakest from high school graduates and associate degree holders.

*Marital Status:* There were no significant differences among marital status categories.

*\*Income:* The higher the income, the stronger the disagreement.

*\*Children:* Parents were more likely to disagree more strongly than non-parents.

*Race & Ethnicity:* There were no significant differences by category.

*\*Religion:* Respondents who selected “very active” in their religious affiliation had stronger disagreement than all other activity levels.

*\*Employment:* Full-time home-makers and unemployed individuals had less disagreement than those in other categories.

*Residency:* There were no significant differences among residency categories.

*Counties:* There were no significant differences in disagreement level among counties.

**4. Resources:** The final survey item was “I know where to find sexual assault resources in my community.” The statistical mean was 4.73 (SD 1.74) for Sample 1 and 4.48 (SD 1.69) for Sample 2. Although the mean was between neutral and “somewhat agree,” 60.0% of study participants selected some level of agreement, but only 15.3% strongly agreed. See the demographic findings for all participants below.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

*Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were similar to men’s (4.62 and 4.56, resp.).

*\*Age:* The strongest agreement levels came from the 50–54 and 60–69 age categories.

*\*Education:* The strongest agreement came from the “less than high school” and graduate degree categories, and those hovered near “somewhat agree.”

*Marital Status:* There were no significant differences among the marital status categories.

*\*Income:* Participants who had incomes of less than \$25,000 had significantly lower agreement levels.

*\*Children:* Parents were significantly more likely to agree than were nonparents.

*\*Race & Ethnicity:* Asian respondents were less likely to agree with this statement than other categories. Black participants had the strongest agreement statistical mean.

*Religion:* Although not significant, Protestants and Catholics agreed the most strongly that they knew where to find resources for sexual assault in their communities. However, the statistical means for each was still slightly less than “somewhat agree.”

*\*Employment:* Full-time home-makers and the unemployed had lower levels of agreement than respondents in the other employment categories.

*Residency:* There were no significant differences among categories.

*\*Counties:* Cache (5.63) and Iron (5.42) counties agreed at significantly higher levels than all other counties or regions in the state. The least agreement came from Utah, Salt Lake, Box Elder, and Davis counties (4.44 to 4.59).

## CONCLUSION

This summary highlights key findings from four questions about sexual assault. Respondents from across the state participated in the study (see [Back-ground & Methods](#) for the demographic details on both samples). Each question illuminates the perceptions and attitudes of Utahns on sexual assault.

In the past, Utah’s challenges with sexual assault have seldom been openly discussed. However, with limited resources, the tireless work of hundreds around the state helping survivors of sexual assault has been happening. Yet, [research](#) shows that only 11.8% of individuals who have experienced rape or sexual assault in Utah report the crime to law enforcement. In the past few years, awareness of this significant societal problem has risen, but the work has just begun. This study has found that there is still a serious lack of awareness regarding the problem, resources, and solutions. To keep more Utah women and girls safe, the work around awareness building and prevention must catapult forward.

Learn more by contacting the [Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#).

#### For questions and information:

- [uwlp@usu.edu](mailto:uwlp@usu.edu)
- [utwomen.org](http://utwomen.org)
- [abolderwayforward.org](http://abolderwayforward.org)

