

of violence, and maybe that will make the topic easier to confront.

Sexual assault and rape are synonymous in Nebraska law. Sexual assault always involves force, threat of force, coercion or deception. It also occurs when the assailant knew or should have known that the victim could not resist or appraise the nature of his or her conduct.

State statute defines three degrees of sexual assault:

- First degree — dexual penetration either anally, orally or vaginally.

- Second and third degree — sexual contact. Serious personal injury is an instance of second degree assault.

- Third degree — sexual contact with less force; usually by threats or coercion.

Lezlie Hartford is a community educator/crisis counselor at the Rape Spouse Abuse Crisis Center. Contrary to popular ideas, Hartford says, first-degree assault doesn't always include bloodshed or bruises, and third-degree sexual assault has as much emotional impact on the victim as first-degree. She says that the difference between second- and third-degree is that second-degree entails more physical injury and more mental anguish.

In a spring 1985 study by the Campus Security Advisory Committee, 16 to 18 percent of women at UNL said they'd been sexually assaulted; 80 percent of the women on campus said they'd experienced sexually aggressive behavior.

“I had to convince myself that it wasn't my fault. I thought I could make it better,” Tracy says. But the abuse got worse after they agreed to get married.

The fear, she says, was “incredible.” She was scared to leave, afraid to let go. “I thought he would come after me,” she remembers.

“I think he genuinely loved me. He just had two personalities,” she says. Little things changed him; stress or a few drinks put him in a different frame of mind. She remembers the times when he'd shove her or push her around.

People in abusive relationships tend to be more traditional, adhering to standard male and female roles, not necessarily in body and appearance but in attitude, Hartford says. Abuse doesn't discriminate; anyone, regardless of social class, religion, or ethnic background, can be a victim.

Abuse usually starts subtly with emotional abuse, Hartford says. Assaults on one's appearance, worth, or housekeeping abilities can evolve into slaps, shoves and attacks with objects or fists. Or the abuser may harm the victim's property or pets. Abusive relationships aren't violent all the time, either. Above all, nothing *makes* a person abuse another person, she says. It's a choice.

Date rape is most likely to occur on the second or third

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Other surveys of college students reveal similar statistics. A 1984 study at Moorehead State University in Minnesota said that nearly 17 percent of 2,388 students from seven colleges and universities in the Midwest have either been victims or perpetrators of abuse in a dating relationship. Nearly 25 percent of 355 students surveyed at Oregon State University said they were involved in violent relationships. And nearly half of the 25 percent said they stayed in the abusive relationship.

Hartford offers additional statistics:

- 6 percent of all cases of domestic violence are women against men.

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Chris Eskridge, an associate professor in UNO's criminal justice department, has surveyed nearly 1,000 UNL students about deviant behavior. Since he began the study in 1984, 19 percent of the 392 women surveyed say they've been forced by a man to have sex. Of the 605 men surveyed, 6.8 percent said that they've forced women to have sex with them against their wills.

Most people don't want to look at the reality of an abusive relationship, Hartford says. People tend to deny reality in our society, she says; they make violence OK with actions like spanking.

date, while physical abuse — often defined as an attack that leaves a mark — usually occurs after a period of serious dating, says Bill Meredith, assistant professor of human development and family. Drinking or drug use and abuse play a part in half of all courtship violence, he says.

Meredith stresses in his 400/800 level course on family violence that it's impossible to look at violence in dating without looking at other areas of abuse like child abuse and neglect, incest and rape.

Most class members are human development majors, but some psychology, criminal justice, social work majors and others fill up the class. When they discussed courtship violence, students wondered why victims often fear that they have no other alternative; people who stay in such a relationship usually have low self-esteem. Often women stay because they believe they can change their partner with their love after they get married. Financial resources also dictate that a woman stay with a man despite abuse — where would she go and how would she take care of herself if she left? Some women feel that they deserve the abuse for something that really is their fault. “Can't you cook any better than this?”

To get out of the situation, Meredith says, the victim needs to be re-educated and her self-esteem elevated.

“We have very warped views of sexuality,” he says. “People don't look at each other as people but as objects.” But in rape, though, sexuality isn't the prime issue, but rather control and power.
