

Opinion: Alcohol and sexual assault tied together

By Emily Yoffe, Slate

In one awful high-profile case after another – the U.S. Naval Academy; Steubenville, Ohio; now the allegations in Maryville, Mo. – we read about a young woman, sometimes only a girl, who goes to a party and ends up being raped. As soon as the school year begins, so do reports of female students sexually assaulted by their male classmates.

A common denominator in these cases is alcohol, often copious amounts, enough to render the young woman incapacitated. But a misplaced fear of blaming the victim has made it somehow unacceptable to warn inexperienced young women that when they get wasted, they are putting themselves in potential peril.

A 2009 study of campus sexual assault found that by the time they are seniors, almost 20 percent of college women will become victims, overwhelmingly of a fellow classmate. Very few will ever report it to authorities. The same study states that more than 80 percent of campus sexual assaults involve alcohol. Frequently both the man and the woman have been drinking.

The men tend to use the drinking to justify their behavior, as this survey of research on alcohol-related campus sexual assault by Antonia Abbey, professor of psychology at Wayne State University, illustrates, while for many of the women, having been drunk becomes a source of guilt and shame.

Sometimes the woman is the only one drunk and runs into a particular type of shrewd—and sober—sexual predator who lurks where women drink like a lion at a watering hole. For these kinds of men, the rise of female binge drinking has made campuses a prey-rich environment.

I've spoken to three recent college graduates who were the victims of such assailants, and their stories are chilling.

Let's be totally clear: Perpetrators are the ones responsible for committing their crimes, and they should be brought to justice. But we are failing to let women know that when they render themselves defenseless, terrible things can be done to them.

Young women are getting a distorted message that their right to match men drink for drink is a feminist issue. The real feminist message should be that when you lose the ability to be responsible for yourself, you drastically increase the chances that you will attract the kinds of people who, shall we say, don't have your best interest at heart. That's not blaming the victim; that's trying to prevent more victims.

Read the whole story