

# The Connection Between Sexual Violence and Substance Use Among Missouri College Students

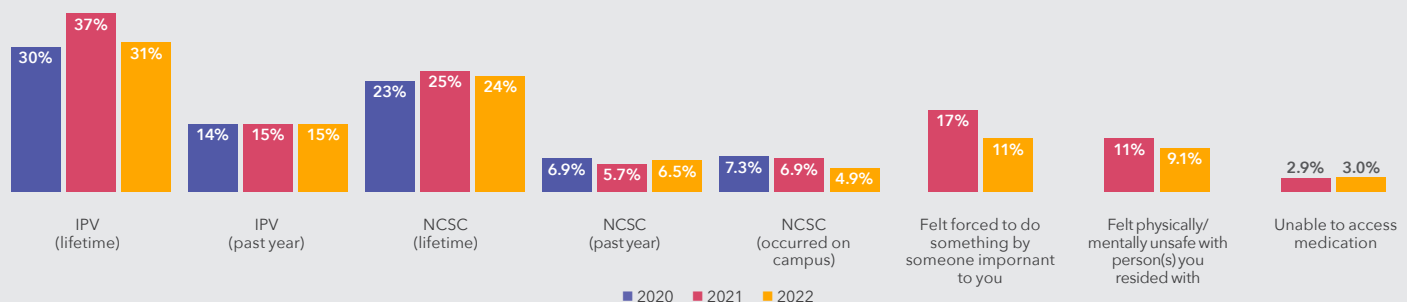
Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 24 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to address the critical health behaviors of college students using evidence-informed interventions. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illicit and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will evaluate the impacts that experiences of sexual violence, such as non-consensual sexual contact and intimate partner violence, has had on the substance use behaviors of Missouri college students, demonstrated by the results of the 2022 MACHB.

## Prevalence of Sexual Violence and Substance Use

Sexual violence includes acts such as non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) and intimate partner violence (IPV), which are common occurrences among college-aged individuals (18-24). This is demonstrated by the results of the MACHB, which are depicted in Chart 1. About 15% of Missouri college students indicated they experienced IPV in the past year while 6.5% experienced NCSC in the past year. It is important

to note that in 2022, 4.9% of students stated that the NCSC they experienced occurred while attending their university, indicating that sexual violence is occurring in environments that are meant to promote academic and personal well-being. Chart 1 also demonstrates how 30% of Missouri college students experienced IPV in their lifetime, while 1 in 4 Missouri students have experienced NCSC in their lifetime. Being cognizant of the lifetime sexual violence experiences of college students will better inform programming and messaging surrounding sexual violence prevention.

Chart 1: Prevalence of Sexual Violence Among Missouri College Students (2020-2022)

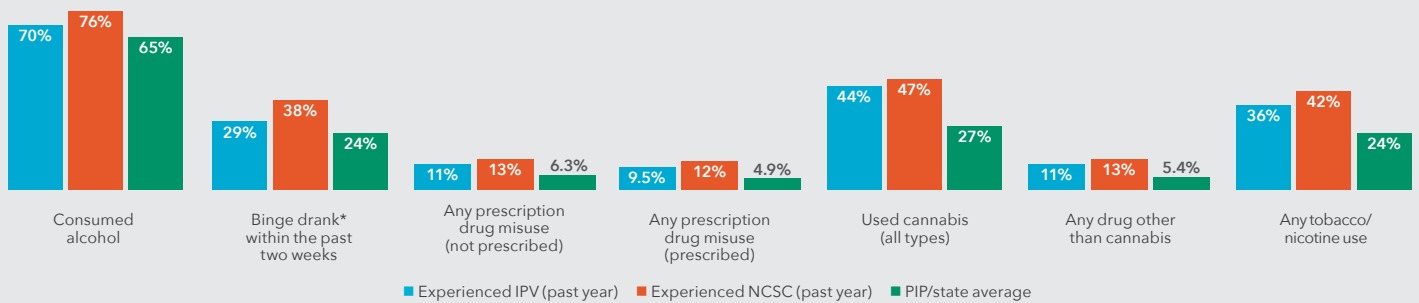


Rates of sexual violence in the past year have stayed the same or slightly increased since 2020. Sexual violence is a pertinent and ubiquitous problem on college campuses that needs to be addressed in order to mitigate the negative consequences of sexual violence, such as poor mental health and substance use outcomes.

## The Connection Between Substance Misuse and Sexual Violence

Chart 2 supports the claim that Missouri college students, who stated that they experienced IPV or NCSC in the past year, have higher rates of substance misuse than the average Missouri college student. Dangerous behaviors, such as binge drinking, prescription drug misuse, and using any drug other than cannabis, are all higher than the state average among both groups. Among students who have experienced sexual violence in the past year, it is vital to note that students who experienced NCSC have the highest rates of substance misuse.

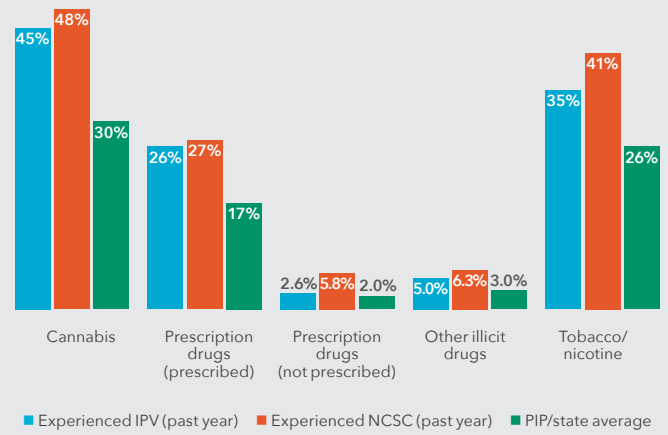
Chart 2: Substance Misuse (Past Year) Among Students that Experienced Sexual Violence (Past Year) - 2022



While we cannot determine a causal link between sexual violence and substance misuse, we can conclude that sexual violence and substance misuse behaviors are strongly connected as exhibited by Chart 2. It is vital for campus health centers and administrations to develop programs and policies that not only treat substance misuse but acknowledge the effect an individual's experience of sexual violence may have on their relationships with substances.

Looking at Chart 3, it is evident that students that experienced IPV and NCSC in the past year engage in

Chart 3: Used Alcohol (Past Year, 2022) and...



poly-use behaviors\*\* at higher rates than all Missouri college students. The data from the 2022 MACHB not only reveals that rates of substance misuse is higher among students who experienced IPV and NCSC in the past year, but the rates of more risky behaviors, such as poly-use, are also higher among this group of students. Experiences of IPV and NCSC in the past year may be risk factors for risky substance use.

## Implications

As substance use and sexual violence continue to permeate Missouri college campuses, it is important to look at the connection between the two issues. Students who have experienced sexual violence, such as IPV and NCSC, have higher rates of alcohol and drug use. Not only do these students use substances at higher rates, but they also use these substances in riskier ways, such as enacting in binge drinking or poly-use. This trend is seen nation-wide<sup>1</sup>. College campuses should acknowledge that the impacts that

sexual violence, both lifetime and in the past year, could impede the academic and personal well-being of their students.

By addressing the connection between sexual violence and substance use, Missouri universities and colleges can create an environment that supports the overall well-being of their students. Strategies that could promote the well-being of impacted students would be to increase the awareness of sexual violence policies and to ensure that these policies are consistently enforced. While both substance use and sexual violence are nuanced and complex issues, tackling them together through targeted support and prevention programs can also help mitigate negative mental and physical health concerns of students who are impacted by sexual violence and are most susceptible to high-risk behaviors.

## Resources

**MOCADSV** (Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence)

MOCADSV provides educational materials about sexual violence and technical support for domestic and sexual violence providers. MOCADSV hosts workshops and trainings where new directors of victim service programs can learn about administration, management, finance, and communication procedures. Visit [mocadsv.org](https://mocadsv.org) for more information.

## ENGAGE

Engage is the new, multi-level violence prevention strategy available to campuses in Missouri. The program focuses on encouraging a culture of care and a desire to engage in preventing potentially harmful situations. Engage focuses on key health and safety topics with shared risk and protective factors including issues related to alcohol and other drug use, bias and discrimination, interpersonal violence, and mental well-being and suicide. The main components of Engage include an online introductory training (which can be found at [mopiptraining.org/engage](https://mopiptraining.org/engage)), in-person training content (both overview and deeper dive trainings), and a community level violence prevention toolkit. Learn more about Engage at [mopip.org/engage](https://mopip.org/engage).

**RAINN** (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network)

RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN provides programs to prevent sexual violence and support survivors through their healing and judiciary processes. RAINN is also connected to sexual assault service providers across the nation.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared by Emily Kiernan, Research Intern. Data prepared by Kayleigh Greenwood and Megan Mottola, Research Coordinators. Published October 2022.

1. Victims of sexual violence: Statistics. RAINN. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2022, from <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>

\*Binge Drinking is defined as consuming 5+ drinks within 2 hours

\*\*Poly-use behaviors are defined as using two or more substances at the same time