

# Preventing Sexual Violence in Washington

Strengthening Communities to Stop Sexual Violence BEFORE it Occurs



The Washington State Department of Health is using innovative strategies and partnerships to prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence across the state. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **Rape Prevention and Education (RPE)** program, Washington works with a diverse group of partners, including the Washington State Department of Commerce/Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OCVA), Washington State Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP), community sexual assault programs, community coalitions and stakeholders, and other local, state, and national agencies to build community capacity to **stop sexual violence BEFORE it occurs**.

## WHAT IS WASHINGTON DOING TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Washington State's RPE program supports communities in **preventing the first-time occurrence of sexual violence**. This is done by **building community capacity** to identify and transform the underlying conditions that allow sexual violence to exist and changing the harmful norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes that cause sexual violence. As part of the strategy to achieve these goals, RPE program activities are designed to **shift the ownership of solutions** from RPE programs and/or service providers to the community itself. The RPE program also encourages the development of comprehensive prevention strategies through activities that **address multiple levels of social influence** – creating change in individuals, relationships, communities, and society.

## WHY IS WASHINGTON WORKING TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

In Washington:

**33%**

of adult women report having been sexually assaulted during their lifetimes

**20%**

of women who experience sexual assault have been the victim of multiple assaults by different offenders

**18%**

of women who experience sexual assault first experience it prior to the age of 18

Source: *Sexual Assault Experiences and Perceptions of Community Response to Sexual Assault: A Study of Washington State Women, 2001* (<http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/research/sexualassaultexpr2001-11.pdf>)

The CDC RPE program has been strengthening our communities and striving to reduce the burden of sexual violence since 1994. CDC provides RPE funding to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

## WHAT IMPACT IS THE RPE PROGRAM INTENDED TO HAVE IN WASHINGTON?

The Washington RPE program aims to prevent sexual violence by promoting **non-violent social norms, attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices**.



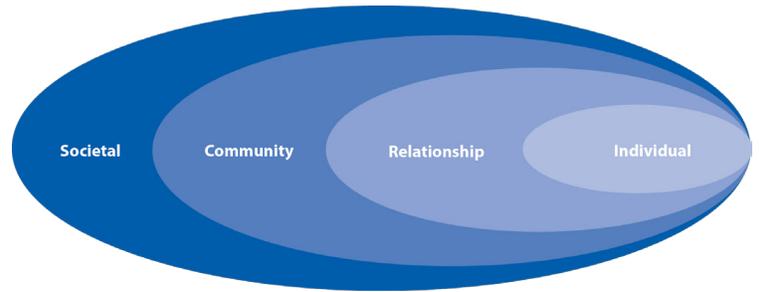
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### WHAT ARE LEVELS OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND WHY DO THEY MATTER FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION?

The ultimate goal of sexual violence prevention is to stop the violence before it begins. Prevention requires understanding the factors that influence violence. CDC uses a four-level social-ecological model to better understand violence and the effect of potential prevention strategies.<sup>1</sup> The overlapping rings in the model illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level, and research suggests that in order to prevent violence, it is necessary to act across multiple levels of the model at the same time. This approach is more likely to sustain prevention efforts over time than any single intervention. Each level of the model has been described by CDC as follows:



**INDIVIDUAL:** The first level identifies biological and personal history factors that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Some of these factors are age, education, income, substance use, or history of abuse. In Washington, high school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can engage in an ongoing project about healthy relationships. In addition to classroom education and age-appropriate activities that support skills development, students in special education classes are invited to attend Healthy Relationships Movie Nights to practice their skills in a social context with their friends and peers.

**RELATIONSHIP:** The second level examines close relationships that may increase the risk of experiencing violence as a victim or perpetrator. In Washington, lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth ages 11-14 can participate in eight-week community-based prevention groups. Each group engages in age-appropriate weekly activities that address topics such as identity, social media safety, interpersonal boundaries and consent, and healthy communication and relationships.

**COMMUNITY:** The third level explores the settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming victims or perpetrators of violence. In Washington, the Coaching Boys Into Men program is being implemented at a mainstream urban high school with an elite athletic program. Due to initial success of the program, the school administration has decided to make Coaching Boys Into Men an expectation for all sports teams. With additional implementations planned, the program will continue to impact the social environment and sports culture at the school.

**SOCIETAL:** The fourth level looks at the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited. In Washington, the RPE program focuses on addressing root causes of violence and shifting social norms that can contribute to a climate in which violence is accepted or tolerated. Some examples of common social norms that local programs target include power, equality, equity, respect, and gender.

**What does this mean for Washington?** Thanks to funding from the CDC RPE program, efforts are underway across the state to:

**DECREASE RISK FACTORS**  
that make it more likely that people will experience sexual violence

**INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS**  
that make it less likely that people will experience sexual violence

**CREATE SAFER COMMUNITIES**  
by preventing sexual violence from occurring in the first place

For additional information or to locate contact information for the state RPE program, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/rpe/states.html>

<sup>1</sup> Dahlberg LL, Krug EG. Violence—a global public health problem. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002:1–56.

