

Cal-VEX 2022: Past-year Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Perpetration in California

BACKGROUND

The majority of California adults have been victims of some form of [sexual harassment or sexual violence](#) in their lifetime, and these experiences of abuse [exacerbate elevated mental health concerns](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prevention of sexual harassment and sexual violence (SHV) should focus on potential perpetrators, but little data exist on those who report committing SHV.

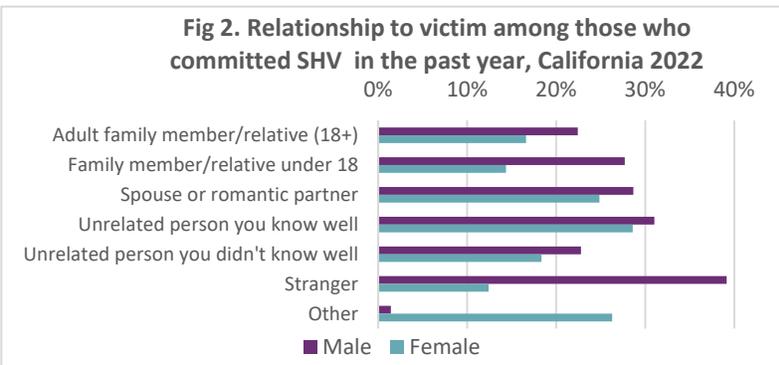
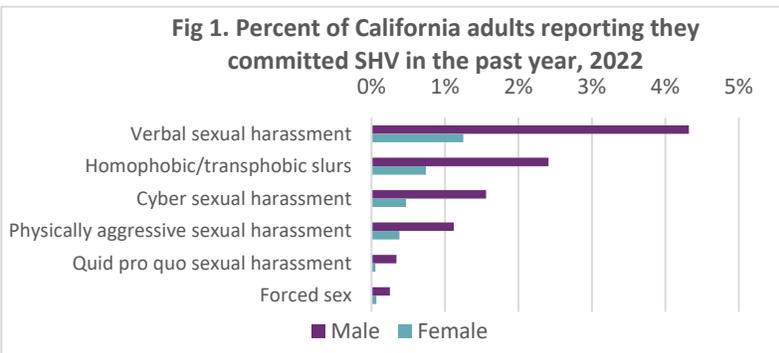
Objective. To assess reports of committing SHV, and relationship to victim among those reporting that they have engaged in perpetrating violence, among a state-representative sample of California adults age 18+.

METHODS

The California Study on Violence Experiences across the Lifespan (Cal-VEX) is an annual state-representative online survey on experiences of violence and health conducted with California residents aged 18 and older. These analyses use March 2022 data from 2,285 respondents. The Cal-VEX survey included a series of items asking respondents whether they had used any of six forms of sexual violence (verbal sexual harassment, homophobic or transphobic slurs, cyber sexual harassment, physically aggressive sexual harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment, or forced sex) against someone in the past year. If they reported using violence, we asked them to report the nature of the relationship with the person they used violence against.

FINDINGS

We found that 5% of our total sample – 1 in 20 Californians - reported that they had committed at least one form of SHV in the past year - 7.5% of men and 2.7% of women. This amounts to 1.1 million men and 400,000 women in California reporting these behaviors. Those who reported perpetrating SHV most commonly committed verbal sexual harassment (4.3% of men and 1.3% of women) followed by using homophobic and transphobic slurs (2.4% of men and 0.7% of women) (Fig 1). Men most commonly reported that the victim of their SHV was a stranger, where women most commonly reported that the victim was an unrelated person the respondent knew well, such as a friend, classmate or co-worker (Fig 2). While participants were least likely to report committing forced sex and quid pro quo (coercive) sex, 0.5% of men reported one or both of these behaviors; this amounts to more than 78,000 men reporting that they committed forced or coercive sex in the past year. Finally, we found that most people who reported perpetrating SHV also reported SHV victimization in the past year (80%).



CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conservatively, the Cal-VEX study provides evidence that more than 1.1 million men and 400,000 women committed sexual harassment and/or sexual violence abuses in the past year in California – and more than 78,000 men committed forced/coercive sex and would disclose that behavior. A number of SHV prevention programs [have been shown to reduce perpetration of violence](#); findings point to the need for greater investments in such SHV prevention activities, with increased focus on verbal sexual harassment and homophobic/transphobic slurs. Findings that most perpetrators of violence are also victims of violence highlights the need for integrated SHV prevention and intervention approaches.

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