

# Campus Sex Abuse By Authority Figures

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LAUREN'S KIDS

PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE  
HEALING SURVIVORS

Sexual violence on college campuses is well-documented, with 13% of all college students experiencing rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence or incapacitation, according to the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN).

## But how common is sexual abuse of students by campus authority figures?

Two high-profile cases claimed hundreds of victims:

Dr. Richard Strauss, former Ohio State team doctor was found to sexually abuse more than 400 OSU alumni throughout the doctor's two decades at the university, making the case the most extensive sex abuse scandal in the history of higher education. Most of the victims were athletes and though nearly all suffered serious life consequences, in most cases, they didn't realize that they were victims of abuse for many years. According to a report released by OSU, Strauss committed at least 1,429 acts of fondling and 47 acts of rape.

Similarly, hundreds of women and girls were sexually assaulted by former Michigan State faculty member and team doctor Larry Nassar while at MSU. Nassar was also found to have assaulted Olympic gymnasts while working with USA Gymnastics and the U.S Olympic Committee.

*Were these isolated cases or signs of an endemic problem?*

In June 2021, Lauren's Kids commissioned a survey of college-educated adults in cooperation with attorneys Ben Crump and Richard Schulte, who together represent hundreds of the victims of the OSU and MSU abuse. The survey of 1,500 college-educated Americans was fielded June 2-3, 2021, including 767 under the age of 45. The margin of error is +/- 3.5% at 95% confidence level. The results are representative of

college-educated American adults in terms of race, gender, income, and region.

The results were shocking: Not only is sexual abuse and harassment by authority figures common on college campuses, reported by 1 in 10 of those surveyed, **among athletes it is endemic.**

## Athletes

### ATHLETES 2.5 TIMES AS LIKELY TO SUFFER ABUSE BY A CAMPUS AUTHORITY FIGURE

More than **1 in 4** current and former college male and female athletes say they endured inappropriate sexual contact from a campus authority figure – most often a male professor or coach.

**28%** suffered inappropriate sexual contact

**26%** were threatened to keep them from declining or reporting advances

**19%** were sexually harassed

**42%** were subject to grooming (inappropriate touch, words, or looks)

*"The risk of sexual abuse and exploitation doesn't end when our children go off to college. If anything, they face a whole new set of risks, even from the authority figures who are supposed to protect them. While the overwhelming number of authority figures on college campuses enrich students' lives, college students must also be educated about what to do if anyone – a coach, a professor, a doctor, mentor or advisor – crosses a line."*

**—Lauren Book, founder of Lauren's Kids  
and Florida State Senator**

## COACHES WERE THE GROUP MOST IDENTIFIED AS INFLICTING THE ABUSE

- 44% athletic coach
- 39% professor
- 28% academic advisor
- 23% administrator
- 21% counselor or therapist
- 21% medical professional

## 74% of perpetrators were male

### ATHLETES WHO SUFFERED ABUSE FELT PRESSURE NOT TO REPORT IT

- 45% were afraid the perpetrator would punish their grade, career or status on a team
- 37% were afraid of losing their scholarship
- 28% felt ashamed
- 27% didn't want to be looked at differently by peers
- 24% liked the perpetrator and didn't want to hurt them
- 22% had no concrete proof and didn't want to be thought of as a liar

Like many of the victims of Strauss and Nassar, the surveyed athletes who say they suffered abuse doubted themselves: 39% weren't sure it was bad enough to warrant reporting.

"The embarrassment of what happened made me not want to say anything to anyone."

"I felt pressure to remain silent to protect my spot on the team. Weakness was frowned upon."

"We were concerned about our image. It felt like no one wanted to be the first one to come forward."

"He was a physician. I thought anything I said would be dismissed."

"He was an authority figure and I felt pressure to do what he said and not to say anything."

—Ohio State University students

"The pressure on college athletes to endure sexual abuse by coaches and other authority figures is enormous. For many, playing college sports is their ticket to college and a pro career. They simply aren't willing to risk losing a scholarship or a starting position on a team by disclosing what's going on."

—Ben Crump, victim's rights lawyer

### MANY ATHLETES FAIL TO REPORT

39% disclosed the abuse to a friend or family member only, and 23% did not report it to anyone.

Just 1 in 4 reported it to campus administrators.

34% were unaware they could bring a lawsuit forward without revealing their identity publicly





## NEARLY ALL ABUSED ATHLETES SUFFERED LIFE CONSEQUENCES

Of those athletes who experienced inappropriate sexual contact by a campus authority figure, *98% reported at least one negative life consequence.*

**50%** had financial consequences, including a lost job, legal bills or bankruptcy

**59%** experienced academic consequences, including lower grades, changing majors, transferring schools, or leaving school entirely

**50%** had health consequences, including avoiding medical treatment, PTSD, anxiety or other mental health issue, or a substance abuse problem

**53%** had a social consequence, including failed relationships or marriages, loss of status on a team, or dropped out of playing

**Athletes who were victims of inappropriate sexual contact report DOUBLE the rates (2x) of negative life experiences in terms of health, social relationships, and financial consequences while in college.**

*"These results point to a toxic environment on college campuses that demands systemic change. Victims need to know they can fight back without going public with their stories."*

**—Rick Schulte, victim's rights lawyer**



*"When I first told my family, many years later, I felt a huge weight off my shoulders. It was a weight that I did not even know was really there."*

*"It definitely impacted my life. I dropped out of OSU. My life could have been different."*

*"It screwed up every relationship I had for the next 30 years. I went through counseling to try to get past what happened."*

*"I felt like I needed to say something. I kept this secret for decades."*

**—Ohio State University students**

## MOST ATHLETES KNOW SOMEONE WHO SUFFERED ABUSE BY A CAMPUS AUTHORITY FIGURE

A shocking **83%** of athletes were aware of someone else who endured some form of sexual abuse by a campus authority figure, including:

**21%** rape or sexual assault

**34%** using their position of authority to coerce a student sexually

**55%** touching or hugging a student inappropriately

**27%** engaging in consensual sexual contact with a student while in a position of authority over them

## AND SAW BEHAVIORS INDICATIVE OF HARASSMENT AND GROOMING

**32%** harassing a student based on their gender, appearance, or sexuality

**45%** making inappropriate or suggestive comments to a student

**27%** looking at students in a way that made them uncomfortable

## AND KNEW STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED COERCION NOT TO REPORT

**22%** knew students whose grades were threatened if they reported

**25%** knew students whose grade or career were threatened if they declined a sexual advance

College students have specific rights under Title IX — to information, to investigation, to action, and to legal representation. Anyone who thinks they have been victimized by sexual abuse or harassment should know their rights. **For a guide to your rights under Title IX, visit [bencrumpstage1.wpengine.com/sexual-abuse-and-harrasment/](http://bencrumpstage1.wpengine.com/sexual-abuse-and-harrasment/)**

## Club Members

Parents often send their children off to college with advice to get actively involved in campus organizations to maximize their college experience. But after student athletes, those active in clubs are the next most likely group to suffer sexual abuse at the hands of a campus authority figure.

### Club members nearly twice as likely to suffer abuse by a campus authority figure

Nearly **1 in 5** who were active in clubs in college say they endured inappropriate sexual contact from a campus authority figure – most often a male professor or coach.

**18%** suffered inappropriate sexual contact

**15%** were threatened

**14%** were sexually harassed

**32%** experienced grooming (inappropriate touch, words or looks)

### 37% of club members weren't sure it was bad enough to warrant reporting

Club members also reported similar reasons for not reporting the abuse and similar life consequences.

Like athletes, an overwhelming majority of club members (**74%**) were aware of someone else who endured some form of sexual abuse by a campus authority figure, with **16%** saying they knew someone who was raped or sexually assaulted by a campus authority figure and **29%** knowing someone who was coerced sexually by a campus authority figure. Nearly **1 in 5** knew other students who experienced coercion not to report.

Nearly a third of club members did not report the abuse to anyone.

Just as we urge parents to teach their kindergarteners that 'It's ok to tell,' our young adult children need the same message."

—Lauren Book, founder of Lauren's Kids  
and Florida State Senator

For a parent conversation guide,  
visit [laurenskids.org/college-conversation-guide-consent-reporting-and-title-ix/](https://laurenskids.org/college-conversation-guide-consent-reporting-and-title-ix/)

If you or someone you love has experienced sexual violence, please contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE (4673) or [rainn.org](https://rainn.org)) for support. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7 in English and Spanish.

