



How Can Physical Assault on College or University Campuses Be Prevented?

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Abstract

Sexual violence victimization is very common among college and university students worldwide. Not only is sexual violence against undergraduate students common, but it may also have devastating short-term and longer-term sequela in a variety of domains. A recent sequence of highly publicized sexual assaults and the ambiguous responses by the educational institutions has led the academic administrators and policymakers to interventive and legislative change. For these changes to be effective, legislators and academic administrators are in need of effective protection of victims, perpetrator punishment, and encouragement of institutional obedience with relevant legislation. This paper aims to review past research studies to initially examine the root causes of sexual assault occurring on college or university campuses, then to suggest an appropriate solution to prevent or at least reduce this issue.

Keywords: *Sexual Assault; College; Emotional Damage; Mental Health; Intervention; Long-Lasting Effect*

Introduction

Sexual assault is defined by the US Department of Justice as any type of sexual behavior, from touching to rape, without the clear consent of the person. Such incidences are occurring at higher rates making it a major public health issue. For instance, according to a survey conducted by the Association of American Universities (AAU) in 2015 and 2019, sexual assault rates increased by 3%, 2.4%, and 1.4% for undergraduate women, graduate and professional women, and undergraduate men respectively (Cantor et al.: 2020). Evidently, young adults are at the highest risk of sexual violence. Youths who are sexually assaulted may face negative effects, such as mental health issues.

Lindquist et al (2013) reported that sexual violence survivors showed more symptoms of depression and were more prone to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those who did not experience sexual assault. Those who have been sexually assaulted have been found to experience a variety of physical health problems, including chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma and arthritis), chronic headaches, fatigue, injuries (e.g., bruises, cuts, and scratches), sleep disturbance, sexually transmitted infections, sexual dysfunction, and, for women, unwanted pregnancy (Campbell, Sefl, & Ahrens: 2003; Eby, Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson: 1995; Fisher et al.: 2000; Koss, Koss, & Woodruff: 1991). Certain

initiatives need to be implemented to prevent college students from experiencing such violence and its negative consequences. Systematic study of sexual assault is important for many reasons, including the deleterious effects it can have on survivors' health. Sexual assault has been associated with injury as well as a range of mental disorders. In community samples, clinically significant symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse have been observed in adult women. In a representative national sample of women, a lifetime history of rape was associated with elevated prevalence of PTSD (36%), major depression (36%) and alcohol abuse (20%).

The Main Part

There are certain root factors leading to sexual assaults frequently occurring on college campuses, including substance abuse, not reporting the assault, and peer pressure (Siefkes-Andrew and Alexapolous: 2018). It is reported that most campus sexual assaults involve substance abuse. Generally, college is the period that many youths use alcohol and drugs for the first time. According to a study, 50% of college students experienced incapacitated rape, meaning they were sexually assaulted when they were under the influence, without them realizing what was occurring. Also, most of these students (43%) seem to feel the peer pressure to engage in social activities that involve smoking, drinking, and using drugs (Abbey: 2002). Lastly, another major reason for the high prevalence of sexual assaults on campuses is not reporting it. Paul and Gray (2011) found that only one in 10 college students report the violence to the police. It may be emotionally and psychologically challenging to disclose the assault, but it can prevent the assaulter from attacking others.

Although sexual assault is assault regardless of substance use, alcohol and other drugs are contributing factors in rape and sexual assault prevalence on college campuses. Studies reveal a strong correlation between students' intoxication and incidence of sexual assault (Hines et al.: 2012), with drug or alcohol-facilitated rape more than twice as common (Hines et al.: 2012; Krebs et al.: 2009). In addition to the increased likelihood of victimization, intoxication reduces the probability that victims hold their attacker responsible, label their experience as a sexual assault (Cleere & Lynn: 2013), or report the experience (Edwards et al.: 2014).

Intoxication at the time of sexual assault contributes to self-blame in many victims (Jones et al.: 2009), with 20% of victims blaming themselves (Edwards et al.: 2014). Even for victims who had begged the assailant to stop, assault by an acquaintance resulted in self-blame and minimizing the experience (Edwards et al.: 2014). Those who experienced negative judgment were even more likely to blame themselves and increase their alcohol consumption following the assault (Jones et al.: 2009). Self-blame impairs psychological healing and minimizing the assault can contribute to future victimization (Edwards et al.: 2014).

Discussion

Many colleges in the U.S. implement bystander intervention programs to address the issue of sexual assault. The main goal of these interventions is to encourage witnesses to take action to prevent violence from occurring. However, those intervention programs can have potential negative effects. Research found that 16% to 20% of students indicated that they were injured as a result of their efforts to prevent some form of sexual violence (Krauss et al.: 2017).

Normally, intervention programs aimed at preventing sexual assault on college campuses target females. However, the majority of assault victims are women, while 9 in 10 of attackers are men (Cassel: 2012). This indicates that males are more in need of sexual violence-based education. There are educational programs and lectures regarding the sexual assault that target males specifically. One example of such education programs is Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP). MVP is a sexual violence

program, which was originated in the 1990s in the U.S., was developed for male high-school and college students. The program aims to motivate and support young students to challenge their beliefs and attitudes regarding a number of forms of violence (Cissner: 2009). According to the research conducted by Cassel (2012), the use of prevention programs such as MVP, can help to increase personal responsibility, and thus motivation in men for secular assault prevention. Sexual assault prevention program content should include gender-role socialization, risk education, rape myths, rape attitudes, rape avoidance, men's motivation to rape, victim empathy, dating communication, controlled drinking, and/or relapse prevention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sexual violence is a significant issue on college campuses and needs to be addressed with a proper preventive solution. Majority of colleges in the U.S. employ bystander intervention programs, despite its certain disadvantages such as physical damage. Policymakers and administrators must consider empirical evidence when making decisions about compelled disclosure policies. The alternatives outlined above purposefully move away from mandatory reporting as a primary response mechanism, and instead expand voluntary reporting options. Establishing more confidential supports, providing multiple voluntary reporting options, and improving investigation and adjudication processes could help survivors come forward on their own. With a combination of increased voluntary reporting and improved institutional response, universities could potentially remedy more cases of sexual assault, without sacrificing survivors' autonomy. There is a pressing need for additional research to further understand the efficacy and effects of compelled disclosure policies and survivor-centered alternatives. Therefore, colleges should educate students to challenge their beliefs regarding sexual assault, rather than implementing programs that only help to stop the attack from escalating.

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