

Policy Brief for Legislators and Advocates:

Campus Sexual Assault in the U.S.: What Research Tells Us

Overview

This brief provides an overview of existing research on prevalence of campus sexual assault and effective campus sexual assault prevention programming. We hope that it can be used to support the use of scientific evidence for campus sexual assault prevention in the United States.

1 in 5

College women has been a victim of campus sexual assault



Only 16%

of survivors utilize campus crisis or support services

Background

One in five women has been a victim of campus sexual assault.^{1,2}

- College-aged women are at increased risk. Sexual assault is 4x more likely for women 18-24 years, compared to all other ages.³

College men and transgender individuals are also at risk.^{2,4}

- 6% of college men experience campus sexual assault.²
- 1 in 3 transgender people has been raped or sexually assaulted.⁴ Data specific to transgender students is lacking.

80% of sexual assault victims know their perpetrator.^{2,5}

- Most common perpetrators include partners/former partners and friends/acquaintances.^{3,5}
- The majority of rapes of both men and women are perpetrated by men.^{3,5}

Use of Services

Most survivors do not report their sexual assault to formal services.

- Of those reporting forced sexual assault, only 13% report to the police, and only 16% report use of campus crisis or health services.²
- Most of these survivors (69%) do disclose informally, to friends/family.²

Reporting is less likely in cases involving incapacitation due to substance use.

- Disclosure to police in these cases is reported by only 2%.²
- Use of campus crisis and health services is reported by 7%.²

Evidence on Prevention Programming

We need more evidence on campus prevention strategies to protect university students.

- Many institutions have required prevention programs, but there is little to no evidence on their long term effects.

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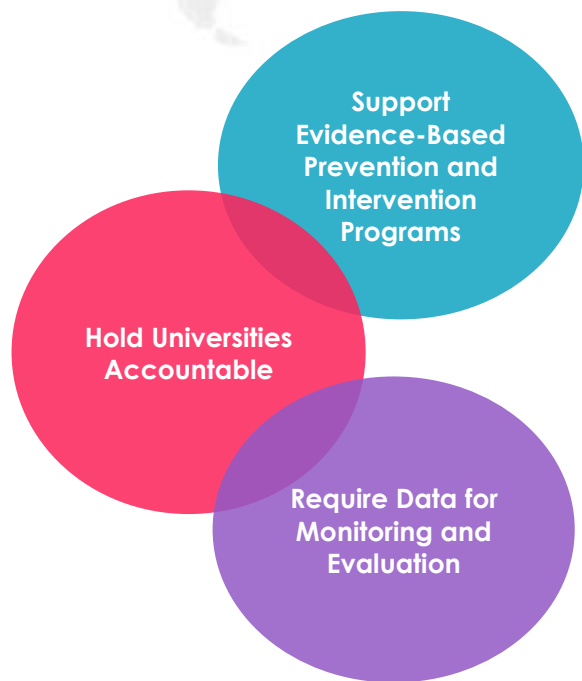
Evidence on Prevention Programming continued...

We know from the research that⁶:

- Interventions tailored to single sex audiences are more effective.
- Professionally-led programs have better impact on beliefs and behavioral intentions, where peer-led programs have greater effect on perceived norms regarding sexual assault.
- Education can clarify the meaning of consent. Skills building can support respectful sexual engagement. Gender equity counseling can support change in disrespectful dynamics.

Novel interventions demonstrating impact on sexual assault include:

- Empowerment and self-defense training for women.⁷
- Bystander training with gender equity counseling to create responsibility among men to stop sexual assaults.⁸



What Legislators Can Do

Ensure there is sufficient funding to provide evidence-based prevention and intervention programming for campuses.

Prioritize engaging male students on campus as allies and for bystander training.

Hold universities accountable for ensuring their services are tailored to the needs of survivors so as to encourage use.

Monitor sexual assault reporting and responses on campus, and **set concrete targets for improvements.**

Support research to generate more evidence **on effective sexual assault prevention programming.**

Ensure that prevention programs are comprehensive and consider equity issues.

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