

ABSTRACT

Campus Rape Culture: Effects on Individual, Social, and Administrative Levels

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“Rape culture” can be defined as the perpetuation of rape myths, sexual objectification of women, male sexual violence, and victim shaming. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate several factors that contribute to the perpetuation of rape culture across American college campuses and its impact on sexual assault survivors, perpetrators, and college administration. Female college students are one of the most vulnerable demographic groups regarding sexual assault; recent studies report that about one-fifth to one-third of female college students experience sexual assault during their time at a university. A sexual assault experience can prove physically and emotionally damaging to survivors. Additionally, academic performance and social relationships can be negatively impacted by a sexual assault experience, especially when survivors face negative social reactions and inadequate support from university resources. College-age perpetrators of sexual assault appear to share several characteristics with one another (i.e. psychopathic tendencies, specific coercion tactics, rape supportive attitudes), suggesting that some male college students are more likely to commit sexual assault. The perpetuation of rape culture across college campuses ultimately leads to a severe underreporting of rape incidents and widespread misinformation regarding sexual assault. Universities should require bystander intervention training to educate students about sexual assault, increase awareness of university procedures regarding sexual assault investigations, and change the current attitude toward sexual assault survivors and perpetrators.

Keywords: sexual assault, rape culture, college

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CAMPUS RAPE CULTURE: EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL, AND
ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“Rape culture” can be defined as “a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women” (Hildebrand & Najdowski, 2015). Rape culture has been continually perpetuated by America’s widespread endorsement of rape myths and rape supportive attitudes. For instance, it has become a rather common practice to blame sexual assault on the actions of the victim rather than the perpetrator, leading to a widely-held belief that sexual assault is less severe than actually warranted. The purpose of the following literature review is to examine the prevalence of sexual assault on American college campuses, the effects of sexual assault on survivors, common trends among perpetrators, and social and administrative responses. Recommendations for combatting college sexual assault are also explored.

The Danger of Rape Myths

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) describe rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). One such myth that often causes people to question the validity of a sexual assault survivor’s claims is the stereotype that rape is committed by a stranger to the victim. Contrary to this belief, the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the victim knows (Schwartz & Gibbs, 2010). Other damaging rape myths include the ideas that “no” really means “yes”, women who dress or act provocatively deserve to be sexually assaulted, and that it is not the perpetrator’s

fault if alcohol was involved or if he simply could not resist his sexual urges (Schwartz & Gibbs, 2010). The endorsement of rape myths can lead to the development of rape supportive attitudes and a lack of empathy toward sexual assault survivors, which can in turn create a negative environment that discourages survivors from disclosing their experience to peers and authorities. Rape myth acceptance among sexual assault survivors is also common and can lead to feelings of self-blame and denial of severity after a sexual assault experience (Egan & Wilson, 2012; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

Differentiation Between Sexual Assault and Rape

Although “sexual assault” and “rape” are oftentimes considered synonymous terms by the general public, separate definitions have been established for research and legal purposes. The Bureau of Justice Statistics ([BJS], 2016) defines rape as “forced sexual intercourse including both psychological coercion as well as physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal or oral penetration by the offender(s)”. Sexual assault, in comparison, involves a “wide range of victimizations, separate from rape or attempted rape... [such as] attacks or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact” (BJS, 2016). In order to avoid misinterpretation or confusion, researchers will often provide the specific definitions used during data collection and the development of sexual assault measures. For instance, the Campus Climate Survey Validation Study (CCSVS) differentiated between sexual battery, rape, and sexual assault (Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, Shook-Sa, & Peterson, 2016). Such definitions are important to keep in mind when interpreting statistics regarding the prevalence of sexual assault and rape, as some studies may consider these categories mutually exclusive while other studies allow overlap of incident criteria.

Prevalence of Sexual Assault

The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study conducted by Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, and Martin (2007) reported that 28.5% of female college students had experienced attempted or completed sexual assault either before or after entering college; 19% of the reported experiences occurred since entering college. Krebs et al. (2007) also deduced that freshmen and sophomores are at greater risk for sexual assault and that the majority of sexual assault survivors are victimized by men they know. Over half of the reported sexual assault experiences occurred while the survivors were incapacitated due to substance use (Krebs et al., 2007).

More recently, the Campus Climate Survey Validation Study (CCSVS) conducted by Krebs et al. (2016) included nine college campuses during pilot testing. The CCSVS defined “sexual battery” as “any unwanted and nonconsensual sexual contact that involved force”, “rape” as “any unwanted and nonconsensual sexual contact that involved a penetrative act”, and “sexual assault” as “any unwanted and nonconsensual sexual contact that involved either sexual battery or rape” (Krebs et al., 2016, p.62). A cross-school average of 34% of female students reported having experienced sexual assault during their lifetime (Krebs et al., 2016) as compared to 28.5% in Krebs et al.’s (2007) CSA study. The prevalence of completed sexual assault for female students since entering college averaged 21% across the nine schools; the individual campus rates ranged from 12% to 38%. The average rate of sexual assault among females since entering college (21%) in the CCSVS is very similar to the reported rate of 19% in Krebs et al.’s (2007) CSA study. During the 2014-2015 academic year specifically, the prevalence of sexual assault for female students averaged 10.3% (Krebs et al., 2016).

The CCSVS concluded that female students who identified as nonheterosexual were at significantly more risk for experiencing sexual assault than heterosexual female students. Additionally, female freshmen students were at significantly more risk than 2nd through 4th year students at the majority of the nine schools. Only 7% of rape incidents and 2.7% of sexual battery incidents were reported to a school official by the survivor, and an even lower percentage of these incidents (4.2% and 1.1%, respectively) were reported to a law enforcement agency (Krebs et al., 2016). The most commonly cited reason for not reporting a rape incident was that the survivor “did not need any assistance, did not think the incident was serious enough to report, or did not want any action taken” (Krebs et al., 2016, p.111). Other common reasons for lack of reporting included feeling that other people would believe that the assault was the survivor’s fault and feeling worried about getting into trouble. Fortunately, the majority of sexual assault survivors who did report to any official (school or law enforcement) found the official to be helpful (Krebs et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the Association of American Universities (AAU) conducted a wide-scale climate survey in 2015 to gauge the prevalence of sexual assault on American college campuses and provide institutions with recommendations on how to handle and prevent sexual misconduct. The AAU (2015), which defined sexual assault as nonconsensual sexual touching or penetration, reported that the incidence of sexual assault among female undergraduate students was 23.1% across 27 universities. 11% of undergraduates reported that they had experienced sexual assault during the 2014-2015 school year specifically. The incidence of sexual assault tended to be higher among LGBT students (as also reported by Krebs et al., 2016) and students with disabilities

(AAU, 2015). Reporting rates for sexual assault were considerably low and varied slightly depending on the type of assault. For example, only 25.5% of instances involving physically forced penetration were reported to school or law enforcement authorities. The most common reasons for non-reporting among sexual assault survivors included the belief that the assault was not serious enough or that the survivor's embarrassment was too severe. Interestingly enough, about 60% of students responded that they believed a report of sexual assault would be taken seriously by campus officials (AAU, 2015). The fact that the majority of students reported that they believed campus officials would take sexual assault instances seriously suggests that there are reasons behind low reporting rates other than mistrust of authorities. Such reasons, as suggested by other studies, most likely include the acceptance of rape myths and a fear of social repercussions among survivors (Egan & Wilson, 2012; Krebs et al., 2016).

Overreaching Goal

As previously mentioned, this literature review explores the contributing factors of campus rape culture, the effects of sexual assault on students and administration, and best practices for sexual assault intervention on college campuses. It is the hope that this review—along with the growing literature on the severity of college sexual assault and the recent focus on college sexual assault cases in the media—serves as a call to action for universities. By raising awareness and promoting effective intervention tools such as student bystander training, researchers may be able to aid campuses in significantly lowering the prevalence of college sexual assault while simultaneously improving social perceptions of sexual assault survivors.

CHAPTER TWO

Survivors of Sexual Assault

College women who experience sexual assault often report a decrease in grade point average (GPA) and general academic performance following the event. One major contribution to this observed negative impact on academic performance is the development of mental health disorders that affect cognitive function and motivation. Survivors may choose not to attend class following a sexual assault due to severity of depressive symptoms or fear of negative social consequences (i.e. seeing the perpetrator, receiving negative social reactions from peers). Additionally, deficits in cognitive functioning such as lack of attention can affect student performance on schoolwork. Sexual assault has also been linked to long-term deficits in physical health such as increased risk for heart attack and stroke, and these deficits are often mediated by problem behaviors such as heavy drinking and smoking. Furthermore, problem/risky behaviors (i.e. heavy drinking) can lead to revictimization of sexual assault survivors.

Academic Performance and Social Interactions Following Sexual Assault

Negative Impact on Academic Performance

Extensive research on the effects of sexual assault on academic performance has not yet been conducted. However, Jordan, Combs, and Smith (2014) explored the relationship between sexual assault experiences and academic performance as evaluated by GPA among female college students. Female students who experienced a sexual

assault during their first semester of college reported lower GPA scores than non-victims at the end of that semester. Additionally, severity of the sexual assault incident tended to be positively correlated with the severity of academic impact. Possible reasons for decreased academic success among sexual assault survivors include the onset of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), cognitive impairment following a traumatic event, or the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse. Changes in social environment, including reactions to disclosure of the sexual assault, can also influence a survivor's ability to perform well in school (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014). Such findings emphasize the need for further investigation into the extent of which sexual assault experiences negatively impact academic performance of survivors. Counselors and school administration may also want to begin actively assisting sexual assault survivors in continuing their college education after a sexual assault incident in order to improve retention rates and overall academic performance of these survivors.

The Influence of Social Reactions on Mental Health of Survivors

Although the majority of sexual assault survivors confide in someone about their experience, many survivors express feelings of embarrassment and shame and believe that no action will be taken if the incident is reported (AAU, 2015). Ullman and Peter-Hagene (2014) investigated the importance of social reactions during the recovery process for sexual assault survivors. Based on the study results, Ullman and Peter-Hagene (2014) asserted that positive social reactions can lead to greater perceived control over recovery for sexual assault survivors, as well as fewer PTSD symptoms and increased use of adaptive coping mechanisms. Inversely, negative social reactions such as blaming

survivors and treating them differently predicted the presence of more severe PTSD symptoms and the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms among survivors (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). Ullman and Peter-Hagene's (2014) study results suggest that interventions which encourage supportive social reactions to sexual assault disclosure may help survivors recover more quickly and utilize healthy social coping mechanisms rather than adopting avoidant social behaviors.

Effects on Mental Health

Depression and Suicide

According to the National Women's Study conducted by Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour (1992), rape survivors are about three times more likely than non-victims to have ever experienced a major depressive episode. Additionally, 33% of rape survivors experience suicidal thoughts and 13% report having attempted suicide (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Indeed, Santaularia et al. (2014) reported that the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation tends to be significantly higher among sexual assault survivors than among non-victims.

It is important to note that the National Women's Study defined rape as "an event that occurred without the woman's consent, involved the use of force or threat of force, and involved sexual penetration of the victim's vagina, mouth or rectum" (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Therefore, the statistics reported by the National Women's Study regarding depression and suicide ideation among female rape survivors do not include women who have experienced unwanted sexual touching or incomplete rape. Based on this consideration, the prevalence of depression and suicide ideation may be

even higher than reported by the National Women's Study when including women who have experienced different types of sexual assault other than rape.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Some survivors of sexual assault report symptoms fitting the criteria for PTSD. About 5-10% of people who experience a traumatic event develop symptoms persistent enough to warrant a diagnosis of PTSD (Aupperle, Melrose, Stein, & Paulus, 2012). However, the prevalence of PTSD among people who experience sexual assault is significantly higher than among people who experience a non-sexual trauma. In general, about one-third of sexual assault survivors will experience PTSD symptoms at some point in their lifetime (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). The National Center for PTSD (2015) reported that about 94% of female sexual assault survivors experience PTSD symptoms immediately following an assault; these symptoms persist for longer than six months for about 30% of survivors. Symptoms of PTSD among sexual assault survivors can include invasive thoughts or memories of the assault, nightmares, avoidant behavior regarding thoughts, feelings, and situations linked to the assault, and an increase in arousal levels (National Center for PTSD, 2015).

PTSD can have a negative impact on survivors' executive functioning, which may be especially problematic for sexual assault survivors attending college. Aupperle et al. (2012) examined cases of PTSD particular to sexual assault survivors and observed a significant correlation between PTSD symptoms and executive functioning deficits; PTSD may lead to an enhancement in difficulty of sustained attention and cognitive inhibition. For example, study participants demonstrated hyperawareness of emotional triggers and subsequent difficulty in inhibiting their redirected attention to such triggers.

Aupperle et al.'s (2012) report concluded that survivors of sexual assault who develop PTSD may have exhibited subtle cognitive deficits before trauma which were then enhanced by the assault, making these individuals more vulnerable to developing PTSD symptoms. Such findings suggest that some individuals are at higher risk for developing persistent PTSD symptoms following sexual assault and that cognitive functioning—particularly attention and memory—can be impacted by assault experiences (Aupperle et al., 2012). The negative impact on executive functioning may help explain why some sexual assault survivors in college experience a decline in general academic performance.

Mental Contamination

Mental contamination, or mental pollution, can be described as feelings of dirtiness in the absence of a physical contaminant that are induced by internal processes such as thoughts or memories. Mental contamination can also involve feelings of disgust and immorality (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004). Persistent feelings of internal dirtiness can cause sexual assault survivors to experience an urge to wash; these feelings appear to be linked to posttraumatic stress symptom severity (Badour, Feldner, Babson, Blumenthal, & Dutton, 2012; Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004).

Fairbrother and Rachman (2004) assessed female survivors of sexual assault and found that the majority of the women experienced mental contamination and urges to wash in the months following a sexual assault experience. Additionally, the women's feelings of disgust and dirtiness that were consistent with the criteria for mental contamination were correlated with strength of washing urges and PTSD symptom severity (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004). Similarly, Badour et al. (2012) observed that

feelings of dirtiness, disgust, and washing urges were associated with PTSD symptom severity among survivors of sexual assault more so than survivors of non-sexual assault.

Risky Behavior and Revictimization

Some survivors of sexual assault display increased risky behavior following their experience as a way of coping with the mental and emotional effects of the trauma. Santaularia et al. (2014) reported that heavy drinking, binge drinking, and smoking were more common among female sexual assault survivors than among non-victims. Additionally, a study conducted by Najdowski and Ullman (2011) found that female survivors who used maladaptive coping strategies (i.e. problem drinking, blaming themselves, sexual promiscuity) were more likely to experience another sexual assault within one year of initial assault. Revictimization can further lead to higher rates of depression and heightened use of both maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies among female survivors (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011). It is important to note that the relationship between increased alcohol use and revictimization is rather convoluted; heavy drinking is often identified as both a risk factor for sexual assault and as a coping strategy following sexual assault (Santaularia et al., 2014). For this reason, risky behaviors are often viewed as behaviors that increase women's vulnerability to sexual assault and as coping mechanisms after a sexual assault experience.

Long-Term Effects on Physical Health

Along with a myriad of negative effects on mental health, sexual assault can also lead to long-term physical health deficits for sexual assault survivors. Santaularia et al. (2014) observed that after controlling for several demographic factors such as age and

annual household income, female sexual assault survivors reported significantly higher rates of asthma, presence of a disability, heart disease, stroke, and high cholesterol as compared to non-victims. As further noted by Santaularia et al. (2014), prolonged psychological stress following trauma can impact immune functioning and ability to sleep, which may lead to further physical health problems among trauma survivors. Additionally, depression among sexual assault survivors appears positively correlated with increased use of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as smoking and heavy drinking, which are activities that can severely impact physical health (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011). Such findings suggest that a reciprocal relationship may exist between short-term and long-term mental and physical health effects of sexual assault, leading to a higher incidence of chronic illness among sexual assault survivors.

CHAPTER THREE

Perpetrators of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault perpetration rates appear relatively consistent across studies, with the general male population reporting higher perpetration rates than the college male population. Repeat perpetration poses as a serious issue among both populations—the majority of sexual assault perpetrators offend more than once. Perpetrators tend to share several key characteristics with one another, such as certain personality traits (i.e. narcissism, impulsiveness) and strong rape supportive attitudes. Furthermore, it appears that alcohol, which is involved in most sexual assault cases, can heighten sexual aggression among predisposed male offenders. Unfortunately, the punishment rate for college-age sexual assault offenders is extremely low; less than one-fourth of college investigations lead to an expulsion and only about 10% of perpetrators face criminal charges.

Rate of Perpetration

General Population

While conducting a study on the personal characteristics of sexual assault perpetrators, Abbey and Jacques-Tiura (2011) collected data from male participants in a metropolitan area; 43% of participants reported having committed some type of sexual assault since the age of 14. Similarly, just over 43% of the male participants in Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram, and Woerner's (2015) study on sexual assault justifications

reported having demonstrated some type of sexual aggression since the age of 14. The male participants in both studies ranged in age from 18 to 35 and predominantly identified as Caucasian (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Wegner et al., 2015). Both studies used a modified 16-item version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) in order to measure which types of sexual assault had been committed by each participant as well as how many times each type of assault had occurred since the age of 14 (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Wegner et al., 2015).

College population

Compared to rates of sexual assault perpetration among the general male population, Mouilso, Calhoun, and Rosenbloom (2013), Mouilso and Calhoun (2015), and Testa and Cleveland (2017) reported lower prevalence of sexual assault perpetration among male college students. Mouilso, Calhoun, and Rosenbloom (2013) reported that 15.1% of college male participants had perpetrated sexual assault and 4.9% had committed rape since the age of 14. Mouilso and Calhoun's (2015) study found that 18% of participants had perpetrated some form of sexual assault and 4% had committed rape since the age of 14. Testa and Cleveland (2017) reported similar findings with 17.6% of the study's participants having committed some act of sexual assault in at least one semester of college. The participants of these studies were predominantly Caucasian and were university students at the time of data collection (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015; Mouilso, Calhoun, & Rosenbloom, 2013; Testa & Cleveland, 2017). Similar to Abbey and Jacques-Tiura's (2011) and Wegner et al.'s (2015) studies on perpetration within the general population, all three college perpetration studies used either the 16-item modified version of the SES to measure type and frequency of sexual assault (Mouilso, Calhoun, &

Rosenbloom, 2013; Testa and Cleveland, 2017) or a 10-item version of the SES (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015).

Although the prevalence of sexual assault perpetration reported by university studies is quite lower than the prevalence reported by general population studies, these findings still suggest an alarming statistic that about 20% of college men perform at least one act of sexual assault or rape by the time they graduate from a university. One question that future studies may want to address is why the prevalence of sexual assault appears to be almost twice as high among the general male population as among the college male population. As mentioned previously, all five studies reviewed for rate of perpetration used similar versions of the SES to measure sexual assault type and frequency. Assuming that the SES is indeed a valid and reliable measure of perpetration, perhaps the varying levels of prevalence can be explained by the different age groups participating in college studies versus general population studies. Participants older than typical college age may encounter more opportunities to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors, therefore raising the perpetration rate within the general population. Additionally, it could be possible that some college-age participants are wary of truthfully answering questions regarding sexually aggressive behavior for fear of a break in confidentiality, academic or legal punishment, etc. Unwillingness to provide honest answers on the SES could result in a seemingly lower perpetration rate among college students.

Repeat Perpetration

In Lisak and Miller's (2002) study on undetected rapists attending an urban commuter university, 6.4% of male participants reported having committed rape or

attempted rape, a number consistent with Mouilso and Calhoun's (2015) finding that about 4% of college men had committed rape. However, the more shocking finding by Lisak and Miller (2002) was that 63.3% of identified rapists in the study had committed more than one rape; repeat rapists averaged almost six rapes each. Lisak and Miller's (2002) study suggests that the majority of sexual assault perpetrators offend more than once.

Wegner et al. (2015) investigated the predictive power of post-assault justifications and rape supportive attitudes in relation to future perpetration among males ages 18 to 35. During the one-year follow-up interview with participants who qualified as sexual assault perpetrators at baseline, 41.5% reported that they had committed at least one other act of sexual aggression during the one-year follow-up period. The number of reoffenders in Wegner et al.'s (2015) study is lower than the number of reoffenders reported by Lisak and Miller (2002), though it is important to note that Wegner et al. (2015) investigated a wide range of sexual assault acts while Lisak and Miller (2002) focused only on rape. Additionally, Wegner et al.'s (2015) study involved a one-year follow-up measure of repeat perpetration while Lisak and Miller's (2002) study included a sexual history questionnaire¹ that covered a longer time span for repeat offending.

¹A major setback of obtaining an accurate estimate of perpetration (and repeat perpetration) is the reliance of self-report. Due to the possibility of untruthful reporting from participants, researchers must take error into consideration when interpreting perpetrator rates. While self-report does not always provide the most accurate measure of occurrence, the reliability of obtaining a sexual assault perpetration rate ranging from about 15-20% and a rape perpetration rate approximating 5% among college males across multiple studies is promising (Mouilso, Calhoun, & Rosenbloom, 2013; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015; Testa & Cleveland, 2017).

Common Characteristics

Personality Traits

Narcissism. Sexual assault perpetrators appear to demonstrate more narcissistic personality characteristics as compared to non-perpetrators. Mouilso and Calhoun (2015) reported that college men who had committed some act of sexual aggression scored higher on pathological narcissism scales. Similarly, Champion (2003) reported a small but significant correlation between sexual aggression and narcissistic traits among college men. Sense of entitlement—a facet of narcissism—also seems to be associated with sexual assault perpetrators (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011). Although narcissistic personality traits may not hold substantial predictive power regarding sexual assault perpetration, the association between sexual aggression and narcissism remains significant (Champion, 2003; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015).

Psychopathic tendencies. Abbey and Jacques-Tiura (2011) reported that sexual assault perpetrators scored higher on measures of psychopathic traits and antisocial behavior than non-perpetrators. In fact, perpetrators in the study admitted that they were aware of their victim's unwillingness to engage in sex but continued the act anyway. Such disregard for another person's well-being along with an expressed sense of entitlement are common characteristics of psychopathy (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011). Testa and Cleveland (2017) similarly noted that sexual assault perpetrators shared certain personality variables such as antisocial behavior and low self-control.

Impulsivity. Aside from general antisocial behavior, college-age sexual assault perpetrators may also display heightened impulsivity. According to Mouilso, Calhoun, and Rosenbloom (2013), perpetrators scored higher than non-perpetrators on measures of negative urgency, positive urgency, and lack of premeditation—all of which are facets of impulsivity. Based on these findings, Mouilso, Calhoun, and Rosenbloom (2013) proposed that higher levels of impulsivity may reflect deficits in affect regulation and executive control among sexual assault perpetrators.

Use of Verbal Coercion

Mouilso, Calhoun, and Rosenbloom (2013) asserted that college-age perpetrators overwhelmingly favored the tactic of verbal coercion during an act of sexual assault (82.6% versus 26.1% by use of alcohol/drugs and 10.9% by use of force). Abbey and Jacques-Tiura (2011) observed a similar trend among male sexual assault perpetrators from ages 18-35; 79.6% of perpetrators reported use of verbal coercion while only 20.4% relied on the victim's impairment. In contrast, Lisak and Miller (2002) reported that the majority of participants (80.8%) who were identified as rape perpetrators described taking advantage of the victim's incapacitation due to drugs or alcohol rather than by coercion or force. The contradictory findings of Lisak and Miller (2002) may be explained by the study's specific focus on rape perpetrators rather than sexual assault perpetrators.

Rape Supportive Attitudes and Post-Assault Justifications

As Wegner et al. (2015) explain, many sexual assault perpetrators appear to form rape supportive attitudes partly due to their exposure to—and acceptance of—common

rape myths. Examples of rape supportive attitudes that are often endorsed in relation to rape myths include the beliefs that “no” actually means “yes” and that women ask to be raped by dressing provocatively or drinking in excess (Wegner et al., 2015).

In Wegner et al.’s (2015) study, rape supportive attitudes among sexual assault perpetrators ages 18 to 35 were significantly positively correlated with the use of post-assault justifications. The most common post-assault justifications endorsed by perpetrators included “She had gotten you sexually aroused”, “She led you on”, and “You thought she’d enjoy it once it started” (Wegner et al., 2015, p. 1030). Additionally, the use of post-assault justifications was a statistically significant predictor of repeat perpetration the following year (Wegner et al., 2015). Although the predictive relationship between post-assault justifications and repeat perpetration was relatively small in magnitude in Wegner et al.’s (2015) study, the correlation between rape supportive attitudes, post-assault justifications, and likelihood of reoffending suggests that several factors may play a role in a perpetrator’s ability to initiate and repeat sexually aggressive behavior. Additionally, the role of rape supportive attitudes in shaping perpetrators’ post-assault justifications lends evidence to the belief that rape myths negatively influence male sexual behavior.

The Role of Alcohol

About half of all sexual assault incidents involve alcohol consumption by the victim, the perpetrator, or both (Abbey, 2011). The frequency of alcohol involvement in sexual assault cases can lead some people to blame survivors for putting themselves in a vulnerable situation. In contrast, others may attempt to justify perpetrators’ actions by insisting that the event only occurred due to cognitive impairment caused by drinking.

Such attributions are usually correlated with rape myth acceptance (Stormo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997).

Although the majority of sexual assault incidents involve alcohol, some research suggests that other factors such as situational context and personality characteristics of the perpetrator are more influential. Abbey's (2011) literature review regarding alcohol's effects on sexual aggression asserted that men who report committing sexual assault while drinking tend to have similar personality traits and women-specific attitudes as one another. Abbey (2011) further suggested that alcohol may enhance the risk of sexual assault perpetration among men who already demonstrate a predisposition for sexual aggression.

Testa et al.'s (2015) study provides additional evidence that alcohol can increase the likelihood of sexual aggression in certain contexts. According to the study, college men who reported consuming alcohol were more likely to engage in both aggressive and non-aggressive sexual behavior with new partners but not with previous partners. Testa et al.'s (2015) findings support the theory that the social context of alcohol may play more of a role in aggressive sexual behavior than the pharmacological effects of alcohol.

Additionally, Testa and Cleveland (2017) explored the relationship between heavy episodic drinking and sexual assault perpetration among college men. Although college men who reported frequent heavy episodic drinking were more likely to engage in an act of sexual assault over the course of several semesters, this result was explained by shared characteristics such as antisocial behavior and low self-control (Testa & Cleveland, 2017). The study also concluded that college men's frequency of bar and party attendance increased their likelihood of sexual assault perpetration; such settings

provide more opportunities for males predisposed to sexual aggression to initiate unwanted sexual advances (Testa & Cleveland, 2017). Casual sexual behavior, certain personality characteristics, and social drinking settings such as bars and parties seem to have a more influential effect on risk of perpetration than does general alcohol consumption (Testa & Cleveland, 2017).

Consequences of Perpetration

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (usually referred to as ‘Title IX’) is a federal law that protects students from gender/sexual discrimination within federally funded education programs. Therefore, the Title IX office of an educational institution is responsible for responding to complaints of sexual or gender-based violence or harassment (United States Department of Education [US Dept Ed], 2014). According to the US Department of Education, it is the educational institution’s duty to “take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the sexual violence, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects” (2014, p. 2-3) in response to a complaint of sexual assault. Such complaints are often followed by a university-held investigation of the incident. If the university determines that the alleged perpetrator is guilty, the perpetrator can face changes in schedule or residential arrangements in order to separate perpetrator and victim. The perpetrator may also receive more serious punishment such as suspension or expulsion (US Dept Ed, 2014). Additionally, the perpetrator can face a criminal investigation conducted by local law enforcement should the victim decide to report the incident to the authorities. However, less than 10% of formal complaints to law enforcement result in criminal charges against the perpetrator (Alderden & Ullman, 2012).

While institutions are held accountable for conducting investigations in response to sexual assault reports, the number of perpetrators who are seriously punished as a result of these investigations is astonishingly low. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (as cited in Lombardi, 2014), only about 10-25% of college sexual assault perpetrators who face a university investigation are expelled as a consequence. For instance, a 2012-2013 survey conducted by the Office on Violence Against Women (as cited in Anderson, 2014) and involving about 100 universities found that only 12% of sanctions for sexual assault perpetrators were expulsions. In addition, 28% of sanctions were in the form of suspensions, 13% were reprimands, and 16% were counseling or community service orders (as cited in Anderson, 2014).

CHAPTER FOUR

Social and Administrative Reactions to Sexual Assault

Both student and administrative responses to sexual assault can significantly impact survivors and the general campus climate. Survivors often receive a range of negative and positive social responses when disclosing sexual assault to peers. For instance, college students appear less likely to provide support for a sexual assault survivor when alcohol was involved, especially when the survivor was drinking or when only the perpetrator was drinking. Gender differences also exist regarding the willingness to provide emotional support to survivors and the direction of blame.

The United States Department of Education holds universities responsible for appropriately investigating sexual assault incidents. However, campus protocol varies in structure and approach across universities. Sexual assault prevention programming and bystander education such as the Green Dot program have been implemented at many universities and show small to moderate effects on bystander attitudes and helping intentions. Students appear to be receptive to bystander education training and report relative confidence in university administration's ability to handle sexual assault cases. Unfortunately, sexual assault reporting rates, bystander efficacy, and sufficient knowledge regarding campus policy remain low. Continued implementation of bystander training that provides students with effective bystander strategies and combats rape myths and rape supportive attitudes will hopefully improve the current campus climate.

Social Responses

Peer Reactions to General Disclosure

Sexual assault survivors who confide in their peers or family members often report either positive or negative reactions following such disclosure. Examples of positive, supportive responses to sexual assault disclosure include listening to the survivor, offering reassurance and tangible aid (such as resource information), not blaming the survivor for the incident, and displaying empathy (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007). Possible negative reactions to disclosure include blaming the survivor for the assault, having an unsympathetic attitude, doubting the truth of the survivor's story, and being too shocked by the disclosure to offer support (Ahrens et al., 2007). Fortunately, the majority (63.1%) of sexual assault survivors in Ahrens et al.'s (2007) study reported that their initial support provider reacted positively to disclosure. In general, disclosure of the sexual assault was described as either helpful or nondetrimental to survivors (67%), particularly when support providers displayed positive social reactions (Ahrens et al., 2007). Ahrens et al.'s (2007) study highlights the importance of positive social reactions from peers during sexual assault disclosure, as positive social reactions can prove helpful for survivors.

Peer Reactions to Alcohol Involvement

In a study conducted by Untied, Orchowski, Mastroleo, and Gidycz (2012), college students were exposed to a hypothetical sexual assault scenario involving alcohol use by the victim, perpetrator, or both. Participants were more likely to blame the victim in the scenario if the victim was drinking. Additionally, participants reported that they

would most likely provide less emotional support to the hypothetical victim if only the perpetrator was drinking as compared to if both victim and perpetrator were drinking. While this result may seem contrary to expectation, the reaction may be explained by the existence of a bias that women should not get involved with intoxicated men. Hence, students might be less likely to support a victim who they view as having made a sober decision to fraternize with a drunk man (Untied et al., 2012).

Another interesting finding by Untied et al. (2012) concerned gender differences—men were less likely to provide positive social support to the hypothetical victim and were also less likely to blame the perpetrator or label the event as a rape. Untied et al.'s (2012) study reveals the prevalence of certain biases among college students pertaining to alcohol use and responsibility in sexual assault situations, as well as several gender-specific perspectives on sexual assault.

Additionally, Relyea and Ullman (2015) assessed alcohol-specific social reactions received by female sexual assault survivors. While 47% of survivors reported having been told by a support provider that the assault was their fault due to drinking, 65% of survivors did receive a positive alcohol-specific reaction from a support provider, such as being told that it was not their fault despite alcohol involvement (Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Contrary to one of Relyea and Ullman's (2015) hypotheses, negative alcohol-specific reactions were not significantly predictive of depression or other psychological symptoms as compared to general social reactions. However, negative alcohol-specific reactions were associated with increased alcohol problems and self-blame among survivors, both of which tend to be correlated with heightened risk of revictimization (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011; Relyea & Ullman, 2015).

Administrative Responses

University Protocol

The United States Department of Education holds all universities that receive federal funding responsible for appropriately responding to sexual assault cases under Title IX (US Dept Ed, 2014). Therefore, universities typically have an office dedicated to handling sexual assault investigations. Amar, Strout, Simpson, Cardiello, and Beckford (2014) surveyed 1,067 campus administrators from both public and private universities across the U.S. regarding school protocol. The most common structure of institutional judicial procedures among the sample included a hearing board with a closed hearing process; the hearing board often consisted of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Two-thirds of the sample favored a team procedural approach in which representatives from law enforcement, mental health counseling, and health services worked together during the investigative and support process. 85% of the institutions provided some form of training for students on how to respond to sexual assault (i.e. prevention presentations during new student orientation). Additionally, 80% of athletics programs and 72% of Greek programs included in the sample provided targeted programming for student members (Amar et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, only 37% of the institutions who participated in Amar et al.'s (2014) survey reported having a written protocol to guide team activities during a sexual assault investigation. Most schools also did not require participation during sexual assault prevention training except for resident assistants and security guards (Amar et al., 2014). Although some of Amar et al.'s (2014) findings shed light on several promising aspects of administrative protocol for campus sexual assault, there are clearly some areas—such

as lack of standardized procedure and student participation—that are potentially weakening the effectiveness of campus sexual assault prevention efforts and investigative processes.

Bystander Intervention Training

Federal level. The United States Department of Justice’s ([US Dept Justice], 2017) Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) supports higher education institutions each year through federal grants as part of its Campus Program. The OVW’s Campus Program (official title: Grants to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus) strives to help education institutions prevent sexual violence, provide support for sexual assault/harassment survivors, and investigate cases of such violence. The OVW also provides information and resources to both students and administrators on how to effectively conduct a campus climate survey and initiate preventative programs (US Dept Justice, 2017).

Green Dot program. Green Dot etc. (2016), a sweeping bystander intervention program created by Dorothy Edwards, serves as a technical assistance provider for the OVW and offers on-site bystander training for universities across the nation. According to Green Dot etc.’s (2016) website, the program incorporates research and practices from several disciplines such as public health and psychology into its bystander curriculum. The program’s ultimate goal is to “mobilize a force of engaged and proactive bystanders” (Green Dot etc., 2016) by educating people on violence prevention and teaching them the necessary skills to become effective bystanders through various exercises. Although the program is still relatively young and its effectiveness has yet to be extensively evaluated,

a preliminary study conducted by Coker et al. (2014) produced promising results when comparing three American college campuses. For instance, the university that implemented the Green Dot training program¹ reported lower rates of sexual harassment and stalking victimization/perpetration compared to the two universities without bystander intervention training (Coker et al., 2014).

Efficacy of bystander intervention training. A meta-analysis headed by Katz and Moore (2013) investigated the efficacy of bystander education programs by comparing 12 separate studies. Bystander education appeared to have moderate effects on bystander efficacy and student intentions to help in situations when peers are at risk. Small but significant effects on helping behaviors, lower rape supportive attitudes, and lower rape proclivity were also observed across the 12 studies. Notably, perpetration behaviors were not significantly affected by bystander education training. Larger effects on bystander intentions as compared to actual helping behaviors and perpetration may suggest that bystander education programs have more impact on bystander-related attitudes than on rape-related attitudes and behaviors (Katz & Moore, 2013).

Student Reception to Administrative Response

Student views on administration. The AAU's (2015) campus climate survey spanning 27 universities measured student attitudes regarding campus administrative ability to properly handle sexual assault cases. 46-77% of students at each university expressed their belief that a sexual assault report would have a positive result through

¹To find more information on the Green Dot program, visit the program website at www.livethegreendot.com. The website includes a map that shows which universities across the nation have received Green Dot etc. Training, how to sign up for prevention training, etc.

administration. Additionally, most students who had reported an incident to an agency (including campus administration) felt like their experience was at least somewhat helpful (AAU, 2015).

Despite the majority opinion among college students that campus administration will adequately investigate allegations and provide support for sexual assault survivors, overall reporting rates remain extremely low. The most common reasons listed in the AAU's (2015) study for not reporting a sexual assault included feeling as if the incident was not serious enough, being too ashamed or emotionally unprepared, and believing that nothing would ultimately be done about it. The discrepancy between the belief that campus administration is reliable and general reporting rates suggests that student perceptions of appropriate action following a sexual assault may be heavily influenced by internalized views of the seriousness of sexual assault. For instance, the belief that a sexual assault incident is simply not serious enough to report may indicate the social and emotional impact of rape myths and rape supportive attitudes on survivors' willingness to report an incident. While it is important that students feel confident in campus administration's ability to effectively handle sexual assault cases, it is also imperative for students to understand that all forms of sexual assault are wrongful and deserve the utmost attention from investigative and support agencies.

Student knowledge of sexual assault prevention. Although the majority of students who participated in the AAU's (2015) campus climate survey seemed to believe that sexual assault cases are taken seriously by campus administration, student opinions varied on the severity of sexual assault on their campuses. For instance, only 20% or fewer of participants at 14 of the 27 universities rated their university sexual assault

climate as very or extremely problematic. Additionally, below 30% of the student participants rated themselves as very or extremely knowledgeable on their university's policies and procedures for handling sexual assault cases (AAU, 2015). In general, it appears that college students are relatively unaware of how often sexual assault occurs on university campuses and are unfamiliar with the actions taken by campus administration and other agencies when responding to a sexual assault.

Aside from low ratings regarding student knowledge of campus procedures and the severity of college sexual assault, the AAU (2015) study revealed startling statistics on student bystander behavior. About 45% of students reported having witnessed a drunk person heading for a sexual encounter—77% of those bystanders did nothing. Similarly, about 20% of students had witnessed some form of violent sexual behavior and 53.5% of them did not intervene (AAU, 2015). The relatively low rates of bystander intervention suggest that many college students are either unwilling to get involved in order to help someone or simply lack the bystander strategies necessary to recognize and prevent ambiguous or sexually violent situations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Best Practices

Based on the results of the AAU's 2015 campus climate survey, the association proposed several recommendations regarding how American universities can combat sexual assault. Additionally, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) published a statement that outlines ways in which universities can develop a more standardized and effective response to sexual assault. Both the AAU and the AAUP have suggested that college campuses should improve administrative response to sexual assault by implementing cohesive and dynamic procedures and making these procedures comprehensible for students and faculty. Requiring campus-wide participation during bystander education programs is another practice that universities should adopt. The standard approach to sexual assault prevention may be greatly improved through emphasizing bystander intervention and targeting common pathways to sexual assault (i.e. acceptance of rape myths, drug and alcohol abuse).

Cohesive and Transparent Administrative Procedure

First and foremost, it is imperative that campuses conduct thorough studies to quantify the severity of sexual assault and tailor intervention and education programs accordingly (AAU, 2015). The AAUP (2012) has called for better coordination between campus administration, local law enforcement, and service providers in order to form cohesive response teams, improve the rate of perpetrator conviction and punishment, and provide better support for survivors. Institutions must also seek a better understanding of

appropriate ways to document and report campus crime as required by the Clery Act¹ in order to avoid confusion and inaccurate crime statistics (AAUP, 2012). Additionally, faculty members should hold an important role in executing campus procedures; they should undergo extensive training on how to respond to a sexual assault disclosure and provide support for students (AAUP, 2012).

Based on students' lack of confidence concerning their knowledge of campus policies and procedures², universities should adequately educate students on the process of reporting sexual assault incidents and on the administrative protocol for sexual assault investigations (AAU, 2015). Indeed, policies and procedures should be clear and accessible to the entire campus community (AAUP, 2012). Transparency and accessibility would promote a better relationship between students and administration and foster a deeper understanding of sexual assault protocol.

Education and Prevention Programs

Low bystander response rates³ among college students reveal a need for bystander intervention training in order to improve students' ability to recognize risky situations and intervene when necessary. Universities may also find it prudent to emphasize sexual assault education for incoming students due to the heightened risk of sexual assault among college freshmen (AAU, 2015). While some programs mainly focus on teaching

¹The Clery Act, created in 1990, "requires all two- and four-year colleges and universities to file annual reports with the federal government on campus crime... [and] require[s] campuses to develop and disseminate prevention policies, make specific assurances to victims, and report an expanded set of crime categories, including hate crimes" (AAUP, 2012).

²See p. 29-30 for statistics on student knowledge of university procedures.

³See p. 30 for statistics on student bystander behavior.

women how to avoid situations that heighten the risk of sexual assault, the AAUP (2012) highly recommends that campus sexual assault prevention programs target both men and women in order to teach bystander techniques and challenge widely-endorsed rape myths.

Regarding bystander intervention programs, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has compiled a comprehensive list that rates prevention programs as either “promising” or “effective” (2016); these programs can be used by universities and other educational institutions. According to the CDC (2016), RealConsent is an effective preventative program “designed to reduce sexual violence perpetration behaviors among college men using a bystander-based model”. RealConsent strives to increase bystander behaviors, change harmful attitudes and misperceptions about rape, and increase knowledge of sexual consent by exposing participants to six 30-minute web-based modules. As an effective program, RealConsent has been shown to decrease sexual violence perpetration and increase bystander behavior among college men (CDC, 2016).

One promising program listed by the CDC (2016) is Green Dot⁴, a bystander intervention program that usually consists of a 5-hour training session for college students and faculty. Although Green Dot was originally designed for college campuses, the program has since been modified for other populations as well, including high school students and military populations. The Green Dot program has been “associated with reductions in unwanted sexual victimization and sexual harassment, stalking, and dating violence victimization and perpetration” in preliminary studies, thereby earning its “promising” status (CDC, 2016).

⁴See p. 27 for more information on the Green Dot program.

Another program described by the CDC (2016) as a promising bystander program for college populations is called Bringing in the Bystander. The program aims to teach both male and female students bystander skills such as “speaking out against rape myths and sexist language, supporting victims, and intervening in potentially violent situations” (CDC, 2016). Although Bringing in the Bystander has demonstrated a positive effect during program follow-up, more research is necessary in order to better understand the program’s specific effects on bystander behavior and sexual violence perpetration (CDC, 2016).

Improved Prevention Model

Flaws of Standard Prevention Approach

O’Donohue, Lloyd, and Newlands (2016) have outlined several issues with the standard approach to sexual assault prevention on college campuses. Many institutions rely on passive methods to educate students about sexual assault such as handing out brochures and providing optional educational lectures. Additionally, sexual assault awareness programming tends to be sporadic throughout the school year or condensed into one awareness week at most institutions. Programming methods such as these often obtain poor student attendance and are not cost effective when considering the low turnout rates and minimal positive impact on those who do attend. Furthermore, outcome and effectiveness data of sexual assault awareness programming is severely lacking due to the absence of responsible data collection by many universities (O’Donohue et al., 2016).

Improved Prevention Approach

After considering issues such as poor student turnout and lack of data regarding the effectiveness of the standard model, O'Donohue et al. (2016) have proposed a new model for sexual assault prevention. The model strengthens the delivery of sexual assault prevention programming and focuses on combatting several sexual assault pathways (i.e. lack of victim empathy, acceptance of rape myths) that can increase sexual assault incidence. O'Donohue et al.'s (2016) new approach has been recently implemented at the University of Nevada, Reno; the university has called it the Sexual Assault Prevention and Counseling program (SAPAC).

Delivery improvement. The improved model recommends that universities should implement year-long programming rather than sporadic or condensed programming. Periodic high-intensity programming such as prevention presentations during new student orientation and homecoming events would increase program exposure to large groups of students. Similarly, targeting captive audiences (i.e. classes when professors are absent) would maximize student exposure to prevention programming (O'Donohue et al., 2016). As previously suggested by the AAUP (2012) and the AAU (2015), university offices and individuals from relevant departments should collaborate as a committee to adequately plan and implement programming (O'Donohue et al., 2016). In order for universities to assess the efficacy of sexual assault prevention programs and contribute to the modification and improvement of future prevention efforts, data must be collected during and after such programming (O'Donohue et al., 2016). Lastly, O'Donohue et al. (2016) have called for the use of empirically evaluated information to ensure that program content is accurate and relevant. By improving the delivery of sexual assault

prevention programming, universities would dramatically increase the rate of student exposure to program content, execute program events in a more efficient manner, and responsibly contribute to the current research literature on the effectiveness of prevention programs.

Targeting the pathways to sexual assault. O'Donohue et al. (2016) identified several common pathways to sexual assault that prevention programs should target in order to effectively combat college sexual assault and challenge misperceptions. The pathways that should be addressed are as follows:

- Poor understanding of consent — programming should educate students on the importance of obtaining verbal consent before participating in sexual acts.
- Poor understanding of available services — students must be aware of available resources such as university offices that handle sexual assault reports and service centers (i.e. counseling center) for sexual assault survivors.
- Lack of victim empathy — interventions that foster empathy for sexual assault survivors, especially among males, can help reduce victimizing behavior.
- Unrealistic perception or lack of knowledge about outcome expectancies — informing students on likely punishments for committing sexual assault (such as suspension, expulsion, criminal conviction, and trouble obtaining future employment) may reduce the likelihood of perpetration.

- Acceptance of rape myths — common rape myths have the potential to affect students' judgment regarding the risk of sexual assault and must be challenged by prevention programs. For example, the false belief that most rapes are committed by a stranger may lead some women to neglect proper precautions when spending time with acquaintances or dates.
- Poor sexual communication and safety skills — students should receive training on effective sexual communication skills that will help them avoid misinterpretations during sexual encounters. Highlighting basic safety skills such as locking doors and windows and avoiding poorly-lit areas at night is also beneficial for students.
- Alcohol and drug abuse — the majority of college sexual assault incidents involve either drugs or alcohol; it is necessary for programs to address the effects of drug and alcohol on sexual behavior, cognitive functioning, and the ability to give and interpret consent (O'Donohue et al., 2016).

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted the significant effects of college sexual assault on several groups, including sexual assault survivors, perpetrators, peers, and school administration. Additionally, the impact of rape myths and rape supportive attitudes on perpetration and response was explored. Recommendations regarding how to combat high sexual assault rates and improve college administrative procedure for sexual assault investigations were also discussed.

Summary of Findings

Sexual Assault Survivors

Nearly one-third of college women report having experienced a sexual assault during their lifetime. On average, one-fifth to one-fourth of college women experience a sexual assault while attending a university (AAU, 2015; Krebs et al., 2007; Krebs et al., 2016). The vast majority of sexual assault incidents go unreported to campus officials or local law enforcement, though most sexual assault survivors do confide in a peer or family member (AAU, 2015; Krebs et al., 2016). Several groups tend to be more at risk for sexual assault, such as underclassmen, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities (AAU, 2015; Krebs et al., 2007; Krebs et al., 2016).

College women who experience a sexual assault are more likely to report a drop in GPA along with decreased overall academic performance and attendance (Jordan,

Combs, & Smith, 2014). Sexual assault survivors suffer from depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, and symptoms of PTSD at higher rates than non-victims (Aupperle et al., 2012; Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992; National Center for PTSD, 2015; Santaularia, 2014). Additionally, sexual assault survivors often show an increase in risky behavior and maladaptive coping mechanisms—such as heavy drinking and sexual promiscuity—that can heighten their risk of revictimization; these behaviors negatively impact survivors’ long-term physical health (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011; Santaularia et al., 2014).

Perpetrators

Several studies have documented that about 43% of the general male population (ages 18-35) has committed at least one act of sexual aggression since the age of 14 (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Wegner et al., 2015). Specific to college males, the rate of sexual assault perpetration tends to fall within 15-18% for acts of sexual assault and 4-5% for acts of rape (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015; Mouilso, Calhoun, & Rosenbloom, 2013; Testa & Cleveland, 2017). Repeat perpetration is common among sexual assault perpetrators—the rate of repeat offense ranges from roughly 41% to 63% depending on length of follow-up period and types of sexual assault (Lisak & Miller, 2002; Wegner et al., 2015). Overall, the literature suggests that about 1 in 5 college males commit an act of sexual assault and that most perpetrators offend more than once.

Certain personality traits such as narcissism (especially a sense of entitlement), psychopathic tendencies, and heightened impulsivity are common among sexual assault perpetrators (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Champion, 2003; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2015; Mouilso, Calhoun, & Rosenbloom, 2013; Testa & Cleveland, 2017). College-age sexual assault perpetrators rely mostly on verbal coercion tactics to subdue their victims rather

than force or victim incapacitation (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Mouilso, Calhoun, & Rosenbloom, 2013). The strength of rape supportive attitudes and the endorsement of post-assault justifications appear to be correlated with likelihood of re-offense (Wegner et al., 2015). Additionally, alcohol use can increase the risk of sexual assault perpetration among males who are already predisposed to sexual aggression. Certain social contexts involving alcohol are also more conducive to perpetration (Abbey, 2011; Testa & Cleveland, 2017; Testa et al., 2015).

The vast majority of college sexual assault perpetrators go unpunished for their crimes. Although federally funded universities are required under Title IX to investigate sexual assault allegations (US Dept Ed, 2014), the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) (as cited by Lombardi, 2014) has reported that only 10-25% of college sexual assault perpetrators are expelled following investigation. In fact, during the 2012-2013 academic year, only 12% of sanctions for sexual assault perpetrators across nearly 100 American universities were in the form of expulsion (as cited by Anderson, 2014). Furthermore, less than 10% of sexual assault complaints filed with law enforcement agencies lead to criminal charges (Alderden & Ullman, 2012).

Peer Reactions

Sexual assault survivors receive an array of both positive and negative reactions from peers after disclosure of the assault; the majority of reactions from initial support providers tend to be positive (Ahrens et al., 2007). Positive reactions from peers are correlated with fewer PTSD symptoms and greater perceived control over recovery among sexual assault survivors (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). However, college students are more likely to blame the victim and less likely to provide emotional support

when alcohol was involved in the assault, especially when only the perpetrator was drinking or when the victim was drinking (Untied et al., 2012). Although negative alcohol-specific reactions from peers are not significantly tied to depression among sexual assault survivors, they are associated with increased alcohol problems, self-blame, and revictimization (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011; Relyea & Ullman, 2015).

Administrative Response

In order to handle sexual assault cases, many universities use a team approach that involves representatives from law enforcement, mental health counseling, and health services. However, less than 40% of college institutions have written protocol to guide sexual assault investigations. Awareness training for students and targeted programming for Greek and athletic programs are offered at most schools, though participation is oftentimes only encouraged rather than required (Amar et al., 2014).

With federal support from the OVW, many universities have begun to implement bystander intervention programs such as Green Dot in an attempt to combat college sexual assault (Green Dot etc., 2016; US Dept Justice, 2017). Although research on the effectiveness of bystander intervention programs such as Green Dot is not yet extensive, preliminary studies show lower rates of sexual harassment and stalking, increased bystander efficacy and intentions to help, and lower rape supportive attitudes and rape proclivity (Coker et al., 2014; Green Dot etc., 2016; Katz & Moore, 2013). Unfortunately, sexual assault perpetration behaviors do not seem to be significantly affected by bystander intervention training (Coker et al., 2014; Katz & Moore, 2013).

Despite university efforts to get students involved in sexual assault awareness programming, the majority of college students do not believe that sexual assault is a

severe problem. Additionally, less than one-third of college students believe that they are very knowledgeable regarding university policies on sexual assault. Furthermore, bystander helping behaviors remain relatively low. Despite low rates of program participation and a lack of sufficient knowledge on campus protocol, most students express the belief that their universities can effectively handle sexual assault cases (AAU, 2015).

Recommendations

Universities should conduct thorough campus climate surveys in order to accurately gauge the severity of sexual assault; they can construct appropriate intervention programs based on the survey outcomes (AAU, 2015). Cohesive investigation teams as well as standardized protocol are key to effective campus administration response. To educate students on proper procedure regarding sexual assault investigations, universities should make campus protocol accessible and easily understandable for both students and faculty (AAU, 2015; AAUP, 2012). Several bystander intervention programs such as Green Dot and RealConsent have been recommended by the CDC (2016) and, if implemented correctly, could improve bystander behavior, combat widely accepted rape myths, and lower the prevalence of college sexual assault.

An improved model for college sexual assault prevention that involves the targeting of common pathways to sexual assault (such as lack of victim empathy, drug and alcohol abuse, and acceptance of rape myths) should be considered by universities. Additionally, bystander intervention training and educational programming should be rigorous, periodic, and mandatory for students (O'Donohue et al., 2016).

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this literature review. First, the studies included in this review vary in sample demographics—some studies collected data from two- and four-year universities while others recruited participants from urban commuter colleges or the general population. Age range and questionnaire types also vary, though the consistency of prevalence across similar studies suggests that sexual assault perpetration rates may be generalizable to a certain extent. Additionally, due to the relatively low prevalence of male sexual assault, many of the statistics cited in this review pertain only to female survivors of sexual assault.

Second, although the rates of sexual assault and rape among college students seem relatively consistent across American campuses, it should be noted that the vast majority of sexual assault cases go unreported by survivors (AAU, 2015; Krebs et al., 2016). Indeed, prevalence studies rely heavily on self-report measures, which are subject to false responses by participants who may not wish to disclose that they have experienced or committed sexual assault. For such reasons, current prevalence rates may not perfectly gauge the true incidence of college sexual assault.

Third, the current research on the efficacy of the standard approach to college sexual assault prevention is narrow, as many schools do not collect data on the outcomes of bystander training or educational programs. However, fairly new programs such as Green Dot, RealConsent, and Bringing in the Bystander are under evaluation and have produced promising results according to recent studies (CDC, 2016; Green Dot etc., 2016).

Implications

The fact that nearly one in every four college women experience a sexual assault during their time at a university (AAU, 2015; Krebs et al., 2007; Krebs et al., 2016) is simply unacceptable. Although the majority of universities offer some sort of programming to raise awareness of sexual assault, ineffective bystander behaviors and rape myth acceptance among college students remain rather high. A more effective approach to sexual assault education with particular emphasis on recognizing the signs of risky situations and knowing who to contact following a sexual assault incident would be a large step in the right direction for universities.

While interventions such as bystander training may not stop perpetration behaviors, they do seem to improve bystander willingness to help. Additionally, high-intensity programming aids in undermining common rape myths that influence rape supportive attitudes (Coker et al., 2014; Katz & Moore, 2013). Rape myths play a critical role in the perpetuation of rape culture; combatting rape myths is crucial in order to reshape students' perspectives on sexual assault and encourage positive social reactions toward sexual assault survivors. Therefore, university programming should focus on educating college students on the detrimental effects of sexual assault on survivors, the falsehood of rape myths, how to act as an effective bystander when witnessing risky sexual situations, and what resources are available in terms of reporting an incident and seeking mental and physical health services following a sexual assault.

Although the research literature provides extensive information on the negative effects of sexual assault on mental and physical health, there seems to be a gap in the literature regarding the academic impact of sexual assault (Jordan, Combs, & Smith,

2014). Similarly, research on the effectiveness of current university assault prevention programs and campus-specific climate surveys are lacking. Future research endeavors should therefore focus on enriching the current literature by exploring the effects of sexual assault on academic performance and the impact of bystander training on college sexual assault prevalence. Universities should also become more diligent in assessing the degree of sexual assault severity specific to their campuses.

Ultimately, American universities should strive to create a campus environment that includes a zero-tolerance policy for sexual assault as well as students who are aware of their important role in sexual assault prevention. A positive, knowledgeable, and proactive student body may in turn help sexual assault survivors feel more comfortable reporting their experiences to administration and law enforcement. With the help of effective bystander intervention programs, dynamic administrative response teams, and actively involved students and faculty, universities may succeed in significantly diminishing the incidence of sexual assault and fostering safer, well-informed, and supportive college campuses.

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