

CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT: HOW AMERICA'S INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION RESPOND

ABSTRACT

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Students, women in particular, are routinely exposed to high risks of sexual victimization on campus--most often at the hands of fellow classmates (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000; Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). While reports of mishandling of sexual assault (SA) cases by administrators are widely publicized by media, underreporting by victims of acquaintance SA remains, however, one of the most significant factors in low reporting rates on institutions of higher education (IHE) campuses. Mandated under Public Law 105-244, this research offers the first comprehensive national-level investigation of how the country's IHE are responding to reports of SA when made by students on their campuses. Specifically, issues relating to prevention efforts, victim support services, reporting policies, protocols, practices, barriers, and facilitators, formal and informal adjudication procedures, and sanctions for SA that currently exist in the nation's IHEs were examined.

The research design was triangulated and multiple forms of data were used to address each of nine mandated issues: content analysis of published SA policy materials and a mail survey of campus administrators, field research at promising practice schools and electronic focus groups, and legal research of state-level legislation. The national research sample (n=2,438) was drawn from all Title-IV funding-eligible school types, and included all Historically Black Colleges (N=98) and Universities and all Tribal Colleges and Universities (N=28). Response rates varied by data- and school-type (e.g., 88 percent for content analysis among four-year public schools), with an overall response rate of 41 percent. For four-year public and four-year private nonprofit schools, the policy material and survey components generated a 65.9 percent and a 49.1 percent response rate respectively.

The Final Report presents research findings by issue, broken down into school type, and discusses strengths, weaknesses, and basic and promising practices with regard to SA response on campuses. The results from this study suggest that the majority of IHEs need examples of model programs in order to develop comprehensive SA prevention and response policies. This would include standard institutional and state definitions of SA and rape; procedures for victim decision-making during the reporting and adjudication processes; campus-wide SA awareness and response training for students, faculty, and campus law enforcement; guidelines for meeting *Clery Act* reporting mandates; and, due process procedures for the accused. Study findings and suggested recommendations should be useful not only to legislators and campus leaders, but also to a wide range of justice professionals, service providers, and advocates.

References

- Fisher, B., Cullen, F., and Turner, M. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women: Findings from two national-level studies*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Koss, M., Gidycz, C., and Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55(2): 162-170.

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