

Inventory and analysis of sexual assault policy and protocol at North Carolina colleges and universities

Joy Messinger, MPH, MSW(c)¹

Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Abstract:

Objective: During the August 2009-May 2010 academic year, research was undertaken with the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence (Durham, NC) as part of North Carolina's Ten Year Plan to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence, a DELTA Project initiative. The DELTA Project is a CDC-funded initiative to build community and organizational capacity for the primary prevention of intimate partner violence. The goal was to assess the intimate partner and sexual violence [IPV/SV] policies, programs, and protocol for North Carolina's 52 public and private institutions of higher education [IHE].

Methodology: Information was collected from each IHE's student handbooks or codes of conduct, as well as from student affairs or student services websites; this method was used because accessibility of information was a key criterion. The information was then assessed using a model "Sexual Assault Response Policy and Protocol" identified and approved by a statewide steering committee working with EMPOWER, the DELTA Project's sister initiative for the primary prevention of sexual violence.

Results: In general, no IHE met all of the criteria for review. Three IHEs had no accessible SV/SA policy and seven IHEs had sexual harassment policies only. In addition, no IHE had an IPV-specific policy. Factors that showed an IHE's commitment to IPV/SV prevention include providing an inclusive definition of sexual misconduct, resources for survivors, and on-campus IPV/SV prevention programming. Factors that needed improvement include not explicitly assuring confidentiality, including consensual sex in a definition of sexual misconduct, and not providing IPV prevention programming or policies.

Conclusions: In order to increase factors that demonstrate a commitment to prevention, each IHE is urged to engage in a university-wide effort that may include adopting a gender-neutral IPV/SV policy that encourages reporting and bystander intervention, ensuring information accessibility and/or convening a campus-wide coalition to support these efforts.

¹ Current affiliation:

Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
1040 W. Harrison St. Chicago, IL 60607
Email: jmessi2@uic.edu

Overview of Results:

Factors Showing a Commitment to Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention:

- Factors having a presence on 50% of IHE campuses:
 - Having a statement that makes a commitment to the prevention of sexual assault and misconduct
 - A protocol or policy that provides information for victims/survivors
 - Having general judicial procedures for the prosecution of assaults and attacks
- Factors having a presence on 25-50% of IHE campuses:
 - Having a policy with a comprehensive definition of sexual misconduct that defines concepts acquaintance rape, gang rape, stalking, sexual exploitation, and sexual assault
 - Outline of an institutional response from campus entities
 - Sexual assault and sexual violence awareness and prevention programming
 - IPV prevention and/or healthy relationship programming
 - Presence of a full-time staff member committed in part or in full to on-campus IPV and SV/SA awareness and prevention
 - Allowing anonymous reporting for bystanders and survivors
 - Judicial procedures specific to the prosecution and investigation of sexual assault and intimate partner violence
 - Sanctions specific to sexual misconduct

Areas Needing Improvement:

- IHE does not offer IPV-prevention programming (approx. 75% of IHEs)
- Policy/protocol does not provide health information for survivors (approx. 53% of IHEs)
- Policy does not provide a definition of “consent” (approx. 51% of IHEs)
- Policy/protocol does not provide mental health and/or counseling information for survivors (approx. 47% of IHEs)
- IHE has no protocol for handling sexual assault on campus or the role and/or responsibility of specific departments (approx. 43% of IHEs)
- IHE does not give an explicit assurance of confidentiality in its policy (approx. 37% of IHEs)
- IHE does not have a readily accessible or available policy or IHE has an EEOC-related sexual harassment policy only (approx. 19% of IHEs)
- Policy mentions “consent” briefly or does not give an expanded definition (approx. 10% of IHEs)
- Policy includes consensual (same- and mixed-gender) sex as a punishable offense (approx. 8% of IHEs)

Recommendations:

- Adopt a gender-neutral and LGBTQ-inclusive policy
- Include provisions that encourage reporting, like anonymous reporting or alcohol/drug policy immunity
- Provide educational bystander intervention programming
- Include intimate partner violence alongside sexual misconduct prevention and awareness programming
- Ensure online accessibility of SV/SA and IPV response protocol for students, staff, faculty, and first responders
- Convene a campus-wide coalition or planning body to support the development and implementation of new and existing policies, protocol, programming, and resources