

INCREASING THE UTILIZATION OF CAMPUS RESOURCES BY SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

By Bailey Fattorusso

Despite high rates of sexual violence on college campuses in the US, utilization of resources for these survivors remains surprisingly low, indicating that there is a problem with the resources that already exist



STUDENTS AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual assault on college campuses is a persistent issue, as is proven by the statistics of as many as one quarter of females experiences sexual violence, while students of all genders in the age range of 18-24¹ are at an elevated risk of experiencing sexual violence. Despite this only 17% to 30%² of survivors utilize such resources.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT UTILIZATION

Although some may claim that this low rate of utilization indicates that these resources are not needed, experts and student survivors alike have pointed out that this is not the case. Instead, they point out the implementation of the resources³ as well as the campus climate,⁴ as being the most likely deterrent keeping students from utilizing these resources.



The most common factors that drive down the utilization of such resources include...

CAMPUS CLIMATE

another common phrase often used to describe this is

'rape culture'

The active stigmatization of women's experiences within society often keeps survivors from coming forward. This line of thought extends to the university level, as many women fear that the resources provided will also be judgemental, rather than helpful.⁵ As a result, survivors often do not come forward with their experiences and do not interact with campus-based resources as a result.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of such resources usually has impacts on if they are seen as beneficial, or even used by survivors.⁶ Some examples of poor implementation include not stationing resources in a clear and easily accessible location, not maintaining the resources, and not tailoring resources to the specific campus/area they are serving

A majority of studies indicated implementation as being crucial to the utilization of resources

FUNDING OF RESOURCES

64%
of centers highlighted concerns about funding in one study

It is a common thought that, due to the prevalence of sexual violence, resources equipped to handle this problem would be properly funded. Unfortunately, this is often NOT the case. Instead, a majority of centers are concerned that their current levels of funding are inadequate and/or are concerned that their funding will not be continued.⁷ As a result, centers are often unable to assist all survivors and may be forced to provide sub-par resources.

WHY SHOULD CAMPUS RESOURCES IN PARTICULAR BE IMPROVED?

Another common argument against campus resources for survivors is that there are already off-campus resources for survivors. While this is true, it has been proven that many of the same factors that drive down utilization of campus resources also impacts off-campus resources. Additionally, it has been proven that students are more likely to use campus resources if they do decide to utilize any resources.⁸

Improvements that should be made include...

Confidentiality is a main concern for a majority of survivors

CLIMATE IMPROVEMENTS

Above all, students and scholars emphasize creating a "culture of care" in which the experiences and confidentiality of the survivor are paramount.⁹ Additionally, scholars point out the importance of all faculty and staff respecting the experiences¹⁰ of survivors in order to create this climate. Finally, the creation and sustaining of trainings to expose students to the realities of sexual assault and how to prevent it have been proven to shift campus climates.¹¹

IMPLEMENTATION IMPROVEMENTS

Students and scholars point out that locating resources in a central, easily accessible location¹² often increases utilization. Additionally, many of the suggestions for shifting the campus climate are also applicable here, such as ensuring confidentiality. Finally, it is crucial that resources are continually reviewed and updates in order to ensure that the most up-to-date resources are presented to survivors.

Many studies point to technology as being a great aid in this process

Ensuring adequate funding is crucial

FUNDING IMPROVEMENTS

One of the most important improvements needed is increased funding, as without adequate funding, there simply will not be enough resources.¹³ Without an increase in funding from various areas (such as the federal government, state, and private donors), no other improvements can be sought.

OTHER AVENUES

While there are many other avenues to pursue in increasing resource utilization, these three are the most researched and most proven methods of increasing utilization.

Although survivor utilization of resources will never reach 100% for various, complex reasons, it has been proven that these resources help student survivors. That, combined with the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, highlights a need for action in regards to increasing the utilization of campus resources by student survivors.

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