



Impact of Sexual Assault Response on Victim's Willingness to Cooperate

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Abstract:

Objective: In 2020, Utah ranked 11th in the country as the most dangerous state for rape and sexual assault (Curtis, 2020). For college students, college campuses are not impervious to these trends with Brigham Young University (BYU) and University of Utah (U of U) reporting their highest counts of rape in 2020 (Annual Fire and Safety Report, 2020.) This study's goal was to identify common issues reported by college advocates and administration to help create a more trauma-informed response policy for student victims. **Methods:** This study employs mixed methods (Dempsey 2009; Venkatesh et al., 2013) which triangulates qualitative and quantitative data collection (Denzin & Lincoln 2013; Driscoll et al., 2007; Jick 1979). The mixed-methods study was led by Dr. Fukushima, where data was collected through survey distribution (N=293), followed by focus groups and/or interviews with survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or human trafficking (N=39). After focus groups and interviews were completed, they were immediately transcribed and coded for themes. **Results:** The common themes found during our interviews were: despite the awareness about sexual violence growing due to the #MeToo movement, there continues to be barriers for survivors to report through Title IX offices. We also found that although mandated reporting is required by Title IX, it has created issues for survivors who do not want to escalate reporting their experiences. Lastly, the process of adjudication can re-traumatize the victim thus barring the individual from wanting to report. **Conclusion:** Current reporting mechanisms have created barriers for survivors of sexual violence to report abuse. In addition to the limits of existing mechanisms of reporting, there is a serious need for additional resources, where support services are understaffed. When survivors are interested in escalating their experience to law enforcement, there is a need to shift Utah's institutional culture towards being trauma informed. Trauma informed processes and practices center the survivor's needs and recognize that trauma is complex, and that healing does not occur immediately. Currently the research team of Mariah Montoya and Dr. Annie Isabel Fukushima are collaborating with Dr. Lindsay Gezinski to co-author a scholarly article for publication of the study's findings.