

# If They Don't Tell Us, It Never Happened

## Disclosure of Experiences of Intimate Violence on a College Campus

LORI K. SUDDERTH, PENNY A. LEISRING AND ERIC F. BRONSON

*Une petite université du nord-est des États-Unis a l'habitude de dévoiler les détails de la vie intime des victimes de violence sexuelle. Cette étude rapporte le résultat des sondages auprès d'une sélection arbitraire dans les classes et de l'échantillonnage recueilli, ont révélé que 165 jeunes filles furent agressées. Peu d'entre elles en ont parlé aux autorités du campus alors que la plupart ont rapporté l'incident à une amie. Des politiques d'interventions et des recherches futures sont envisagés.*

The proportion of female undergraduates on U.S. campuses who experience sexual assault ranges from 8.3 percent (Fisher, Cullen, and Lu) to 17.6 percent (Tjaden and Thoennes). While three to five percent of female college students are sexually assaulted in one year, one out of five to one out of four is assaulted in the course of their college career (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000). When “unwanted or uninvited sexual contacts” are included, over one third of women in colleges and universities have experienced sexual intrusion (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 9). Physical dating violence among undergraduates is also common, with rates ranging from 25 to 40 percent (Foo and Margolin). Straus examined rates of violence among social science students attending 31 universities across 16 countries. He found that 29 percent of the

students engaged in physical dating violence in the past year and about 9.4 percent of college students engaged in severe forms of physical dating violence (Straus).

Most university communities remain relatively unaware of the magnitude of the problem of intimate physical and sexual violence. Official reports of crime on campus are published in accordance with U.S. federal law (*Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act* of 1990). However, official reports of violent crime on campus typically underestimate the actual rate of crime. College students report between 35 percent and 43 percent of violent crimes committed against them, and only four to twelve percent of college women who experience sexual victimization report the incident to law enforcement (Baum and Klaus; Hart). Thus, a small percentage of actual crime reaches the attention of campus authorities.

This study was undertaken with the intention of a) highlighting the circumstances under which students who experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence disclose to campus authorities and b) to offer recommendations for improving the chances that students will report these experiences to college staff and faculty. Campus authorities, including security personnel, student affairs staff, counseling, and faculty

represent options for students who want to report, but are reluctant to report to the police. This paper is based on results from a survey examining students' experiences of gendered violence and their choices for disclosure. Although the research was conducted on one secular private university campus in the United States, the results may be of interest to any college or university that seeks to improve the lines of communication between students and staff in terms of reporting intimate violence.

College students who have been assaulted by dating partners rarely disclose the fact that they have been victimized; if they do tell someone, they are more likely to tell friends than mental health professionals or the police (Murry and Karatzke). The reluctance to disclose information about their experience of sexual or physical assault may stem from embarrassment, isolation, fear of rejection, and concerns about retaliation (Murry and Karatzke 83). Furthermore, women may not report physical partner violence because they do not recognize it as a “crime.” Studies that examine rates of intimate partner violence within a survey about various crimes, as in the National Crime Victimization Survey, often yield lower rates of violence than studies that use surveys that inquire about specific acts of

aggression without labeling them as “abuse” or “crimes” (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000: 4).

Similarly, women who have been sexually assaulted typically do not report sexually coercive incidents to law enforcement agencies for several reasons. First, of those women who are victimized during their college years, 78.5 percent to 90 percent know the perpetrator (Baum and

classic rape myth that rape only involves attacks by strangers could be a reason why women do not characterize their own experiences as rape, or they could be in denial that they have been raped. In addition, calling the incident something other than rape may be a “strategy to avoid self-blame” for women (Bondurant 309).

Second, women may feel appre-

women who experience acquaintance and date rape assume that the perpetrator could not be convicted on the available evidence, and therefore choose not to report to the police (Lizotte 185).

Third, many women want to avoid going through the judicial process because they are distrustful of the police: they question how sensitively and professionally law enforcement

---

## Many women want to avoid going through the judicial process because they are distrustful of the police: they question how sensitively and professionally law enforcement will handle the situation. They also worry about having to testify in court

---

Klaus 4; Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000: 17). In fact, closer relationships are associated with completed, rather than attempted rapes (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 1999). Because the perpetrator is familiar, even trusted in some cases, there is often uncertainty whether what happened was “criminal” (Warshaw). It is well documented that women who are raped may not label the experience as rape, and the percentage of women who do not acknowledge an incident as rape, even though it fits the legal definition of sexual assault, ranges from 43 percent (Koss) to 73 percent (Pitts and Schwartz). Women are less likely to label an experience rape when they are not visibly injured by the attack or when the attack does not involve any other type of physical violence (Gunn and Minch; Hammond et al.; Kahn, Mathi, and Torgler; Lizotte; Mason, Riger, and Foley), which some researchers have linked to stereotypical beliefs about rape (Bondurant; Mason, Riger, and Foley). In fact, in studies of rape victimization in colleges, the majority of respondents said they did not think the incident was serious enough to warrant notifying law enforcement (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000: 23; Thompson et al.). Bondurant speculated that acceptance of the

hensive about how others will react if they report the incident to the police. Often, they are afraid of retaliation by the offender if they report the crime to the authorities (Biaggio et al.). It is also possible that women want to avoid the stigma associated with being raped or they fear that they will be blamed by others (Biaggio et al. 23), and thus do not report the incident. There is some evidence that women who experience either sexual or physical victimization off-campus (as opposed to on campus) are more likely to say they did not report because of “shame and embarrassment” (Thompson et al. 279), although it is not clear why this is the case. In fact, Rita Gunn and Candice Minch found that a supportive reaction by the first person to which a rape is disclosed is positively associated with reporting to the police. There is, however, evidence that talking about rape can provoke fairly negative reactions from others in the woman’s network of friends and family (Sudderth). Women often respond to negative reactions by keeping the information to themselves. Moreover, raped women wrestle with feelings of self-blame, particularly when the perpetrator is known (Harned; Katz and Burt), and this may delay or discourage reporting the incident as a crime. It is often speculated that

will handle the situation. They also worry about having to testify in court (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000: 25; Feldman-Summers and Norris). Students are most likely to report rape when they are not required to undergo adjudication procedures and when anonymous reporting is an option (Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen). It is not suggested that college campuses refrain from offering women the option of adjudication, but it is important to recognize how difficult it is for raped women to report the crime and to repeat the story multiple times to police, medical personnel, attorneys, victim advocates, etc. The process itself is intimidating to women, and is listed as a reason they fail to report sexual assault to law enforcement.

Fourth, the emotional aftermath of rape includes embarrassment, depression, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed and distraught. If this emotional aftermath is not addressed, it may lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Resick; Romeo). It is not uncommon for those suffering from trauma to use avoidance and minimization to cope with their feelings (Burgess and Holmstrom; Frazier and Burnett; Harned 402), which may inhibit discussion of the incident as well as increase the likelihood of

further victimization (Hammond et al. 1; Messman-Moore, Ward, and Brown).

Exacerbating the problem of non-reporting is the acceptance of rape myths among college students. Male students are more likely to accept rape myths than female students (Bledsoe and Sar; Burt). Some evidence suggests that these beliefs are used by men to rationalize sexual violence against women, while women believe them in order to feel safer (Lonsway and Fitzgerald). The acceptance of rape myths has been associated with the likelihood of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse and with acceptance of interpersonal violence and adversarial sexual beliefs (Burt 225; Chiroro et al.). Adversarial sexual beliefs are a continuum of attitudes that include acceptance of the ideas that heterosexual intimate relationships are inherently exploitative and manipulative, and that partners can not be trusted (Burt). No association was found between acceptance of rape myths and having experienced sexual victimization (Carmody and Washington). Some U.S. studies have found that African Americans and Latinos are more supportive of rape myths than white students (Giacopassi and Dull; Lefley et al.), while others have found no differences based on race (Carmody and Washington 433). There is also some evidence that women who are injured in an attack or physically coerced are more likely to report to the police (Gunn and Munch 23), which suggests that women who do not report may believe that their experience was not a "classic" rape, consistent with yet another rape myth (DuMont, Miller, and Myhr). In one study, agreement with items on the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt 229) and the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale was related to holding women responsible for the rape, lower likelihood of defining a sexually coercive situation as rape, and believing that authorities should not be notified (Mason, Riger, and Foley 1167).

Under-reporting has also been linked to characteristics of the assault: assaults by known perpetrators without weapons off campus are associated with non-reporting (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, and Turner). In addition, women's beliefs about police reactions may influence their willingness to report. For example, African American women are less likely than white women to report sexual assault to the law enforcement out of fear of not being believed (Thompson 281; Wyatt).

The impact of intimate violence on young women is well documented. Physical violence by a romantic partner, for example, has long-term consequences for women. Some studies suggest that battering is associated with higher incidence of PTSD, alcohol abuse/dependence, depression, avoidant personality, and panic disorder (Watson et al.). Similarly, women who have been raped report more alcohol use, more sexual activity, lower scores on measures of psychological well-being and more psychological distress compared to those who have not been raped (McMullin and White). Some studies have suggested that the impact of rape may depend on whether or not the woman actually labels the experience as rape. Darcy McMullen and Jacquelyn White found that women who have been raped did not differ from women who have not on measures of psychological well-being or number of sexual partners in one year, regardless of whether or not they labeled the experience rape (99). They suggest this means that women do not have to label their experience as rape in order to recover; however, they also find that non-labelers use more alcohol in the first year of college than labelers or women who have not experienced rape, suggesting that the process of labeling an experience as rape leads to healthier behaviors (103). In the short term, there is some evidence that not labeling the experience as rape and not disclosing to others may be somewhat functional in that women who do not disclose

are not subject to negative reactions from others. Initially, they also report fewer symptoms of distress, including medical problems (Conoscenti and McNally; Ullman). Women who do not acknowledge that their experience was sexual assault are less likely to disclose details about their experiences (Littleton, Breikopf, and Berenson).

Although the evidence indicates that most women do not report to law enforcement, in the majority of cases, they do discuss the incident with someone, usually a friend (Bernhard; Biaggio et al. 39; Fisher et al. 1999, 2000, 2003; Lievore; Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, and Starzynski; Marvin). In fact, women who have experienced sexual assault are less likely to report to the police than they are to turn to their network of family and/or friends, or to a social service agency, for support (Kaukinen). Some evidence suggests that women are more likely to discuss a sexual assault within their informal networks when they do not know the perpetrator and when they clearly define the experience as rape (Ensink et al.; Koss 209), while others have found that the victim/perpetrator relationship and defining an experience as rape have no bearing on disclosure (Fisher et al. 2000: 3; Littleton et al.).

Women who do discuss the assault within their informal network do so in order to get assistance in the immediate aftermath of the attack, to solicit emotional support, to respond to the concerns of a friend or family member, to obtain information about the perpetrator, or to try to make sense of the incident (Lievore 25). These informal sources of social support can help women to clarify what happened to them, to seek additional assistance, to reduce feelings of stigmatization (Biaggio et al. 38; Lievore 25), and may even strengthen friendships (Ahrens and Cambell). Indeed, one study found that women who disclosed a sexual assault to someone other than police and parents found their reaction helpful (Ullman et al. 809).

Disclosure that results in supportive reactions (e.g., believing, listening) from friends or family can help women in their recovery process (Ullman 520) by encouraging further help-seeking and defining the incident as a sexual assault (Bondurant 310; Lievore 22). This does not mean that women who disclose to someone can expect unconditional support. Negative reactions (e.g. avoiding the

disclosed the assault: days later (18 percent), weeks later (13.9 percent), or a year later (4.9 percent)” (Ullman 514).

Non-disclosure, however, has long-term consequences. For women who have experienced a sexual assault but have not disclosed the attack to anyone, studies have noted more alcohol use, more doctor visits and more medication, feelings of “numbness,”

Yet that link is important. Campus personnel also provide another source of support, enabling survivors of violence to disclose and to obtain assistance in coping. The university context provides an opportunity to study women’s decisions to disclose intimate violence to campus personnel in order to further our knowledge of the sociological context of help-seeking.

---

**Because of the difficulty of labeling an experience as rape, the reluctance of women to engage in the criminal justice system, self-blame, and the uncertainty of reactions within informal social networks, it is not uncommon for survivors to tell no one or to delay disclosure of a sexual assault.**

---

woman, telling her to “get over it and move on”) can, in fact, adversely affect the psychological well-being of survivors (Ullman 520). Carol Patitu found attitudes towards women who had been raped varied by gender (but not by ethnicity or year in school), in that male college students had harsher attitudes towards raped women compared to female college students. Both support and a lack of support within one’s informal network has been linked to help-seeking in more formal networks (Lievore 14), leaving unclear the role of friends and family in obtaining further assistance.

Because of the difficulty of labeling an experience as rape, the reluctance of women to engage in the criminal justice system, self-blame, and the uncertainty of reactions within informal social networks, it is not uncommon for survivors to tell no one or to delay disclosure of a sexual assault (Botta and Pingree; Fisher et al. 2003: 24; Littleton et al. 772; Littleton; Pitts and Schwartz 390). Sarah Ullman found in a sample of 155 survivors of sexual assault that five percent did not tell anyone, 34 percent “disclosed the assault immediately after it occurred ... whereas another one-third waited more than a year to tell anyone about the assault (29.2 percent) (516). The remaining one-third of women first

somatization, and lower satisfaction with sources of social support compared to women who acknowledged and disclosed the sexual assault (Botta and Pingree 210; Ensink et al. 88; Littleton et al. 772; McMullin and White 102). Moreover, refraining from disclosure means that women do not receive support from friends or family and do not have the opportunity for “reciprocal disclosure” (Bondurant 310). Non-disclosure also means that survivors do not receive any medical help or mental health care that might be necessary, and perpetrators face no consequences for their actions (Bondurant 310; Pitts and Schwartz 390).

College communities are unique environments with respect to women who have been raped. There is an added layer of venues for reporting: personnel who work at the college in counseling, student affairs, residence halls, security, medical facilities, and faculty. These are all possible mechanisms by which survivors of intimate violence can report an assault without pursuing a legal case against the perpetrator. The literature distinguishes between college students who tell law enforcement and telling someone other than law enforcement, but there is little research specifically on disclosure to campus personnel.

### **Methods**

To explore these ideas, a random sample of classes was obtained from a small, private university in the northeast United States. The university had an enrollment of almost 5500 undergraduates and approximately 2,000 graduate students at the time of the study. Instructors for the selected classes were then contacted and asked to allow for a 15-20 minute survey on intimate violence on campus. Participants were advised of the voluntary nature of the survey, and they were asked to read a consent form. The purpose of the project was described as “to learn more about violent experiences among students on campus and how these experiences are reported.” They were also provided with information for counseling and community resources for dealing with intimate violence.

The questionnaire was based on a survey used by Linda Bledsoe and Bibhuti Sar at the University of Louisville (33). The survey included questions from several different instruments, including the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (Burt 222), questions similar to those found in the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-Mc-

Coy, and Sugarman) and the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss and Oros). Data collection was completed in the spring of 2006.

The initial goal was to collect 100 surveys from each year of students (seniors, juniors, etc.); in fact, the final total of 549 completed surveys included 261 (47.5 percent) seniors, 119 (21.7 percent) juniors, 79 (14.4 percent) sophomores, and 86 (15.7 percent) freshmen. The majority of participants were female (60.7 percent), accurately reflecting the gender balance at the university (61.9 percent of students are female).

Analysis was restricted to female undergraduates ( $n = 330$ ) between the ages of 18 and 26 who had experienced an attempted or completed rape or who had experienced at least one incident of partner violence. Transfer students were eliminated since it was not clear in what context they had experienced intimate violence. Out of the remaining 277 female undergraduates, 165 (49.5 percent of female participants) had experienced at least one type of either physical or sexual violence.

Of the 165 female students who had experienced either physical violence with a partner or a type of sexually assault, the mean age was 20.49, and they ranged in age from 18 to 26. White students were over-represented in our sample (92.1 percent), but this was consistent with the overall racial ethnic composition of students on this campus in 2006. In the student population, the majority of students (79.2 percent) identified themselves as white, and the largest minority groups were Hispanics (4.6 percent), African Americans (2.4 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islanders (2.4 percent). In addition, the majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (97.6 percent), and the largest proportion of them were in a committed relationship (38.9 percent). Approximately one third were not dating, one fourth were casually dating, and less than one percent were married. Over half of the sample were seniors, while the other classes were

more evenly distributed (15.2 percent freshmen, 13.9 percent sophomores, and 18.2 percent juniors). All except two subjects were full-time students. Less than five percent were in a sorority, and 6.1 percent were school athletes.

## Results

Many women in the sample had experienced more than one type of violence. Specifically, two-thirds said a partner “threw, smashed, or kicked something,” and 40.5 percent said they had been “pushed, grabbed, or shoved.” Others had a partner who “threatened to hit you or throw something at you” (23.3 percent), “threw something at you” (16.0 percent), or “kicked, bit, or hit you with a fist” (9.8 percent). Less than five percent of the participants had experienced more serious violence at the hands of a partner, such as being beaten up (1.2 percent), choked (4.3 percent), threatened with a weapon (2.5 percent), or had a weapon used on them (.6 percent).

Almost half of the women had experienced a completed or attempted rape, even though only 12.2 percent said they had ever been raped. Specifically, 6.1 percent had experienced an attempted rape, 13.4 percent experienced forced sexual intercourse, and 43.9 percent experienced “unwanted sex because you were asleep, unconscious, drugged, drunk, or helpless.” It is important to note that 61.2 percent of the sample checked off more than one incident of intimate violence.

Consistent with the literature, most survivors of intimate violence (either physical or sexual) disclosed to someone (64.8 percent), but 22 percent did not tell anyone. Of those who did disclose, the vast majority (97.2 percent) confided in a friend. Just under one third disclosed to a family member, and 7.4 percent reported to the police. Almost one-fifth of those who disclosed to someone informed a campus representative (18.5 percent).

Cross-tabular analysis and compar-

ison of means (not shown) suggested that the difference between those who disclosed to campus authorities and those who did not had less to do with the characteristics of the assault (known perpetrator, possible alcohol involvement) or attitudes about sexual assault (rape myth scores, adversarial sexual beliefs) and more to do with seeking support from friends and family, and the total number of violent incidents experienced by the students, particularly sexually coercive incidents. In addition, non-white students and students in sororities were less likely to disclose to campus authorities than white students or students who were not in sororities. Students living on campus and those ranked as seniors were more likely to disclose to campus authorities than those living off campus and students ranked below senior, although the differences were not significant.

Based on these preliminary results, logistic regression (backward LR) was used to determine statistically significant predictors that should remain in the explanatory model. Disclosure of intimate violence to campus authorities was best predicted by four variables: living on campus, senior status, seeking support from friends and/or family, and the total number of incidents of intimate violence, including physical and sexual violence. The results suggested that characteristics of the assault and attitudes about sexual assault were not essential to the model consistent with the descriptive analysis. Ethnicity/race and involvement in a sorority were also eliminated from the model, but both categories included very small numbers of participants (in the case of the ethnicity/race category, for example, less than 15 participants identified themselves as African American, Hispanic, or Asian). Living on campus, being a senior, and seeking support informally (from friends and family) were all retained in the model as significantly related to disclosing to campus authorities. The total number of incidents was added to a second model to understand the

impact of multiple experiences of intimate violence on disclosure to campus authorities.

In Model I, living on campus, senior status, and seeking support from friends and/or family were included as independent variables. Students living on campus are 22 times more likely to disclose intimate violence to campus representatives as compared to students living off campus. Seniors were 20

significantly) more likely to talk to campus authorities as compared to students with fewer incidents. The Nagelkerke R statistic suggests that this model explains about 26 percent of the variance.

### Discussion and Conclusions

This study suggests that it is not simply the characteristics of the as-

Those factors are important, however. The fact that living on campus increases the likelihood of disclosing intimate violence to campus authorities is not surprising. However, the implication is that incidents that occur off campus are reported to authorities less often. Further analysis and a larger dataset are needed to understand the impact of campus residence and the location of the

---

## The later age of disclosure indicates a limit to the tolerance of violent behavior from an intimate partner. Rather than one isolated incident, women experience a series of incidents or a pattern of abuse that culminates in disclosure to campus authorities.

---

times more likely to disclose intimate violence to campus authorities as compared to all other students in the sample. Women who sought assistance from friends and/or family members were 1.27 times more likely to disclose to campus authorities as compared to students who disclosed only to friends or disclosed to no one. The Nagelkerke R statistic suggests that approximately 20 percent of the variance is explained using these variables.

The second model included the total number of incidents of intimate violence (sexual and physical combined). Including this variable in the model enhanced the effects of living on campus, with campus residents approximately 25 times more likely to disclose to campus authorities than those students living off campus. This means that the cumulative impact of multiple incidents of intimate violence increases the likelihood that campus residents will disclose to campus authorities. Seniors were still almost 20 times more likely to disclose to campus representatives compared to other students. The effects of seeking support from friends and/or family members are no longer significant when controlling for the number of violent incidents. As the number of violent incidents increases, students are slightly (but

sault that determine disclosure by women students who experience sexual violence. Maturity, familiarity with campus resources, proximity, and an increasing number of violent incidents also influence the decision to disclose to campus authorities. Given that freshmen are the most vulnerable to sexual violence, the later age of disclosure indicates either delay in seeking support or a limit to the tolerance of violent behavior from an intimate partner. These results also speak to the context in which college students experience intimate violence. Rather than one isolated incident, women experience a series of incidents or a pattern of abuse that culminates in disclosure to campus authorities. The higher rate of reporting by seniors may be because their understanding of the incidents as violent or criminal crystallizes only when other incidents ensue. It is also possible that students experience ongoing violence from partners and disclose to friends only because they are the ones in their network from whom they can expect support. It is not clear from these data at what point women decide to disclose to campus authorities, only that certain factors increase the likelihood of disclosure.

incident as it relates to disclosure to campus authorities.

It is also not terribly surprising that older students like seniors are more likely to report intimate violence to campus authorities. The analysis can only suggest why this might be, but two interpretations are possible. First, women who experience intimate violence often delay disclosure for hours, days, even years, and these data may simply reflect that delay. Perhaps advanced students are more aware of the definition of sexual assault and partner violence, either because of their interaction with friends who have had similar experiences, or through educational experiences endemic to college life. Second, perhaps advanced students are more familiar with the protocol for reporting criminal or violent behavior, and thus are more likely than younger students to bring campus authorities into the situation. Knowing who to call or how to get support may provide more experienced students with an advantage in help-seeking, because one level of confusion (who do I report to?) is eliminated.

The more disturbing finding is that students experience multiple incidents of intimate violence before seeking formal assistance. Simply having a rape or attempted rape ex-

perience or an experience of physical violence within a relationship is not enough to prompt women to disclose to campus representatives. By the time they speak to someone working on campus, those who disclosed had experienced two to four incidents of intimate violence. The fact that survivors of either sexual assault or physical violence have experienced multiple incidents is not news, but the fact that they experience several incidents before reaching out to campus authorities invites at least two possible interpretations. First, it may indicate minimization of the first few incidents: women may not define them as problematic. Students most often do not report criminal incidents to campus security, for example, because they defined it as a private matter or not important enough to involve authorities. This suggests that only when the violence escalates do women disclose to campus personnel. Second, this finding may suggest a learning process whereby survivors of violence seek ways to cope with the after-effects by disclosing to friends and sometimes family members. But coping with the effects of intimate violence may not be sufficient to prevent a re-occurrence of violence or additional types of violence. Upon reoccurrence, women may seek out more information, others who have experienced similar types of violence, and ultimately, campus authorities.

The results of this study indicate first, that efforts to educate freshmen and sophomores about intimate violence should be clearer in terms of defining violent behavior as criminal and specifying the protocols for seeking assistance. While many universities provide this information during freshman orientation, perhaps the dispersion of information should be continuous, widespread, and easily accessible to all students. In addition, Catherine Kaukinen suggests that sources of support "need to be provided with the skills, resources, and information they need to appropriately attend to the victims of crime..." (453). Second, the patterns

of disclosure indicate that students who experience intimate violence are most comfortable talking to their peers. Therefore, there should be classes or workshops available on campus that would train students to respond to sexual and physical violence in a supportive and informative manner. Third, the results suggest that in order to encourage reporting of intimate violence, universities must respond to violence as a community. Campus personnel should be provided training on how to appropriately respond to disclosures of sexual and physical violence, and the fact that they have been trained should be widely advertised. Some universities have hesitated to discuss sexual assault on campus because of the possibility of bad publicity, but demonstrating that the university is prepared to sensitively and intelligently respond to intimate violence is ultimately more reassuring to students and family members than silence and subterfuge.

The limitations of this research include problems with missing data. It is not unusual for participants to refuse to answer questions about such private matters, and so there were missing data because some questions were left unanswered. There may also have been missing data in some cases because students misunderstood that the survey questions were on both sides of the paper, and thus left whole pages blank. Nevertheless, we received enough responses to feel comfortable with the representativeness of the sample.

In addition, there is little discussion here about on-campus and off-campus incidents in terms of disclosure. While there was no clear pattern of on-campus incidents being more often disclosed to campus authorities, the numbers were too small to be certain. Larger studies may be able to discern whether off-campus incidents, for example, are more likely to be reported to the police rather than to campus security or health services. The sample was also small enough that we violated the

assumption of 50 cases or more in the logistic regression. This would indicate that replication with a larger sample would be advisable to verify the results.

Future studies should include a prospective research method to follow freshmen through their senior year in order to understand the timing and reasoning behind their decisions to disclose intimate violence to campus authorities. Researchers should be asking questions not only about to whom have women disclosed violence, but why they chose to talk to one friend over another and the impact of having friends who have also survived intimate violence. In addition, the training and protocol for reporting intimate violence on campus should be included in analysis to understand the impact of policy on disclosure to people who work there. Moreover, cross-national research that included universities with similar rates of reporting and disclosure would greatly enhance our understanding of the cultural context of surviving and confronting intimate violence.

Ultimately, disclosure of intimate violence to campus authorities matters because it is one more avenue for women to receive the support they need to effectively cope with the consequences of intimate violence. Campus authorities who are aware of violence can require that perpetrators of intimate violence face the consequences of their actions. They can also keep women safe, respect their choices, and encourage others to report incidences of intimate violence.

*Lori K. Sudderth is Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. She earned a B.A. in sociology at the University of Texas, and she received her M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from Indiana University. Her research interests include sexual assault, domestic violence, gender, and the criminal justice response to violence against women.*

Penny A. Leisring is an associate professor of psychology at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT. She holds a B.A. in psychology and child development from Connecticut College and she received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. She is a licensed psychologist and has led domestic violence intervention groups for male and female perpetrators. She conducts research examining intimate partner violence and is on the editorial board for *Partner Abuse* and for the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, and Trauma*.

Eric F. Bronson is associate professor and director of criminal justice at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from Bowling Green State University. His main areas of research include prison communities and inmate subcultures.

## References

- Ahrens, C. E. and R. Cambell. "Assisting Rape Victims as they Recover from Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 15 (9) (2000): 959-986.
- Baum, K. and P. Klaus. *Victimization of College Students, 1995-2002*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 2005.
- Bernhard, L. A. "Physical and Sexual Violence Experienced by Lesbian and Heterosexual Women." *Violence Against Women* 6 (1) (2000): 68-79.
- Biaggio, M. K. et al. "Reporting and Seeking Support by Victims of Sexual Offenses." *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 17 (1/2) (1991) 33-42.
- Bledsoe, L. K. and B. K. Sar. *Campus Survey Report: Safety Perception and Experiences of Violence*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 2004.
- Bondurant, B. "University Women's Acknowledgement of Rape." *Violence Against Women* 7 (3) (2001): 294-314.
- Botta, R. A. and S. Pingree. "Interpersonal Communication and Rape: Women Acknowledge their Assaults." *Journal of Health Communication* 2 (1997): 197-212.
- Burgess, A. W. and L. L. Holmstrom. "Adaptive Strategies and Recovery from Rape." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 136 (1979): 1278-1282.
- Burt, M. R. "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 38 (2) (1980): 217-230.
- Carmody, D. C. and L. M. Washington. "Rape Myth Acceptance Among College Women: The Impact of Race and Prior Victimization." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 16 (5) (2001): 424-436.
- Chiroro, P. et al. "Rape Myth Acceptance and Rape Proclivity: Expected Dominance Versus Expected Arousal Mediators in Acquaintance-Rape Situations." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 16 (5) (2001): 427-442.
- Conoscenti, L. M. and R. J. McNally. "Health complaints in acknowledged and unacknowledged rape victims." *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 20 (2006): 372-379.
- Du Mont, J., K-L Miller and T. L. Myhr. "The Role of 'Real Rape' and 'Real Victim' Stereotypes in the Police Reporting Practices of Sexually Assaulted Women." *Violence Against Women* 9 (4) (2003): 466-486.
- Ensink, B. et al. "Secrecy and Persistent Problems In Sexual Assault Victims." *International Criminal Justice Review* 10 (2000): 81-97.
- Feldman-Summers, S. and J. Norris. "Differences Between Rape Victims Who Report and Those Who Do Not Report to a Public Agency." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 14 (1984): 562-573.
- Fisher, B., F.T. Cullen, and C. Lu. "Crime in the Ivory Tower: The Level and Sources of Student Victimization." *Criminology* 36 (1998): 671-710.
- Fisher, B., F. T. Cullen, and M. G. Turner. *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington: National Institute of Justice, 2000.
- Fisher, B., F. T. Cullen and M. G. Turner. *The Extent and Nature of the Sexual Victimization of the College Women: A National-Level Analysis*. (1999) Rockville, MD: National Institute of Justice.
- Fisher, B. S., L. E. Daigle, F. T. Cullen and M. G. Turner. "Reporting Sexual Victimization to the Police and Others: Result from a National-Level Study of College Women." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 30 (1) (2003) 6-38.
- Foo, L. and G. Margolin, "A Multivariate Investigation of Dating Aggression." *Journal of the Family Violence* 10 (4) (1995): 351-377.
- Frazier, P. A. and J. W. Burnett. "Immediate Coping Strategies Among Rape Victims." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 72 (1994): 633-639.
- Giacopassi, D. and R. Dull. "Gender and Racial Differences in the Acceptance of Rape Myths within a College Population." *Sex Roles* 15 (1986): 63-75.
- Gunn, R. and C. Minch. *Sexual Assault: The Dilemma of Disclosure, the Question of Conviction*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1998.
- Hammond, C. et al. "Rape Acknowledgement and Rates of Sexual Victimization." Paper presented at the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Cognitive & Behavioral Therapies, Chicago, 2006.
- Harned, M. S. "Understanding Women's Labeling Unwanted Sexual Experiences With Dating Partners: A Qualitative Analysis." *Violence Against Women* 11 (3) (2005): 374-413.
- Hart, T. *National Crime Victim Survey, 1995-2000: Violent Victimization of College Students*. Washington: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, 2003.
- Kahn, A. S., V. A. Mathi and C. Torgler. "Rape Scripts and Rape Acknowledgement." *Psychology of*



- Women Quarterly* 18 (1) (1994): 53-66.
- Karjane, H. M., B. S. Fisher and F. T. Cullen. *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities Are Doing About It*. Washington: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 2005.
- Katz, B. and M. Burt. "Self-blame in Recovery from Rape: Help or Hindrance?" *Sexual Assault* 2 (1988): 151-168.
- Kaukinen, C. "The Help-seeking Decisions of Violent Crime Victims: An Examination of the Direct and Conditional Effects of Gender and the Victim-offender Relationship." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17 (2002): 432-456.
- Koss, M. P. "The Hidden Rape Victim: Personality, Attitudinal and Situational Characteristics." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 9 (1985): 193-212.
- Koss, M. P. and C. Oros. "Sexual Experiences Survey: A Research Instrument Investigating Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Higher Education Students." *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology* 50 (3) (1982): 455-457.
- Lefley, H. et al. "Cultural Beliefs About Rape and Victims' Responses in Three Ethnic Groups." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63 (1993): 623-632.
- Lievore, D. *No Longer Silent: A Study of Women's Help-Seeking Decisions and Service Responses to Sexual Assault*. [Canberra] Commonwealth of Australia: Australian Institute of Criminology, 2005.
- Littleton, H. C. R. Breitzkopf and A. Berenson. "Beyond the Campus: Unacknowledged Rape Among Low-income Women." *Violence Against Women* 14 (3) (2008): 269-286.
- Littleton, H. et al. "Rape Acknowledgement and Post-assault Experiences: How Acknowledgement Status Relates to Disclosure, Coping, Worldview, and Reactions Received from Others." *Violence and Victims* 21 (6) (2006) 761-778.
- Lizotte, A. J. "The Uniqueness of Rape: Reporting Assaultive Violence to the Police." *Crime & Development* 31 (2) (1985): 169-190.
- Lonsway, K. A. and L. F. Fitzgerald. "Attitudinal Antecedents of Rape Myth Acceptance: A Theoretical and Empirical Reexamination." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 68 (4) (1995): 704-711.
- Marvin, Mary Jo. *Preventing Violence against Women: Not Just a Women's Issue*. Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1995.
- Mason, G. E., S. Riger and L. A. Foley. "The Impact of Past Sexual Experiences on Attributions of Responsibility for Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19 (10) (2004): 1157-1171.
- McMullin, D. and J. W. White. "Long-term Effects of Labeling a Rape Experience." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 30 (2006): 96-105.
- Messman-Moore, T. L., R. M. Ward and A. L. Brown. "Risk for Rape in College Women: The Mediating Effects of Substance Use and Sexual Behavior." Poster presented at the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies, Chicago, 2006.
- Murry, C. E. and K. N. Karatzke. "Dating Violence among College Students: Key Issues for College Counselors." *Journal of College Counseling* 10 (2007): 79-89.
- Patitu, C. L. "College Students' Attitudes Toward Rape Victims." *College Student Affairs Journal* 17 (2) (1998) 44-55.
- Pitts, V. L. and M. D. Schwartz. "Promoting Self-Blame in Hidden Rape Cases." *Humanity & Society* 17 (1993): 383-398.
- Resick, P. A. "The Psychological Impact of Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 8 (1993): 223-255.
- Romeo, F. F. "Acquaintance Rape on College and University Campuses." *College Student Journal* 38 (1) (2004): 61-65.
- Straus, M. A. "Prevalence of Violence Against Dating Partners by Male and Female University Students Worldwide." *Violence Against Women* 10 (7) (2004): 790-811.
- Straus, M. A., S. L. Hamby, S. Boney-McCoy and D. B. Sugarman. "The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2): Development and Preliminary Psychometric Data." *Journal of Family Issues* 17 (1996): 283-316.
- Sudderth, L. K. "It'll Come Right Back to Me: The Interactional Context of Discussing Rape With Others." *Violence Against Women* 4 (1998): 572-594.
- Thompson, M. et al. "Reasons for Not Reporting Victimization to the Police: Do They Vary for Physical and Sexual Incidents?" *Journal of American College Health* 55 (5) (2007): 277-282.
- Tjaden, P. and N. Thoennes. *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Atlanta, GA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999.
- Ullman, S. E. "Social reactions, coping strategies, and self-blame attributions in adjustment to sexual assault." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20 (1996): 505-526.
- Ullman, S. E., H. H. Filipas, S. M. Townsend and L. L. Starzynski. "The Role of Victim-Offender Relationship in Women's Sexual Assault Experiences." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21 (6) (2006) 798-819.
- Warshaw, R. *I Never Called It Rape*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1988.
- Watson, C. G. et al. "Lifetime Prevalences of Nine Common Psychiatric/Personality Disorders in Female Domestic Abuse Survivors." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 185 (10) (1997): 645-647.
- Wyatt, G. E. "The Sociocultural Context of African American and White American Women's Rape." *Journal of Social Issues* 48 (1992): 77-91.