

Perceptions of University Policies to Prevent Sexual Assault on Campus Among College Students in the USA

Tara K. Streng¹ · Akiko Kamimura¹ 

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to assess correlations between attitude, opinions, and perceptions of sexual assault on campus and perceptions of university policies related to sexual assault among college students. Students ($N=507$) at a large public university in the intermountain west region of the USA completed a survey in February and March 2015. Multivariable multiple regression was conducted to test the association between perceptions of students regarding university policies on sexual assault and individual factors. The factors that were predictive for student perceptions of sexual assault policy importance included student gender, affiliation with a campus organization, previous report of sexual assault to university officials, and adherence to particular anti-rape attitudes. Attitudes and perceptions of sexual assault may be very important for successful implementation of university policies related to sexual assault.

Keywords Sexual assault · University policy · Safety · Violence prevention

Introduction

Sexual assault is an extremely prevalent occurrence within the American system of higher education. Previous studies have shown that close to 20 % of women have experienced a completed sexual assault by their senior year of

college (Krebs et al. 2009). Further, students attending institutions of higher education are subject to increased risk for sexual assault and rape than the general population and may experience both at higher rates as well (Joseph et al. 2013).

The negative health effects stemming from sexual violence are extensive and well documented. Those who have experienced sexual violence are more likely to report psychological disorders such as the following: major depressive disorder, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kirkpatrick et al. 2007; Nickerson et al. 2013). These survivors are also more likely to abuse of drugs and alcohol and to drop out of school compared to students who have never survived sexual violence (Zinzow et al. 2011; Gidycz et al. 2008). The development of psychological disorders and their effects not only harm the students who have survived sexual assault, but also further disrupt the larger academic community.

There is a trove of literature regarding proposed preventative measures for universities to address sexual violence. However, student attitudes toward campus sexual assault policies remain relatively undocumented. In 2014, The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault released its *Not Alone* report. The report advocates for American institutions of higher education to adopt sexual violence policies if they have none and also vies to reform existing policies (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault 2014). The *Not Alone* report suggested recommendations in the following areas: reporting policies and protocol, investigative policies and protocol, grievance and adjudication procedures, prevention and education policies, and training information for related faculty and staff. Since the release of *Not Alone*, colleges and universities have rapidly worked to reform their sexual violence policies.

✉ Akiko Kamimura
Akiko.kamimura@utah.edu

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Utah, 380 S 1530 E, Salt Lake City, UT 84112, USA

Despite this action, sexual assault prevention policies and implementations still vary across universities (Streng and Kamimura 2015).

Previous studies have examined attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of sexual assault on campus among college students. Acceptance of collegiate sexual assault is often linked to belief of rape myths. Rape myths refer to false beliefs about rape in which rape is considered the victims' fault and victims are blamed. These views have been shown to be one of the factors that increase sexual violence (McMahon 2010; Aronowitz et al. 2012; Mouliso and Calhoun 2013). Rape myth acceptance is more prevalent among males (Vance et al. 2015), as well as people who conform to more traditional gender roles (Grubb and Turner 2012), although students' acceptance of rape myths is generally moderate (McMahon 2010). Adherence to rape myth beliefs allows for collegiate communities to excuse perpetrators of sexual violence and ignore the reality of sexual assault (Joseph et al. 2013). The environment of American colleges fosters student beliefs that sexual assault between acquaintances or an intimate partner does not constitute actual sexual assault or rape and further allows the environment to support and perpetuate sexual assault between acquaintances (Aronowitz et al. 2012). There is also a statistically significant positive correlation between belief of rape myths and likelihood of perpetration of sexual assault (Mouliso and Calhoun 2013).

Attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of sexual assault among college students have been previously studied. However, how students' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions regarding university sexual assault are associated with their perceptions of college sexual assault policy need to be further examined. This may help to a more complete understanding of the issue and offer tools to develop more effective prevention programs. On the one hand, as more educational and preventative policies are developed and implemented, incidence of sexual assault rates may decrease (Kress et al. 2006). On the other hand, current university preventative programming and policies are not always effective in reducing sexual assault; a fact they have received criticism for (Kress et al. 2006). Student perceptions may help to pinpoint the areas that students most value within a policy. Students' perceptions of university sexual assault policies are important and can provide universities with insight into the resources that students feel that they need to prevent sexual assault and to aid after sexual assault. The purpose of this study is to assess the relationships between attitude, opinions, and perceptions of sexual assault on campus and perceptions of university policies related to sexual assault among college students. Potential contributions from this study include increased knowledge for the improvement of university sexual assault policies to prevent sexual assault on campus.

Methods

Data Collection and Study Participants

Data were collected at 21 social science classes. Total enrollment in the 21 classes was 1260. The response rate was 40.24 % ($N=507$). The students who were selected to be eligible for the sample were undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. The data were collected at a state university in the intermountain west of the USA, in March 2015. A consent cover letter and a survey instrument were distributed to undergraduate students attending social science classes. The classes were selected based on whether an instructor at that university was able to allow 15 min of class time for the survey to be administered. Since some classes had very strict content requirements, not all had extra time for the survey. The consent cover letter and survey were administered in paper format, which were both provided to, and picked up from professors by one of the co-authors. The classes taught by the co-author were not included in data collection. Prior to the data collection, the university's institutional review board (IRB) approved this study. There was no incentive for students to take part in the survey.

Measures

University Policy Perceptions

The scale to assess respondent perceptions regarding university sexual assault policy elements was developed based on sexual assault policies from seven state universities (University of California, 2014; University of Michigan 2014; University of Utah 2014; University of Alabama 2013; University of Iowa 2013; University of Oregon 2013; University of North Carolina 2014). This scale included 21 policy-related items. Respondents were asked to rate the statements based on how important they felt each potential university sexual assault policy statement was to reducing sexual assault within a university setting. The respondents answered within a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not important to 5 = very important). There were five subscales: counseling/support resources (2 items), reporting (5 items), investigation (3 items), prevention (7 items), and grievance/adjudication (4 items). These subscales were developed from a larger list of policy suggestions from the White House Task Force Not Alone report as they directly affect student survivors. The examples of the items include, "A university providing sexually assaulted students with written references of health or counseling resources" (counseling/support resources), "University officials assisting a student who has been sexually assaulted notifying law enforcement" (reporting), "A university beginning investigation of a report of sexual assault within 7 days" (investigation), "New student

orientations teaching about sexual assault” (prevention), and “An assaulted student being notified of the outcome of accused student’s hearing” (grievance/adjudication). The investigation subscale had lower than 0.6 Cronbach alpha even after one of the items was dropped. The investigation subscale was not included for analysis accordingly. Other scales have high internal consistency with Cronbach alpha values 0.813 for counseling/support resources, 0.773 for reporting, 0.808 for prevention, and 0.647 for grievance/adjudication. A higher score indicated that a respondent perceived the policy elements to be important in reducing sexual assault.

College Date Rape Attitudes

College date rape attitudes were measured using the College Date Rape Attitudes and Behaviors Survey (CDRABS) (Lanier and Elliott 1997; Lanier and Green 2006). The 20 attitude-related items were used. The behavioral section was not included because the focus of this study was attitudinal in nature. The CDRABS uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with the scoring reversed for some of the items. The examples of the reversed scoring items include “I believe that talking about sex destroys the romance of that particular moment,” “If a woman dresses in a sexy dress, she is asking for sex,” and “Date rapists are usually motivated by an overwhelming unfulfilled sexual desire.” This scale has a high internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha being 0.826. This scale has been validated for college student populations (Lanier and Elliott 1997; Lanier and Green 2006). Higher scores represented higher levels of anti-rape attitudes.

Opinions Regarding Sexual Assault on Campus

To measure opinions regarding sexual assault on campus, we used the Readiness-to-Change Scale (Banyard et al. 2010). The Readiness-to-Change Scale includes nine items divided into three subscales, (1) pre-contemplation subscale (3 items), (2) contemplation subscale (3 items), and (3) action subscale (3 items). All items are measured by a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true; 5 = very much true). The mean of each subscale was used for analysis.

The pre-contemplation subscale measures a respondent being unaware that sexual violence exists and consists of *I don’t think sexual assault is a big problem on campus, I don’t think there is much I can do about sexual assault on campus, and There isn’t much need for me to think about sexual assault on campus, that’s the job of the crisis center.* A higher score on the pre-contemplation subscale suggests a person is less aware that sexual violence exists. Cronbach alpha for the pre-contemplation subscale was 0.662.

The contemplation subscale measured how respondents are aware that sexual violence exists, but have not taken an action to change his or her behavior or situation. This subscale includes the following: *Sometimes I think I should learn more about sexual assault but I haven’t done so yet, I think I can do something about sexual assault and am planning to find out what I can do about the problem, and I am planning to learn more about the problem of sexual assault on campus.* A higher score on the contemplation subscale implies a person is more aware that sexual violence exists and wants to learn more about sexual assault. Cronbach alpha for the contemplation subscale was 0.593. To increase internal consistency, one of the items “Sometimes I think I should learn more about sexual assault but I haven’t done so yet” was dropped. Cronbach alpha for the contemplation subscale became 0.835 accordingly.

The action subscale indicates that a person has taken an action to change behavior or situations related to the prevention of sexual assault and includes, *I have recently attended a program about sexual assault, I am actively involved in projects to deal with sexual assault on campus, and I have recently taken part in activities or volunteered my time on projects focused on ending sexual assault on campus.* A higher score on the action subscale indicates that a person takes more action. Cronbach alpha for the action subscale was 0.853.

Perceptions of Sexual Assault

Perceptions of sexual assault were measured using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) which has 22 items (Payne et al. 1999; McMahon and Farmer 2011). The IRMA uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, to 5 = strongly disagree) and has four subscales, including subscale 1: she asked for it (6 items), subscale 2: he did not mean to (6 items), subscale 3: it wasn’t really rape (5 items), and subscale 4: she lied (5 items). The examples of the items include, *If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped (she asked for it), If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally (he didn’t mean to), If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape (it wasn’t really rape), and A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it (she lied).* Higher score represented adherence to rape-blaming and victim-shaming perceptions. Cronbach alpha for the subscales are as follows—subscale 1: 0.838, subscale 2: 0.789, subscale 3: 0.811, and subscale 4: 0.914.

Knowledge About Someone who was Sexually Assaulted and Health-seeking Sources

Participants were asked whether they knew a college student who had been sexually assaulted. If the respondent knew

someone, they were then asked to specify the nature of the relationship with the person (i.e., friend or acquaintance from college, friend or acquaintance outside of college, family member, neighbor, themselves, and other). In addition, participants were asked to whom they would report sexual assault, if they were a victim of sexual assault, including the university's officials, the police, friends, family members, counseling center, hospital or healthcare facility, other, or would not report to anyone.

Demographic Information

The following demographic information was obtained from participants: age, gender, race/ethnicity, years as a student at the university, major, and membership of a campus organization.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS (version 22). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the distribution of the demographic characteristics of the students. Descriptive data were presented as frequencies and percentage for categorical variables and means with standard deviations (*SDs*) for continuous variables. Multivariable multiple regression was conducted to predict perceptions of university polices regarding sexual assault based on individual factors (age, female gender, white race, student less than 1 year, and member of a campus organization), knowledge of someone who was sexually assaulted, whether a participant would report sexual assault to university officials, and attitudes to and perceptions of sexual assault. Only completed surveys were included in the analyses, and thus there were very small missing data. Missing data were treated as missing.

Results

Table 1 describes participant demographics of the 507 students. The average age of the participants was 21.1 (*SD*=2.5). More than 60 % of the participants were women ($n=320$, 63.1 %). Nearly 70 % of the participants were white non-Hispanic ($n=338$, 66.7 %). Approximately one-third of the participants had been a student of the university less than 1 year ($n=160$, 31.6 %). While all participants were students enrolled in, and attending a social science class, the majors of the participants varied. The most common major was sociology ($n=103$, 20.3 %). One-fourth of the participants were a member of a campus organization ($n=123$, 24.3 %). Half of the participants knew a college student who was sexually assaulted ($n=257$, 50.7 %). The percentage was statistically significantly higher for women (56.7 %) than men (42.0 %)

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

	Mean (SD)
Age	21.1 (2.5)
	Frequency (%)
Female	320 (63.1)
Race/ethnicity	
White (non-Hispanic)	338 (66.7)
Hispanic	49 (9.7)
Asian/Pacific Islanders	37 (7.3)
Black	16 (3.2)
Native American	2 (0.4)
Other race or mixed race	45 (8.9)
Years as a student at the University	
Less than 1 year	160 (31.6)
1–2 years	156 (30.8)
3–4 years	153 (30.2)
More than 5 years	20 (3.9)
Major ($n \geq 20$ only)	
Sociology	103 (20.3)
Psychology	48 (9.5)
Health society and policy	24 (4.7)
Anthropology	20 (3.9)
Member of a campus organization	123 (24.3)
Know a college student who was sexually assaulted	257 (50.7)
Friend or acquaintance from college	161 (31.8)
Friend or acquaintance outside of college	121 (23.9)
Family	38 (7.5)
Neighbor	6 (1.2)
Myself	51 (10.1)
Other	14 (2.8)
Help seeking	
The University's official	204 (40.2)
The police	291 (57.4)
Friends	284 (56.0)
Family members	275 (54.2)
Counseling center	234 (46.2)
Hospital/healthcare facility	258 (50.9)
Other	52 (10.3)
I would not report my assault	26 (5.1)

N=507

($p < 0.01$) (not shown in the table). The most common relationship with the victim was friend or acquaintance from college ($n=161$, 31.8 %) followed by friend or acquaintance outside of college ($n=121$, 23.9 %). Fifty-one participants (10.1 %) had been sexually assaulted. Forty-three of them are women (not shown in the table). The total degree-seeking undergraduate (full time and part-time student) enrollment at this university for the 2014–2015 school year was 22,804. Total percentage of

the university's student population that identify as women was 46.36 %. Total percentage of students who are identified as women and are declared as having an undergraduate major in the college within the university surveyed was 55.40 %; this was 7.7 % lower than the female response rate within our sample. Enrollment by race/ethnicity at the university was as follows: White Non-Hispanic 70.51 %, Hispanic/Latino 10.11 %, Asian 5.4 %, Black/African American 1.36 %, and American Indian/Alaskan Native Non-Hispanic less than 1 %. The sample of this study had slightly higher percentages of Asian and Black students than the total university population.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of perceptions of and attitudes to university policies, college date rape attitudes, changes of stage, and rape myth acceptance. All of the subscales of perceptions of university policies have mean scores more than 4. The Skewness statistics for the dependent variables, which were less than -1 , indicate a negative skew. The positive values of Kurtosis statistics, which were not close to 0, indicate the leptokurtic distribution. However, based on the Central Limit Theorem

(Evans 2007), the sample size of 507 should be large enough to assume the distribution of the mean approximates normal distribution. The scale for policy measures was a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 being "not important" to 5 being "very important"). Reporting policies had the highest mean score (mean=4.73, $SD=0.46$), while the prevention subscale had the lowest mean score (mean=4.42, $SD=0.61$). The mean score of the College Date Rape Attitude was 4.29 ($SD=0.43$). The average of pre-contemplation was (mean=2.08, $SD=0.72$). Contemplation had a higher score (mean=3.36, $SD=0.88$) than action (mean=2.09, $SD=1.02$). All of the IRMA subscales had mean scores greater than 4. The subscale "It wasn't really rape" had the highest mean score, 4.71 ($SD=0.50$). The subscale 'She lied' had the lowest score, 4.06 ($SD=0.87$).

Table 3 summarizes the predictors of university policies to prevent sexual assault on campus. Based on the multiple R -square, the percentages of variability in the dependent variables which were accounted for by the independent variables were as follows: 16 % for counseling, 28 % for reporting, 34 % for prevention, and 22 % for grievance. The model for prevention accounted the highest variance. According to the p values for the F tests, all of the models had a good fit. The values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) which were less than 5 indicate that there was no significant concern about multicollinearity. Higher levels of acceptance of the occurrence of college rape were more likely to be associated with the belief that reporting policies are important ($p<0.05$). Participants who had higher levels of awareness of sexual assault on campus were more likely to believe that reporting policies are important ($p<0.01$). Higher levels of interest in improving situations related to sexual assault were related to higher levels of support of prevention and grievance policies ($p<0.01$). Participants who had higher levels of interest in taking actions to improve the situations related to sexual assault were more likely to support prevention policies ($p<0.05$). Higher levels of the rejection of the rape myth: "he did not mean to," were associated with higher levels of support for grievance policies ($p<0.05$). Female participants were more likely to believe that reporting policies are important than male participants ($p<0.05$). Participants who were a member of a campus organization are less likely to believe that counseling/support resources are important ($p<0.05$). Participants who indicated that they would report sexual assault to university officials were more likely to believe that counseling/support resources ($p<0.05$), reporting policies ($p<0.05$), and prevention policies ($p<0.01$) were important compared to those who did not belong to a campus organization. Based on the beta weights (not shown in the table), the most

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of perceptions related to sexual assault

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perception of university policies ^a				
Counseling/support resources	4.59	0.68	-2.05	4.83
Reporting	4.73	0.46	-3.14	13.50
Prevention	4.42	0.61	-1.44	2.19
Grievance/adjudication	4.46	0.60	-1.49	2.47
College date rape attitudes ^b	4.29	0.43	-1.35	2.62
Readiness-to-change				
Pre-contemplation ^c	2.08	0.72	0.36	-0.26
Contemplation ^{#d}	3.36	0.88	-0.28	-0.01
Action ^d	2.09	1.02	0.87	0.25
Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) ^e				
She asked for it	4.32	0.72	-1.06	0.61
He didn't mean to	4.01	0.71	-0.47	-0.41
It wasn't really rape	4.71	0.50	-2.58	9.51
She lied	4.06	0.87	-0.62	-0.45

$N=507$

^a Higher scores indicate that a participant is more likely to believe it's more important. Score range 1–5

^b Higher scores indicate higher levels of acceptance of college date rape. Score range 1–5

^c Higher scores indicate that lower levels of awareness of sexual assault on campus. Score range 1–5

^d Higher scores indicate that higher levels of interests in improving situations related to sexual assault on campus. Score range 1–5

^e Higher scores indicate greater rejection of rape myths. Score range 1–5

[#] To improve reliability, one of the three items was dropped

Table 3 Predictors of perceptions of university policies

	Counseling β		Reporting p		VIF		Prevention β		Grievance β		CI		VIF	
	β	p	lower	upper	lower	upper	lower	upper	lower	upper	lower	upper	lower	upper
(Constant)	3.46	<0.01	2.36	4.56	3.36	4.06	2.66	4.06	2.85	2.57	1.96	3.75	1.29	3.51
Age	-0.02	N.S.	-0.05	0.01	1.27	0.01	-0.01	0.03	1.28	0.002	-0.03	0.02	1.29	0.03
Female	0.08	N.S.	-0.07	0.22	1.25	0.11	<0.05	0.20	1.25	0.09	-0.03	0.21	1.25	0.18
White non-Hispanic	0.11	N.S.	-0.03	0.25	1.11	-0.07	N.S.	-0.16	1.11	0.03	-0.08	0.14	1.11	0.04
Student less than 1 year	-0.07	N.S.	-0.21	0.07	1.20	-0.02	N.S.	-0.11	1.20	0.11	-0.01	0.23	1.21	0.10
Member of a campus organization	-0.16	<0.05	-0.31	-0.02	1.10	-0.05	N.S.	-0.15	1.10	-0.10	-0.22	0.02	1.10	0.03
Know a college student sexually assaulted	-0.02	N.S.	-0.16	0.12	1.25	0.04	N.S.	-0.05	1.25	-0.08	-0.19	0.03	1.25	0.16
Report to university officials	0.14	<0.05	0.004	0.27	1.10	0.09	<0.05	0.01	1.10	0.15	0.05	0.26	1.11	0.18
Date rape attitude and behavior	0.18	N.S.	-0.06	0.43	2.98	0.21	<0.05	0.05	3.07	0.07	-0.13	0.27	2.95	0.34
Pre-contemplation	-0.11	N.S.	-0.23	0.01	2.00	-0.12	<0.01	-0.19	2.00	-0.13	-0.23	-0.03	1.99	0.10
Contemplation	0.09	N.S.	-0.01	0.18	1.88	0.04	N.S.	-0.02	1.90	0.19	0.12	0.27	1.87	0.22
Action	0.04	N.S.	-0.03	0.11	1.39	-0.001	N.S.	-0.05	1.39	0.07	0.01	0.13	1.39	0.03
Rape myths: she asked for it	-0.001	N.S.	-0.15	0.15	3.04	0.07	N.S.	-0.02	3.00	0.04	-0.08	0.17	3.09	0.19
Rape myth: he didn't mean to	0.00	N.S.	-0.13	0.13	2.11	-0.03	N.S.	-0.11	2.10	0.02	-0.08	0.12	2.07	0.11
Rape myth: it wasn't really rape	0.16	N.S.	-0.01	0.34	1.99	0.04	N.S.	-0.07	2.01	0.11	-0.03	0.25	1.98	0.16
Rape myth: she lied	-0.06	N.S.	-0.18	0.05	2.50	-0.02	N.S.	-0.09	2.50	-0.02	-0.11	0.08	2.49	0.14
R^2	0.16				0.28				0.34				0.22	
Adjusted R^2	0.13				0.25				0.32				0.19	
F	5.17				10.08				13.48				7.36	
p value	<0.01				<0.01				<0.01				<0.01	

$N = 507$

p value denotes significance from multivariate regression analysis

CI lower 95 % confidence intervals lower bound, CI upper 95 % confidence intervals upper bound, VIF variance inflation factor, $N.S.$ not significant

effective predictors are as follows: rape myth: It wasn't really rape ($\beta=0.12$) for counseling; Date Rape Attitude and Behavior ($\beta=0.19$) for reporting; contemplation ($\beta=0.28$) for prevention; and contemplation ($\beta=0.20$) for grievance.

Discussion

This study examined associations between attitude, opinions, and perceptions of sexual assault on campus and perceptions of university policies related to sexual assault among college students. The results of this study suggest that students were positive toward most policy measures, and mean scores were high for all policy items. There were three main findings. First, date rape attitude and awareness of sexual assault, gender, and intention to report sexual assault to university officials were associated with perceptions of university's reporting policies. Second, interests in improving situations related to sexual assault on campus were related to perceptions of prevention policies. Third, one of the subscales of rape myths—he didn't mean to—and interests in improving situations were associated with grievance policies. Date rape attitudes and opinions of sexual assault on campus and individual factors are important determinants of perceptions regarding sexual assault on campus and perceptions of university policies.

The results suggesting higher levels of acceptance of date rape were associated with higher levels of support for reporting policies. The results are surprising and are unable to be supported or countered by previous studies. The result seems in opposition to previous research surrounding date rape attitudes, since students who accept date rape would seem to be more likely to perpetrate or to be apathetic toward the issue. The results could be due to the fact that students in general are supportive of adding reporting policies to a campus sexual assault policy. Further research is necessary to investigate the association, as there has not been previous research that examines this relationship. There was a positive relationship between higher levels of awareness of a sexual assault issue on campus and perceived importance of reporting procedures. This relationship is consistent with other studies that have measured awareness of collegiate sexual assault (Sorenson et al. 2014). In addition to date rape attitude and awareness of sexual assault, female gender and higher levels of intention to report sexual assault to university officials were related to higher levels of perceptions that reporting policies are important. This may be because women are more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of sexual assault, as men commit 98% of all sexual assaults (Sedgwick

2006) and women may perceive reporting policies as more important than their male peers. Furthermore, intention to report to a university official was related to the perceptions of reporting policies. It may be important for universities to create a system in which students are aware that university officials can be helpful to students who have experienced sexual assault.

Higher levels of interest in improving situations related to sexual assault on campus, based on the contemplation and action subscales, were related to higher levels of perceptions that prevention policies are important. This result indicates that raising awareness and promoting action among college students are important for drafting prevention policies. Previous studies have suggested that bystander intervention trainings may be helpful in changing student attitudes (Coker et al. 2011), and in preventing sexual assault (McMahon and Banyard 2012) as well as greater dissemination of policy information regarding consent within sexual activity (Borges et al. 2008).

The result that rejection of rape myths was related to grievance policies indicates that reducing rape myth acceptance may be essential to better support victims of sexual assault. These results show that students who are less likely to perpetuate rape myths in their campus believe student survivors should be allowed sufficient redress from the university and that perpetrators should be held accountable for sexual assault. Individuals who accept rape myths do not willingly help people at risk of sexual violence (McMahon and Farmer 2011). Rape myths are not only related to the issue of rape but also to perceptions of women. Rape myth acceptance is related to hostile attitudes and behavior toward women (Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Reducing rape myth acceptance can help to provide students with a safer campus environment. Providing intervention programming directed toward populations likely to believe rape myths may help to decrease rape myth acceptance and has been proven to be effective within differing populations (Rau et al. 2010; Coker et al. 2011).

Explanation of reporting procedures is an important element within a sexual assault policy; typically if a survivor of sexual assault chooses to report their assault, it will be to friends and family before school officials or law enforcement (Orchowski et al. 2009). Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to develop programs to increase awareness of the realities of campus sexual assault. Development of female-focused programming to encourage reporting may be beneficial as well. As programming is implemented within universities to increase levels of reporting, it is important that reporting policies are included within university sexual assault policies. It is important for students to know what the procedures may entail if they choose to report their assault. Although education directed toward reporting procedures may be beneficial for female students, male-focused educational programs are important in prevention of sexual assault,

and to teach about consent (Stewart 2014). With that in mind, males also have a unique opportunity to play an important role in potentially preventing sexual assault through active bystander intervention (Gidycz et al. 2011). Future research should examine male-focused as well as female-focused educational programs.

Since participants interested in improving situations or taking action surrounding campus sexual assault are more likely to be supportive of prevention policies and perceive them as important, explanation of educational and preventative programming must be elements of a university sexual assault policy as well. This will help to increase student understanding of the school's commitment to addressing sexual assault. Further, educational programming has been found to make the most statistically significant difference in prevention of sexual violence (McMahon 2008). Educational programming has the ability to create systemic societal change, which may reduce sexual assault. Such educational programming can aid in reducing sexual assault in creating university culture that no longer is supportive of rape myths and understands the realities of campus sexual assault. Educational programming can also make dispersing information regarding support services, reporting policies, investigative policies, and grievance processes easier.

Finally, elements that address potential options regarding grievance redress and adjudication procedures are essential to be included within a university sexual assault policy, as they specifically address how the student perpetrator will be addressed if found responsible for a sexual assault. Currently, American universities carry out sexual assault adjudication in a preponderance of the evidence fashion, as required by the United States Department of Education (Weizel 2012). Options for redress of survivor grievances may include the ability to change course schedule, change housing (if they reside in on-campus housing), or access to information regarding the university investigation of their sexual assault (University of Utah 2014; University of California 2014; University of Michigan, 2014; University of Iowa 2013).

This study has several note-worthy limitations. For example, the data were only collected from one large state university in the intermountain west of the USA, and therefore may not be generalizable to all American universities. Further, the study participants were from a convenience sample. There is no way to assess how respondents and non-respondents are different or similar to each other. Due to the subject matter of the survey, it may be possible that some participants chose socially desirable answers. It is to be noted that some students declined to participate due to the topic of the survey—they may not have been interested in the topic or may have felt that it was too sensitive. This study was cross-sectional and did not examine causal directions. There is also the possible impact of a ceiling effect given how high means were within the

possible range of the scales. Finally, the Cronbach alpha was low for grievance/adjudication under university policy perceptions and suggested poor reliability.

Conclusion

Research into student perceptions and attitudes of university sexual assault policies has a gap within current relevant literature. The majority of literature regarding university sexual assault policies has been government funded and has not always included student perspectives. This study provides increased knowledge about the association between attitudes and perceptions of sexual assault and perceptions of university sexual assault policies among college students. The results of this study indicate that attitudes and perceptions of sexual assault may be very important for successful implementation of university policies related to sexual assault. In particular, university programs to increase awareness and interest, female-focused programs, better access to university officials, and eliminating rape myth acceptance are key factors for university policies. More research regarding student attitudes and awareness of sexual assault policies can help to guide policy reform. Research into policy effectiveness would also be beneficial in continuing to reform policies and prevent collegiate sexual assault.

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