

## **G8.4** Conwy 1 Thursday 6 December 9.00-11.00

### ***Campus sexual violence and graduate students (0192)***

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The majority of efforts to address campus sexual violence focus on undergraduate students, which is important, as they are at particular risk due to their developmental stage, age, and other social factors in the United States (Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, Shook-Sa, & Peterson, 2016), in the UK (National Union of Students, 2015) and in other countries (e.g., Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). However, the lack of attention to graduate students is a glaring gap in the research literature and in our delivery of prevention and outreach efforts.

There is limited research documenting the experiences of graduate students related to sexual assault. One recent source of information is a large campus climate study project conducted by the American Association of Universities (AAU) that gathered information from both undergraduate and graduate students at 27 IHE across the United States. The study found that in total, 3.4% of female graduate students reported nonconsensual penetration or sexual touching involving physical force or incapacitation. Other U.S. campuses have also produced reports indicating the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by graduate students, with rates of sexual violence varying. For example in a report released by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Office of the Chancellor, 2014), a total of 5% of female graduate students reported experiences of sexual assault. According to a 2015 report from Stanford University, 2% of female graduate students reported experiences of sexual assault and 10.1% reported sexual misconduct (Office of the Provost, September 2015).

Graduate students may experience particular vulnerabilities to sexual violence on campus that have not been adequately studied (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2017). Many graduate students are in situations where they are dependent on their instructors for completing advanced degrees, and may be placed in laboratories or clinical settings that feel isolated from the larger campus community. Graduate students may also perceive sexual assault as more of an undergraduate issue that happens at parties where alcohol is abundant, and may therefore feel uncomfortable disclosing their experience or seeking assistance. A national study of counseling center directors found that graduate students tend to wait longer to seek counseling services than undergraduate students (Gallagher, 2011). In addition, there is evidence that students more

generally are unaware of resources related specifically to sexual violence on campus (Banyard et al., 2007; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010), which may be exacerbated for graduate students who are not involved in direct outreach efforts.

To further explore the experiences of graduate students, an online survey was administered to 9,546 students, which was comprised of 79.9% undergraduates and 20.1% graduates. The sample included a diverse representation of ethnicity, including 46.1 % White, 31% Asian American, and smaller percentages of African American, Hispanic and “Other”. Of the graduate students in the sample, 78.6 identified as heterosexual, 18.3% as bisexual, and 3.1% as gay/lesbian.

A total of 5.2% of graduate students reported experiences of sexual violence since coming to the university, with 7.2% of graduate women reporting such experiences. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students reported greater frequencies of victimization, with bisexual students demonstrating significantly increased victimization compared to other students. In addition, 13% of graduate students reported receiving disclosures from peers. MANCOVA revealed that compared to undergraduate students, graduate students had significantly less awareness of campus resources, less confidence in knowing where to seek assistance, and less of a sense of community. There were no differences in perceptions of the university’s handling of sexual violence.

The findings highlight the importance of including and targeting graduate students in campus outreach efforts, service delivery, and awareness programs. Work is needed to tailor educational programs to be relevant for graduate students, including both the content and delivery of such efforts. Graduate students are often in situations different from undergraduates and outreach needs to address their unique contexts that may include partners, children, finances and careers (Bulmer et al., 2010; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Best practices for prevention work indicates that multiple exposures to information are needed (Taylor et al., 2010), and thus a variety of messaging efforts are likely needed to reach graduate students.

The results suggest that it is important not only for victims to be aware of resources related to sexual violence, but also for the greater community of students to be informed so that they can react in supportive ways to disclosures. Of those students receiving disclosures from peers who were women, over 50% received more than 2 disclosures, which is consistent with other research that demonstrates that most students disclose sexual violence incidents to a

peer (Sabina & Ho, 2014). Graduate students, as well as undergraduates, therefore need to know how to respond to peers that disclose in effective ways.

Further work is needed to replicate these findings across other institutions. In addition, this study did not include specific questions about sexual harassment, which may be an even more prevalent experience for women of graduate student status. Studies from both within the U.S. (Rosenthal, Smidt and Freyd, 2016) and other countries such as Ghana (Norman, Aikins, & Binka, 2013) and the Netherlands (Rademakers, van den Muijsenbergh, Slappendel, Lagroanssen & Borleffs, 2008) indicate the widespread problem of sexual harassment for female-identified graduate students. Future work is needed to ask about the spectrum of sexual harassment behaviors.

This study adds to the growing body of knowledge on campus sexual violence and has implications to consider for the development of intervention and prevention efforts to engage graduate students to ensure that they are receiving information, training, and know how to access resources.

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