

Knowledge of Campus and Community Sexual Assault Resources Among Students

Cortney A. Franklin, Ph.D.

Tasha A. Menaker, M.A.

The prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses has drawn substantial attention from scholars and university administrators. Concerns surrounding the safety of the campus environment are motivated by a desire to protect students who may be increasingly vulnerable to sexual assault victimization. Vulnerability is, in part, due to the hypersexualized and high-risk nature of the campus context, where alcohol consumption and a “hook-up culture” proliferates. Indeed, estimates suggest that approximately 20 to 25 percent of women will experience attempted or completed rape during their tenure in college (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Additionally, estimates report that approximately 9 to 14 percent of college males report experiencing sexual assault (e.g., Struckman-Johnson, 1988; Ryan, 1998). Scholars and advocates have also drawn attention to the importance of victim-centered responses to individuals who disclose sexual assault (Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005). Empathic and positive reactions by service professionals have the capacity to mediate the negative impact of victimization on students’ mental health outcomes, including internalizing disorders like generalized anxiety and clinical depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and elevated levels of fear (Ullman, 1999). To be sure, appropriate victim-centered responses have blunted some of these negative effects that result from sexual assault victimization and have directly encouraged post-traumatic growth (Ullman, 1999). It is important to note, however, that for campus and community service providers to respond appropriately and aid recovery, victims must be aware that these resources are available to them.

This report presents results from a survey about Sam Houston State University students’ knowledge and awareness of campus and community resources for victims of sexual assault.

Resources Available to Student Victims

Similar to other higher education campuses, Sam Houston State University campus provides a range of resources to undergraduate and graduate students who have experienced crime victimization (Eisenberg et al., 2012; Hayes-

Smith, & Hayes-Smith, 2009). An inventory of services demonstrates that students have access to counseling and health resources, including therapy for interpersonal relationships, victimization-specific interventions, pregnancy testing, and screening for sexually transmitted infections through on-campus Centers. A University Police Department (UPD) with commissioned police officers investigates reports of sexual assault. The Dean of Students’ Office conducts civil investigations and, by Title IX federal regulations, provides appropriate accommodations to anyone who discloses victimization. Sexual Assault Awareness-Raising programs include an annual “Ignite the Night” rally, part of the national “Take Back the Night Movement” that originated in the mid-1970s as a protest march and has since spread to colleges and universities across the country. Students are also provided with target-hardening strategies, including blue light emergency telephones that dial directly to the University Police Department and are strategically positioned across campus, as well as a University-Sponsored “Escort Service” to provide protective accompaniment for any student who feels uncomfortable traveling across campus during periods in which vulnerability is heightened.

The broader community in which the SHSU campus is located also provides resources for student residents. Indeed, a local non-government-affiliated domestic violence shelter and rape crisis center services individuals who disclose victimization. A 24-hour crisis hotline, sponsored and maintained by the center, is available to provide crisis counseling and advocacy to callers. The county also houses a Women’s Shelter that offers intervention, advocacy, and hospital accompaniment. In addition to any counseling services provided by the city and county shelters, there are a limited number of therapists in private practice within the city limits with the capacity to provide intervention for victims. Religious organizations are also situated within the city limits. The community hospital is located less than three miles from the campus and can provide emergency response, but does not currently provide forensic medical examination. Finally, the municipal city police department responds and investigates reports of sexual assault from community and student residents.

Current Study

Findings presented in this research brief were derived from a study of resource knowledge and use among students enrolled at Sam Houston State University. Data were collected during September and October 2013. Classes were selected for inclusion in the study through a two-phase process. First, sections with enrollment exceeding 100 students were identified in the College of Criminal Justice. Eleven professors were contacted and their permission to administer the survey was solicited. One-hundred percent of professors contacted agreed to allow participation. Next, students enrolled in each of the 11 courses were invited to voluntarily participate in an IRB-approved survey. Administration of the survey instrument took approximately 30 minutes. Students were provided with contact information for university resources in the event of emotional upset. Administration produced 503 completed surveys.

Sample Description

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample of students who participated in the study. The average age of respondents was nearly 21 years old, and females made up 50 percent of the sample. Freshman represented 17.6 percent of the sample, sophomores made up 25 percent, juniors comprised 32.7 percent, and the remaining 24.8 percent were seniors. Nearly half of the students were White, 17.4 percent were African American, and almost 27 percent were Hispanic. Approximately 45 percent of subjects were employed, nearly 86 percent were criminal justice majors, 11 percent were part of the university Greek system, 7 percent were involved in university athletics, and 3 percent were part of ROTC. Finally, just under half of respondents were in an exclusive dating relationship (44.2%).

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents	
Age (mean)	20.63
Females	50%
Class standing	
Freshman	17.6%
Sophomores	25.0%
Juniors	32.7%
Seniors	24.8%
Race	
White	45.8%
African American	17.4%
Hispanic	26.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4%
Native American	0.2%
Other	8.5%
Employed	44.9%
Criminal Justice Majors	85.6%
University Greek System	10.7%
University Athletic Affiliation	7.3%
ROTC	3.2%
Exclusive dating relationship	44.2%

Resource Knowledge on Campus

The first series of analyses focused on students' general knowledge of resources for victims of sexual assault on campus. While all incoming and transfer students who attend orientation are provided with information on the campus resources available to student victims of sexual assault, only 50 percent of students reported receiving information on sexual assault resources since enrolling for classes at this higher education institution. More problematic, when asked if they were aware of where to "get information about sexual assaults on campus," only approximately one-third of students answered affirmatively. These findings are consistent with research conducted on college campuses in other geographic regions of the country (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010).

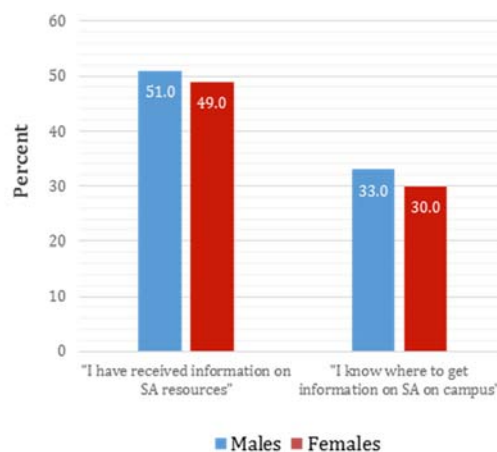


Figure 1. Resource Knowledge on Campus

Campus Resource Accessibility

The second series of analyses investigated the extent to which students felt that resource information provided by this particular university were sufficient to aid bystanders or student victims if faced with a sexual assault situation. Results demonstrated that approximately 44 percent of the males and 53 percent of the females agreed that the sexual assault resources provided to students were "NOT informative enough." Similarly, nearly 66 percent of males and 68 percent of females reported not knowing enough about the sexual assault resources on campus to use them in "a sexual assault situation." These findings suggest that, in general, more than half of the 500 students surveyed were unaware of services designed to mitigate trauma for sexual assault survivors.

Likelihood of Resource Use

The third series of analyses focused on whether or not students would actually use the information they were provided if faced with a sexual assault situation. Findings from these analyses were more promising in terms of the percent of the sample that responded affirmatively. Specifically, nearly 85 percent of males and 83 percent of fe-

males reported that they would indeed use the sexual assault information given to them by the university if they “encountered a sexual assault situation.” This was also the case regarding prospects for using sexual assault information if they were sexually assaulted (81.7% of males and 86.8% of females).

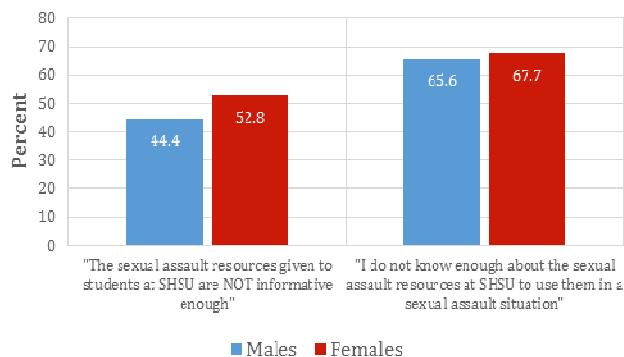


Figure 2. Campus Resource Accessibility

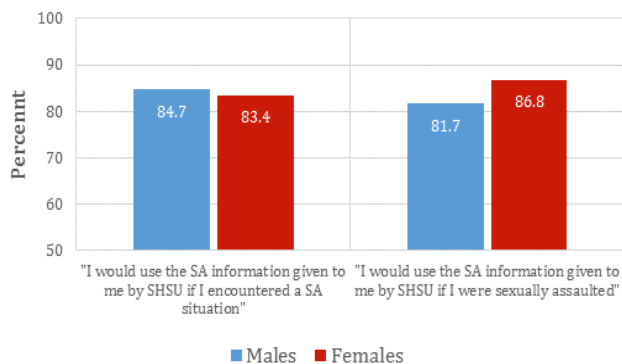


Figure 3. Likelihood of Resource Use

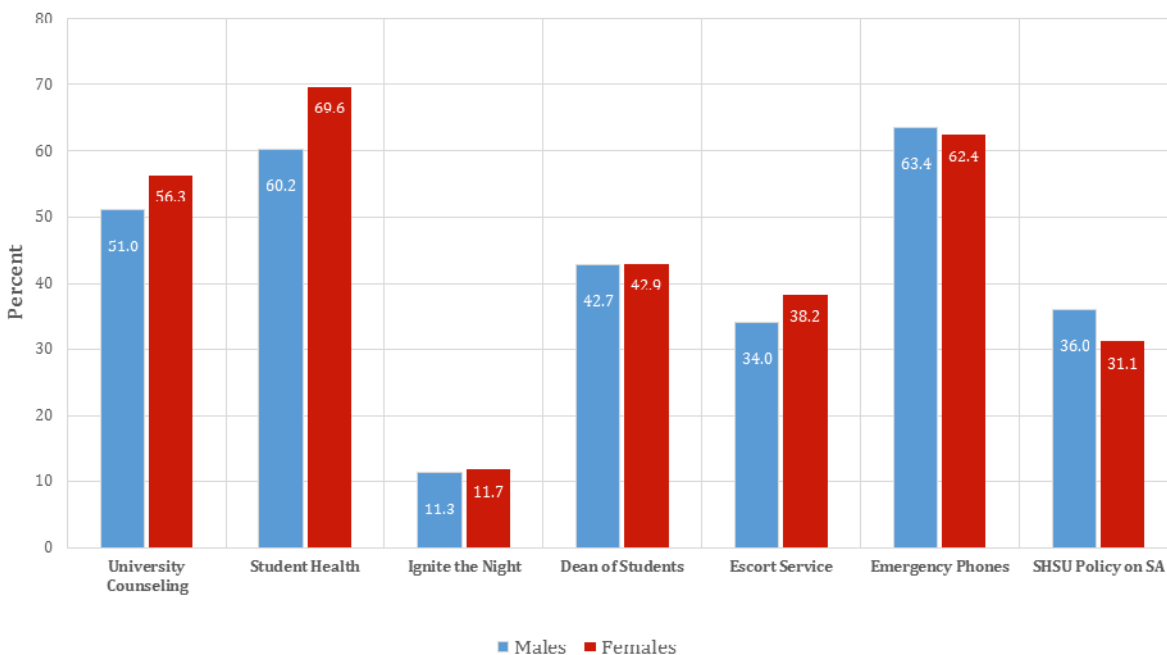


Figure 4. Familiarity with Campus Resources

Familiarity with University Services

The fourth series of analyses investigated students’ familiarity with seven different services provided by the University and located on campus. Approximately half of males and more than half of females reported some level of familiarity with university counseling services. Related, the majority of male and female respondents were familiar with the on-campus student health facility (60.2% and 69.6%, respectively). In contrast, just over 10 percent of respondents reported any familiarity with the University’s awareness raising campaign, “Ignite the night.”

Approximately 43 percent of students were familiar with the Dean of Students’ Office as a sexual assault resource, and just over one-third of males and females were familiar with the university-sponsored escort service.

Not surprisingly, the greatest proportion of students reported familiarity with campus emergency phones as compared to all other university resources, but only approximately one-third of respondents were aware of a university policy on sexual assault. It appears as if those resources with the greatest degree of visibility and/or those most likely to be used for services other than sexual assault intervention were familiar to students participating in the survey.

Familiarity with Community Services

The final series of analyses focused on students’ familiarity with eight resources available to the local community. Findings from these analyses demonstrate a general lack of awareness in terms of community support for victims of

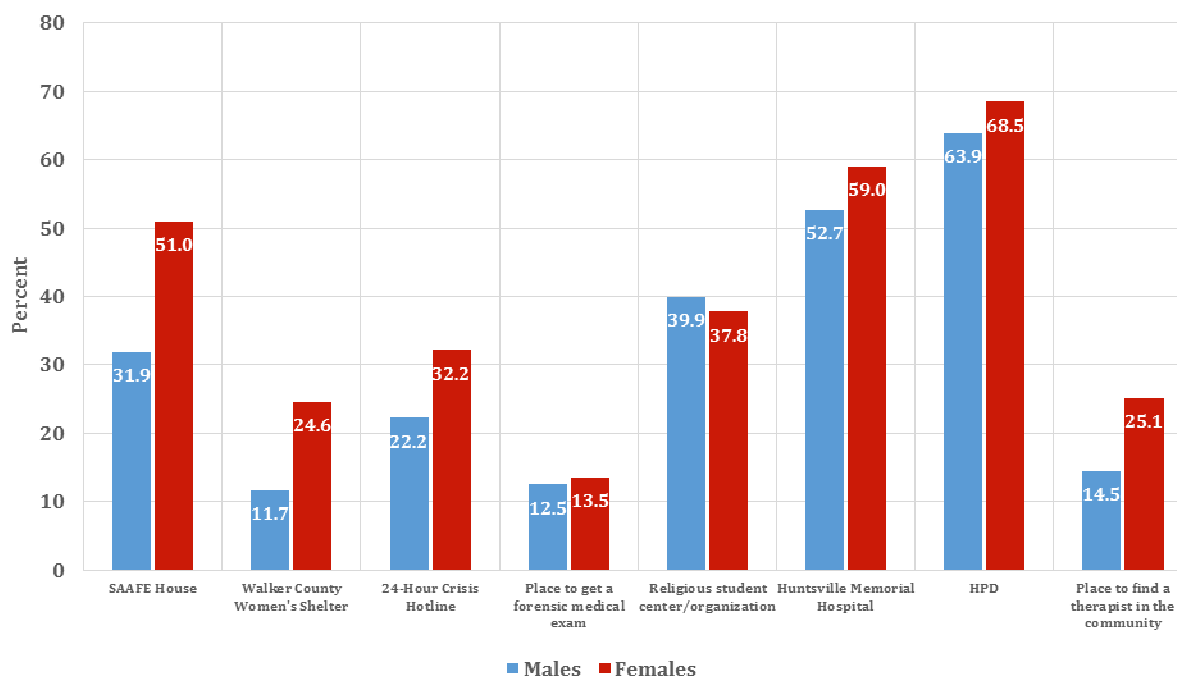


Figure 5: Familiarity with Community Resources

sexual assault. To be sure, the local rape crisis center was only familiar to one-third of male respondents and one-half of female respondents. The county women's shelter was even less well known, where 12 percent of males and 25 percent of females reported some degree of familiarity. Similarly, 22.2 percent of males and 32.2 percent of females reported familiarity with a 24-hour crisis hotline and only approximately 13 and 14 percent of males and females, respectively, had knowledge of a place to get a forensic medical exam. These findings are particularly problematic as forensic medical exams provide the necessary evidence collection and treatment intervention for victims of sexual assault that aid in formal criminal justice case processing through the local district attorney's office. With no knowledge of where to obtain these services, victims suffer and offenders are less likely to face formal sanctions. Student familiarity with a religious student center/organization approached 40 percent and more than half of respondents reported awareness of the community hospital. The local municipal police department garnered the greatest proportion of respondent familiarity with 63.9 percent of males and 68.5 percent of females reporting police department knowledge. Finally, students were generally unfamiliar with a place to find a therapist within the community.

Findings from these analyses demonstrate generally that student awareness of and familiarity with resources is lacking. In addressing victims of sexual assault, this limited knowledge can have adverse long-term mental and physical health outcomes for victims and tangible criminal jus-

tice system consequences (Fisher et al., 2000). Indeed, results from the current study do provide hope in terms of student likelihood to use services.

Sexual Assault Survivors

After identifying the general knowledge, awareness, and familiarity with campus and community resources among the full sample, the next series of analyses identified the proportion of students who reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact as a result of intoxication, threats of force, or force, and their familiarity with resources for victims of sexual assault. Results demonstrated that, among women who responded to questions regarding sexual assault experiences (90.4%; $n = 216$), 16.7 percent reported unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault ($n = 42$). Among males responding (11.6%; $n = 28$), 8 subjects (or 28.6 % of respondents) reported unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault. These findings are relatively consistent with existing research (Fisher et al., 2000), though prior empirical assessments of prevalence have generally found higher proportions of females affected directly by sexually coercive experiences and sexual assault on college campuses.

Once sexual assault survivors had been identified, the last series of analyses compared responses between victims and their non-victimized counterparts on campus resource accessibility and likelihood of use. Results demonstrated that, among those men and women enrolled at this university, victims provided significantly different responses than their non-victimized counterparts when

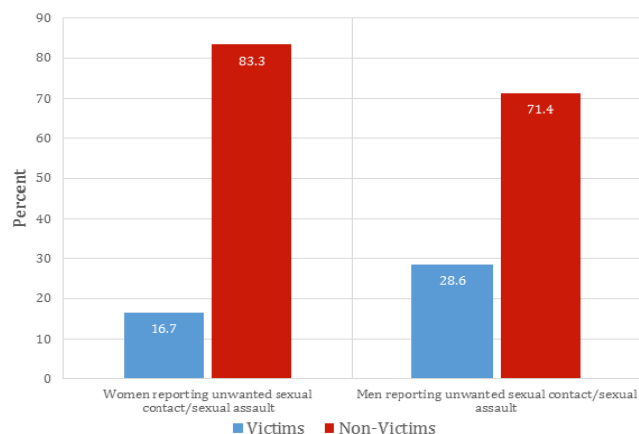


Figure 6: Sexual Assault Survivors

prompted about the nature of information regarding sexual assault resources on campus and their likelihood to use resource information if they were sexually assaulted. To be sure, the mean response among victims regarding the nature of information provided to students was significantly more negative as compared to non-victims, where more victims rated sexual assault resource information as “NOT informative enough.” Related, a significantly greater proportion of victims reported that they were “not likely to use resource information given to them by this university if they were sexually assaulted” as compared to non-victims. It appears as if victims may be rating likelihood of service use based upon previous personal experience of information provided and, perhaps, previous help-seeking and resource use behavior at this university.

Strategies to Enhance Resource Knowledge and Help-Seeking among University Students

Generally, the findings presented here are not inconsistent with what has been demonstrated in existing literature (Eisenberg et al., 2012; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010). From a policy standpoint, there are several steps that may enhance student awareness, knowledge, and familiarity with resources, and thus increase effective help-seeking and resource use behaviors among victims. Addressing these pertinent issues can have an important impact on student health and well-being, as well as retention, persistence, and degree completion for existing students. Additionally, among those who reported victimization, it appears as if information and resources may need to be augmented with victim-centered strategies that encourage disclosure and post-traumatic healing.

In terms of increasing knowledge and familiarity, presenting students with information primarily during new student orientation sessions, while efficient at reaching a large number of students, may not be the most effective strategy as participants are already overwhelmed with a host of

Variables	Victims		Non-Victims	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
“The sexual assault resources given to students are NOT informative enough”	1.19*	0.78	1.51	0.71
“I do not know enough about the sexual assault resources to use them in a sexual assault situation”	1.08	0.85	1.09	0.85
“I would use the sexual assault information given to me if I encountered a sexual assault situation”	0.68*	0.47	0.86	0.35
“I would use the sexual assault information given to me if I was sexually assaulted”	0.79	0.41	0.87	0.33

SD = Standard Deviation; * statistically significant difference at p<.05

material related to their experience as new college students. Additionally, studies have demonstrated a dosage effect whereby information presented over a long time period is more effectively retained and recalled than that given in a short time span (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Perhaps current strategies would be enhanced by dissemination plans that remind students of campus and community resources during the first several weeks of classes and again throughout the semester. Taking advantage of residence life and Greek, athletic and ROTC affiliations may also aid efforts to capture freshmen students residing on campus and those involved in university organizations.

Efforts to enhance existing service provision can be informed by research demonstrating that, upon disclosure, victims who are met with empathic and understanding responses (regardless of criminal outcome) are more likely to report positive mental health outcomes and post-traumatic healing (Campbell et al., 2001; Ullman, 1996). Training first-responders on appropriate protocol for sexual assault disclosure will limit “secondary victimization” (Campbell, 2008) and increase the overall health and well-being of the university community. This includes strategies for police, hospital and health service personnel, and university stakeholders (e.g., Residence Life staff, Dean of Student Services office, and faculty) in terms of the best practices for dealing with student disclosure (Sabina & Ho, 2014).

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About the Authors

Cortney A. Franklin, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the College of Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University. Her research specializes in victimology, sexual assault on the college campus, intimate partner violence, and human sex trafficking. She was recently awarded the New Scholar award for the Victimology section of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Tasha A. Menaker, M.A. is a doctoral candidate in the College of Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University. Her research focuses on trauma and posttraumatic growth and violence against women, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and prostitution.

Resources

National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-HOPE

National Center for Victims of Crime
Washington, D.C.
www.victimsofcrime.org
202-461-8701

National Sexual Violence Resources Center
Enola, PA
www.nsvrc.org
877-739-3895

RAINN: Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network
www.rainn.org

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault
Austin, Texas
www.taasa.org
512-474-7190

SAAFE House
Huntsville, TX
www.safehouse.org
936-294-2513; 936-294-3369

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month



NEW CAMPUS SAFETY MOBILE APP

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) has recently launched Texas Safety University (TX Safety U), a free app available on iOS and Android. Through this app, students, faculty, staff, and other members of campus communities can quickly access customized contact information, including campus and community resources available to those who have experienced sexual assault, dating, violence, domestic violence or stalking. As is apparent from the study reported here, this is a necessary and welcome resource to assist students and others in finding the resources they need. The TX Safety U app is available to download on Google Play and iTunes Store and may be accessed at:

www.taasa.org/txsafetyu/

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