



Addressing the Trauma of Intimate Partner Violence on College Campuses An Issue Brief Developed By Witness Justice and the GlassBook Project Helga Luest, Author

Background

Recognizing that intimate partner violence (IPV) on college campuses is a significant issue facing young people, Witness Justice and the GlassBook Project brought together advocates from different communities to discuss and develop an issue brief as a starting point for change in the region and beyond. This project was supported by the Office on Women's Health, Region II.

One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.¹ In 1998, the U.S. Department of Justice published *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women* which states "One in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape." It is estimated that 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.² Females accounted for 86% of abuse victims at the hands of a boyfriend.³ The trauma experienced by those families involves the adult victim and children alike, having an impact on mental and physical health, the cost of which is estimated in excess of \$5.8 billion each year.⁴

According to the *Bureau of Justice Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence*, May 2000, women ages 16-24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence. The same report indicates that, "in 1995, seven percent of all murder victims were young women who were killed by their boyfriends." Further evidence of this significant public health concern for women includes:

- One of five college females will experience some form of dating violence.
- A survey of 500 young women, ages 15 to 24, found that 60 percent were currently involved in an ongoing abusive relationship and all participants had experienced violence in a dating relationship.
- One study found that 38 percent of date rape victims were young women from 14 to 17 years of age.
- A survey of adolescent and college students revealed that date rape accounted for 67 percent of sexual assaults.

¹ Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2003). *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta, GA: National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control.

³ Bureau of Justice Statistics. (June, 2005). *Family Violence Statistics*. U.S. Department of Justice.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2003). *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta, GA: National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control.

The GlassBook Project is a creation of Artist Nick Kline, done in partnership with Witness Justice. The Project collaborates with other artists, survivors, students, colleges, agencies and community organizations.

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- More than half young women raped (68 percent) knew their rapist either as a boyfriend, friend or casual acquaintance.
- Six out of 10 rapes of young women occur in their own home or a friend or relative's home, not in a dark alley.

Students, parents, teachers, academic administrators, service providers and others in the community need to be aware of some of the warning signs that IPV may be taking place. Some of these signs include isolation from family and friends, verbal and emotional abuse and a pattern of behavior to control the victim. But even when recognizing these signs, “bystanders” often choose not to get involved because they view IPV as a personal matter, because there is risk associated to becoming involved and because reporting and getting involved can impact a reporter’s safety and wellbeing.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s “10 Strategic Initiatives” announced in January 2010, the issues of violence and trauma are priority issues, with the goal being to “reduce the behavioral health impacts of violence and trauma and integrate trauma-informed services in prevention and treatment programs in States and communities, and throughout the health service delivery system to address root causes of pervasive, harmful, and costly public health problems.” This issue brief and activities directed to inform this effort brought together community partners to identify and advocate for the best practices in addressing IPV among women on college campuses, thereby addressing a federal priority area.

While this issue brief is based on circumstance and perspective in New Jersey, the expert participants agreed that consensus and advocacy points are applicable throughout the United States.

Expert Roundtable Discussion

On July 9, 2010 an expert roundtable discussion was convened by Witness Justice and the GlassBook Project at Rutgers University-Newark to discuss trauma related to IPV on college campuses. Participants spent their time looking at the most significant obstacles to addressing IPV on college campuses in New Jersey. The group discussed best practices (i.e. the Green Dot program) and strategies for survivors, students/bystanders, university staff, family members and other communities. The meeting was attended by 17 people, with additional experts in the state and elsewhere providing perspective and input for this issue brief.

Areas of Challenge

Domestic violence or IPV often gets missed on college campuses for a number of reasons. As teenagers and young adults, students find themselves, often for the first time, in a different life and environment with others who have different experiences. When a new romance arises, a partner’s charm, love and likability, coupled with uncertainty about what acceptable adult behavior is, can make it difficult to recognize physically or emotionally abusive behavior or control as domestic violence. And being away from home makes new and loving relationships that much more important. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt, confusion

and pride all come into play. Disclosing and reporting IPV can present difficult consequences that can be economic, social and academic in nature, and may also compromise safety for the survivor.

While the prevalence of IPV in the lives of young people is clear, this issue does not seem to be a priority concern for university administrations. For those schools that have taken action, IPV on campus that has received public attention seems to have been a stronger motivator than violence prevention. And when programs are present, there is typically a disconnect between what prevention program administrators are doing and what the academic and university leadership is aware of. The lack of standards at the state level has meant campus communities have remained in a “status quo” environment, ripe for IPV, where instituting uniform policies and procedures and accountability could greatly improve matters. If change is to occur and better mechanisms for reporting, assessing and responding to IPV are to be developed, university leadership needs to facilitate and apply adequate resources toward a responsive change.

Some other campus concerns are cultural in nature. Culture plays a significant role in the intergenerational attitudes regarding gender, class, home environment, drug and alcohol use and acceptability of violence. Therefore, the language (both literal and in tone) being used in prevention and awareness needs to take these cultural factors into account in order to resonate with all populations and cultures on campus. In keeping with a trauma-informed approach, it is important to meet survivors *where they are*, so looking at the campus versus commuter cultures is also helpful in finding an appropriate way to connect with all students.

Consensus and Advocacy Points for Change

This group of experts felt that a number of things could and should happen to ensure that students have the best support possible to prevent IPV and related trauma on college campuses. These points were developed by Witness Justice and the GlassBook Project together with other partners at the meeting and may not reflect the views or positions of the U.S. Government. The consensus and advocacy points include:

1. All students should undergo an orientation to IPV upon beginning their academic work at a college and should hear similar messaging throughout their academic experience.
2. Students who report IPV should be informed of treatment, support and victim rights by campus programs and services and faculty and staff. This should be done with a trauma-informed approach.
3. National, regional and local domestic and sexual violence and stalking resource groups should be encouraged to include cyber stalking in educational materials around women and violence on college campuses.
4. An adaptation of the nationally utilized lethality screen for domestic violence or Mosaic threat assessment tool should be developed for use on college campuses with students. This lethality screen could be utilized by anyone suspecting that a student may be in a less than safe or unhealthy relationship and the assessment tool could be the first step in reporting concern.

5. A universal trauma education and awareness program (e.g. the GlassBook Project or through Active Minds) on campuses should be engaged to look at IPV and related trauma responses to open channels of communication that may be essential in eliminating IPV on campuses. A gender-specific focus within this initiative would be very helpful and this effort should include information about how alcohol and drugs may play a role in behavioral changes and IPV. The Higher Education Commission should mandate this initiative.
6. A national media campaign should be developed to communicate what is acceptable in relationships (both heterosexual and LGBTQ) and how to break the cycle of IPV and inactive bystander behaviors that only perpetuate the problem. The campaign should have an emphasis on the message of hope and resiliency. When possible, college sports figures should be involved in outreach initiatives.
7. Best practices in preventing and addressing IPV on campuses should be shared with schools across the country.
8. National standards to prevent and address IPV on college campuses should be encouraged for institutions of higher learning, with legislation and funding consequences attached. Strategic initiatives that create cultures of support and safety should be engaged, with full faculty and staff training required.
9. State governments should mandate state funded institutions to regularly have all faculty and staff educated on IPV.
10. Universities and faculty should be incentivized to integrate IPV education (awareness and prevention) into classroom curriculum. This integration should happen across disciplines.
11. The secondary or vicarious traumatization experienced by campus and other law enforcement officers as well as campus professional and mental health staff responding to campus IPV calls needs to be addressed with appropriate education and support services.
12. Law enforcement must be trained in IPV and related trauma so they can be effective and sensitive during investigation and prosecution.

Expert Contributors

The following experts attended the roundtable discussion and contributed to the development of this issue brief.

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