The Violence Prevention & Women’s Resource Center
Preventing Sexual Assault on College Campuses
Assessment Report

Erika Zepeda, Coordinator

Choose One: Operational Assessment

Date of Assessment Implementation: April 2010

Date of Report: August 2010

Purpose of Assessment
The U.S. Justice Department (2005) estimates that up to 25 percent of college aged women will be raped or sexually assaulted by the time they graduate from a four year institution. This epidemic is unknown largely due to the amount of “hidden rape” occurring in the United States. Sexual assault prevalence studies have coined the term “hidden rape” to emphasize that rape is one of the most underreported crimes in the United States. The U.S. Justice Department estimates that less than 5 percent of sexual assaults are reported to campus or community law enforcement. The Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office emphasizes that eighty to ninety percent of sexual assaults occurring against women between the ages of 16-24 are acquaintance crimes. Among this age group, survivors of sexual assault are most likely to know the perpetrator as an intimate partner, friend, co-worker or acquaintance.

In the 1990s, the United States Congress passed laws to ensure college and universities institutionalized strategies to prevent and respond to sexual assault. The Campus Sexual Assault Victims’ Bills of Rights of 1990, 1992, and 1998 required that universities develop prevention policies and provide victim advocacy to survivors of intimate partner violence. The Federal Crime Awareness Campus Security Act of 1992 specifies that a university receiving Federal Title IV funding develop a sexual assault prevention policy (Potter, Krider, & McMahon, 2000). The research is specifically aimed at campus partners that collaborate in preventing and responding to sexual assault investigations.

At Cal Poly Pomona, the University offers services through the Violence Prevention and Women’s Resource Center that strive to impact their development through cultural enhancement. A pair of professional staff members is responsible for offering these services, in conjunction with student interns, student assistants, and volunteers.

The purpose of the research is to explore approaches to conducting a survivor-centered campus response to sexual assault. The research will focus on addressing the following questions:

1. How does a university assess the campus climate and students perceptions of rape victims, rape prevention, and false beliefs about rape?
2. What feedback, concerns and fears do university students have regarding campus prevention of sexual assault?

Assessment Methodology
The survey population included 400 female students attending Cal Poly Pomona that were sent the link to the survey, and 60 students participated in the survey. The focus group population was a subset of the survey population, all of whom opted in to participate in the group at the completion of the survey, 9 students participated in the focus group. The Attitude Toward Rape Victims Scale assesses attitudes toward rape victims including: power and rape, women’s resistance during rape, women’s responsibility in rape prevention, perceptions of rape victims, and false beliefs about rape. The ARVS is to be used in research in sexual victimology, investigation of rape-related attitudes and behaviors (Ward, 1988). The ARVS has been validated through the use of four scales, Sexual conservatism (SC), Adversarial Sexual Beliefs (ASB), Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (AIV), and Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS). The focus group served as an additional means to obtain pertinent
information on student’s feelings toward sexual assault, barriers to reporting incidences of sexual assault,
important aspects of support services on campus, and ways the university might help prevent sexual assault on
campus. Focus group questions were generated from the Sexual Assault and Campus Climate study conducted
in 1999 by the Cal Poly Pomona Police Department.

Results
The female survey participants illustrated a higher level of sexual conservatism (SC) (.99 on a Likert scale of 0
corresponding to attitudes most favorable towards rape victims, 4 illustrating attitudes least favorable towards
rape victims). Higher SC accounted for women portraying negative attitudes towards rape victims when ranking
statements that pertained to the appearance of the victim, false accusations and victim blaming. Women surveyed
portrayed mixed attitudes towards rape victims for myths and stereotypes pertaining to reputations, unplanned
pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, and effective consent.

The focus group participants addressed six themes pertaining to sexual assault including: 1) the importance of
awareness, 2) survivor concerns pertaining to policy and confidentiality, 3) safety concerns, 4) support service
suggestions, 5) law enforcement support, and 6) prevention education needs.

Conclusion
Current students refer to understanding sexual assault and survivor options as their “right”. The transition from
using “survivor healing process” to “survivor rights” could be contributed to ten years or prevention education
programming available on the campus. Today’s students stressed the importance for campus leadership and
administration to support the efforts of a violence prevention program. 100% of students surveyed agreed to the
statement that “no one deserves to be raped” but still illustrated victim blaming beliefs when ranking statements
such as “women who dress provocatively are asking for it”, and “women who drink are more likely to have sex”.

Implications for Practice
Recommendations include:

1) The Violence Prevention & Women’s Resource Center should continue to develop, strengthen, the
violence prevention efforts on their campus by promoting a prevention education model in which the role
of campus and community partners are widely advertised among the students, staff and faculty members.
Year round information regarding survivor support services and campus Sexual Assault Response Team
(SART), confidentiality policies, cost of services, and survivor rights need to be distributed among
students. Policy pertaining to confidentiality and underage drinking needs to be clarified as it is viewed as
unclear to female students.

2) Prevention Education needs to be strengthened to include strategies that focus on bystander education,
men as allies, and the definitions of sexual assault, rape, and effective consent. Such prevention
education models were seen by the women as a means to educate potential victims with skills needed to
prevent an assault from taking place. Bystander education and buddy system strategies should address
scenarios involving alcohol, party safety, and dating safety

3) Addressing victim blame and sexual assault stereotypes could be improved by adjusting in-class
presentations to highlight the risk that all women face in being a potential victim. While current students
do not identify themselves at risk for experiencing sexual assault, they know that other women are. Thus,
educating the campus community on sexual conservatism and how an individual’s ideology can
negatively or positively affect their ability to assist, respond, and refer a survivor of sexual assault to
support services is crucial. If students are able to understand their own ideology and victim blaming
tendencies, students can become better informed on the realities of sex crimes and how they can
appropriately help others.

4) It is encouraged that the university develop a stronger relationship with the Sexual Assault Response
Team Coordinator housed within the local rape crisis center. By revisiting community practices and
protocol, the university can develop their own strategy in responding to sexual assaults that involve
medical examinations, police interviews, and after-hour attention. It is crucial that the university have a
close partnership with the rape crisis center to be in compliance with state and federal laws, preventing
the infringement of victim rights during an investigation.