



Progress on Campus Climate Surveys

More than one year after the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault on Campus released a set of reports and documents on its website notalone.gov, we have seen unprecedented levels of conversation about campus surveys as a key tool in these efforts. This document summarizes key work from the past year. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list but rather a sample of initiatives that are helping institutions take next steps to make campus surveys valuable resources for ending sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking on campuses. The focus of this summary is on efforts to improve campus climate surveys and to support campuses as they conduct them.

Resources for Campuses:

A number of websites and documents provide helpful information to campuses interested in conducting climate surveys.

- Notalone.gov has a document that summarizes a number of key issues related to conducting sexual violence surveys on campus <https://www.notalone.gov/assets/ovw-climate-survey.pdf>
- Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) has a website that includes information on their work related to helping campuses understand and conduct sexual violence climate surveys. <http://campusclimate.gsu.edu/>
- Rutgers University and their Center on Violence Against Women and Children, as part of their research project for the White House Task Force has prepared a guide entitled “Understanding and Responding to Campus Sexual Assault: A Guide to Climate Assessment for Colleges and Universities.” The guide already has several chapters available on their website <http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centersandprograms/vawc/researchevaluation/CampusClimateProject.aspx> including a copy of their survey, a guide to fostering relationships on campus related to conducting climate surveys, and conducting a resource audit.
- Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, as part of their university’s many years of experience with campus surveys on sexual assault, developed a guide for campus administrators, faculty, and staff to aid discussions about how to use and communicate about climate survey data http://cola.unh.edu/sites/cola.unh.edu/files/departments/Prevention%20Innovations/Climate_Survey_Guidance_FINAL_10_24_14_.pdf

- A recent discussion of the potential utility of campus surveys on sexual assault appeared in the July, 2014 issue of the peer reviewed journal *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*.¹

Research Initiatives:

- Campus Climate Survey Validation Study (CCSVS). The Bureau of Justice Statistics in partnership with Research Triangle Institute (RTI) has been researching a revised campus survey to assess the prevalence of sexual assault and campus climate. We anticipate a report later this year on their findings. Their work seeks to answer questions about how students respond and understand questions on sexual assault campus surveys, what types of incentives are most effective, how data collection methods may impact findings from the study. The final report should be useful to campuses considering conducting surveys on their campus. A summary of their ongoing work can be found at http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/Public_CCSVSSummary_091515.pdf
- Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3). <http://campusclimate.gsu.edu/> In February, 2015 a group of researchers who are leaders in the field of measurement of sexual assault and related risk factors met to design a campus survey that would assess rates of victimization and perpetration as well as related campus climate constructs. This survey instrument has been released and used on a number of campuses.
- The Association of American Universities developed and tested a campus climate survey. Findings and the survey instrument can be found at <https://www.aau.edu/Climate-Survey.aspx?id=16525>
- The Washington Post conducted their own poll in partnership with the Kaiser Family Foundation <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/local/2015/06/12/1-in-5-women-say-they-were-violated/> . Their findings are in line with other research about the prevalence of sexual assault on campus. They used a telephone survey of 1053 college students from around the country. Full methodology can be found at <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/national/washington-post-kaiser-family-foundation-survey-of-college-students-on-sexual-assault/1726/> . They asked questions regarding exposure to prevention messages, perceptions about sexual assault on their campus, and used some behaviorally specific items about victimization experiences that are similar to those used in other research studies.
- A number of individual campuses have or are conducting campus surveys related to sexual violence. Some have been doing this for years while others are adapting the notalone.gov survey. Below we highlight some of the efforts we are aware of, though the list is by no means exhaustive.
 - Rutgers University was named in the White House Task Force Report. They volunteered to conduct research on the notalone.gov survey at their own expense. They designed they survey and a social marketing campaign to raise awareness about

it. Twenty-eight percent of students accessed the survey, which was made available to all students. They are in the process of analyzing the data and conducting follow-up focus groups with students.

- OVW Campus program. By one indicator, roughly one third of campus grantees are conducting climate surveys this year either individually or in local consortium groups that pool resources. Campuses are using versions of the notalone.gov survey or developing their own that are tailored to the needs of their individual campus. Grantees have discussed with us the potential of these surveys to provide needed indicators of student awareness of resources and policies on campus as well as the impact of prevention efforts and student perceptions of how institutions are responding to incidents. They also highlight concerns about resources available to do research well and about under what conditions survey answers would constitute notification of an institution of an incident that must be investigated.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology conducted its own survey in fall of 2014 and made both the survey instrument and the results publically available. <http://web.mit.edu/surveys/casatips/>
- The University of Michigan conducted a campus sexual assault survey this spring and released findings publically. <https://publicaffairs.vpcomm.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2015/04/Complete-survey-results.pdf>
- Researchers at many other campuses continue to collect climate survey data including University of Oregon <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/campus/> ; University of New Hampshire <http://cola.unh.edu/justiceworks/project-unwanted-sexual-experiences> ; The University of California system in collaboration with Rankin and Associates, Consultants <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/results/index.html> ; Indiana University <http://news.indiana.edu/releases/iub/iu-in-the-news/dnb-11-10-2014.shtml> ; Barnard College https://barnard.edu/sites/default/files/campus_climate_survey_report_final.pdf . We know there are many other efforts out there as well and encourage conversations about challenges and successes.

Emerging Issues:

- **Survivor concerns about research questions.** Recent news articles have highlighted concerns by some students about being asked questions about sexual assault and other victimization experiences. These news articles have particularly highlighted the detailed and behaviorally specific nature of many questions related to these topics (see for example <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/27/language-sexual-assault-surveys-criticized-students-triggering>). Decades of research documents why it is important to ask behaviorally specific questions about victimization in order to obtain more accurate estimates of the problemⁱⁱ. Further, collecting trustworthy data is a complex process as discussed below.

However, there is also a growing body of research that shows that participants overall report benefits to being asked questions about sexual assault and dating violence, relatively few (less than 10% and most figures are more like 5%) report any emotional distress or negative emotion at all, and those that do report that these feelings are transitory and do not show up in later follow-ups. These results have been obtained with both high school and college samples, with men and women, and with participants with and without their own victimization histories. The findings are also consistent with broader reviews about the impact of asking questions not only about trauma but also about psychological symptoms. Data represent both self-reports by research participants asked to reflect about their participation in surveys and interviews on sensitive topics and also more experimental studies that give students different surveys and assess their mood over time and perceptions of research participation (thus directly comparing asking survey questions about trauma compared to survey questions about cognitive ability)ⁱⁱⁱ. Thus, the overall evidence from the research is clear that asking students, even those with a victimization history, questions about sexual assault presents very minimal risk and is often perceived as beneficial. However, as noted in the notalone.gov report, there are many important safeguards for participants that can help minimize even minimal risk of distress including having a clear informed consent process for the research that provides participants with clear information about the nature of what they will be asked.^{iv}

- **Research response reporting to Title IX.** Researchers have raised concerns that some institutions are considering disclosures by students made on research surveys as part of their reporting obligations. There has been growing discussion and concern about this. It seems some campuses have interpreted policy to exempt researchers from the responsible employee role when they are in the role of researcher while others are not. Given the ability to identify students who take online surveys and indeed, given some sampling strategies which can potentially match students with responses, at least initially, this is a concern for researchers and institutions interested in using research as an important tool for better understanding the problems of sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and stalking on campuses. Researchers at Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire have prepared a white paper on this issue that can be found at https://cola.unh.edu/sites/cola.unh.edu/files/departments/Prevention%20Innovations%20Research%20Center/pdf/Prevention_Innovations_Research_Center_Title_IX_Human_Subject_Research_White_Paper_Nov_5_2015docx.pdf.
- **Conducting campus surveys and obtaining trustworthy data is complex** and requires time and resources, a point that was clearly made in the White House Task Force documents <https://www.notalone.gov/assets/ovw-climate-survey.pdf>. This point has been reinforced by the many researchers who have joined conversations about campus climate surveys and interpersonal violence over the past year.
- **Need for goal clarity.** Campus surveys related to sexual assault, dating and domestic violence and stalking can have many purposes. Do we want to use them as enforcement or watchdog tools to hold campuses accountable for rates of sexual assault on campus? Do we want to use

them as needs assessment tools for campuses to better understand the experiences of community members so that they can tailor response and prevention efforts? Do we want to use them to compare institutions? Do we want to use them to assess the impact of efforts campuses are making? Social science methods on which climate surveys are based have strengths and limits that vary in relation to the stated goals of the project. As campuses move forward with climate surveys related to sexual violence it is important to have intentional conversations about what purpose they will serve.

- **Important next steps are being taken.** The efforts reflected in this report are moving this work forward significantly. By the end of 2015 we will have revised survey instruments and carefully gathered data about how best to measure specific aspects of campus climate related to sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking and climate constructs related to these crimes. We will have a great deal more information about what methods work best for gathering trustworthy estimates of these problems on a campus. Many of these new measures will be free and openly available for campuses to use. We already have new resource guides to help campuses think about what they want to use a survey for, what resources they will need, and how to communicate about it. Many individual campuses have tried launching surveys and are now in the midst of learning how information from this research can help them create a better campus response. We have seen unprecedented public debate and dialogue about how campus surveys may be used, and collaborations and information sharing to improve the state of our knowledge and sharing.

ⁱ Cantalupo, N. C (2014). Institution-Specific Victimization Surveys Addressing Legal and Practical Disincentives to Gender-Based Violence Reporting on College Campuses. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 15, 227-241.

ⁱⁱ Koss, M.P., Abbey, A., Campbell, R., Cook, S; Norris, J., Testa, C., Ullman, S., West, C., & White, J. (2007). Revising the SES: A collaborative process to improve assessment of sexual aggression and victimization. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31, 357-370.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edwards, K. M., Probst, D. R., Tansill, E. C., Gidycz, C. A., (2012). Women's reactions to interpersonal violence research: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28, 254-272. doi:10.1177/0886260512454721. Edwards, K. M., Sylaska, K. M., Gidycz, C. A., (2014). Women's reactions to participating in dating violence research: A mixed methodological study. *Psychology of Violence*, 4, 224-239. doi:10.1037/a0034339. Edwards, K.M., Haynes, E. E., Rodenhizer-Stamfli, K.A., & Eckstein, R. (under review). High School Youth's Reactions to Participating in Mixed Methodological Dating Violence Research. Edwards, K. M., Kearns, M. C., Calhoun, K. S., & Gidycz, C. A. (2009). Women's reactions to participating in sexual assault research: Is it distressing? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33, 225-234. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01492.x Edwards, K. E., Gidycz, C. A., & Desai, A. D. (2012). Men's reactions to participating in interpersonal violence research. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Jorm, A. F., Kelly, C. M., & Morgan, A. J., (2007). Participant distress in psychiatric research: A systematic review. *Psychological Medicine*, 37, 917-926. Yeater, Miller, Rinehart & Nason (2012). Trauma and Sex Surveys Meet Minimal Risk Standards : Implications for Institutional Review Boards. *Psychological Science*.

^{iv} Newman, E. & Kaloupek, D. (2009). Overview of research addressing ethical dimensions of participation in traumatic stress studies: Autonomy and beneficence. *Journal of Traumatic Stress Studies*, 22, 595-602.