



Sexual Assault and Study Abroad

Full citation (s):

- Sexual Assault Victimization Among Female Undergraduates During Study Abroad: A Single Campus Survey Study William F. Flack, Jr., Matthew O. Kimble, Brooke E. Campbell, Allyson B. Hopper, Oana Peterca, and Emily J. Heller *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 2015; 30:3453-34 doi:10.1177/0886260514563833
- Kimble, M., Flack, W. F. Jr., & Burbridge, E. (2013). Study abroad increases risk for sexual assault in female undergraduates: A preliminary report. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5, 426-430. doi:10.1037/a0029608

Research Review:

These two articles discuss the problem of sexual assault while U.S. students are studying abroad using samples of about 200 undergraduate women each. They represent samples from two different campuses. The Kimble et al (2013) study found rates of unwanted sexual experiences (including unwanted contact, attempted and completed rape) to be higher while studying abroad than while on campus in the United States (38.1% of the sample reported an unwanted experience, 6% reported attempted rape and 4.6% reported completed rape). They found that perpetrators were most likely to be non-student residents of communities where students lived and found some elevated risk for different regions of study, though the study could not specify what factors might be operating that led regions including Africa and the Americas to have higher reported rates of unwanted sexual experiences. The Flack et al (2015) used similar survey methodology but found rates of unwanted sexual experiences reported by undergraduate women while studying abroad to be comparable to what has been found on U.S. campuses (18.8% for unwanted experiences including unwanted contact, 8.7% of the sample reported attempted or completed sexual assaults). The authors note, however, that these rates are reported for rather short periods of time (one semester for most of the students in the study). In this study the majority of perpetrators were other students at the university. As with previous work, unwanted sexual experiences were associated with symptoms of traumatic stress.

Putting it in Practice:

While discussions of sexual assault on college campuses have increased in recent years, most research and practices focus on education and response on campuses in the U.S. The studies summarized above remind us that students are at risk, perhaps even at elevated risk for unwanted sexual experiences while studying abroad. Comprehensive education initiatives need to include training programs on interpersonal violence for students as part of their preparation for studying abroad. Indeed, many campuses focus a great deal on prevention and risk reduction education for incoming students and may be missing a key opportunity for additional education during junior and senior years when study abroad is most likely. Feminist risk reduction programs like those developed by Gidycz at Ohio University or Senn at University of Windsor as well as adaptations of bystander intervention training are potential models and innovations in this area are needed.