Preventing Sexual Violence on College Campuses: Lessons from Research and Practice

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PART ONE:

Evidence-Based Strategies for the
Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence Perpetration

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Highlights

- Sexual violence is a serious and complex public health problem.
- CDC focuses on preventing sexual violence perpetration before it happens to achieve the greatest population level impact.
- Effective prevention strategies are comprehensive—addressing the multiple levels of influence for sexual violence victimization and perpetration in the social ecology. These levels include characteristics of individuals, their relationships, and their physical, social and cultural environments.
- Prevention strategies should be based on the best available evidence, with emphasis on rigorous evaluation that measures changes in behavior.
- Prevention strategies that are consistent with best practices—such as being theory-based and including multiple skill-based sessions—have the greatest potential in reducing rates of sexual violence.
- Only two programs have rigorous evidence of effectiveness for preventing sexual violence: *Safe Dates* and the building-level intervention of *Shifting Boundaries*. Both were developed with middle/ high school students but may provide useful models for the development of college prevention strategies.
- Other strategies have some evidence for changing behavior or modifying risk factors. These include:
    - Building relationship skills;
    - Organizational policies or practices to improve safety or climate;
    - Addressing social norms and behavior with messages from trusted and influential voices; and
    - Training student bystanders to intervene.
- Brief, one-session educational programs focused on increasing awareness or changing beliefs and attitudes are not effective at changing behavior in the long-term. These approaches may be useful as one component of a comprehensive strategy. However, they are not likely to have any impact on rates of violence if implemented as a stand-alone strategy or as a primary component of a prevention plan.
- There are steps that college campuses can take now to better address sexual violence. These include:
    - Using data to better understand sexual violence and student needs;
    - Developing comprehensive prevention plans that include campus-wide policy, structural and social norms components;
    - Selecting prevention strategies based on best practices and available evidence;
    - Evaluating strategies that are implemented; and
    - Sharing lessons learned.

Appendix B. Sexual Violence Prevention Program Checklist

This checklist is provided for colleges and universities to guide their sexual violence program and strategy selection process. Programs and strategies that adhere to specific principles for effective prevention (Nation et al., 2003), and are selected according to the best available evidence have a better chance of succeeding.

Principles of Effective Prevention	√
Comprehensive: Multiple prevention strategies, participant groups, and settings are addressed through a comprehensive approach to sexual violence prevention. • For example, within a single university, a bystander intervention that builds skills for intervening in unhealthy situations and establishing positive norms at the *individual* level could be complemented by *peer* level norms strategies in dormitories and athletic departments. Campus- and community-wide social marketing campaigns to address gender and sexual violence norms could also be implemented at the *organizational* and *community* levels.	
Repeated: Prevention programs and strategies should engage participants repeatedly over time. One-time programs or sessions are rarely effective for changing behavior.	
Relevant: Prevention programs and strategies should be culturally relevant and appropriate, in content and approach, to the individuals and/or groups served.	
Collaborative: Prevention programs and strategies should be developed or selected in collaboration with relevant prevention experts, practitioners, researchers, and key stakeholders and leaders in the community. These collaborators can help ensure that the prevention programs and strategies are grounded in theory and evidence, and likely to be supported by the community.	
Elements of Best Available Evidence	√
Logical: Prevention programs and strategies are based on clear logic for the targeted problem and expected outcomes for change.	
Supported: Prevention programs and strategies are supported by documentation (i.e., journal articles, registries, reports) indicating that they are considered best practices or effective in resulting positive change.	
Review data: Existing sources of data and information are reviewed to help increase the understanding of the nature of sexual violence on campuses.	
Collect data: Colleges and universities collect data to help increase the understanding of sexual violence prevalence and risks on their campuses.	
Evaluation: Prevention programs and strategies being implemented are evaluated using the most rigorous research design possible.	
Dissemination: Lessons learned from prevention programs and strategies are shared with the sexual violence prevention field, key stakeholders, and other colleges and universities.	