

Enhancing Campus Sexual Assault Prevention Efforts Through Situational Interventions

Preventing sexual assault requires a comprehensive approach that accounts for multiple determinants – including individual, peer, community, environmental, and policy elements – to achieve not only reductions in victimization rates, but also reductions in perpetration opportunities and behaviors.¹ Most college campus sexual assault prevention programs focus largely on individuals but have not expanded to address environmental conditions. To create safe, supportive environments for all people on campus, programming must consider how the campus environment impacts violence perpetration. This is especially true for the safety of marginalized and disenfranchised people on campus who may be especially susceptible to experiencing violence.

Project Vision

This effort, *Enhancing Campus Sexual Assault Prevention Efforts through Situational Interventions*, working closely with three college campus partners: Duke University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Williams College. This effort is designed to help colleges identify and employ **environmental strategies that can change physical, social, and cultural factors that facilitate sexual and gender-based violence on campus.** Drawing from the fields of criminology and public health, as well as social justice approaches to campus-based gender and sexual violence prevention, the project will identify situational prevention efforts that will complement existing campus sexual assault prevention strategies.

Public Health Responses to Sexual Violence on Campus

Sexual violence on college campuses can be addressed using public health principles. From the American College Health Association's toolkit on sexual violence prevention² to the CDC's 2016 publication *Sexual Violence on Campus: Strategies for Prevention*³, public health approaches offer a framework to prevent sexual violence on college campuses. The CDC highlights five components of a sexual violence prevention approach:

- 1. Comprehensive Prevention:** Comprehensive prevention is defined as “an ongoing, integrated strategy that incorporates efforts to address diverse risk and protective factors as they occur in relation to sexual violence. It involves consistent messaging and action across levels of the social-ecological model before, during and after sexual violence takes place.”⁴ Efforts should take place at all levels: individual, relationship, community, institution, and society.
- 2. Infrastructure:** Prevention efforts require basic organizational systems and structures to effectively implement sexual violence prevention strategies on a college campus, including: well trained staff, standardized training, dedicated prevention staff, establishing relationships with referral services, and incorporating violence prevention with other prevention programs.⁵
- 3. Audience:** Successful prevention efforts must appeal to diverse audiences - including students, faculty, and staff - and must reflect the culture and values specific to the institution.
- 4. Partnerships and Sustainability:** Sustainable prevention efforts require partnerships with key stakeholders and constituencies, both on campus and with community partners.
- 5. Evaluation:** Evaluation is an essential practice to let practitioners know what efforts are working. Ongoing evaluation informs program modifications and improvements.

The Roots of Situational Prevention

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) emerged in response to criticism that sociologists had traditionally overstated the social causes of crime, and largely neglected the role of environmental influences. Situational prevention theories argue for an epidemiological public health approach to reducing violence. In other words, instead of focusing on the individual, prevention efforts should focus on reducing the environmental opportunities for crime, or “situational prevention.” Examples include removing areas of concealment and increasing light to improve natural surveillance, and access control to disrupt perpetration opportunities. The consideration of situational prevention work in this effort marks a new approach to gathering and assessing environmental data to support decision-making on campus educational efforts, policy, and the built environment.

Environmental Management for Harm Prevention

Now widely adopted by colleges and universities as a part of their comprehensive alcohol and other drug (AOD) strategic plans, environmental management strategies grew out of the public health socio-ecological model. AOD environmental management typically falls into five different approaches, described by William DeJong and Linda Langford as: (1) offering alcohol-free opportunities to engage in social, extracurricular, and public service options; (2) creating a health-promoting normative environment; (3) limiting alcohol availability; (4) restricting the marketing and promotion of alcohol; and (5) creating and increasing enforcement of policies and laws. All five strategies involve a wide range of possible program and policy options.⁶ Given the well-established connection between alcohol use and sexual violence, it is also appropriate to adopt AOD environmental management strategies as a component of a situational prevention approach to sexual violence prevention. These tactics may be adapted on participating campuses to specifically address sexual violence through, for example, the promotion of a violence-free normative environment or through the increased visible enforcement of policies and laws address sexual harassment and sexual misconduct.

An Overview of the Work on Each Campus

Duke University is piloting The Story Project, which invites students to craft the tapestry of experiences shared by women of color at Duke as project participants chronicle the encounters and perceptions of women of color in their social groups. While the stories gathered characterize the life of women of color at Duke, the storytellers and their peers will remain anonymous. Project participants will collaborate with Women's Center staff to develop responsive programs and initiatives that reduce incidents of gender violence and sexual assault, and that help survivors of gender violence and sexual assault heal.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) will address the social and environment conditions that put LGBTQ+ students at increased risk for sexual violence. The project team will define modifiable risk and protective factors that can impact sexual assault on campus, conduct a LGBTQ+ student-led exercise to map social and academic spaces at MIT, and utilize a storytelling approach to communicate how LGBTQ+ MITers experience the environments in which they learn, socialize and live.

Williams College has focused largely on the perceived and actual safety of campus social spaces, which students identify as a primary location for the experience of unwanted sexual touching. The project team developed a mapping methodology to collect both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of student experiences. Team discussions centered around on-campus event locations (buildings where parties are hosted), lay-out of physical space within buildings, dimensions described in student and staff conversations (soundscape, sightlines, crowd density, locating friends, alcohol consumption), and the need to gather demographic student information. Initial mapping has commenced and results will be analyzed and reported over the course of the project. Recommendations will be suggested about how to potentially alter unsafe spaces to prevent unwanted sexual touching and victimization.



Contact Us

Our work will vary at each of the participating campuses and these diverse experiences will be documented and shared with the field, so that the lessons learned can be adapted on other campuses interested in implementing elements of these innovative approaches. For more information, contact Leilah Gilligan, Project Manager at lgilligan@cepp.com.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *The Social-Ecological Model: framework for prevention*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>.

²American College Health Association, *Shifting the Paradigm: Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence*. Linthicum, MD: American College Health Association, 2008.

³Dills J, Fowler D, Payne G. *Sexual Violence on Campus: Strategies for Prevention*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016.

⁴Hoffman, L. *Sexual Assault Prevention on U.S. College Campuses: A National Scan*, Sacramento, CA: California Coalition Against Sexual Assault/PreventConnect, 2016.

⁵Dills et. al. (2016).

⁶DeJong, W; Langford, L. (2016) *Evaluating Environmental Management Strategies for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention*. Higher Education Center. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/sssta/20130315_evaluating.pdf



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