

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Boston University

Violence Repair and Prevention: A Program for Close-knit Communities

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. Prevention: Audience-specific anti-sexual harassment education
2. Remediation: Reintegration Strategies and Programs
3. Remediation: Other efforts to remediate the harm of sexual harassment and/or support those that experience sexual harassment

Description of Work:

Purpose & goals

Violence Prevention & Repair: A Program for Close-Knit Communities is a group-level intervention that addresses the impact of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment) enacted by a member of a close-knit community (e.g., sports team, student-run organization, or research lab). This intervention focuses on three types of experiences:

1. When a harm-doer and a survivor are both members of a closed group—particularly when the sexual misconduct case is made public or investigated by the University.
2. When group members (including survivors of violence) experience trauma symptoms while navigating the impact of the sexual misconduct enacted by a peer within their group.
3. When the perpetrator has caused harm to someone external to the group and this draws attention to the group more broadly.

What we did and how it was done

This intervention provides a confidential space for a student group (e.g., sports team, student-run organization, or research lab) that has experienced sexual misconduct. Representatives from the Sexual Assault Response & Prevention Center (SARP) and the University Ombuds Office collaborate with the student group—apart from the accused party. Collaboration begins with consulting with group leaders (e.g., team captains, coaches, or presidents) individually or in small groups, as well as surveying the full group on their perceptions and needs.

In a synchronous meeting, professional staff from SARP and the Ombuds Office provide:

- Education on sexual misconduct definitions,
- Psychoeducation regarding trauma responses,
- Explanation of the investigation processes (including their limitations), and
- Facilitated conversations of possible solutions for moving the group forward.

How it works

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Group members are given a space to learn about sexual misconduct, the investigation process, and the limits in their role as members and leaders. Members are given a space to process the events in a confidential space, ask questions regarding the investigation process, and brainstorm ways of getting back to the mission of the group. They also learn how to best support survivors and ways to hold each other accountable for future actions.

The group may choose to have ongoing support and communication following the facilitated meeting, including further training and consultations with professional staff from SARP and the Ombuds Office. Often this includes a re/commitment by group leaders and general members to prevent violence in their community and strengthen the support they provide to survivors. One immediate benefit of this intervention is that survivors identified during the intervention can be quickly connected to resources such as safety planning, interim measures, counseling, and reporting.

How the work is new

SARP and the Ombuds Office both identified an unmet need among student groups where sexual misconduct harm had been done. Both offices were approached by students requesting support and consultation when harm had been done by one member toward another member. This unmet need is common on university campuses where the primary focus has been on addressing individuals (often victims and harm-doers) for the purposes of adjudicating a sexual misconduct policy violation. Fewer services are offered with a goal of repairing harm—particularly when harm is felt beyond the direct victim. *Violence Repair and Prevention* is new because it broadens the focus of attention to a group-level lens, which identifies the ways that sexual misconduct can disrupt beyond the individual victim and harm-doer. Also new is a focus on facilitating conversations within the group that can allow for healing and getting back to the primary mission of the group. Finally, the intervention also incorporates skills to support future survivors if they are identified later.

Current status of the work

The intervention has been piloted with four student groups. Each iteration has been built on lessons learned from those that preceded it. Following further pilot testing and evaluation, the program will be offered more widely to BU student groups.

Plans for evaluating the success, effectiveness, and/or impact of the work

Feedback has been solicited from the participating student groups via anonymous surveys and by student leaders and survivors through one-on-one conversations. Students report the intervention is helpful, particularly for better understanding sexual misconduct, investigative processes, and the limitations on student groups when a disclosure happens. Students also appreciate having a confidential space to discuss these complex issues and identify realistic ways they can move the group forward. We will continue to pilot and evaluate the program before offering more widely to the other BU student groups.

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Next steps for the work

Boston University plans to further pilot test this intervention with additional student groups. This will allow for further evaluations of the intervention for effectiveness and student satisfaction.

Links to relevant webpages

- <http://www.bu.edu/shs/sarp>

Website for further information (if applicable): www.bu.edu/sarp

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