

Sexual assault victimization disproportionately affects certain minority college students

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Students who perceive that their college campus is more inclusive and welcoming of sexual- and gender-minority people have lower odds of being victims of sexual assault, according to a study led by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and published today in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

In a complementary study, the researchers found that some [minority groups](#) are at considerably higher risk for sexual assault in college than peers in majority groups. Published recently in the journal *Prevention Science*, it is among the first analyses to explore how populations with intersecting minority identities have varying risks of sexual assault victimization.

"Despite the formation of The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault in 2014, few interventions have been shown to be effective in preventing such assault. Even fewer interventions are tailored for racial and ethnic minorities, and not one intervention has been evaluated with sexual- and gender-minority [people](#)," said Robert Coulter, M.P.H., a doctoral candidate in Pitt Public Health's Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences and lead author of both studies. "Our studies highlight the need for college prevention and treatment programs to focus efforts on sexual, gender, racial and ethnic minority groups."

Coulter and his team analyzed surveys completed by 71,421 undergraduate students from 120 U.S. post-secondary education institutions between 2011 and 2013.

- Non-transgender women had nearly 150 percent greater odds of being sexually assaulted in the past year than non-transgender men.
- But [transgender people](#) were at even greater risk: They had nearly 300 percent higher odds of being sexually assaulted than non-transgender men.
- Among non-transgender men, gay and bisexual men had higher odds of sexual assault than heterosexual men, and black men had higher odds than white men.
- Among non-transgender women, bisexual women had higher odds of sexual assault than heterosexual women. Compared with white women, black women had higher odds of sexual assault, while Latino and Asian women had lower odds.
- Among transgender people, black transgender people had higher odds of sexual assault than white transgender people.

"What is particularly unique about this analysis, aside from being one of the largest studies to examine sexual assault on college campuses, is that it provided insights into how sexual assault varies among populations with multiple and intersecting marginalized identities—such as being both transgender and black," said Coulter.

In their other study, Coulter and his team examined surveys completed by nearly 2,000 sexual- and gender-minority undergraduates from colleges in all 50 U.S. states.

Students who perceived that their campus was more inclusive of sexual- and gender-minority people had 27 percent lower odds of having been sexually assaulted than their peers who felt their campus was less

inclusive.

The researchers hypothesize that sexual- and gender-minority inclusive campus climates may embolden bystanders to stop, or attempt to stop, sexual assault of sexual- and gender-minority people. Such campuses also may dissuade perpetrators from targeting sexual- and gender-minority people. Additionally, inclusive campuses may empower people to reduce their likelihood of becoming sexual assault victims by, for example, being cautious when drinking alcohol.

Examples of potential ways to make colleges more inclusive include programs that train faculty, staff and students how to be allies for sexual- and gender-minority people; forming resource centers and student groups for these minorities; as well as creating and enforcing anti-discrimination policies that protect these groups.

"If [sexual assault](#) prevention efforts solely focus on heterosexual violence, they may invalidate sexual- and gender-minority people's assault experiences and be ineffective for them," said Coulter. "To overcome this, existing programs could be augmented to explicitly address homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and racism. And new interventions could be created specifically for sexual, gender, racial and ethnic minorities."

More information: Robert W. S. Coulter et al. Prevalence of Past-Year Sexual Assault Victimization Among Undergraduate Students: Exploring Differences by and Intersections of Gender Identity, Sexual Identity, and Race/Ethnicity, *Prevention Science* (2017). DOI: 10.1007/s11121-017-0762-8

Robert W. S. Coulter et al. College Sexual Assault and Campus Climate for Sexual- and Gender-Minority Undergraduate Students, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2017). DOI: 10.1177/0886260517696870

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