Campuses need safety planning to protect abuse victims, study finds

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With up to half of college students experiencing abuse by an intimate partner at least once during their college careers, safety planning should be added to prevention and education programs in higher education, according to a research brief by the Crime Victims' Institute.

"Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive social problem, with one in three women experiencing IPV at least once in their lifetime," said Lisa Mufti?, Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Sam Houston State University. "While IPV can impact women at any stage in the life course, research indicates that women between the ages of 18-24 are at increased risk. It is not surprising, then, to find that 10 percent to 50 percent of college students have experienced victimization at the hands of an intimate partner at least once during their college career."

Safety planning is a detailed, personalized, and practical plan to protect oneself from an abusive partner. It includes such elements as identifying a place to go in the event of an emergency and the items to take in such situations, such as a change of clothes, identification, cell phone and charger, cash or ATM card, and medications.

Last year Mufti? surveyed 1,135 female students from a Texas university, and about one-quarter said they had been exposed to intimate partner violence in their lifetime, with 7 percent reporting sexual abuse by a partner and 4 percent reporting physical or verbal abuse by a partner over the last 12 months. While the majority of students identified safe

places to go and items to bring with them, those involved in abusive relationships were less likely to have alternatives available. Less than 1 percent of the sample said they would go to an emergency shelter and only as a "last resort" or in "a worst-case scenario," the study found.

"Students who reported having been exposed to parental domestic violence were less likely to report having a safe place to go," said Mufti?. "Students who reported they had experienced forced sexual activities within the past year were significantly less likely to report having a safe place to go."

Given the prevalence of abusive relationship on campus, more needs to be done to educate students on safety planning strategies, the study recommended.

"The bulk of on-campus violence prevention and education endeavors focus on sexual victimization," said Mufti?. "While there is good reason for this, considering the elevated risk female college students are at for all forms of partner violence, the findings presented in this research brief suggest that more needs to be done to instruct students in safety planning strategies that center around IPV."

Several women who participated in the survey echoed those sentiments.

"There needs to be more of an awareness of harmful relationship and how to get out of them," said one respondent.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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