

Effects of Violent Sexual Crime on College Campuses

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Abstract

The prevalence of violent sexual crimes on college campuses, and the subsequent widespread effects, require a deep review of the ramifications. Some studies show that incidence rates of attempted or completed rapes are as high as one in four female college students (Cullen, Fisher, and Turner, 2000). The purpose of this paper is to investigate the emotional and economic effects of violent sexual crimes on college campuses. The highly traumatic nature of violent sexual crimes correlates to varied and dramatic lasting effects. Emotional responses to violent sexual crime include anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, and post-traumatic stress disorder (RAINN, 2018). The financial impacts are derivative of the academic impacts of sexual assault and rape. College students who are victims of violent sexual crimes experience greater academic disengagement and lower GPA's than those that are not victims, which correlates to lower wages following their education (Black and Mengo, 2015). In college students, these effects are compounded with high rates of coexisting stressors and disorders such as depression, anxiety, and high-risk behavior.

I. Introduction

The three most common crimes committed on college campuses are, in order, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and forcible sex offenses (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The rate of burglary and motor vehicle theft have been decreasing since 2001, but the rate of forcible sex offenses committed has increased by 262 percent between 2001 and 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Some studies show the incidence rate of rape on college campuses in a year to be as high as 35.3 per 1000 college women (Cullen et al., 2000). If this statistic were to be applied to the 1824 female students that attend Robert Morris University it would correspond to 64 rapes per academic year. The prevalence of violent sexual crimes on college campuses requires an in-depth review of the widespread effects of these crimes. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the emotional and economic impacts of violent sexual crimes on college campuses.

II. Background

Generally, violent sexual crimes refer to sexual assault and rape. Sexual assault is characterized by sexual contact that is a result of coercion by one party. The methods of coercion specifically listed in the penal code include threatening or causing bodily harm to the victim, falsely claiming that the sexual contact has a professional purpose, and pretending to be someone else in order to conduct sexual contact (United States Code, 2006). Additionally, sexual assault is any sexual contact that occurs when the victim is unconscious or unable to consent due to impairment (United States Code, 2006). Rape only differs from sexual assault in that grievous bodily harm must be threatened or committed (United States Code, 2006). The physical nature and intimacy of violent sexual crimes isolates it from other examples of violent

crime such as assaults or murders. It is common for the victims of violent sexual crimes to experience shame or guilt following the incident, which can lead to the assault going unreported (Samuel Merritt University, 2018). In fact, less than five percent of attempted or completed rapes on college campuses are reported to police or school officials (Cullen, Fisher, and Turner, 2003). Generally, a victim of another violent crime, such as a mugging or an assault, will not face self-imposed difficulties in reporting the crime committed against them. Victims of violent sexual crimes also experience physical effects that differ from other violent crime victims including pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (RAINN, 2018). The volatile emotional and physical effects of violent sexual crimes, and the increasing prevalence of the crimes, has led to increased visibility to the general populace, as shown by the #MeToo movement of 2018. Although the #MeToo movement lacks a specific body or leadership, it's ostensible aim is to reduce the trepidation of victims of violent sexual crimes to report their experience to the authorities. Prior to the #MeToo movement, smaller movements and protests against violent sexual crimes still existed. The most notable of the early movements was the Take Back the Night protests in England, New York, and San Francisco during the late 1970's (NSVRC, 2018). The objective of these protests was to raise awareness of the sexual violence that women faced when walking at night in their cities (NSVRC, 2018). As protests and movements continued to occur to present day, awareness of the prevalence of violent sexual crime increased, which required a further investigation into the devastating effects of the event.

III. Emotional Effects

The emotional effects experienced by victims of violent sexual crimes are complex and widely varied. The victims may develop depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or suicidal ideations in response to their experience (Samuel Merrit University, 2018).

Additionally, victims can also have flashbacks to the crime, and experience shame and guilt related to it (Samuel Merrit University, 2018). Other victims depend on denial, disassociation, and isolation to cope with the trauma they have experienced (Samuel Merrit University, 2018).

The emotional effects of violent sexual crime can also be manifested physically. Victims may turn to self-harm and substance abuse as a means of coping with trauma, and can develop sleeping or eating disorders in response to the event (RAINN, 2018). The trauma, and subsequent emotional effects, experienced by victims of violent sexual crimes is not limited to only the incident itself. Secondary trauma can be caused when victims receive negative reactions from authorities that they reach out to for help. The incidence of secondary trauma on a victim correlates to a, "...significant effect on PTSD symptoms of adult sexual assault survivors," (Banyard, Cohn, Moynihan, and Walsh, p.244, 2010). Another important factor in understanding the emotional effects of violent sexual crimes is the characteristics of the attacker themselves. Between 79% and 88% of college aged violent sexual crime victims are attacked by someone they know (Fisher, Krebs, Lindquist, Martin, and Warner, 2007). The result of knowing the attacker can lead to trust issues for the victim, as well as difficulty in sustaining future relationships (Samuel Merrit University, 2018). By examining the underreporting of violent sexual crimes, the usual acquaintance with the attacker, and the communal nature of college campuses, it can be concluded that the emotional effects of these crimes is exacerbated and much more severe for college students.

IV. Socioeconomic Effects

The devastating emotional effects of violent sexual crimes on college campuses can branch and result in far reaching outcomes. An example of one of these far-reaching outcomes is the effect of violent sexual crime on the victim's academic success. College is an investment period where students spend time and energy to achieve high grades in order to command a higher salary after graduation. The importance of this period of education has lifelong economic ramifications yet a general decline in GPA is strongly associated student victims of violent sexual crime (Black and Mengo, 2015). The strongest correlation between violent sexual crime and a decline in GPA occurs when the victim is in their first semester of college (Combs, Jordan, and Smith, 2014). 14.3% of women who were raped in their first semester of college finished the semester with a GPA below 2.5 (Combs et. al, 2014). The decline of victim's GPA also correlates with violent sexual crime victim's dropout rates being 4.3% higher than the average college rate (Black and Mengo, 2015). Black and Mengo (2005) theorize that, "A victim of sexual violence is likely to experience psychological distress, depression, fear, and self-destructive and disordered eating behaviors (that are) likely to negatively influence their concentration in coursework" (Black and Mengo, p.11, 2015). If this academic disengagement is extrapolated to the future it can be assumed that the financial cost of campus sexual crimes deeply affects the future earning power of the victims. Additionally, victims of violent sexual crimes pay an average of 14% of the healthcare costs associated with treatment following the crime (Bradham, Simpson, Tennessee, and White, 2017). This percentage equates to an average of \$948 paid by the victim for their treatment (Bradham et. al, 2017). The severity of

these economic ramifications necessitates a thorough investigation into a means of stopping violent sexual crime during the crucial college years of students.

V. Conclusion

Violent sexual crime on college campuses is becoming more and more prevalent, and the insipid effects of these crimes will continue to compound. The purpose of this paper was to investigate the emotional and economic effects of these violent sexual crimes on college campuses. The emotional effects experienced by the victims are numerous, and are capable of branching widely into other facets of their lives. These emotional effects can include depression, anxiety, flashbacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition to the emotional effects, student victims can experience significant economic ramifications. The economic effects include decreased academic engagement and GPA during crucial college years which can limit future earning power. Student victims also face steep healthcare costs that lower income students may not be able to afford. By examining these effects cumulatively, it is easy to visualize the cancerous nature of violent sexual crime. These crimes are even more devastating when the victims are students in their deeply formative college years. The disturbing upward trend of forcible sex offenses on college campuses demands an in depth look at campus violent sexual crimes, and a fervent response from colleges, parents, and lawmakers.

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