Gender-Based Violence Awareness
and Prevention Alliance

The City College
of New York

CUNY School of Medicine

#commuter-campus-students-too: Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence on an Urban, Commuter Campus in New York City
A Research-to Practice Fellowship Project

Alvaro B Gamio Cuervo, Sophia English, Victoria Frye, Kimberly Hernandez & Jasmin Salcedo
City University of New York School of Medicine
Gender-Based Violence Awareness and Prevention (GAP) Alliance
of the City College of New York (CUNY)

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Center for Victim Research

The [Center for Victim Research](#) (CVR) is a one-stop resource center for victim service providers and researchers to connect and share knowledge. Its goals are to increase 1) access to victim research and data and 2) the utility of research and data collection to crime victim services nationwide. CVR's vision is to foster a community of victim service providers and researchers who routinely collaborate to improve practice through effective use of research and data.

Accordingly, CVR engages in a number of training and technical assistance activities to support victim research-and-practice collaborations. Specifically, CVR:

- Hosts a library of open-access and subscription-based victim research;
- Provides light-touch research-focused technical assistance to victim service providers;
- Translates research findings for the field in fact sheets, reports, and webinars; and
- Highlights useful research-and-practice tools and training resources for the field.

CVR also supports two types of [researcher-practitioner collaborations](#): interagency VOCA-SAC partnerships and local-level Research-and-Practice (R/P) Fellowships. In 2018, CVR's R/P Fellowship program supported nine teams of researchers and practitioners engaging in a variety of victim-focused research projects. Fellows were engaged in emerging, ongoing, or advanced research-and-practice partnerships. This report describes activities by one of CVR's 2018 R/P Fellowship teams.

R2P Fellows: Organizational Descriptions

The partner organizations are the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Medicine and the Gender-Based Violence Awareness and Prevention (GAP) Alliance, formerly known as the Gender-Based Violence Response and Prevention Task Force (GRPT) at The City College of New York (CCNY). Each represent distinct entities within the City University of New York system, a major urban, public university system in the United States (US).

The CUNY School of Medicine (CSOM) began as the Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program in 1973 as a 5-year program to recruit and train members of social groups historically underrepresented in medicine. Over the past five years, it has moved to become a fully accredited 7-year BS/MD program or medical school. In June of 2018, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education provisionally accredited the school. The CSOM is located on the campus of The City College of New York (CCNY), located in West Harlem in upper Manhattan. Since its founding in 1847, CCNY has provided a high quality and affordable education to generations of New Yorkers in a wide variety of disciplines. CCNY embraces its role at the forefront of social change.

The GAP Alliance at CCNY was launched in July 2016 as the result of a longstanding grassroots initiative launched by CCNY students to establish a safe environment for students of all gender identities and sexual expressions, where they can seek out information as well as counseling on issues such as health and wellness, sexuality, and

domestic/gender based violence. Student activism contributed to the hiring of a Gender Resources Social Worker, who co-leads the GAP Alliance and provides supportive counseling, crisis support and resources for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) communities, survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner and relationship violence, stalking, and interpersonal violence. Also co-leading the GAP Alliance is the Student Psychological Counselor/Confidential Advocate, in the Office of Diversity and Compliance; they provide confidential, Title IX-related services, as well as short-term counseling, consultation regarding reporting options on/off campus, and assistance with community referrals.

The GAP Alliance seeks to be inclusive of all members of the CCNY community and task force participants include student, faculty and staff representation. The goals of the GAP Alliance include: 1) convene CCNY stakeholders to develop an action plan on addressing gender violence needs; 2) educate and inform CCNY on definitions of gender based violence and gender identity; 3) ensure that members of the CCNY community are aware and have access to campus resources for counseling, safety, maintaining confidentiality and on/ off campus reporting options for all cis-gendered, gender non-conforming, and trans identified persons; 4) identify needs in the CCNY community relating to gender based violence issues on campus across departments, faculty, staff, athletics, and facilities; and 5) plan and implement educational programming and training about response and prevention of gender based violence.

Description of the Problem

Sexual violence victimization is unacceptably common in the United States (US), with 18.3% of women and 1.4% of men reporting lifetime experience of sexual assault, defined as attempted or completed forced penetration or alcohol/drug facilitated completed penetration; 1.1% of women experienced this in the past year.[1] Almost half of women (45%) and one in five (22%) of men report lifetime sexual coercion and/or unwanted sexual contact.[1] The health effects of sexual violence victimization include physical injury, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attempted/completed suicide, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted infections.[1] The population economic burden is estimated to be over three trillion dollars, driven in part by physical and mental health treatment costs, lost work productivity and property loss and damage.[2]

College campuses are the focus of response and prevention in part because assault often happens on campus (or in relation to the college/university).[3] Among women who report lifetime sexual violence victimization, 37% first experienced it between 18 and 25, often while attending college.[1] Further, sexual violence has serious academic consequences.[4] Sexual violence complaints on campuses increased more than 1000% between 2009 and 2014[5, 6] reflecting an increased willingness to report sexual violence, due perhaps to more university-based reporting mechanisms. However, not all campuses have witnessed increased reporting. And while reporting is important, without access to support services it is not ideal. Support services can decrease post-traumatic responses, mitigate adverse impacts on academic progress, and address health and safety concerns for survivors.[7] Increasing access to reporting mechanisms and/or response and support services is a major goal for many campus providers and practitioners.

In terms of prevention, the evidence base on programs for college students is limited,[8] with a few campus-based prevention programs for men [9-11] and a handful of bystander-focused and/or social marketing campaigns rigorously evaluated.[12-15] There are no evidence-based programs designed specifically for urban commuter campus students. Thus, there is a need to focus response and prevention research on commuter students, many of whom are born and raised in urban areas. Commuter students need focused attention because many are sexual and gender minority students, who often seek higher education in urban settings where gay enclaves are more likely to exist[19]. In addition, urban, commuter-campus students are more likely to be simultaneously racial/ethnic minorities, immigrants, sexual orientation minorities, and/or gender non-conforming. In addition to occupying multiple, often marginalized, identities, urban, commuter campus students have qualitatively different experiences of "student life" and often feel less connected to their campus.[20] Greek life has less prominence on commuter campuses, and organized athletics may also have different influences on students' social lives.[21] Socializing is more likely to happen at bars and clubs or at off-campus parties and student engagement is different and may be weaker.[21, 22] Whether and how bystander behavior may be enacted in urban contexts is important to understand. When Bringing in the Bystander[12] was tested among male students at an urban university with a high percentage of commuter students, efficacy was diminished perhaps due to decreased feelings of connectedness to the campus and student community[23]. Understanding facilitators and modifiers of bystander behavior is crucial to the design of tailored interventions[24-26]; currently, little is known about what modifies likelihood of intervention among urban commuter campus students. Focused research is also needed on optimal communication around available responses for urban commuter campus students.

Addressing the Problem

The researcher-practitioner partnership was formed when the leaders of the GAP Alliance, Ms. Jasmin Salcedo and Ms. Sophie English, and a faculty member at the CSOM, Dr. Victoria Frye, began discussing ways to systematically characterize the needs of CCNY's urban commuter campus students around both response to *and* prevention of sexual violence. Victoria Frye, the researcher in this researcher-practitioner partnership, is an Associate Medical Professor at CSOM and the head of the Laboratory of Urban Community Health (LUCH). Ms. Salcedo and Ms. English, CCNY on-campus clinicians, formed the GAP Alliance in 2016 to promote awareness of resources on and off campus for survivors of gender-based violence in the CCNY community and to implement holistic and intersectional prevention programs at the CCNY campus. Dr. Frye, Ms. Salcedo and Ms. English began to collaborate in early 2017 through the GAP Alliance. Through monthly meetings with campus stakeholders, prevention and response goals were developed, resulting in a series of activities and strategic pursuit of resources to advance the goals. Ms. Salcedo, Ms. English and Dr. Frye have collaborated during this time on developing a better understanding of CCNY students' experiences of sexual violence, response and prevention.

With input from GAP Alliance members, the partnership goals evolved to focus on generating grounded knowledge around the experiences of and perspectives on sexual violence prevention among urban commuter campus students, with the ultimate goal of

informing the design of prevention and response programming to reduce the incidence of sexual violence and mitigate the negative sequelae of it when it occurs. To achieve these goals, the researcher-practitioner partnership team conducted both original research and engaged in cross-learning and communication. The research aims were to characterize preferred modes, content, and times of communication with students of information on existing victim services and prevention resources, identify behaviors and spaces where sexual violence (conceptualized as "alarming behaviors") occurred on and off campus, and identify factors important to bystander behaviors among diverse commuter campus students. The overarching theoretical frameworks for our inquiry were socioecological[27], which explores influences at multiple levels of the social ecology on individual behavior, and intersectionality[28], an "analytical tool to capture and engage contextual dynamics of power" (Cho et al 2013), which recognizes the influence of multiple, often overlapping, social identities and systems of power on human behavior[29]. To achieve our research study aims, we used a blend of qualitative methods, including focus (mapping) groups and in-depth interviews with students. The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the City University of New York.

Data Sources

To achieve the aims of the project, we conducted 3 community mapping groups (N=19) and in-depth interviews (N=15) with urban commuter campus students attending a 4-year urban college, with over 15,000 students enrolled, located in the Northeast of the United States. The student body of CCNY is diverse, with over half self-identifying as Black/African-American or Latinx, 7% as gay, bisexual, asexual, queer or questioning, and 1% as gender non-conforming. We recruited students via messages to student social groups, flyers on campus, recruitment via student organizations, course-based communications, and face-to-face recruitment. The resultant sample reflects this diversity. The in-depth interviews (IDIs) were designed to characterize student experiences on campus and their sense of community; bystander experiences; and thoughts on future sexual violence prevention. The main goals of the mapping groups (MGs) were to identify spaces that are central to facilitating communication of resources, risk, and violence prevention. The mapping group consisted of three sections focusing on participants' help-seeking behavior, information-gathering skills, and safety concerns.

Results

The sample of students recruited for the IDIs generally reflected the CCNY student population. About a third self-identified as male and the remainder as female (one as female/tomboy). In terms of race/ethnicity, about a fifth identifying as "white," a third as Hispanic or Latinx, a quarter as Black or African-American, and 10% as Asian. The majority were between 18 and 24 years of age; 20% were between 25 and 34. Two-thirds lived with family members; the remainder lived with roommates or alone. Similarly, just over a third of MG participants self-identified as male and the remainder as female. Nearly three-quarters of MG participants self-identified as Black or African-American; about 16% as Latinx and the rest as Asian or Other. The vast majority were between 18 and 24 years

of age, with just one participant between 25 and 34. Several key finding emerged from the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and mapping groups (MGs).

<u>Key IDI Findings</u>

Several findings emerged including themes involving commuter identity, alarming behaviors, bystander intervention, sexual violence prevention and communication. In terms of their identity as a commuter student and feelings of connectedness to community, most students described identities that influenced their experiences on campus in various ways. Respondents identified commuting, working and attending school and additional responsibilities as overlapping facets of their identities and factors that influenced their feeling of connectedness to campus communities. Overall, few participants described feeling tightly connected to the campus, noting that their commute, external responsibilities and lack of opportunities for socializing made it difficult to make friends and thus feel connected. Several students also noted that they generally do not socialize on campus or socialize exclusively with students from their own division or program. Despite this, almost all participants noted the appeal of social diversity within the campus student body and among their fellow students and friends.

When asked to describe an "alarming behavior," one that would trigger for concern and potential intervention, every participant identified street harassment (i.e., "catcalling"), which happens frequently, making this the most common form of sexual violence experienced and witnessed. Other alarming behaviors identified included persistent "staring" or being followed; these were described mostly in the context of street harassment or unwanted attention in social settings. In addition, some students identified sexist, racist and/or homophobic language as alarming and behavior that might trigger potential intervention.

In terms of experiences with bystander intervention behavior, very few participants described prior experiences with intervening. Of those that did, the majority occurred either on the subway or public areas. Predicted likelihood of bystander intervention varied by numerous factors including the number of people involved, and the likelihood of weapons or serious injury occurring, which was in turn influenced by the sex, size and number of actors involved. Understandable concerns around personal safety were described. Several participants said that they were more likely to intervene in situations on campus. Others vacillated between saying they had an obligation to intervene and noting that they would not either because of their personality (they "stay in my lane") or the culture of NYC ("mind your own business"). Several participants said that they thought that ignoring "low level" street harassment was an important strategy as it prevented further escalation. Another key finding is the level of distress that participants reported in facing the decision of whether to intervene and how. The majority described being distressed when they experienced or witnessed sexual violence and by their intervention decision-making process.

Most importantly, nearly all participants described that they did not know exactly how to intervene responsibly, despite the belief that doing so could be helpful; further, they were unsure which type of intervention was most effective and safe. Even participants who had intervened previously reported that further support and training on bystander intervention would be helpful. When asked about prevention of sexual violence, the

majority of participants reported that they believed that while complete prevention of sexual violence is unlikely, intervention is possible; they know it happens and can imagine doing it, with proper support. Despite not feeling very connected to the broad campus community, students reported feeling safer on campus. Further, several students noted that there is accountability and responsibility to respond to and prevent sexual violence on campus. This is important as students reasonably expect that the school community will address the issue, which was taken seriously by all participants. Many students indicated that they would be more likely to intervene on campus, to be better able to support a friend or access support (for friend or self) on campus, even though many did not report significant feelings of community or connectedness to campus.

Key MG Findings

Several key findings emerged from the mapping groups. Overall, results indicated that most students would reach out to Public Safety and/or academic departmental leaders for support or resources, but that there is lack of knowledge of the difference between confidential and mandated reporting of sexual violence experiences. Most importantly, few students had solid knowledge of how specifically to access confidential resources. Student identified staff, offices and departments that they trust as confidential resources, but many are, in fact, responsible employees, meaning that they would have to report the experience to the Title IX Office. For example, most students assumed that their advisor would be a confidential source. These findings suggest that students need continued education on where to obtain confidential help and on-campus resources.

We also found that most students were unaware of where to go for psychological and other support around their own or their friends' experiences of sexual violence. Students identified public safety as the main point of contact, because they are clearly meant to address safety, highly visible, and located throughout all campus spaces. This strongly suggests that the response of public safety to reports of sexual violence, including sexual harassment or street harassment, may be crucial to students' experience of the help-seeking process, as well as reporting. In terms of the mapping of key spaces on campus and communications, because students prioritize academic spaces, studying and lounge spaces as key places where they spend the most time, messaging should be focused on these spaces and in ways that reflect how students use the spaces.

Implications for Policy and Practice

We identified several potential, local strategies for better on- and off-campus communication around resources and reporting, as well as important insights into how to adapt existing bystander approaches to better meet the needs of urban commuter campus students. However, our sample sizes were small and thus we conclude that further research is needed to extend these findings and more fully achieve our goals as a research-practice team.

Programming to support communication, reporting and resource access

In order to reach students without fail and emphasize the importance of the information offered, communicating with them in classrooms and via their instructors is crucial. This

requires a number of supports for faculty and staff, including templates for required text for syllabi, further mandated training on roles and responsibilities of various faculty and staff and appropriate responses to disclosure of violence, and supplementary training on classroom (both face-to-face, hybrid and web-based) management of discussions and interactions around sexual violence, harassment and discrimination. Clear guidance on how to handle sex- and gender-based discrimination, including the spectrum of violence that occurs within classrooms or between students, faculty and staff, is needed. Key members of the faculty, staff and administration (i.e., deans, department chairs, public safety offices, and academic advisors) were identified by students as most likely points of contact. These individuals need tailored training as well to ensure the most sensitive and accurate response, as well as a clearer understanding of how best to support students who are experiencing a range of violent experiences; training on bystander intervention for these key community members is needed as well.

In addition to administration, faculty and staff, students need focused attention. Further training and programming is needed for all students to reinforce the mandated training they already receive. This may need to be more intensive and/or face-to-face in the first or incoming year and in the years that follow. Booster trainings that build on foundational information should be considered as students' progress through their educational programs. It is important to note that many students enroll at this campus for their third and fourth years (or more) of college, transferring from the various community colleges throughout the larger university system. This, combined with the challenges of nurturing feelings of connectedness to the campus community, suggests that further research on how to message to reach all students on campus is required. This should include a strong emphasis on reaching students via web-, app- and other virtual approaches that can be used by commuters and taps into how they identify with the campus (or perhaps city) community and their various identities, priorities and motivations. The added focus on students, faculty and staff will require clear leadership from school administration, fiscal and human resource support and greater faculty-staff collaboration.

Bystander intervention programming

Established bystander intervention (BI) programs define sexual violence, identify barriers to intervention and teach skills on how to intervene safely. In our research, personal safety was identified as a critical modifier of the self-reported likelihood of commuter campus students' bystander intervention. For the few students who had intervened previously, safety considerations were taken into account as well. Practicing safe and appropriate intervention skills is a goal of BI programs. Scenarios in established BI programs can be enhanced by integrating the experiences described in our research into scenarios adapted for commuter campus students. For example, a tailored training could include a scenario that explores experiences of violence that may occur on the street or subway, as students described spending several hours a day commuting where they experienced and/or witnessed street harassment. Street harassment and "staring" was identified as something that occurs on campus and among acquaintance groups, in addition to on the street or subway. Commuter students may need more refined scenarios and time to consider whether and how to intervene, based on the factors they identified as important to intervention, such as whether it occurs on or off campus and

safety concerns. Although the challenges of enacting bystander behaviors and the individual decision-making processes are often discussed in BI curricula, an adapted training would include off-campus dilemmas faced by commuter campus students and discuss how they influence intervention on campus or amongst acquaintances.

A strong and clear finding of our research is that commuter campus students described a need for further support and training on bystander intervention within the NYC culture of "mind your own business." Discussions and skills on how to prioritize personal safety while committing to becoming an active bystander is an area of opportunity for BI programs to further explore. In addition, commuter campus students most often live with their families and are likely exposed to diverse views on gender norms, family values and cultural beliefs on bystander intervention. BI programs for commuter campus students should include small group work and discussions that explore cultural beliefs and the lived realities of negotiating multiple identities and pro-social behavior in various contexts. Finally, commuter campus student participants who identified what they called the "bystander effect" (essentially diffusion of responsibility) raises the question of the social norms approach commonly used in BI trainings. The social norms approach seeks to correct misperceptions around behavior, specifically the under-estimation of intervention behaviors, and offer correct information, and thus change perceptions; this has the effect of increasing the likelihood of engaging in the behavior. Further research could explore how incorporating "real" and "perceived" commuter campus students' bystander behaviors might relate to attitudes and predicted behaviors among urban commuter campus students. Overall, additional data on violence experienced by commuter campus students and a multifaceted curriculum is necessary to fully address the diverse needs of commuter campus students.

Sustaining the Partnership

Our researcher-practitioner partnership will continue to build on what we have learned in order to advance the goals of the GAP Alliance. Our first step will be presenting the results of the researcher-practitioner partnership study to the full GAP Alliance team. Through discussions in the GAP Alliance, we will determine what further presentations (e.g., to the Faculty Senate, college leadership, Public Safety, etc.) may be made. These discussions will also inform our next steps (see above) in terms of programming. In sum, our results suggest that enhanced training of students is needed to ensure that they know what resources are available, where to report and/or the meaning of reporting to various entities and individuals. Further, our results identify key entities with which to work and critical spaces on campus where we may communicate best with students. Finally, in terms of bystander training, our results offer several insights for adapting existing training programming. Further research is needed to tailor this training to meet the needs of urban commuter campus students. Our next step will be to seek further support for a more in-depth study of how to adapt an existing bystander intervention, as well as funds to pilot an adapted intervention, applying the results of this research as week as new insights generated. Finally, we will explore how to advocate for the resources needed for robust implementation of the recommendations identified through this process by the GAP Alliance, which offers the infrastructure needed to move the work forward.

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