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SCHOOL SPIRIT & CAMPUS SAFETY: SEXUAL ASSAULT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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Project Empowerment Volume 2, Article 4
September 23, 2023

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College can be a time to explore new opportunities and become more involved in the community. However, it is important to understand and educate yourself on staying safe and protected on campus.

According to a 2013 CNN article, 1 in 5 college students will be sexually assaulted while at university. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network estimates that college-aged women are 3–4 times more likely to experience sexual assault than other groups of women. Women of color are at an even higher risk: 19% of Black women, 24% of mixed race women, and 34% of Native American women are at risk for experiencing sexual assault in their lifetimes. On college campuses, this statistic is significantly higher for students involved in Greek life.

GREEK LIFE

Greek life is the collective term for collegiate social societies called fraternities and sororities. In the United States, Greek organizations are found on 800+ college campuses and are home to 750,000+ active members. There are 4 national fraternity and sorority councils: Panhellenic Association (NPC), the National Pan-Hellenic Council, the Interfraternity Council (IFC), and the Multicultural Greek Council. For this article's purposes, statistics will be drawn from the experiences of Panhellenic Association members, the governing body of 26 historically white all-women's organizations. Please note that the experiences of historically non-white organization members may be different.

Sexual assault and discrimination can start before women have even joined an organization. Many NPC and IFC organizations are historically white, and many people of color experience racial discrimination during the recruitment process. At the University of Alabama, which formally desegregated its sororities in 2013, only 4% of the 2018 NPC new member class was African American.

Once a woman has joined, they may be subjected to hazing by the organization. Hazing is a recruitment tactic involving humiliation or harassment and has historically been used for initiation into Greek organizations. The national organization StopHazing defines hazing as an initiation process that "humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers" potential members. These practices often target new members' physical and mental health, and can leave long-lasting impacts on members. Since 1970, there has been at least 1 hazing-related death on a college campus annually. Although 44 states have passed anti-hazing laws since then, a 2008 study found that 73% of Greek organizations still participate in some form of hazing. The NPC and IFC have strict anti-hazing platforms that include education, transparency, and accountability initiatives. Both organizations are members of the Anti-Hazing Coalition, which works to create federal anti-hazing legislation to protect students from harmful initiation practices.

Greek organizations are notorious for their heightened rates of sexual assault and violence. Women in Greek organizations are often placed in situations that expose them to this type of violence. For example, some fraternities are known to target specific women to sexually assault, a process known as "rapebaiting." This sexual assault culture is reflective of the effect that fraternities have on their members: Research has found that fraternity members committed acts of sexual violence 3x more than men who were not in Greek life. This culture is objectively harmful to women, especially if they are involved in the system. 29% of women in sororities experience sexual assault, a significantly higher rate than the 7% that non-Greek affiliated women face.

The culture of these organizations also encourages using harmful substances, such as alcohol and drugs, in addition to putting their members in other dangerous situations. Greek life promotes a culture of excessive substance use and abuse. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, nearly 50% of fraternity members showed signs of substance abuse disorder after college. In particular, members participated in binge drinking at significantly higher rates than their non-Greek affiliated peers. For women in sororities, overall rates of substance abuse were lower, but were still greater than those seen in non-sorority members. This culture of substance abuse creates an unsafe and violent environment in many Greek organizations. In part, substance use contributes to the higher rates of sexual assault and violence that disenfranchise and traumatize Greek women in chapters across the country.

While Greek-lettered organizations can be a positive experience for their members, they also place women in dangerous situations that increase their chances of substance abuse and sexual assault.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

TITLE IX

Title IX is the section of the Education Amendments of 1972 that bans sex discrimination in schools receiving federal funding. Title IX protects students in public schools from things like sexual assault and harassment. It also protects against discrimination targeting non-binary or trans students, as well as pregnant students. For 50 years, Title IX has helped protect public school students by holding that their education should be free from discrimination. However, the legislation is often misunderstood – leaving survivors without the proper resources or representation. Read below to explore the function of Title IX on college campuses and some shortcomings of the legislation.

Title IX may have lapses in its effectiveness, but it is more harmful to survivors to get rid of the legislation entirely. Rather, we must focus on expanding, revamping, and funding Title IX programs to make them more effective. Title IX's effectiveness would also benefit from additional legislation to enhance its efficacy. At the university level, the Clery Act requires higher education institutions to report campus crime data. This includes cases of gender- and sex-based violence and hate crimes. The Clery Act offers further protections for students in higher education institutions by making information on campus crime available. Universities that receive federal funding are required to release an annual security report. This report details campus crime statistics, including information on sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination. In the context of Title IX, the Clery Act requires that both parties are informed of the outcome of a Title IX investigation. Universities also cannot require victims to abide by a non-disclosure agreement. This legislation can help protect and educate collegiate women on the safety of their campus.

To utilize Title IX to its full capacity, it is vital to understand how to access Title IX resources on your campus:

- At its core, Title IX requires college campuses to have a Title IX office to satisfy gender discrimination cases. The easiest way to access this is by simply searching your university's name and "Title IX" on a search engine.
- Each university may have a slightly different submission process, but all of them will take reports on the following:
 - sexual orientation
 - gender identity and expression
 - pregnant persons
 - parental status
 - gender stereotypes (or lack thereof)
 - sexual assault
 - sexual harassment

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) handles Title IX complaints and questions. For more information on what is covered by Title IX, reach out to your school's coordinator or email ocr@ed.gov.

If you feel your institution is handling Title IX cases improperly, OCR encourages you to report to them at:

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html or email ocr@ed.gov.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Many universities have counseling services and support groups for sexual assault survivors. Once again, these will vary by institution, but they can often be accessed on a general search engine or the homepage of your university's website.

CAMPUS POLICE

If you see a sexual assault occur or you are the victim of sexual violence, your campus's police station is able to help you document it and seek legal action. This is a different process than Title IX because it involves criminal penalties. Each university police station will have a separate access number than 911, so it is best to become well-acquainted with this contact to keep yourself safe.

Many American universities also install blue light systems to alert campus police in the event of emergencies. If you feel unsafe on campus, you are able to press the blue light button at one of the stations to alert authorities. Controversy over blue lights has sparked on many campuses because they are often underfunded or inoperational. If this is the case on your college campus, or your campus does not have a blue light system, it is best to know your campus police number in the event of an emergency.

STUDENT GROUPS

Look for these organizations to help stop sexual violence on campus or seek support for survivors:

- National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
- Students Active for Ending Rape (SAFER)
- Know your IX
- RAINN

SOURCES

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