

University of Mary Washington 2016 Student Climate Survey: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Prevalence of Interpersonal Violence

A Summary

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Abstract

Purpose: This study marks the first in a series on biennial campus climate surveys of University of Mary Washington students. This survey is meant to capture perceptions, attitudes, and prevalence of interpersonal violence, in particular sexual and gender-based violence, among students. The findings of these ongoing studies will inform prevention and intervention efforts on campus.

Methods: The University utilized a modified version of the Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) survey, sent to all undergraduate, graduate, part-time and full-time students enrolled as of February 2016.

Results: Overall, 82% of students indicated feeling safe on campus. Perceptions of the severity of sexual on violence is evenly split, with 33.7 indicating that sexual violence was not a problem on campus, 32% reporting that it is a problem, and 34.4% neutral on the subject. Nineteen percent of all students reported that they had experienced some form of sexual/gender harassment. Of students who reported experiencing violence while enrolled, 53% said that the University met their needs for support and accommodation, 64% said the University created an environment where they felt safe to discuss their experiences, and 64% said that they felt supported either through formal or informal resources.

Conclusions: The findings of this survey indicate that rates of interpersonal violence at the University of Mary Washington are on par with national averages. While the majority of respondents felt happy and safe during their time at Mary Washington and reported a low tolerance level for harassment and moderate rates of bystander intervention, many indicated lukewarm faith in the ability or inclination of the University to appropriately handle cases of interpersonal violence or address the factors contributing to them.

Implications and Contribution

These findings show that the University can improve in garnering student trust and increase education and awareness efforts about sexual and gender-based assault and harassment. This survey, applied every two years, may be a vital tool to track progress in changing student perceptions about safety on campus and ability of the University to appropriately respond to complaints.

One in five women and one in sixteen men are sexually assaulted while in college [1]. A traditionally college-aged student is at higher risk of gender-based violence than the wider population, with 37.4% of adult-aged female rape victims reporting that they were first assaulted between 18 and 24 years old [2]. Dishearteningly, a vast majority of these incidents (90%) are never reported [3]. The University of Mary Washington is committed to taking a stand against all forms of interpersonal violence as well as providing support, resources, education, and preventative awareness to our campus community. UMW understands that sexual and gender-based violence can greatly impede a student's opportunities for academic and personal success; as such, we are committed to reducing risk and enhancing resources on campus for all of our students. This study marks the first in a series on biennial campus climate surveys of University of Mary Washington students. This survey is meant to capture perceptions, attitudes, and prevalence of interpersonal violence among students. The findings of these ongoing studies will inform prevention and intervention efforts on campus.

Methods

The University utilized a modified version of the Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) survey, sent

via email to all 4,376 undergraduate, graduate, part-time and full-time students enrolled as of February 2016. Raffling off incentives, including an iPad and University bookstore merchandise, were used to encourage participation. If a student provided five or more responses within Module 1 of the survey, they were included in the analysis. All questions in the survey were optional, and students were allowed to skip questions they did not wish to answer. The survey remained open for a period of one month, after which responses were recorded and data was analyzed.

Results

A total of 590 students were included in the survey, indicating a 13% participation rate.

Safety on Campus

Overall, 82% of students indicated feeling safe on campus. A majority of students responded that they would both re-attend UMW (74.7%) and recommend to a friend (86.1%). Perceptions of the problem of sexual violence on campus is evenly split among students, with 33.7% indicating that sexual violence was not a problem on campus, 32% reporting that it is a problem, and 34.4% neutral on the subject. Broken down by types of violence,

79.8% reporting feeling safe from dating violence, 75.7% felt safe from sexual harassment, 75.5% felt safe from sexual violence, and 68.5% felt safe from stalking. A vast majority (91.7%) of respondents indicated safe and health perceptions of their friends' attitudes regarding a variety of interpersonal behaviors. Between 30 – 52% of respondents indicated that they participated in bystander intervention “at least most of the time” when witnessing a variety of events including asking someone who was upset at a party if they needed help (52.4%), walking a friend who had too much to drink home (44.9%), and intervening if they witnessed a friend verbally (45.4%) or physically (45.8%) abusing another person.

Prevalence

Nineteen percent of all students reported that they had experienced some form of sexual/gender harassment; 10% said they had experienced sexual assault as a student, 8% experienced stalking, 5% experienced rape, 5% experienced a form of sexual exploitation, 5% experienced retaliation, and 4% experienced dating violence. Additionally, 4% of respondents indicating experiencing an other, unspecified form of interpersonal violence while a student. While the majority of students reporting interpersonal violence in this survey were White/Caucasian, female, and heterosexual, responses indicated that students of sexual, ethnic, racial minorities and gender non-conforming students experience interpersonal violence at higher rates. Rates of sexual/gender harassment were particularly high among self-identifying bi-sexual students, while rates of sexual/gender harassment were highest among Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and respondents who identified with an other race/ethnicity.

Perceived Response of University

A majority of students indicated that they believed the University would respond appropriately in a variety of ways to a report of sexual misconduct- 76.3% of students believed that the University would punish the complainant in a report of sexual harassment, 75.7% felt their privacy would be maintained, and 71% felt that their report would be taken seriously. However, 19.7% of students believed that UMW would not address factors that led to the prohibited sexual conduct, 16.3% believed it would be hard for UMW to support the person making the report, and 15.6% did not believe the University would provide accommodations for that person.

Response and Services

In considering from whom they would seek help after experiencing an incident of sexual misconduct, 79% of respondents indicated they would approach Campus Police. The next three most-indicated resources for help were the Office of Title IX (47%), the Talley Center for Counseling Services (46%) and the Student Health Center (40%). However, of the respondents who indicated that they had experienced a form of interpersonal violence while enrolled, only 2.9% said that they reported the incident to student health services, 5.8% to campus

police, and 16.3% to an on-campus counselor/therapist. The majority of students who experienced interpersonal violence told a close friend (84.6%) or roommate (51%) about the experience. Of students who reported experiencing violence while enrolled, 53% said that the University met their needs for support and accommodation, 64% said the University created an environment where they felt safe to discuss their experiences, and 64% said that they felt supported either through formal or informal resources. The majority of racial or sexual identity minorities reported not being treated differently by the University due to their sexual orientation (82.7%) or race (85%).

Conclusions

The findings of this survey support that rates of interpersonal violence at the University of Mary Washington are on par with national averages. While the majority of respondents felt happy and safe during their time at Mary Washington and reported a low tolerance level for harassment and moderate rates of bystander intervention, many indicated lukewarm faith or general ambivalence in the ability or inclination of the University to appropriately handle cases of interpersonal violence or address the factors contributing to them. These findings show that the University can improve in garnering student trust and increase education and awareness efforts, including more effective bystander intervention training, more education regarding resources the University can provide to survivors of interpersonal violence, and continuing to reduce barriers in reporting.

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