

Responding to Domestic Violence on Campus: Warning Signs and Prevention

By Terri Howard, Senior Director, FEI

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines intimate partner violence (IPV)—also called domestic violence, battering or spouse abuse—as a serious, preventable public health problem that affects millions of Americans. The term “intimate partner violence” describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a spouse, ex-spouse or current or former girlfriend or boyfriend. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.



Domestic violence is a serious issue in itself, but it can become even more challenging when it spills over onto college campuses. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, about 21 percent of college students reported dating violence by a current partner. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence. In addition, about 68 percent of young women who have been raped knew their rapist either as a boyfriend, friend or casual acquaintance.

Abuse comes in all forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, digital and sexual. On

college campuses, many domestic violence cases are non-physical — stalking, verbal abuse or electronic abuse. Even though texting and emailing don't include face-to-face contact, they still can be considered a form of domestic (electronic) abuse.

Stalking behaviors most commonly experienced include:

- Unwanted phone calls and messages, letters or emails
- Using social media like Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook or Instagram to send unwanted posts or photos
- Spreading rumors, either verbally or electronically
- Following or spying
- Showing up at places where the victim is present, such as a class, dorm or workplace
- Waiting for the victim
- Leaving unwanted gifts

The Statistics

According to the CDC, more than one in three women and one in four men in the United States have experienced

some form of domestic violence in their lifetimes. Approximately 2 million women are assaulted each year, 75 percent by intimate partners. Men also can be victims of intimate partner abuse as more than 800,000 men are raped and/or assaulted by a partner every year. Domestic violence occurs among all types of families and relationships, regardless of income, profession, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education level or race.

Domestic violence on campus is a safety and health issue with medical, emotional, personal, economic and professional consequences. Acts of domestic violence not only pose a threat to the victim, but also potentially to the victim's friends, roommates, coworkers or customers who may be present at the victim's workplace. Additionally, many acts of domestic violence go underreported on college campuses. For many students, a partner's charm, love and likability, coupled with uncertainty about what is acceptable adult behavior, can make it difficult to recognize physically or emotionally abusive behavior or control as domestic violence.

Warning Signs

As a campus law enforcement official, it's important not only to recognize signs of domestic violence, but also to know how to respond to such situations in a safe manner. Through training provided by the

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campus safety office, professors and students alike should be educated about how to look for the following types of behaviors in a student, indicating he or she might be a victim of domestic violence:

- Unexplained injuries or injuries that do not correlate with the explanation
- Dress that is inappropriate

- Uncharacteristic absenteeism from class
- Uncharacteristic signs of anxiety and fear including emotional distress, tearfulness and depression
- Sensitivity about home life or hints of trouble at home

Some red flags to be aware of in attackers:

- Jealousy
- Controlling behavior
- Blaming
- Hypersensitivity
- Past history of abuse
- Coercion into sex with little concern for partner's wishes
- Mistreatment of animals and/or children with an exhibited lack of empathy
- Attempts to isolate partner from friends, class or job
- Verbal abuse

Campus Responsibilities

Campus law enforcement could partner with the university health center to provide resources for those who are victims of domestic violence. A female officer or advocate trained in responding to domestic violence is necessary.

In a crisis situation, three things are key: policy, planning and training.

Parents send their children to college with the expectation that campus will be a safe environment. It's the college or university's responsibility to develop a domestic violence policy and to educate faculty, staff — including campus security — and students about the policy. The purpose is to set forth procedures and guidelines to reduce the occurrence of domestic violence and its impact on the campus.

A good policy will contain a definition of domestic violence, a no-tolerance statement, and a campus response. It should include holistic language that covers the perpetrator and the victim. As part of the policy, the campus should provide awareness training and describe the warning signs (as described above), as well as provide assistance for victims including a list of hotlines, resources and referrals.

Having a written policy, however, is not enough. Once the policy is in place, plan for the "what-if." Create a written crisis plan that identifies many different crisis scenarios, related to domestic violence and in general, that could occur on a campus and outline

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action steps for each one. For example, the plan for a student being held hostage by an intimate partner situation might be different than one for a power outage.

Before that plan gets put on a shelf, conduct training exercises. Run through the disaster plan using a mock crisis. This will allow you to make adjustments or corrections to the plan where needed. Just as you practice routine fire drills, schedule a yearly review of your plan and run through the drill. These drills are a good way to create muscle memory for campus security, students and staff so that if a worst-case scenario domestic violence situation becomes a crisis situation, everyone will know what to do.

The SaVE Act

Any higher education institution participating in federal student aid programs is required under the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, or Campus SaVE Act (SaVE), to increase transparency about the scope of sexual violence on campus. SaVE is a 2013 amendment to the federal Jeanne Clery Act. It was designed by advocates along with victims/survivors and championed by a bipartisan coalition in Congress as a companion to Title IX that will help bolster the response to and prevention of sexual violence in higher education. It was extended to include acts of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. The measure was signed into law as part of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 on March 7, 2013.

The law, which must be implemented no later than Oct. 1, 2014 and goes into effect by the 2014-15 aca-

demical year, guarantees victims enhanced rights, provides for standards in institutional conduct proceedings, and provides campus-wide prevention education programming. Institutions have been given this time in order to make any necessary changes to their formal policies and procedures before the deadline.

Increased Transparency

Higher education institutions already are required to report sexual assault statistics. In 2013, colleges and universities began collecting and reporting statistics for domestic violence, dating violence and stalking occurring on-campus, on public property within and adjacent to campus, and at non-cam-

pus properties like off-campus student organization housing and remote classrooms.

As required by the SaVE Act, these institutions must collect statistics from a broad range of campus officials including resident advisors, deans and athletic coaches, campus police or security, and local law enforcement. The law requires disclosures to protect the confidentiality of victims.

Keeping the Campus Safe

When university security officials review their disaster plans, special attention should be given to preparation for domestic violence situations. While practice does not always make perfect,

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it does begin to make permanent. Your disaster plan most likely includes drills for evacuation and shelter in place.

No matter what the situation—whether a stalker, a student-hostage scenario, an active shooter, armed robbery, tornado or other natural disaster—all campus employees and students should know how to alert security at the first sign of trouble. Using technology and social media, campus security can issue a campus-wide alert and partner with local law enforcement when necessary. Accurate and timely communication is important to reassure students, faculty, parents and the media that you are taking every step necessary to get the situation under control.

Prevention

All campus law enforcement should be trained to recognize and respond to domestic violence on campus. Collaborate with the university at the beginning of the school year, or each new semester, to educate students on domestic violence. It should be part of the overall campus safety message, along with information on lock-down procedures, alcohol and drug awareness, situational awareness and overall campus safety. Include plans to bring

in crisis counselors after a domestic violence or crisis situation to talk to students, staff and family members. These counselors have mental health expertise and critical incident experience to assist with the human side of recovery by providing meaningful support to those affected.

As the school year progresses, provide regular updates to students, faculty, staff and families to keep domestic violence awareness at the top of mind. In the unfortunate event the campus experiences a violent instance of abuse, providing information about the response and lessons learned will help improve the resiliency of staff, students and the community so that recovery can begin.

About the Author

Terri Howard, Senior Director, Crisis Management is responsible for working with corporate clients to ensure companies are prepared for, can respond to and recover from a crisis incident. She also coordinates the people support and psychological first aid services for those impacted by a crisis incident and is experienced in developing drills and exercises aimed at testing current crisis management plans and procedures.

Prior to her tenure with FEI, Terri served as vice president for the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) and also worked for Target Corporation, leading a team for incident management, crisis response and business continuity.

Terri has contributed to several international standards and guidelines on crisis management and workplace violence prevention, including ASIS and the FBI. She has spoken at numerous conferences and conducted webinars. She completed undergraduate studies at Chatham University, attended both Pennsylvania State and Marquette University for graduate study, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in Public Safety/Emergency Management Leadership.

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