SEXUAL MEDICINE REVIEWS REVIEWS

A Review of Undergraduate Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Sexual violence (SV) has been a prevalent issue on college campuses for decades. Researchers, universities, and legislators have tried to understand and prevent it. Despite these efforts, 25% of female and 6% of male undergraduate students will experience a nonconsensual sexual experience (NSE) as a student. An immense amount of research has been conducted on the prevalence, effects, resources for, and outcomes of SV over the last few decades.

Objectives: The current paper aims to compile and summarize the extant literature on undergraduate student disclosures of sexual violence. The objective is to provide a comprehensive review of the research.

Methods: A literature search was performed using the terms sexual violence, NSE, undergraduate students, informal and formal reporting, and disclosure.

Results: Disclosure patterns and outcomes for survivors vary widely based on individual factors including type of disclosure source (ie, informal or formal reporting), disclosure recipient response, previous history of NSEs, and personal identity (ie, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity). Though there are many formal resources (ie, police, Title IX), the majority of survivors report to informal sources (ie, family or friends). In addition to researching survivors' experiences and rates of disclosures, research also evaluates how disclosure recipients perceive their response to a survivor's disclosure, their likelihood of receiving a disclosure based on their own individual identities, and how the disclosure impacts the recipient and their relationship with the survivor.

Conclusion: The individualized response and decision to report SV has made prevention and the creation of effective resources difficult. As there are so many individual factors to consider when evaluating how or whether a NSE will be disclosed, future research should consider these individual differences and use them to create more effective reporting sources and resources. **Sears-Greer MA, Friehart BK, Meston CM. A Review of Undergraduate Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence. Sex Med Rev 2022;XX:XXX–XXX.**

Key Words: Sexual Violence; Disclosure; Undergraduate Students; Nonconsensual; Sexual Experience; Rape; Sexual Assault

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that up to 25% of female and 6% of male undergraduate students will experience sexual violence (SV) while in college.[1-6] Over the past several years in particular, the pervasiveness of sexual violence has received a great deal of research and media attention, illuminating the deleterious effects of such experiences on survivors. More specifically, women with a history of nonconsensual sexual experiences (NSEs) are more likely to be revictimized,[7-9] experience future life stressors,[7,8,10] engage in risky sexual behaviors,[11] be diagnosed with mental or physical health disorders,[10,12-14] and experience difficulty with sexual function and relational intimacy.[15-18] NSEs have also been shown to negatively impact survivors' views of themselves as sexual beings and their conceptualization of sex and sexuality more generally.[19]

Despite the high rates of sexual victimization among college students and the long-term effects of these events, students do not consistently disclose sexual violence experiences to others. Moreover, research suggests that student willingness to report depends heavily on the context of the disclosure itself. Demers et al. found a discrepancy in student disclosures; while 80% of students disclosed their nonconsensual sexual experience to an "informal" source (ie, a friend, family), only 7% reported their experience(s) to a "formal" source such as a police officer, university official, or legal professional for support.[20] This gap is meaningful, as formal disclosures facilitate access to available services and accommodations.

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There has been a significant research focus on the high rates of sexual violence and inconsistent rates of disclosures on college campuses, as well as many attempts to address this discrepancy. As many formal supports already exist for students but are underutilized, research in this area plays an important role in helping universities best respond to the changing landscape of student needs. By creating systems that are responsive to such needs, students' likelihood of disclosing to a formal source may improve over time, providing increased access to services and supportive responses.

THE CURRENT PAPER

Given the emphasis of increasing disclosures in general, and formal disclosures in particular, within university settings the goal of the present paper is to provide a summary of the most up-to-date research in this field to assist universities, researchers, and policymakers as they attempt to improve systems for victims of sexual violence. In 2017, a systematic review by Halstead et al. comprehensively summarized the research published between 2010 and 2015 primarily exploring (i) trends in student disclosures and (ii) campus resources and services.[21] The present review will briefly summarize their findings and provide an update on how the research has shifted since that time.

PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Halstead et al. identified 6 primary research areas related to student disclosures, which we will summarize briefly: informal disclosures, formal disclosures, friend perception of disclosures, process/effect of the disclosure on the survivor, barriers to disclosure, and social support in the disclosure process.[21] With regards to informal disclosures, the authors found that while students frequently disclosed their experiences to a range of supports, they are much more likely to disclose to friends (with disclosure rates ranging from 55 to 94%) or romantic partners (55.5%) than to relatives (5−31.9%).[22-24] Informal disclosure recipients were typically older than 19 years old, employed, and more likely to endorse a history of mental illness (ie, PTSD, lifetime major depression, substance abuse, etc.[25]). Recipients also commonly reported a personal history of SV, suggesting that students feel most comfortable disclosing to others with similar experiences.[25,26]

Halstead et al. also noted that students could identify a wide range of formal reporting sources, including police, healthcare providers, counselors, religious leaders, and campus health services.[21,22,24] Despite this wide array of options, formal reporting rates ranged from <1% to 15%.[27,28] This study found particularly low reporting rates for campus university officials (<1%) or for campus sexual assault centers (<1%), despite the SV-specific nature of these resources.[24] One qualitative study found that students identified mental health services as a last resort option only to be pursued in cases of extreme distress.[29]

Not only has research focused on disclosure avenues and likelihood for survivors to disclose, but also on recipients' perceptions of survivors' disclosures. Overall, Halstead et al.'s review suggests a generally supportive response from recipients, over half of whom reported feeling helpful after a disclosure[30] and two-thirds of whom felt able to respond to the victim in an encouraging manner.[25] However, these patterns may be influenced by several notable moderators; research suggests that men might experience more discomfort and fears about appropriately empathizing when receiving an SV disclosure, while women may experience higher levels of emotional distress.[26,30] Similarly, individuals who have received previous disclosures report increased personal effectiveness and decreased confusion with the experience.[26] Finally, though research indicates that individuals with a history of SV may be more effective in providing support, these individuals may also experience increased emotional distress during the disclosure.[30]

Halstead et al. also examined research exploring a disclosure's effect on the survivor long-term.[21] The extant literature suggests that individuals who disclose their SV may experience less interpersonal distress, decreased avoidance symptoms, reductions in physical health complaints, and decreased psychological and trauma symptoms.[31,32] These benefits of disclosure are not observed unilaterally, however, and seem to be impacted by the response to the disclosure itself. Positive reactions to the disclosure predicted increased coping skills, while negative reactions to the disclosure often resulted in self-blame, negative cognitions, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress.[33]

Barriers to disclosure reflect one of the most important research areas as universities, researchers, and mental health professionals alike try to support survivors of college sexual violence. Halstead et al. found that 25−55% of students do not report their SV experiences to anyone.[22,23,30] These rates are likely influenced by potential fears related to disclosure, including negative reactions from others, potential minimization of the event, possible feelings of helplessness, and the experiencing of unwanted outcomes. Of these, the latter is among the most frequently cited barriers to formal disclosure, as survivors fear interference with important relationships, increased parental restriction, and unwanted court/police involvement.[28,29] Similarly, students frequently report a fear of utilizing campus health services due to a larger concern about lapses in confidentiality and anonymity.[29]

Halstead et al. also explored the role of social support in the disclosure process.[21] In general, having a larger social support network increases the likelihood of student disclosure,[23] and seems to be related to pre-existing coping skills that may improve outcomes for survivors of SV.[22] Importantly, the size and strength of an individual's support network does not predict the types of reactions they are likely to receive, and while social support increases the likelihood of disclosure, it does not guarantee that a survivor will receive supportive or helpful responses.[23]

In addition to student disclosures, Halstead et al. also examined the types of services available to students following SV on campus.[21] Their findings suggest 3 primary areas of research in this larger domain: student knowledge of services, student utilization of services, and student suggestions for service provision. Importantly, regardless of the breadth of services available, students are only able to use the services they are aware of. When Halstead et al. reviewed the literature from 2010 to 2015, the authors found limited knowledge of available resources and systems. In fact, one study reported that students knew of less than half of the services available to them related to SV.[34] Another study found that though students knew of available services, they felt unprepared to actually navigate or access those services.[35] This suggests that universities may not actually have large gaps in service provision for this population, and instead, should focus on the knowledge and utilization of existing care.

Finally, Halstead et al. reviewed the utilization of existing campus services and student suggestions for improvements. Between 2010 and 2015, quantitative and qualitative research overwhelmingly found notably low rates of service utilization.[24,34,36] One qualitative study did find that students reported hypothetical comfort with accessing with campus SV resources, however, those students also reported barriers to service utilization including a lack of knowledge about the location of services.[35] Given these low rates of service utilization, student suggestions for improvements have been elicited in previous research. Many students reported a desire to hold campus-wide events to increase awareness of SV and to increase the visibility of existing services by placing posters and advertisements on- and off-campus.[34,35] Similarly, many students reported a desire to engage with technology to increase knowledge of services, including designing an online course focused on SV and leveraging the internet to advertise campus services.[34,35]

NEW TRENDS IN THE LITERATURE

Informal Reporting

Consistent with earlier findings noted in Halstead et al.' review, recent research suggests that students are more likely to report their sexual violence experiences to an informal source, particularly a friend, over a formal reporting source.[20,37] Though the preference for informal sources has not changed, there have been several, important cultural shifts that have notably influenced the nature of these disclosures since 2015. Sociocultural movements, particularly, the #MeToo Movement and the popularization of digitized disclosures, have redefined the nature of informal disclosures in recent years.[38-41] Rather than sharing disclosures behind closed doors to friends or family, survivors are publicly sharing their experiences and receiving informal support from other survivors online.

Informal disclosure rates rose notably in 2017, owing to the #MeToo movement—a cultural moment in which millions of individuals shared histories of sexual violence on Twitter and other social media platforms using the hashtag, "#MeToo."[38,41] Researchers attribute the increase in disclosures to a sense of solidarity and empathy with other survivors, a decrease in stigma associated with disclosure, and increased comfort with disclosing as part of a large, collective group.[38] A recent network analysis of over 1.8 million #MeToo tweets supports this framework. The authors found survivors more likely to share specific details in their own disclosure when they had a higher number of exposures to other #MeToo disclosures before posting.[40] In turn, seeing previous disclosures with specific details made an individual more likely to disclose themselves.

These network-level, reciprocal relationships may have implications for disclosures more generally, suggesting a snowball effect in which individuals are more likely to disclose as they observe disclosures among their peer groups.[40] To that end, research suggests that since #MeToo, informal disclosures have continued increasing through online, digitized formats (eg, Twitter, reddit, online support groups), potentially providing a new avenue for survivors to access support.[42] Additionally, many forms of advocacy and activism for survivors of SV have moved to online forums, in part because disclosures are becoming more common in such environments.[43] These trends significantly impacted the format and frequency of informal disclosures; as such, it is important for research to take this into account when evaluating disclosure frequencies, sources, and reactions in future research.

Though informal disclosure rates did increase in 2017, such improvements were not universal and seem to be moderated by a number of demographic and social factors. More specifically, disclosure rates among black students significantly increased relative to their white peers in response to #MeToo, which may be a function of several noteworthy African American women coming forward with SV experiences throughout the #MeToo movement (eg, Tarana Burke).[41] Similarly, undergraduate students were more likely than graduate students to disclose sexual violence during this time, perhaps because younger students benefited more from the education component or visibility of #MeToo on social platforms. In 2017, only 25% of undergraduate students identified having an NSE in their lifetime, but by 2019, that rate climbed to 39.1%. For graduate students, rates of identification with unwanted sexual experiences remained constant throughout this period. Taken together, these data suggest that more undergraduate students than graduate students re-evaluated past sexual experiences, and thus disclosed those experiences, because of the #MeToo movement.[41]

Formal Reporting

While large cultural shifts have influenced the frequencies and avenues available for informal disclosures since 2015, research findings on formal reporting rates have remained fairly stable. Indeed, formal reporting rates have not increased despite systematic efforts by universities, researchers, and the federal government to improve reporting infrastructure.[2,5] As one example, the

Department of Education enacted mandatory reporting policies for nearly all university employees under Title IX of the Education Amendment Act in 2011 with the goal of increasing formal reporting. Research since this policy's implementation has found mixed results regarding student opinions.[44-47]

Mancini et al. found that students expressed concern that the implementation of mandatory reporting would erode trust in university employees and potentially retraumatize peers with NSE histories.[46,47] In this study, 57% of students believed mandatory reporting policies would reduce help-seeing behaviors in survivors, 65% thought such policies might retraumatize survivors, and 76% thought mandatory reporting would reduce survivor autonomy. Though 56% of students thought they would be more likely to report their own NSEs with mandatory reporting policies in place, 15% thought it would decrease their own likelihood, and 62% believed it would decrease reporting among their peers.[47] Despite overall mixed results, research identified consistent moderators of reporting likelihood. Different types of perpetrators, different types of SV, and different personal histories all differentially affected reporting likelihood. Students viewed the policies more positively in instances of rape than in instances of assault or harassment (ie, fondling, groping), students endorsed higher a likelihood of disclosure with SV perpetrated by professors rather than students, and students with NSE histories reported less support for mandatory reporting and thought they would be less likely to disclose with mandatory reporting policies in place.[44-46] Though these findings on student disclosures to formal sources under mandatory reporting are mixed, they do suggest that, at least hypothetically, students believe these policies will decrease their trust in universities. As trust is critical to increasing formal reporting, it is possible that mandatory reporting may have the unintended effect of reducing rather than increasing formal reports of SV.

In addition to implementing mandatory reporting, confidential reporting structures at universities have also increased and improved. A random sampling of colleges in Ohio in 2013 found that only 25−31% had confidential reporting or 24/7 reporting options respectively.[48] A national study in 2015 found that almost two-thirds of all institutions of higher education had options for confidential reporting of some kind, suggesting that more universities may have created confidential reporting resources within the last several years.[48,49] While rates of such reporting are not readily available due to their confidential nature, there is reason to suspect that students would access these services at higher rates than other formal reporting sources (eg, the Title IX office, reporting to a faculty member with mandatory reporting responsibilities, etc.). In one study, 30% of SV victims identified fear as a primary reason for not reporting the assault.[50] This fear makes sense given the possibility of perpetrator revenge; in up to 96% of cases the offender is known to the victim, which makes opportunity for perpetrator revenge more feasible.[3]

In addition to these university- or government-lead initiatives, student-lead, university-supported organizations have gained increasing popularity as an avenue for disclosing sexual violence. One study found that among colleges surveyed, 39.3% had student-led sexual violence awareness events, 35.7% hosted multiple of such events, and 75% of schools had pamphlets about sexual violence posted around campus.[51] Additionally, 71.4% of schools offered support groups or counseling and 82.1% offered escort or safe walk services.[51] Another study randomly sampled over 1,000 universities and found that over 85% of universities offered training for students on how to respond to sexual assault.[52] Previous research found that students suggested campus-wide events, advertisement of resources, and engagement with technology to increase overall reporting and knowledge of services. The growth of student-lead, university-supported organizations indicate that many universities heard and implemented students' suggestions on how to improve SV reporting.[34,35] While it is important to note that schools may be demonstrating responsivity to student recommendations, it is also important to understand the popularity of these reporting sources. While these organizations are still university-affiliated, students may feel safer using student-lead resources as they are composed of peers and may not require any formal, legal, or justice-seeking actions. In this way, student-lead organizations may be an effective hybrid between informal and formal reporting. Further research should evaluate the efficacy of these resources for supporting survivors, as well as the impact of such services on disclosure recipients.

In some university settings, police and healthcare resources are integrated into university-affiliated reporting structures. In a sample of over 1,000 universities, over 60% reported using a team approach. With this approach, a coordinated group responded to sexual violence allegations; this group might include law enforcement, mental health, healthcare, and sometimes trained student advocates.[52] Other students may choose to report to entirely external, nonuniversity affiliated sources, such as the local hospital or police department. There is some evidence suggesting that students prefer such resources. Indeed, one study asked students how they would feel about reporting a hypothetical sexual assault, finding that students would be more likely to report sexual assault to police than university officials.[53] While it remains unclear why students would prefer police to university resources, it's possible that students' trust in their university, particularly with regards to SV, may play a role in this discrepancy. Indeed, a study by Holland et al. found that trust in one's university, characterized by taking SV allegations seriously and handling them appropriately, significantly moderated students' perception of these policies and potential likelihood of reporting sexual violence to a university official.[44]

While formal reporting has remained consistently low, studies suggest that these reporting rates may be influenced by social and cultural factors. For example, though the #MeToo movement is most known for its impact on informal disclosures, it also had a significant effect on formal reporting patterns. In 2016, 23.2% of sexual assaults were reported to the police nationally. The following year, as #MeToo dominated the landscape of public

discourse, reporting rates to police rose to 40.4%, suggesting that increased informal disclosures gave way to increased formal reporting. Long term, these patterns do not seem to have been maintained. Indeed, by 2018, reporting rates to police had returned to 24.9%.[54] While more research is needed to explain the fluctuations in these reporting rates, it is feasible that the temporary feelings of social support and decreased stigma evoked by #MeToo may have increased a desire to report experiences formally. As the coverage and disclosures surrounding #MeToo dissipated, perhaps so too did a desire to engage formal reporting structure.

Barriers to Reporting

Though the structures for reporting SV and rates of disclosures have changed over time, the research focus on barriers to disclosure has remained consistent. The focus on this area makes sense; without a deeper understanding of barriers to disclosure, universities will have little guidance for improving existing reporting infrastructure and service provision. As seen in the literature on reporting avenues and reporting rates, individual factors are often important when evaluating SV disclosures. To that end, Peterson and Mulenhard's Match and Motivation Model may provide vital insight into survivors' reasons for or against reporting sexual violence.[55] According to their research, survivors are differentially inclined to identify, and subsequently disclose sexual violence based on 2 primary factors: (i) the match of one's own experience with the definition one holds for sexual violence, rape, abuse, etc., and (ii) an individual's motivation for disclosing or not disclosing their SV experience.[55] One's motivation could be dependent on social stigma, family reactions, fear of retribution, or an avoidance of labeling their perpetrator as such (eg, not wanting to label their romantic partner as a rapist). In fact, Demers et al. (2018) found that the 2 most common reasons individuals decide not to report their NSE(s) are related to a discrepancy in match or individual motives.[20] More specifically, participants declined to report their NSE because they classified the event as "not serious," "not a big deal" (12−27%), or a "private matter" (16−20%).[20] These studies emphasize the importance of creating reporting streams or SV education materials that take into account definitional and motivational barriers to disclosure.

Additional research also identified the gender identity of the survivor as a potential barrier to resources. Indeed, one study found a common perception that male survivors face greater barriers to care than female survivors. Participants viewed the barriers of shame, guilt, and/or embarrassment and discomfort with friends and family knowing about the SV as the top motivational factors preventing disclosure.[56] While true of both male and female survivors, students believed these barriers to be significantly more likely to prevent men from reporting SV as compared to women.[56] Participants in this study believed that male survivors would also be more susceptible to discouragement from disclosure due to fears of being perceived as gay, distrusting the police, lacking a belief in the helpfulness of campus and community resources, and a fear of not being believed. Conversely, participants thought barriers related to a fear of retaliation and a disbelief that the perpetrator would be successfully prosecuted would be significantly more likely to prevent women from reporting SV than men.[56] These findings build upon previous work outlined by Halstead et al. in 2017 and provide a greater understanding of barriers to care that may be more specific to individual differences.

Informal Supports' Perceptions of and Responses to Disclosures

Fleming et al. found that 70% of people disclose their experience first to a friend or family member, suggesting a slight rise in informal disclosures since 2015.[21,37] Fleming et al. further discovered that survivors were likely disclose to only one friend, indicating the critical nature of recipient responses to these disclosures.[37] In their study, approximately 40% of survivors described their first disclosure as positive, caring, or comforting, while 25% of participants reported a negative or hurtful response.[37] Only 10% of informal supports encouraged the survivors to seek out a formal reporting resource.[37] Importantly, all of the survivors who received this encouragement and subsequently reported to a formal source rated the response they received from their informal support to be positive. [37] This finding is critical as it suggests that encouraging informal sources to refer survivors to formal sources and additional resources could lead survivors to perceive their disclosure experiences as more positive and supportive. This should be considered in future educational or institutional programs.

More recent research has identified several new moderators of recipient responses to and perceptions of survivor disclosures. One study aimed to assess how perpetrator type and survivor race might impact recipient responses to disclosures.[57] Researchers found that, when presented with hypothetical disclosure scenarios, students saw survivors as more at fault in acquaintance rape.[57] As a result, students reported being less likely to refer such students to resources than survivors of stranger rape. This study also found that race moderated the effect of survivor culpability on likelihood to give resource referrals after the disclosure such that participants reported less empathy for a Black survivor of stranger-rape than for a White survivor. Empathy moderated these findings as well. At last, women more frequently gave resource referrals than men.[57] These findings illustrate how victim-blaming, race, gender, and empathy interact to form differential responses to disclosures.

Since 2015, the literature has focused more closely on disclosure recipients' personal distress in response to receiving a disclosure, as well as any changes that occur in the relationship between a survivor and a recipient after the disclosure. Milliken et al. found that the more closeness the recipient identified in their relationship with the survivor and the greater confusion

they felt about how to best aid the survivor, the more emotional distress they experienced in response to the disclosure.[58] The same study also found when the recipient identified greater closeness with the survivor and attributed less culpability to the survivor in the SV itself, they rated postdisclosure relationship changes more positively. Negative changes in the relationship between the survivor and the recipient predicted less self-reported closeness, more survivor culpability, and more recipient feelings of uncertainty about their response to the disclosure.[58] These findings build on those identified in Halstead et al.' review and create a clearer view of when recipients are more susceptible to emotional distress after a disclosure.[21,58]

Effects of Disclosures on Survivors

While it is important to understand how disclosures will affect recipients, it is also critical to understand how the process of disclosing might impact survivors' well-being, especially as the field moves to increase disclosure rates. A study by Eisenberg et al. evaluated how disclosures to formal or informal reporting resources impact the well-being of college-aged women.[59] They assessed well-being using the presence or absence of anxiety, depression, panic attacks, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in addition to self-reported health. The findings indicated a significant increase in anxiety, depression, panic, and PTSD for women who disclosed to formal sources, as compared to women who reported to informal sources.[59] They found no differences in self-reported health. Though these effects are staggering, it is possible that survivors who use formal resources are in more distress or are more likely to classify their experience as SV or an event that *should* be reported. These findings are critically important to consider and expand upon given the research and policy emphasis on increasing formal disclosure rates.

On the other hand, an additional study by Hassija et al. found a positive association between utilization of mental health care resources and posttraumatic growth and improvement in well-being.[60] These findings suggest that disclosing SV experiences may facilitate resilience following a traumatic, sexual event. It is possible that having the opportunity to discuss their NSE with a healthcare provider may allow survivors to process their trauma in ways that are less available to individuals who choose not to disclose.[60] Contrary to Eisenberg et al.' findings, this research indicates that there is some positive association between mental health outcomes and formal reporting; the directionality of this association, however, is still unclear and warrants further research.

Social Support in Disclosure Process

Social support is an additional factor thought to positively influence well-being in the disclosure process.[21] The presence of supportive, safe, and nurturing relationships (SSNRs) acts as a protective buffer against the deleterious effects of lifetime experiences of SV.[10,61] In addition to these protective effects in general, Orchowski and Gidycz found that larger social support networks for survivors predicted greater likelihood of disclosing SV in 2014.[62] Though previous research has identified that SSNRs and large social support networks predict better health outcomes for survivors and increase likelihood of disclosing SV, there does not appear to be more recent research on this particular area of the literature since the review between 2010 and 2015 by Halstead et al. Future studies should address this gap in the literature as understanding how social supports for survivors could lead to better outcomes and more effective educational efforts and reporting systems.

New Areas of Exploration

Since 2015, the research on disclosures has also expanded into some relatively new domains. One such expansion of the literature has been the more intentional examination of disclosures rates across marginalized groups on college campuses. For instance, a recent study examining disclosures among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning (LGBQ+) college students found that while LGBQ+ students had higher rates of SV overall, informal reporting rates were at parity with heterosexual students.[63] Interestingly, LGBQ+ students used formal reporting sources, particularly those off-campus, to disclose SV experiences more often than their heterosexual peers.[63] These results contradict other findings which suggest that bisexual survivors are more likely to disclose in general, especially to a romantic partner, while lesbian and gay students are more likely to report to formal counselors, crisis centers, or university staff.[64] Despite these higher disclosure rates, lesbian and gay students also reported higher levels of anticipation for negative social responses after a disclosure than did heterosexual or bisexual students.[64] While the first study suggested that LGBQ+ students may be concerned with identity management and concealment and may therefore be hesitant to engage with on-campus resources; the second suggests that LGBTQ students' disclosure rates and preferred disclosure resources may be more complex and depend on identification with particular sexual orientations. Given these findings, universities may consider closer partnerships with off-campus SV resources to ensure the full spectrum of service options (including on and off-campus resources) are accessible to LGBQ+ students, especially given their elevated risk for SV.[63]

Another recent study explored disclosure experiences for women at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).[65] Results suggest that informal reporting rates among female students at HBCUs are high, while formal reporting rates—particularly to law enforcement—remain exceptionally low. More specifically, only 3−10% of SV survivors at HBCUs reported their experience to law enforcement. Of those, 36−69% later regretted the disclosure, with less than 50% of women who reported to law enforcement feeling satisfied with how their report was handled. Indeed, mistrust of law enforcement among Black students as a function of historical events, as well as the dissatisfaction of those who do decide to report, likely presents

significant barriers to formal reporting.[66] The authors also engaged in a qualitative analysis of student suggestions for improving disclosure rates, finding that students desired more education and awareness, more services for survivors, alternative mechanisms for reporting, and better mechanisms to ensure confidentiality.

At last, one other individual factor that has been evaluated in recent years is the role of NSE identification in disclosing SV. Identification of NSEs refers to how a survivor understands and labels their SV experience(s). People who use sexual violence labels (eg, rape, assault, abuse) to describe their NSE, or "identifiers," have been found to be more likely to disclose their NSEs than people who do not use sexual violence labels, or "nonidentifiers."[33,67] Though this research has been shared in the literature on NSEs, it has not yet been evaluated in the context of a university, mandatory reporting, or with any particular focus on undergraduate students, which would be beneficial as they are such a vulnerable population. Future research should continue to explore this relationship.

DISCUSSION

Following this review of the literature, several areas for future research have been identified. Firstly, future work should aim to bolster education and resources for informal reporting sources so that they may more effectively respond to survivors. The current literature indicates that empathy and victim-blaming are significant predictors of recipient response.[57,58] Resources should specifically work to increase understanding of SV and decrease rape myths (ie, misconceptions about SV including victim-blaming) when teaching students how to empathetically respond to disclosures from a survivor. This is particularly important as research has determined that recipient response can impact the recipient's well-being, the survivor's well-being, and that informal sources could play an important role in facilitating positive experiences with formal reports in the future.[25,58]

In addition to victim-blaming and empathy, race is also a significant moderator of recipient response. Participants in one study reported less empathy for a Black survivor of stranger rape, than for a White survivor.[57] Empathy moderated the effects of culpability on likelihood for a recipient to provide resource referrals. These findings indicate that Black survivors receive less empathy, are seen as more culpable for their SV experience, and are less likely to receive resources referrals.[57] It is clear that research and education efforts must dispel this harmful bias. This is particularly important as minority groups are more susceptible to experiencing SV, often experience greater barriers to reporting, and report less satisfaction with the way their reports are handled if they do report.[63,66] Further research must continue to investigate the intersectionality of SV experiences and race as well as other minority groups.

To date, the limited research on reporting SV in minority groups has centered on race and sexual orientation. Future research should consider evaluating reporting experiences for individuals whose first language is not English and for individuals with intellectual, cognitive, or physical disabilities. The ability to express a SV experience to another person, whether formally or informally, may significantly impact the response the survivor receives. Since the language of sexual violence is vast and complicated, language barriers should be evaluated as impediments to reporting. Given the wide variability in recipient response based on both contextual factors and individual differences, it is critical that research and education efforts explain the variability in appearance of SV, SV's different interaction with various identities, and how and where to report. Sexual violence education in all of these domains is critical for all students as they are more likely to receive a disclosure than any other formal source.

Additionally, given that informal disclosure recipients are more likely to have previous NSEs themselves, increasing support and resources for this population may provide benefits for both the recipient and the survivor.[21,68] Indeed, while informal supports with previous NSE histories are more likely to receive reports and respond effectively, they are also more likely to experience higher levels of distress during the disclosure itself.[69] In light of this, it is important to provide resources for disclosure recipients to help manage difficult emotions that may arise as a function of a disclosure. Future research should further evaluate how the experiences of disclosure recipients may vary based on their own history with SV and whether or not they disclosed their own experience(s). It is possible that a recipient's past experiences with SV and personal disclosures may impact the support or advice a recipient gives to a disclosing peer. Research indicates that the response to a disclosure impacts the survivor's likelihood of telling another person.[37] Future studies should examine whether this effect generalizes to disclosure recipients; it is possible that recipient's personal experiences disclosing SV (including whether disclosing was a positive or negative experience) may inform how they respond to disclosures from others.

Future research should also emphasize a continued focus the benefits and detriments of disclosing sexual violence in general. Some of the extant literature has indicated that disclosing sexual violence may lead to less distress, decreased avoidance, less physical health complaints, and decreased psychological and trauma symptoms.[31,32] For some survivors, formal disclosures may validate their experience and help them heal. Other research on NSE identification specifically, meaning whether or not a survivor identifies their SV experience(s) with SV labels (ie, rape, assault, abuse), has returned conflicting results on the impact identification has on survivors' wellbeing.[16,70] Some research has shown some benefits from identifying one's NSE(s) with SV labels, such as experiencing less self-blame; however, negative effects such as greater self-reported sexual distress, have also been identified.[70] Additionally, identifiers are more likely than nonidentifiers to incorporate the NSE or concepts of SV into their

sexual schemas; this suggests that identifiers may integrate SV themes into their conceptualization of sex in general and of themselves as sexual beings more than a nonidentifier would.[16] It is still unclear how identification of NSEs with sexual violence labels may positively or negatively impact survivors in the short- and long-term. In order to formally report sexual violence, it must first be identified as an event that is reportable, either by the survivor or an external figure (ie, disclosure recipient). In light of this, there is growing concern over how formal reporting may unintentionally negatively impact survivors.

The literature on the benefits and detriments of disclosure and identification of sexual violence is unclear and occasionally contradictory. As such future research should ensure that the benefits of formal reporting (eg, trained responders, legal options, accommodations) are outweighing the potential costs. This is particularly crucial as much of the ongoing research and many of the university and federal policies around reporting aim to increase formal disclosure rates.

Formal disclosure rates have not increased since 2015 despite being the explicit goal of much of the research and policy in this area.[2,5] This may indicate that the ways in which policy tries to increase reporting are ineffective or that there is something about formal reporting that survivors inherently do not like or avoid. For instance, students believed that the introduction of mandatory reporting policies would decrease trust in their universities.[46,47] A decrease in trust does not bode well for an increase in disclosures. This is evidenced by findings indicating that trust in one's university significantly moderates both opinion of these policies and likelihood of reporting under them.[44] Alternatively, individual and contextual factors may differentially influence the accessibility of formal reporting and the impact it has on survivors such that new policy and educational efforts have not been effective for all survivors. Research indicates that individuals in minority groups have less access and greater barriers to reporting despite these policy efforts.[57,63,66] Student opinion and usage of formal sources seems to depend on a variety of individual and contextual factors that are still being discovered. As research continues to identify the moderators of disclosure likelihood, the benefits and detriments of formal reporting may become more clear.

The extant literature on sexual violence disclosures in undergraduate students is vast, but there are still a number of critical areas that should be addressed in future research. This review aimed to both consolidate and summarize key findings in this area of research and highlight future direction for this field. It is critically important that research be continued in this area, particularly in undergraduate populations, as sexual violence is so prevalent and has so many short- and long-term consequences on survivors.

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