

Depression as a correlate of college students' perceptions of campus climate regarding sexual harassment and assault

[Amanda S. Birnbaum](#), Stephanie A. Navarro Silvera, Lisa Lieberman, Jacqueline Bavaro, Alejandra Kaplan, and Eva S. Goldfarb

November 2019

APHA Abstract

Background

Depression is an overlooked but potentially important context in which to explore sexual violence. Although depression is a well-known consequence of sexual violence, its role in college students' perceptions and experiences of campus climate related to sexual violence has not been studied.

Methods

In March 2017, we conducted an online campus survey, inviting all undergraduates over age 18 to respond about their perceptions and experiences of campus climate related to sexual assault and harassment. We included the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale, with scores >16 indicating elevated depressive symptoms. Respondents with complete CES-D data are presented (n=771).

Results

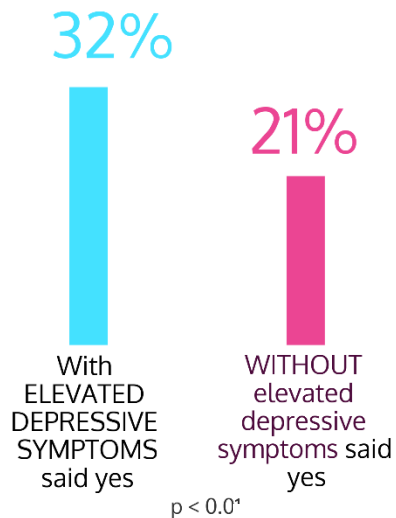
Students with elevated depressive symptoms at the time of the survey were less likely than non-depressed peers to report that the university was "taking steps to prevent unwanted sexual experiences from happening" (64% vs 72%, $p<0.01$). They were more likely to agree that groups or individuals on campus actively contribute to a negative climate (32% vs 21%, $p<0.01$), and more likely to report having been sexually harassed, raped, or assaulted themselves while at the university (33% vs 14%, $p<0.01$). Students with elevated depressive symptoms reported poorer overall attitudes towards, and engagement with, the university.

Conclusion

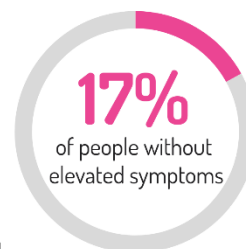
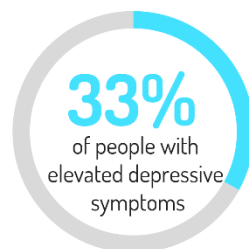
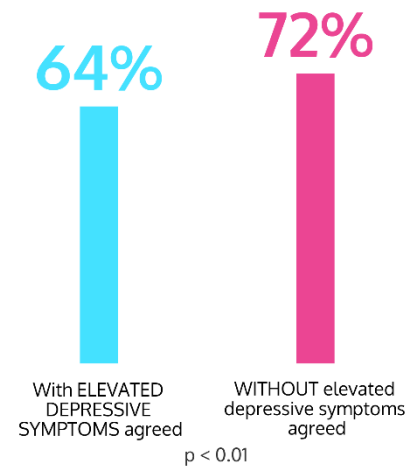
While the cross-sectional design precludes determining temporality, the data suggest elevated depressive symptoms as a correlate of both experiencing sexual harassment/assault and perceiving a less safe campus climate. Understanding and explicitly addressing these connections may be beneficial for the effectiveness of campus prevention and intervention efforts.

Key Findings: Figures

Are there groups or individuals on campus you feel actively contribute to a negative climate with respect to sexual assault or harassment?



The university is taking steps to prevent unwanted sexual experiences from happening



Have you been sexually harassed, raped, or assaulted while at the university?