



# UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF VICTIM ADVOCATES IN THE COLLEGE CONTEXT

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# AGENDA



Introduction

National Advocate Study

Implications for the field

Questions / comments

# NICE TO MEET YOU!

- Assistant Professor of Social Work, Eastern Connecticut State University
- Interim Campus Climate Director, Connecticut State Community College
- 15 years in higher education, approximately 10 in Title IX work
- Research: Sexual Assault/Reporting/Campus Climate; Campus-Based Victim Advocates
- Sole Proprietor, Nightingale Consulting LLC



# CAMPUS-BASED VICTIM ADVOCATES

National Study

# WHO ARE CAMPUS-BASED VICTIM ADVOCATES?

Crisis  
intervention

Confidential  
resource

Accommodations

Navigate  
reporting  
systems

Connect with  
resources

Training and  
prevention work

# BACKGROUND

- There is limited research on campus-based victim advocates.
- Several small, qualitative studies have been published
  - Concerns about devaluation of the role (i.e., everyone is an expert) (Brubaker & Keegan, 2019)
  - Increased focus on compliance and liability (Moynan, 2016)
  - Push and pull between allegiance to the institution and to survivors (Brubaker, 2019)
- Gaps in the literature concerning the experience and impact of the work on victim advocates.
- Why does this matter?



## METHODOLOGY

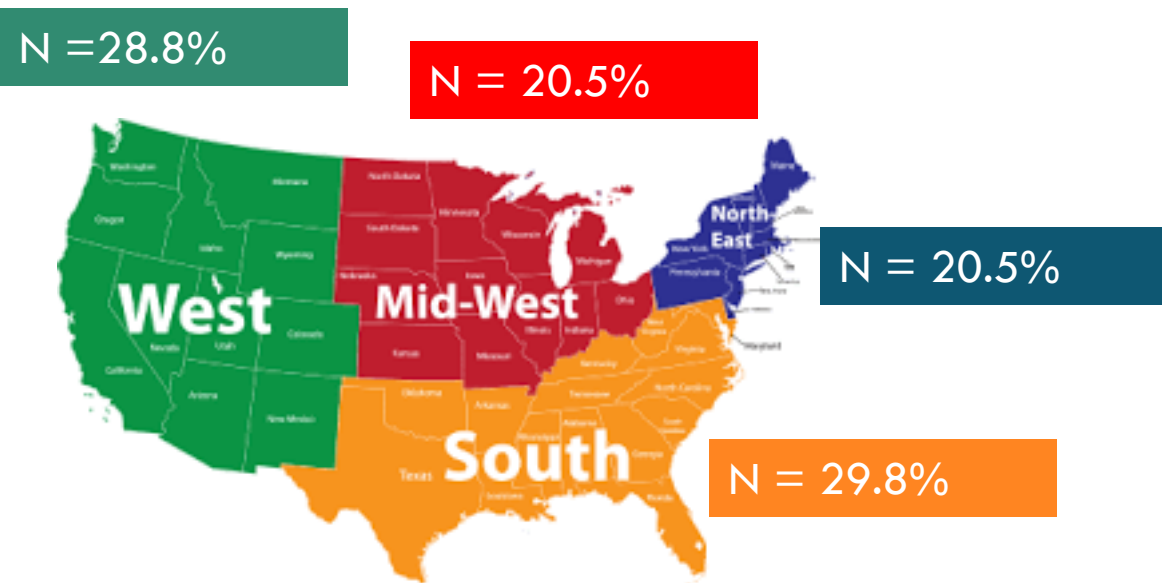
- Screened the websites of 1,162 colleges and universities.
- 33% (n = 388) had a professional campus-based advocate.
- 562 individuals identified and contacted.
- Invited to take part in an on-line survey and/or focus group.
- Amazon Gift Card incentives.

# METHODOLOGY: SAMPLE

**N = 208**

**Response Rate = 37%**

## Location of college



## Type of college

Public college:	70.2%
Private college:	29.8%



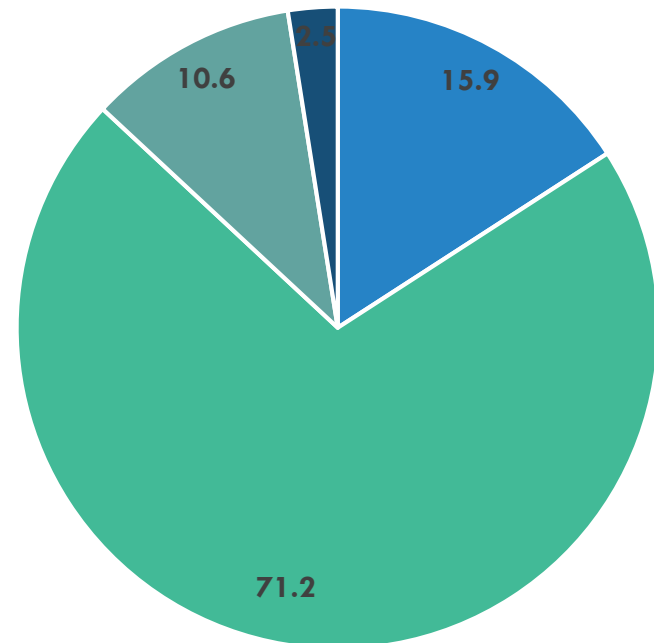
# METHODOLOGY: SAMPLE

<b>Gender Identity (n= 208)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Female</b>	181	87
<b>Male</b>	12	5.8
<b>Genderqueer</b>	7	3.4
<b>Non-binary</b>	6	2.9
<b>Prefer to self-describe</b>	2	1

<b>Race (n= 208)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>White</b>	147	70.7
<b>Black / African American</b>	19	9.1
<b>Another Race</b>	17	8.2
<b>Multi-Racial</b>	12	5.8
<b>Asian</b>	9	4.3
<b>Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander</b>	2	1
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	2	1

# METHODOLOGY: SAMPLE

Highest Level of Education Completed



■ Doctorate ■ Master's ■ Bachelor's ■ Other

Average time in advocacy: 4 years

65% ( n = 135) had a state based certification.

Came from many academic disciplines: social work, counseling, higher education/student affairs.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

R1: How do victim advocates perceive institutional response to sexual assault?

R2: What factors contribute to how advocates perceive institutional response?

R3: What is the experience of burnout amongst campus advocates?

R4: What factors contribute to burnout amongst campus advocates?

# PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

**Is the response to sexual assault on campus fair?**

**Are reports handled in a responsive, appropriate way?**

**Are respondents held responsible?**

- 65.6% of students perceived that their campus would take a sexual assault report seriously and 50.5% of students perceived their campus would likely conduct a fair investigation (Cantor et al., 2020)
- In a state-wide, multi-phase study of administrators in the U.S state of Georgia, almost 30% of participants stated that their response could be a model for other institutions (Bellis et al., 2018).
- Moylan and colleagues (2020) also found that campus personnel report improvements in response efforts and an increased focus on fairness.

# INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE - MEASURE

If someone were to report a sexual assault to a campus authority at your college, how likely is it that:

	Very Likely	Moderately Likely	Slightly Likely	Not at all Likely
Campus officials would take the report seriously.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus officials would keep knowledge of the report limited to those who need to know in order for the university to respond properly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus officials would forward the report outside the campus to criminal investigators.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus officials would take steps to protect the safety of the person making the report.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

## Psychosocial Factors

Burnout

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Compassion Fatigue

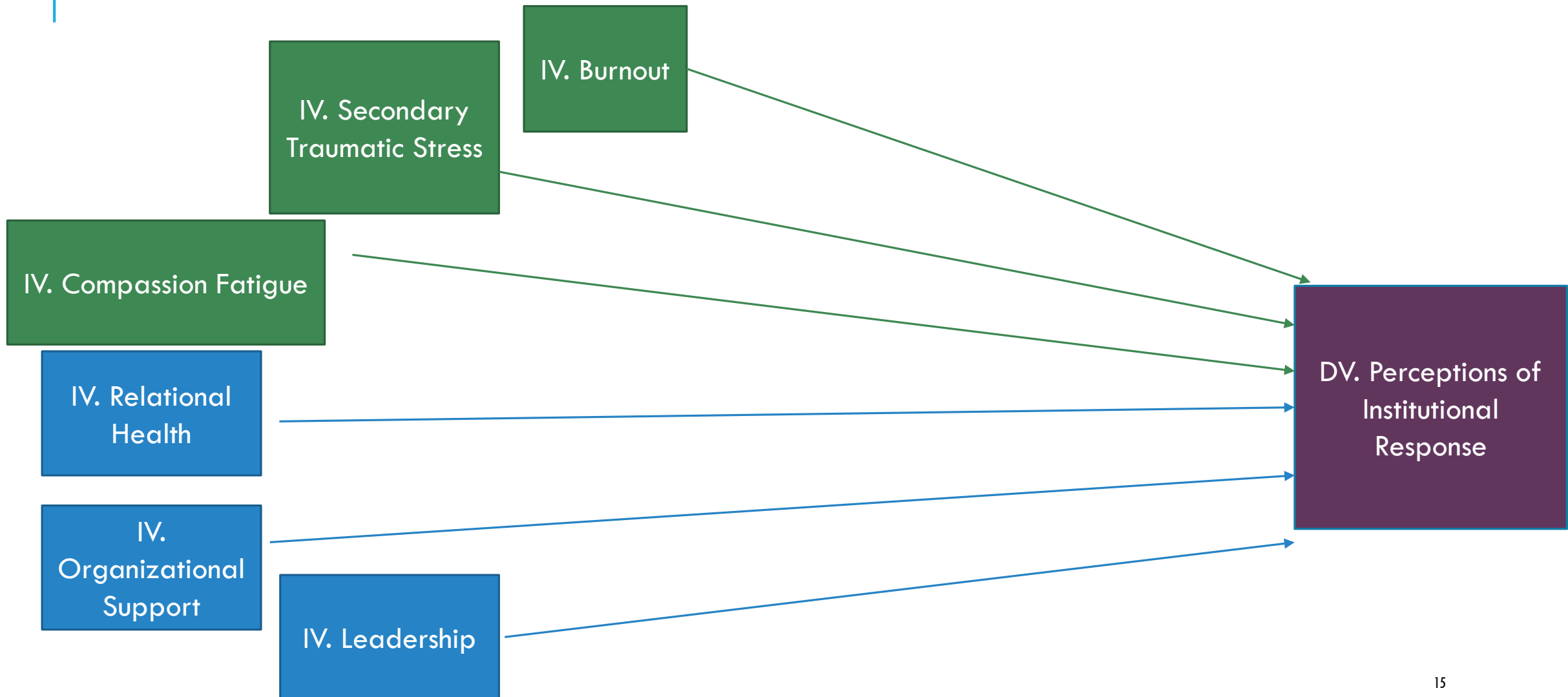
## Organizational Factors

Relational Health

Organizational Support

Perceptions of Leadership

# R1 AND R2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



# RESULTS

Advocates thought it was slightly likely their campuses would respond to reports in a fair and just manner.

Average levels of burnout for folks in helping professions.

Average levels of secondary trauma for folks in helping professions.

Below average level of compassion satisfaction.



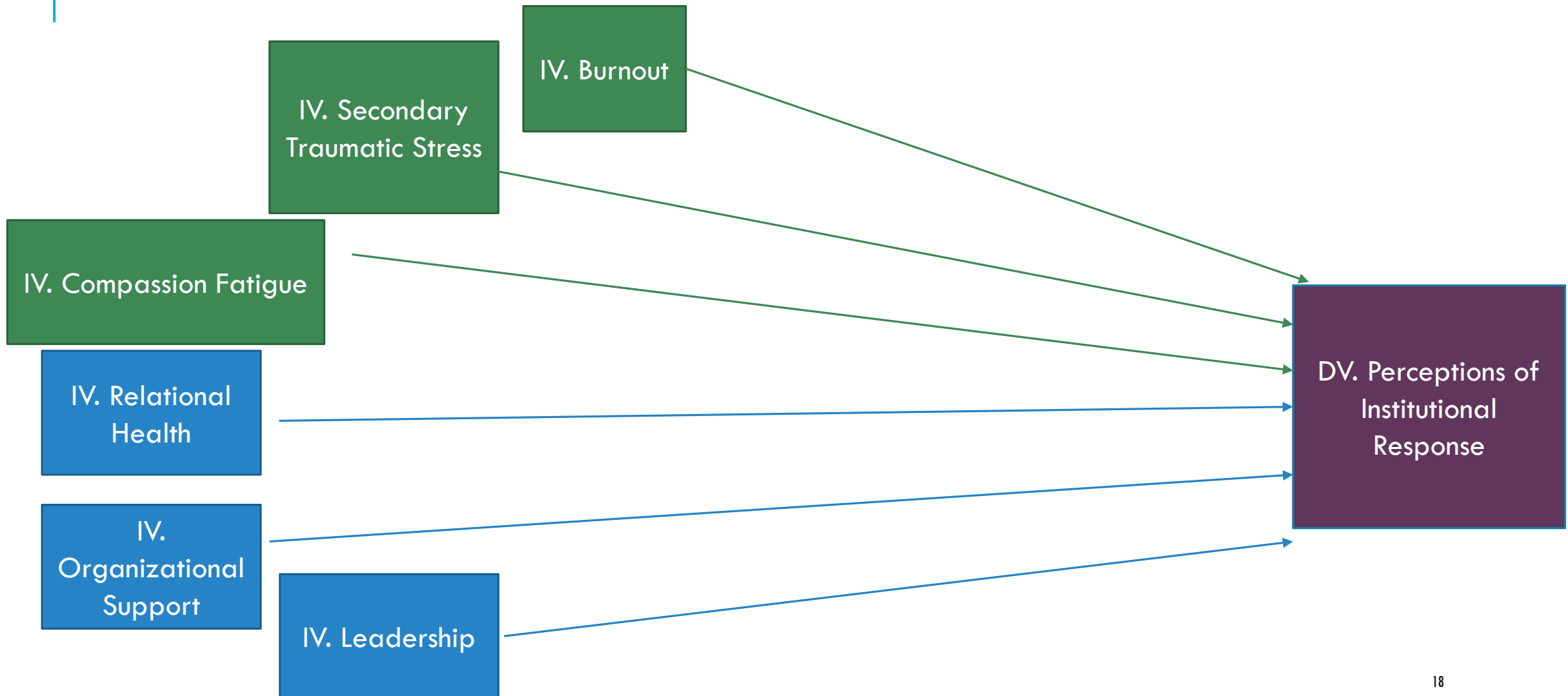
# RESULTS

Advocates indicated between slight and moderate support from their organization.

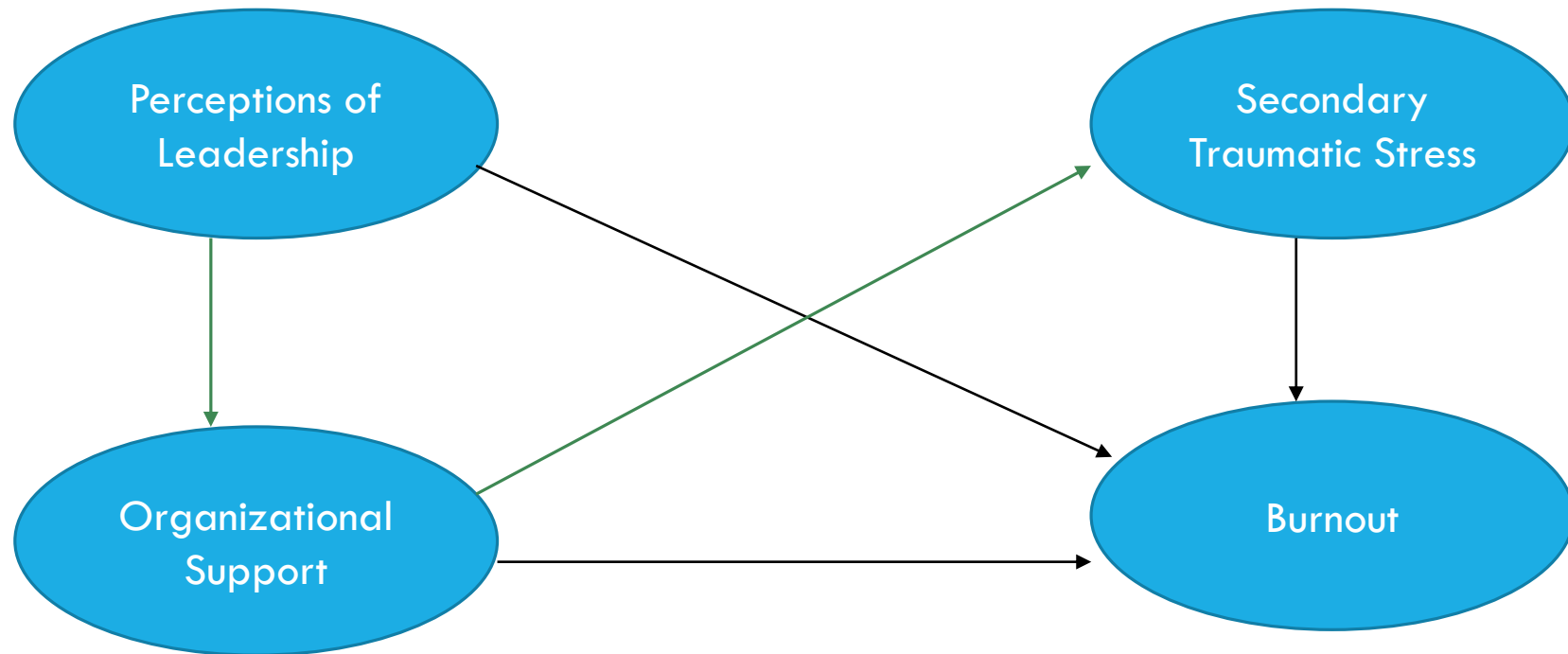
Advocates perceive leadership on their campus to only moderately understand the dynamics of sexual assault and have effective communication skills about sexual assault.

Campus-based victim advocates in this study had a moderate level of relational health with their campus community.

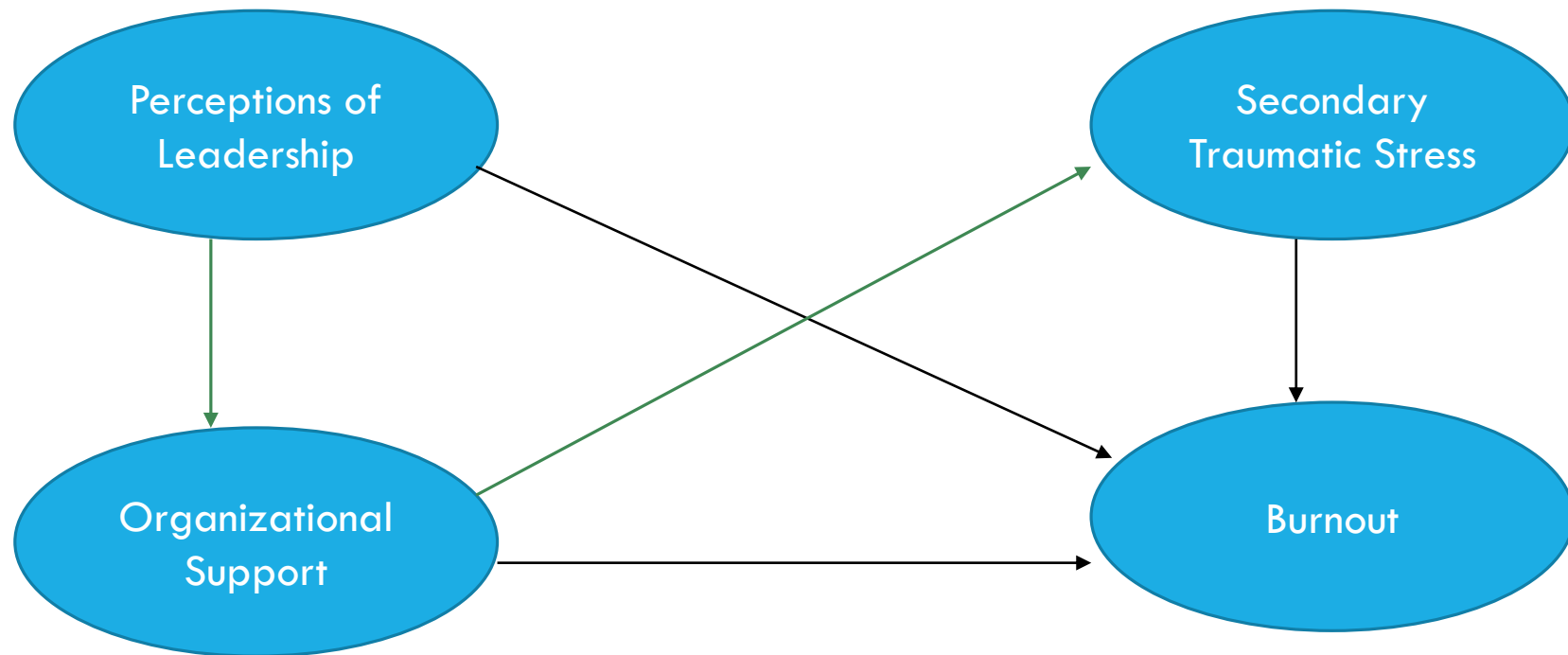
# R1 AND R2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



# R3 AND R4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

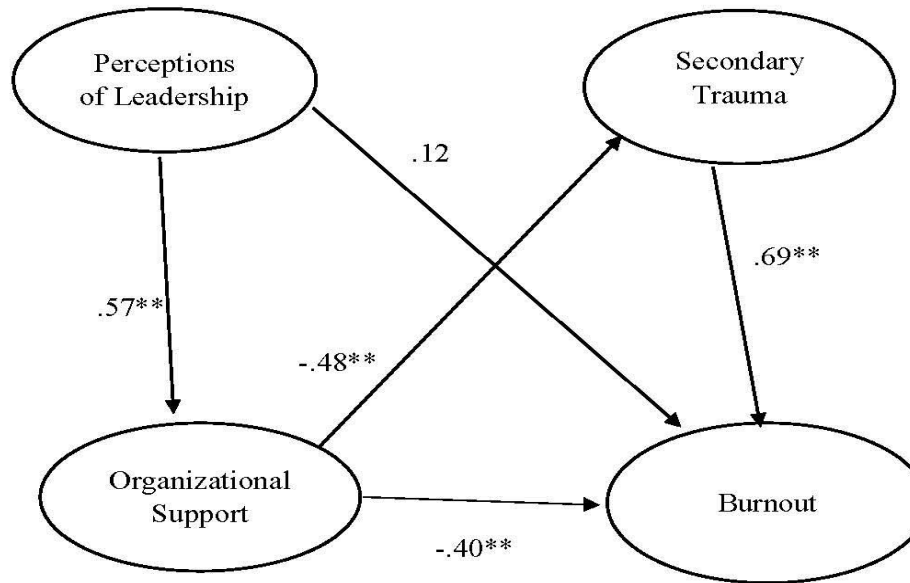


# RESULTS



**Figure 2.**

*Hypothesized structural model of relationships of Burnout, Secondary Trauma, Organizational Support and Perceptions of Leadership.*



*Note.* \*\* $p \leq .001$

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

## Enhancing organizational support

- Workload
- Control of work
- Compensation

## Nourishing relational health

- Include advocates in discussions related to sexual misconduct
- Team approaches to work (not list for advocate)
- Show support for their efforts

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

## Improving perceptions of leadership

- Leadership should receive high level of training
- Instrumental in organizational support for advocates
- Request feedback from advocates as experts in their area



**QUESTIONS / COMMENTS**

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# REFERENCES

Brubaker, S., & Keegan, B. (2019). “Suddenly everyone’s an expert in our field”: Campus victim advocates and the promise and perils of professionalization. *Violence Against Women, 25*(9), 1116–1137.

Brubaker, S. (2019). Campus-based sexual assault victim advocacy and Title IX: Revisiting tensions between grassroots activism and the criminal justice system. *Feminist Criminology, 14*(3), 307–329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085118772087>

Moylan, C. (2017). “I fear i’m a checkbox”: College and university victim advocates’ perspectives of campus rape reforms. *Violence Against Women, 23*(9), 1122–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216655623>