UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF VICTIM ADVOCATES IN THE COLLEGE CONTEXT

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June 15, 2023
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
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 (Moylan, 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?
- 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:
- **West**: N = 29.8%
- **Mid-West**: N = 20.5%
- **South**: N = 20.5%

Type of college:
- **Public college**: 70.2%
- **Private college**: 29.8%
## METHODOLOGY: SAMPLE

### Gender Identity (n= 208)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to self-describe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Race (n= 208)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black / African American</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Race</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
METHODOLOGY: SAMPLE

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 to 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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Moderately Likely</th>
<th>Slightly Likely</th>
<th>Not at all Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus officials would take the report seriously.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus officials would keep knowledge of the report limited to those who need to know in order for the university to respond properly.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus officials would forward the report outside the campus to criminal investigators.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus officials would take steps to protect the safety of the person making the report.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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

IV. Secondary Traumatic Stress

IV. Burnout

IV. Compassion Fatigue

IV. Relational Health

IV. Organizational Support

IV. Leadership

DV. Perceptions of Institutional Response
R3 AND R4 CONCEPTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Perceptions of Leadership
- Organizational Support
- Burnout
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
RESULTS

Perceptions of Leadership

Organizational Support

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Burnout
Figure 2.
Hypothesized structural model of relationships of Burnout, Secondary Trauma, Organizational Support and Perceptions of Leadership.

Note. **p ≤ .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
