



RUTGERS

School of Social Work

Findings from Student Focus Groups at Rutgers-New Brunswick

*Student perceptions
of intimate partner
violence on campus*



CENTER ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN

Julia Cusano, MSW
Jess Burnham, B.S.
Julia O'Connor, MSW MPH
Sarah McMahon, Ph.D. Principal Investigator

April 20, 2018

Information provided in this document was produced by the Center on Violence Against Women and Children through the generous support of a NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education grant and additional funding provided by the New Brunswick Office of Student Affairs. This work is provided for internal purposes only and is not intended for external dissemination.



RUTGERS

School of Social Work

CONTENTS



KEY FINDINGS

- 1. While many focus group participants expressed a broad understanding of the behaviors that constitute dating violence, some participants expressed confusion about defining dating violence and violence that is perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim.**
- 2. Participants often discussed the normalization of controlling behaviors within student relationships. Further, many participants discussed the normalization of such behaviors and the intersection of technology.**
- 3. Participants expressed a lack of knowledge regarding University policies related to dating violence and stalking. While some were able to name Title IX, most were unfamiliar with the processes in place to report incidents of intimate partner violence.**
- 4. While most focus group participants considered university resources valuable, they emphasized the importance of raising awareness of existing resources and the need for increased opportunities for education and training regarding dating violence and stalking.**
- 5. Many participants discussed several barriers to effectively intervening when they perceive a peer to be in a relationship where dating violence is occurring. Barriers included (1) feeling it is not their place to intervene, and (2) a lack of tools needed to effectively intervene.**



INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 2017-2018, researchers at the Center on Violence Against Women (VAWC) within Rutgers University's School of Social Work conducted a total of nine focus groups with 43 Rutgers–New Brunswick students to gather more in-depth information about the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV). The purpose of the groups was to collect information about students' understanding and perception of IPV in order to inform the campus climate survey design (to be administered in Spring, 2018) and to inform educational programming by Student Affairs. The focus groups were designed to collect information from students about:

- general thoughts regarding intimate partner violence on campus and how the terms are defined by students;
- perception of the issue of intimate partner violence at Rutgers–New Brunswick;
- campaign messaging, perceived university responsiveness, and peer supportiveness;
- awareness of policies and resources regarding intimate partner violence on campus; and
- willingness to intervene as a prosocial bystander in potential situations of intimate partner violence.

Students from both the general student body as well as specific subsets of the student population were invited to participate in the focus groups. Subsets of the student body included students from cultural/ethnic centers, graduate students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) students, commuters, student advocates, and student intimate partner violence survivors. Because these groups differ in their risk factors for intimate partner violence victimization and specific groups of students may be under-represented in the upcoming survey sample, the research team felt it was important to hear from these subsets of students in the focus groups.

The findings in this report are general and summarize broad findings that emerged across groups.



SECTION 1. METHODS

In order to gain a variety of perspectives on the issue of intimate partner violence and the campus climate at Rutgers University–New Brunswick, focus group recruitment required both individual efforts with various student groups and ethnic/cultural centers on campus as well as electronic announcements for general student recruitment (for a more detailed description of recruitment efforts please see Appendix A).

The guide¹ that was used during each focus group started with a brief introduction, including a brief summary of the current study and detailed information about the consent form, disclosure, and confidentiality. To further protect participants' confidentiality, focus group participants were instructed to refrain from disclosing personal experiences, and instead instructed to talk about personal experiences as something that happened to a "friend." At the conclusion of each focus group, resources on services were made available to students.

Recruitment Partnerships

Graduate Student Association

Undergraduate Student Listserv

The Center for Social Justice
Education and LGBT Communities

The Center for Global
Advancement and International
Students

Office for Violence Prevention and
Victim Assistance

Rutgers Commuter Student
Association

¹ All materials used during the focus groups conducted on Rutgers University–New Brunswick campus, including the focus group guide, consent form, and distressed participants protocol was submitted to the Internal Review Board and received approval on October 22, 2017.



SECTION 2. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1 shows the types of focus groups conducted as well as the number of students who attended these groups. A majority of the students (88 percent) who participated were undergraduate students and a little more than half of the participants (51 percent) were female. Other demographic characteristics of the student participants are found in Table 2.

Table 1. Focus Group Types

	Type of Group	Gender	Number of Groups	Number of Students
1	Undergraduate Students	Female (2), Male (2)	3	13
2	Graduate Students	Mixed	1	5
3	LGBTQ	Mixed	1	8
4	Cultural Center	Male (1), Female (1)	2	9
5	VPVA Student Survivors	Female	1	4
6	Commuter Students	Mixed	1	4
	TOTAL		9	43

Table 2. Focus Group Participant Demographics

	(n=43)	
	n	%
Gender Identity		
Man	3	13
Woman	1	5
Another	NR	9
Sexual Orientation		
100% Heterosexual/Straight	32	74
Not 100% Heterosexual/Straight	11	26



	(n=43)	
	n	%
Class		
Undergraduate	36	84
Graduate	7	16
Student Organization Membership		
Yes	37	86
No	6	14
Living Situation		
On campus	24	56
Off campus	19	44
Race		
African American	12	28
Asian American	10	23
White	18	42
Other	NR	7
Latino		
No	40	93
Yes	NR	7
Disability Status		
No	40	93
Yes	NR	7

NR: Not reported; cell size smaller than 5. The symbol "-" represents zero, indicating no students affirmed that question. Cells that are empty represent a question not asked to the respondents in that cell.



SECTION 3. RESULTS

Content analysis of the focus groups examined broad, overarching themes based on the questions asked within the focus group guide. For this analysis and summary report, the results are reported from all (n=9) of the focus groups held at Rutgers–New Brunswick. The main findings are listed below and include the following areas:

- general dating violence² knowledge and definitions;
- dating violence on campus;
- perceived university responsiveness;
- and responding to peer disclosure.

GENERAL DATING VIOLENCE KNOWLEDGE & DEFINITIONS

In this category we found three main themes, including definitions of dating violence, confusion with defining dating violence, and identification of "gray areas" by students.

Definitions of Dating Violence

Many focus group participants defined "dating violence" as a wide range of behaviors, including actions that constitute emotional and psychological abuse in addition to physical abuse. Many focus group members described emotional and psychological abuse as constantly putting someone down, and as emotionally manipulating one's partner. For example, an undergraduate student from the LGBTQ group, when asked to define dating violence, said,

"...I think like the traditional stuff like hitting and throwing down the stairs or whatever, but also sort of like emotional stuff, like sort of guilting you and like making you feel – like they're sort of

trying to control your emotions in a really weird way."

As highlighted in the previous quote as well as by many other focus group participants' definitions of dating violence, behaviors in which one person exerts control over their partner were also frequently discussed, with 40 percent of all participants in the focus groups articulating this within their definitions of dating violence. This is exemplified by the following statement made by an undergraduate student,

"I feel like our generation, especially, it's more than physical, it's like mentally, just very controlling. People are like 'Don't talk to this person,' or like my friend's boyfriend was like block all these guys on Facebook, I don't want you talking to any guys, you can't go out with any guys, you can't go out with your friends. Everybody just thinks that the person they're dating just belongs to them and they can't have people surrounding them."

Confusion With Defining Dating Violence

While many focus group participants expressed a broad understanding of the behaviors that constitute dating violence, some participants expressed confusion about defining dating violence and violence that is perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim. Such confusion is exemplified by an undergraduate student who, when asked if dating violence was a problem at Rutgers–New Brunswick, stated,

"A friend of mine has actually had somebody walk her home and then tried to like pounce. So it was just like is

² At the beginning of each focus group, participants are asked which term they prefer to use to refer to behaviors that constitute intimate partner/domestic violence. A majority of participants expressed a preference for the term "dating violence," therefore the term "dating violence" will be used throughout the report.



anybody safe? Like who can you trust? And it's tough, it's really tough."

This quote seems to exemplify some focus group participants' challenges with distinguishing dating violence from other forms of violence and was a common occurrence amongst focus group participants in each focus group that was conducted.

Gray Area

Some focus group participants discussed a "gray area" within their definitions and discussions of dating violence. Overall, the focus group participants who described the "gray area" referenced behaviors that constitute emotional and psychological abuse as less serious or legally punishable as compared to physical dating violence. This concept particularly arose when participants were asked to articulate their definitions for dating violence as well as when participants were discussing the ways in which students experiencing dating violence can access support and report dating violence. A graduate student explained

"...I think with, especially with emotional abuse and maybe verbal abuse, that's kind of like a gray area because law enforcement, like what are you gonna do, like law enforcement can't, you can't really do much if there's no physical or sexual violence that is documented. Like emotional abuse is just kind of I feel, is that gray area because there's not much that the law enforcement, or law enforcement can do to protect against that."

While this concept was only mentioned by slightly less than 10 percent of focus group participants, it is important to note as it has implications for how students at Rutgers-

New Brunswick may view dating violence as well as perceive who should be accessing on-campus support.

DATING VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

In this category we found two main themes, including the normalization of dating violence behaviors, and the intersection of technology and dating violence.

Normalization of Dating Violence Behaviors

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was the normalization of controlling behaviors within student relationships. Discussions of the normalization of such behaviors was in reference to both dating violence and stalking on campus. For example, one student from a cultural center on campus stated,

"...This [dating violence] behavior has been normalized. I have a lot of friends who are in relationships and the thing they like to do is share each other's locations, and they're constantly checking where their partner is or if they're not in the location they're usually at they're like what if he's cheating on me, what is he doing there? And another thing that they do is like have each other's passwords to social media to make sure that they're not talking to people that they shouldn't be talking to."

Technology and Dating Violence

When focus group participants were discussing the normalization of controlling behaviors within relationships, such as tracking locations, another theme that emerged was the intersection of such behaviors with the use of technology. While



the theme of technology seems to overlap with the theme outlined above, is important to differentiate and expand upon the use of technology and its intersection with dating violence and relationship norms on campus due to its implications for possible prevention efforts on campus.

Focus group participants specifically noted the expectation for students within a relationship to share their locations with their partners, as well as share their passwords for various social media platforms and to unlock their cell phones as outlined in the quote above as well as one undergraduate student's statement of,

"I know girls that their boyfriends will be like don't go out to this party or like they have their locations on, so they track their location and stuff or they want your Instagram password or Facebook password, everything they go through."

While participants did not explicitly state that such behaviors occur in relationships that are only abusive, it seems the expectations within some relationships on campus include tracking partners' locations, and dictating where and who dating partners are permitted to see and speak to, which is potentially problematic.

PERCEIVED UNIVERSITY RESPONSIVENESS

In this category we found four main themes, including mixed feelings toward mandatory reporting, lack of knowledge of policies, the need to raise awareness of existing campus resources, and a desire for more education and training.

Reporting/Mandatory Reporting

During each focus group, participants were asked if they were aware of the university's mandatory reporting policy for responsible employees on campus. The vast majority of students were not formally aware of the protocol prior to participating in the focus group.

When asked whether they believed this protocol to be a help or a hindrance to survivors in coming forward, most acknowledged the complexity of these experiences and some participants believed the protocol could be beneficial for those uncomfortable coming forward on their own. Other participants expressed concerns that such a policy could risk escalating abuse, and that the reporting process can be overwhelming and invasive for survivors.

Lack of Knowledge of Policies

Throughout all of the focus groups conducted, there was a total of 41 utterances that highlighted participants' lack of knowledge regarding university policies. When asked about familiarity with policies related to dating violence or stalking, the majority of students had no awareness of the policies regarding dating violence on campus and expressed sentiments similar to, "I'm not really aware of any specific policies" or "I have no idea, to be honest."

Some students expressed knowledge of Title IX's existence while divulging they have little understanding of what Title IX is or how it works. Other students expressed that survivors often do not realize they can pursue recourse through the university instead of/in addition to criminal proceedings.



Resources

Participants cited university resources such as the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA), Scream Theater, Counseling, Alcohol & Other Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) and Psychiatric Services (CAPS), The Center for Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities, Title IX, the Dean of Students Office, and Residence Life. While most focus group participants considered university resources to be valuable, they emphasized the importance of raising awareness of existing resources. Many also believed more resources are needed to adequately meet the needs of students.

Need to raise awareness.

One theme that emerged was the need for greater awareness of existing resources. Participants expressed that they were generally exposed to resources during new student orientation and at the beginning of their time at Rutgers University, yet felt this education did not continue throughout their tenure as students. Students further described the importance of outreach efforts, emphasizing the impact of flyers and literature around campus. One undergraduate student stated,

“In single-use bathrooms it’s really important that those flyers are there. I’ve seen posters for VPVA, like have you experienced sexual assault, here are the resources...that’s the perfect opportunity.”

Resources are valuable.

Many students recognized that Rutgers University has resources available and spoke very highly of VPVA as a supportive resource for student survivors. One undergraduate student expressed,

“I know that VPVA like has so many resources for students to talk about this type of thing and it’s pretty amazing what goes on here.”

Barriers to accessing resources.

Students described a number of barriers to accessing existing resources. Students expressed a fear of being stigmatized as a potential deterrent to accessing resources. An undergraduate student explained,

“I think there’s also that stigma of, I mean, what are people going to think of me if I get help or if I talk about it, and sometimes it’s even hard for them to talk about it out loud. So the resources are there. Rutgers is trying. There’s just a stigma.”

Some participants also pointed out that students may not realize available resources are free, so financial barriers could arise. Others identified a perceived lack of privacy in making a phone call access services, or within the services themselves. Students also indicated that particular communities may have a more difficult time accessing resources.

Community barriers.

Participants emphasized the importance of culturally competent services, as communities experience violence in different ways. Having counselors available who understand the LGBTQ community, for example, was named as a service that would be meaningful. Students identified LGBTQ students and students of color as two groups that experience additional barriers, due to intersectional marginalization in addition to victimization. One student from the LGBTQ group explained,



“I think a lot of people don’t realize that there’s a way to kind of get help from the situation without involving the police, because I know a lot of people will say, yes, I will take the help, but as long as you don’t call the cops that’s why there’s a big barrier to that.”

Students expressed that queer and transgender students often feel unsafe on campus, explaining they have heard slurs used, pronouns disrespected, and that professors have even been known to make fun of transgender identities during class. If students feel unsafe, they will be less likely to trust campus resources. Additionally, if students feel they are unable to “come out” about their relationships, this presents a barrier to reporting experiences of violence. One participant described a general institutional mistrust many people of color experience because of differential treatment. Referring to Black individuals in particular, this student explained they would be less likely to attempt to access resources knowing their family has had a difficult time accessing resources in the past.

Education/outreach/training for students

Students were enthusiastic about the educational opportunities made available on campus regarding dating violence and stalking. Participants described widespread educational initiatives like the online modules, in addition to awareness-raising campaigns such as Turn the Campus Purple and Joe Biden’s speech during the “It’s On Us” Rally. Many also spoke to the specialized training they received as student leaders, members of Greek life, and Rutgers employees.

Further, many participants described the

effects of on-going awareness-raising efforts on campus. A number of participants noted the purple “End Sexual Violence Now” bus and believed it did a good job of catching attention and making a statement. One undergraduate student described the impact the bus had on him,

“My friends told me to look at it and that’s why I was always on a lookout to see that bus just ‘cause it was so unique. So I feel like that definitely...puts out a message.”

Others spoke to the positive influence of outreach materials such as posters and contact information around campus.

Need for additional education/outreach/training for students.

Students provided constructive input when asked what Rutgers University could do to better address issues of dating violence and stalking. Focus group participants spoke of the need to present students with additional information. They suggested hanging more posters around campus, acquainting students with the “red flags” of abuse, proactively dispelling rape myths, and providing statistics so survivors will know they are not alone. Participants also emphasized the importance of reaching all communities.

They recommended expanding educational opportunities through allocating more time to discussing these topics in the classroom, and providing more education on bystander intervention.

RESPONDING TO PEER DISCLOSURE

In this category we found the one main theme was an existence of barriers to providing peer support.



Barriers to Providing Peer Support

When participants were asked, "If you had a friend who was experiencing physical or emotional dating violence, would you feel like you could help?" many participants discussed several barriers to effectively intervening when they perceive a peer to be in a relationship where dating violence is occurring. These barriers fell into two categories: (1) Feeling it is not their place to intervene, and (2) The lack of tools needed to effectively intervene. It is important to note that during the focus groups, participants often discussed "intervening" in terms of speaking to a peer about their relationship, offering resources, and encouraging their peer to end the relationship as opposed to directly intervening during an incident of dating violence.

Feeling it is not their place to intervene.

Focus group participants expressed a hesitation to talk to their peers about their relationships that they perceive to be abusive. Overall, the focus group participants described this hesitation as the belief that it was not their place to identify dating violence as occurring in a relationship if the person experiencing the dating violence themselves did not identify such behaviors as abusive. Many participants stated that the first step to assisting someone in a potentially abusive relationship was the person themselves first recognizing it. For example, an undergraduate expressed,

"It's so hard to get through because they're like 'I love this person.' They're not actually hurting me. So it's definitely something that has to click for them...it's up the person to really get there."

Further, according to participants, it is particularly problematic that the first step to helping a peer is the need for the student themselves to first recognize that abuse is occurring as, according to many participants, their peers are unable to recognize dating violence and identified this as an area where more education is needed. One undergraduate student expressed,

"I feel like it would also be helpful if there was just more like not on what is dating violence, because I feel like some people experience it and they don't even recognize this is not okay."

In addition, some participants also expressed a sense of frustration that stems from their peers' inability to recognize signs as well as their peers' decisions to stay with potentially abusive partners. An undergraduate student highlighted this when explaining her efforts to support a friend who had disclosed that she is experiencing dating violence,

"... I talked to her for four hours trying to give her support and then for what, because she just went back to him. But, yeah, it's all about the person first acknowledging the problem and then being willing to get the help that they need."

The lack of tools needed to effectively intervene.

Focus group participants expressed that they currently do not have the skills necessary to support a peer experiencing dating violence and expressed the need for additional information and training regarding this. Focus group participants articulated the need for information and training that extends



SECTION 4. LIMITATIONS

beyond having an awareness of the resources available on campus, as many participants noted the importance of speaking to their peers in a supportive, unbiased manner about these issues. A student from the group conducted with survivors and advocates on campus articulated this by stating,

“I would like to say I have all the resources and I would like know exactly what to say, but I don’t think that’s realistic... to tell, talk to friends about something like this, your reaction is like extremely important because if you don’t react in a certain way or like kind of dismiss it, then that victim is not gonna wanna talk to anyone professional about it or like a resource that they may need or do anything about it ‘cause they’re gonna be like well my best friend like the person I trust thinks it’s fine, so like it must be fine. So I think that that’s another reason why there should be like some more education.”

While many focus group participants discussed barriers that currently limit their ability to act as a prosocial bystander, many students expressed the desire to support a peer experiencing dating violence as well as the desire to learn more about how to do so.

FOCUS GROUP LIMITATIONS

Although the findings are not generalizable beyond this sample, focus groups can indicate trends and ideas for future exploration. The limitations of the focus groups include small sample sizes for some of the groups. Focus groups that contain too few participants may limit the quantity

and diversity of experience that can be drawn upon.³ In general, the recommended size for focus groups is five to eight participants.⁴

While many efforts were made to recruit larger numbers of students for each focus group such as sending out multiple reminders and electronic announcements as well as offering students a \$30 gift card incentive at the end of each group, certain difficulties posed an issue with participation numbers. Difficulties included students confirming then not showing up for a scheduled group, cancelling right before the start of the group, and students’ failure to respond to emails confirming an assigned group. Another limitation with the focus groups is that there may likely be limitations based on selectivity in the people who chose to participate in the focus groups.⁵

While small focus group sizes and selectivity may challenge the generalizability of the results, the meaningfulness and insights generated from the groups due to the richness of the information collected should not be overlooked.⁶

³ Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A. (2000). *A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.



CONCLUSION

The purpose of the focus groups were to inform the development of the campus climate survey instrument. Further, in conjunction with the upcoming campus climate survey that will be administered at Rutgers–New Brunswick in the Spring of 2018, the results from the focus groups can help present an integrated description of how students perceive intimate partner violence on their campus.

The major findings from the focus groups indicate that while students acknowledge the broad range of behaviors that constitute dating violence, when discussing methods for intervening and reporting dating violence, many perceive emotional and mental abuse as falling in a “gray area.” Additionally, many students have difficulty talking to their peers about potentially abusive relationships.

This is in part due to students’ inability to recognize signs of an abusive relationship when they are in the relationship, the normalization of certain abusive behaviors, particularly in the context of technology and abuse, as well as an overall lack of tools and knowledge among students to effectively discuss such an issue. However, there was an overall sense that students would like to assist their peers that are in such relationships.

This presents an opportunity to capitalize on students’ acknowledgement that intimate violence is an issue that affects their peers and their desire to learn more about ways to help, in order to further educate the policies and resources available on campus, and how they can be prosocial bystanders.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team thanks the many members of the Rutgers–New Brunswick community who contributed to the campus climate assessment project. This report and the project as a whole are the result of the enthusiastic support and participation of administrators, faculty, staff, and students across Rutgers. This report is dedicated to all those who are survivors of intimate partner violence. We hope our efforts can help contribute to creating campus communities that are free of all forms of violence.

We would especially like to thank the following members of the Rutgers community who provided support to the project:

Felicia McGinty, Ed.D., Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Dayna Weintraub, Ph.D., Director of Research and Assessment

National Association for Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA), who provided the funding necessary to conduct, code, and analyze the focus groups

Additional thanks goes to the following Rutgers organizations, groups, and individuals:

CAMPUS CLIMATE ADVISORY BOARD

Felicia McGinty, Ed.D., Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Jackie Moran, J.D., Director, Director of Office of Student Affairs Compliance & Title IX

Loren Linscott, Director, Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance

Kaleigh Sosa, Training Coordinator, Office of Student Affairs Compliance & Title IX

Judy Postmus, Ph.D., Director, Center on Violence Against Women and Children;

Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Sarah McMahan, Ph.D., Associate Director, Center on Violence Against Women and Children;

Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Julia O'Connor, M.P.H., M.S.W., Graduate Student, School of Social Work

Rita Seabrook, Ph.D., Post-Doctoral Associate, School of Social Work

Julia Cusano, M.S.W., Graduate Student, School of Social Work

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The Center on Violence Against Women and Children, School of Social Work New Brunswick

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Jessica Burnham, Laura Melendez, and all focus group facilitators, students, and staff who provided assistance.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Details about the campus climate assessment can be found on the website of the Rutgers' Center on Violence Against Women and Children, at <http://vawc.rutgers.edu>.

Email the research team (Principal Investigator Sarah McMahon and research team members Julia O'Connor, and Julia Cusano) at campusclimatestudy@ssw.rutgers.edu.

The research team at the Center on Violence Against Women and Children compiled a resource for higher education institutions embarking on campus climate assessments. *Understanding and Responding to Campus Sexual Assault: A Guide for Colleges and Universities*: (<http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/CentersandPrograms/VAWC/researchevaluation/CampusClimateProject.aspx>) documents methodological issues for consideration, lessons learned, and recommendations across dimensions of the campus climate assessment process, including: fostering campus collaborations, conducting a resource audit, conducting a student survey, collecting qualitative data, and developing an action planning.

To speak confidentially with a trained advocate or counselor, contact Services Empowering the Rights of Victims (SERV) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 866-295-7378. For assistance outside of Rutgers, please visit the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (<http://njcasa.org>) or the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (<https://rainn.org>).



APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP METHODS

In order to gain a variety of perspectives on the issue of sexual violence and the campus climate and culture at Rutgers–New Brunswick, two different sampling methods were used. First, for the focus groups conducted with subsets of the student population, subsets of the student body included students from cultural/ethnic centers, graduate students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) students, commuters, student advocates, and student intimate partner violence survivors. Participants were recruited through different student organizations. Participants for each of these groups were directly recruited through a university affiliate who worked with the student population. An additional three focus groups were conducted with the general student population. Participants for these groups were recruited through a mass listserv announcement. Students interested in participating were directed to an email address where they could sign up. All participants who signed up for the general student focus groups were randomly assigned to a focus group.

The groups were one hour to one and a half hours long and were conducted by two facilitators, ranging in size from four to eight participants. All facilitators were hired by the Rutgers–New Brunswick Office of Student Affairs and received training on reviewing informed consent with students, answering students' questions regarding confidentiality and the informed consent, asking the questions outlined in the focus group guide, techniques for eliciting responses from students, and the protocol for distressed participants developed by the research team. The focus groups used semi-structured interviews based on a guide developed by the research team.⁷

The guide started with a brief introduction, including a summary of the current study and detailed information about the consent form, disclosure, and confidentiality. To further protect participants' confidentiality, focus group participants were instructed to refrain from disclosing personal experiences, and instead instructed to talk about personal experiences as something that happened to a "friend." At the conclusion of each focus group, resources were made available to all students and students received a \$30.00 gift card incentive. All materials used during the focus groups conducted on Rutgers–New Brunswick campus, including the focus group guide, consent form, and distressed participants protocol, was submitted to the Institutional Review Board. The study was presented to students as voluntary and confidential and students were informed that they could leave the group at any time. Each focus group participant completed an informed consent prior to the start of each focus group.

⁷McMahon, S., O'Connor, J. & Cusano, J. (2018). iSPEAK campus climate focus group guide. Center on Violence Against Women and Children, School of Social Work. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey: New Brunswick, NJ.



Questions addressed during the focus groups included the following broad topic areas: general thoughts regarding intimate partner violence on campus and how the terms are defined by students; perception of the issue of intimate partner violence at Rutgers–New Brunswick; perceived university responsiveness, campaign messaging, and peer supportiveness; awareness of policies and resources regarding intimate partner violence on campus; and willingness to intervene as a prosocial bystander in potential situations of dating violence.

All groups were audio-recorded. Once all focus groups were conducted, audio files were sent out to a professional transcription service. Over a two-month period, the research team analyzed the focus group data by using systematic coding processes.⁸ The coding schemes were developed by VAWC researchers based on a similar previous study.⁹ To ensure reliability, three of the nine focus group transcripts were doubled-coded. In order to double-code the focus groups, three transcripts were randomly selected and assigned to a second coder who independently coded the focus group. The project coordinator then reviewed both of the coded transcripts to ensure that the codes were similar. All coding was done in ATLAS.ti (version 7.5) coding software. Qualitative analysis allowed the researchers to group the codes into general themes.

⁸ Doody, O., Slevin, E., & Taggart, L. (2013). Focus group interviews. Part 3: analysis. *British Journal Of Nursing*, 22(5), 266-269.

⁹ McMahon, S., Stepleton, K., Cusano, J. & O'Connor, J. (2016). iSPEAK campus climate survey. Center on Violence Against Women and Children, School of Social Work. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey: New Brunswick, NJ.



APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Guide – Campus Climate Discussion Guide

I. Introduction (warm up) 5 MIN

Facilitator: “First, we are going to start with some general questions about your experiences at Rutgers New Brunswick as a student and your sense of community.”

- a) How connected do you feel to the campus community at RU-New Brunswick?
- b) Do you take pride in being a student at RU-New Brunswick?

Sensitive Topics/Confidentiality Warning

Facilitator: “It is important to remember that the issues to be covered are sensitive topics. Due to the nature of the current research study, we ask that all participants please refrain from personal disclosure, during the focus group. Like we said before, please talk about “my friend”, “someone I know”, “a student I heard about” or something along those lines. This is to maintain everyone’s confidentiality.

II. Campus Climate Survey 15 MIN

Facilitator: “For the first few minutes of the focus group, we will discuss the campus climate survey that will take place in 2018. Campus climate surveys have been used to collect information about the scope and prevalence of campus sexual assault, as well as attitudes toward sexual assault on campus. Your feedback today will help shape an upcoming campus climate survey that will focus on additional forms of intimate partner violence. ”

- a) You may have heard the terms “intimate partner violence,” “dating violence,” and “domestic violence,” what behaviors do you think these terms include?
 - i. What term would you use? Why?
- b) When you hear the term “stalking” what do you first think? What types of behaviors do you think occur?
 - i. Do you think certain stalking behaviors are considered more acceptable than others?
- c) Are there any specific questions or topics that you think should be asked about intimate partner violence or stalking on Rutgers New Brunswick?



Facilitator: “For the purposes of today’s focus group, we will rely on the following definitions:”

Intimate Partner Violence: a range of behaviors experienced in the context of any type of intimate relationship or friendship. These behaviors include use of physical force or threats of force against a partner such as slapping, punching, throwing objects. It can also include extreme emotional abuse such as intimidation, blaming, putting down, making fun of, and name calling.

Stalking: a range of behaviors that are unwanted by the recipient and that cause fear including repeatedly, so two or more times, maintaining unwanted visual or physical proximity to a person, repeatedly conveying oral or written threats, or other activities that are intended to make someone afraid.

- a) Are there any additional behaviors that you would add to either of these definitions?

III. Intimate Partner Violence Questions – General

15 MIN

Facilitator: “While there has been an emphasis on campus sexual assault at Rutgers New Brunswick, dating and intimate partner violence is another prevalent issue on college campuses. The CDC has found that almost 50% of women who experienced intimate partner violence had their first incident between the ages of 18 to 24, making it a very relevant issue for college students.

- a) Do you think dating or intimate partner violence is a problem here at Rutgers New Brunswick?

- i. What do you think leads to these problems at Rutgers New Brunswick?
- ii. Do you think certain toxic behaviors have been normalized in relationships?
- iii. Are there particular types of students who are more likely to be victims of dating or intimate partner violence?
 - i. Are there particular students who are more likely to be perpetrators?

- b) Do you think campus administrators are supportive of expanding/improving efforts



to address dating or intimate partner violence on campus?

c) How do you think Rutgers New Brunswick handles and responds to students who have experienced dating or intimate partner violence?

d) Do you think stalking happens on campus? Do behaviors that constitute stalking often occur in relationships/ among people who are seeing each other/hooking up?

i. What role does technology play in stalking behaviors on campus?

Facilitator: "I would just like to check-in and make sure everyone is doing okay. How are we feeling? Again, remember you are free to step outside if you become uncomfortable; please ask one of us to come with you if you have concerns to discuss."

IV. Intimate Partner Violence Resources and Policies Questions – on RU-New Brunswick campus 20 MIN

Facilitator: "Now we will discuss resources and policies here at Rutgers New Brunswick regarding dating or intimate partner violence and stalking on campus. Keep in mind our goal is to make improvements to the system so all thoughts and comments are welcome."

a) What kinds of information have you received about intimate partner violence or stalking since coming to Rutgers New Brunswick?

i. Where did this information come from? (i.e., brochures, student handbook, website, training, presentation, etc.)

ii. Did you think the information was useful/beneficial?

b) Are you aware of any resources that Rutgers New Brunswick or the surrounding community offers to address the issue of dating or intimate partner violence or stalking?

i. If yes, which resources are you aware of?

ii. Are these resources appropriate for addressing intimate partner violence and/or stalking at Rutgers New Brunswick?



- c) If you had (or if you have had) a friend who was experiencing physical or emotional dating violence, would you:
- i. Feel like you could help? In what ways would you (or have you) helped?
 1. Is it different if it is physical or emotional?
 - ii. Know where to tell your friend to get help on campus?
 1. Is it different if it is physical or emotional?
 - iii. Do you think you or your friend would use these resources?
 1. Would it differ if it was physical/emotional?
- d) If you had (or if you have had) a friend who was experiencing stalking, would you:
- i. Feel like you could help? In what ways would you (or have you) helped?
- e) Do you think that you have the tools needed to effectively intervene or offer support to a peer who is experiencing dating violence?
- i. What can Rutgers New Brunswick do to help students develop such tools?
- f) Are you aware of any policies on campus related to dating or intimate partner violence? What do you know about them? For example, there are policies for students who are caught drinking underage, are there similar policies for dating or intimate partner violence?
- e) Are you aware of any policies on campus related to stalking? What do you know about them?
- f) There is currently a University-wide protocol mandating that any faculty and/or staff member, not listed as a confidential resource, must report any student disclosure of sexual violence and/or intimate partner violence to the Title IX Coordinator's Office.
- i. Were you previously aware of this protocol?
 - ii. In your opinion, is this protocol supportive or helpful for survivors?
 - iii. Do you think this protocol could prevent students from disclosing?



V. Key Messages and Intimate Partner Violence Campus Climate Survey Questions

10 MIN

Facilitator: “The Rutgers New Brunswick campus is committed to including students’ voices in the ongoing End Sexual Violence Now campaign as well as in ongoing initiatives to prevent and address sexual and intimate partner violence on campus. Because your voices matter, we will discuss some aspects of the ongoing campaign, including the upcoming campus climate survey.”

a) What key messages or slogans would you want to see or hear from Rutgers University as a whole regarding sexual violence and dating or intimate partner violence? (i.e., we are a safe campus; we are an environment that does not tolerate violence; we all have a part to play in preventing violence, etc.)

i. Where would you want to see or hear these messages? (i.e., website, posters, through faculty or administrators etc.)

Facilitator: “For our final question, we’d like you to think broadly about the Rutgers New Brunswick effort to address intimate partner violence...”

a) What else do you think Rutgers New Brunswick can do to better address the issues of intimate partner/dating violence and stalking on campus?

b) Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I have not asked here today?