

# **Community Practice Bulletin**

## **Taking Action in the Community**

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### **Addressing a Frequent Practitioner Question through Synthesizing Research & Practice Wisdom**

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Alcohol use is implicated in 50 to 70% of campus sexual assaults (Abbey, 2002; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; Krebs et al., 2009). This intersection of sexual assault and alcohol on campus has led to great interest in alcohol's role in sexual assault. While guidance from organizations ranging from the American College Health Association to the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault to the Centers for Disease Control recommends that campuses address this intersection, there is limited concrete guidance as to *how* campus practitioners should actually do so. To address this critical gap, my colleagues and I are completing a study that uses an interdisciplinary community participatory approach to synthesize the best available research and practice wisdom on this topic. There are four aspects of our approach that may be useful to others.

First, we assembled an interdisciplinary research team representing social work, psychology, student affairs, public affairs, and public health perspectives. So often, we end up working within silos based on discipline, so this allowed us to escape our echo chambers and embrace a collaborative approach. We went to the literature in both our disciplines and others' to gain a full breadth of what is available while also choosing areas that would benefit from systematic review. We knew that we did not have the resources or timeline to fill all those gaps, but we wanted to make sure that we could illuminate not only the research gaps but share with practitioners what key areas of practice need more evaluation and innovation.

Second, we aligned closely with a community of practice, Campus Advocates and Prevention Professionals Association (CAPPA) that would connect us with over 500 practice experts. The qualitative portion of the study involved interviewing campus-based sexual assault prevention educators from across the United States. In campus sexual assault prevention, there is

often a gap between researchers and practitioners, and we sought to close that gap as much as possible in our methods. We developed the interview guide in partnership with the organization's leadership and piloted it with members. We not only asked them about their perspectives, decision-making, and programming but also asked them if they knew about others who were doing promising or innovative work on addressing alcohol's role in sexual assault. We worked closely with this group throughout the analysis process to ensure that the themes we identified resonated with their experiences.

Third, when we began the project, we asked our community partners how they would want to receive the findings and guidance we would develop. They mentioned that they did not frequently conduct searches of peer-reviewed literature, as they often felt those articles provided findings but not tangible next steps. Therefore, in addition to producing peer-reviewed publications, we worked from the beginning to assemble a freely available toolkit that practitioners could access via PDF. This toolkit will be available in early 2018. Because of our close partnership with the community of practice, we were then able to create a dissemination plan that would reach those who needed the information the most including through listservs, blogposts, webinars, and other venues.

Lastly, we engaged an expert advisory group who are helping us create the toolkit at all stages. Through an iterative process, we are working through the content, format, dissemination, and language included in the toolkit to ensure that it represents the interdisciplinary nature of the issue and provides practitioners evidence-informed and practice wisdom-driven strategies for addressing alcohol's role in sexual assault.

While closely engaging stakeholders throughout this entire process has sometimes been time-consuming, it has been essential to ensuring that our research is grounded not only in what is searchable in journals but what is happening on college and university campuses on the ground. Our process not only led to a larger wealth of information but also established trust with the professionals who are doing the day-to-day work to prevent sexual assault on campus, leading to more honest answers and greater likelihood that they will use our toolkit in practice.

Our preliminary findings show that campus-based practitioners want to implement evidence-based prevention practices to address alcohol's role in sexual assault but they often lack findings that can be integrated into their practice. We are looking forward to completing this process and creating venues for continued practitioner feedback in hopes that we can develop

interventions to further address alcohol's role in sexual assault on campus in our future research. We hope that these practitioner-engaged research methods can help strengthen not only the quality of our research but the likelihood that it will be adopted into practice.

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*This is one of a series of bulletins, formerly titled Theory into Action, highlighting the use of community psychology in practice. Comments, suggestions, and questions are welcome. Please direct them to Tabitha Underwood at [underwoodtabitha@gmail.com](mailto:underwoodtabitha@gmail.com).*