



Review article

Effects of Campus Sexual Assault Prevention Programs on Attitudes and Behaviors Among American College Students: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis



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 A B S T R A C T

The US Campus Sexual Assault Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act of 2013 mandates that all higher education institutions receiving federal funds offer incoming students primary prevention and awareness programming addressing sexual violence. Yet, there is no thorough and up-to-date quantitative synthesis of the effects of campus sexual assault prevention programs on sexual assault attitudes/knowledge and behaviors. Thus, we conducted a systematic review of the literature and a meta-analysis of experimental and high-quality quasi-experimental research examining effects of college sexual assault prevention programs on sexual assault attitudes and behaviors. Our synthesis of 385 effect sizes from 80 eligible studies disseminated between 1991 and 2021 indicates campus sexual assault programs have a more pronounced effect on attitudes/knowledge than on violence. Effects on sexual assault victimization were significant but small ($g = 0.15$) and effects on sexual assault perpetration were nonsignificant. Moderator analyses indicate programs that use a risk reduction framework are associated with less favorable outcomes than programs that do not use a risk reduction framework. Considering the limited effect of campus sexual assault prevention programs on violence, we recommend programming efforts move beyond a focus on individuals and, instead, adopt an ecological perspective targeting individuals, social relationships, community factors, and societal factors.

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IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

This systematic review and meta-analysis provides an up-to-date quantitative synthesis of high-quality research evaluating the effects of campus sexual assault prevention programs. Findings indicate that programs have a more pronounced effect on knowledge and attitudes than on violence outcomes.

Campus sexual assault is a prevalent problem with serious implications for the health of adolescents and young adults. Findings from campus climate surveys administered across the United States indicate that approximately 20%–25% of women

and 7%–8% of men have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact since entering college [1,2]. These rates are problematic, as sexual assault in young adulthood is associated with numerous adverse health outcomes, including risk of repeated victimization, depressive symptomology, heavy drinking, and suicidal ideation [3–5].

In an effort to combat this problem, the US Campus Sexual Assault Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act of 2013 mandates that all higher education institutions receiving federal funds offer primary prevention and awareness programming addressing sexual violence to incoming college students [6]. However, selecting the

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best prevention program for a specific campus can be daunting, as there is a wide array of sexual assault prevention programs available for implementation and different components of these programs may have differential effects. The difficulty of this task is compounded by the fact that there is no recent quantitative synthesis of high-quality research evaluating effects of the comprehensive realm of college sexual assault prevention programs. Although a number of narrative reviews of the literature on sexual assault prevention programs have been published in the last decade [7–11], almost two decades have passed since the publication of meta-analyses of such research [12–14].

Thus, the purpose of this study was to (1) determine the effects of campus sexual assault prevention programs on sexual assault attitudes and behaviors and (2) identify significant moderators of the effects of these programs. To that end, we conducted a systematic review of the literature and a meta-analysis of experimental and high-quality quasi-experimental research that examined the effects of college sexual assault prevention programs on sexual assault attitudes and behaviors among American college students.

Approaches to campus sexual assault prevention

The most frequent program components of campus sexual assault prevention programs can be classified into three main categories: risk reduction, rape awareness, and bystander intervention [15]. However, this categorization is not necessarily exhaustive or exclusive.

Risk reduction. Risk reduction programs focus on actions college students can take to decrease their risk of victimization. They tend to target potential victims (as opposed to targeting perpetrators) and include content on alcohol and drug use, refusal skills, and self-defense. Risk reduction programs have been criticized as putting too much responsibility for preventing violence on potential victims. However, proponents of such programs argue that other approaches assume only perpetrators can truly prevent sexual violence, but in reality, potential victims can be empowered to reduce their risk for assault by acting when they detect danger [16]. Importantly, some content of risk reduction programs has changed over time. Programs that target refusal skills have begun to shift toward an emphasis on affirmative consent [17]. Additionally, although self-defense strategies were once thought to foster victim-blaming, these strategies have demonstrated a recent resurgence bolstered by claims of their effectiveness [18,19].

Rape awareness. Rape awareness programs seek to educate participants about sexual assault (e.g., define assault, explain laws/policies), dispel rape myths, foster empathy/compassion for victims, and challenge gender and peer norms that are thought to encourage or minimize sexual assault. This approach to sexual assault prevention is arguably the most popular, as a comprehensive review of the literature suggests the aforementioned topics are among the most frequent components included in sexual assault prevention programs [8]. Yet, the emphasis on gender norms as a major contributor to sexual assault has made rape awareness programs susceptible to the criticism that they are inherently anti-male because they critique masculine norms and instill a sense of guilt among the men who participate in these programs [20].

Bystander intervention. Bystander intervention training is a newer approach to campus sexual assault prevention that may avoid the criticisms associated with risk reduction and rape awareness programs (i.e., that the former places too much responsibility on women victims and that the latter can be unappealing to men) [20]. Bystander programs encourage participants to intervene when witnessing incidents or warning signs of sexual assault (e.g., walking a friend home when they have had too much to drink, calling the police to report suspicious behavior). They seek to sensitize participants to warning signs of sexual assault, create attitudinal changes that foster bystander responsibility for intervening, and build requisite skills and knowledge of tactics for taking action [21–24]. By treating participants as potential allies in preventing sexual assault, bystander programs have the potential to be less threatening than traditional sexual assault prevention programs, which tend to approach participants as either potential perpetrators or victims of sexual violence [20,23,25]. The evidence base for bystander intervention training is promising, as systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies evaluating these programs indicate they are effective at encouraging young people to take action when witnessing signs of sexual assault [26–28].

The current study

In this project, we evaluated the effectiveness of campus sexual assault prevention programs by conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis of the extant high-quality research. To be consistent with the parameters of the US Campus SaVE Act, which mandates that all higher education institutions receiving federal funds offer incoming students primary prevention and awareness programming addressing sexual violence, our meta-analysis focused on evaluations of programs that target individual students' attitudes and behaviors (as opposed to those that implement broad policies or target and measure campus-level cultural change). We preregistered our meta-analysis with PROSPERO and full methodological details can be found in the registration protocol (CRD42020191392).

Inclusion criteria

To be included in the review, eligible studies had to evaluate a campus sexual assault prevention program implemented with college students in the United States. Research reports could be disseminated in any year, but had to be written in English. Eligible studies also had to meet the criteria outlined below.

Intervention/program. Eligible studies must have assessed outcomes related to a sexual assault prevention program implemented with college students in the United States. Programs may have either addressed sexual assault exclusively or in conjunction with other topics (e.g., intimate partner violence, sexual health, gender, etc.), but they must have included content on sexual assault and reported at least one eligible outcome described below. Studies that reported eligible outcomes, but did not explicitly report that the program contained sexual assault content, were not eligible.

Outcomes. Eligible studies must have reported at least one outcome in one of the following domains: sexual assault attitudes/knowledge, sexual assault victimization, sexual assault perpetration, and bystander-related outcomes. Although our

main outcomes of interest were victimization and perpetration, past reviews of research on sexual assault prevention programs have indicated that attitudes and knowledge are measured with much greater frequency than violence outcomes [28–34]. This is because such programs often target violence-related attitudes/knowledge as causal mechanisms of violence and, thus, evaluations often measure attitudes/knowledge as proxies for violence [29,32,35]. In addition to including attitudes and knowledge, we also included bystander outcomes because many contemporary sexual assault prevention programs aim to foster bystander responsibility for preventing violence [21–24].

Sexual assault attitudes/knowledge included any measure of attitudes/perceptions (e.g., rape myth acceptance, victim empathy) or knowledge (e.g., definitions of sexual assault, scope or patterns of sexual assault, laws/policies concerning sexual assault). Sexual assault victimization included any measure of sexual assault victimization (i.e., any range of unwelcome sexual acts), whether self-reports or official reports. Sexual assault perpetration included measures of sexual assault perpetration (i.e., any range of unwelcome sexual acts). It included self-reports and official reports, but it must have represented actual behavior. Intentions to commit sexual assault did not qualify as measures of sexual assault perpetration in our study. Although the extant research has demonstrated a positive relationship between rape supportive attitudes and intentions to commit sexual assault, there is less consistent evidence of the validity of intentions to commit sexual assault as a predictor of future sexual assault behavior [36–39]. Bystander-related outcomes were relevant to bystander attitudes (e.g., intentions to intervene, bystander self-efficacy) or behaviors (e.g., actual bystander intervention).

Participants and setting. Eligible studies must have assessed programs implemented with a sample of college students attending colleges/universities in the United States (i.e., undergraduate populations). This included studies that reported on general samples of college students as well as studies that used specialized samples such as those primarily consisting of college athletes, fraternity/sorority members, or single-gender samples. Studies that reported findings for breakout groups (e.g., reported results separately for different gender groups, Greek members and nonmembers, etc.) were eligible only if findings were reported in such a way that breakout groups could be combined to calculate aggregate effect sizes. In order to ensure our results were representative of program effects among traditional college students, the mean age of samples could be no greater than 25 to be included in the review. However, in our screening process, no otherwise eligible studies were excluded based on this maximum age criterion.

Research design. To be eligible for inclusion, studies must have used the individual as the unit of analysis and implemented an experimental or controlled quasi-experimental research design to compare an intervention group (i.e., students assigned to a sexual assault prevention program) with a comparison group (e.g., students not assigned to a sexual assault prevention program). More specifically, the following designs were included: randomized controlled trials (i.e., RCTs using individual or cluster assignment), quasi-randomized controlled trials, and controlled quasi-experimental designs ([QEDs] i.e., studies that used a comparison group that was not assigned randomly or quasi-randomly). Eligible QED designs included regression discontinuity designs, matching, and studies where enough statistical information was reported to

permit estimation of pretest effect sizes (treatment/comparison group equivalence) for at least one outcome measure.

Search strategy

We conducted an initial literature search in January 2020 and an updated search in June 2021. To minimize omission of relevant studies and capture a sample that was representative of both published studies (i.e., those that appeared in peer-reviewed journals and were cataloged in electronic bibliographic databases) and unpublished studies (i.e., dissertations, theses, conference papers, working papers, articles in-press), we conducted a comprehensive search of the literature following strategies suggested by Cooper [40]. This involved conducting literature searches in electronic databases as well as conducting a gray literature search for unpublished studies.

Electronic databases. We searched electronic bibliographic databases that cataloged research from a range of disciplines relevant to campus sexual assault including health, sociology, psychology, education, criminology, etc. This included the following databases: PsycINFO, Education Resources Information Central (ERIC), Sociological Index, ProQuest (including dissertations and theses), PubMed, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Criminal Justice Abstracts, PsycARTICLES, and SocIndex. We used search terms that were specific to both the target population and terms that captured sexual violence as well as more general terms that had the potential to identify studies that address physical and/or sexual violence. Specific search terms were as follows:

[("intervention" OR "prevention" OR "program" OR "education" OR "training" OR "curriculum") AND ("college" OR "university" OR "higher education") AND ("sexual violence" OR "sexual assault" OR "sexual coercion" OR "sexual consent" OR "unwanted sex" OR "undesired sex" OR "forced sex" OR "forced intercourse" OR "rape" OR "sexual victimization" OR "sexual violence perpetration" OR "sexual perpetration" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "IPV" OR "dating violence" OR "dating aggression" OR "dating abuse" OR "partner abuse" OR "bystander" OR "gender violence" OR "gendered violence" OR "gender based violence" OR "gender-based violence")]

Gray literature and other searches. In addition to searching electronic abstract databases, we searched sources that were likely to produce unpublished research as well as ongoing studies that had the potential to be finalized before our coding process was complete. This included searching and reviewing clinicaltrials.gov, grant award listings from the National Institutes of Health and National Institute of Justice, and conference proceedings from relevant organizations (i.e., American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, American Society of Criminology, Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality). We also reviewed reference lists of all eligible reports and review articles, contacted authors of relevant studies to request copies of unpublished (e.g., in-press) studies, and reviewed tables of contents of research journals relevant to sexual assault.

Eligibility screening

After completing the comprehensive search, we double-screened abstracts of all candidate reports to eliminate any clearly ineligible studies such as those that did not assess campus

sexual assault prevention or single-group pretest–posttest studies. Then, we retrieved full-text versions of all remaining candidate reports. We based final eligibility decisions on readings of the full-text reports. In order to ensure reliability, two team members double-screened all candidate reports while adhering to a detailed codebook.

Study coding

We coded all eligible studies for candidate moderator variables that may influence program effects. These potential moderators included study design (e.g., RCT, quasi-experimental design, follow-up timing), program content (e.g., variables pertinent to risk reduction programs, rape awareness programs, and bystander intervention training programs), program implementation (e.g., group size, frequency of treatment contact, delivery format), and participant/setting characteristics (e.g., type of campus setting, proportion of men/women, average age, proportion of athletes, etc.). Two independent coders double-coded eligible studies while adhering to a detailed codebook. Coders entered data directly into a database and coding results were compared for discrepancies that were resolved by further discussion among the four-member research team. We made all reasonable attempts to collect complete data on variables identified in the coding manual. When key variables of interest could not be extracted from study reports, we contacted primary study authors to request this information. To minimize risk of bias, research team members recused themselves from screening/coding any reports that they had authored or coauthored.

Calculation of effect sizes

We extracted relevant summary statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations, proportions, observed sample sizes) to calculate effect sizes. We reported continuous measures of treatment effects using a standardized mean difference (SMD) effect size metric with a small sample correction (i.e., Hedges' g). For cases in which binary outcome measures were reported in eligible studies, we transformed log odds ratio effect sizes available from binary measures into standardized mean difference effect sizes by entering the observed proportions and sample sizes into Wilson's online effect size calculator [41]. We coded all standardized mean difference effect sizes such that positive values (i.e., greater than 0) indicate a beneficial outcome for the intervention group and negative values (i.e., less than 0) indicate an unfavorable outcome for the intervention group.

The unit of analysis was the individual (i.e., individual-level attitudes and behaviors). Some eligible studies used cluster randomized trial designs where participants were randomized into the intervention or comparison conditions at the group level (e.g., entire classes or athletic teams assigned to a single condition), but authors made inferences at the individual level. To correct for these unit of analysis errors, we followed procedures outlined in the Cochrane Handbook [42] to inflate the standard errors of the effect sizes from these studies by multiplying them by the square root of the design effect [$1 + (M - 1) ICC$], where M is the average cluster size for a given study and ICC is the intra-cluster correlation coefficient for a given outcome. In cases where study authors did not report ICCs, we used a liberal assumed value of 0.10 [30,43].

Data analysis

Because the final sample included some dependent effect sizes (e.g., estimates from multiple follow-up waves or multiple treatment arms within a single study), we used the robust variance estimation (RVE) meta-analytic method with inverse variance weighting and a small sample adjustment using the `robumeta` package in R [44–48]. To minimize any potential bias in the meta-analysis results due to effect size outliers, we Winsorized all effect sizes that fell more than two standard deviations away from the mean of the effect size distribution by replacing them with the value that fell exactly two standard deviations from the mean of the distribution of effect sizes [49]. We conducted separate meta-analyses for each outcome, assessed heterogeneity using the I^2 and τ^2 statistics, and conducted bivariate moderator analyses by implementing metaregression using small-sample RVE estimators for candidate moderators reported by a minimum of 10 studies for a specific outcome. We conducted bivariate moderator analyses because many of the outcomes in our meta-analyses were reported by an insufficient number of studies to permit multivariate moderator analysis. A list of moderators reported by less than 10 studies for specific outcomes is available from the first author upon request.

Results

Literature search results

The PRISMA diagram in Figure 1 outlines the flow of studies through the search and screening process. Through both our initial search (January 2020) and updated search (June 2021), we identified 14,737 reports. After deleting duplicate reports ($n = 4,856$), reports that we deemed ineligible through the abstract screening process ($n = 9,502$), and reports that could not be located ($n = 8$), 371 reports for 297 independent studies were eligible for full-text screening. Of those studies, we deemed 178 to be ineligible. Additionally, we found that 13 otherwise eligible studies did not report sufficient information for effect size calculation (and our efforts to obtain this information from authors were unsuccessful), and 10 studies were ongoing/incomplete. In total, we coded 96 eligible studies relayed through 139 reports for this meta-analysis [50–188].

Sixteen of these 96 eligible studies reported disparate outcomes that were difficult to aggregate in a meaningful way across studies. These included outcomes that we classified as “other” attitudes/knowledge or skills, such as confidence in ability to refuse sex, attraction to sexual aggression, belief that a perpetrator was justified for rape in response to a vignette, etc. These outcomes were conceptually dissimilar from one another and/or were measured in such a disparate manner that synthesizing them would not provide a meaningful measure of program impact. Thus, we included 80 studies in the meta-analytic sample, each of which reported one or more of the following outcomes classified into three categories: attitude/knowledge outcomes (i.e., rape myth acceptance, victim empathy, knowledge of sexual assault, knowledge of consent, social norms about sexual assault attitudes, social norms about sexual assault behavior), bystander outcomes (i.e., bystander efficacy, bystander intentions, bystander intervention behavior), and violence outcomes (i.e., sexual assault perpetration, sexual assault victimization). Table 1 summarizes characteristics of the 80 studies included in the meta-analytic sample.

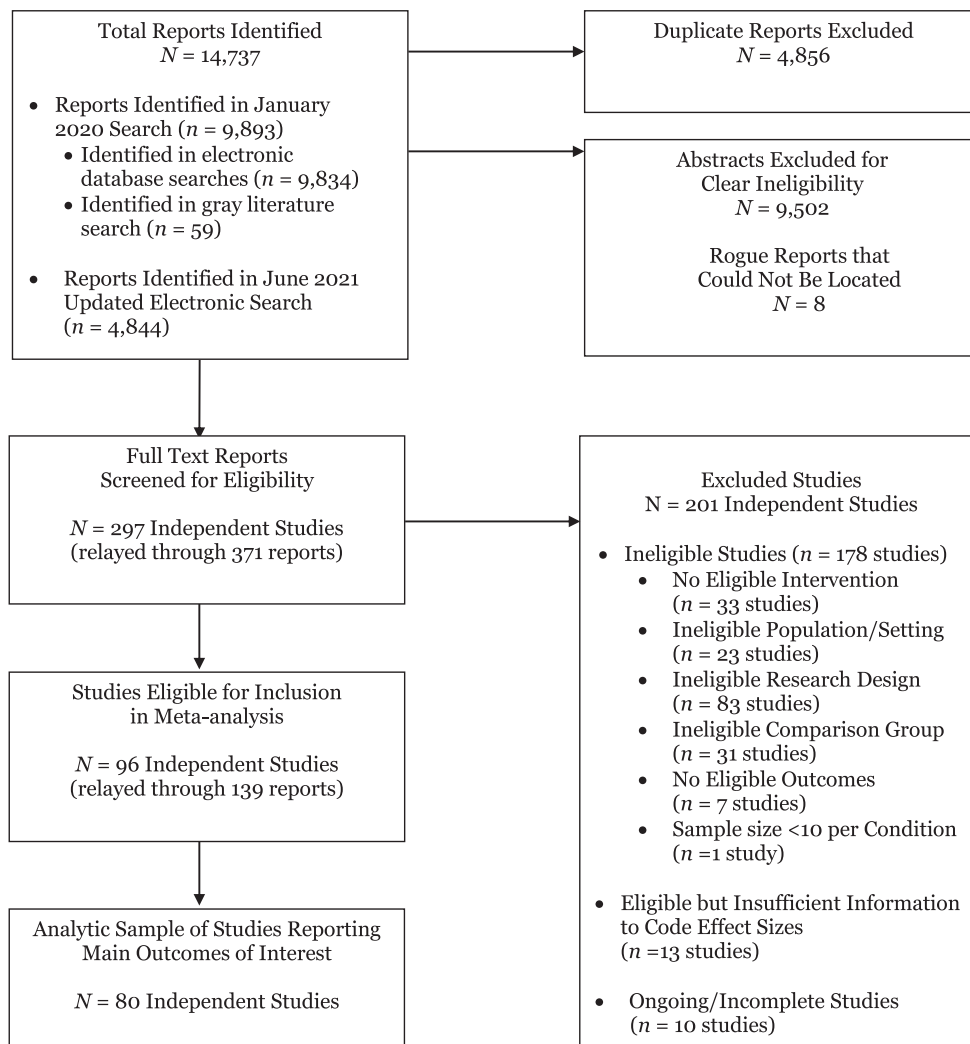


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram Documenting Flow of Reports Through Systematic Review.

Meta-analysis results

We ran separate meta-analyses and, when appropriate, moderator analyses, for each individual outcome classified under each outcome category. Due to space constraints, we only include forest plots for the two violence outcomes: sexual assault victimization and sexual assault perpetration (see Figures 2 and 3). Forest plots for the remaining outcomes are available from the first author upon request.

Main effects. Main effects from our meta-analyses (including the Hedges g , 95% confidence interval [CI], τ^2 , and I^2) for each model) are presented in Table 2. We found significant program effects on two attitude/knowledge outcomes, two bystander outcomes, and one violence outcome. Regarding attitude/knowledge outcomes, programs had a significant favorable effect on rape myth acceptance ($g = 0.31$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.42]) and a significant favorable effect on knowledge of sexual assault ($g = 1.07$, 95% CI [0.25, 1.89]). Pertinent to bystander outcomes, programs had a significant favorable effect on bystander efficacy ($g = 0.31$, 95% CI

[0.02, 0.60]) and a significant favorable effect on bystander intentions ($g = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.62]). Regarding violence outcomes, programs had a significant favorable effect on sexual assault victimization ($g = 0.15$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.30]).

Moderator effects. We coded candidate moderators classified into the following categories summarized in Table 1: study characteristics, rape awareness program content, risk reduction program content, bystander program content, program implementation, and participant characteristics. We discuss findings from moderator analyses below, organized by moderator category.

Study characteristics. The only study characteristic moderator that had a significant effect on at least one program outcome was study design. Studies that used quasi-experimental designs found significantly greater favorable effects on sexual assault perpetration compared to studies that used randomized controlled trial designs with individual assignment ($b = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.45]).

Table 1
Characteristics of studies included in the meta-analytic sample

	Percent or mean (SD)	Valid No. Studies or effects
Study Characteristics		
Peer-Reviewed	72.50	80
Year of Dissemination ^b (range 1991–2021)	2021 (9.50)	80
Study Design		
Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) - Individual	67.50	80
Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) - Cluster	17.50	80
Quasiexperimental Design (QED)	15.00	80
Study Attrition		
% Attrition at first follow-up	17.75 (15.82)	74
% Attrition at last follow-up	31.70 (20.79)	43
Posttest Timing in Weeks	8.04 (11.26)	382 ^a
Rape Awareness Program Content		
Rape Myths	35.53	76
Victim Empathy	39.47	76
Gender Norms	20.78	77
Victim Gender		
All or Mostly Women	77.42	62
Gender-Neutral	22.58	62
Perpetrator Gender		
All or Mostly Men	75.86	58
Gender-Neutral	24.14	58
Social Norms – Sexual Assault	6.25	80
Social Norms – Alcohol	11.39	79
Risk Reduction Program Content		
Personal Safety	28.00	75
Sexual Refusal	19.74	76
Sexual Consent	48.05	77
Self-Defense	7.79	77
Alcohol	57.14	77
Communication Skills	35.53	76
Bystander Training Program Content		
Bystander Intervention	49.32	73
Program Implementation		
Program Delivery Format		
In-Person	61.11	72
Web/Computer/Video	38.89	72
Group Composition		
Mixed Gender	31.25	80
Single Gender or Individual	68.75	80
Group Size		
Individual	34.72	72
Small Groups (<10)	8.33	72
Large Groups (10 or more)	56.94	72
Treatment Frequency		
Single-day program	83.78	74
Multiple-day program	16.22	74
Hours of Treatment Contact	2.46 (5.73)	66
Participant & Setting Characteristics		
Campus Setting		
Community or Technical College	0.00	71
Historically Black College or University (HBCU)	0.00	71
Public University (non-HBCU)	85.92	71
Private University (non-HBCU)	14.08	71
Mean % Men in Sample	41.18 (35.52)	78
Mean % White in Sample	76.41 (19.94)	64
Mean % LGBTQ+ in Sample	5.63 (6.16)	24
Mean Age of Sample	19.96 (1.31)	52
Mean % Greek Members in Sample	57.65 (38.67)	26
Mean % Athletes in Sample	50.33 (47.30)	9

^a The N for posttest timing in weeks represents number of effect sizes. All other values represent number of studies (*k*).

^b Mode is reported for Year of Dissemination.

Rape awareness program content. The following rape awareness moderators had a significant effect on at least one program outcome: social norms about sexual assault, social norms about alcohol, gender-neutral victim, and gender-neutral perpetrator.

All of these variables moderated program effects on bystander efficacy. Programs that included content on social norms about sexual assault ($b = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.70]) or social norms about alcohol ($b = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.70]) had significantly greater

Table 2
Main effects of eligible campus sexual assault prevention programs by outcome

	No. Studies (<i>k</i>)	No. Effect sizes	Hedges <i>g</i> (95% CI)	τ^2	I^2
Attitude/Knowledge Outcomes					
Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA)	38	98	0.31 (0.20, 0.42)***	0.00	0.00
Victim Empathy	6	12	0.18 (−0.43, 0.79)	0.19	48.88
Knowledge of Sexual Assault	17	35	1.07 (0.25, 1.89)*	1.35	90.00
Knowledge of Consent	9	29	0.02 (−0.45, 0.49)	0.32	67.42
Social Norms – Sexual Assault Attitudes	3	11	0.33 (−0.25, 0.90)	0.00	0.00
Social Norms – Sexual Assault Behavior	2	5	0.00 (−0.54, 0.54)	0.00	0.00
Bystander Outcomes					
Bystander Efficacy	22	56	0.31 (0.02, 0.60)*	0.44	75.17
Bystander Intentions	21	55	0.35 (0.07, 0.62)*	0.30	65.68
Bystander Intervention Behavior	16	38	0.22 (−0.01, 0.44)	0.17	53.21
Violence Outcomes					
Sexual Assault Victimization	15	31	0.15 (0.01, 0.30)*	0.00	0.00
Sexual Assault Perpetration	11	15	0.16 (−0.08, 0.40)	0.00	0.00

*** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

favorable effects on bystander efficacy compared to programs that did not include content on social norms about sexual assault or social norms about alcohol. However, it is important to note that social norms about sexual assault and social norms about alcohol were perfectly collinear with one another, meaning that programs either included content on both or neither of these.

Programs that portrayed victims in a gender-neutral manner ($b = 0.57$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.97]) or portrayed perpetrators in a gender-neutral manner ($b = 0.52$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.89]) had a significantly greater favorable effect on bystander efficacy compared to those that portrayed victims as all/mostly women or portrayed perpetrators as all/mostly men, respectively.

Risk reduction program content. The following risk reduction moderators had a significant effect on at least one program outcome: self-defense and personal safety. Programs that contained self-defense content had significantly less favorable effects on rape myth acceptance than programs that did not include self-defense content ($b = -0.41$, 95% CI [−0.53, −0.30]). A post hoc analysis indicated that the effect of self-defense content on rape myth acceptance remained significant and negative when controlling for program content critiquing rape myths ($b = -0.46$, 95% CI [−0.64, −0.27]).

Programs that included content on personal safety had significantly less favorable effects on bystander intervention behavior compared to programs that did not include content on personal safety ($b = -0.79$, 95% CI [−0.96, −0.61]). A post-hoc analysis indicated that the effect of personal safety content on bystander intervention remained significant and negative when controlling for bystander program content ($b = -0.83$, 95% CI [−1.10, −0.55]).

Bystander program content. Programs that contained content on bystander training had a significantly less favorable effect on sexual assault victimization compared to those that did not include bystander training content ($b = -0.06$, 95% CI [−0.10, −0.03]).

Program implementation. Two program implementation moderators had a significant effect on at least one program outcome: group composition (single gender) and group size (small group). Programs that were implemented with single gender groups or with individuals alone had a significantly greater favorable effect

on sexual assault victimization compared to programs that were implemented in mixed gender settings ($b = 0.44$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.57]). Programs that were implemented with small groups (<10) had a significantly greater favorable effect on sexual assault victimization compared to programs that were implemented with individuals alone ($b = 0.38$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.71]). However, there was no significant difference in the effects on sexual assault victimization among programs that were implemented with large groups (10 or more) compared to programs implemented with individuals alone.

Participant and setting characteristics. The only participant or setting characteristic moderator that had a significant effect on at least one program outcome was proportion of men. Studies with a greater proportion of men in the sample demonstrated significantly less favorable effects on sexual assault victimization ($b = -0.96$, 95% CI [−1.44, −0.48]). No other participant or setting characteristics were significant moderators of program effects on any of the outcomes included in the meta-analysis. However, it is important to note that studies reported demographic and participant background information with such irregularity that we were not able to conduct moderator analyses for each participant characteristic and every outcome. For example, only 24 of the 80 included studies reported the proportion of LGBTQ+ participants in study samples.

Discussion

The overarching goal of this systematic review and meta-analysis was to provide a thorough and up-to-date evidence base that may assist college administrators as they select the appropriate sexual assault prevention programs to implement on their campuses in compliance with the US Campus SaVE Act. Before discussing implications of our results, it is important to note that the scope of our study poses a few limitations to our findings. First, by focusing on campus sexual assault prevention programs, our meta-analysis did not capture effects that general health, sexuality, or gender programs that do not explicitly address sexual assault may have on sexual assault outcomes. Second, by focusing on studies conducted in the US, our findings may not generalize to other national contexts. Finally, due to the dearth of studies reporting the sexual/gender identity of participants and/or evaluating the effects of campus sexual assault

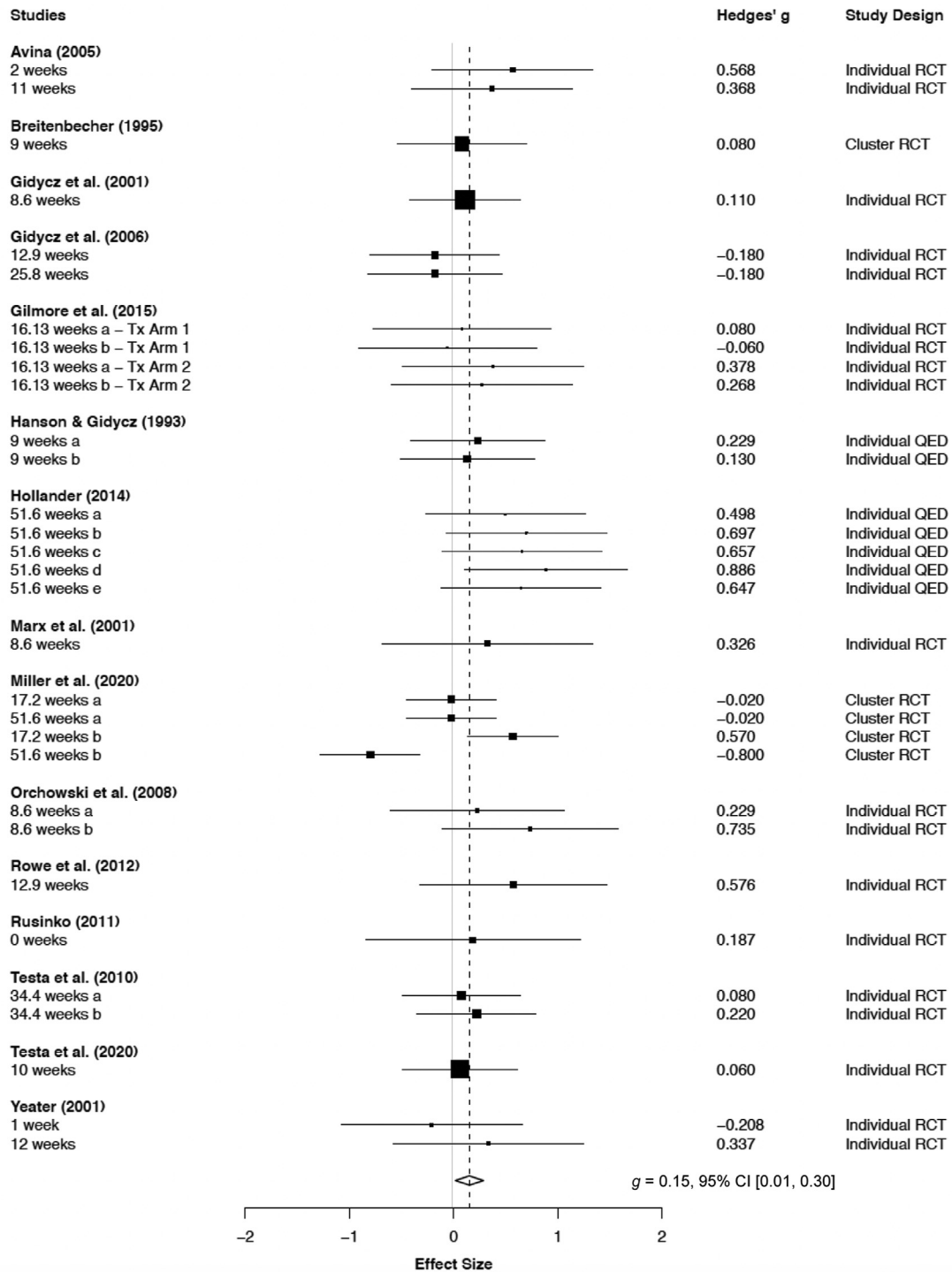


Figure 2. Forest Plot of Program Effects on Sexual Assault Victimization. Note: Solid line represented the null effect value. Broken line represents the standardized mean difference effect. Effect sizes that fall to the left of zero favor the comparison group and effect sizes that fall to the right of zero favor the treatment/program group.

prevention programs at Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), our findings may not generalize to LGBTQ+ students or students attending HBCUs. Future research should focus on these two student populations.

In general, our findings indicate that campus sexual assault prevention programs have a more pronounced effect on

attitudes/knowledge than on violence outcomes. We also found that some program effects were significantly moderated by specific program components. For example, those programs that depicted victims and perpetrators in a gender-neutral manner had more favorable effects on bystander efficacy than programs that depicted victims as all or mostly women or perpetrators as

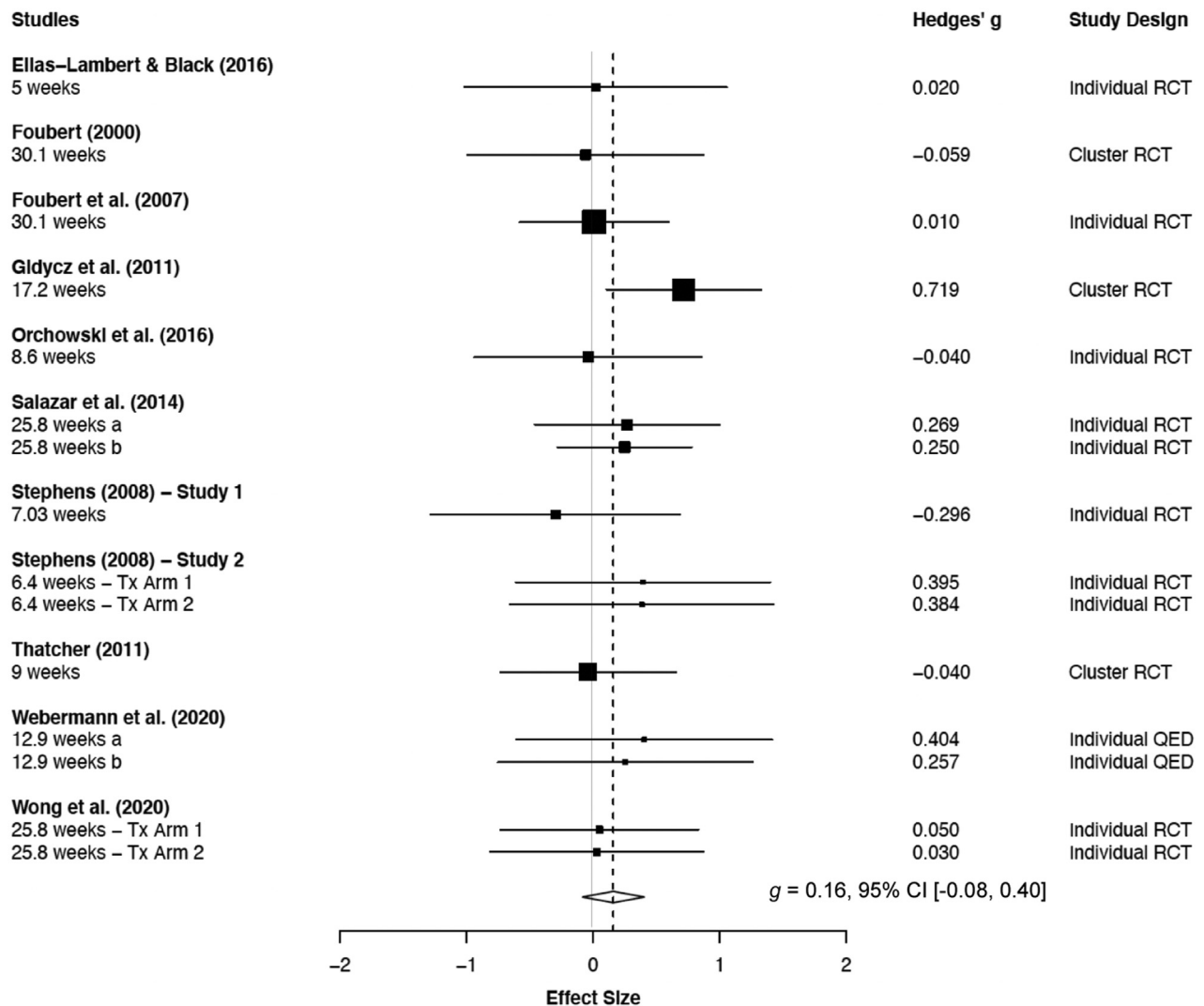


Figure 3. Forest Plot of Program Effects on Sexual Assault Perpetration. Note: Solid line represented the null effect value. Broken line represents the standardized mean difference effect. Effect sizes that fall to the left of zero favor the comparison group and effect sizes that fall to the right of zero favor the treatment/program group.

all or mostly men, respectively. This finding is noteworthy, as it indicates there may be benefits associated with the recent tendency of bystander programs to adopt a gender-neutral approach [20,189]. Scholars have noted that, while incurring the risk of minimizing the roles gender norms and power imbalances may play in fostering sexual violence, adopting a gender-neutral approach may deflect the criticism that sexual violence prevention programs are inherently antimale and, thus, may make these programs less threatening to the men who participate in them [20]. Our findings seem to lend support to this argument.

Additionally, our analysis suggests that risk reduction programs may be less effective than other approaches to campus sexual assault prevention. Specifically, programs that included two specific risk reduction components (i.e., self-defense and personal safety) were associated with less favorable effects on outcomes than programs that did not include these components.

Despite recent arguments that self-defense programs are the only programs with demonstrated effects on sexual assault

victimization [19,190], our meta-analysis of high-quality studies found no evidence that self-defense programs are more effective than other programs at preventing sexual assault. Instead, we found college students who participated in campus sexual assault prevention programs that included self-defense content (e.g., training to defend oneself from a sexual assault) reported greater endorsement of rape myths than college students who participated in programs that did not include self-defense content. This is consistent with previous research that indicates a positive relationship between sexist attitudes (such as rape myth acceptance) and the belief that victims should be responsible for preventing sexual assault (such as through self-defense) [191].

Programs that included content on personal safety (e.g., advice to reduce risk of assault such as never leaving drinks unattended, walking with groups of friends, etc.) had a less favorable effect on bystander intervention compared to programs that did not include content on personal safety. This suggests that emphasizing the responsibility of potential victims

for preventing sexual assault may have an unintended consequence of discouraging third parties from taking action to prevent such violence.

Ultimately, we believe our most important finding is that the sexual assault prevention programs evaluated in our meta-analysis had a greater impact on attitudes/knowledge than on violence. Our meta-analysis revealed a favorable, but small, effect on sexual assault victimization and a nonsignificant effect on sexual assault perpetration. Importantly, program effects were not particularly disparate for these two outcomes. The effects on victimization and perpetration were similar in magnitude (victimization $g = 0.16$ and perpetration $g = 0.15$) and the effect on victimization barely demonstrated statistical significance [95% CI (0.01, 0.30)] whereas the effect on perpetration barely demonstrated statistical non-significance [95% CI (-0.08, 0.40)].

Importantly, any significant and favorable effect on sexual assault has substantive effects on the lives of college students. Thus, our findings indicate campus sexual assault prevention programs do have a meaningful impact on the health and safety of college students, as they produced favorable effects on victimization. Yet, the small magnitude of this effect suggests there is room for improvement. The small effect on violence could partially be explained by the fact that our meta-analysis was limited to studies that used the individual as the unit of analysis. This precluded the inclusion of programs that aim to foster larger cultural change, as opposed to individual change. For example, studies that assessed the effects of campus-wide resources or policies (e.g., creating spaces for dialogue about sexual assault on campus) on broad outcomes (e.g., campus-wide reports of sexual assault, the rate at which the student population accesses sexual assault services, etc.) were not eligible for inclusion. In fact, our systematic review of the literature indicated that evaluations of such programs are especially rare, as we only excluded a handful of studies that used a unit of analysis that was broader than the individual.

This tendency for the extant research to focus on individual attitudes and behaviors is potentially shortsighted, considering the fact that The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of viewing violence from an ecological perspective [192]. Such a perspective entails recognizing the multifaceted nature of violence as a product of interactions between the individual, social relationships (e.g., peers, intimate partners, and family members), community factors (e.g., schools, workplaces, neighborhoods), and societal factors (e.g., cultural norms and attitudes). From an ecological perspective, programs/studies that target individual attitudes/knowledge and use the individual as the unit of analysis only examine the most basic unit and ignore broader influences on campus sexual assault. Thus, in order to identify more effective approaches to preventing campus sexual assault, future programs that focus on broader influences (i.e., social relationships, community factors, and societal factors) should be developed, implemented, and empirically evaluated using rigorous research designs. If such programs prove to be effective, then the Campus SaVE Act might have a greater impact on campus sexual assault if it expands its programming mandate to ensure that students are offered prevention services that target factors lying at each level of the ecological model.

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