

**REPORT OF THE
STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA
AND THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM**

**The Need for the Identification,
Causes, Consequences, and Treatment
of Sexual Assault in Professional
Education Programs for Mental-Health
Treatment Providers**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 36

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
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PREFACE

Senate Joint Resolution No. 339, sponsored by Senator Janet Howell, directed the Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System "to study the need for the identification, causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault in professional education programs for currently licensed and certified, and future practitioners of psychiatry, psychology, professional and other counseling, social work, and psychiatric and mental-health specialty nursing." The resolution also requested that the Department of Health Professions "develop a plan for the certification of providers of mental-health and counseling services to sexual assault victims and offenders."

This report responds to that resolution. It includes information from the literature on professional education for providers of mental-health treatment, the results of a survey of institutions in Virginia, and recommendations for those who train providers of mental-health services in Virginia.

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Executive Summary

Senate Joint Resolution No. 339, sponsored by Senator Janet Howell, directed the Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System "to study the need for the identification, causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault in professional education programs for currently licensed and certified, and future practitioners of psychiatry, psychology, professional and other counseling, social work, and psychiatric and mental-health specialty nursing." The resolution also requested that the Department of Health Professions "develop a plan for the certification of providers of mental health and counseling services to sexual assault victims and offenders."

A survey about undergraduate and graduate programs in Virginia revealed that academic coursework specific to the identification or treatment of sexual-assault victims and offenders appears sporadically and often only as a part of generic training in victimization theory and practice. Both public and private institutions, as well as many of the state's community colleges, responded with data about the inclusion of (but not concentration on) the topic of sexual assault in coursework.

At the undergraduate and master's levels, degrees and licensure routinely require practicum experiences, but inclusion of specific experience related to treatment of those involved in sexual assault is not a part of the requirement. If a student engaged in a practicum happens to work with a sexual-assault victim or offender, it is a random occurrence. Occasionally at the doctoral level the area of sexual assault receives more time and attention, usually a required semester or six-month clinical rotation with only victim or offender clients.

Recommendations

1. Institutions preparing students to be treatment providers in the mental-health professions or school guidance counselors should ensure that at least one course required for these students includes explicit and substantial instruction about the causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault.
2. Coursework about sexual assault alone may not be adequate for preparing mental-health providers to offer treatment to victims or offenders. Institutions should include a component about the treatment of persons involved in a sexual assault in all supervised practicum experiences for mental-health providers.

The Need for the Identification, Causes, Consequences, and Treatment of Sexual Assault in Professional Education Programs for Mental-Health Treatment Providers

Senate Joint Resolution No. 339

Introduction

Senate Joint Resolution No. 339, sponsored by Senator Janet Howell, directed the Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System "to study the need for the identification, causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault in professional education programs for currently licensed and certified, and future practitioners of psychiatry, psychology, professional and other counseling, social work, and psychiatric and mental health specialty nursing." The resolution also requested that the Department of Health Professions "develop a plan for the certification of providers of mental health and counseling services to sexual assault victims and offenders."

Staff from the Council and the Virginia Community College System have collaborated to complete their part of the study and have consulted with the Department of Health Professions to learn about their recommendations in response to the resolution. The Department of Health Professions will submit to the General Assembly a separate report of their findings and recommendations in response to SJR No. 339. The report of the Council and the Virginia Community College System follows.

Background

Earlier legislative studies in Virginia In 1990 Senate Joint Resolution No. 194 directed the State Council of Higher Education to study sexual assault and rape on the campuses in Virginia. The Council surveyed higher-education institutions and 5,000 students across Virginia about campus sexual assault. The report of that study and recommendations of the Council are contained in Sexual Assault on Virginia's Campuses (Senate Document No. 17, 1992).

Senate Joint Resolution No. 108 of the 1992 General Assembly mandated a study of resources and modalities of treatment and education for juvenile sex offenders and community-based programs for child victims of sexual abuse. The commission, chaired by The Honorable Donald B. Beyer, Jr., also examined cost-effective mechanisms for the coordination and expansion of resources and treatment services. Senate Document No. 31 (1993), Report of The Commission on the Reduction of Sexual Assault Victimization in Virginia, contains the findings of that study.

House Joint Resolution No. 41 of the 1992 Virginia General Assembly directed the Department of Health Professions to study the need for special certification or other credentialing of providers of mental-health services to sexual-assault victims and sex offenders. The study,

conducted by a task force, included a review of the public record of recent policy studies of sexual assault in the nation and the Commonwealth, a review of the scientific and professional literature, a survey of other states, a public hearing, and the solicitation and review of public comments. Senate Document No. 17 (1993), Feasibility and Desirability of Establishing a Program of Certifying Persons Who Provide Mental Health Treatment to Sexual Assault Victims and Offenders, contains the findings of the study.

One of the recommendations in Senate Document No. 17 (1993) was that the Council and the Virginia Community College System study and resolve the need for greater exposure to the causes and consequences of sexual assault in professional educational programs for those who provide mental-health treatment. This recommendation became a part of Senate Joint Resolution No. 339. This report responds to that resolution.

Studies about training programs Alpert and Paulson (1990) state that there are few courses offered in psychology programs at the graduate level dealing specifically with sexual abuse and that students gain most of their knowledge about the topic through internships or externships. They suggest that a content course and a practicum about sexual abuse be offered in graduate programs.

Shrum and Halgin (1985) have reported on educating psychology majors about sexual victimization through a senior seminar at the University of Massachusetts. More than 50 students sought registration in the 20-person class. Course evaluations were unanimously positive, with students suggesting that the course be mandatory for all psychology majors. Shrum and Halgin suggest that in planning a similar course, the content be broadened to include additional forms of victimization. Two examples would be a course on various types of victimization or a course on family violence, including the topics of abuse of the elderly, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse.

Jackson, Long, and Skinner (1991) studied the need for formal training about sexual victimization for psychology doctoral students. They surveyed directors of clinical training about courses taught, number of hours allotted to sexual-assault topics, whether faculty were engaged in sexual-assault research, and the estimated number of client sexual victimizations in their clinics' female censuses. The results of their study support the need to include formal education and experiences in mental-health training programs in order to improve the provision of services to victims.

Jackson et al found a relationship between education and training in sexual assault and the estimated sexual-victimization rates of clients reported by mental-health providers. Providers who had had sexual-assault practicum experiences reported higher estimated percentages of assault victims. Estimated victim percentages were also related to whether the providers had been educated by faculty who were engaged in sexual-assault research. Compared with programs with no such faculty involvement, clinics of programs that had faculty active in sexual-assault research reported higher estimated percentages of assault victims.

Jackson *et al* hypothesize that since sexual-assault victims often are unable or hesitant to self-identify, it is necessary that mental-health professionals receive appropriate training to be able to recognize the symptoms associated with the trauma. Formal classroom instruction on sexual assault is important to prepare for the clinical experience, but the number of classroom hours spent on sexual assault alone does not correlate with the estimated percentage of victims. This finding suggests that learning facts and figures about sexual assault is not sufficient and that clinical training may be the more critical factor. Students who have a practicum experience working with victims or offenders of sexual assault, or who have professors who are researching sexual assault, seem to have a heightened awareness about the issue. These students (and later professionals) may be more likely to recognize sexual-assault victims or offenders and quickly begin appropriate and efficient treatment.

Description of the Study

The staff of the Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System surveyed all provosts and deans of instruction of the community colleges, as well as schools and departments in the fields of medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, and education at the four-year institutions. The staff sent 100 surveys, and the response rate was 75 percent.

The purpose of the survey was to determine what courses and practicum experiences related to sexual-assault treatment were required for degrees or certification of providers of mental-health treatment, professional counseling, or school guidance counseling, the last included specifically at the request of the sponsor of the bill, Senator Janet Howell. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey.

Results of the Survey

Survey results of undergraduate programs in Virginia revealed a considerable number of first-year orientation programs educating freshmen about sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both public and private institutions, as well as many of the state's community colleges, responded with data about the inclusion of the topic of sexual assault in coursework. Academic coursework specific to the identification or treatment of sexual-assault victims and offenders appears sporadically and often only as a part of generic training in victimization theory and practice.

At the undergraduate and master's levels, degrees and licensure routinely require practicum experiences, but inclusion of specific experience related to sexual assault is not a part of the requirement. If a student engaged in a practicum happens to work with a sexual-assault victim or offender, it is a random and not planned occurrence. Occasionally at the doctoral level the area of sexual assault receives a significant commitment of time and attention. Here it is usually a required semester or six-month clinical rotation with only victim or offender clients.

Community colleges In the community colleges, programs of nursing, and to some degree administration of justice, provide the most common source of education about treatment for sexual-assault victims and offenders. Students in nursing programs are required to take sociology and psychology courses that contain sections about sexual assault. Administration of justice courses in criminology, enforcement, and forensics also cover, among other topics, sexual assault. These community-college programs, however, are not designed to prepare graduates to provide treatment for victims or offenders.

Schools or departments of education At the graduate level, schools and departments of education prepare students to be school counselors. A limited number of required courses listed by respondents contain a general section (not specific to victims or offenders) about sexual assault. These are mostly courses on counseling theory, addiction, human sexuality, and ethics in counseling. Five institutions listed required courses with content about sexual-assault victims, but only one of those courses -- Professional Seminar in Counseling: Counseling Sexual-Assault Victims -- concentrates on the topic. The respondents listed no courses about sexual-assault offenders. While the institutions require students to complete an internship in the graduate programs, experience with sexual-assault victims or offenders is not specifically planned.

Schools or departments of social work In the area of social work, education for treating sexual-assault victims and offenders is also limited. Six of the 11 respondents reported requiring one, two, or three general courses with some sexual-assault content. Three of the institutions had between one and three required courses with content about sexual-assault victims and two had courses about, though not concentrating on, offenders. The required practica "may result" (a phrase respondents used often) in student experience about sexual-assault victims or offenders, but that experience may or may not occur.

Schools of nursing Of all the schools and departments surveyed, the schools of nursing offered the most required in-depth coverage of the topic of sexual assault. Virginia Commonwealth University's graduate program of nursing offers six courses with general sexual-assault content. Four of those courses are about victims and are required. Two of the courses also deal with offender treatment. The nursing programs at the University of Virginia and, to a lesser extent, Radford University and Old Dominion University, are similar. An experiential component dealing with sexual-assault victims or offenders, however, may or may not occur.

Schools of medicine Eastern Virginia Medical School has several required courses containing information about sexual assault. The Psychiatry Residence Training Program includes clinical rotations in which residents work with sexual-assault victims and offenders. The psychology program requires practicum experiences in treating sexual-assault offenders. The Graduate Art Therapy Program requires courses with content about sexual assault and also an internship at local abuse-victim shelters.

The Medical College of Virginia of Virginia Commonwealth University offers its students no formal courses about sexual assault and requires no practicum experience. The survey respondent stated, "Historically, the care of such patients is provided by faculty or resident

physicians who receive training post graduation from medical school."

The University of Virginia Medical School includes information about sexual assault in a first-year required course, Introduction to Human Behavior, and in a second-year course, Human Psychopathology. A third-year clerkship course to train primary-care physicians includes a hands-on component on ambulatory medicine. Part of this course focuses on physical- and sexual-assault reporting.

Departments of Psychology The only psychology program that requires a practicum experience about treatment of sexual-assault offenders is the Psychology Internship Program of the Eastern Virginia Medical School. The program includes a six-month rotation at The Pines (a private residential mental-health treatment facility in Portsmouth). Five of the eight respondents require no courses about identification and treatment of sexual-assault victims or offenders. The three remaining respondents each require one or two courses about sexual-assault victims, and one of the respondents requires a course about offenders. Again, other practicum experience about sexual assault may or may not occur.

Findings and Recommendations

Studies indicate that sexual victimization -- whether it be childhood sexual abuse, incest, sexual assault, or rape -- is a common occurrence. Because numerous methods are used to measure these incidence rates, it is difficult to accurately determine the scope of the victimization. The Virginia Department of State Police reports 2,008 forcible rapes in 1992. Data of Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) suggest that 27.5 percent of college women have experienced rape since the age of 14. The study of the Virginia Council of Higher Education indicates that nearly seven percent of Virginia's college students experience rape or attempted rape while attending college. Government estimates also suggest that for every rape reported, 3-10 rapes are committed but not reported.

It is not as clear that education and training is adequate for those who provide treatment for victims and offenders of sexual assault and rape. Findings of this study indicate that students seeking degrees, licensure, or certification in Virginia to provide mental-health services will likely receive some training about treating persons involved in sexual assault. However, the knowledge gained will be through courses that may or may not be required and that contain, but do not concentrate on, information about sexual abuse and assault. Training about this topic during practicum experiences may or may not occur.

Recommendations

1. Institutions preparing students to be treatment providers in the mental-health professions or school guidance counselors should ensure that at least one course required for these students includes explicit and substantial instruction about the causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault.

2. Coursework about sexual assault alone may not be adequate for preparing mental-health providers to offer treatment to victims or offenders. Institutions should include a component about the treatment of persons involved in a sexual assault in all supervised practicum experiences for mental-health providers.

Summary

Kathleen Giles, Ed.D., is the executive director of Contact Peninsula, a crisis-intervention agency in Newport News, Virginia. Her dissertation about therapy for adult survivors of incest discusses implications for educating therapists who treat these survivors. States Giles,

The question from one of the therapists for future study, "What's the most helpful way to educate therapists?" is well spoken. One of the policy questions at present concerning the future of mental health treatment for survivors is will we be content to find a few self-selected experts who have trained themselves both by continuing education and experience to treat the increasing volume of survivors seeking services? Or is there a way that the number of qualified professionals with specialized training in recovery from childhood sexual abuse can be increased rather quickly to take care of the volume of requests?

There may be an appropriate and thoughtful way to increase the number of qualified professionals who offer treatment for persons involved in a sexual assault. It is through encouragement that required coursework for training these professionals include explicit and substantial information about the causes, consequences, and treatment of victims and offenders of sexual assault, and that all practicum experiences include a component about this important topic.

Appendices

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 339

Requesting certain state agencies to develop a certification plan for providers of treatment to sexual offenders and to study the need for training in the identification and treatment of sexual abuse.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 19, 1993

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 17, 1993

WHEREAS, Senate Joint Resolution No. 41 (1992) requested that the Department of Health Professions investigate the feasibility and desirability of establishing a program for certifying or otherwise assessing the credentials of persons, particularly therapists, who provide mental health treatment to victims of sexual assault and sexual assault offenders, and submit a report to the Governor and the 1993 Session of the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Health Professions has completed that investigation, and the report is published as Senate Document No. 17, 1993; and

WHEREAS, the investigation found that there are a number of persons who offer mental health services to sexual assault victims and a wide variation in their education, training, and experience; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to better prepare mental health and counseling professionals for practices which will include significant numbers of sexual assault victims and sexual assault offenders; and

WHEREAS, the need for better preparation includes training at the practice entry level and assurances of continued competency throughout the professional careers of such persons; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Health Professions found that there is a need for certification of such professionals by the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, specialized training and testing are warranted for these providers to protect the public from the sex offender and to ensure accountability for the treatment; and

WHEREAS, this certification should be in addition to licensure or certification within an existing professional group (e.g., psychiatry, clinical or other psychology, professional or other counseling, clinical social work, psychiatric clinical nurse specialist) in all cases in which a license or certificate to practice in the Commonwealth is required; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That certain state agencies be requested to develop a certification plan for providers of treatment to sexual offenders and to study the need for training in the identification and treatment of sexual abuse. The agencies shall be requested to perform the following:

1. The State Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System are requested to study the need for the identification, causes, consequences, and treatment of sexual assault in professional education programs for currently licensed and certified, and future practitioners of psychiatry, psychology, professional and other counseling, social work, and psychiatric and mental health specialty nursing. The State Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System are requested to consult with all relevant public and private agencies in documenting and meeting the need for such programs.

2. The Department of Health Professions is requested to develop a plan for the certification of providers of mental health and counseling services to sexual assault victims and offenders. The plan for certification shall include: (i) appropriate statutory changes required to accommodate the certification process; (ii) proposed regulations for the implementation of the certification program, including all requirements for certification; (iii) a mechanism for the phased implementation of the certification program; and (iv) a system to evaluate the effectiveness and utilization of the certification program at the end of five years to determine the need for its continuation. The Department is requested to develop the plan in consultation with the relevant regulatory boards and other appropriate public and private agencies.

The State Council of Higher Education, the Virginia Community College System, and the Department of Health Professions shall complete their work in time to submit their findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1994 General Assembly in accordance with the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

Appendix B

**Survey About Sexual-Assault Professional Education for
Treatment Providers for Victims and Offenders**

Please complete and return this survey by Friday, October 8, to: Dr. Vicki Mistr, Council of Higher Education, 101 N. 14th St., 9th floor, Richmond, VA 23219.

Name of Respondent _____

Department or School _____

Institution _____

Address _____

Phone _____ FAX _____

- (1) Do any courses required for degrees or certification* in your department or school cover content about sexual assault?

If so, please list the courses that address sexual assault and briefly describe their content.

- (2) Do any courses required for degrees or certification* specifically address identification and treatment of sexual-assault victims?

If so, list and briefly describe them.

- (3) Do any courses required for degrees or certification* specifically address identification and treatment of sexual-assault offenders?

If so, list and briefly describe them.

- (4) What experiential components, e.g. internships, that relate to sexual assault are required in your department or school?

- (5) Is the topic of sexual assault addressed in other courses not mentioned above? Please explain.

- (6) Please add any other information you wish to provide about sexual assault education for treatment providers for victims and offenders.

* Refers to degrees or certification for students training to provide professional mental health or rehabilitation treatment, or training to provide public school guidance counseling.

Thank you for your assistance.

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