A Public Health Approach to Sexual Violence

My Role in this Session

• Present the scientific (public health) perspective
  – Current research and status of the field
  – Comprehensive approaches and best practices
• Frame the rest of the session

Law & Science

• To address foreseeable risk proactively, must consider what is effective in preventing problems

• Law can lead to narrow focus on compliance, liability avoidance
  – Stipulates what is required (or allowed)
  – Often no regard for effectiveness

• The question of effectiveness is one for science
  – Consider law in structuring solutions, but shouldn’t dictate solutions
What is “Prevention?”

**Spectrum of Prevention & Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Early Intervention</th>
<th>Response &amp; Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stop problems from occurring by reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors</td>
<td>Intervene early in problem behavior</td>
<td>Assist victim, Sanktion/treat offender, Crisis intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These also have a role in supporting prevention.

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**How to prevent problems?**

Public health model:

- Define & understand the problem
- Identify the contributing factors
  - Envision the “chain of events” that result in the problem
- Institute measures intervening in that chain of events
  - Combination of programs, policies, services, systems
- Evaluate to examine whether problems were prevented
  - Use that information to design better efforts

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**What is “Effective?”**

- No simple answer
  - Sexual assault is complex, with multiple causes
  - Current research reveals more about what doesn’t work
  - Diversity of college environments => no “one size fits all” program or policy
- Community prevention research & public health suggest principles and a process
- Elements of a comprehensive approach to campus violence outlined in Higher Education Center “framework”

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Focus on 3 Principles

- Data-driven
- Defined goals and objectives
- Coordinated

"Data-Driven" Planning

Solutions must be driven by

- The nature of the problem
  - Example:
    - Lighting, escort services -> primarily address stranger rape
    - BUT vast majority of campus rapists are not total strangers
      -> Need other approaches as well
  - Its causes and contributors

Violence Has Multiple Causes/Contributors

Any violent event results from combination of:

- Risk Factors
- Protective Factors
- "Vulnerability" Factors - past victimization is main predictor

Factors occur across the Social Ecological Model

- Individual factors
- Group (peer) factors
- Institutional factors
- Community factors
- Public policy

"Environmental"
Types of Contributing Factors & Examples

- Individual factors = within the individual person
  - e.g., Attitudes and beliefs: Belief in “rape myths”
- Interpersonal factors = group, peer, family factors
  - e.g., Perceived norms: Perceived peer support for aggressive behavior
- Institutional factors = structures, incentives of the IHE
  - e.g., Policies & enforcement: Inadequate policies against sexual assault
- Community factors = structures, incentives of local community
  - e.g., Community policies: Lack of law enforcement response to student behavior
- Policy/societal factors = state & federal policies, larger culture
  - e.g., Cultural/society factors: Male gender role socialization

Risk is Highest with a Convergence of Factors

- High-risk settings combining various elements
  - High levels of alcohol in the environment
  - Beliefs about what is acceptable
  - Lax restrictions on behavior
  - etc.
- Planners must address:
  - Multiple risk, protective, & vulnerability factors
  - Both individual and environmental factors
  - Both distal and proximal factors

In general: Most campus sexual assault prevention efforts do not follow standards of good prevention science

- Poorly conceptualized, unfocused
  - Unclear goals and objectives
    - Don’t address specific causes
    - Desired behavior changes unclear
  - Goals not differentiated by gender
    - No local problem analysis
- Lack intensity, fragmented
  - One-time, brief programs
  - Scattered efforts -- don’t reinforce one another
Clear Goals and Objectives = Getting out of the “Activity Trap”

Paradigm Shift: Activities to Strategies

Instead of asking: What are we going to DO?  
E.g., Conduct a workshop

Ask: What are we trying to CHANGE? 
E.g., Increase knowledge of the elements of sexual consent

Paradigm Shift: Activities to Strategies

- Strategic approach
  - Identify needed changes
  - Jargon alert — these are “goals/objectives” or “outcomes”
  - Then determine which activities will work best to achieve those goals/outcomes
- Identify goals/outcomes based on a problem analysis
Planning/Evaluation Process
Problem Analysis/Needs Assessment
- Set long-range goals
- Consult the literature
- Select program strategies, translate these into specific activities, and plan for evaluation
- Implement program activities
- Evaluate whether goals were achieved

In reality, this is a non-linear process
- Logic model
- Eval Plan
- Task plan

Start with: Problem Analysis
(sometimes, "needs assessment")
- Gather and analyze data to understand the problem locally
- Questions to Answer:
  1. What are the problems? (Extent, patterns, effects)
     - Including alcohol involvement
  2. What factors cause or contribute to the problems?
     - Look at research literature as well as your campus
  3. What is the current situation: Existing initiatives & resources? Political climate?

Key Point
Strategies & activities flow from problem analysis
- Problem/contributing factors
- What needs to be changed (strategic objective)
- Specific strategies/program content
- Program activities/method of delivery
- Then, coordinate across activities
Looking at Current Efforts, Program Planners Should Be Able to Articulate…..

- What contributing factor is each program/policy element intended to change?
- What do these change goals imply about the problem?
- Does research and/or local data:
  - Support that view of the problem?
  - Suggest changing the targeted factor will affect sexual assault?
- Focus is on critical thinking & checking against research
- Must be specific – get beyond goals like “raise awareness”

Example: Content of Orientation Theater Piece

- Can you answer the previous questions about each element….?
  - Statistics about rape
  - Dramatization of a rape survivor’s experience
  - Myths/facts, e.g., “Rape only occurs in poor, urban environments”
  - American gender roles and cultural expectations
  - Images from the media that objectify women
  - Definition of consent
  - Resources for survivors
  - How to get involved in rape prevention efforts

Coordination and Synergy

- Coordination: efforts more effective if they reinforce one another
  - Make sure all efforts refer to each other, build on common themes
    - e.g., Create a deliberate sequence of educational efforts over the year
  - Create systems, procedures to coordinate
    - E.g., every fall, all educational programs share program outlines
    - When one department changes procedures, always notify others

- Also, go beyond coordination to synergy
  - Unite diverse efforts conceptually, across problems
  - Address common underlying risk factors
Issues and Questions Raised by Lisak’s Research

Effectiveness Gap is Even Wider

- Existing efforts assumes problem = well-intentioned guys who err based on immaturity, ignorance, miscommunication, intoxication
  - Prevention: teach them to avoid these mistakes
  - Sanctions: educate them not to repeat mistakes
- Problem definition based on Lisak research:
  - Many (not all) incidents perpetrated by predatory men who premeditate acts
  - Most prevention/response doesn’t address these dynamics

Recommendation #1
Expand Problem Definition

- Solutions must address heterogeneous dynamics
  - Different solutions for predatory acts
  - High rates of violence against women => need for universal efforts as well
- 2 complicating factors:
  - General beliefs about what constitutes a “real” rape
  - Competing theories of causation among stakeholders
Recommendation #2
Improve Design of All Initiatives

- **Comprehensive**: along the spectrum of prevention -> response
- **Planned**: systematic process, start with analysis
- **Research-based**: addresses contributors; avoids what doesn’t work
- **Targeted**: defined goals and objectives, audiences
- **Coordinated**: multiple approaches that work in sync
- **Supported**: infrastructure, systems

Recommendation #3
Use Truly Interdisciplinary Solutions

- We all know collaboration is important….
- But
  - Efforts must be driven by a deep understanding of the problem
  - Must surface and balance competing “first priorities,” e.g.,
    - Public health = research-based, follow principles of effectiveness
    - Legal = legality, rights, case law, duty
    - Victim advocates = support, healing, avoiding retraumatization
    - Law enforcement = conduct investigation, criminal responsibility
    - Judicial….
    - Housing… etc.

Rest of Session

- Goal is to begin to have that interdisciplinary discussion, particularly with Lisak’s research in mind
- Brief presentations
- Facilitated discussion
  - Submit your questions on the question cards
Resources

- Resource list in your materials
- Website: www.HigherEdCenter.org
  - > 100 Free Publications
  - Preventing Violence and Promoting Safety in Higher Education Settings: Overview of a Comprehensive Approach
  - Environmental Management (alcohol and other drug prevention)
  - Fact Sheets

Higher Education Center
for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education

www.HigherEdCtr.org
1-800-676-1730