

Institutional Responses to Campus Sexual Assault: Examining the Development and Work of A Multidisciplinary Team

Julie M. Olomi M.A., Anne P. DePrince & Kerry L. Gagnon

To cite this article: Julie M. Olomi M.A., Anne P. DePrince & Kerry L. Gagnon (2019) Institutional Responses to Campus Sexual Assault: Examining the Development and Work of A Multidisciplinary Team, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 20:3, 324-339, DOI: [10.1080/15299732.2019.1571886](https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2019.1571886)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2019.1571886>



Published online: 09 May 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 9



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Institutional Responses to Campus Sexual Assault: Examining the Development and Work of A Multidisciplinary Team

Julie M. Olomi M.A., Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D., and Kerry L. Gagnon, Ph.D.

Psychology Department, University of Denver, Denver, CO, USA

ABSTRACT

Responding to campus sexual assault can involve complex processes and procedures that span campus, criminal justice, and community-based institutions, particularly when there are co-occurring Title IX and criminal investigations. This study investigated the development of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) that involved campus, criminal justice, and community-based institutions seeking to improve coordinated responses to campus sexual assault. Data included observations of MDT monthly meetings over 16 months as well as individual interviews with MDT members. Transcripts of the MDT meetings and individual interviews were coded to capture major themes. The MDT meetings were dynamic and flexible with a structure that involved intentional agenda setting along with responsiveness to current events and collaborative processes. The MDT invested more time during the meetings addressing the complexity of navigating existing procedures than developing new protocols. Individual interviews with MDT members highlighted logistical challenges that were relevant to MDT effectiveness, such as consistent attendance, supervisor legitimacy, and differences in stakeholder priorities. Implications for future MDT work are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Sexual assault; title IX;
campus sexual assault;
multidisciplinary team (MDT)

In recent years, campus sexual assault has garnered both research and policy attention in light of alarming prevalence rates (see Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007) and failures of institutions to prevent and/or respond appropriately to such assaults (Smith & Freyd, 2013). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education issued a “Dear Colleague” letter, which detailed the obligations of educational institutions to respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence by conducting adequate, reliable, and impartial investigations (US Department of Education, 2011). Schools had been required to address campus sexual assault as a violation of student’s civil rights since the 1980s (*Alexander v. Yale University*, 1980; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2001), but the 2011 “Dear Colleague” Letter provided substantial clarifications and identified best

CONTACT Julie M. Olomi, M.A.  julie.olomi@du.edu  Department of Psychology, University of Denver, 2155 South Race Street, Denver, CO 80208

Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/wjtd.

© 2019 Taylor & Francis

practices regarding the investigation and adjudication of campus sexual assault. Indeed, the letter emphasized that sexual assault was a violation of Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in education. The letter also suggested a series of guidelines for schools to follow to ensure their procedures met Title IX requirements and that their responses to sexual violence were adequate. The letter further indicated that schools not in compliance with the encouraged guidelines were at risk of losing their federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011).

The “Dear Colleague” letter left the involvement of the criminal justice system to the judgment of the educational institutions: “in cases involving potential criminal conduct, school personnel must determine, consistent with State and local law, whether appropriate law enforcement or other authorities should be notified (p. 5).” Further, the letter explicitly stated that educational institutions “should not wait for the conclusion of a criminal investigation or criminal proceeding to begin their own Title IX investigation, and if needed, must take immediate steps to protect the student in the educational setting (p. 10).” Thus, the “Dear Colleague” letter alerted campuses to their responsibilities, but left unclear whether and how campuses were to work with criminal justice institutions in the face of co-occurring Title IX and criminal investigations, which have different standards of proof, investigative procedures, and timelines.

Differences between the investigative and adjudicative procedures across educational and criminal justice institutions seemed likely to cause confusion among professionals and victims, as has been the case in other kinds of responses to sexual assault where there is lack of coordination (Campbell & Ahrens, 1998; Campbell, 1998). Sexual assaults that are reported to a higher education institution and law enforcement will prompt co-occurring investigations, which can be in tension with one another given the different timelines and obligations of professionals from the respective institutions (e.g. different standards of evidence, investigative interview protocols, confidentiality limitations, etc.). In their study examining community responses to rape, Campbell and Ahrens (1998) point to the “long-standing problems of miscommunication and lack of communication between service providers who assist rape victims” in which providers are not connected across systems and therefore do not know the role and function of other organizations. This in turn not only leads to confusion for service providers, but also for survivors. Reflecting the challenges in co-occurring investigations, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault issued guidance in 2014 on developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between educational and criminal justice institutions for the purposes of preventing and responding to campus sexual assault (Department of Justice, Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014). Coordination is further complicated when sexual assaults involve more than one institution of higher education. For example, if a sexual assault is perpetrated by a student at one institution of higher education against

a student at another institution, differences in responses by each institution can create challenges for victims who disclose.

The multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach to responding to sexual assault that was emphasized in the 2014 White House Task Force call for MOUs between educational and criminal justice institutions is not a new concept. Sexual assault response teams (SARTs), which are teams comprised of diverse professionals (e.g., law enforcement, prosecutors, community-based providers), have been implemented since the 1970s in order to address the lack of coordinated responses to sexual assault in the general population (Greeson & Campbell, 2013). These teams have facilitated collaborative relationships (Campbell & Ahrens, 1998) as well as been linked with improved victim experiences (e.g. less traumatic process) (Noble, Brannon-Patel, & Tysoe, 2001) and legal outcomes (Campbell, Greeson, Bybee, & Fehler-Cabral, 2012; Nugent-Borakove et al., 2006). Groups like SARTs, however, were not developed to address the range of issues that arise in campus sexual assault cases where co-occurring campus and criminal justice investigations may come into conflict and create specific challenges for victims.

To date, higher education and criminal justice institutions have had to find ways to be responsive to their respective obligations in the absence of research to guide best practices for coordinated responses to co-occurring investigations. While government policies and guidance have a significant part to play in ensuring appropriate responses to campus sexual assault, ecological theory points to the importance of interventions developed *in and by* communities for addressing complex problems (see Campbell, Patterson, & Fehler-Cabral, 2010; Hawe, Shiell, & Riley, 2009; Kelly, 2006). Action research, with a focus on documenting emerging practice and impact (Stringer, 1999), has the potential to be a powerful tool for identifying best practices that can help communities coordinate responses across higher education, criminal justice, and community-based institutions, and support the investigation and adjudication of campus sexual assault cases.

The current study focused on the development and implementation of a MDT that included representatives from educational (public, private), criminal justice, and community-based victim advocacy institutions in a single jurisdiction. Using an action research approach, our research team was embedded in the MDT in order to document the emerging practices of the group as they sought to develop coordinated responses to campus sexual assault across institutions. Our research team observed and transcribed MDT monthly meetings to identify the central issues addressed by the MDT over time (Part 1). Additionally, individual interviews with MDT members were conducted to assess perceptions of the impact of the MDT on individual effectiveness as well as challenges to the MDT (Part 2).

Part 1: method

Study site

The study site was an urban jurisdiction in the Rocky Mountain West with a long-standing coordinating council dedicated to ensuring a consistent, collaborative, and victim-centered response to sexual assault. In 2014, following the federal guidance on developing MOUs across educational and criminal justice institutions, a subgroup of that coordinating council established a MDT to focus on coordinating institutional responses to campus sexual assault across educational (including five institutions of higher education, both public and private), criminal, and community-based institutions. This study began in 2015.

Participants

MDT members included representatives from higher education (public, private), community, and criminal justice offices with responsibilities relevant to campus sexual assault (e.g., Public Safety, Title IX investigators/coordinators, counselors, General Counsels, police officers). All MDT members were adult professionals, including both men and women. An average of thirteen ($SD = 3.5$, Range 9–21) MDT members attended each meeting.

Materials

MDT meetings

Observations of the MDT monthly meetings were gathered from March 2015 to August 2017 for a total of 16 meetings. Real-time transcripts of the MDT meetings were created and then coded for major themes (see Data Analysis section for further details regarding the coding).

Procedures

The study was approved by a university institutional review board. Researchers attended the MDT monthly meetings. Prior to the start of each meeting, the researchers gave a brief overview of the study and explained procedures for in-vivo transcription and confidentiality. Following this overview, the meetings were transcribed in real-time. Each member had a nameplate in front of them that listed a code name by which notes were taken. This procedure allowed tracking of individual speakers during the meeting (which may not have been possible by audio) while also ensuring that data were stored anonymously. Anonymous data storage was prioritized to minimize the impact of observation and transcription on MDT members' participation in the group discussion. Members had the option to lay down their nameplate at any time if they wanted their comments to be excluded from notes; this option was rarely exercised.

Data analysis

Based on the transcriptions of the MDT meetings, a coding system was developed using a bottom-up approach. The bottom-up approach sought to generate themes from observations of the MDT meetings, in which researchers had no a priori expectations but rather developed themes directly from the transcripts (Campbell & Ahrens, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The authors read through a randomly selected subset of transcripts and identified thematic categories. Authors then discussed these categories; eventually settling on themes that accounted for the breadth of topics covered in the MDT meetings and to make sure that the themes were mutually exclusive. The bottom-up approach resulted in the identification of seven major themes.

A primary rater coded all of the transcripts, and a second rater double coded 50% of the transcripts separately to ensure the reliability of the coding system. Transcripts were coded in random order. Any differences between the coders were resolved in consensus coding.

Data were analyzed using percentages of utterances within a meeting for each theme. An utterance was defined as one person's continuous contribution to the discussion. For example, one person might have articulated three sentences before someone else made a comment. Those three sentences were treated as a single utterance. Theme(s) were then identified within that utterance. Overall utterances during a meeting, and percentage of each theme across utterances were then counted. An utterance could have more than one theme present.

Part 1: results

Analysis of meeting transcripts revealed seven themes: (1) information sharing, (2) current procedures, (3) problem-solving, (4) MDT process, (5) new procedures, (6) case consultation, and (7) policy discussion. Results are presented in terms of average percent utterances for each theme across all meetings (Table 1) as well as within each meeting (Figure 1). As illustrated in Figure 1, the MDT appeared to be dynamic and responsive to emerging issues and challenges over the course of 16 months, rather than tackling issues (e.g., new procedures) sequentially and then moving on to new topics.

Themes

Information sharing

The Information Sharing theme captured when MDT members provided educational or instructive material related to the group's campus sexual assault mission, but which was not directly relevant to new or current investigatory practices, case consultation, or policy categories. For example, a member presenting on new local

Table 1. Percentage of MDT meeting total utterances spent on each theme.

Theme	Percentages of total utterances	Example Response
Information Sharing	21	"Next month is Sexual Assault Awareness month and our university is organizing an event about it" "This is a community resource that may be as it may facilitate anonymous reporting"
Current Procedures	19	"How long do Title IX investigators have to provide a decision on your campus?"
Problem Solving	15	"We are having issues with DNA testing and timing – it can affect the outcome of the case but takes way too long." "Is there a way we can take it into consideration without having to reopen the case?" "Maybe the university can take it into account despite the case being closed?" "If we set up individual trainings for the group, would this be helpful?"
MDT Process	14	"We're going to have to figure out how to share and coordinate interviews and how we are going to record those"
New Procedures	11	"The defendant's friends are blackmailing the complainant"
Case Consultation	6	"We are having a situation where a non-English speaker has come forward and we are having issues with translation."
Policy Discussion	5	"Is this new administration going to change Title IX requirements for schools?" "A bill is currently being discussed regarding accommodations for campus sexual assault victims and breaking their lease."

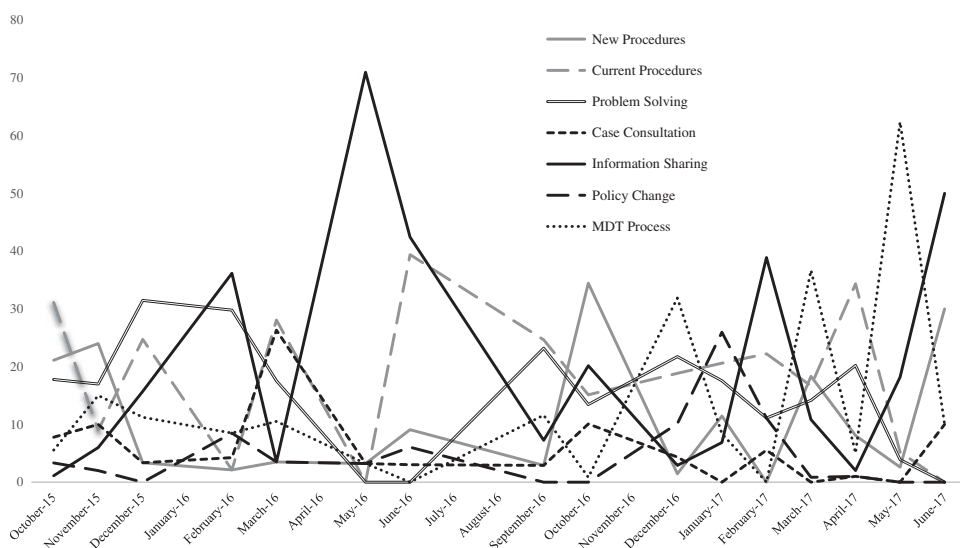


Figure 1. Percent of utterances for each identified theme by MDT meetings.

or national services that could improve responses to campus sexual assault (e.g., texting hotlines) would be captured here. The information that was shared included cross-trainings and updates on related current events. Cross-trainings were training presentations from representatives of institutions whose work pertains to campus sexual assault (e.g., legal center, Title IX investigator) and are used to broaden MDT members' understanding of different practices. The majority of Information Sharing utterances related to cross-trainings in the MDT meetings addressed specific issues, spanning Title IX presentations to legal explanations, and appeared to reflect the group's major concerns and interests. The cross-trainings that produced the most conversation in the meetings involved legal information (e.g., what constitutes a felony as opposed to misdemeanor, how can a university get sued), how to best respond to victims (e.g., discussing research findings regarding sexual assault survivors and their experience disclosing to service providers), and how to best use evidence collected outside of the university or criminal justice system (e.g., what constitutes a SANE exam and who should use that information).

Current procedures

The Current Procedures theme included discussions of current procedures in campus sexual assault cases (e.g., investigative, adjudicative). Topics consisted of clarifications and discussions of current procedures for all MDT members. This theme included MDT members asking for clarification about another member's agency as well as members' formal and informal descriptions of their organizations.

Problem-solving

The problem-solving theme captured MDT members' discussion that identified a problem in current policy or practice that affected organizations' abilities to respond to campus sexual assault cases. Problem-solving was a relatively consistent focus of the MDT over time. Across meetings, problem-solving focused on addressing challenges that arose from variation in Title IX processes across institutions that had a negative impact on criminal justice responses, community-based support for victims, and inter-campus collaboration. For example, if a complainant and respondent attended different institutions of higher education, then differences in Title IX processes at each institution could present challenges as both schools tried to respond to the case. Problem-solving discussion also focused on resolving communication issues. For example, the MDT addressed how to improve campus and police communication to ensure appropriate information sharing when issues did not rise to the level of requiring timely-warning for public safety, but were still relevant to both campus and law enforcement organizations effectiveness. Additionally, the problem-solving discussion focused on clarifying terms and definitions used by the MDT members. For example, clarifying terms and definitions of sexual assault acts that might not rise to the level of a crime (e.g. "sexual fondling"). Similarly, problem-solving discussion focused on clarifying confusion caused by differences in civil versus criminal legal issues to further facilitate collaboration with law enforcement.

MDT process

The MDT Process theme included checking in on the direction of the MDT (including reflection on how to best facilitate the group) and self-evaluation. An example of MDT process was the group facilitator inquiring about members' interests in using MDT meeting time to address specific training needs or determining a shared agenda for moving the MDT forward. The group discussed its direction and purpose as well as engaged in self-evaluative conversation and surveys. While the group remained focused on Title IX issues and their action items, self-evaluation was an important component of the group discussions. Discussions around MDT process were especially relevant when several action items were wrapping up and leadership was changing.

New procedures

The New Procedures theme included generating new ideas for and troubleshooting investigative procedures, both within a single organization (e.g., police department) as well as across multiple MDT organizations (e.g., establishing a MOU between each institution of higher education and the police department as suggested by federal guidance on Title IX).

Case consultation

The Case Consultation theme captured when MDT members from different organizations shared information about a specific legal case to receive advice about, learn from, and/or provide an update on a case. MDT members often used real-life case examples to illustrate Title IX challenges as they arose. Case consultations were a small but consistent theme across time, as displayed in Figure 1. During case consultations, MDT members discussed concrete examples to illustrate challenges that their individual agencies faced as well as collaboration challenges between agencies. For instance, a university sought consultation when confronted with a case in which the cultural background of the victim emerged as an important factor to consider during the implementation of Title IX regulations. In discussions of the cultural, linguistic, and ethical issues that arose in the case, the agency articulated the challenges they faced and the MDT provided advice on how best to collaborate with criminal justice providers while respecting the victim's cultural background.

Policy discussion

The Policy Discussion theme captured discussions involving any current or potential policy changes and their impact on organizations' handling of campus sexual assault cases. MDT members, for example, discussed the impact of local and federal election results on their organizations' handling of campus sexual assault cases (e.g., impact on victim rights, funding, and potential job loss). Though MDT members were not necessarily in positions to create a new policy, discussion focused on the impact that external events might have on their work. For example, in light of local and federal election results, the MDT discussed potential implications for local and federal policies that intersect with responses to campus sexual assault. Outside the uptick in time spent discussing policy after the 2016 election, policy discussions represented a consistent, but small theme across time. Typically, the ongoing focus involved legislative updates that were relevant to the MDT members (e.g., when state law changed to make strangulation a felony).

Part 2: method

Participants

Ten individual MDT members were interviewed at the start of this research when observation of the MDT began (Part 1). The majority of individual interviews were conducted with participants working for education institutions ($n = 7$), the majority of whom served undergraduate and graduate students. In addition to participants from law enforcement and community-based agencies ($n = 3$).

Materials

Participants were invited to share perceptions of the MDT's effectiveness as well as their own effectiveness within the group using a semi-structured interview schedule developed for the purpose of this study. Using primarily open-ended questions, the interview covered two major topics: current perceptions of the internal functioning of the group (e.g. *"If you could keep one thing about this group, what would it be?"*); and current perceptions of the participant's effectiveness within the group (e.g. *"In what ways is being part of this group important to you?"*). Information was also collected about participants and their agencies, including their agencies' primary purpose (e.g. advocacy, adjudication, etc.), information regarding the students they provide services to (e.g. undergraduate, commuter, international etc.), and how long they had been working in their current position.

Procedure

MDT members were invited to take part in an hour-long individual interview in which they were asked about their perceptions of the MDT's effectiveness. A list of all consistent MDT attendees was generated, resulting in 19 potential participants. Of those, 10 responded to the invitation to participate within the study timeline. Interviews were conducted in person or over the phone. Consent information was provided both orally and in written form.

Data analysis

MDT member's responses to the open-ended questions were transcribed verbatim using audio recordings from the interviews. A coding system was then developed using a top-down approach. The coding system was developed based on previously identified thematic categories that were direct reflections of the main topics in the interview protocol. The authors also discussed the thematic categories to ensure that the coding system accurately captured the range of topics covered in the interviews. Two major themes were identified for the purpose of the current study, (1) Individual Impact of the MDT and (2) Barriers to MDT Effectiveness. From these two major themes and for clarity purposes, a bottom-up approach was used to further divide these themes into sub-categories.

Similar to Part 1 procedures, the primary rater read and coded all of the transcripts based on the coding system. A second rater then double coded 30% of the transcripts separately to ensure reliability of the coding system. Coders coded the transcripts in random order. There was good agreement between the two raters, and any differences between the coders were resolved in consensus coding for the final analyses.

Part 2: results

MDT members discussed two major themes during the individual interviews, encompassing several sub-categories each: (1) Individual Impact of the MDT (Networking and Collaboration, Important Resource and Information Sharing, and Facilitating Productivity), (2) Barriers to MDT Effectiveness (Time Constraints, Institutional Buy-In, Attendance Consistency and Accountability, Treading Water, and Conflicting Interests) (Table 2).

Individual impact of the MDT

The Individual Impact of the MDT theme reflected participants' sentiments about the benefits of the MDT to individual group members. These positive sentiments fell into three categories: Networking and Collaboration, Important Resource and Information Sharing, and Facilitating Productivity. First, all participants reported appreciating the ability to make connections and network with others. Specifically, participants reported that being able to meet and build relationships with

Table 2. Percentage of individual members responses by theme.

Theme	Percentages members responses	Example Response
Individual Impact of the MDT		
Networking and Collaboration	100	<i>"It's been really helpful to reach out to my counterpart in another university and hear that they are facing the same challenges I am." "I feel like it's easier to be accountable to victims when I can speak to someone directly and have them explain to us what's going on with the case."</i>
Important Resource and Information Sharing	90	<i>"I was able to connect with a very much needed resource within a week, and I wouldn't have known where to look if it weren't for the working group."</i>
Facilitating Productivity	60	<i>"These new connections and tools I have developed and learned about in the group has helped me do better at my job"</i>
Barriers to MDT Effectiveness		
Time Constraint	90	<i>"Time is definitely the number one cost of attending, especially since I could be seeing clients in need."</i>
Institutional Buy-In	70	<i>"My boss doesn't really understand why I spend a whole morning on this, they think it's a volunteering event."</i>
Attendance Consistency and/or Accountability	60	<i>"The same members don't always show up, so we often end up having the same conversations but with new people who weren't aware we had already talked about this." "We need a point person to hold each other accountable for the projects we take on – otherwise we don't really see them get done."</i>
Treading Water	60	<i>"I feel like we talk a lot but we haven't been progressing much since the MOU."</i>
Conflicting Interests	40	<i>"I feel like it can be hard to juggle between the members who are more focused on compliance when others want to talk about prevention – it's a little bit of a tug of war."</i>

colleagues across institutions facilitated their work responding to campus sexual assault cases. Second, participants indicated that the MDT meetings also provided a space for members who held the same positions at different institutions to network and learn from each other. Further, participants reported that the MDT meetings helped providers to connect with other institutions more quickly when consultation or outreach was needed. Six out of the 10 participants reported that being part of the MDT and collaborating with other members had directly facilitated their own work responding to campus sexual assault cases. Additionally, the majority of participants ($n = 9$) reported that the MDT facilitated important resource and information sharing, such as legal and policy updates, and cross trainings on different members' organizations. Third, 70% ($n = 7$) of participants cited specific MDT accomplishments as significant for their sense of effectiveness and desire to participate. For example, participants cited the development of the MOU as an example of a concrete outcome of the group's work, which made attendance worthwhile.

Barriers to MDT effectiveness

The Barriers to MDT Effectiveness theme reflected challenges or areas where improvement was needed. These areas of improvements fell into five categories: Time Constraints, Institutional Buy-In, Attendance Consistency and Accountability, Treading Water, and Conflicting Interests. Ninety percent of participants ($n = 9$) cited time as a barrier to participating in the MDT in light of the monthly meeting commitment (1.5 hours) and time to commute to the meeting location (which was 30 min or more for some participants). Seven out of the 10 participants described concerns that their institutions did not value the MDT, which made using the time to attend the MDT meetings difficult to justify. Unfortunately, poor attendance had an impact on members' perceptions of the group. Six out of ten participants reported that the effectiveness of the group was negatively affected when members did not attend consistently or were not accountable to the group. Participants described that high turnover rates at institutions (which led to changes in membership in the group) as well as inconsistent attendance impeded work across meetings. Indeed, although most participants acknowledged the MDT's concrete accomplishments, six of them also described concerns about the group's ability to move forward and be effective. Specifically, participants expressed frustration that bringing new MDT members up to speed caused the group to revisit topics, and that discussion of potential actions did not necessarily translate into actions. Finally, four out of the 10 participants expressed concern that the different roles and perspectives of MDT members sometimes led to valuing one approach or topic over other important approaches or topics (e.g., emphasis on compliance over advocacy).

Discussion

The current study documented the emerging practices of a MDT comprised of representatives from educational, criminal justice, and community-based institutions as they sought to coordinate responses to campus sexual assault. The monthly MDT meetings revealed several things about cross-institutional responses to campus sexual assault that are applicable to other communities seeking to build collaborative responses. First, though the 2014 White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault guidance on developing MOUs was an impetus for the convening of this group, the MDT did not narrowly respond to that issue and then disband. Instead, the group continued to convene and actively address issues that emerged over time. Though each meeting had a pre-set agenda, the group flexibly shifted attention to problems that were identified during the course of their discussion. Indeed, the specific problems identified and discussed were rarely the focus of the formal meeting agenda. Instead, problem-solving discussions about issues, such as discrepancies in terms and communication, typically emerged from other topics, suggesting that in-person dialogue was key to their work together.

The MDT's consistent focus on problem-solving highlights the complexity of campus sexual assault responses across institutions, where ongoing collaborative work is needed to address problems that arise in the implementation of coordinated procedures. The MDT meetings also focused considerable time on discussion of current procedures, with twice as many utterances related to current relative to new procedures. The emphasis on current over new procedures suggests at least two interesting things. First, co-occurring investigations were complicated by the fact that each institution has its own procedures. To operate effectively as an MDT, members invested considerable time in clarifying procedures at each other's institutions. Second, the initial motivation for the group to convene was to address the federal advisement regarding MOUs between educational and criminal justice institutions, which might suggest the group would focus their time on developing new procedures. Only a minority of MDT time, however, was spent developing new procedures. When the group did focus on new procedures, they were goal-oriented and efficient. For example, during the period of our observations, the group developed a template for an MOU for campuses and law enforcement, as well as established new victim-centered, trauma-informed procedures to share information across campus and criminal justice investigations with victim consent.

The MDT invested time in sharing information, suggesting that sharing information was a core function of the group. For instance, cross-trainings were used to address specific issues that arose as well as broaden MDT members' understanding of practices across institutions. The group discovered that even across similar institutions, procedures differed widely. The MDT also used the

time to focus on their own group process, suggesting that self-evaluation practices are important for collaborative, cross-institution MDTs. Overall, the group process involved addressing pre-set agenda items while also responding dynamically to current events and issues that arose in the course of discussion. The responsiveness to current events was reflected in their use of case consultation around current/recent cases and occasional policy discussions. Although discussion of policy issues was fairly minimal, when those discussions did emerge, they were generally in response to important external events (e.g., policy change). Taken together, these observations suggest that MDTs focused on campus sexual assault should plan to invest time in information sharing, using a structured agenda to guide progress and focus in the group while also ensuring that meetings offer adequate time to be responsive to issues as they emerge in real time.

Complementing what was learned from the MDT meetings, individual members shared important perspectives. The MDT provided substantial networking opportunities that individual members believed had a direct impact on their work at their home institutions. In particular, participants described that the MDT facilitated better services for victims because providers were able to connect more effectively across institutions to gather information or take actions on cases. The interview data demonstrated the importance of diverse membership from across institutions to support the broad networks necessary to respond to campus sexual assault cases with co-occurring investigations. Inconsistent attendance and time costs, however, were significant challenges to attending, especially as participants expressed concerns that supervisors at their home institutions did not necessarily value the MDT. Taken together, these themes point to the importance of institutional recognition of the value of MDTs and to specific issues that jurisdictions seeking to establish MDTs might consider. Indeed, a large part of the challenges identified by individual members might be resolved with reliable and consistent attendance (e.g. not having to constantly bring new people up to speed, which contributes to feelings of treading water, and in turn wasting precious time). Institutional and supervisor buy-in is likely to have a significant impact on attendance and engagement, providing a clear illustration of the impact that institutional leadership can have on responses to campus sexual assault. In addition, the in-person nature of the group's work seemed to be especially important to participants in building relationships across institutions to facilitate their work. In light of concerns about time (including supervisors' views of how MDT members are using their time), addressing the value and reason for in-person meetings clearly is important for members themselves and their supervisors. Concerns about attendance, turnover, and buy-in speak to the need for strong group leadership to manage multiple stakeholder needs, onboard new members, and articulate shared goals for the group to ensure that the group's work continues to move forward.

In interpreting these results, several limitations should be considered. The study methods focused on understanding the work of the MDT, but did not assess the effectiveness of their collaboration in terms of victim well-being and case outcomes. Future studies should examine the impact of MDTs on victim well-being and case outcomes. As with any qualitative work, the generalizability of findings must be carefully considered. This study was conducted in a jurisdiction that was home to multiple institutions of higher education, which required the MDT to consider coordination across higher education institutions as well as with the criminal justice system. This characteristic of the study site may have influenced the topics covered by the MDT, such as the ongoing need for problem-solving discussion. The coordination across institutions of higher education may be less relevant in communities where there is only one institution. Observation of the MDT meetings might have also affected discussion; however, we selected methods to minimize such concerns (e.g., using codes and never names in transcripts made during meetings). Despite these limitations, the current study offers valuable insight into the focus and development over time of MDTs convening to respond to campus sexual assault. The findings point to the importance of ongoing coordination given the persistent challenges in responding to campus sexual assault across campus, criminal justice, and community institutions.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Sexual Assault Interagency Council and Title IX Working Group for their partnership in recruiting for this study; the Traumatic Stress Studies Group for project support; and the group members who participated in the study.

References

- Alexander v. Yale University*, 631 F. 2d 178. (1980)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Campbell, R. (1998). The community response to rape: Victims' experiences with the legal, medical, and mental health systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(3), 355–379.
- Campbell, R., & Ahrens, C. E. (1998). Innovative community services for rape victims: An application of multiple case study methodology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(4), 537–571.
- Campbell, R., Greeson, M. R., Bybee, D., & Fehler-Cabral, G. (2012). Adolescent sexual assault victims and the legal system: Building community relationships to improve prosecution rates. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1–2), 141–154. doi:10.1007/s10464-011-9485-3
- Campbell, R., Patterson, D., & Fehler-Cabral, G. (2010). Using ecological theory to evaluate the effectiveness of an indigenous community intervention: A study of sexual assault nurse

- examiner (SANE) programs. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46, 263–2760. doi:[10.1007/s10464-010-9339-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9339-4)
- Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women*. (NCJ 182369). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Greeson, M. R., & Campbell, R. (2013). Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) an empirical review of their effectiveness and challenges to successful implementation. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 14(2), 83–95. doi:[10.1177/1524838012470035](https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838012470035)
- Hawe, P., Shiell, A., & Riley, T. (2009). Theorising interventions as events in systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 43, 267–276. doi:[10.1007/s10464-009-9229-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-009-9229-9)
- Kelly, J. G. (2006). *Becoming ecological: An expedition into community psychology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2007). *The campus sexual assault (CSA) study*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.
- Noble, A., Brannon-Patel, E., & Tysoe, I. (2001). *An evaluation of the sexual assault response team victim advocate program*. Sacramento, CA: Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning Program Evaluation Division.
- Nugent-Borakove, M. E., Fanfilk, P., Troutman, D., Johnson, N., Burgess, A., & O'Connor, A. L. (2006). *Testing the efficacy of SANE/SART programs: Do they make a difference in sexual assault arrest and prosecution outcomes?* Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Smith, C. P., & Freyd, J. J. (2013). Dangerous safe havens: Institutional betrayal exacerbates sexual trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 26(1), 119–124. doi:[10.1002/jts.21778](https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21778)
- Stringer, E. T. (1999). *Action research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2011, April 4). *Dear colleague letter: Sexual violence (with accompanying background, summary, and fast facts)*. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.html
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. (2001). *Revised sexual harassment guidance: Harassment of students by school employees, other students, or third parties*. Retrieved from https://www.nccpsafety.org/assets/files/library/Revised_Sexual_Harassment_Guidance_2001.pdf
- U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. (2014). *Not alone: The first report of the white house task force to protect students from sexual assault*. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_task_force_law_enforcement_mou.pdf