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Value of Rigorous Review and Evaluation to Support Implementation of Effective Sexual Violence Prevention Programming

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The goal of identifying evidence-based programming that reduces sexual violence (SV) on college campuses and elsewhere is crucial given SV's high lifetime frequency, the range of mental and physical health consequences linked to SV, and its economic costs [1]. To reduce SV on college campuses, the US Campus Sexual Assault Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act of 2013 (www.campussaveact.org) mandated institutions of higher learning to provide primary prevention and awareness programming to reduce SV. Sexual Assault Violence Elimination (SaVE) now acts as an impetus for novel SV prevention programming development and evaluation. Yet when SaVE was enacted, few SV prevention programs had been rigorously evaluated for their efficacy to prevent or reduce SV, including in which settings and with which students. Systematic reviews are strategic approaches to establish the effectiveness of SV programming to prevent SV or mitigate the, often life-long, trauma associated with SV [2,3] and are used to inform resources that can be used by communities for action. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's STOP SV resource for action [4] provides a summary of the best available evidence needed to establish an evidence base for selecting SV prevention programming. While important, the STOP SV resource for action was published in 2016, and an update is needed to reflect the recent evaluations as well an expanded range of settings and persons that could benefit from SV prevention intervention programming.

In their systematic review and meta-analysis, Kettrey et al. [5] provide a rigorous review of the effectiveness of US-based campus sexual assault programming on students' attitudes and behaviors. Scientific challenges were noted [6] and addressed [7]. This exchange is a good example of healthy scientific communication in service of identifying SV prevention programs that are effective and work well based on their strategy and target population. Continued efforts are needed to systematically review promising new strategies and approaches to prevent SV and/or mitigate the impact that SV has on survivors. Expanding these systematic review efforts across national borders can be challenging given unique legal

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or policy implications that may shape program content and recommendations. If, however, the focus of a comprehensive systematic review involves what programs work well, in which settings, and with which populations, a broad and inclusive systematic review incorporating evidence across national borders would be beneficial. We therefore call for international systematic reviews of SV prevention research to evaluate the existing evidence and consider the cultural context.

Disclaimer:

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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