The Violent and Sexual Victimization of College Women: Is Repeat Victimization a Problem?
Leah E. Daigle, Bonnie S. Fisher and Francis T. Cullen

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The Violent and Sexual Victimization of College Women

Is Repeat Victimization a Problem?

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Little attention has been given to repeat violent and sexual victimization among college women. Using two national-level data sets, the authors find that a small proportion of college women experience a large proportion of violent and sexual victimizations. Women are more likely to experience repeat sexual victimization than repeat violence incidents. Repeat victimization tends to happen in the same month of the initial victimization, and the most likely next type of victimization is by far the same type of victimization. Comparing incident-level characteristics of repeat incidents to single incidents, there are few differences, with the exception that, in a larger proportion of single incidents, women took self-protective action. Implications for prevention and educational programs are discussed.

**Keywords:** sexual victimization; repeat; college women; violent victimization

Although extensive research has documented that college women are at high risk of sexual assault, little is known about their repeat violent and sexual victimization or about how to prevent such incidents (see Gidycz, Coble, Lantham, & Layman, 1993; Gidycz, Hanson, & Layman, 1995). Studies have shown the impact of child and/or adolescent sexual abuse on revictimization in adulthood (see Breitenbecher, 2001), but these investigations have largely ignored repeat victimization within the single development period of early adulthood—a high-risk period for women. Furthermore, the likelihood of repeat rape and physical assault during adulthood by an intimate partner has been well documented (see Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). This research, however, does not explicitly focus on

1296
different types of sexual (e.g., rape, coercion) and violent victimization (e.g., simple assault, robbery), potentially committed by different perpetrators, over a specific period in women’s lives. Davis, Combs-Lane, and Jackson (2002) suggested as well that to understand the prevention of victimization, researchers should broaden their investigations to assess multiple incidents of sexual and physical assault that may occur within developmental periods.

Using two national-level samples of more than 8,000 female students, the current study makes four contributions to understanding college women’s victimization. First, to address the existing gap in the extant literature, we assess the extent to which college women have experienced different types of repeat violent and sexual victimization during an academic year.

Second, we provide descriptive information on the time course for repeat sexual and violent victimization incidents. Studies of repeat property victimization have revealed that following an initial incident, subsequent victimization tends to recur quickly; there appears to be a delimited period of heightened risk for repeat victimization, which then decreases and eventually levels off (Farrell, 1995). We examine whether this time-course pattern generalizes to college women’s repeat violent or sexual victimization incidents and also explore the implications of the findings for more effective campus prevention programs. Furthermore, researchers have explored whether victims are prone to experience victimizations of the same type; however, these analyses have not been conducted on sexual victimization incidents for college women. We examine a crime-switch matrix to depict the sequential pattern of sexual victimization incidents.

Third, we explore the preincident, situational, and postincident characteristics of repeat incidents and compare them to the characteristics of single incidents. Prior research has suggested factors of potential relevance. Thus, two preincident factors associated with victimization risk for women are knowing the perpetrator (Fisher, Cullen, & Daigle, 2005) and alcohol consumption (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004). Studies have also identified high-risk situations for sexual assault such as being in isolated locations (e.g., one’s living quarters). The use of self-protective action is another situational factor that merits consideration; researchers have consistently reported that self-protective action can effectively thwart an attack (see Ullman, 1997).

Fourth, research has revealed that women who are sexually assaulted generally do not report their victimization to the police or campus officials but do tend to tell other people, especially friends (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003). Reporting, likely a key factor in preventing future
victimization, has not been considered in the repeat victimization field. We also address this issue.

**Method**

Data from two national-level studies—the National College Women Violent Victimization (NCWVV) and the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV)—are analyzed (for a detailed description, see Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000). The NCWVV study measured the extent and nature of different types of violence college women had experienced, whereas the NCWSV study measured different types of sexual victimization.

**Sampling Designs**

The NCWVV and NCWSV studies used the same probability two-stage sampling design to select females who were enrolled in postsecondary institutions during the 1996-1997 academic year. In the first stage, institutions were stratified into 12 strata based on their location and total student enrollment; 233 schools were randomly selected. In the second stage, students were chosen using a probability proportionate to the size of the female enrollment.

The surveys were administered during spring 1997. Female interviewers, who were trained in general principles of survey design and skills used to obtain sensitive information from respondents, administered the surveys using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system. In all, 4,432 females completed the NCWVV survey. The response rate was 91.6%. About the same number of females, 4,446, completed the NCWSV survey. The response rate was 85.6%.

**Measurement Process**

Each study used a two-stage measurement process. First, respondents were asked a series of questions to screen for victimization experiences “since school began in the fall 1996.” Affirmative answers were followed by asking the respondents how many different incidents had happened. The number of different incidents is important because for each different incident, the interviewer completed a separate incident report.

Starting with the most recent incident, respondents were asked detailed questions about the specific incident. Each incident was classified as the most
serious type of victimization that the respondents experienced within that incident. Sexual victimizations are (a) rape (unwanted penile–vaginal, mouth on your genitals, mouth on someone else’s genitals, penile–anal, digital–vaginal, digital–anal, object–vaginal, or object–anal penetration by physical force or the threat of force), (b) sexual coercion (unwanted, verbally coerced penetration), (c) unwanted sexual contact with force (touching, grabbing, or fondling of breasts, buttocks, or genitals either under or over clothes, kissing, licking or sucking, or some other form of unwanted sexual contact but not penetration with force or the threat of force), (d) unwanted sexual contact without force (verbally coerced sexual contact), and (e) threats (verbal threats of rape, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact). Violence includes (a) robbery, (b) simple assault, and (c) aggravated assault.

Measures

Repeat victimization. Repeat victimization is defined as having experienced more than one of the same type of victimization (e.g., two rapes or two simple assaults).\(^1\) Repeat victimization was operationalized at the individual and incident levels. At the individual level, a woman who experienced two simple assaults within the time frame of since school began in the fall 1996 and when she was interviewed in the spring 1997 would be classified as a repeat simple assault victim. At the incident level, each type of incident was coded as whether it was a single specific type of victimization incident or whether it was an incident within a repeat victimization episode. A single incident is one in which the victim experienced only one incident of that specific type of victimization (e.g., one rape, one simple assault).

Incident-level characteristics. The first preincident measure, the victim–offender relationship, includes (a) current or former intimate partner, (b) someone else known (e.g., acquaintance, coworker), and (c) stranger. The second preincident measure, consumption of alcohol and/or drugs by the victim or offender prior to the incident, was based on the victim’s account.

The situational characteristics included location of the incident and use of self-protective action by the victim during the incident. First, location measured whether the incident occurred in living quarters or did not occur in living quarters (e.g., on- or off-campus bedroom or living quarters). Second, each respondent was asked if she had done anything with the idea of protecting herself or stopping the behavior while the incident was going on.\(^2\) Women who responded affirmatively were then asked which actions
they took. The response categories were not mutually exclusive, so the respondent could have used more than one type of self-protective action (e.g., forceful physical and nonforceful verbal; see Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Santana, 2007). Self-protective action and the type of protective action used are measured as dichotomies.

Two postincident characteristics were whether (a) the respondent reported the incident to any campus official, including campus police, and (b) the respondent had told someone else about the incident (e.g., friend, roommate, parents).

Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the college women in the two samples were very similar. The women in the NCWVV sample were full-time students (89.0%), undergraduates (82.0%), and White or Caucasian, non-Hispanic or Latina (81.6%), with a mean age of 23.18 (SD = 4.79). Similarly, the majority of NCWSV study sample were full-time students (90.0%) and undergraduates (86.0%). The mean age was 22.55 (SD = 4.25). Almost 81.0% reported their race/ethnicity as White or Caucasian, non-Hispanic or Latina.

Data Analysis

SPSS Version 14.0 and STATA Version 9 were used to analyze the data. Counts and percentages describe the distribution of the repeat victims and incidents. A chi-square test of independence was used to determine if there was a relationship between the type of victimization in the preceding incident and the type of victimization in the following incident. Two-sample tests of proportion were performed to determine (a) if the proportion of women who experienced different types of repeat victimization were significantly different and (b) if single-incident characteristics significantly differed from characteristics of repeat incidents.

Results

The Extent of Repeat Victimization

Table 1 shows the proportion of college women who were victimized, how many times they were victimized, and the proportion of incidents that happened to these women.
The results show that a small proportion of women experienced a large percentage of all types of violent and sexual incidents during the academic year. Less than 1% of the women who experienced two or more violent incidents experienced 27.7% of all the violent incidents. More than 7.0% of the women experienced nearly three fourths (72.4%) of all the sexual victimization incidents. Noteworthy is that the most sexually victimized, those 3.3% who experienced three or more sexual victimization, experienced almost half (45.2%) of all sexual incidents.

Table 2 reports the rates of repeat victimization broken down by types of violent and sexual victimization. As shown, a much larger proportion of women experienced more than one sexual incident compared to those who experienced more than one violent incident. Close to half of the women, 47.3%, had been sexually victimized more than once by either the same type of sexual victimization or more than one type of sexual victimization since school began in the fall. A significantly smaller yet still substantial proportion of women, 14.4%, were violently victimized more than once by either the same type of violence or more than one type of violence during this time ($z = 8.653$, $p < .001$, two-tailed).

**Repeat violent victimization.** Also shown in Table 2, nearly 14% of the simple assault victims were repeat assault victims, and they experienced...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Victimization</th>
<th>Percentage of Victims</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Percentage of Incidents</th>
<th>Percentage of Repeat Victims</th>
<th>Number of Repeat Incidents</th>
<th>Percentage of Repeat Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple assault</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual coercion</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted sexual</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact with force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted sexual</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact without force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>1,318</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
close to 28% of all the simple assaults. None of the robbery or aggravated assault victims were repeat victims.

Repeat sexual victimization. Three noteworthy results are evident in Table 2 regarding repeat sexual victimization. First, repeat sexual victimization was common. From 22.8% (rape, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact with force, respectively) to 25.5% (unwanted sexual contact without force) of the women were repeat victims. The percentage of repeat incidents was also striking. For example, nearly 22% of rapes were repeat rape incidents. Similarly, just more than 25% of sexual coercions and unwanted sexual contact with and without force were repeat incidents. Even more of the threats, 31.8%, were repeat incidents.

Second, within each type of sexual victimization, a disproportionately small percentage of the victims experienced a large proportion of the incidents. For example, slightly less than one-fourth of the repeated rape victims experienced close to 40% of the rapes. Just more than 25% of the victims of unwanted sexual contact without force experienced 44.3% of these incidents. A quarter of the repeat threat victims experienced 47.5% of the threats.

Third, women were more likely to repeatedly experience any type of sexual victimization compared to any type of violence. A significantly larger percentage of women experienced repeated rape (22.8%), sexual coercion (23.2%), unwanted sexual contact with (22.6%) or without force (25.5%), or threats (25.0%) compared to those who experienced repeated simple assault (13.7%; \( p \lt .001 \) for all pairs of two-tailed proportion test comparisons).

The Nature of Repeat Victimization

The time course of repeat victimization. Figure 1 presents the time course of repeated simple assault and each type of sexual victimization. For each pair of repeated type of victimization, the difference in the number of months between the most recent incident and the next most recent incident was calculated. For example, if the most recent rape occurred in January and the rape before this one happened in November, then the number of months between the two incidents was 2 months. The number of months between paired repeat incidents that happened in the same month was 0.

As can be seen in Figure 1, there is an elevated risk of repeat violence or any type of repeat sexual victimization in a short time. In particular, this elevated risk is greatest within the same month. For example, 49% of the repeat rapes happened within the same month, as did 36% of the sexual coercions, 32% of the threats, 31% of physical assaults, and 28% of the unwanted sexual contacts with force.
The only exception to the increased risk of being victimized a second time within the same month was for unwanted sexual contact without force. The risk of unwanted sexual contact without force happening a second time was highest a month after the first incident. Of the repeat unwanted sexual contact without force incidents, 39% occurred in the following month, which is greater than the 25% that occurred within the same month.

As can also be seen in Figure 1, the risk of repeat sexual and violent victimization, with the exception of rape,4 steadily declined over the passage of time when looking at the proportion of repeat incidents having had occurred 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 months apart. For example, 28% of the repeated unwanted sexual contacts with force incidents happened within the same month, compared to 23% that happened within 1 month; 20% within 2 months; 10% within 3 and 4 months, respectively; 7% within 5 months; and 2% within 6 months. This pattern suggests that the risk of a second violent or sexual victimization decreased after the passage of 1 month.

Victimization crime-switch patterns. To examine the sequential pattern of type of victimization,5 we constructed a crime-switch pattern matrix. For each victim of two or more incidents, we examined her sequentially paired incidents as to the type of victimization that composed the preceding–following
incident pair (e.g., a rape followed by a rape, a sexual coercion followed by a rape). As shown in Table 3, a matrix was constructed to reflect the total number of each type of victimization pairs that had occurred.

There is a significant relationship between the type of victimization that occurs in the preceding incident and the type of victimization that occurs in the following incident ($\chi^2 = 208.66, df = 16, p < .001$). Comparing the percentages in the diagonal (proneness) to those in the off-diagonal (crime switching) illustrates that regardless of type of sexual victimization, victims were most likely to have experienced the same type of victimization in consecutive incidents. More than half of the sexual contacts without force, 52%, were followed by another sexual contact without force. Almost 30% of all rapes were followed by a rape. There is also considerable proneness to sexual contact with and without force and threats among victims reporting these experiences.

**Characteristics of single and repeat incidents.** The comparison of the characteristics of single and repeat violent and sexual incidents is presented in Table 4. From this table, it can be seen that few incident characteristics differ across single and repeat incidents. For simple assault, rape, and sexual coercion, none of the preincident, situational, or postincident characteristics were significantly different.

Some significant differences did emerge, however, for unwanted sexual contact with force, unwanted sexual contact without force, and threats. For unwanted sexual contact without force, single incidents were less likely to be committed by an intimate partner (3.7% vs. 14.5%) and more likely to be committed by someone known to the victim than repeat incidents (63.4% vs. 49.2%).

Overall, in a significantly larger proportion of the single incidents, women used self-protective action while the incident was going on compared to in the proportion of repeat incidents (84.8% vs. 73.5%; $z = 3.795, p < .001$; results not presented in table). This result was also evident in the comparison of single incidents of rape, unwanted sexual contact with and without force incidents, and threats to repeat incidents. For example, in 86.1% of the single-incident rapes, the victim used protective action, compared to 74.2% of the repeat-rape incidents. Almost all (95.1%) of the single incidents of unwanted sexual contact with force involved the use of self-protective action by the victim, compared to 86.3% of the repeat incidents.

Repeat and single-rape incidents also differ in the types of self-protective action that were used. In single-rape incidents in which self-protective action was used, a larger proportion of women used two strategies—forceful physical
Table 3
Victimization Crime-Switch Matrix: Sexual Victimization Pairs of Preceding and Following Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Sexual Victimization Reported as Preceding Incident</th>
<th>Type of Sexual Victimization Reported as Following Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual contact with force</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual contact without force</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Exp = expected.
Table 4
Single-Incident and Repeat Violent and Sexual Incidents, Preincident, Situational, and Postincident Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Victimization</th>
<th>Violent Victimization</th>
<th>Sexual Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple Assault</td>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident Characteristic</td>
<td>Single*</td>
<td>Repeat*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preincident characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim-offender relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate partner</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol or drug consumption prior to incident</td>
<td>48.2**</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living quarters</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used self-protective action</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postincident characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported to authorities</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told someone</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
- Single incident.
- Repeat incidents.
- Respondents were asked about whether or not the perpetrator had been drinking at the time of the incident.
- This information was not asked on the National College Women Victimization survey.

* p < .10. ** p < .05. Two-tailed tests were performed for victim-offender relationship, living quarters. All of the other proportion tests were one-tailed tests.
and nonforceful verbal strategies, which have been shown to be effective in stopping the completion of rape—compared to the proportion who did in the first incident of a repeat-rape episode. For example, in 71% of the single-incident rapes, women used forceful physical actions compared to only 14% of the repeat-rape incidents. Similarly, in 31% of the single incidents of unwanted sexual contact with force, women used nonforceful verbal actions compared to 26% of the repeat incidents (results not presented in table). Although the small number of cases limited meaningful statistical testing, the pattern indicates that women who experienced only a single rape or unwanted sexual contact with force incident did so because they used effective protective actions to thwart the attack.

**Discussion**

**Is Repeat Victimization a Problem?**

Among victimized college women, repeat victimization is a common experience, striking from 14% to 26% of the women during an academic year. On any given campus, a relatively small proportion of women account for a disproportionate amount of the sexual and violent incidents. Furthermore, repeat victimization occurs quickly, with the risk of another victimization peaking in the time immediately following the initial victimization and then decreasing over time. The crime-switch analysis suggests that women are prone to experience repeat incidents of the same type of sexual victimization. Taken together, these findings are potentially disquieting. Repeat victimization does occur, is little understood, and is not systematically addressed by either sexual or violence prevention programs.

**Why Does Repeat Victimization Occur?**

At this exploratory stage, the cause of repeat victimization is unclear. However, three considerations merit attention. First, the incident-level risk factors for a single victimization are similar to the risk factors for repeat incidents. Our data indicate that the situational context in which victimizations occur—the victim–offender relationship, alcohol or drug consumption prior to the incident, location, and reporting—does not differ for single and repeat incidents. Those factors that increase the risk of victimization, if unchanged, will continue to be risk factors for subsequent incidents. Accordingly, prevention efforts targeting the situational factors that are related to single victimizations may also be effective at preventing repeat episodes.
Second, one factor that did differ in the current study is that self-protective action was used more frequently in single incidents than in repeat incidents. In light of the existing research, this finding suggests that women who use self-protective action and who use effective actions may be less likely to experience a repeat victimization. It is possible that the ability to use self-protective action (whether physical or verbal) might reflect an underlying personal vulnerability that continues to make these women “attractive targets” for predatory men (Ullman, 1997). Failing to use self-protective actions, however, may also have a psychological impact on women that makes them feel less capable of preventing victimization in the future. By contrast, studies have cited beneficial psychological consequences for women who took self-defense training compared to those who did not. From this line of research, it is possible that the use of self-protective action is empowering, particularly because its use is related to an offense being attempted rather than completed (see Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman, 1997). Thus, a woman who actively tries to prevent her victimization from continuing may be more able or willing to protect herself after an initial victimization and reduce her likelihood of a repeat victimization. This is not meant to imply “victim blaming” because the responsibility lies with the offender and no women should have to “fight off” an attacker. Scientifically, however, there may be individual differences in the ability to use self-protection and in the effects of doing so—or not doing so. This phenomenon cannot be ignored but merits careful study.

Third, and related, the initial victimization might affect some women differently—in ways that are unmeasured by our data. Some victimized women may experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or self-blame that increases their vulnerability. Research on the effects of PTSD suggests that women who are sexually victimized may be less able to recognize risky situational cues and do not take protective action in such situations (Arata, 2000; Messman & Long, 2003). As a result, PTSD, depression, or self-blame may mediate the relationship between an initial sexual victimization and subsequent victimization (Ellis, Atkeson, & Calhoun, 1982). In this regard, future research is needed to collect individual-level and incident-level data longitudinally, including information on psychological factors that could make the risk of repeat victimization more likely to happen.

What Are the Policy Implication of Repeat Victimization?

The majority of efforts on college campuses to prevent victimization focus on either prevention of the initial incident or the response to an incident after
it occurs (see Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005). Specifically, once an incident occurs, the focus is to have the person report the incident to campus police or authorities and to receive medical attention and/or psychological counseling. These are all valuable responses. A missing component to this response, however, may be the failure to take into account that violent and sexual victims are at an elevated risk in the near future of a repeat victimization. There needs to be explicit attention given to preventing a repeat incident among college women. Yet, little published empirical work has provided direct secondary-prevention programs for this high-risk group.

Reducing victimization risk immediately following an initial victimization is challenging because those who are victimized do not generally report their victimization to the police or campus officials (see Fisher et al., 2003). Research shows, however, that most college women do disclose their victimization to a friend, including a roommate (Fisher et al., 2003). This finding suggests that a key to reaching victims and preventing a repeat victimization might be through students whose friends are victimized. Our results show that reporting to someone other than the police or campus officials does not differ from single and repeat incidents, meaning that single and repeat incidents are likely to be disclosed. Perhaps one of the reasons telling someone does not, at least in our data, facilitate a reduction in risk of subsequent victimization could be because the people who are told are not trained or educated to provide the kind of assistance and advise that would prove preventative.

Research has also shown that one of the key elements for reducing opportunity for victimization is capable guardianship (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003). In this regard, a friend of a victim, such as a roommate, could potentially serve as a “capable guardian.” For college women, friends might furnish guardianship by not leaving the victim alone in risky social situations, by taking her to counseling or medical services to receive help with continuing vulnerabilities, and by encouraging her to learn about effective self-protective actions, such as enrolling in a self-defense course. This recommendation to foster social guardianship skills implies that colleges should conduct not only general victimization prevention seminars but also programs that specifically target the role that friends might play if someone they know is victimized. It will be important to raise consciousness that anyone who is victimized is at risk immediately thereafter for another victimization. Being a guardian is one possible way to assist a victim in reducing the chances of experiencing a repeat incident. Knowing whether or not this solution would be effective requires information beyond the scope of our cross-sectional research design.
Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study begins to fill the gaps noted earlier, the findings need to be viewed in light of the study’s methodological limitations. First, our study used a cross-sectional design to retrospectively examine violent and sexual victimization of college women. Similar to White and Smith’s (2004) study, future repeat victimization studies should use longitudinal research designs to prospectively examine the extent and nature of repeat victimization within a specified period. Use of a panel design would allow researchers to examine temporal effects and changes in women’s psychological well-being and behavioral characteristics before and after a victimization. Second, incident-level information allowed us to track incident-level characteristics across repeated incidents. More precise information, such as the exact date of the incident and not just the month it occurred, is needed to fully understand the time course of repeat incidents. Third, and related, in the current study we can determine only if the same type of offender (i.e., intimate partner) committed the first and repeated incidents; we are not able to determine if each incident was perpetrated by the same offender (e.g., current boyfriend, ex-boyfriend 1, ex 2, friend 1, or friend 2). Determining whether the same offender perpetrates against the same victim or if different perpetrators commit multiple single victimizations against the victim and the associated risk factors of each could be at the center of future research. Knowing if the victim is experiencing repeated incidents by the same perpetrator or different perpetrators could inform the content of interventions for victims and perpetrators. Despite its limitations, this research takes us one step closer to a better understanding of the complex issues surrounding repeat victimization of college women, knowledge that will hopefully be helpful to those who design and implement effective sexual and violent assault education and prevention programs.

Notes

1. We use this operationalization for repeat victimization for two reasons. First, the revictimization research distinguishes among repeat victimization (experiencing two or more victimizations of the same type), revictimization (experiencing repeated assaults occurring across two or more developmental periods), and poly-victimization (experiencing four or more different kinds of victimization in a single year) (see Davis, Combs-Lane, & Jackson, 2002; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). The term repeat victimization is commonly used in the crime prevention field to refer to a person or place that has experienced two or more of the same type of criminal offense (see Farrell, 1995). Our use of the term repeat victimization is thus in line with the revictimization and crime prevention fields. Second, Testa and Dermen (1999) reported that sexual victimization—rape and sexual coercion—have different risk factors. Guided by their work, we distinguish among different types of sexual and violent victimizations (e.g., repeat rape, repeat sexual coercion, repeat threats).
2. The wording of this question suggests that the victim responded to the attack in reaction to the perpetrator’s assault actions or after the perpetrator initiated his behavior.

3. Note that robbery and aggravated assault are not included in the time-course results because there were no repeat victims for either type of crime.

4. This exception needs to be qualified as a small number of repeat rapes happened within 1 month of each other ($n = 4$), 2 months ($n = 6$), 3 months ($n = 6$), and 5 months ($n = 1$). None happened within 4 or 6 months of each other. Sixteen repeat rapes happened within the same month.

5. There were only five pairs of repeat violent victimization, hence we did not include them in the crime-switch analysis.

6. A woman who experienced two incidents has one pair. For example, her rape in September is the preceding incident (incident #1) to her rape in October, which is the following incident (incident #2). These incidents constitute one pair. A woman who experienced three incidents has two pairs. For example, her rape in November is the preceding incident (incident #1) to her sexual coercion in December, which is the following incident (incident #2). These incidents comprise one pair. Her sexual coercion in December is the preceding incident (incident #2) to her unwanted sexual contact with force in April, which is the following incident (incident #3). These incidents comprise the second pair (Reiss, 1980).

7. Forceful physical actions included (a) attacked offender with a gun or knife; (b) attacked offender with other weapon; (c) used mace, pepper spray, or similar devices; and (d) used physical contact such as hitting, punching, or kicking against the offender (see Ullman, 1997). Nonforceful verbal action refers to the victim having used nonaggressive verbal responses with the offender. Nonforceful verbal action included three behaviors: (a) tried to reason or negotiate with the offender, (b) pleaded with or begged offender to stop, and (c) told the offender to stop. This measure is similar to the nonforceful verbal resistance measure utilized by Ullman (1997), who included the behaviors of pleading, talking, reasoning, begging, and crying.

References


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