



# SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DATING VIOLENCE

## ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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## Forward-thinking. Courageous. Committed.

Two decades ago, Alpha Chi Omega adopted its national philanthropy, domestic violence awareness, and the organization continues to be a leader in the fight to end domestic violence. As we celebrate Alpha Chi Omega's leadership in this cause, we must also be knowledgeable about and comfortable with the topic as we lead others to become part of the effort.

**One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime<sup>4</sup>, and Alpha Chi Omega members work diligently to serve those who are impacted within our communities.**

Violence against women reaches outside family homes and onto college campuses everywhere. Alpha Chi Omega's chosen cause allows members not only to support others, but also to educate and protect each other. The need to address domestic violence on college campuses is more prevalent than ever.

College women are especially susceptible to sexual misconduct and dating violence. Women ages 20 to 24 are at the greatest risk of experiencing nonfatal intimate partner violence<sup>2</sup>, and freshman and sophomore women are most likely to experience sexual assault on campus<sup>5</sup>.

Nearly half (43 percent) of college women report experiencing some form of abusive behavior in a dating relationship, including "physical, sexual, tech, verbal or controlling abuse"<sup>1</sup>. In addition, one in five women will be victims of sexual assault while in college<sup>5</sup>, and 78 percent of those women will know the individual who has assaulted her<sup>3</sup>.

### Who's Taking Action?

With sexual and relationship violence occurring so frequently, the issues have been propelled to the forefront of media and government attention. It has come to light that victimized students were infrequently reporting incidents and were not aware of resources available to support them, according to Katie Clifford (BT, Miami University), an attorney, legal education consultant and partner with Schuster & Clifford, LLP in Columbus, Ohio, and an affiliated

consultant with the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management.

"There is a large percentage of underreporting, less than 5 percent [of victims]," said Clifford. "Institutions failed to provide good avenues of reporting. Policies were not clear. [Students were left thinking,] 'This is what I experienced. What remediation is available? What's my recourse?'"

As a result of increased attention and recent findings, a number of initiatives have been implemented to create safer college environments.

"There is increased awareness of the scope of the problem now, driven largely by student activism, including those who have stepped forward to tell their personal story or the story of a close friend," said Allen Groves, dean of students at the University of Virginia and former chairman of the North-American Interfraternity Conference. "That, in turn, has led to a new federal government push to address the problem, originating with the April 2011 'Dear Colleague' letter and continuing with additional guidance released earlier this spring."

In April 2014, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, a group created by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, released its first report, titled "Not Alone." The report details expectations being placed on college campuses and their administrators in order to create communities free from sexual and relationship

## Fighting Domestic Violence on Campus: Action Steps

- Learn about the policies at your college or university and educate others.
- Approach your administration about creating a safe and healthy environment.
- Do not confront the accused or try to resolve the situation yourself.
- Encourage victims to report violence and to always make choices that are right for them.
- Lead by example. Follow policies and procedures. Engage others in your efforts.

Be sure to follow Alpha Chi Omega on social media and visit [alphachiomega.org](http://alphachiomega.org) to become part of our Domestic Violence Awareness Month 2014 efforts in October.

misconduct.

Through extensive research and conversations with stakeholders and experts nationwide (including Alpha Chi Omega Executive Director Tami Shields Silverman), the task force offered action steps to campuses. Recommendations included information about how to effectively respond when a student is sexually assaulted and how to increase transparency and enforcement of policies. Additionally, campuses were asked to complete a Campus Climate Survey. The purpose of the survey is to enable institutions to self-evaluate the culture and resources on their own campuses and create a plan for how to improve.

One key piece of legislation, Title IX, protects students on college campuses experiencing sexual misconduct. Not just in place to manage equality in sports, Title IX requires colleges and universities receiving federal funding to efficiently and systematically handle discrimination on the basis of sex and related to sexual violence<sup>6</sup>.

While these government policies are in place to protect college students from relationship and sexual misconduct, each campus should also implement its own policies and resources to support students. What is your campus's approach to fighting relationship and sexual misconduct and supporting those who have been impacted?

## AXOs In Action

Two Alpha Chi Omegas are on a mission to ensure their campus takes protecting its students seriously. Maggie Burcham and Annie Hess (both members of the Epsilon Phi chapter at Georgia Institute of Technology) observed a lack of attention to fighting sexual assault on their campus, and they took action. Along with another student, Burcham and Hess authored "Sexual Violence at the Georgia Institute of Technology: A Call to Action." The persuasive document addressed the issue at the university and urged students and administration to follow designated steps to create a safe campus community.

Burcham and Hess initially took action due to the administration's resistance to update the sexual misconduct policy and their own research on what the university was and was not doing to create a safe campus environment.

"I think it's important to note that our administration made mistakes, but we wanted to make our campus the best it could be," said Hess. "It was a call to action not because things went wrong, but because we knew things could be better."

Their report prompted administration to revise the policy and bolstered a tremendous amount of action and support across campus.

"Having students stand behind the policy allows us to hold each other accountable," Hess believes. It also allows the "administration to hold students accountable and [itself] accountable."

Both Burcham and Hess believe in helping others recover from violent situations, as well as educating others to be safe and to not be bystanders. Burcham hopes to provide "a safe space for others. Being able to stand with [a victim], that's the biggest thing. We can't always force the government or administration to change, but we can support the people we love."

## What Actions Can You Take?

It is important that we, Alpha Chi Omega collegians and alumnae alike, be leaders on our campuses and in our communities. Sexual assault and dating violence are not issues for administrators and the government alone to solve.

The first step in protecting yourself and others is education. What policies are in place, and what resources are available at your campus or alma mater?

"Have discussions in your chapter." Clifford encourages.

“Take time to talk about [dating violence and sexual assault]. Provide members with education and an environment in which they feel comfortable to talk about it. Provide names, numbers and resources so that Alpha Chi Omegas can confidentially and privately seek out those resources.”

In order to truly lead in the fight against domestic violence, we must first be knowledgeable and comfortable discussing the topic.

That comfort level will lead to an inclination to act when witnessing sexual or relationship violence. Groves encourages students to “always be willing to step in when you see something that looks wrong and back each other up on it. We know that the best opportunity to reduce the number of sexual assaults is from student intervention at a key moment of potential risk to a peer.”

Another action step in line with the current national conversation is to be sure your campus completes the Campus Climate Survey provided by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. In the coming year, campuses will be encouraged to complete the assessment to self-evaluate and improve upon their practices against sexual assault, but it will not become a requirement until the following year. Contact your campus administration and ask if they plan to complete the Campus Climate Survey. If not, will they consider it? What are they doing to protect students from sexual violence?

Clifford encourages collegiate members to “take action. Really become involved in your institution. Question your institution about what they’re doing and say to them, ‘We want to be a part of the solution.’ [Members should] go to those institution leaders and say they want to participate. They want knowledge. They want to be a part of creation of the Campus Climate Survey. They want it to be a true reflection of what’s occurring on their campus.”

To really create change, members should initiate conversation about dating violence and sexual assault, approaching sororities, fraternities and other organizations to join in understanding and action. Alpha Chi Omegas should “be leaders. Be partners. Be models,” Clifford believes. “I think if a Greek community took a lead on many campuses, it would change the culture.”

Alpha Chi Omegas across the country must join in this fight against an epidemic impacting individuals all around us. As Hess encourages, “Not only can we support those who have gone through it, but we can do our part to not let anything else happen to our sisters and educate others to not be bystanders, stepping in when you see someone in trouble.”

The time to take action is now. Let’s bring an end to domestic violence together.



*If you or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, text “loveis” to 22522. You will be connected with an advocate who can provide confidential healthy relationship support and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.* 

## References

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