

# **The consequences of sexual violence for gender and sexual minority university students\***

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## **1. Relevance**

Sexual violence among college students has serious and well-documented consequences for individual mental health and academic achievement. Sexual minority (i.e., identifying as other than heterosexual) and gender minority (i.e., identifying with a gender different from the one assigned at birth) students experience higher levels of sexual violence on campus compared to their heterosexual or cisgender (i.e., have gender identities the same as those assigned at birth) peers. What is unknown, however is if students with these identities are more vulnerable to the psychological and academic sequelae of sexual violence.

## **2. Aims & Objectives**

Using a sample (N = 1201) of undergraduate students from six francophone universities in Quebec, Canada, the current study explored if gender and sexual minority students are more vulnerable to post-traumatic stress and negative academic outcomes as a result of sexual violence than their cisgender/heterosexual peers.

## **3. Method**

The “*Enquête sur la sexualité, la sécurité et les interactions en milieu universitaire,*” recruited university students, staff and personnel to participate in a study detailing their experiences of on-campus sexual violence. The current sample consists of the 1201 student respondents who reported one or more experiences of sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion. Participants were asked about their gender (e.g., male, female, trans or non-binary) as well as their sexual identity (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian bisexual, queer/pansexual/allosexual, asexual, uncertain). Participants completed a questionnaire assessing their trauma symptoms in response to on-campus sexual violence, as well as a question assessing if their experiences with sexual violence had made them change or want to change their academic programme. All analyses controlled for years in university, visible minority status, experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and number and type of sexual violence experiences.

## **4. Results**

Binary logistic regressions revealed that students with trans/non-binary gender identities were five times more likely to report clinically significant levels of trauma symptoms when compared with their cisgender peers (OR = 5.44, CI 95% 2.25, 13.12). These students were also more than as likely to report changing or intending to change their academic programme because of sexual violence experiences (OR = 2.75, CI 95% 1.04, 7.27). The same analyses were subsequently conducted for sexual minority students. Among cisgender women, sexual minority status was not associated with the likelihood of reporting clinically significant trauma symptoms, but was associated with being almost twice as likely to change or intending to change academic programming compared with heterosexual women (OR = 1.83, CI 95% 1.06, 3.15). Sexual minority status was not associated with variation in the consequences of sexual violence for cisgender men.

## **5. Conclusions**

Sexual minority women, and in particular gender minority students were more vulnerable to the consequences of sexual violence when compared to their heterosexual or cisgender peers. These findings are extremely troubling in that these students are not only more vulnerable to sexual violence, but are also more likely to suffer serious consequences of sexual violence. They underscore, however, the urgency of working with sexual and gender minority students to make university campuses a safe learning environment for all students.