



Policy Brief

Number 5

Fall, 2001

The Impact of the Clery Campus Crime Disclosure Act on Student Behavior

This report marks the fifth in a series of policy briefs issued by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI) of Virginia Tech. In this issue, Steve Janosik and Don Gehring summarize a national study on the impact of the Clery Campus Crime Disclosure Act on student behavior. The project involved 9,150 students at 305 colleges and universities in the United States.

Violence and crime in our schools and on our college campuses continue to be a concern for educators and policy-makers alike. At the federal level, the United States Congress passed the Clery Campus Crime Disclosure Act in 1990. Since then, the statute has been amended several times. College and university administrators have struggled to keep up with the changes in the law and continue to have difficulty in complying with some of the Act's requirements.

While administrators and policy-makers continue to debate the intent and implementation requirements of the Act, Steve Janosik and Don Gehring have tried to ascertain the Act's effectiveness in increasing student awareness and changing student behavior in ways that will reduce their risk of becoming victims of campus crime. Their findings should be of interest to all upper level college administrators, campus law enforcement officials, and policy makers. The complete report has been submitted for publication in the Journal of College Student Development.

EPI wishes to acknowledge Dr. Don Gehring and the Association for Student Judicial Affairs for their financial contributions to this project. And finally on a professional note, I want to announce that Steve Janosik received tenure this past summer having been in his full-time tenure track position for just three years. His work in EPI and education policy played an important role in the decision made by the University and the Board of Visitors.

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The Impact of the Clery Campus Crime Disclosure Act on Student Behavior

By

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In this national study national study of the Clery Campus Crime Disclosure and Reporting Act, 305 college and university administrators distributed 9,150 questionnaires to undergraduate students. A total of 3,866 (42%) useable questionnaires were returned. The reliability coefficient for the 13-item instrument using this sample was .72.

Student knowledge of the Act and changes in student behavior were minimal and varied by gender, victim status, institutional type, institution location, and institution size. Difference reported below were tested for their significance using chi-squares.

Knowledge of the Act

Only slightly more than one-fourth (27%) of the students responded that they were aware of the Act. Even fewer students (24%) recalled receiving the summary in their admissions materials. Only 22% of the students remembered receiving a copy of the annual Security Report and the same low percentage read the report.

College Choice

A very small proportion of students (8%) are actually influenced by the summary data mandated by the law in selecting the college or university they attend.

The Use of Other Information

Overall, students appear to more often use “other types of information” to inform themselves about crime on campus. A total of 60% of the respondents stated that they read other crime related reports, news articles, or flyers produced by their institutions, but only 27% attended crime prevention or awareness programs mandated by the Act. This “other

information” did influence the way students protected themselves (41%) and their property (37%), but had no major influence (25%) in changing the way students moved about the campus.

Gender

Student awareness of the Act or having read the Security Report mandated by it remains low. Men were significantly more likely to be aware of the Act and to read an institution’s annual report.

Women, on the other hand, were significantly more likely than their male counterparts to have read other campus material such as flyers or news paper articles relating to crime and safety or to have attended a crime prevention or crime awareness program. As a result of engaging in these activities, when compared to male respondents, women were significantly more likely to change the way they protected their personal property, change the way they protected themselves from harm, and change how they moved around campus.

Finally, as a result of reading these flyers or newspaper articles, women were significantly more likely to report criminal activity than male respondents.

Victim Status

Among the respondents, 562 (15%) indicated that they had become victims of some type of criminal activity while enrolled at their respective institutions. Twelve percent were women and 17 percent were men. Those who reported being victimized were more likely to know about the Act, but victims were no more likely than their non-victim counterparts to remember receiving the federally mandated reports or using the information contained in those documents. Victims, however, were significantly more likely to have read other crime related reports, news articles, and flyers available on campus, to have attended a crime prevention or awareness program, to have changed the way they

protected their personal property, to have changed how they protected themselves from harm, and changed the way they moved around their respective campuses.

Responses by Institutional Type

Respondents identified the institutions they were currently attending as being public or private. Again, while the total percentage of students being aware of the act, having read the Security Report or using that information to make their college choice is very low, when compared to their public institution counterparts, students attending private institutions were significantly more likely to have: remembered receiving the crime summary contained in an admissions packet, read the crime summary contained in the admission's packet, used this summary in their college choice decision, remembered receiving the institution's annual crime report, read the annual report, read other types of awareness materials such as posters, flyers, and newspaper articles, and attended crime awareness or crime prevention programs. Despite these findings, there were no significant differences when changes in behavior were examined by institutional type.

Responses by Location of Institution.

Respondents were asked to characterize the population density in which the institution was located as either (a) urban, defined as a metropolitan area or large city or (b) rural, defined as a small town, city, or rural area. Data were grouped into these two classifications based on the respondent's self-report. Two significant differences were found.

Students attending urban institutions were significantly more likely to have read other awareness materials about campus crime or crime prevention than students attending rural colleges or universities. Based on this information, students attending urban institutions were significantly more likely to change the way they moved around their campuses.

No significant differences regarding knowledge of the Act or use of the information supplied in the federally mandated reports, were found when location was examined.

Responses by Institutional Size.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the size of their institutions when completing the questionnaire. Respondents attending institutions of less than 5,000 students were significantly more likely to have: remembered receiving the crime summary in an admissions packet, read the crime summary contained in the admission's packet, used this summary in their college choice decision, remembered receiving the institution's annual crime report and attended crime awareness or crime prevention programs than their counterparts attending colleges or universities with enrollments of more than 5,000 students. Conversely, respondents attending institutions with more than 5,000 students were significantly more likely to have read additional other kinds of campus crime awareness and prevention materials such as posters, flyers, or newspaper articles than respondents at smaller institutions. Based on this information, respondents attending larger schools were also significantly more likely to have changed how they moved around their campuses.

Conclusion

Among respondents, 89% reported feeling safe or very safe on their respective campuses, 75% reported feeling safe or very safe off campus, and only 15% reported having been victimized by a criminal act while enrolled on their campuses. These perceptions correspond to the conclusion drawn by the U.S. Department of Education (2001) that the incidents of crime on college campuses, in most cases, are much lower than the nation as a whole. These factors may color how students respond to issues of campus safety. Motivating students to read crime reports or to request information about campus crime in such an environment will remain a difficult task. While crime victims seem to be more aware of

the Act, even they fail to use the information contained in these annual reports.

Students at private institutions and smaller colleges were significantly more likely to

remember receiving these reports and to having read them. It may be that these institutions have more effective communication and distribution mechanisms. It may also be that since these institutions have lower crime rates, they may be more likely to use this comparatively good news as part of their recruitment and public relations strategies. These differences merit further study.

Today, most of the public debate regarding the Clery Act continues to revolve around which categories of criminal activity, which school properties and geographically close areas, and which academic and co-curricular programs are or should be covered by this federal statute.

The National Center for Educational Statistics also reports, however, that the Clery Act was intended, in part, to encourage colleges and universities to put more emphasis on campus safety and on crime prevention services and

programs. The findings of this research suggest that the energy and emphasis devoted to the reporting requirements of the Act may be misplaced. If the Act's purpose is to educate, change behavior, and protect college students, policy makers and college administrators might be better served by focusing their attention on the development of those services and programs that seem to make a difference.

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