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Sexual Abuse in Higher Education and the Impact of #MeToo: *Institutional Sexual Abuse in the #MeToo Era*

The opening chapter to this collection explores sexual violence on college campuses, with the goal of illustrating this violence as a long-standing issue, despite not being acknowledged until recently. With amplification from the #MeToo Movement, sexual violence in higher education has become an area of national concern. The chapter provides an overview scholarly research on sexual assault in higher education, and begins a discussion of how #MeToo has impacted disclosure and policies on college campuses.

1. Sexual Abuse in Higher Education and the Impact of #MeToo

Mia Gilliam and Shelly Clevenger

The #MeToo movement has gained momentum and raised awareness nationwide, and this is perhaps no more apparent than on college campuses. College students have embraced the movement and have come forward with their own stories of harassment and sexual assault. #MeToo has been discussed in classrooms, and students have rallied outside of class in support of survivors and mobilized to form a network of community within the college campus. The #MeToo movement has shown survivors, particularly those on campus, that they are not alone and has given them a way to connect with one another. It has also exposed the structural problems and years of sexual harassment and sexual assault committed by men within the rape culture that exists in the United States.

Historically, the public has viewed college as a safe place for young people to live and learn (Fisher et al., 2010). This public perception has been changing, however, and the #MeToo movement is contributing to greater change. As the media reports the increase in the number of sexual assaults on college campuses, society is beginning to realize the dangers that young people face regarding sexual victimization in higher education (Hunter, 2005; Wilcox et al., 2007).

Women ages 18–24 have higher rates of sexual victimization than any other age group, and the victimizations often are unreported to police (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). While in college, women are often more vulnerable to sexual victimization than women in the general population (Fisher et al., 2000; Gross et al., 2006; Koss et al., 1987; White & Smith, 2009). For these reasons, the #MeToo movement has relevance for the women on college campuses.