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Campus Sexual Harassment, Other Violence, and Racism, Oh my! Evidence From Black Women Undergraduates for a Culturally Competent University Approach to Title IX

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Abstract

Relevant for Title IX federal legislation, the purpose of the current study is to examine cultural betrayal (within-group perpetrator) and sexual harassment (SH) with other violence and racial discrimination on Black women undergraduates' mental health. In a 60-minute online study (N = 162), over 50% experienced campus SH and other violence and/or racial discrimination, with multi-victimization being related to anxiety and other mental health outcomes. Cultural betrayal SH did not predict mental health when controlling for between-group SH. Implications include the 2019 Critical-Interdisciplinary Sexual Violence Research Summit's comprehensive research agenda: Intersectional Approaches, Perpetration, Communications, Beyond Policy, and Sexual Violence and Equity.

Keywords

campus sexual violence; title IX; cultural betrayal trauma theory; institutional courage; Black women undergraduates

Title IX, Campus Sexual Harassment, Other Violence, and Racial Discrimination

As violence perpetrated against members of universities, campus sexual violence is a long-standing public health crisis (e.g., Fedina et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2018). Enforced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Title IX (1972) protects people from sex discrimination within educational programs and activities at institutions that receive federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). Specifically, Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). Within the scope of Title IX, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault was formed in January 2014 (Obama, 2014), with the explicit goal of "[leading] an interagency effort to address campus rape and sexual assault, including coordinating Federal enforcement efforts by executive departments and agencies and helping institutions meet their obligations under Federal law" (p. 1). The U.S. Department of Education is currently at a juncture of further specifying guidance on Title IX as it relates to campus sexual violence (Gómez, 2021d; Howard et al., 2021; McDaniel & Gómez, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). Though research often examines contact sexual violence (e.g., rape on college campuses; e.g., Gómez et al., 2015), so-called yellow zone incidents, such as non-contact campus sexual harassment (SH), are relatively common, though understudied, underreported, minimized, and potentially damaging and traumatic to victims (Belknap & Sharma, 2014; Pinchevsky et al., 2019). Specifically, almost 50% of students experience campus SH, with perpetrators putting women at increased risk for victimization (Wood et al., 2021). Therefore, non-contact campus SH, and not just contact campus sexual violence, needs to be specifically studied.

Additionally, campus SH occurs alongside other forms of violence (Rennison & Addington, 2018), thus, examining campus SH in isolation provides information on only a fraction of students' experiences. Crenshaw's (1991) structural intersectionality identifies how Black women experience both structural racism and sexism, which then manifests into direct harms, such as anti-Black racism and violence against undergraduates (Blosser, 2020; Le et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the impact of campus SH against Black women undergraduates requires conjunctively examining other forms of violence, such as physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and police violence, and racial discrimination as well.

Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory

With intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991) as one of its bases, cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT; e.g., Gómez, 2019e) is a Black feminist framework that incorporates the larger context of inequality, such as anti-Black racism, into the study of violence against marginalized populations, including Black women and girls (Gómez & Gobin, 2020). According to CBTT (e.g., Gómez & Gobin, 2020) as relevant for Black people in the U.S., anti-Black racism creates the context for there to be solidarity, known as (intra)cultural trust, within the Black community as a protective cultural mechanism. Therefore, when violence happens within the Black community, it is a violation of this (intra)cultural trust, which is defined as a cultural betrayal. These cultural betrayal traumas—within-group violence in the Black community—are linked with poorer mental health. Misogynoir, or sexism within the Black community (Bailey, 2016), makes Black women and girls particularly vulnerable to the impact of gendered physical and sexual violence (Gómez & Gobin, 2020). Research studies with diverse, racially marginalized young adults have found that cultural betrayal in trauma predicts mental and cultural health outcomes (Gómez, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2021a, 2021b), though no known studies have tested CBTT in the context of SH at all, much less within the Black community.

Purpose of the Study

Relevant to Title IX legislation, campus SH disproportionately impacts women undergraduates (Wood et al., 2021). Importantly, other violence victimization co-occurs with campus SH (Rennison & Addington, 2018), with Black women undergraduates additionally enduring racial discrimination (Blosser, 2020). Cultural betrayal trauma theory (e.g., Gómez & Gobin, 2020) offers a theoretical model for examining victimization in the context of anti-Black racism. However, it is unknown if CBTT applies to instances of within-group SH. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to examine the association between cultural betrayal (within-group perpetrator) and SH with other violence and racial discrimination and Black women undergraduates' mental health.

Hypothesis 1. The majority of victims of campus SH experience at least one other form of violence and/or racial discrimination

Hypothesis 2. Campus SH, other violence, and racial discrimination together are associated with mental health, while controlling for SH only, SH and other violence, and SH and racial discrimination

Hypothesis 3. Cultural betrayal SH is related to mental health, while controlling for between-group SH

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants (N = 162) are self-identified Black/African American women undergraduates (M_{age} = 20.08 years, SD_{age} = 2.49 years; self-identified sexual orientation: 80% heterosexual/straight; 15% bisexual; 2% other description; 1% lesbian; .6% pansexual or fluid) attending introductory-level psychology courses at a predominantly White university in the Midwestern United States. Participants received extra credit in their courses as compensation for their time in participating in research. The online sona system allowed participants to view which studies they were eligible for and chose which studies, if any, to participate in based on study characteristics, such as time and format (e.g., in person vs. online). Following informed consent, participants completed the 30-minute online survey at a location of their own choosing. Participants could withdraw from the study or decline to answer any item without penalty. The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the current study.

Measures

This study is part of a larger data collection, therefore, only some of the measures are reported.

Cultural Betrayal Multidimensional Inventory for Black American Young Adults Violence and Discrimination Questionnaire.—The Cultural Betrayal Multidimensional Inventory for Black American Young Adults (CBMI-BAYA) Violence and Discrimination Questionnaire (Gómez & Johnson) includes seven items, which assess with one item each SH, other violence (physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sex

trafficking, and police violence), and racial discrimination experienced after the age of 18. Additionally, as an indicator of between-group versus cultural betrayal, race of perpetrator (same race vs. different race) was also included for lifetime SH. Items are SH—*Have you been spoken to in a sexually provocative manner while walking on the street, at work, or at school (i.e., cat-calling; unwanted flirting)?*; Physical Abuse—*Have you been slapped, hit, pushed, strangled, or otherwise physically hurt by another person or people?*; Psychological Abuse—*Have you been yelled at, called names, or been putdown (i.e., told you're stupid, worthless, or unlovable)?*; Sexual Abuse—*Have you been made to engage in sexual acts by being physically forced?*; Sex Trafficking—*Have you been forced to engage in sexual acts with other people?*; Police Violence—*Have police slapped, hit, push, strangle, or otherwise physically hurt you?*; Racial Discrimination—*Have you been called a racial slur (i.e., the N word) in a derogatory manner?* Responses for violence/discrimination items were Yes- 1 and No- 0, with check boxes for age of victimization (before age 13, 13–17 years old, 18 years old or older) and a Likert scale from 0—none, to 4—many times for race of perpetrator for lifetime incidence. The CBMI-BAYA (Gómez & Johnson) is in the process of being validated across multiple samples of Black/African American young adults, with preliminary findings suggesting both face and predictive validity.

Trauma Symptoms Checklist.—The Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC; (Elliott & Briere, 1992) is a 40-item questionnaire that assesses posttraumatic mental health with a Likert scale of 0—never–3—often. A sample item is *How often have you experienced each of the following in the last 2 months? Anxiety attacks*. In the current sample, internal consistency for trauma symptoms [total] was excellent (α= .94) and fair for each subscale: dissociation (α= .78), anxiety (α= .77), depression (α= .79), sexual abuse trauma index (α= .71), sleep disturbances (α= .81), and sexual problems (α= .76).

Data Analysis Plan

Using SPSS Version 26, I will run descriptive statistics on independent variables: SH, other violence (physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sex trafficking, police violence), and discrimination experienced after the age of 18. To test Hypothesis 1, I will run descriptive statistics on co-occurrence of victimization: SH only, SH and other violence, SH and discrimination, and SH, other violence, and discrimination. To test Hypothesis 2, I will run a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with covariates SH only, SH and other violence, and SH and discrimination, independent variable SH, other violence, and discrimination, and dependent variables, trauma symptoms total, dissociation, anxiety, depression, sexual abuse trauma index, sleep problems, and sexual problems. Finally, to test Hypothesis 3, I will run a MANCOVA with the same dependent variables and independent variables of between-group SH and cultural betrayal SH.

Results

In the current study, the majority of Black women undergraduates experienced SH after the age of 18 (63.6%), with substantial minority proportions experiencing physical abuse (13.5%), psychological abuse (28.5%), sexual abuse (4.8%), sex trafficking (3.6%), police violence (.6%), and racial discrimination (30.3%). In line with Hypothesis 1, only 12.7%

of Black women undergraduates experienced only SH, whereas just over 50% experienced another form of violence and/or racial discrimination in addition to SH (Figure 1).

Contrary to Hypothesis 2 (Table 1), a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) revealed that SH combined with other violence and racial discrimination was not associated with mental health outcomes. Instead, SH combined with other violence was associated with trauma symptoms [total], anxiety, depression, sexual abuse trauma index, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, SH combined with racial discrimination was associated with anxiety and sleep disturbances. Importantly, SH only was not linked with any mental health outcomes when other combinations of SH, other violence, and racial discrimination were in the model. Finally, regarding Hypothesis 3, a MANCOVA suggested that lifetime between-group SH—and not cultural betrayal SH—was related to anxiety, $F(1, 162) = 4.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, while controlling for trauma symptoms [total], dissociation, depression, sexual abuse trauma index, sleep disturbances, and sexual problems.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine Black women undergraduates' experiences of cultural betrayal, campus SH, other forms of violence (physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and police violence), racial discrimination, and mental health. As such, the current study bolsters prior literature on campus SH as a major public health concern, as it is a facet of non-contact campus sexual violence (Pinchevsky et al., 2019). Through the lens of intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991), the current study highlights the vast prevalence and outcomes of diverse violence and racial discrimination, alongside campus SH. Specifically, in line with Hypothesis 1, almost 2/3rds of Black women undergraduates experienced SH. Half of the total sample experienced another form of violence and/or racial discrimination in conjunction with campus SH.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, campus SH, other violence, and racial discrimination together did not predict mental health outcomes. However, campus SH and other violence together was associated with total trauma symptoms, anxiety, depression, the sexual abuse trauma index, and sleep problems. Moreover, campus SH and racial discrimination together was related to anxiety and sleep problems. Building upon prior literature that has examined both contact campus sexual violence and non-contact campus SH (e.g., Pinchevsky et al., 2019), these findings demonstrate how the combination of campus SH with other violence and racial discrimination, respectively, are associated with mental health.

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, cultural betrayal SH was not associated with Black women's mental health, when controlling for between-group SH. These findings are contrary to the literature on CBTT that demonstrates that cultural betrayal in trauma is associated with outcomes above and beyond that of between-group trauma (Gómez, 2017, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2021a, 2021b). However, this is the first study to test CBTT regarding SH. Therefore, in line with research on racialized SH (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Woods et al., 2009), as well as the co-occurrence of racial and SH (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008), it is possible that racial discrimination permeates between-group—but not cultural betrayal—SH (e.g., Woods et al., 2009) in a way that uniquely impacts anxiety. Furthermore, this additional

racial discrimination may be more prevalent and palpable in SH than it is in some forms of contact sexual violence (e.g., sexual violence by an intimate partner), thus, differentiating it from other forms of within-group violence.

Implications

Study Implications.—In addition to testing CBTT (e.g., Gómez & Gobin, 2020) through lifetime history of SH, the current study assessed a wide range of campus victimization —SH, other violence (physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sex trafficking, police violence), and discrimination—and their individual and combined associations with mental health for Black women undergraduates. In this study, campus victimization was defined as that occurred after the age of 18, which means that some violence may have occurred off campus and/or by non-university members. Universities interpret Title IX in various ways, with the majority of universities requiring most if not all employees to report "any incidences of sexual misconduct" or "all details of an incident (including the identities of both the victim and alleged perpetrator)" (Holland et al., 2018, p. 260) to the Title IX office. While conflation of Title IX requirements and university policy is not ideal, universities' ability to provide support for its students is benefited by understanding the full scope of victimization of its students. Therefore, direct implications of the current study include both future research and universities' prevention and intervention strategies incorporating various forms of SH, other violence, and racial discrimination together (National Research Council, 2021). By centralizing Black women undergraduates and their experiences, universities' actions will likely be more efficacious.

Institutional Betrayal, Institutional Cowardice, and Institutional Courage.—In addition to a moral imperative, universities have a legal responsibility through Title IX to address campus SH in order to foster an equitable educational environment (Obama, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2021b; White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014). Importantly, universities are not bystanders to the violence that occurs to members of the campus community. Rather, the policies, actions, and inactions of universities and its members impact victims. Specifically, institutional betrayal refers to acts of commission or omission on the part of institution and/or institutional actors that do harm to dependent members (e.g., Smith & Freyd, 2014). The majority of victimized undergraduates of Color experience institutional betrayal (Gómez, 2021c). Recognizable in universities' responses to campus sexual violence, including SH, is institutional cowardice (Brown, 2021). As a type of institutional betrayal, institutional cowardice is "a known or consciously motivated act, an intentional decision to go in a particular direction and allow a vulnerable person or persons to be harmed" (Brown, 2021, p. 242). Some examples of institutional cowardice include the absence of an apology, removing all support from a Title IX complainant, and/or not taking any action in the face of institutional betrayal under the guise of simply "following the rules."

Though the depth and breadth of institutional betrayal and cowardice can be overwhelming, universities simultaneously have the power to instead behave courageously and promote educational equity. Founder of the Center for Institutional Courage (Center for Institutional Courage, Inc., 2021), Freyd (2018) defines institutional courage as an institution's

behavioral commitment to moral action despite risk and short-term cost. The outcome of institutional courage is that sites, including universities, become more equitable places for all members. There are multiple ways for institutions to engage in institutional courage (e.g., Gómez et al., 2016). Freyd (2018) identifies these specific 10 steps: (1) comply with laws without a risk management mindset; (2) educate the institution, including leadership; (3) respond well to victim disclosures, including implementing a trauma-informed reporting policy; (4) bear witness, be accountable, and apologize; (5) cherish the truth tellers; (6) conduct scientifically-sound anonymous surveys; (7) regularly engage in self-assessment; (8) be transparent generally and regarding data and policy specifically; (9) use the institution to address societal problems; and (10) commit ongoing resources (e.g., monetary, personnel, and time) to numbers 1–9.

Culturally Competent and Trauma-Informed Institutional Courage.—In bringing together 20 scholars from across disciplines to develop a comprehensive agenda to eradicate all forms of sexual violence on college campuses, The Critical-Interdisciplinary Sexual Violence Research Summit (Marine et al., 2019); Principal Investigators Marine, Harris, and Linder, funded by the Spencer Foundation Conference Grant) provides a roadmap for how universities can provide safe, equitable educational environments. The explicit dual foci were centering minoritized people and interrogating systems of dominantion and power. As a scholar at The Summit, I was fortunate to witness how—in process, content, and outcome—systems of oppression were identified and dismantled, with solidarity, respect, and expertise coalescing into rich, evidence-based outcomes. As such, The Summit engaged in institutional courage that was both culturally competent and trauma-informed. Specifically, we identified a 5-pronged agenda for universities: (1) intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) approaches; (2) sexual violence and equity; (3) perpetration; (4) communications; and (5) beyond policy.

Intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) Approaches.—Similar to the findings from the current study, at (Marine et al., 2019), we began with the recognition that multiple structural oppressions and inequities, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, were together putting those most marginalized at increased risk for various forms of campus violence. Consequently, it quickly became evident that any efforts to address campus sexual violence must begin with identifying and structurally dismantling these oppressions.

Sexual Violence and Equity.—We posited that truly taking an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) approach would mean that efforts to address campus sexual violence could not be divorced for campus work that promotes equity. Importantly, these approaches should not promote one-size-fits-all strategies, as equity does not equal “sameness.” While that stance is fairly obvious, we quickly discovered that implementation would not be. At (Marine et al., 2019). we grappled with the realities that staff whose jobs it is to promote equity (diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, affinity groups, etc.) are understaffed, underpaid, and overworked. Therefore, adding addressing campus sexual violence to their responsibilities seemed untenable at best and exploitative at worst. As a result, accomplishing an integrative effort for addressing both sexual violence and equity requires correcting the intersectional

oppression (Crenshaw, 1991) that fosters a culture of inequity in how resources are allocated (or not) for such efforts.

Perpetration.—At (Marine et al., 2019), we identified how much of the emphasis on addressing campus sexual violence centers primarily on changing prospective female victims' behaviors or educating bystanders on how to intervene, with the intervention research dominated by White women participants. Conspicuously absent are prevention strategies for prospective perpetrators: administrators, faculty, staff, and students. That absence is alarming given that perpetrators—supported by the culture and climate of the university and society—are solely responsible for their violence (Bonar et al., 2020). Being able to design and test effective prevention and intervention strategies requires a complex understanding of the motivations and behaviors of sexual violence perpetrators. Non-profit organizations like Set The Expectation (2019) provide a great model for working with college athletic men on addressing campus sexual violence. Such a shift in focus, however, is not without a potential cost. We identified tensions around not wanting to privilege perpetrators' perspectives over those of survivors'. Therefore, a shift in focus on perpetration requires an attunement to the delicate balance between behaviorally placing the responsibility for ending violence on the perpetrators where it belongs, while not invalidating or erasing the perspectives of survivors.

Communications.—A focus on communications displayed itself in two forms at (Marine et al., 2019). The first is the importance of fostering listening conditions that are capable of engaging with marginalized victims as if they are the knowers (Dotson, 2011). Meaning, many college campuses are plentiful with marginalized students, staff, faculty, and administrators who have scholarly expertise and lived experience that can contribute to sustainable structural change. However, such individuals are often excluded from the decision-making process, and, when they are included, are not listened to (Gómez, 2019e). Therefore, the first step in healthy communication is to avoid epistemic exclusion (Settles et al., 2020) by centralizing marginalized scholarship and perspectives, thus, letting those inform policy and action. Secondly, we discussed the need for effective public communication between the university, its members, and the public, including implementing campus climate surveys (Holland et al., 2020) and making the findings public (Freyd, 2018), having savy media strategies, and disseminating education.

Beyond Policy.—Policy, including Title IX federal legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b), are important cornerstones of a functioning, just society (Yoshino, 2007). Additional proposed legislation, such as the Combating SH in Science Act of 2019 (Albright et al., 2020), can also promote change by holding universities legally accountable. Simultaneously, policies can provide us with the bare minimum, with de facto differential enforcement due to the existing inequality that the legislation is attempting to address (Yoshino, 2007). Thus, universities can utilize Title IX and other legislation as the starting point in engaging in institutional courage (Freyd, 2018; Freyd & Smidt, 2019) that promotes educational equity through trauma-informed and culturally competent actions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Future research can build up on the current study's limitations. Future mixed-methods work should attempt to replicate the findings quantitatively with full scales, as well as employ semi-structured interviews to qualitatively gain specificity in victimization, meaning-making, and outcomes. Such work should differentiate victimization by where it occurs (e.g., on campus, at other college activities, and off campus) and by whom (e.g., university members vs. people from the surrounding community). Additionally, future versions of the CBMI-BAYA (Gómez & Johnson) can specify race of the perpetrator by time period of victimization since, without that information, the current study was only able to assess lifetime between-group versus cultural betrayal SH. Given the surprising null findings for cultural betrayal SH, future research can examine the current research questions in multiple, different contexts, such as historically Black college or universities (HBCUs). Future research should also include measures of racialized SH (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Woods et al., 2009) and racism within SH, which may contribute additional harm from White perpetrators. Future work can also examine a wider array of outcomes outside of mental health, including intimidation and uncomfortability (Pinchevsky et al., 2019). Finally, longitudinal work can track both victimization and mental health across Black women undergraduates' time at the university and after they graduate.

Concluding Thoughts

Relevant to Title IX legislation, the current manuscript had two goals: (1) provide empirical information about Black women undergraduates' experiences of cultural betrayal and campus SH, other violence, and racial discrimination as they are related to their mental health; and (2) delineate the 2019 Critical-Interdisciplinary Sexual Violence Research Summit's comprehensive research agenda, which indicts power and inequality as contextual facilitators of campus violence. Through institutional courage, universities can employ campus strategies that are in line with upcoming Title IX guidance and legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a), while also being culturally competent and trauma-informed. Doing so can promote social justice (Campbell, 2009), resulting in educational equity for all members of the campus community, including those—like Black women undergraduates—who endure high rates of multiple forms of violence victimization and racial discrimination.

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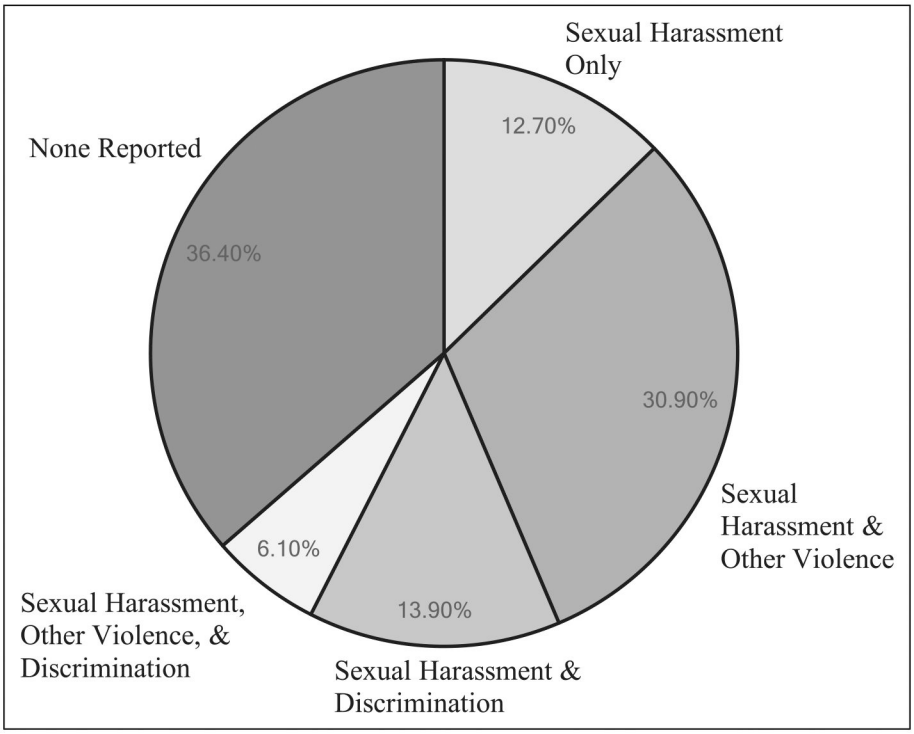

Figure 1.
Prevalence rates of campus sexual harassment, other violence, and racial discrimination in black women undergraduate students.

Table 1.

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) Examining Sexual Harassment Alone and in Conjunction with Other Violence and Racial Discrimination on Mental Health in Black Women Undergraduate Students.

	Trauma Symptoms Total	Dissociation	Anxiety	Depression	Sexual Abuse Trauma Index	Sleep Problems	Sexual Problems
	F (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)	*F* (1, 160)
	(η^2)	(η^2)	(η^2)	(η^2)	(η^2)	(η^2)	(η^2)
Covariates							
Sexual harassment only	.019 (.000)	.855 (.005)	.023 (.000)	.070 (.000)	.034 (.000)	.006 (.000)	.511 (.008)
Sexual harassment and other violence	7.115** (.043)	1.554 (.010)	5.371* (.032)	11.172** (.065)	3.764* (.023)	5.402* (.033)	.235 (.001)
Sexual harassment and discrimination	2.540 (.016)	1.435 (.009)	5.228* (.032)	1.990 (.012)	2.345 (.014)	5.309* (.032)	.553 (.003)
Independent variable							
Sexual harassment, other violence, and discrimination	1.059 (.007)	.538 (.003)	.848 (.005)	1.276 (.008)	.857 (.005)	1.453 (.009)	.426 (.003)

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p < .01$