

# **The Impact of the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act on Student Behavior<sup>1</sup>**

By

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## **Introduction**

The Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (Public Law 101-542) was passed in 1990 and was signed into law by President George Bush. Title II of this Act has been known as the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990. Since then, it has been amended several times (National Center of Educational Statistics, 1997). In 1992, for example, the law was amended by the Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights Act that required schools to develop policies to deal with sexual assault on campus. The law also increased the number of arrest categories and referrals for campus disciplinary action that college and university administrators must report (Public Law 102-26).

The most recent version of this law was passed as part of the Higher Education Amendments Act of 1998. Its official title under this Act is the "Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act" (Public Law 105-244). This legislation grew out of a tragic incident at Lehigh University involving the rape and murder of a young woman living in university housing. Since their daughter's death, the Clery's have worked tirelessly to force colleges and universities to be more forthcoming about the criminal activity on their campuses.

Current regulations call for institutions to distribute the security report defined by the Act annually to all current students and employees and to any applicant for enrollment or employment upon request (Federal Register, 1992). In addition, the Secretary of Education added an important reporting provision. In the discussion section of the regulations, the Secretary stated that he "believes that any person requesting information on admission should be notified of the availability of the report, given a summary of the report, and given the opportunity to request it" (Federal Register, 1994, 22314).

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The purpose of the legislation is largely two-fold. First, by requiring institutions to report specific crime statistics, open their criminal activity logs, and share information about their crime prevention programs to prospective students and their parents, information about campus safety can be factored into the college choice decision. Second, by notifying students, faculty, staff, and other visitors of criminal activity occurring on campus, individuals can be made aware of the potential risks and make active choices about their personal behavior.

Some refer to this type of legislation as “truth in advertising” or “consumer protection” legislation. The hope is that by educating students and other members of the academic community about the real risks to their personal safety, they will make wiser choices about their own behavior and thereby reduce the chance of becoming a victim of criminal activity. While this legislation, and others like it, has its supporters, others contend that this type of legislation is ineffective. Detractors argue that reports that record historical data are almost never read and rarely result in changed behavior. These individuals suggest that the time and money spent to generate reports and comply with the statute could be better spent on training, personnel and equipment, or direct law enforcement.

The purpose of this study was to respond to this debate by determining the effect of this piece of legislation on student behavior. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are students aware of the Campus Crime Awareness Act?
2. Do students use the information required under the Act in making their decisions about college choice?
3. Do students use the information required under the Act to reduce their safety risks?
4. How does increased information sharing affect the relationship between students and the campus police?

## Method

To analyze the effect of this policy on student behavior, the researcher invited administrators at several institutions to participate in the study. Three of the six who were contacted agreed to participate. Administrators at each of three institutions were asked draw a random sample of 500 students for inclusion in the study. The three participating institutions included a community college, a comprehensive college, and a research university. All of the campuses in the study were located in suburban or rural areas and all were in compliance with the provisions of the Act.

Five hundred usable labels were received from the comprehensive college, 490 useable labels were received from the community college, and 475 usable labels were received from the research university selected for the study. Thus, the student sample totaled 1465.

The researcher developed a 20-item questionnaire. Thirteen questions addressed the student's knowledge of the Act's existence and asked if specific changes in behavior occurred as a result of attending crime prevention programs or reading about the information mandated in the institution's annual report. The researcher used five other questions to collect a variety of demographic data. The remaining two questions asked respondents to indicate how safe they felt on campus and in areas immediately adjacent to their respective campuses.

Before the questionnaires were mailed, a small group of students and college administrators was asked to read each item for clarity and asked if the item corresponded to the research questions identified for the study. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

Students in the sample received a questionnaire with a cover letter describing the study and encouraging their participation. A pre-stamped return envelope was included in the mailing. Two weeks after the initial mailing, respondents were sent a reminder card. No other contacts were made.

## Results

After the initial mailing, 42 (2.8% of the sample) questionnaires were returned as undeliverable. While the researcher made every effort to ensure correct addresses, some students did not leave complete addresses with their institutions or keep this information current.

Of the remaining 1423 questionnaires, 795 (55.8%) were returned. The response consisted of 442 (55.6%) women and 353 (44.4%) men. Three hundred and seven (38.6%) respondents lived on-campus and 488 (61.4%) lived off-campus. Three hundred and nine (38.9%) classified themselves as first year students, 198 (24.9%) were second year students, 150 (18.9%) were third year students, and 138 (17.3%) were fourth year or graduate students. Finally, at the time of the study, 172 respondents (21.8%) reported that they were attending the community college, 254 (31.9%) were attending the comprehensive college, and 362 (46.3%) respondents were attending the research university.

Within group response rates revealed that thirty-five percent of the community college students, fifty-three percent of the comprehensive college students, and seventy-eight percent of the research university students contacted responded and returned questionnaires. Response rates for the three groups were statistically different from the sample (Chi-square = 69.15, df = 2, p = .001). Community college students were under

represented and research university students were over represented in the respondent group.

The reliability for the 13 items was calculated using the Cronbach Alpha model. The reliability coefficient was .73. Additional findings are reported below.

Awareness of the Act and Formal Reports

As Table 1 shows, more than seventy-one percent of respondents indicated that they were unaware of the Campus Crime Awareness Act. Using a Chi-square to compare groups, women (29%) were significantly more likely than men (23%) to know about the Act (Chi-square = 4.10, df = 1, p. = .043).

Table 1

Number, Percentages, and Chi-Square Results By Gender

Item	Yes	No	Don't Remember	Chi-Square	df	p.
Awareness of the Act						
Women	128 (29%)	313 (71%)	NA	4.10	1	.043
Men	80 (23%)	273 (77%)	NA			
Total	208 (26%)	586 (74%)	NA			
Received summary in admission packet						
Women	96 (22%)	114 (26%)	225 (52%)	.957	2	.620
Men	83 (24%)	95 (28%)	166 (48%)			
Total	179 (23%)	209 (27%)	391 (50%)			
Read the summary						
Women	93 (22%)	186 (44%)	144 (34%)	21.08	2	.001
Men	71 (20%)	208 (59%)	73 (21%)			
Total	164 (21%)	394 (51%)	217 (28%)			
Summary influenced your enrollment decision						
Women	25 ( 6%)	389 (94%)	NA	12.53	1	.001
Men	4 ( 1%)	345 (99%)	NA			
Total	29 ( 4%)	731 (96%)	NA			

Received the annual report

Women	49 (11%)	277 (63%)	116 (26%)	.527	2	.768
Men	45 (13%)	218 (62%)	90 (25%)			
Total	94 (12%)	495 (62%)	206 (26%)			

Read the annual report

Women	32 ( 7%)	316 (73%)	83 (19%)	10.19	2	.006
Men	45 (13%)	262 (74%)	46 (13%)			
Total	77 (10%)	578 (74%)	129 (16%)			

Read any other reports, news, or flyers

Women	244 (55%)	180 (41%)	18 ( 4%)	7.39	2	.025
Men	170 (48%)	155 (44%)	28 ( 8%)			
Total	414 (52%)	335 (42%)	46 ( 6%)			

Attended a prevention or awareness program

Women	74 (17%)	360 (81%)	8 ( 2%)	6.47	2	.039
Men	37 (10%)	310 (88%)	6 ( 2%)			
Total	111 (14%)	670 (84%)	14 ( 2%)			

Information changed how you protect personal property

Women	174 (40%)	267 (60%)	NA	31.21	1	.001
Men	74 (21%)	279 (79%)	NA			
Total	248 (31%)	546 (69%)	NA			

Information changed how you protect yourself from harm

Women	195 (44%)	247 (60%)	NA	75.76	1	.001
Men	54 (15%)	299 (85%)	NA			
Total	249 (31%)	546 (69%)	NA			

Information changed how you move around campus

Women	133 (30%)	309 (70%)	NA	93.76	1	.001
Men	12 ( 3%)	341 (97%)	NA			
Total	145 (18%)	650 (82%)	NA			

Programs and information increased your level of confidence in your campus police

Women	96 (22%)	341 (78%)	NA	2.19	1	.139
Men	62 (18%)	288 (82%)	NA			
Total	158 (20%)	629 (80%)	NA			

### Programs and information increased the likelihood that you would report crime

Women	231 (53%)	202 (47%)	NA	31.87	1	.001
Men	115 (33%)	233 (67%)	NA			
Total	345 (44%)	435 (56%)	NA			

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When asked if students had received a summary of the institution's crime report as part of their admission material, more than seventy-five percent of the respondent group reported that they did not receive the summary or could not remember if they had. The response pattern between men and women was not statistically different.

A larger number (79%) reported that they failed to read the information. Men, however, were significantly more likely to read the report than were women respondents. (Chi-square = 21.08, df = 1, p. = .001).

Six percent of female respondents indicated that the crime report summary influenced their enrollment decision. One percent of the men reported such influence. The difference was significant at the .001 level. (Chi-square = 12.53, df = 1, p. = .001.)

Eighty-eight percent of the respondent group reported that it had not received or could not remember if it received the institution's federally mandated annual crime statistic report. Thirteen percent of men and seven percent of the women reported reading the annual report. The difference was significant (Chi-square = 10.19, df = 1, p. = .006).

### Other Publications and Programs

Beyond these formal reports, those responsible for campus safety post flyers in and around campus, college newspapers report on crime and safety related incidents, and a variety of campus administrators deliver crime awareness and prevention programs to individual student and student groups. When asked if respondents had read any of these flyers, newspaper reports, and other less formal reports, fifty-five percent of women and forty-eight percent of men reported that they had done so. A significantly greater proportion of women reported reading or using this type of material (Chi-square = 7.39, df = 2, p. = .025).

Fourteen percent of respondents reported that they had attended a campus crime awareness or prevention program. Women were significantly more likely to attend this type of event (Chi-square = 6.47, df = 2, p. = .039).

### Student Behavior and Attitude

As a result of the reports, flyers, news articles, programming and other information connected with the Act, forty percent of women in the respondent group reported that they had changed the way they went about protecting their personal

property. Twenty-one percent of men reported changing their behavior. This difference was statistically significant (Chi-square = 31.21, df = 1, p. = 001).

Forty-four percent of women reported they had changed how they protected themselves from physical harm. Men reported changing their behavior as a result of this crime prevention information at a significantly lower rate (15%) (Chi-square = 75.78, df = 1, p. = .001).

Lower percentages of men and women reported that they have changed the way they moved around the campus as a result of the information provided by their institutions. The difference here also was statistically significant. Thirty percent of women and only three percent of men reported they had changed their behavior (Chi-square = 93.76, df = 1, p. = .001).

Respondents were asked if these programs and information had increased their level of confidence in their campus police. Approximately twenty percent of the group indicated that it had. There were no significant differences between men and women. Respondents were also asked if these programs and information increased the likelihood that they would report criminal activity. Fifty-three percent of women indicated they would. Thirty-three percent of male respondents responded in a similar fashion. Again, the differences were significant (Chi-square = 31.87, df = 1, p. = .001).

### Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the impact of the Campus Crime Awareness Act is mixed. Large numbers of respondents were not aware of the Act or the formal reports that institutions are required to publish and distribute. While women used the material made available by the Act at higher levels than men, very few of the respondents in this study reported that they received, requested, or read the crime reports required by the Act. It is interesting to note that when these formal statistical reports were read, men report reading them at statistically higher rates than women. It may be that women are less prone to read statistical reports of this nature.

Less than four percent of the respondents used crime statistics in their decisions about college choice. Traditional factors such as quality of academic program, cost, and location are likely to remain more important considerations. In addition, the vast majority of respondents had not attended programs designed to teach individuals how to protect themselves and their property.

Despite these disappointing findings, fifty-two percent of respondents report that they have read flyers, posters, and newspaper articles that relate to campus crime awareness and prevention. Most importantly, more than forty percent of women responding to the questionnaire reported that crime awareness and prevention information had changed the way they went about protecting their property and themselves from harm.

It appears that this more informal and timely approach to educating members of the campus community accounts for the changes in student behavior and attitude. The attention devoted to the discussion of school safety and campus crime may increase general awareness, notwithstanding the specific reporting provisions of the Act.

It is also important to note that the attention paid to crime awareness and prevention may be having a positive effect on other student attitudes. Twenty percent of the respondent group indicated that the activity promoted by the Act increased the level of confidence it had in the campus police. Forty-four percent of the respondent group reported that the activity promoted by the Act increased the likelihood it would report criminal activity. These results may be unintended consequences of the Act but are positive outcomes nonetheless.

The General Accounting Office suggests that colleges and universities are having difficulty complying with the Act (United States General Accounting Office, 1997). The research by Gerhing and Callaway (1997) support this conclusion and offer some explanations as to why colleges and universities have not done so. One reason may be the constant changes in the reporting requirements themselves. Others suggest that the difficulty stems from the fact that federal government has yet to define how crime statistics are to be reported (Nicklin, 1999). Differences of opinion over reporting requirements among campus safety advocates, elected officials, professional education associations, and college administrators have been well documented (Burd, 1999). The findings in this study suggest, however, that it may well be that policy makers, media groups, and the public are focusing their attention in the wrong place. Arguing over who must report and what should be reported may do little to protect students or change student behavior.

Clearly, the issue of campus safety deserves more study. While American schools and colleges, viewed by any measure, are extremely safe places to work and learn, they do reflect the problems found in society as a whole. While tragic incidents are infrequent, college and school administrators do have a moral and legal obligation to reduce the safety risks to members of their respective communities where possible. Administrators on individual campuses may want to replicate this study to assess the awareness, knowledge, and behavior of their own students. Such studies could be conducted longitudinally to determine if progress is being made. Qualitative studies also should be conducted to determine the most effective educational tools and delivery methods.

It also is important to remember that the three institutions participating in this study were located in suburban and rural areas of the country. Ninety-four percent of the respondent group reported feeling safe or very safe on campus and eighty-four percent reported feeling safe or very safe in the areas immediately adjacent to campus. These perceptions of the environment may have colored how students responded to the issue of campus safety. The motivation to read crime reports or to request reports about campus safety may not be present on the campuses selected for this study. Results are likely to be

very different on urban campuses where security may be of greater concern or on campuses where students lack confidence in the administration.

In the final analysis, however, policy makers and administrators must be willing to act on what is learned. There can be no doubt that the passage of the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, and its predecessors, has caused college and university administrators to change their behavior. While many reported criminal activity occurring on their campuses in good faith to their students, faculty, and other constituents before these laws were passed, many did not. Clearly, these statutes have raised the standard and have caused institutions to report crime statistics in a more consistent and comprehensive way.

Today, as in years past, most of the public debate regarding this statute continues to revolve around what categories of criminal activity must be included in the annual report. The findings in this study suggest that the attention paid to these formal reporting requirements may be misplaced. Devoting time and energy in developing a single reporting mechanism by which institutions may be compared may not have its desired effect if the Act's purpose is to educate, change behavior, and protect college students.

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