

Institutional Response and Betrayal: A Systematic Review of Campus Sexual Violence Literature

Gena K. Dufour, M.Sc., PhD. Student in Applied Social Psychology
University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada.



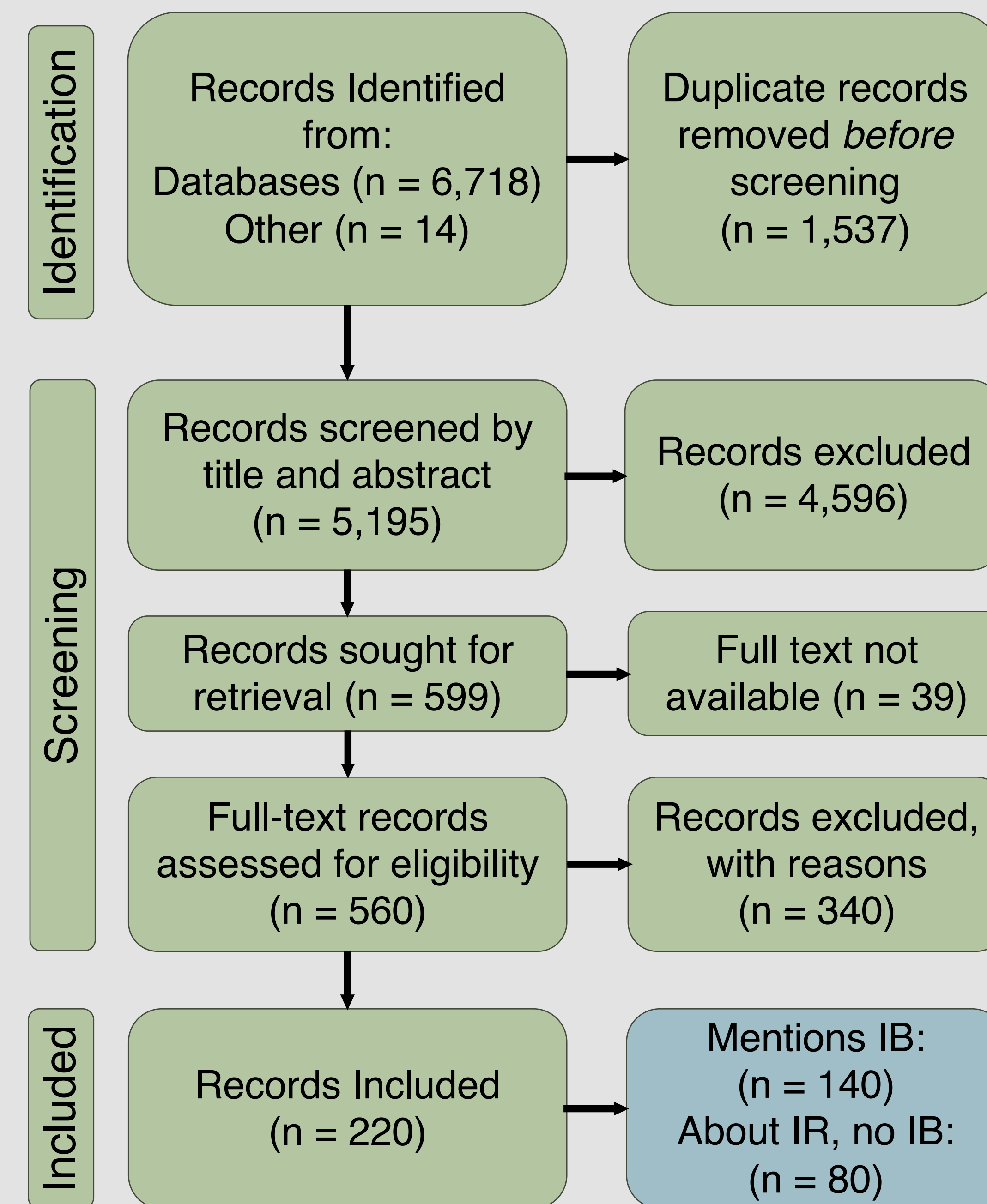
University
of Windsor

Introduction

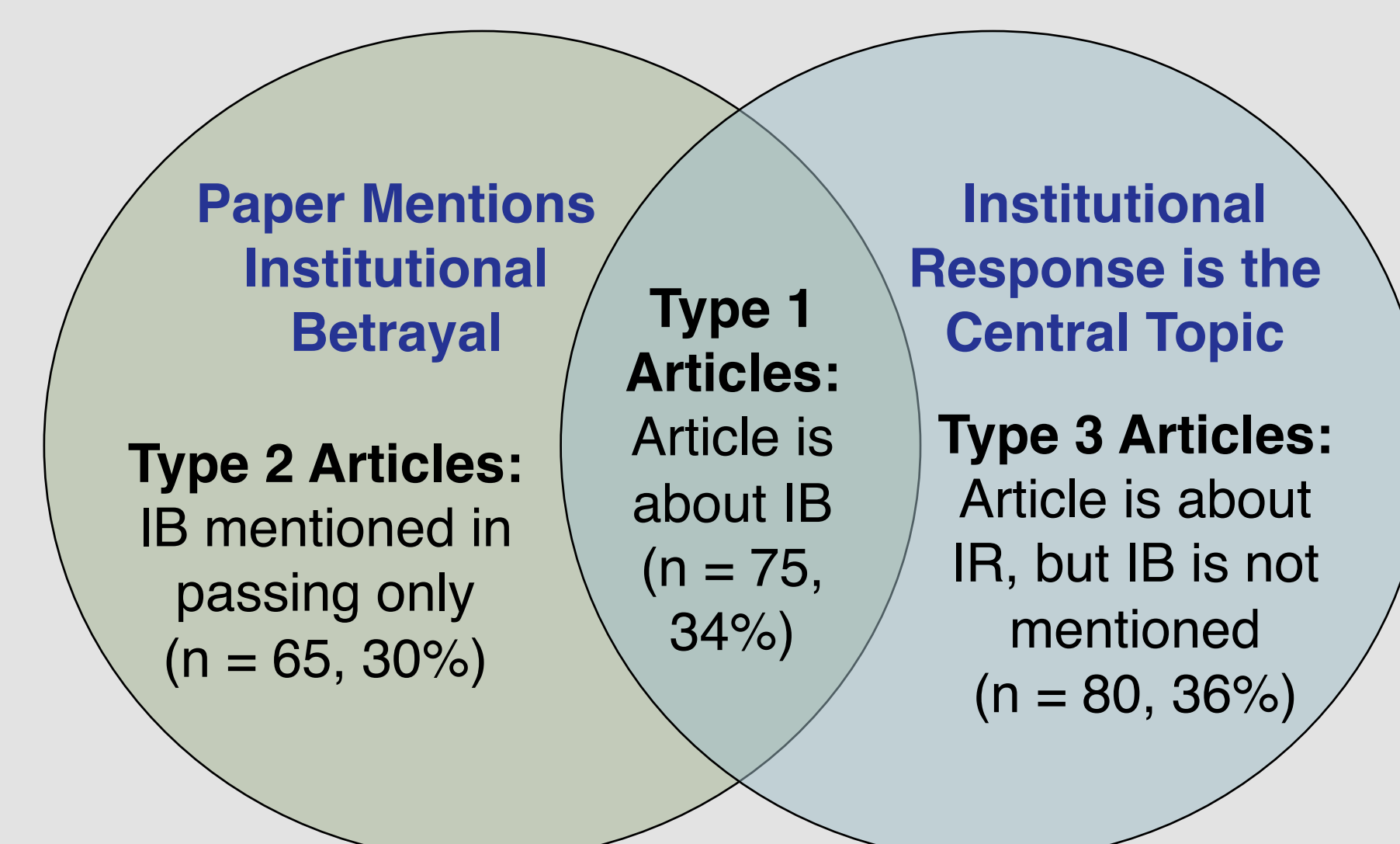
Post-secondary institutions have recently been under increased scrutiny regarding their ability to prevent and respond to campus sexual violence (CSV). The day-to-day practices that constitute institutional response (IR) to violence have direct implications for survivors navigating the bureaucracy of their institutions in the wake of sexual violence. Poor IR to CSV is often referred to as *Institutional Betrayal* (IB; Smith & Freyd, 2013; 2014), which broadly refers to practices or policies within an institution that perpetuate harm to those who are dependent on the institution. IB includes acts of omission (e.g., lack of CSV prevention) and acts of commission (e.g., confusing reporting procedures). IB is also associated with a range of adverse outcomes for survivors (Sall & Littleton, 2022). This systematic review of CSV literature is guided by a feminist intersectional lens as well as Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EST posits that individuals exist within various levels of larger social-ecological contexts which shape relationships and behavior (E.g., individual, microsystem (relational), meso/exosystem (community), and macrosystem (societal) levels; Campbell et al., 2009). The goals of this review are to identify what specific behaviors, policies, responses, and other factors constitute IB as defined by the existing literature and to use the EST framework to organize and identify relationships between those factors. Finally, this review explores how IB at each level of the social ecology impacts social psychological outcomes for survivors of sexual violence.

Prisma Flow Diagram

(Page et al., 2020).



Systematic Review Sample (N = 220)



Empirical Studies:

- N = 125 (57%)

Commentary/Lit reviews:

- N = 65 (29%)

Other (theses, books):

- N = 30 (14%)

Post-Secondary Setting:

- N = 156 (71%)

Multi-setting/Not specific:

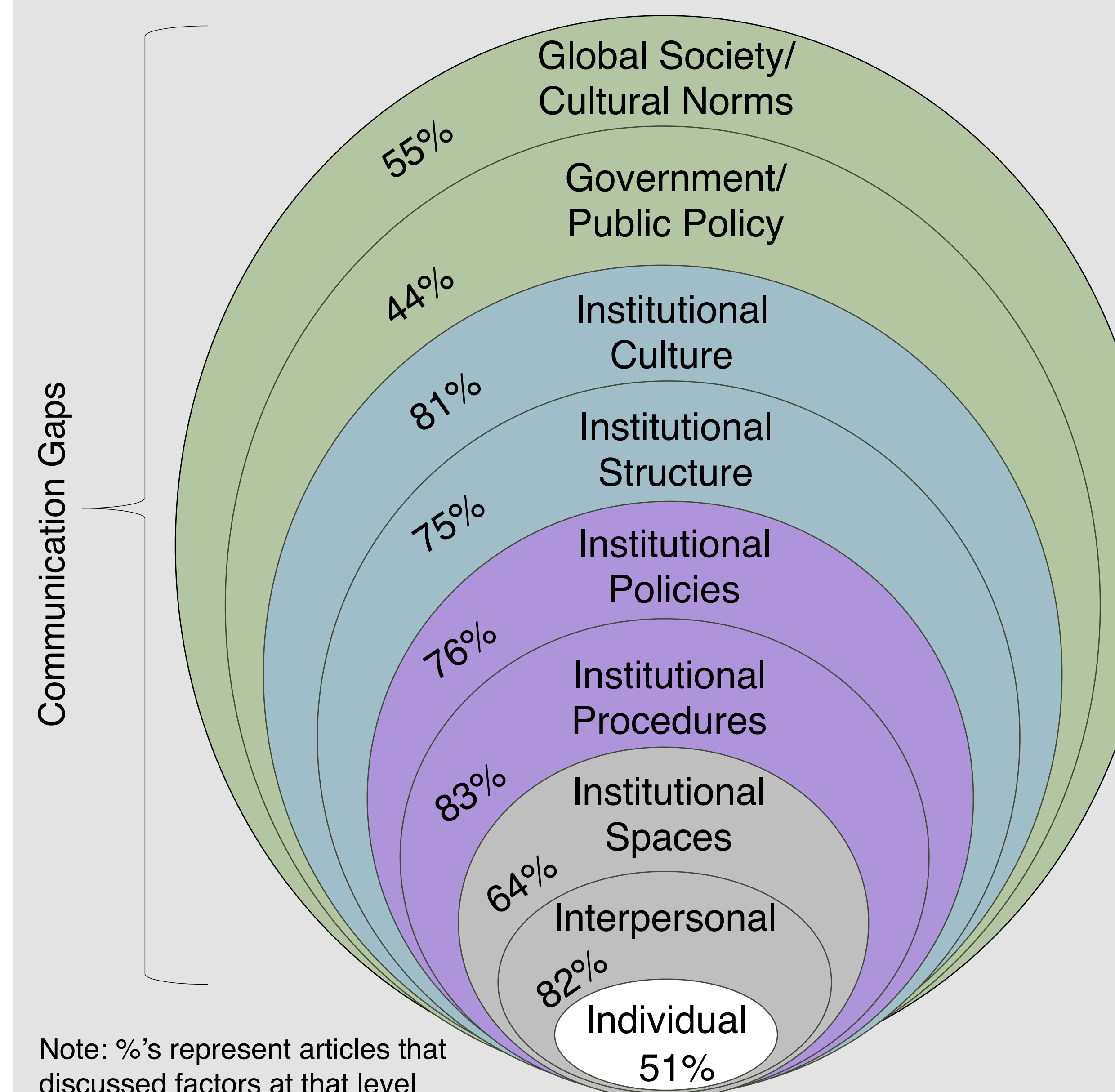
- N = 17 (8%)

Other (military/church)*:

- N = 47 (21%)

*only included in RQ 3

Results: RQ 1 & 2: What Does IB Look Like? (N = 102 articles that mentioned IB in a CSV context)



Macrosystem (Societal) Level Factors (66%)

Lack of federal/state guidance on CSV; patriarchal power/oppression structures; public policies without oversight or enforcement; apathy regarding victimization of marginalized groups; conflict between government and institutional policies; cultural silencing practices; normalized rape culture; politically-driven decision-making

Exosystem (Community – Broad) Level Factors (88%)

No institutional buy-in to prevention; abuse of power to perpetuate violence; refusal to remove known perpetrators; hierarchal and patriarchal structures of power; “damage control” (protect the image of the institution) mentality; problematic institutional norms; normalized rape culture; lack of training across institutional levels; silos/no collaboration between departments

Mesosystem (Community – Specific) Level Factors (88%)

Inconsistent policies and procedures; confusing/difficult reporting procedures; inaccessibly written policies (“legal-ese”); policies or procedures made without student consultation; mandatory reporting or “compelled disclosure” policies; no oversight, enforcement or evaluation of policies; false-promises; practices that silence survivors; no prevention focus in policies

Microsystem (Relational) Level Factors (92%)

Non-response/ignoring survivor; broken/lack of websites with policies and resources; victim blaming, minimizing, dismissive, or denial responses; violence in campus spaces (fraternities, residences); lack of safe spaces (women’s groups, LGBT centers); attacking survivor personally; lack of advocacy options, SV cover-ups; punishing the survivor

Individual Level Factors (51%)

Role confusion (“whose job is that?”); administrators who do not understand or value prevention initiatives; staff who feel unprepared to work with survivors; faculty, staff, or admin who do not perceive CSV as their problem, rape-myth endorsement, victim blame attitudes

Research Questions

1. What factors have been characterized as contributing to Institutional Betrayal in the campus sexual violence response literature?
2. Using EST as a framework for organizing those factors, what does Institutional Betrayal look like at each level of the social ecology in post-secondary settings?
3. Across contexts, what social psychological outcomes for survivors have been identified as relating to Institutional Betrayal, and what specific findings have been reported regarding these outcomes?

Methodology

- **Searched 16 databases** across 8 disciplines. Search string included 14 phrases related to sexual violence (e.g., sexual assault, rape, sexual misconduct, etc.) AND 18 phrases related to institutional response to violence (e.g., institutional betrayal, institutional support, university response, etc.).
- **Inclusion (n = 220):** English, Peer reviewed papers & books, dissertations & theses, SV victimization focus, discussed IR implications, relevant to post-secondary campus context.
- **Exclusion (n = 340):** Not applicable to campus context (19%), not English (1%), not academic (14%), not about SV or perpetration-only focus (26%), no relevant institutional considerations (28%) or not otherwise relevant (12%).

Results: RQ 3: Outcomes Associated With IB

Twenty-four studies quantitatively measured experiences of IB and explored related psychological outcomes. Of these, 23 studies used original or modified versions of the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ; Smith & Freyd, 2013), and one study used a single open-ended question. IB is largely associated with intensified clinical post-traumatic symptoms. Additional social-psychological correlates of IB include (↑ = increased; ↓ = decreased):

- ↓ Institutional attachment/closeness (n = 5)
- ↓ Institutional perception/satisfaction (n = 4)
- ↓ Perceived social support (n = 3)
- ↓ Institutional forgiveness (n = 1)
- ↓ Institutional/interpersonal trust (n = 1)
- ↓ Self-esteem (n = 1)
- ↓ Sense of control/empowerment (n = 1)
- ↑ Help-seeking avoidance (n = 3)
- ↑ Likelihood of leaving institution (n = 2)
- ↑ Sense of unsafety/vulnerability (n = 2)
- ↑ Adverse impact on school/work (n = 1)

Across the 140 records that mentioned IB, the following social psychological factors were most commonly identified as *potential* outcomes of IB but warrant further empirical exploration:

- Fear of reprisal by institution
- Financial Harm
- Social Isolation
- Difficulties with communication
- Substance use
- Strain on romantic, platonic, or professional relationships
- Impact on lifestyle or activities

Conclusion

Literature on IB has focused on factors that manifest at the relational and community levels. Commonly, IB occurs when conflicts arise within the social structure of an institution, such as when individual responses to disclosures conflict with SV policies, or when hierarchal power structures hinder efforts to improve protocols or build supportive spaces. Gaps in communication within an institution contribute substantially to IB. Systemic IB (e.g., inadequate policies, lack of prevention, shifting administration) can be more challenging to capture through typical quantitative measures compared to apparently isolated or interpersonal examples of IB (e.g., blaming, disbelief). This review has highlighted emerging perspectives regarding how IB manifests in post-secondary settings and has emphasized the need for more research on the ways in which IB can adversely impact survivors.

Acknowledgements

The author is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC File Number 752-2021-1459) and from the UWindsor Humanities Research Group. Thank you to my research advisor, Dr. Charlene Y. Senn.

SSHRC CRSH



Find more information at
genadufour.com