



HEART

Creating Victim-Centric Spaces for Muslim
Survivors of Sexual assault on College Campuses

Lessons from a year-long anti-sexual assault advocacy program
for student leaders



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the #metoo movement gains traction, survivors of sexual violence are disclosing and seeking help at higher rates, including those who identify as Muslim. Yet, too often, in their moment of disclosure, Muslim survivors, like their non Muslim peers, are met with inadequate responses. Muslim communities can play a key role in responding to and supporting survivors and working to prevent sexual violence.

HEART is a nationally recognized nonprofit that has been promoting sexual health education and sexual violence prevention in Muslim communities for the last decade. Through this work, the organization's leaders have learned the **numerous barriers** facing survivors in Muslim communities, and are working to push for systemic change that reduces the barriers facing survivors as they seek help.

With the reality that an overwhelming number (1 in 4) of college women experience sexual violence on their campuses, it is not surprising that many Muslim students are either victims themselves, or in bystander roles calling them to respond to and support their peers. Muslim students who are victims of sexual assault on college campuses are particularly vulnerable to suffering in silence. Like all survivors, Muslims face barriers to reporting, including shame, self-doubt, love/fear of the perpetrator, and fear of not being believed. Yet, there are unique barriers facing Muslim survivors that stems from the misappropriation of cultural and religious tradition, thereby encouraging survivors to stay silent and not seek help. These include belonging to a community that values marriageability, extreme spiritual guilt, self-blame for the assault, pressure to forgive their perpetrator, and living between the intersection

of Islamophobia and sexual assault. Those who do seek help and disclose can often times be shamed and blamed for their assault, and their perpetrators may face little to no accountability.

Currently, there are not enough spaces or services on most campuses that adequately serve the unique needs of Muslim survivors of sexual assault. Many Muslim student-led organizations in particular have shared with HEART staff their limited competency in responding to student disclosures and supporting survivors to seek healing and justice. At the same time, students have shared that the existing services on campus do not offer the nuance and cultural-sensitivity that many Muslim survivors are looking for.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, HEART implemented a year long anti-sexual violence advocacy training program for Muslim student leaders ages 18-22 on three college campuses across the country. These trainings brought students together to understand sexual violence, learn how to support victims, and develop victim-centric approaches, policies, and best practices that address and prevent sexual violence in student organizations.

In partnership with the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago, HEART conducted a program evaluation in order to gauge its effectiveness and inform future programming.



Pre- and post-survey data indicated that HEART's programming model of working in partnership with Muslim students is effective and facilitates important student activism and student-led campaigns on campus. The data not only showed that student leaders were able to build their capacity specifically in the area of addressing sexual violence, but it also showed that they were able to apply those skills to addressing other stigmatized and sensitive topics.

Perhaps the most compelling success of this program was the student activism that it facilitated, particularly at one of the west coast campuses. Muslim students committed to this program found themselves at odds with leaders of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) on campus, who were opposed to hosting the program. Ultimately, these student leaders led a revolution and worked to establish a HEART chapter on campus in order to sustain ongoing programming. Despite the challenges these students experienced, the university recognized them for their excellence through a university-wide award within their first year of being incorporated.

This finding brought to the surface many of the deeper questions we explore in this report around systems of power and privilege among student organizations on campus, building trust and cultivating belonging for marginalized students, and addressing the gaps in traditional Muslim-led structures.

As such, this pioneering program built the foundation for a long-term vision for our sexual violence prevention work and brought intersectionality and nuance to the forefront when working to build victim-centric spaces on college campuses. Participants showed an increase of knowledge and felt more equipped to support their peers who experienced sexual violence. Moreover, it serves as an excellent case study offering several key learnings for those working to design programs led by directly impacted people. This report will explore in detail the lessons learned from this program, as well as the evaluation findings.

THE PROGRAM

The year-long program had three components and reached campuses in California, Illinois, and Washington, DC:

training student
leaders
to be survivor
advocates

co-facilitating
awareness
workshops with
the student
leaders on campus

conducting pilot
research
and evaluation

This program ultimately strengthened the capacity of **25 student leaders who then collectively reached nearly 146 students on five campuses** through ongoing awareness campaigns and programming. Participants explored experiences with stigmas around sex, sexual violence, and rape culture in Muslim communities and learned skills to challenge these social norms. The overarching goal of this program was to build the knowledge, skills, and capacity of student leaders and help them create more victim-centric spaces and services for Muslim survivors. Specifically, these spaces and services would:



Be attentive to and inclusive of the needs of Muslim survivors and will be free of victim-blaming and rape culture.



Offer survivors the nonjudgmental support, safety, and timely responses they need to seek healing and justice.



Actively work to dismantle the structural barriers Muslim survivors face when trying to seek justice and healing.

THE CAMPUS TRAININGS WERE A TWO-PART SERIES:

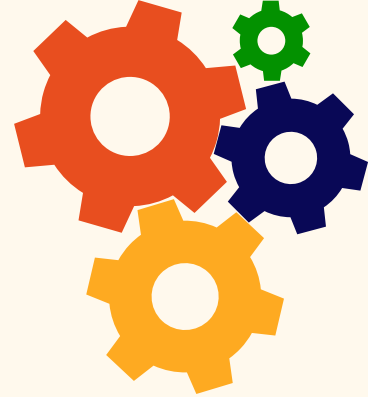
1 'train the trainers'



The first training followed a **train the trainers model** and recruited student leaders to make a year-long commitment to serve as anti-sexual violence advocates on campus. This day-long training was an opportunity for students in leadership positions on each campus to delve deeper into the discussion and work to strategize on how to create safer spaces within their student-led organizations. Student leaders:

- **Were recruited and selected by an application process to serve as Fellows.**
- **Committed to co-hosting at least two additional follow up events with HEART in the school year after being trained.**
- **Continued to receive virtual and on the ground technical support and programming ideas.**
- **Were required to attend additional continuing education programming through webinars on campus organizing, the Title IX process, and Islamic law.**

2 sexual assault awareness workshops



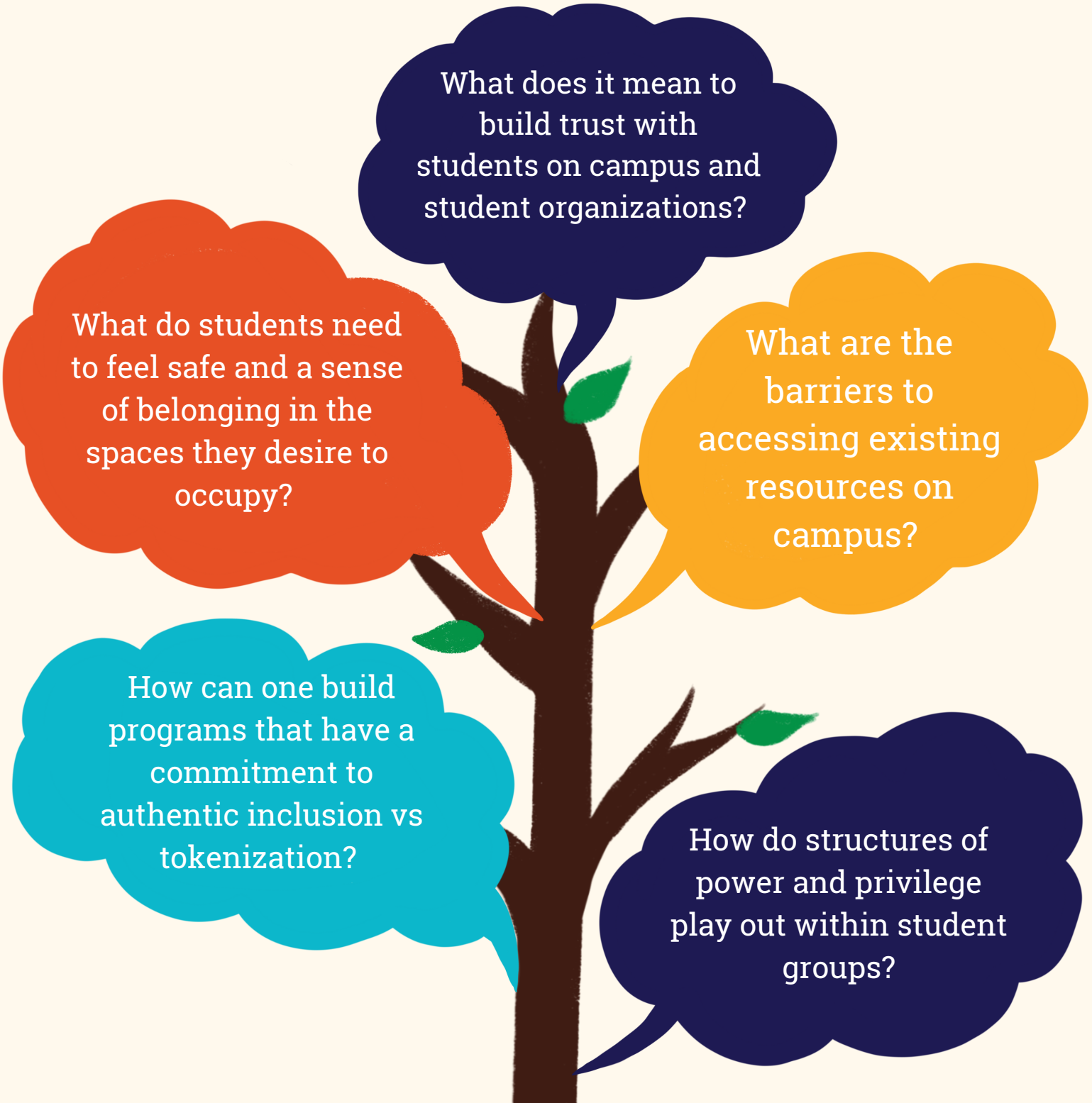
The second component of the program **implemented sexual assault awareness workshops reaching the general Muslim student body**. These workshops were co-facilitated by the HEART fellows as a way for them to practice their acquired skills and build trust and rapport with the student body as a resource and support system. The seminar brought participants together to learn important information about sexual violence and myths surrounding sexual violence. Particularly, participants:

- 1 learned the various barriers to disclosure for victims, especially within Muslim communities, how to support survivors, how to report assaults, and the local resources accessible to survivors on campus.
- 2 were offered additional support and resources to student survivors who disclosed their sexual assault after having established contact with workshop facilitators.

These workshops had a separate evaluation and research component, the results of which will be explored in another paper.



AS WE DEVELOPED THIS PROGRAM, WE CONSIDERED SEVERAL QUESTIONS:



What does it mean to build trust with students on campus and student organizations?

What do students need to feel safe and a sense of belonging in the spaces they desire to occupy?

What are the barriers to accessing existing resources on campus?

How can one build programs that have a commitment to authentic inclusion vs tokenization?

How do structures of power and privilege play out within student groups?

THE CURRICULUM

The HEART team worked to develop a rich, comprehensive curriculum for the student leaders to take a deep dive into understanding sexual violence. Topics included sexual violence 101 such as definitions, statistics, and barriers to disclosure; facts about sexual violence in Muslim communities, the power and control wheel, avenues of support and the **RAHMA principles, a framework grounded in the Islamic principle of compassion (rahma) on how to respond to survivors of sexual violence.**

The curriculum also included time for personal reflection, small group work, resource mapping, and case studies. As mentioned earlier, the student leaders also participated in continued education through additional webinars, including a webinar on the intersections of Islamic law and sexual violence, as well as one on organizing on college campuses.

The two-hour workshop for the greater student body covered Sexual Violence 101, with a brief mention of the RAHMA Principles.



- Respond by listening
- Affirm & believe
- Honor cultural & religious context
- Maintain privacy
- Assist with providing resources

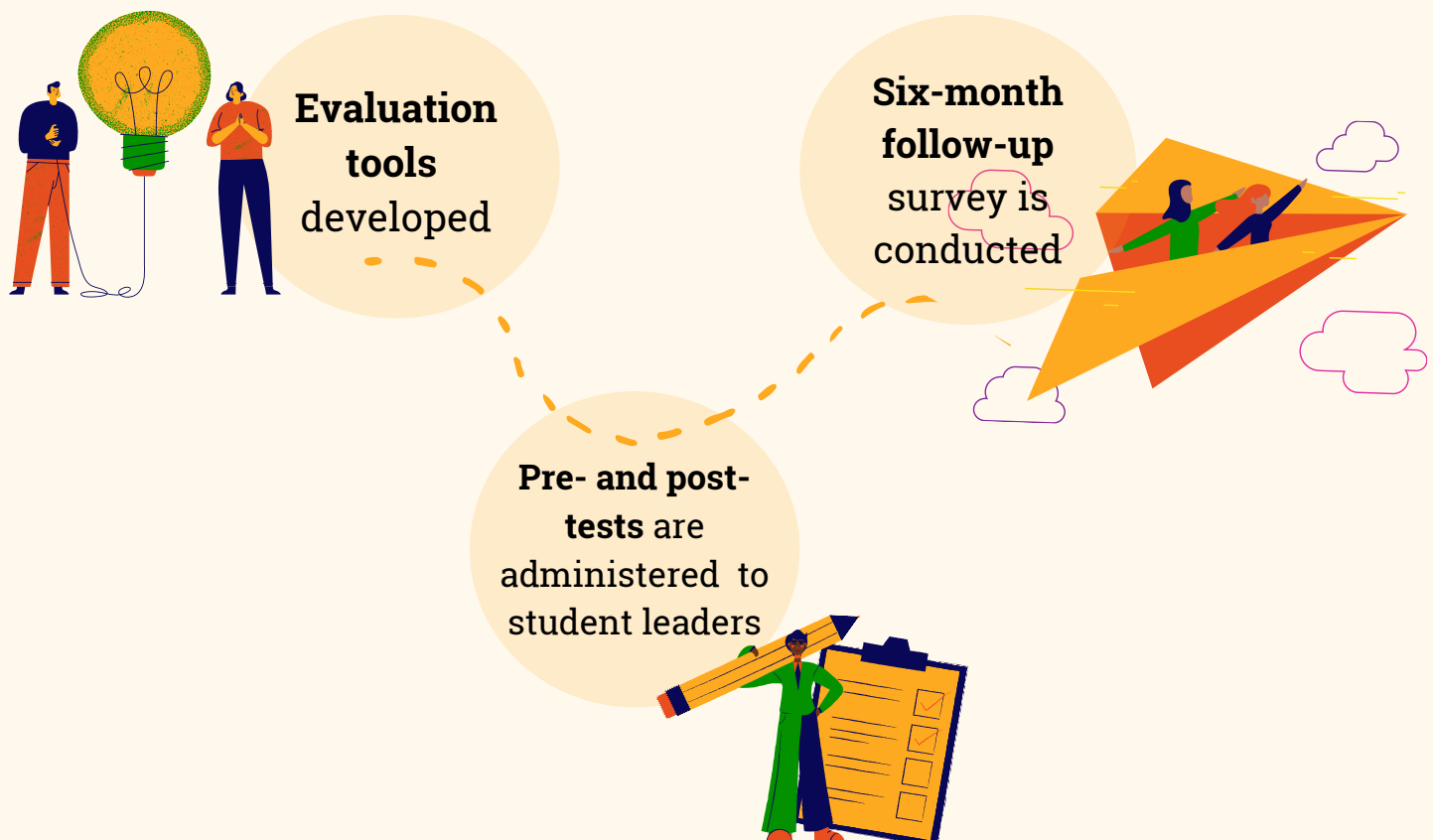
KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROGRAM INCLUDED:

- ★ Student/survivor led
- ★ Muslim and/or people of color led
- ★ Co-creation/shared leadership
- ★ Healing centered
- ★ Strengths-based and honored identities
- ★ Intersectional & interdisciplinary

RESEARCH METHODS

The Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University Chicago has been a key partner in the evaluation of this program. Evaluation included pre- and post-surveys for the group of student leaders as well as 6-month follow up qualitative interviews to measure their success in applying their skills and facilitating change in their student organizations. The 2-hour workshop used a post-workshop evaluation to determine its efficacy; the results will not be discussed in this paper. This research was reviewed and approved by Loyola University Chicago's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH: A Year Long Program



THE FINDINGS



HEART programming is effective and builds capacity of participants to better meet the needs of survivors.



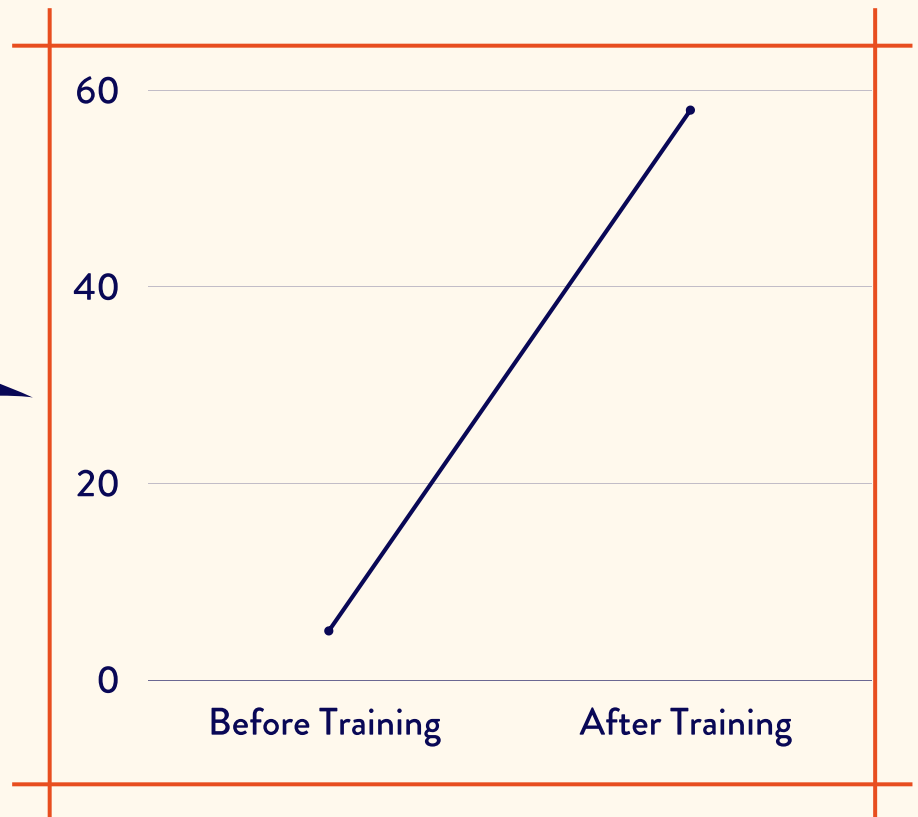
After the training...

- ★ Student leaders reported feeling more equipped to support a friend after a sexual assault occurs.
- ★ Students reported feeling more confident providing resources and information to survivors.
- ★ Students were more likely to refer survivors to on campus resources and local rape crisis centers.

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

A SURVEY SNAPSHOT

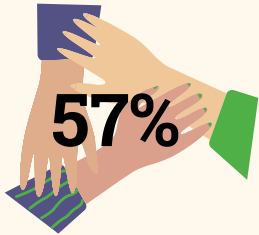
The proportion of students who feel very well equipped to address the needs of Muslim survivors **increased** from 5% to 58%.



HELPING SURVIVORS ACCESS RESOURCES

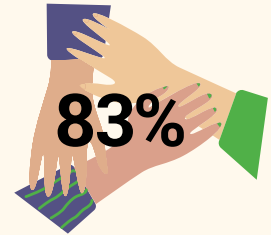
After the training, students feel more confident in their ability to provide information about resources to survivors.

Before Training:



The proportion of students who would recommend on-campus sexual violence prevention organizations to other friends **increased from 57% to 83%**.

After training:



SURVEY RESULTS :

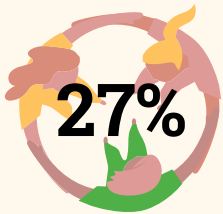


- Confidence in themselves to provide resources to survivors
- Likelihood to recommend on campus resources to survivors
- Likelihood to seek help from local rape crisis center or sexual assault agency

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS' CHOICE TO REPORT

Students also showed increased confidence in helping a survivor with on-campus and off-campus justice systems.

Before Training:

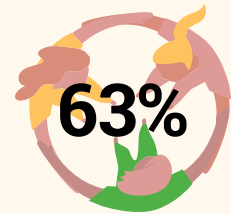


A lot to a great deal of confidence in their ability to help a survivor work with **on-campus justice systems**

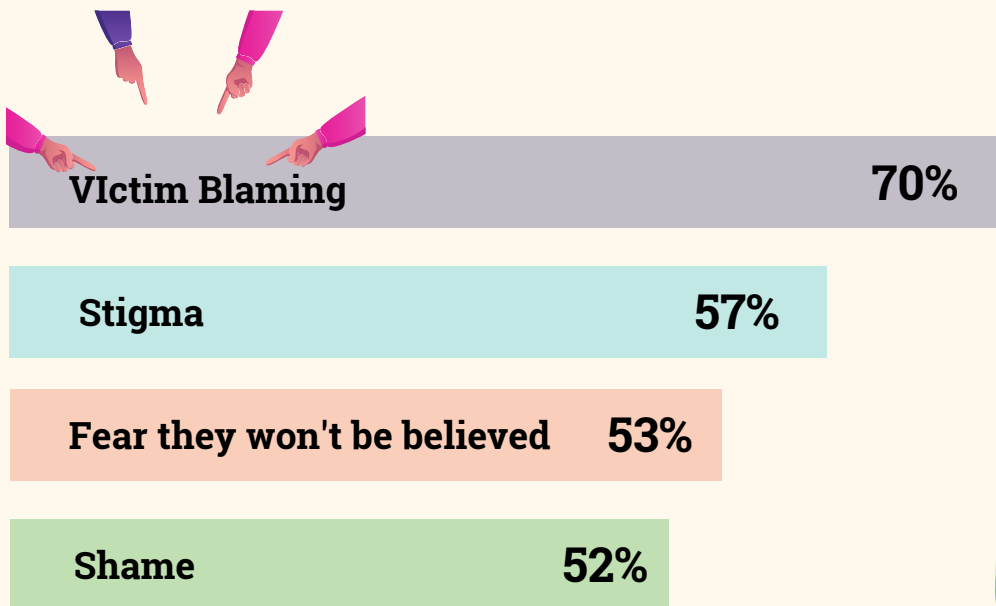


A lot to a great deal of confidence in their ability to help a survivor work with **off-campus justice systems**

After Training:



MOST COMMON REASONS SURVIVORS CHOOSE NOT TO REPORT:





Skills gained in this program were universal skills that can be applied to any experience needing support.



- ★ Student leaders eagerly utilized skills from the workshop and training including: active listening, providing resources for survivors, and offering more critical and conscious responses to sexual violence.
- ★ While a few students utilized these skills specifically with survivors, many recognized the universality of these skills when engaging any person experiencing trauma.
- ★ Overall, students had limited knowledge of policies and laws regarding sexual violence, limited interactions with Title IX investigators, some collaboration with campus advocates, and had completed minimal sexual violence research outside of the workshop/training.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Student leaders were asked about the skills and knowledge they gained from the HEART training and workshops. There was unanimity across the respondents regarding their skills gained and implementing the RAHMA principles, specifically in how to support a survivor through active listening, providing resources, and creating a safe space. Respondents became more cognizant of their own behaviors and reactions to sexual violence or victims of sexual violence. One respondent explained that:

After having these trainings and these conversations I realize that that's victim blaming and that's wrong of me to do because it's not the victims fault, so I definitely think...I think I'm still in a...trying to address these conversations in a non-judgmental way (17MELF).

Not only does this suggest that students are retaining information taught by HEART but that they are critically reflecting on their own thoughts and actions regarding sexual violence as a result of the HEART training.



Having the students retain the skills learned in the training is important, but implementing these skills and the RAHMA principles with survivors and individuals experiencing trauma exemplifies the necessity of these skills. Two respondents shared their experiences with supporting a survivor:

I think from the experiences that I have had to have these conversations before, it was really important just to listen to them and allow them to feel the emotions they were feeling at the moment but never forcing them to feel something- not telling them what to do, basically, and being very patient with them. But also letting them understand how much support I can offer and how much I am willing to offer because I also have a limited amount of energy, physical energy and emotional energy. In terms of resources, I try to know as many as I can and I would like to say I am pretty well equip with the list starting from the [HOPSITAL] having rape kits to like all the offices on this campus that relate to sexual violence so I would give them those resources only after they feel comfortable and they allow, give me the permission to. (08LIPA)

I have a friend, I'll say friend A. This individual unfortunately experienced sexual abuse during their childhood when they went over to a relative's house. And they've been struggling with that for a long time now and they still, of course they've overcome it. Well they said, they told me that they've overcome it now that they're in college and when they shared their experience with me. The first word that I said was that I was glad that they were so strong that they are able to stand right here in front of me and share this with me. I was glad that I was somebody that they could trust and that I just love them from the bottom of my heart and I would be there for them. (16MELP)

Both of these students presented not only the bravery of the survivors, but their ability to provide emotional and physical support and resources in a way that aimed to comfort and empower the survivors. They implemented the RAHMA principles in a manner that garnered gratitude and trust between themselves and the survivors without undermining the severity of their experiences. Having these examples of supporting survivors reveal the importance and practicality of the skills provided by HEART.

The respondents that did not interact with a survivor were able to recognize how they still utilized these skills with other friends or acquaintances that needed emotional support. In this way, the students understood the universality of these skills and how they can be integrated into everyday life. Some respondents expressed:

“So just having it to just implement in day-to-day life. I don't want to say social change—I feel like that's a little bit more—kind of self-righteous—but just to make it a little bit more normal, include it in day-to-day life. Normalizing stuff. It's not just something you do at HEART from, you know, only in the workshop, it's a thing people live with (02SOMJ)

“It has come up in so many other instances where you wouldn't think that. When you are learning it, you are like -Okay, Yeah someone comes out to me and shares their story, this is where it comes in. This doesn't only have to be in a moment of trauma” (29SUHA)

In this way, not only are students grasping the skills taught, but they are implementing and normalizing the importance of these skills. Specifically, they are exemplifying the universality of the RAHMA principles not just with sexual violence survivors, but anyone in need of emotional support. In a way, the RAHMA framework has provided students with the skills to become more empathetic.

Students were grateful for having culturally-sensitive programming. Not only is it rare to have Muslims discuss sexual violence generally, but it is often not discussed with Islam and cultural nuances in mind. One respondent explained that this was the first time she learned about sexual violence from a religious framework, but she also emphasized how empowering it was to have Muslim women specifically discussing sexual violence. She explained that **“a lot of times, it feels very alienating and [women] can't talk”** (29SUHA), so to have the inclusion of a Muslim woman voice presents the information through a lens that is often underrepresented.



Muslim students found it uncomfortable and stigmatizing to openly talk about sexual violence as an issue affecting Muslims.



- ★ While sexual violence (SV) resources are growing on campuses, many students felt their overall campuses were limited in accessibility and effectiveness in responding to or preventing sexual violence.
- ★ Among the Muslim communities across campuses, there is overwhelming denial and hesitation to discussing sexual education and violence.
- ★ Many student leaders found it difficult to share SV knowledge with their families, specifically with male relatives, due to deeply ingrained mythical beliefs regarding SV as well as generational, language, and cultural barriers.
- ★ Islamophobia often was present in the form of microaggressions and the stereotypes and negative expectations that students faced when addressing sexual violence.

MUSLIM CLIMATE REGARDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Student respondents were additionally asked about the climate within the Muslim community on campus more specifically. The majority of respondents characterized an overwhelming hesitancy by the Muslims on campus in discussing sexual education or sexual violence. Many respondents associated words like “fear”, “harm,” “difficult,” “awkward,” “controversial,” “frustrating,” etc. when bringing up sexual violence with other Muslims on campus. It is worth noting that some respondents are not strongly connected to the campus Muslim community, but that does not disregard the overwhelming lack of conversation about sexual violence among Muslim students.

More specifically, there was an overwhelming sense that Muslims on campus believe in the myth that sexual violence does not occur in Muslim communities or that it is haram, religiously prohibited, to discuss these kinds of topics. Thus, it comes to no surprise that much of the sexual violence-related harm among Muslims persist through denial and stigmas. One respondent retroactively explained their interaction with Muslims when attempting to discuss sexual violence:

That conversation would have never happened; we rarely ever talked about things like sexual assault or violence against women or anything of that sort because most people assume that we're Muslim so this conversation does not need to happen because these kind of things don't happen in our community. Some of them were like “we don't do that stuff.”(12ILHM)

One respondent explained that **“all the prevention work being done is just students who spend a lot of physical and emotional labor to complete these things” (08LIPA)**. The student reveals the physical and emotional exhaustion of engaging in SV prevention, but alludes to a disappointment in the university response to SV on campus. In this way, the student response to SV may be a result of a lack of university or institutional support. Although resources are available on campus, students are aware and frustrated by the lack of prevention, response, or enforcement of university policies by the university as a whole.

IMPACT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA AND STEREOTYPES

HEART interviewers were curious about students' experiences with Islamophobia on campus in relation to sexual violence. Overall, respondents agreed that Islamophobia is not really an issue felt on their campuses because of a substantial Muslim population and presence on their respective campuses.

At the same time, many student leaders offered reflective observations regarding how Islamophobia may inhibit people from reporting or discussing sexual violence. As one respondent explained, **“somebody may wanna protect their religion against whatever is being said in society or wherever they live. And so they sit with the discomfort, they sit with the pain instead of coming forward”** (02SOMJ). There is both a fear in how others will perceive Muslims reporting sexual violence, but also a shared anxiety over being the **“perfect Muslim”** and ignoring issues of sexual misconduct. But, the respondent rebutted and said, **“let’s just talk about it”** (02SOMJ) rather than keeping these issues hidden or masked under the fear of Islamophobia.

While blatant Islamophobia does not seem to be an issue on these campuses, students revealed the subtle microaggressions experienced when discussing or presenting about sexual violence. Specifically, a respondent explained that non-Muslims often were surprised that Muslims were discussing sexual violence. One respondent presented a nuanced description:

“So I think sometimes folks come in and they’re worried that—oh, ya know—yeah you’re talking about sexual violence in the Muslim community but are you being aware of the intersection of things. Like do we talk about privilege? Do we talk about different identities that exist within the Muslim community? So I think definitely, I remember when we had our first workshop I think people were a little worried that, oh what if they talk about sexual violence but they’re not LGBTQ friendly, that sort of thing. Right?” (15LAIG)

While this specific incident presents a critical reflection of how intersectional the discussion of sexual violence can be, it also alludes to the negative expectations projected onto Muslims. This respondent refers to the misconception that Muslims are not progressive enough to discuss sexual violence, and are often misjudged by non-Muslims. Not only do these sentiments perpetuate Islamophobic stereotypes, but these microaggressions complicate and undermine the SV work done by Muslims.



HEART provided an opportunity to Muslim students to explore these issues in a way that they did not have before.



★ While many Muslims still adhere to myths regarding sexual violence within Muslim communities, more students are beginning to discuss this stigmatized issue.

★ Students felt it was difficult to concretely discuss change on their campuses but recognized having culturally sensitive programming through HEART as a sign of positive change for Muslims on and off campus.

CHANGE IN CAMPUS CLIMATE

Once respondents described how they perceived their campus climate regarding sexual violence, they were probed to assess the changes on campus since the HEART workshops and trainings. While it was difficult for some respondents to assess broad “change” across their campus, a few respondents recognized that having HEART and the workshops was change in and of itself. For many of the students, having HEART as an outlet and justification to discuss sexual violence among other Muslims provided an opportunity that was not offered to them prior. One respondent explained:

If those conversations aren't brought up, if someone's not initiating it, then that's not going to happen. And I think with bringing HEART to [university]it has definitely sparked that initiative to start raising awareness and to hopefully break the taboos surrounding sexual health and sexual violence. (17MELF).

Not only did it spark a shift in conversation, but respondents also said that HEART's presence on campus provided the cultural perspective needed to engage Muslims in these discussions. One respondent explained:

Bringing that cultural perspective in it because I feel like, at first, it was kind of like one brush that's depicting experiences and so a lot of folks who can't even really talk about sex just really didn't feel like had a voice (15LAIG).

The culturally-sensitive programming fostered a reason to discuss sexual violence, but, according to this respondent, students gained a voice in combatting cultural stigmas and sexual violence. It is worth noting that a respondent (29SUHA) expressed that **some students still voiced misconceptions regarding sexual violence, but now they had the voice, language, and space to concretely break down those myths.**

Across the interviews, students revealed a general hesitation by Muslim men in discussing sexual violence. Thus, respondents were surprised and excited to see Muslim men engage in discussion through the HEART workshops and events. When asked about how campus climate changed, one respondent expressed:



I don't know how I would have measured that but I do know that it was good to see, especially Muslim males coming to the workshop and what not. Having these conversations, because, you know, a lot of, in my perspective, and also a lot of from what I have seen, a lot of males tend to not want to have this conversation or feel like it's not about them (08LIPA).



For this student, HEART provided not only an open space for discussion, but a space that encouraged men to also engage in constructive conversation that perhaps did not exist for them before. We begin to see a gendered component to how Muslim men and women differ in their interaction with HEART as well as their general response to SV. One respondent, perhaps realistically, explained that campus climate may have changed in a minute way. In their words:



I would like to think that it changed, but I don't think that it changed as much as... I would like to think that it had that effect on people, but in reality I don't think that it did as much. Mostly because...it's really hard to reach out to young people about these kind of things because they are still invested in other things and it's really hard to kind of get their attention. (12ILHM)





Barriers to ongoing programming included lack of support from other Muslim-led organizations with greater power and privilege on campus.

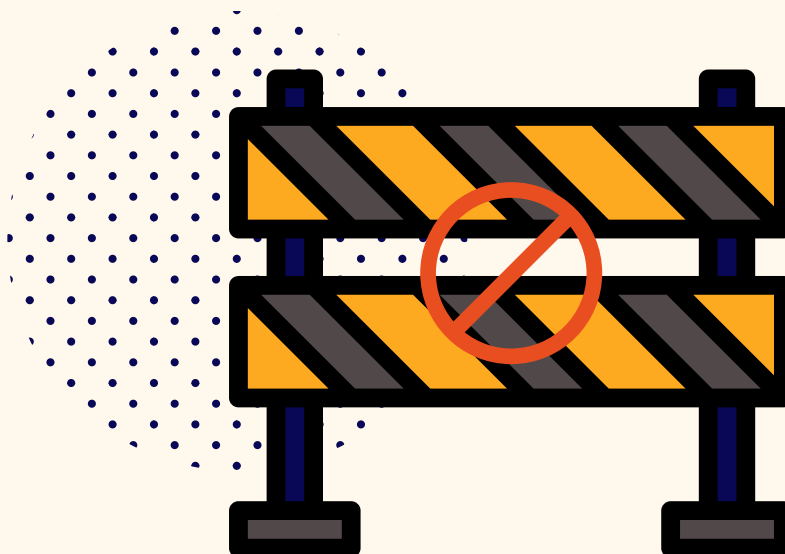


- ★ While students intended to create new workshops on campus, timing, logistics, and difficulties with student organizations were cited as reasons for the common delays in implementing new programming on campuses.
- ★ Aside from logistical barriers, student leaders struggled with engaging Muslim students and Muslim organizations on campus in serious and open conversations regarding sexual violence.

BARRIERS TO CAMPUS CHANGE

When asked about barriers to creating change on their campuses, respondents began by listing logistical barriers they face: finding spaces for events, collaborating with other student organizations, funding and fundraising, connecting students to campus resources, finding creative ways to engage students, reaching more students across campus, creating a HEART organization on campus, etc.

That being said, **the greatest barrier among student leaders was engaging the Muslim community and organizations on campus in serious and open conversations regarding sexual violence.** Students referenced grave tensions between HEART Fellows and Muslim student-led organizations on campus, especially with the organizations' leadership boards. For HEART Fellows, fostering trust and a strong relationship with a major Muslim student organization not only would help them reach the larger Muslim community on campus but also help to engage Muslims from a religiously legitimate perspective. Specifically, one respondent explained that **"that unwillingness to have those conversations is a bit concerning, especially since it's coming from the board members"** (15LAIG). Thus, many of the student respondents felt frustrated not gaining the support they wanted from the leadership boards and from other spiritual leaders on campus.



One male respondent explained:



...It would have helped if I had another male ally there from MSA. But I also think that just my involvement with MSA definitely—like if I wasn't involved I wouldn't have made—no one would have really cared. Been like “Ok he's just...” you know, or whatever, just brushed it under the rug. Or “Oh he's working with the feminists...” or whatever. So yeah—just being, I guess like, having that history and the involvement—that helped. The gender divide was definitely there. (02SOMJ)

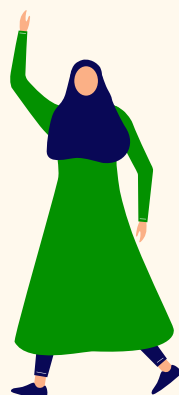


This respondent was one of the only male HEART Fellows, and he pointed out that without his involvement in the Muslim organization, he did not know how other men may have responded to HEART workshops. He alluded to a few misconceptions of how Muslim men respond to sexual assault or about feminism more generally. So, we begin to see problematic attitudes and reactions from men that further hinder how sexual assault is discussed in the Muslim community.

Similarly, many respondents expressed hesitancy in discussing sexual violence with men (especially male relatives) or knowing how to address misconceptions often held by men. In this way, we can see how the issue becomes more focused on destigmatizing the mere discussion around sexual assault than the behaviors perpetuating sexual violence. A respondent critically explained that:

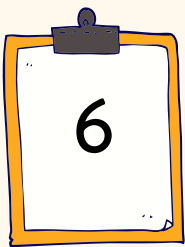


So we do have that presence, but I kind of want/wish that we focused more on what we're trying to talk about and what we're trying to bring awareness to, rather than, I don't know, it's kind of like...It's one of those things where acknowledging that a lot of what is talked about it is taboo, quote unquote, ya know, to bring up. And so there is that discomfort or this people who are unsure how to respond to it. (15LAIG)



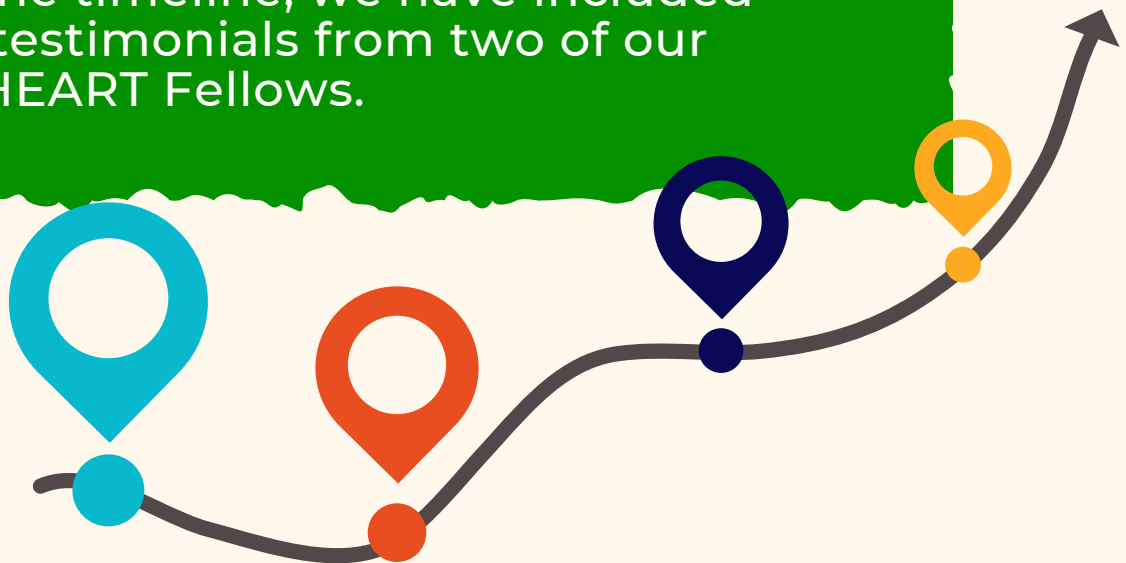
CASE STUDY

OUR FINAL FINDING



When students receive programming from an intersectional lens, it can facilitate pioneering student-led activism.

The following timeline offers an in-depth look at one of our most successful campuses on the west coast and the student organizing that occurred as a result of this program. For anonymity purposes, we have named this university *Best Coast University (BCU)*. Following the timeline, we have included testimonials from two of our HEART Fellows.



TIMELINE

MAY 2017

HEART staff begin to work with MSA at BCU to establish a year long fellowship about supporting Muslim survivors of sexual violence.

NOVEMBER 2017

9- Homam begins to organize with other Muslim student led organizations on campus. Student Government at BCU offers to support the program financially given student activism and organizing.

15- Homam and allies attend MSA Town Hall where a student leader asks if a popular vote would persuade the board to support the fellowship. The MSA president states that a popular vote may indicate a need for the program and that they would consider supporting if that was the case.

MAY 2016

12- MSA at BCU invites HEART to present on sexual violence in the Muslim community.

OCTOBER 2017

4- MSA president emails student leaders stating the MSA no longer wants to participant and partner with HEART. HEART had already started to secure trainers, bookings, and accommodations for the fellowship.

Homam confronts the MSA president. President states the program is no longer aligned with the goals of the MSA and the MSA would not support a program relevant to only some members.

JANAUARY 2018

2- Applications for HEART fellowship reopen after hiatus in 2017.

FEBRUARY 2018

3,4- HEART staff facilitate a two-day fellow and ambassador training for participants in the fellowship program.

25- MSA hosted their bi-yearly Fundraising Gala. Homam and HEART fellows were in attendance and served as volunteers for the event despite interpersonal tensions.

APRIL 2018

8- MSA board sends out a statement entitled "MSA Statement Regarding HEART." The statement documented the reason for refusing to support HEART. HEART fellows believed the statement painted them in an unprofessional light.

18- Despite the uneasy relationship between MSA and HEART, HEART fellows continue to meet and plan events on campus. HEART fellows participate in campus-wide event Take Back the Night, in spite of backlash from MSA statements. This event was recognized for its success by university offices and diverse student groups.

MARCH 2018

6- Six HEART fellows including Jeanine meet with MSA to discuss the relationship between HEART and MSA. HEART addressed MSA's concerns. HEART members believe a petition would help convince MSA board members that constituents are interested in HEART programming.

7- A petition was circulated through MSA indicating a need for HEART programming. A total of 80 MSA members expressed their desire for the MSA to support HEART financially and organizationally. MSA does not change their stance on supporting HEART programming. The results of the petition were shared with MSA on 3/22/2018.

14- HEART fellows host their first HEART workshop titled "Demystifying Sexual Violence: Facts, Myths, & Solutions." MSA board members did not attend the workshop.

MAY 2018

30- HEART fellows host their second HEART workshop “Developing Safer Spaces.” MSA members were in the same building but did not attend the event.

JULY 2018

5- An article titled “How HEART Women and Girls Preys on the Muslim Community” further divides Muslim students on campus between HEART supporters and MSA supporters. Many MSA members cut ties with HEART fellows and vice versa.

SEPTEMBER 2018

School resumes and HEART fellows are socially ostracized. HEART fellows decide they would like to be registered as an official student organization.

NOVEMBER 2018

8- HEART hosts their first general body meeting. There was a low-turnout (less than 10 people). MSA scheduled another parallel event at the same time despite HEART marketing the event.

DECEMBER 2018

6- HEART chapter at BCU hosts a healing space where the group made tasbeeh (prayer) beads. MSA moved their awards night to the same night.

JANUARY 2019

24- HEART at BCU meets with CARE to develop a working relationship and address the needs of Muslim survivors on campus. With the support of the on campus women's center HEART at BCU is able to host biweekly "Tea Time Wednesdays with HEART," a space created to discuss typically "taboo" topics in the Muslim community.

APRIL 2019

17- HEART fellows continue to meet and plan events on campus. HEART participates in Take Back the Night. Like the previous year, Take Back the Night was a very successful event for HEART and we were able to outreach and connect with hundreds of students.

JUNE 2019

22- HEART at BCU teams with HEART National to bring the RAHMA Retreat, which was a 2-day workshop conference for the west coast.

BCU awards HEART at BCU a Certificate of Recognition for contributing to the campus community in uplifting underrepresented groups on campus.

MARCH 2019

6- The chapters most successful event "Let's Talk About Sexual Health, Baby" with Dr. S takes place. Dr. S is an OBGYN who facilitated a woman-only space in which different forms of contraceptives, sexual health, and gender-based violence myths were discussed. About 20 were in attendance, our biggest turnout of the year.

MAY 2019

HEART at BCU continues to be a student organization on campus aimed at "Education and advocacy for Muslim survivors on campus."

SEPTEMBER 2019 - PRESENT

- Leadership currently struggles with recruitment given the history of the group's formation.
- HEART at BCU members are involved in multiple student organizing spaces making it difficult for the group to stay active and fully engaged.
- HEART at BCU members continue to have unique needs which need to be met as Muslim survivors (prayer areas, accessible dinners during Ramadan, etc.)

In his own words:

HOMAM



As soon as I jumped aboard the HEART mission, I felt immediate opposition and turbulence from the community. When I, along with another student, confronted the MSA President about going back on their word for the HEART fellowship, this kickstarted the deterioration of my belonging in the Muslim student community at BCU. The board stated that the program no longer aligned with the greater goals of the MSA and they would not support a program that was only relevant to some Muslims; the president retracted their support of the program altogether. We began discussing an alternative vision of collaborating with various campus organizations to bring the fellowship to life, understanding that this work would be harder without the support of the MSA. Meanwhile, we still tried to maintain our professionalism with the MSA in order to advance HEART's vision. When we continued to face opposition, we tried organizing through a petition. Ultimately, we decided to launch the fellowship separately from the MSA. Challenges that arose during the HEART fellowship and some challenges new leadership continues to face are as follows:

the BCU @ HEART team being heavily involved in other clubs so at times it became very overwhelming trying to juggle other clubs, work, extracurriculars, studying, etc.;

“Once losing a relationship with MSA, HEART events became taboo...”

...and we lost a lot of advertising; and lastly the chapter had difficulty reaching Muslim survivors on campus because of the ostracization MSA created. This became a problem when campus partners would ask HEART @ BCU how they could best support Muslim survivors and HEART. Yes, HEART @ BCU succeeded by carving a place for itself on campus...

“...but it did so at the cost of personal relationships from the alienation of the MSA.”

Now, HEART @ BCU and its members continue to experience marginalization: they are viewed as a social pariah in Muslim spaces and “too exclusive” in non-Muslim survivor spaces on campus.

In his own words:

HOMAM



We as students know this work is hard, and these obstacles have motivated us to keep fighting despite the difficulty in recruiting and retaining members on campus.

“As the personal and professional relationship between myself and the MSA board deteriorated, I questioned my place in MSA as a whole.”

The reality was that there was no other space on campus offering a prayer space, accessible dinners during Ramadan, or Friday prayer service for Muslim college students.

On the other hand, there was a dire need for sexual violence prevention within the community and I felt alone in my efforts to combat it. Muslim survivors of sexual trauma are often silenced by members of the faith who unknowingly--or knowingly--perpetuate victim-blaming that impacts one's spiritual health and makes them feel excluded from the faith community based on their traumas. It is important to both support marginalized Muslims in general, but also support the subgroup of Muslims further marginalized due to sexual trauma within the larger Muslim community.

I decided to take a risk and trust myself to work towards improving my own community rather than leaving it entirely.

I realized that black and white thinking in the context of supporting marginalized groups and progressive causes is overly simplistic; often more nuance is required. I continued with the fundraising gala and remained professional with the board because it was important even for a cause like HEART, that may be perceived as divisive, to accommodate to more conservative religious views. After all, those spaces include many types of Muslims and a working relationship between them would mean adequate resource accessibility for Muslim survivors in the long run.

In the end, I did lose MSA friends who invalidated the need for HEART, but I gained a greater awareness of the full scope of my community members.

“This has helped me be more vocal about issues arising within my community as well as believe in the simultaneity of existence.”



In her own words:

JEANINE

“My decision to participate in HEART @ BCU left me feeling alienated from what once was a safe spiritual campus community I was active in previous years.”

This alienation and how easily myself and the HEART @BCU team were outcast, is a testament to what survivors feel in Muslim communities, and further demonstrates why we need organizations like HEART to create alternative spaces for spiritual healing.

“The silencing that happened @BCU is, unfortunately, not an anomaly but a reality in many of our Muslim communities.”

When we faced the original pushback from MSA board, we as a HEART team, thought meeting with the MSA board would help clear up any misunderstandings and explain the importance of HEART’s presence on campus, especially since many of us, myself included, were friends. We really did believe that a petition would work and show the MSA board the support from MSA members.

After all the advertising and campaigning we did around the petition, MSA board sent out a statement entitled: “MSA Statement Regarding HEART,” which documented communication between HEART and MSA board from their perspective. In this email, they presented all the reasons why they refused to support HEART. This email was especially detrimental to the HEART fellows at BCU that were also involved in the MSA because it painted us in an unprofessional and manipulative light. Tensions were also high because members of the HEART fellows team, like myself, were also part of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) leadership; SJP and MSA leadership already had strained relationships. These tensions inevitably conflated and further exacerbated the uneasy relationship between MSA and us as HEART fellows.

“Ultimately, MSA members who were also HEART fellows or SJP members began to feel unwelcome in MSA, despite having been very active members in the years prior and even holding leadership within the MSA.”



In her own words:

JEANINE

Furthermore, the article, "How HEART Women and Girls Preys on the Muslim Community" further divided Muslim students on campus, between HEART Fellows and MSA supporters. This article would set the tone for the 2018-2019 academic school year in which MSA no longer advertised our events and often had events scheduled at the same time, HEART Fellows felt unwelcome in the shared community lounge. Members, such as myself began spending time at the on-campus Womxn's Hub instead.

“

Although lack of support from MSA@BCU brought a lot of challenges, it also forced us to network and think more broadly about what community means.

”

Our campus partnerships strengthened and allowed us to connect with other student organizations, reaching out to Cross-Cultural Staff, the CARE office, and the Womxn's Hub.

Beyond the tensions of the MSA the 2018-2019 school year was difficult for programming for the HEART fellows, since many of the fellows who received the training had graduated in 2018 or stepped down from their positions due to the strained MSA relationship. In 2018-2019, we were a total of seven board members and general members; despite this we remained passionate about HEART's vision. However the reality was that we also held leadership positions in other organizations on campus and found ourselves spread too thin under the tense circumstances. It was the support of the Cross-Cultural and Womxn's Hub staff that helped empower us to continue to do this work, demonstrating the way community can be redefined and reimaged.

“

I hope to live in a future where there is a HEART chapter on campuses all across the US, and Muslim students do not have as many barriers as we did.

”

DISCUSSION



- ★ There is a need for victim-centric spaces for Muslim survivors of sexual assault on campuses. Reinforcing the narrative that Muslims are not impacted by sexual violence may prevent Muslims from seeking support.
- ★ One of the biggest barriers was engaging Muslim organizations on campus in serious and open conversations regarding sexual violence. Students with marginalized identities engage in campus activism as a way of responding to not feeling heard.
- ★ The burden of this advocacy often falls on the most directly impacted. This can also contribute to burn out and further isolation.
- ★ Further research should explore how does power and privilege manifest in Muslim communities and determine who is included, seen, and given a place to belong.
- ★ Campus engagement with HEART resulted in numerous positive changes, including moving from denial of issues to open conversations, building the capacity of students to better serve the needs of their peers who may be survivors, and identifying barriers to this work within the campus system.

Ultimately, HEART programming proved effective in building the skills of student leaders as well as activating their own innovation and self empowerment to continue the work well beyond the program ending. We contend that this efficacy was a result of developing programming that was rooted in belonging, intersectionality, and being healing-centered.

Taken together, quantitative and qualitative findings from this case study and pilot program demonstrate the importance of intentionally cultivating space for Muslim students as well as the need for campus administrators and community partners to work together to create victim-centric spaces for Muslim survivors of sexual assault.

While barriers to creating these spaces and the efficacy of HEART's programming have been described earlier in this report, it is imperative to connect these findings to the broader research on awareness, beliefs, and knowledge around sexual violence and the role of student activism in creating change on college campuses.



BUILDING VICTIM CENTERED SPACES

Current literature on sexual violence programming and advocacy on college campuses highlights that Muslim survivors may be missing from institutional discussions around creating victim-centric spaces. Often sexual violence programming is white-led and lacks an analysis attending to race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Marine & Trebisacci, 2018; Linder & Myers, 2016). Similarly, our participants eluded to challenges managing institutional Islamophobia in the form of microaggressions, and surprise from non-Muslim peers that Muslims were open to discussing sexual violence. **This narrative, that Muslims are not impacted by sexual violence, or do not need comprehensive sexual education, may prevent Muslim survivors from seeking the support and spaces for healing they might need.** As such, creating a campus culture and climate which offers multiple avenues of intervention in reducing the frequency and impact of sexual violence is imperative.

Campus culture and climate includes organizational openness to addressing the topic of sexual violence, feeling safe within an organization, and reporting or not reporting an incident (Garcia, Lechner, Frerich, Lust, Einsenburg, 2012).

For an overwhelming number of the student leaders and campus organizations HEART partnered with, one of the greatest barriers among respondents was engaging Muslims and Muslim-led organizations on campus in serious and open conversations regarding sexual violence. Participants' references to tensions between advocates, Muslim organizations, and leadership boards. Perhaps most disappointing to learn is the resistance of Muslim leadership on campuses had to conversations about sexual violence and the ways in which this continued to marginalize Muslim survivors looking for spaces in which their experiences would be honored.

Our findings suggest that the denial by the greater Muslim community on campus led to a divide in Muslim survivors to have a faith-based community and avenue for support. **This highlights not only the role of power and privilege within Muslim organizational boards and leadership, but also the ways in which members of the Muslim community who were committed to creating conversation about sexual violence had to create new spaces for support and belonging.**

This dynamic echoes literature in higher education around power, identity, and student activism on campus. Specifically, students with marginalized identities often engage in campus activism as a way of responding to hostile campus environments, reasserting their existence on campus, and challenging institutional leaders to be accountable (Linder, Quaye, Lange, Roberts, Lacy, Okello, 2019; Linder, Quaye, Steward, Okello, Roberts, 2019). However, student activism also contributes to burnout and compassion fatigue, does not include credit or compensation for student activists' labor, and in some cases can lead to decreased academic performance and a reduction in emotional, and physical well-being including isolation (Linder et. al, 2019; Linder, et. al, 2019).

For some student activists on campus, the dismissal from leaders within the Muslim community empowered them to continue pushing for spaces in which their values, experiences, and worldviews were honored. HEART's engagement with these campus leaders therefore also aligns with literature that suggests minoritized students' path to activism includes the experience of marginalization within identity groups leading to the construction of spaces on campus in which they can thrive and engage in social justice work (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Linder, Quaye, Lange, Roberts, Lacy, Okello, 2019). Furthermore, based on anecdotal lived experience, we know a similar divide between marginalized Muslims and mainstream Muslims exists and warrants further research, namely: **how does power and privilege manifest in Muslim communities and determine who is included, seen, and given a place to belong?**

Lastly, highlighting the resilience and ways of being which seem to be working for Muslim students and survivors on campus is an important element of strength-based praxis (Bryant-Davis, T., & Comas-Díaz, 2016). Given that many of the student leaders shared about how they were directly impacted by sexual violence, it also highlights the ways in which the student leaders may already be engaged in providing support and resources to survivors in their circles. This finding also suggests that the burden of support for survivors of violence may be concentrated to specific key informants and leaders. Attending to the mental and emotional well-being and continued investment in the development of awareness, knowledge, beliefs, and skills of these student leaders is an important factor in continuing change on campus and reducing burnout (Baird & Jenkins, 2003). This finding also uplifts the ways in which decolonial practices of remembering, sharing, naming, and storytelling (Smith, 1999) are ways in which survivors of sexual violence may already be connecting and facilitating in their own forms of healing by disclosing their experiences to individuals they trust.

FINAL THOUGHTS & RECCOMENDATIONS



FINAL THOUGHTS

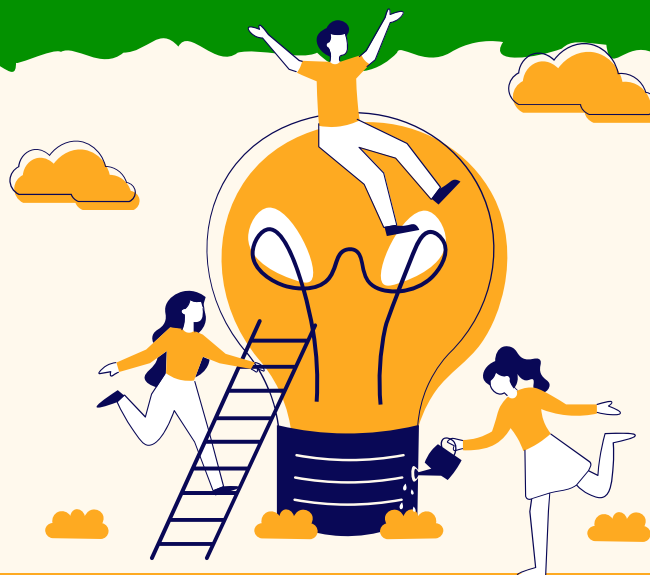
★ Building authentic, victim-centric spaces comes at a considerable cost. The desire to address sexual violence not only deepened existing tensions and wounds within campus organizations and individual relationships but also demonstrated the ways in which power and privilege within the MSA space contributes to erasure of nuance around faith and faith-related journeys.

★ Survivors of violence - who have struggled in silence in the past because of narratives that assume sexual violence happens to less religious or non-Muslim people - learn they cannot rely on their traditional faith community systems to find healing.

★ When survivors and allies worked to create their own spaces due to this pushback, these new organized spaces were labeled as “rebellious”, “liberal”, and “divisive” and thus less religious.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ★ Campus Chaplains, campus organization advisors, and alumni should push student leadership and student leaders to think beyond notions of belonging and affirmation of identity on campus by encouraging student leaders to interrogate their own identities in relation to power, privilege, marginalization and oppression.
- ★ It is important to integrate curriculum and facilitate conversations around the role of campus-based activism contributing to burnout, compassion fatigue, and academic distress.
- ★ Allies and supporters of Muslim survivors on campus can be ready to support the isolation marginalized students experience when they are shut out from faith and organizational resources.
- ★ Hire and retain Muslim therapists, advocates, chaplains, and faculty on campus.



While this report demonstrates culturally specific psychoeducation changed levels of awareness, knowledge, and beliefs about sexual violence for Muslim students on campus, **this report also found that building authentic victim-centric spaces comes at a considerable cost for students working towards a world in which all Muslims have the resources, language, and choice to nurture sexual health and confront sexual violence.**

As the case study demonstrates, students interested in sexual violence prevention work may lose friendships, ties to the mainstream community, and may be ostracized for their commitment to organizing spaces on campus for marginalized students. Furthermore, often the students organizing for these spaces are students who have already been marginalized from mainstream Muslim spaces or who are survivors themselves. The desire to address sexual violence not only deepened existing tensions and wounds within campus organizations and individual relationships but also demonstrated the ways in which power and privilege within the MSA space contributes to erasure of nuance around faith and faith-related journeys.

The resistance and push-back from the MSA community to talk about and support programming was not only hurtful to individual survivors but also contributed to global narratives that dismiss the existence of faith-based trauma and the need for survivors of violence to find solace within a faith-based community. **Specifically, survivors of violence - who have struggled in silence in the past because of narratives that assume sexual violence happens to less religious or non-Muslim people - learn they cannot rely on their faith community systems to find healing.**

Furthermore, when survivors and allies worked to create their own spaces due to this pushback, these new organized spaces were labeled as “rebellious”, “liberal”, and “divisive” and thus less religious. This division not only prevented additional survivors to seek the care and healing they may need, but also perpetuates the ostracization of Muslim advocates. The incorrect and assumptive association that Muslims working against sexual violence are “increasing fuel to Islamophobic rhetoric,” are new ways in which binary categorizations of “good” and “bad” Muslims deter Muslim college students from engaging in open, honest, and often difficult conversations surrounding sexual violence. Intentional and deliberate decisions to not be in solidarity with other Muslims or marginalized groups on campus further creates divisions reminiscent of colonial ideology.

If Muslim-majority organizations cannot stand with Muslim survivors, the authors of this report wonder what is necessary for Muslim campus organizations to stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Students for Justice for Palestine, and Asian and Latinx cultural centers in times of joy and distress. We believe it is the responsibility of campus Chaplains, campus organization advisors, and alumni to push student leadership and student leaders to think beyond notions of belonging and affirmation of identity on campus by encouraging student leaders to interrogate their own identities in relation to power, privilege, marginalization and oppression. Specifically, we urge campus organizations to partner with community organizations rooted social justice and introspection to expand dichotomized notions of who is Muslim and the gatekeeping of Muslimhood on college campuses.



As HEART continues to work with student and community leaders, this report also demonstrates the importance of integrating curriculum and facilitating conversations around the role of campus-based activism contributing to burnout, compassion fatigue, and academic distress. Moving forward we recognize that although campus-based activism can be a source of empowerment for many, often the burden of advocacy falls on those who are most impacted by an issue. As such, individuals and groups interested in continuing sexual violence prevention work on college campuses and with Muslim survivors students must be aware of both interpersonal and systemic silencing which occurs within the Muslim community. We also recommend allies and supporters of Muslim survivors on campus be ready to support the isolation marginalized students experience when they are shut-out from faith-communities and organizational resources related to their well-being on campus. Hiring and retaining Muslim therapists, advocates, chaplains, and faculty are therefore additional ways to ensure that campuses continue to be a place of growth and healing for Muslim survivors.

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