



# Journal of Social and Political Sciences

**Setianingrum, V. M., Nurhaeni, I. D. A., Utari, P., & Rahmanto, A. N. (2025). From Silence to Action: Organizational Communication in University-Based Sexual Violence Prevention. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 8(1), 273-283.**

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.08.01.562

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>

Published by:  
The Asian Institute of Research

The *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* is an Open Access publication. It may be read, copied, and distributed free of charge according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

The Asian Institute of Research *Social and Political Sciences* is a peer-reviewed International Journal. The journal covers scholarly articles in the fields of Social and Political Sciences, which include, but are not limited to, Anthropology, Government Studies, Political Sciences, Sociology, International Relations, Public Administration, History, Philosophy, Arts, Education, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies. As the journal is Open Access, it ensures high visibility and the increase of citations for all research articles published. The *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* aims to facilitate scholarly work on recent theoretical and practical aspects of Social and Political Sciences.



ASIAN INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH  
Connecting Scholars Worldwide

# From Silence to Action: Organizational Communication in University-Based Sexual Violence Prevention

Vinda Maya Setianingrum<sup>1,5</sup>, Ismi Dwi Astuti Nurhaeni<sup>2</sup>, Prahastiwi Utari<sup>3</sup>, Andre Noevi Rahmanto<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,3,4</sup> Communication Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Public Administration Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup> Communication Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Correspondence: Vinda Maya Setianingrum, Communication Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta 57126 Indonesia. Tel: 081235620276.

E-mail: vindasetianingrum@unesa.ac.id

## Abstract

Sexual violence in higher education institutions (HEIs) remains a pervasive issue that threatens student safety and academic success. Despite increasing institutional policies and government interventions, the prevalence of sexual violence remains high, highlighting gaps in prevention strategies and institutional responses. This study examines the role of organizational communication in shaping university-based prevention and response efforts. Using a case study design, this research explores how three universities, Universitas Andalas, Universitas Riau, and Universitas Indonesia manage policy dissemination, interdepartmental coordination, and support mechanisms for survivors. The study applies the Four Flows Theory to analyze how membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning influence sexual violence prevention efforts. Findings reveal innovations in institutional communication strategies for prevention, with some universities demonstrating proactive engagement through structured policies and survivor-centered outreach, while others adopt a reactive approach primarily focused on reputation management. The speed of interdepartmental coordination, bureaucratic responsiveness, and victim protection significantly support prevention efforts. Digital communication channels and student-led initiatives play a crucial role in shaping a campus culture that is aware of and responsive to sexual violence. This study emphasizes the need for transparent, survivor-centered, and well-coordinated communication strategies to enhance institutional accountability, student trust, and the prevention of sexual violence in higher HEIs.

**Keywords:** Prevention, Sexual Violence, Higher Education, Organizational Communication, Institutional Response

## 1. Introduction

Sexual violence within higher education institutions (HEIs) remains a critical and widespread issue that threatens the safety, psychological well-being, and academic success of students worldwide. Despite increased advocacy efforts, institutional policies, and government interventions, the prevalence of sexual violence in universities

continues to be alarmingly high, highlighting the need for stronger, more effective prevention mechanisms (McMahon et al., 2019). Research suggests that the university environment, which fosters close social interactions, hierarchical power dynamics, and sometimes inadequate regulatory oversight, creates conditions that facilitate sexual violence and limit effective institutional responses (Krebs et al., 2016).

Numerous studies indicate that sexual violence in HEIs is not limited to a particular region but is a global concern affecting students across diverse cultural and institutional settings. In the United States, a nationwide survey reported that 26.4% of undergraduate women and 6.8% of undergraduate men had experienced non-consensual sexual contact during their time in college (Cantor et al., 2020). Similarly, research in Europe found that one in five female students had been subjected to some form of sexual harassment or violence (Krahé et al., 2015). In Australia, an extensive report revealed that 51% of students had witnessed sexual violence on campus, while 6.9% reported experiencing sexual assault (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). Studies from South Asia, Africa, and Latin America present similar findings, reinforcing that sexual violence in HEIs is not just a Western problem but a deeply embedded issue in university settings globally (Mullins et al., 2021).

One of the major challenges in addressing sexual violence in universities is the persistent underreporting of cases. Fear of retaliation, social stigma, lack of institutional support, and uncertainty about the reporting process often prevent survivors from coming forward (Holland & Cortina, 2017). Fisher et al. (2003) found that less than 30% of sexual assault cases in HEIs are reported to authorities, suggesting that official statistics may vastly underestimate the actual prevalence. Survivors often doubt the effectiveness of institutional responses due to previous cases where reports were mishandled, dismissed, or subjected to victim-blaming narratives (Richards, 2019). This failure to establish trust in institutional mechanisms perpetuates a culture of silence that enables perpetrators and further discourages victims from seeking justice (Amar et al., 2014).

Institutional responses to sexual violence vary significantly across universities, leading to disparities in support for survivors and accountability for perpetrators. While some institutions have implemented robust Title IX policies, crisis response teams, and survivor-centered approaches, others still lack clear guidelines, trained personnel, and adequate funding to address sexual violence effectively (McMahon et al., 2019). Institutions with insufficiently defined reporting mechanisms or opaque disciplinary procedures tend to discourage survivors from seeking institutional support (Holland et al., 2020). The inconsistency in policy implementation across different universities creates a fragmented system where students receive varying degrees of protection depending on their institution's commitment to addressing sexual violence (Coker et al., 2016).

A growing body of research highlights the importance of organizational communication in shaping institutional approaches to sexual violence prevention. Effective communication strategies can facilitate awareness campaigns, encourage reporting, and enhance survivor support by ensuring that students and faculty understand their rights, responsibilities, and available resources (Banyard et al., 2010). Universities that employ clear and consistent communication regarding sexual violence policies have been shown to foster more supportive environments where survivors feel safer reporting their experiences (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). Additionally, institutions that engage in proactive and transparent communication efforts tend to experience higher rates of student engagement in prevention initiatives and bystander intervention programs (Edwards et al., 2011).

Bystander intervention programs have been particularly effective in reshaping campus culture by encouraging students to recognize and prevent potentially harmful situations (Coker et al., 2011). These programs train students to act as active participants in creating safer environments rather than passive witnesses to sexual misconduct. A study by Banyard et al. (2007) found that students who underwent bystander intervention training were more likely to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence. Similar initiatives in Australian and European universities have demonstrated a measurable reduction in sexual violence incidents following widespread implementation of bystander intervention training (McMahon et al., 2019).

Beyond bystander intervention, the integration of social norms campaigns in HEIs has also contributed to shifting attitudes toward sexual violence prevention. These campaigns use strategic messaging to challenge common misconceptions, such as the idea that sexual assault is inevitable or that victims are responsible for their

own victimization (DeGue et al., 2014). Studies indicate that universities that consistently promote positive social norms regarding consent and respectful relationships tend to have lower rates of sexual violence and increased student participation in prevention efforts (Katz & Moore, 2013). Digital and multimedia campaigns have further expanded the reach of these initiatives, utilizing social media, online platforms, and campus-wide email campaigns to reinforce anti-violence messaging (Amar et al., 2014).

Another key aspect of effective communication in sexual violence prevention is the accessibility and inclusivity of institutional messaging. Many universities fail to adequately consider marginalized student populations, including LGBTQ+ students, international students, and students with disabilities, who face disproportionate risks of sexual violence (Sterzing et al., 2017). Coulter and Rankin (2020) found that LGBTQ+ students were significantly more likely to experience sexual violence than their heterosexual peers, yet many campus policies and communication strategies failed to address their specific needs. Institutions that implement culturally responsive communication—such as multilingual outreach materials, specialized programming for at-risk groups, and trauma-informed approaches—tend to have higher rates of student trust and engagement in prevention efforts (DeGue et al., 2014).

The role of institutional leadership in sexual violence prevention cannot be understated. Research suggests that students are more likely to trust their university's response to sexual violence when campus leaders actively promote and endorse prevention initiatives (Holland & Cortina, 2017). Universities with strong leadership in sexual violence prevention not only provide clearer policy frameworks but also ensure accountability through rigorous enforcement mechanisms (Richards, 2019). Leadership involvement also fosters a campus-wide culture of zero tolerance toward sexual violence, making it clear that such behavior will not be condoned (McMahon et al., 2019).

As digital technology continues to evolve, universities have increasingly turned to digital tools and online platforms for sexual violence prevention and reporting. Mobile applications, online reporting portals, and social media campaigns provide students with easier access to support services while ensuring anonymity in reporting cases (Amar et al., 2014). Research shows that students are more likely to engage with digital-based prevention efforts, particularly when those efforts are interactive, accessible, and user-friendly (DeGue et al., 2014). However, while digital tools offer significant advantages, they also pose challenges related to data privacy, potential misuse, and cybersecurity concerns (Holland et al., 2020).

## 2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore how universities manage organizational communication in preventing and handling sexual violence. A multiple case study allows comparison across institutions to understand how different actors engage in communication strategies (Yin, 2018). The study is based on the Communication of Organizations theory and Four Flow by McPhee and Zaig (2000), which argues that organizations are shaped and sustained through communication rather than existing as static entities. This framework is useful in examining how universities structure policies, coordinate responses, and communicate prevention strategies related to sexual violence (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

The study was conducted at three Indonesian universities—Universitas Andalas, Universitas Riau, and Universitas Indonesia—selected due to their active engagement in sexual violence prevention programs. Participants included members of the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS), lecture, faculty members, administrative staff, student, and public relations officers involved in crisis communication. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 20 participants based on their experience in policy-making, communication management, and sexual violence prevention (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method ensures that insights are gathered from individuals directly involved in university decision-making and communication efforts (Amar et al., 2014).

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews lasting 60–90 minutes were conducted with key stakeholders to explore their roles in crisis

communication and policy implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participant observations were conducted in task force meetings, prevention workshops, and policy discussion forums to examine real-time interactions and decision-making processes (Banyard et al., 2010). Document analysis included reviewing institutional policies, government regulations—especially Ministerial Regulation No. 30 of 2021—media reports, and university archives related to sexual violence cases (Richards, 2019).

Data were analyzed using pattern matching and explanation building, in line with case study research methods (Yin, 2018). The study examined how four communicative flows of four flow theory—membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning—were reflected in university policies and crisis responses (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Membership negotiation was analyzed through how task force members were recruited and trained, self-structuring examined how policies were designed, activity coordination focused on interdepartmental collaboration, and institutional positioning assessed how universities managed external communication with media, government, and the public (Coker et al., 2016).

To ensure research validity and reliability, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing interviews, observations, and document reviews (Flick, 2018). Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including informed consent, participant anonymity, and voluntary participation (Holland & Cortina, 2017). This study provides insights into how organizational communication structures influence the effectiveness of sexual violence prevention and response strategies in higher education institutions.

### 3. Results

This study reveals the complex and multi-layered nature of organizational communication in the prevention and handling of sexual violence in higher education institutions. Findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis indicate that universities employ various communication strategies, yet their effectiveness is shaped by multiple institutional and cultural factors. While universities have demonstrated a commitment to addressing sexual violence through the establishment of Task Forces for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS), the extent to which these task forces operate successfully varies across institutions. In some universities, task forces serve as active agents of change, ensuring that information about sexual violence policies is widely disseminated and that survivors receive the necessary support and guidance.

One of the key challenges affecting communication strategies is the institutional prioritization of sexual violence prevention. While universities formally recognize the issue, prevention efforts often compete with other administrative and academic concerns, resulting in inconsistent messaging and a lack of sustained engagement. In some cases, communication efforts are reactive rather than proactive, with universities addressing sexual violence only after public pressure or media scrutiny. Additionally, internal coordination plays a significant role in shaping communication effectiveness. Universities that foster collaboration between student affairs offices, legal teams, and task forces tend to have more structured and responsive communication strategies, while institutions with fragmented interdepartmental coordination experience delays in case handling and inconsistent messaging.

The cultural environment surrounding sexual violence discourse further influences how communication strategies are perceived and adopted. Universities situated in more conservative settings often encounter social resistance to open discussions about sexual violence, which impacts how prevention programs and reporting mechanisms are framed. In contrast, institutions that actively engage with student organizations and advocacy groups tend to create a more inclusive and survivor-centered communication approach. These findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive and well-integrated communication strategies that extend beyond policy creation to ensure effective implementation and institutional accountability.

At Universitas Andalas, Universitas Riau, and Universitas Indonesia, the role of task forces has been instrumental in shaping the way sexual violence policies are communicated and understood within the university community. Task force members play a pivotal role in ensuring that institutional leadership, survivors, and the broader academic community remain informed about prevention initiatives, reporting mechanisms, and available

support services. Through policy dissemination, training programs, and direct engagement, these task forces are intended to function as the main institutional actors responsible for implementing communication strategies related to sexual violence prevention and response. However, despite their critical role, their effectiveness is frequently constrained by institutional barriers and structural limitations.

One of the primary challenges faced by task forces is limited institutional support, which manifests in resource constraints, administrative delays, and leadership reluctance to fully integrate sexual violence prevention into university-wide policies. Task force members reported that communication efforts about sexual violence are often reactive, occurring primarily in response to media coverage or external pressure. This reactive approach limits the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, as prevention messaging is often delivered sporadically rather than being embedded into the broader institutional culture. Reporting mechanisms has left many students and staff unaware of the formal procedures for seeking help. In many cases, awareness of reporting systems depends on individual initiative, meaning that only those who actively search for information become informed, while others remain unaware of their rights and available support.

In addition to resource and awareness challenges, institutional bureaucracy has further hindered the ability of task forces to function effectively. Task force members described administrative delays in the approval and implementation of new policies in different departments. Task force members emphasized that while formal policies exist, their ability to implement meaningful change is making structures that require approval from multiple levels of university administration. This often results in slow response times when handling cases and delayed outreach efforts for prevention campaigns.

Moreover, cultural and social factors also influence how these policies are communicated and received within the university. Discussions with students revealed that deeply ingrained societal stigmas surrounding sexual violence discourage survivors from coming forward, making communication efforts even more challenging. Task force members acknowledged the need for more inclusive and survivor-centered messaging, as well as stronger engagement with student organizations to build trust within the university community. These findings suggest that while task forces play an important role in shaping institutional communication strategies, their effectiveness is contingent on institutional commitment, consistent policy enforcement, and the ability to foster open dialogue within the academic environment.

Interviews with student representatives further highlighted gaps in institutional communication, particularly regarding how information about sexual violence prevention and reporting mechanisms is disseminated and perceived by students. The student shared their concerns about the inconsistency of institutional messaging, which has contributed to widespread uncertainty among students about where to seek help. While official university policies outline reporting mechanisms, students expressed that these procedures are not always clearly communicated, leaving them unsure of who to approach in cases of sexual violence. Many students described their experiences of navigating institutional channels as confusing, with different departments providing varying levels of support and information, leading to delays or misinterpretations of available services. Beyond the lack of clarity in communication, students also voiced concerns that sexual violence prevention efforts appear to be more focused on institutional compliance rather than fostering meaningful cultural change.

At Universitas Riau, Universitas Andalas, and Universitas Indonesia, student-led organizations have stepped in to fill gaps in institutional communication, taking on the role of informal communicators for sexual violence prevention and response. Student activists described how peer networks and social media platforms have become primary sources of information about survivor support services. These student-led initiatives have been instrumental in raising awareness, because not all students have equal access to accurate information, reinforcing the need for more structured and proactive institutional communication strategies.

Observations during university-hosted events provided deeper insights into how institutional culture shapes the effectiveness of communication in preventing sexual violence. The task force revealed that discussions on sexual violence prevention programs must be formally incorporated into the university agenda, on par with other institutional priorities such as academic policies, faculty development, and administrative restructuring. This

approach addresses bureaucratic procedures and competing administrative concerns that often diminish the visibility and perceived importance of sexual violence prevention initiatives.

Several faculties actively promote awareness by organizing campaigns, discussions, and prevention programs, ensuring equitable access to information across the university. Research indicates that departments with strong leadership support for sexual violence prevention, such as the faculties of medicine and psychology, are more likely to allocate resources, establish infrastructure, and encourage student participation. In contrast, less engaged faculties often lack the necessary resources and infrastructure. Task force members emphasized that university-wide policies should be implemented uniformly rather than being left to the discretion of individual departments.

The variation in engagement across faculties reflects broader challenges related to leadership and institutional commitment. Some departments have demonstrated a clear willingness to facilitate open discussions, support survivor-centered initiatives, and collaborate with student organizations. However, others perceive discussions on sexual violence as controversial or outside the scope of academic priorities. These findings suggest that while institutional culture plays a crucial role in shaping communication strategies, the extent to which universities fully integrate sexual violence prevention efforts largely depends on leadership engagement and the consistent enforcement of policies at all levels of the institution.

Another recurring theme from the findings was the lack of structured coordination between university departments, which significantly affects how sexual violence cases are handled. Observations and interviews revealed that fragmented communication between departments often results in delays in decision-making, inconsistent responses, and inadequate survivor support. Public relations officers, faculty members, and student affairs representatives acknowledged that institutional responses to sexual violence are not always well-coordinated, leading to gaps in procedural efficiency. Some staff members described how, in cases of sexual violence, different departments handle incidents separately, rather than collaborating under a unified framework. As a result, survivors often experience delays in receiving support services.

Coordination challenges are particularly evident in the relationship between legal units, counseling services, and academic departments. One informant explained that these departments often operate independently, making it difficult for survivors to navigate the reporting process. Delays in receiving formal assistance prolong survivors' distress and diminish their trust in the institution's ability to provide effective support. Task force members identified similar structural deficiencies, noting that survivors frequently have to repeat their testimonies multiple times to different university personnel. This repeated recounting of traumatic experiences contributes to emotional distress and discourages some survivors from filing formal complaints. The findings indicate that without improved coordination and communication between departments, institutional responses remain reactive, preventing survivors from accessing the timely and supportive interventions they need. These challenges highlight the urgent need for clearer protocols, interdepartmental collaboration, and an integrated response system to ensure that survivors receive adequate support without bureaucratic barriers.

In addition to internal communication concerns, the study also examined how universities engage with external audiences, including the media, advocacy organizations, and government bodies. At Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Andalas, and Universitas Riau, task force members described how collaboration with women's rights organizations and independent advocacy groups has contributed to a broader dialogue on sexual violence prevention. Digital communication has also emerged as an area where universities are beginning to recognize the importance of student engagement but have yet to fully integrate digital strategies into their prevention frameworks. Task force members explained that while official university accounts have posted about sexual violence prevention, student organizations have taken the initiative to use social media platforms to raise awareness and share survivor support resources. However, students have also expressed concerns about online reporting platforms, particularly regarding privacy and anonymity. Digital reporting channels must ensure strong confidentiality protections so that reporters do not fear potential exposure or retaliation.

Despite these ongoing challenges, the study also identified emerging initiatives that reflect a growing institutional willingness to improve communication on sexual violence prevention. At Universitas Andalas, a new faculty training program has been introduced to help academic staff develop skills in trauma-informed communication, ensuring that survivors receive more appropriate responses when disclosing their experiences. At Universitas Riau, efforts are underway to simplify reporting procedures, reducing bureaucratic obstacles that have previously discouraged survivors from seeking institutional support. Meanwhile, Universitas Indonesia has initiated a collaborative campaign involving student organizations, university leadership, and advocacy groups, aiming to promote a more open and consistent discussion on sexual violence prevention across multiple platforms.

Taken as a whole, the findings demonstrate that while universities have made progress in addressing sexual violence, distinctions remain in how communication strategies are implemented and sustained over time. Institutional efforts are often shaped by administrative priorities, leadership involvement, and socio-cultural norms, meaning that policies alone are not always enough to foster a meaningful shift in attitudes and behaviors. Survivor trust remains a key issue, as reporting mechanisms are not always widely understood or perceived as accessible. Furthermore, inconsistencies in communication across different university units have created barriers to effective collaboration, leading to delays in policy enforcement and case resolution. These challenges highlight the ongoing need for more structured, inclusive, and proactive communication strategies to ensure that sexual violence prevention efforts are fully integrated into university life.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multi-layered role of organizational communication in shaping institutional responses to sexual violence prevention in higher education institutions (HEIs). While universities have implemented policies and established task forces to address this issue, the effectiveness of these efforts is heavily influenced by institutional priorities, internal coordination, and broader cultural dynamics. The findings align with the principles of Communication of Organizations and four flow theory, which argues that organizations are socially constructed through communication rather than existing as fixed entities (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This study demonstrates how the four communicative flows of membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning shape the way universities respond to sexual violence cases. Membership negotiation is evident in how universities integrate task force members into their institutional framework. While some universities provide structured training and clear role definitions, others treat these bodies as symbolic entities with limited authority. This finding supports previous research that highlights the importance of well-defined roles and structured recruitment in strengthening institutional responses to sexual violence (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). The study also found that self-structuring plays a crucial role in determining how sexual violence policies are designed and enforced. Universities with well-defined policies and strong interdepartmental coordination tend to have more effective prevention strategies, while those with fragmented communication structures experience delays and inconsistencies. This aligns with research indicating that structured communication frameworks enhance institutional accountability and survivor trust (McMahon et al., 2019).

A recurring issue in the findings is the lack of structured coordination between university departments, which significantly affects case handling and survivor support. Responses to sexual violence cases are not always well-coordinated, leading to delays in decision-making and survivor assistance. How legal units, counseling services, and academic departments often function independently, making it difficult for survivors to navigate the reporting process. This lack of coordination is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of interdepartmental collaboration in improving institutional crisis responses (Richards, 2019). A related issue is the emotional distress survivors experience when they must repeat their testimonies multiple times to different university departments. The inefficiencies caused by fragmented coordination discourage many survivors from pursuing formal complaints, a challenge that has been widely documented in studies on campus sexual violence reporting (Holland & Cortina, 2017). In addition to structural coordination, the findings also illustrate that universities vary significantly in how they position themselves within public discourse regarding sexual

violence. Some universities, particularly those with stronger engagement in advocacy networks, adopt transparent and proactive communication strategies, fostering a more supportive institutional climate. Others focus on reputation management, responding to sexual violence cases only when public scrutiny forces a response. This supports previous research demonstrating that universities with open and transparent communication policies are more likely to build trust among students and faculty (DeGue et al., 2014).

A key finding from this study is the persistent issue of underreporting, which remains a major challenge across all three universities. Many survivors hesitate to report sexual violence due to fears of retaliation, social stigma, and skepticism about institutional support mechanisms. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which indicate that when universities fail to provide clear and survivor-centered communication strategies, reporting rates decline, and survivors may seek external alternatives rather than relying on internal institutional processes (McMahon et al., 2019). Moreover, this study found that many students perceive university-led sexual violence prevention efforts as compliance-driven rather than a genuine commitment to cultural change. While formal policies exist, the university's messaging does not always reflect a commitment to fostering a long-term cultural shift, reinforcing the idea that prevention efforts are procedural rather than transformative. This aligns with previous research that critiques universities for prioritizing regulatory compliance over meaningful institutional change in addressing sexual violence (Amar et al., 2014). A similar challenge, where student-led organizations have stepped in to fill communication gaps left by the university. Student activists described how peer networks and social media platforms have become primary sources of information about survivor support services, particularly in cases where university-led communication has been inconsistent or insufficient. This aligns with previous findings that highlight the critical role of student activism in shaping campus discourse on sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2010).

Another important finding concerns the effectiveness of digital communication strategies in sexual violence prevention. While universities are increasingly using social media, email campaigns, and online reporting tools, these efforts remain largely unstructured. Some universities have implemented digital initiatives but have no to integrate them into a broader, long-term prevention strategy. This reflects earlier research emphasizing that digital platforms can enhance accessibility and engagement, but they require structured implementation and strong privacy safeguards to be truly effective (Amar et al., 2014). Moreover, concerns about anonymity and digital security emerged as a major issue for survivors, as some online reporting tools lack adequate confidentiality protections, discouraging survivors from utilizing these platforms. This echoes findings from previous research, which argue that digital innovations in reporting must be accompanied by rigorous privacy policies to ensure that survivors feel safe when accessing support services (DeGue et al., 2014). Beyond digital strategies, this study highlights that bystander intervention and student-led awareness campaigns play a crucial role in bridging communication gaps in universities. Student organizations have taken on the responsibility of disseminating survivor support information via peer networks and social media, compensating for the lack of sustained university-led outreach. This finding aligns with research by Banyard et al. (2010), which argues that bystander intervention programs and student-led initiatives are highly effective in shifting campus culture toward active prevention.

The role of institutional leadership also emerged as a defining factor in determining the effectiveness of sexual violence prevention policies. Universities with strong leadership commitment tend to have more comprehensive policies, clearer enforcement mechanisms, and higher levels of survivor trust. The study found that leadership engagement is a key driver of communication effectiveness, as universities where leadership actively endorses and promotes sexual violence prevention initiatives demonstrate higher levels of student and faculty involvement. This finding is consistent with previous research by Richards (2019), who found that leadership-driven communication strategies contribute to greater institutional accountability and more effective crisis response mechanisms. Conversely, universities where leadership is hesitant or reluctant to openly address sexual violence tend to have weaker implementation frameworks, allowing inconsistencies and delays in policy enforcement to persist.

Taken together, the findings reinforce that organizational communication is not just a procedural element of sexual violence prevention but a fundamental determinant of how effectively institutions address and respond to

the issue. The study demonstrates that when communication is structured, proactive, and survivor-centered, institutional responses tend to be more effective. However, when communication is fragmented, inconsistent, or primarily driven by compliance concerns rather than a commitment to change, prevention efforts remain inadequate. The comparison with previous research highlights that universities globally face similar challenges in aligning their policies with meaningful action, further emphasizing the critical need for clear, coordinated, and transparent institutional communication strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of organizational communication in shaping institutional responses to sexual violence prevention in higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings reveal that while universities have implemented policies and established task forces, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains inconsistent across institutions. The presence of Task Forces for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS) reflects institutional efforts to address sexual violence; however, their ability to function effectively depends on institutional priorities, leadership engagement, interdepartmental coordination, and cultural attitudes toward sexual violence discourse. In some universities, task forces operate as active agents of change, ensuring that prevention programs and survivor support services are well-communicated and accessible. In others, they function more symbolically, with limited authority and inadequate institutional support, resulting in fragmented implementation and minimal impact.

One of the most significant challenges identified in this study is the lack of structured coordination, which affects the efficiency of case handling and survivor support mechanisms. The study found that survivors frequently face bureaucratic barriers when navigating the reporting process. In institutions where legal units, counseling services, and student affairs offices operate independently, survivors struggle to access clear and reliable support. This fragmented communication system discourages reporting, contributes to emotional distress, and reinforces mistrust toward institutional responses. These findings underscore the need for universities to establish centralized, survivor-centered support systems that streamline communication between departments and ensure a more coordinated and trauma-informed response.

Another key finding is the variation in institutional positioning regarding sexual violence prevention. Some universities adopt transparent and proactive communication strategies, engaging with students, advocacy groups, and external stakeholders to promote awareness and policy accountability. Others, however, prioritize reputation management, addressing sexual violence only when public scrutiny or media pressure demands action. The study found that institutions with open, survivor-centered messaging tend to foster greater trust and engagement among students and faculty, while those with opaque or reactive approaches risk deepening the culture of silence surrounding sexual violence. This highlights the importance of institutional transparency in fostering a culture of prevention and accountability.

A persistent challenge across universities is many survivors remain reluctant to report incidents due to concerns about how their cases will be handled and whether institutional responses will be adequate. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the need for universities to create an environment in which survivors feel safe and supported when coming forward. The study also found that university-led prevention efforts often appear compliance-driven rather than reflecting a deep institutional commitment to cultural change. While formal policies exist, their implementation and integration into campus culture must be consistent, reinforcing perceptions that prevention initiatives are more procedural than transformative.

The role of digital communication strategies in sexual violence prevention also emerged as a key theme in this study. While universities are increasingly utilizing social media, email campaigns, and online reporting tools, these efforts remain largely unstructured. Survivors and student representatives expressed concerns about data privacy and anonymity in digital reporting mechanisms, leading to hesitation in utilizing online platforms. This highlights the importance of implementing secure and confidential digital reporting tools, alongside clear policies on data protection and institutional accountability.

Beyond institutional efforts, this study found that student-led initiatives and peer networks play an essential role in bridging communication gaps. Student organizations have taken the lead in raising awareness and disseminating survivor support information, compensating for weak institutional messaging. This demonstrates the potential of student-led activism in fostering a more engaged and informed university community. However, the study also emphasizes that while student-led initiatives are valuable, universities must take primary responsibility for ensuring that communication strategies are structured, sustained, and inclusive of all students.

Overall, this study underscores that organizational communication is not merely a procedural aspect of sexual violence prevention but a fundamental determinant of its effectiveness. The findings indicate that when communication is structured, proactive, and survivor-centered, institutional responses are more effective in preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors. Conversely, when communication is fragmented, inconsistent, or driven primarily by regulatory compliance rather than a commitment to change, prevention efforts remain insufficient. To address these challenges, universities must adopt more integrated, transparent, and survivor-centered communication strategies that prioritize prevention, accountability, and long-term cultural change in addressing sexual violence on campus.

**Author Contributions:** All authors contributed to this research.

**Funding:** Not applicable.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Informed Consent Statement/Ethics Approval:** Not applicable.

## References

- Amar, A. F., Strout, T. D., Simpson, S., Cardiello, M., & Beckford, S. (2014). Administrators' perceptions of college campus protocols, response, and student prevention efforts for sexual assault. *Violence and Victims, 29*(4), 579-593. DOI: 10.1891/0886-6708.vv-d-12-00154
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2017). *Change the course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities*. <https://humanrights.gov.au/>
- Banyard, V. L., Plante, E. G., & Moynihan, M. M. (2007). Bystander education: Bringing a broader community perspective to sexual violence prevention. *Journal of Community Psychology, 32*(1), 61-79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.10078>
- Banyard, V. L., Plante, E. G., & Moynihan, M. M. (2010). Bystander intervention: Developing an evidence base for prevention programs. *Journal of Community Psychology, 38*(6), 761-775. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20397>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Townsend, R., & Lee, H. (2020). *Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and misconduct*. Association of American Universities. <https://www.aau.edu/>
- Coker, A. L., Bush, H. M., Fisher, B. S., Swan, S. C., Williams, C. M., Clear, E. R., & DeGue, S. (2016). Multi-college bystander intervention evaluation for violence prevention. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 50*(3), 295-302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2015.08.034>
- Coulter, R. W. S., & Rankin, S. R. (2020). College sexual assault and campus climate for sexual- and gender-minority undergraduate students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35*(23-24), 4571-4594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517696870>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- DeGue, S., Valle, L. A., Holt, M. K., Massetti, G. M., Matjasko, J. L., & Tharp, A. T. (2014). A systematic review of primary prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 19*(4), 346-362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.05.004>

- Edwards, K. M., Gidycz, C. A., Orchowski, L. M., & Banyard, V. L. (2011). Primary prevention of sexual violence: A comparison of programs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(6), 1055-1078. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260510365860>
- Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2003). The sexual victimization of college women. *Research Report, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice*. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Holland, K. J., & Cortina, L. M. (2017). The evolving landscape of Title IX: Predicting mandatory reporters' responses to sexual assault disclosures. *Law and Human Behavior, 41*(5), 429-439. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000243>
- Holland, K. J., Rabelo, V. C., & Cortina, L. M. (2020). See something, do something? Predicting sexual harassment disclosure and bystander intervention. *Law and Human Behavior, 44*(2), 135-147. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000381>
- Katz, J., & Moore, J. (2013). Bystander education training for campus sexual assault prevention: An initial meta-analysis. *Violence and Victims, 28*(6), 1054-1067. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00113>
- Krahé, B., Tomaszewska, P., Kuyper, L., & Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2015). Prevalence of sexual aggression among young people in Europe: A review of the evidence from 27 EU countries. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 21*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.01.005>
- Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2016). The campus sexual assault (CSA) study: Final report. *U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice*. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf>
- McMahon, S., & Banyard, V. (2012). Understanding and addressing campus-based sexual violence: A contextual approach. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 13*(1), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838011426015>
- McMahon, S., Palmer, J. E., Banyard, V. L., Murphy, M., & Gidycz, C. A. (2019). Measuring perceptions of campus climate regarding sexual misconduct: Development of the ARC3 Campus Climate Survey. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 34*(21-22), 4477-4496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517719907>
- McPhee, R. D., & Zaig, P. (2000). The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation. *Electronic Journal of Communication, 10*(1-2). <https://www.cios.org/>
- Mullins, C. W., Rothe, D. L., & Mullins, C. W. (2021). Sexual violence in higher education: A criminological perspective. *Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 19*(3), 312-327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895819873657>
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. (2009). *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication*. Routledge.
- Richards, T. N. (2019). An updated review of institutions of higher education's responses to sexual assault: Results from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 34*(10), 1983-2007. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516658757>
- Sterzing, P. R., Gartner, R. E., Woodford, M. R., Fisher, C. M., & Russel, S. T. (2017). Sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity microaggressions: Toward an intersectional framework for social work research. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 8*(3), 449-471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2016.1263819>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.