

How Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Campus Involvement Impact Students' Sense of Belonging on Campus

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 27 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. This brief includes data for the 23 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their data is not included in this statewide aggregate. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on data related to experiences of intimate partner violence, a sense of belonging on campus, and how these factors affect a student's decision to discontinue their education. This data was collected from the 2025 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (sample size, N = 5,634).

Background

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined by the World Health Organization as behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors. This definition covers violence by both current and former partners². In the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey, IPV is broken down into many subcategories. These include 1) verbal abuse, 2) sexual abuse, 3) physical abuse, 4) emotional/mental abuse, 5) financial abuse, 6) using technology to abuse (sending explicit photos without consent, online harassment, cyber-stalking), and 7) abuse in any other way/don't know how to define. It was seen that 30% of students self-reported an experience of IPV within their lifetime. Within the past 12 months, 14% of students have self-

reported having experienced at least one type of IPV. IPV can be multifaceted and include one or more of the categories listed above. When an individual is a survivor of intimate partner violence, it can significantly and negatively impact their mental health and may cause troubles in future relationships. Understanding how IPV affects the well-being of college students is vital to the overall health of a campus community.

Feelings of Belonging Amongst Students

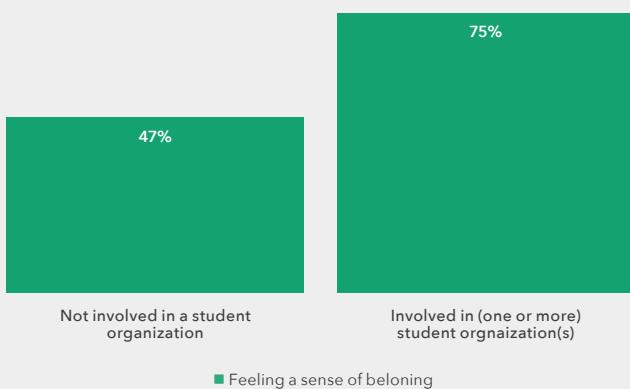
The feeling of being accepted, valued, and respected as a member of the campus community can be defined as feeling a sense of belonging. This feeling is closely associated with overall well-being. There are various contributing factors that impact whether an individual feels a sense of belonging. Students that have experienced IPV have a lower sense of

belonging (63%) compared to students that have not experienced IPV (69%). This may be due to a general decrease in trust or interpersonal difficulties that manifest due to traumatizing relationships.

How Involvement in Activities Influences Well-Being

A strong sense of belonging is important to overall well-being. Community, connection, and support are protective factors against mental health issues and suicidality¹. Bolstering a sense of belonging can be achieved in many ways. A significant increase in a sense of belonging coincides with student involvement in campus activities (religious groups, academic clubs, volunteer groups, student government, Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Association, intermural teams, multicultural organizations, on-campus jobs, etc.). Amongst those who are involved in at least one student organization, 75% either agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging. Compared to those who are not involved in a student organization, 47% agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging. Membership in an organization has benefits that impact the well-being of students.

Chart 1: Student Organization Membership and a Sense of Belonging

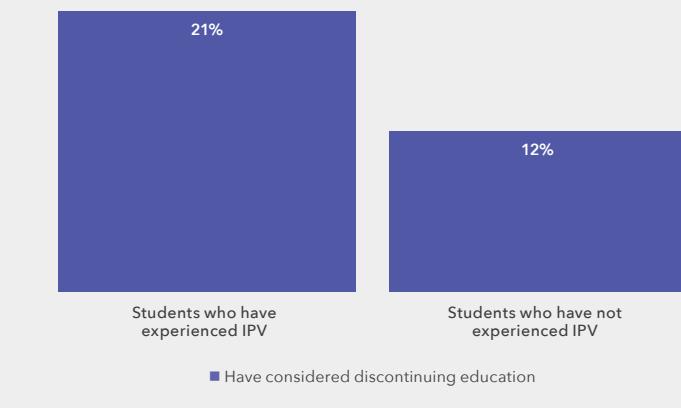


How IPV Influences the Choice to Discontinue Education

There are various reasons that a student would want to discontinue education. Some of the most prevalent

reasons reported by Missouri college students are mental health concerns (47%), a lack of friends/loneliness (37%), and feeling as if I don't belong on campus (23%). These concerns not only impact a student's desire to continue education, but also their overall well-being. IPV also negatively harms well-being and can influence the choice to discontinue education. Of students that have experienced IPV, 21% have considered discontinuing their education. This rate is higher compared to students that have never experienced IPV (12%). As data shows, experiences of IPV contribute to a decreased sense of belonging, which may exacerbate one's desire to discontinue education. IPV impacts various aspects of one's life, whether that be their physical safety, mental health, emotional trust, or their ability to attain an education.

Chart 1: Student Organization Membership and a Sense of Belonging



Conclusion

There are various contributing influences when considering the well-being of students. It is seen that a sense of belonging is positively impacted by membership in a student organization and negatively impacted by experiences of IPV. When striving to increase the well-being of students on campus, it is important to identify which factors are benefiting this pursuit and which factors are hindering it. Promoting camaraderie within student organizations has beneficial impacts across the campus community. Creating actionable steps to decrease instances of IPV will result in greater wellness and increased likelihood

of continued enrollment. A multifaceted lens ensures that each aspect of a student's well-being is fostered.

Resources

Engage

Partners in Prevention created the Engage program, which is designed to introduce students to the concept that by contributing to a culture of care within their campus community, they can be a part of creating a safer campus community. Engage provides information on the reduction of harm related to substance use, interpersonal violence, acts of bias and discrimination, and suicide/ mental well-being. The program aims to reduce chances of substance misuse, IPV, discrimination, and suicide, and teaches students how they can intervene if they know someone struggling with any of these issues. Engage is available to any higher education campus in Missouri. More information can be found at mopip.org/pip/engage.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

Centers for Disease Control's STOP SV Technical Package is a helpful resource for learning actionable strategies in violence prevention.

The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MOCADSV)

The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MOCADSV) unites Missourians with a shared value that rape and abuse must end, and advances this through education, alliance, research, and public policy. To learn more about MOCADSV visit mocadsv.org.

For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit mopip.org/pip/research.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared by Amy Hohenberger, Prevention and Implementation Team Intern, published April 2026.

References

1. Wilkins, N., Tsao, B., Hertz, M., Davis, R., & Kleven, J. (2014b, July). Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence. https://www.cdc.gov/elder-abuse/communication-resources/connecting_the_dots-a.pdf
2. World Health Organization. (2022). Intimate Partner Violence. Violence Info. <https://apps.who.int/violence-info/intimate-partner-violence/>