Hazing Is Widespread Among Student Groups, Study Finds

Boston - More than half of students who belong to campus organizations experience hazing, according to a national study presented here at the annual conference of NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

While the practice is most common among fraternities, sororities, and varsity athletics teams, with more than two-thirds of their members experiencing hazing, it also happens to half of students in performing-arts organizations and more than a third of those in academic clubs, says a report on the study, by Elizabeth J. Allan and Mary Madden, both associate professors in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine at Orono.

Based on survey responses from more than 11,000 students at 53 institutions, the study defines hazing as “any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them.” The activities typically involve alcohol consumption, sex acts, and sleep deprivation, the report says, and they can result in physical and psychological harm, as well as death. Hazing is illegal in most states and classified as a felony in some.

But hazing is “woven into the fabric of student life and campus culture,” Ms. Allan and Ms. Madden say, and it’s often “dismissed as nothing more than silly pranks or harmless antics.”

Nine in 10 students who experienced hazing by the study’s standard did not think they had been hazed, the authors reported. And among students who did identify their experiences as hazing, most said its consequences were more positive than negative, and nearly all opted not to report it to campus officials.

The study also found that a quarter of coaches or advisers were aware of their teams’ or clubs’ hazing rituals, a quarter of such incidents occurred in public on a campus, and in more than half of cases, students posted pictures online.

Colleges’ efforts to prevent hazing are falling short, the report says. Institutions must do more than distribute anti-hazing policies and give one-time presentations, it says, and they should reach out to all student organizations, not just the usual suspects.

Ms. Allan and Ms. Madden plan to publish more reports on their data throughout the year. -Sara Lipka