Gender Differences of Bystander Intervention within a Community Sample

Hannah Perry, Abby Jackson, Andrew Rizzo B. A., Victoria L. Banyard, Ph. D., & Katie Edwards, Ph.D., University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

Abstract

Intro. Given the prevalence of sexual and intimate partner violence in communities, researchers and community leaders alike are exploring potential preventive methods. There has been growing research on gender differences in bystander behavior within college samples; however, few studies have explored gender differences in bystander behavior in the context of community settings. The current study explores gender differences in rates of bystander intervention within small New England communities.

Methods. Our sample was drawn from New England communities in the United States (N = 1,683). Of 1,683 participants, 633 (37.6%) were male and 1,052 (62.4%) were female. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 97 years. The mean age was 56 and the standard deviation was (SD) = 18.2. Of those who indicated their race (n = 1,267), 94.8% of participants (n = 1,197) indicated that they were white. The most common annual household income was between $51,000-$75,999. Participants were offered $1 and reminders as an incentive to participate in the given series of surveys inquiring about each participant’s own bystander behavior within the last month. Results. Three out of the six bystander interventions saw a significant difference with rates of intervention among women.

Gender Differences of Bystander Intervention within a Community Sample

Table 1. Frequency of opportunities to intervene

| Item | Frequency (%) | N
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you heard someone in person or online saying a girl or woman deserved to be raped, how many times did you say that it was not OK to joke about rape (or something else to indicate your displeasure with their comments)?</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In response to knowing someone who had experienced sexual assault or domestic violence, how many times did you do to help them (offer them a place to stay, tell them about resources in the community)?</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you heard fighting like yelling and screaming coming from someone’s apartment, house, trailer, how many times did you do something (call 911, go over to see if the couple is OK) to stop the fighting?</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>1642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you saw a couple on the street fighting like yelling and screaming, how many times did you try to stop the fighting?</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>1645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you saw a drunk person being left behind by their friends a social event or bar, how many times did you offer to help get the drunk person home safely?</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>1641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you saw someone possibly committing domestic violence or a sexual assault, how many times did you do something to try to stop the domestic violence or sexual assault from happening?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Discussion. Future research should investigate areas to improve bystander intervention for areas in which there is an opportunity for a primary intervention as well as secondary for both genders.

Conclusion & Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

• The results of the current study suggest that women are more likely to intervene when a joke or comment is made, when a survivor needs resources, and when a fight is coming from someone’s apartment, compared to men who are faced with the same situations.
• The results suggest that men are just as likely as women to intervene by stopping a fight in the street, helping a drunk person get home safely, or stopping a possible act of dating violence or sexual assault.
• Eagly and Crowley (1986) found that women are more likely to intervene by helping friends, family members, and acquaintances in lower risk situations, and theorized that this is because women are expected and socialized to be altruistic, nurturing, and concerned about the needs of others (3).
• The results of this current study support Eagly and Crowley’s (1986) theory that women are more likely than men to intervene in low-risk ways that prevent sexual violence or domestic abuse and more likely than men to give support to survivors (3).
• Future research should explore methods that would increase intervention rates among men in low-risk or ambiguous situations.
• Future research should also investigate the situations acts of sexual assault and domestic violence are most likely to occur within communities outside of college settings in order to develop optimal bystander intervention training.

References


Gender Differences Continued

• The current study explored gender differences in rates of bystander intervention within small New England communities.

Conclusion & Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

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References


Contact Info: hpey@wildcats.unh.edu, aj2004@wildcats.unh.edu