



# Gender Differences of Bystander Intervention within a Community Sample

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## Abstract

**Intro.** Given the prevalence of sexual and intimate partner violence in communities, researchers and community leaders alike are exploring potential prevention 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 = 4). Out 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 = 1670), 94.8% of participants (n = 1,597), indicated that they were white. The most common annual household income was between \$51,000-\$75,999. Participants were offered \$1 and reminders as 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 variables saw a significant difference with rates of intervention among women. There was no significant difference between men and women's responses for the other three bystander variables. **Discussion.** Future research should investigate areas to improve bystander intervention for areas in which there an opportunity for a primary intervention as well as secondary for both genders.

## Introduction

- Recent studies have supported the idea that bystanders can prevent potential acts of violence (1, 4).
- Bystanders are individuals who are not directly involved in an event or situation; they may see, hear, or otherwise perceive the event as it occurs (4).
- Research into men and women's past experience with intervening across many situations found that female respondents had more experience with actual past interventions (1).
- Gender differences in bystander behavior has more frequently been examined in college samples (2); however, few studies have explored gender differences in bystander intervention in the context of community settings.
- The current study explored gender differences in rates of bystander intervention within small New England communities.

## Methods

### Participants:

- A total of 1,683 people from four different New England towns
- Mean age of sample: 56 (SD = 18.2), Age range: 17-97 years old
- 1,052 females (62.4%) and 633 males (37.6%).
- 94.8% of participants who indicated race reported as Caucasian

### Measures:

- Actual bystander action responses
- Bystander behavior scale (1)
- The sample became smaller when those without opportunity were filtered out

### Definition of Terms

- Domestic Violence was defined as "Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional abuse, and/or stalking that occurs in a current or former relationship."
- Sexual Assault was defined as "Unwanted sexual activity that occurs without an individual freely giving consent and can occur in any type of relationship."

### Procedures:

- Participants were mailed surveys and reminders to take the survey
- Participants also received a \$1 bill as an incentive for participating in the survey
- Participants answered questions about their actual bystander behavior within the past month, along with questions regarding awareness of community based bystander action

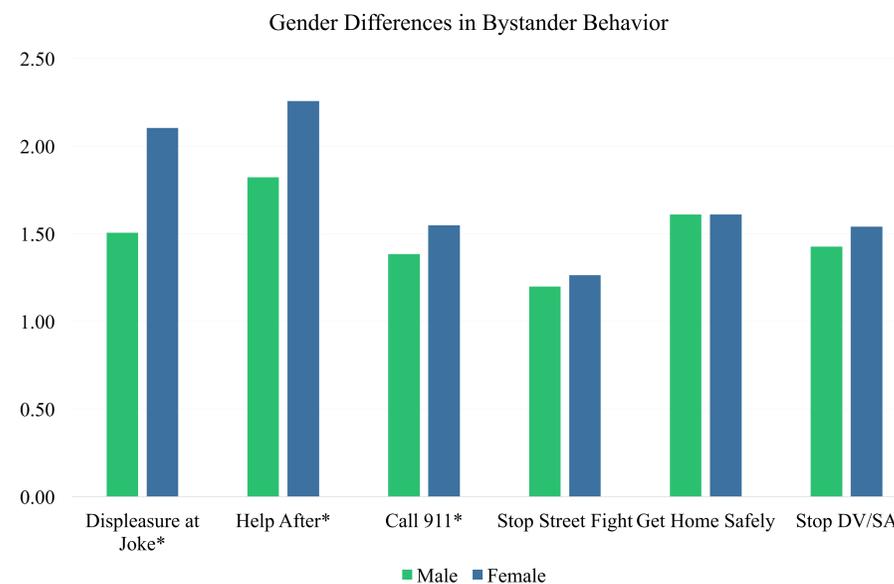
### Data Analysis Plan:

- In order to determine how many people intervened when they had an opportunity to do so, participants who had no opportunity to intervene were filtered out
- An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare differences in bystander behavior between men and women

## Intervention Opportunity

Table 1. Frequency of opportunities to intervene		
Item	Frequency (%)	N
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)?	16.2	1644
In response to knowing someone who had experienced sexual assault or domestic violence, how many times did you try to help them (offer them a place to stay, tell them about resources in the community)?	27.8	1644
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?	25.4	1642
When you saw a couple on the street fighting like yelling and screaming, how many times did you try to stop the fighting?	23.8	1645
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?	11.0	1645
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?	10.5	1641

## Gender Differences in Bystander Behavior



\*Statistically significant,  $p < .05$

## Gender Differences Continued

- The most common intervention reported was trying to help someone who had experienced sexual assault or domestic violence (27.8%).
- A significant difference was found between the frequency in which males (M = 1.50, SD = .77) and females (M = 2.10, SD = 1.06) expressed displeasure in response to a rape joke or comment,  $t(263) = -4.60, p < .01$ , with females expressing displeasure at higher rates than men.
- A significant difference was found between the frequency in which males (M = 1.82, SD = .99) and females (M = 2.26, SD = 1.08) tried to help someone who had experienced sexual assault or domestic violence,  $t(455) = -4.08, p < .01$ , with females trying to help at higher rates than men.
- A significant difference was found between the frequency in which males (M = 1.34, SD = .61) and females (M = 1.55, SD = .82) tried to do something (call 911) when fighting such as yelling and screaming was coming from someone's apartment,  $t(413) = -2.15, p < .05$ , with females trying to intervene at higher rates than men.
- No significant difference was found between the frequency in which males and females tried to stop a couple fighting on the street.
- No significant difference was found between the frequency in which males and females offered to help a drunk person get home safely.
- No significant difference was found between the frequency in which males and females tried to stop someone from possibly committing domestic violence or a sexual assault.

## 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 programming options that would improve men's confidence in expressing displeasure at jokes or comments and offering resources to survivors.
- Additionally, 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

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