



Action and Reaction: The Impact of Consequences of Intervening in Situations of Interpersonal Violence

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Abstract

Intro. Previous research has examined barriers to helping in situations involving interpersonal violence, though little has investigated the outcomes of interventions that actually do take place. The purpose of the present study was to explore how consequences that bystanders experienced in helping situations varied by the type of interpersonal violence and impacted the likelihood that bystanders would help again. **Methods.** Participants (n = 1,391) were recruited from a university psychology subject pool and Amazon Mechanical Turk, and completed online or in-person surveys. **Results.** Bystanders experienced both positive (e.g., positive reactions from the victim) and negative consequences (e.g., negative reactions from the perpetrator) after helping. Helping in instances of dating violence was associated with more negative consequences, while helping in situations of unwanted sexual advances was associated with more positive consequences. Bystanders were more likely to help again when they experienced more positive and less negative feelings about their actions. **Conclusions.** Implications for adapting intervention programming to promote the likelihood that bystanders will help in future situations are discussed.

Introduction

- Interpersonal violence (e.g., sexual and dating violence) is a nationwide health problem¹. Bystanders can effectively intervene to stop these incidences².
- Only few studies have explored what happens after bystanders choose to help.
- The Action Coils model suggests that bystander behavior functions as a feedback loop, where the outcomes of helping have ramifications for future action³.
- Several studies have found that bystanders report a series of positive (e.g., victim thanked bystander, pride) and negative (e.g., perpetrator was angry, bystander reported traumatic stress symptoms) consequences to their actions^{4,5}.
- Victims have also reported experiencing different safety and well-being outcomes based on the type of violent situation (e.g., sexual violence, peer-perpetrated violence)⁶.
- The present study examined how the outcomes that bystanders experienced varied by the type of interpersonal violence (i.e., harassing comment, unwanted sexual advances, dating violence, and controlling behavior), and how these consequences influenced bystanders' self-reported desire to help again.

Methods

Participants:

- Amazon Mechanical Turk sample:
 - 717 individuals, including 356 males, 359 females, and 2 other.
 - Mean age – 22.25 years.
 - 57.4% Caucasian, followed by 18.3% Asian, 7.8% Hispanic, and 7.7% Black.
 - 81.9% had at least some college, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree.
- Psychology Subject Pool sample:
 - 674 individuals, including 186 males, 479 females, and 2 other.
 - Mean age – 19.07 years.
 - 89.6% Caucasian.
 - 81.9% were freshman or sophomores at university.

Procedures:

- Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk and psychology courses at a mid-size northeastern university.
- Participants completed an online or in-person survey inquiring about their own bystander action, consequences they experienced as a result of their behavior, and bystander attitudes (e.g., bystander efficacy).

Measures:

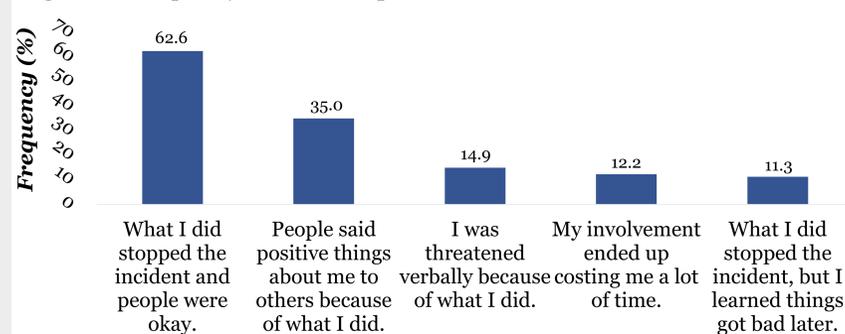
- Situational characteristics (e.g., type of violence, desire to help again)
- Incident-Specific Consequences
- Bystander Feelings⁷
- Bystander Action Response – Victim and Perpetrator⁷

Results

Incident-Specific Outcomes:

- As shown in Figure 1, bystanders reported positive outcomes most frequently, followed by intangible and tangible negative outcomes.

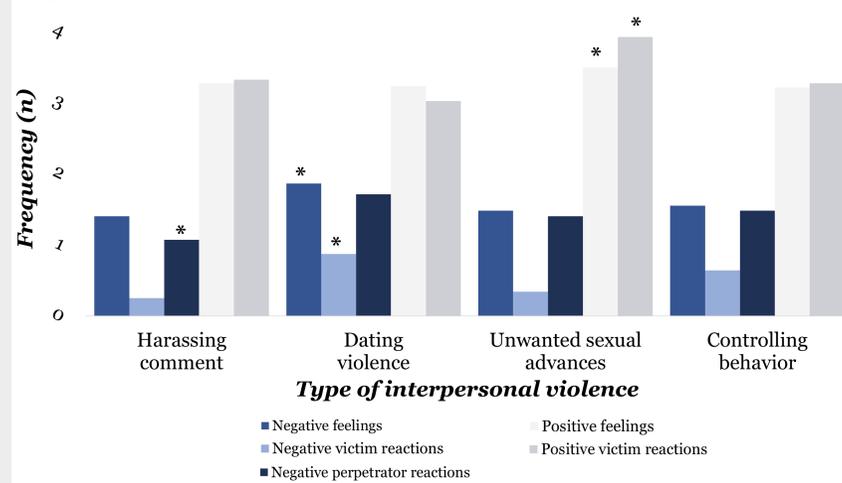
Figure 1. Frequency of incident-specific outcome items



Type of Interpersonal Violence and Consequences:

- As shown in Figure 2, all consequences significantly differed across types of interpersonal violence.

Figure 2. Frequency of consequences for type of interpersonal violence

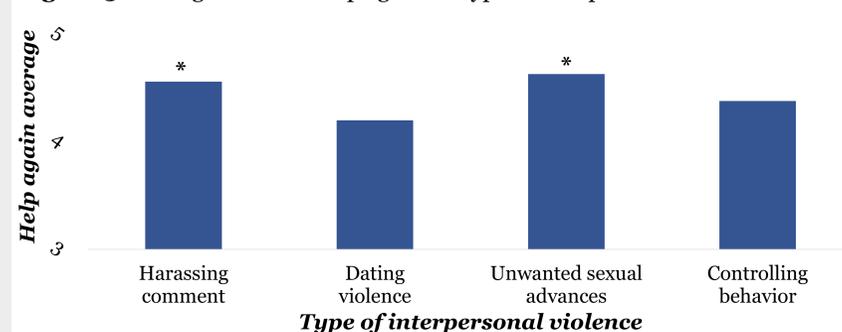


* significantly different compared to other types of interpersonal violence

Type of Interpersonal Violence and Helping Again:

- As shown in Figure 3, the desire to help again significantly differed across types of interpersonal violence.

Figure 3. Average desire to help again for type of interpersonal violence

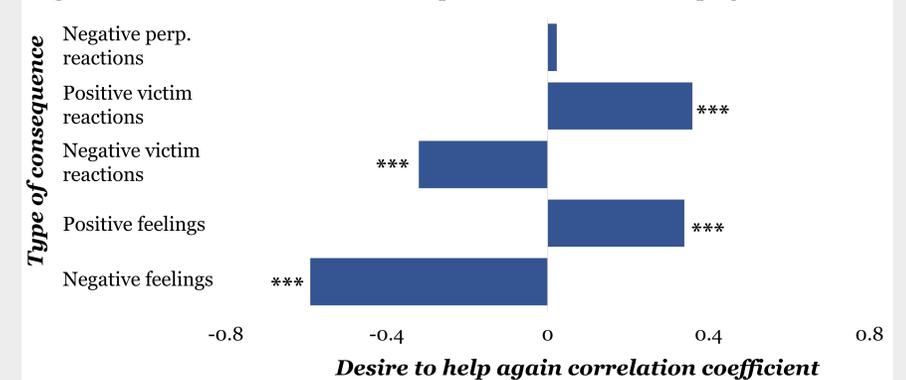


* significantly different compared to other types of interpersonal violence

Helping Again and Consequences:

- As shown in Figure 4, bystanders who experienced more positive reactions from victims and more positive feelings reported greater desire to help again.
- Bystanders who experienced more negative reactions from victims and more negative feelings reported less desire to help again.

Figure 4. Correlations between consequences and desire to help again



p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Implications & Conclusions

- Bystanders reported experiencing both positive and negative outcomes after helping, which is consistent with previous research^{4,5}. Indeed, they experienced the most positive consequences in instances of unwanted sexual advances, and the most negative consequences in instances of dating violence.
- Our findings also support the Action Coils model, which theorizes that outcomes of bystander action impact bystanders' desire to help again³. Bystanders who are presented with another opportunity to help are likely to reflect on their prior experiences, which may reaffirm or oppose their decision to help.
- Intervention programming should not only educate bystanders about the possible outcomes (i.e., positive and negative) they may experience as a result of their actions, but should also prepare them to reduce conflict and inhibit further negative responses. It is also important to teach bystanders how to process their negative feelings in a healthy way.
- Future research should identify situational characteristics (e.g., severity) and the specific actions that bystanders engaged in (e.g., calling 911) that led to positive outcomes to promote positive helping experiences.

References

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