

Examining the Bystander Effect and Sexual Violence: Do Middle School Prevention Programs Work?

By: Gabriela Beatriz Cardona
 Advisor: Dr. Napierski-Prancl
 Russell Sage College

Research Question

Do prevention programs influence middle school students reactions to sexual harassment, violence, and assault?

Bystander Effect

Bystander Effect: A social psychological phenomenon where individuals are less likely to intervene on behalf of a victim when other people are present.

- 1960's • Murder of Kitty Genovese
- 2009 • Experiment was conducted
- October 2017 • #MeToo media blow up
- September 2018 • Kavanaugh Trial
- November 2018 • Proposed Title IX changes

Prevention Program: A program incorporated into school curriculum that addresses a behavior it wishes to change or prevent.

Data Set

The Experimental Evaluation of a Youth Dating Violence Prevention Program in New York City Middle Schools

- ❖ **Independent Variables:** Age, Sex, Attendance at a prevention program
- ❖ **Dependent Variables:** Action taken by student

Descriptive Variables

Victimization Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Types of Victimization (Sample size: n=2655*)		
Have had sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks directed at them. (n=1901)		
Female	275	14.5%
Male	459	24.1%
Total	734	38.6%
Have had someone show, give, or left them sexual pictures, photographs, messages or notes (n= 2077)		
Female	177	8.5%
Male	123	5.9%
Total	300	14.4%
Have had someone touch or grab them in a sexual way (n=2002)		
Female	185	9.3%
Male	174	8.7%
Total	359	17.9%
Have had someone block or corner them in a sexual way (n=2038)		
Female	98	4.8%
Male	116	5.7%
Total	214	10.5%
Have had someone force them to kiss them (n= 2026)		
Female	207	10.2%
Male	127	6.3%
Total	334	16.5%

Hypothesis Testing

H₁: Children who went to a school program on sexual assault, harassment and intimate partner violence are more likely than those who did not to agree they would tell a friend to stop using put-downs when he talks about a girl he is going with.

Table 1: Influence of Attending a School Prevention Program on Telling a Friend to Stop Using Putdowns when Speaking about their Partner.

Agreeability would tell friend to stop using putdowns	Attended a School Program		Totals
	Attended	Did not Attended	
Agree	243 82.4%	1013 76.5%	1256 77.6%
Disagree	52 17.6%	311 23.5%	363 22.4%
Total	295 100.0%	1324 100.0%	1619 100.0%

Chi Square: p ≤ .029*
 Cramer's V = .054

H₃: Children who went to a school program on sexual assault, harassment and intimate partner violence are more likely than those who did not to agree they can help prevent sexual harassment against girls at their school.

Table 3: Influence of Attending a School Prevention Program on if they Believe they can Help Prevent Sexual Harassment Against Girls at Their School.

Agreeability can help prevent sexual harassment against girls at their school	Attended a School Program		Totals
	Attended	Did not Attended	
Agree	150 57.3%	726 52.1%	876 52.9%
Disagree	112 42.7%	668 47.9%	780 47.1%
Total	262 100.0%	1394 100.0%	1656 100.0%

Chi Square: p ≤ .124
 Cramer's V = .038

H₂: Children who did not go through a school program on sexual assault, harassment and intimate partner violence are more likely than those who did to agree it would be too hard for them to face up to another student who is being disrespectful toward the boy or girl he/she is with.

Table 2: Influence of Attending a School Prevention Program on if they Would Intervene when a Student is being Disrespectful Toward the boy or girl he/she is going with.

Agree it would be too hard for them to face up to another student who is being disrespectful toward the boy or girl he/she is with.	Attended a School Program		Totals
	Attended	Did not Attended	
Agree	192 64.9%	808 59.9%	1000 60.8%
Disagree	104 35.1%	542 40.1%	646 39.2%
Total	296 100.0%	1350 100.0%	1646 100.0%

Chi Square: p ≤ .110
 Cramer's V = .039

H₄: Children who went to a school program on sexual assault, harassment and intimate partner violence are more likely than those who did not to agree they can help prevent sexual violence against girls at their school.

Table 4: Influence of Attending a School Prevention Program on if they Believe they can Help Prevent Sexual Violence Against Girls at Their School.

Agreeability can help prevent sexual violence against girls at their school	Attended a School Program		Totals
	Attended	Did not Attended	
Agree	139 56.3%	713 53.1%	852 53.6%
Disagree	108 43.7%	630 46.9%	738 46.4%
Total	247 100.0%	1343 100.0%	1590 100.0%

Chi Square: p ≤ .356
 Cramer's V = .023

Discussion

- Research Highlights:**
- ❖ Friendship plays a role in bystander interaction
 - ❖ Gender is a risk factor for victimization
 - ❖ Gender and Age play a role in bystander interaction
 - ❖ Race does not play a factor in bystander interaction
 - ❖ Prevention Program Effectiveness is questionable in this study

Conclusion

- Social Implications:**
- ❖ Sexual harassment, assault, and violence are problems in society and in schools.
 - ❖ There are not enough bystanders intervening on behalf of victims.
 - ❖ More evaluative research is needed on prevention programs.

- Future research:**
- ❖ Research should continue to examine the prevalence of sexual harassment, assault, violence, and intimate partner violence in schools with a particular focus on gender and racial inequality.

- ❖ Research should examine bystander intervention techniques, community resources, and student understanding of consent.

- ❖ Longitudinal research is recommended with pre and post-test surveys to measure students' knowledge pre and post prevention program attendance.

- ❖ The study should be conducted in middle schools because this is where sexual harassment, assault, and violence often begins.

- Policy Recommendations.:**
- ❖ Current prevention programs appear to be ineffective new programs need to be developed and analyzed.

- ❖ New prevention programs should be conducted in classrooms, in small groups, with teachers modeling proper behavior, and should allow students the opportunity to role play.

- ❖ Core materials should be multicultural and LGBTQIA inclusive.
- ❖ Successful prevention programs should be implemented in all schools.