



## UNH Researchers Prove Educating Bystanders Is Successful In Reducing Incidents Of Sexual Violence

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DURHAM, N.H. – A rape prevention program that approaches men and women as potential bystanders or witnesses as opposed to men as perpetrators and women as victims is successful, according to University of New Hampshire researchers who received a U.S. Department of Justice grant to evaluate its effectiveness.

“Sexual violence is not just about the pathology of one person,” says Victoria L. Banyard, associate professor of psychology. “It’s about norms and behaviors. Everyone in the community has a role to play. This program does not approach men as perpetrators and women as victims, which helps to reduce defensiveness of both men and women, and gives them a different way to think about their role.”

Banyard, Mary M. Moynihan, research associate professor of women’s studies, and Elizabeth G. Plante, former director of the university’s Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program, collaborated on the project — the first time this type of program has been evaluated for its effectiveness — randomly assigning 389 undergraduates to one of two groups that received education about sexual violence and the role they could take as a bystander, or to a control group that received no training.

Participants met in small groups with two peer leaders — one male, one female — to explore attitudes about rape myths and learn ways to practice intervening, including when it is not appropriate. Moynihan stressed that participants were always reminded their safety came first.

“Across all areas we saw improvement in the groups that received the program, and not in the one that didn’t,” Banyard said. “In addition, follow-up questionnaires two, four and 12 months after the program revealed that students retained the information.”

According to Moynihan, many participants said they did not realize that as a bystander there are a lot of situations in which they could do something, like intervening at a party when someone has had too much to drink. She said students also were surprised to learn that only two percent of rape cases are false reports, which is the same as for other felony crimes.

“As a community, we need to get past the ‘this doesn’t apply to me’ attitude, and this program does,” Banyard said.

Banyard and Moynihan said the next step is to pilot the program at UNH with a focus on Greek organizations and athletes through a federal Violence Against Women grant with the UNH Police Department.