

Media Relations

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UNH Receives Grant to Expand Bystander Intervention Education to High Schools

DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire will expand its Prevention Innovations' sexual assault and relationship violence bystander prevention program, [Bringing in the Bystander](#)[®], to nearly 30 high schools across New England thanks to a \$1 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to test the effectiveness of the programs with younger students.

"The study has the potential to contribute substantially to the prevention of sexual assault and relationship violence among youth in the U.S. by adding a novel and evidence-based bystander prevention program to the repertoire of existing school-based prevention tools," said Katie Edwards, assistant professor of psychology and women's studies.

Bringing in the Bystander is an interactive training program that teaches bystanders how to safely intervene when an incident of sexual assault or dating violence may be occurring or where there may be risk. It's the first program of its kind to have been experimentally evaluated and found to have positive behavior changes up to one year following training. This new study is one of the first nationally to test the effectiveness of bystander intervention programs in high schools.

To better understand the high school context and student developmental issues, the research team conducted surveys and focus groups with a cross section of New Hampshire high school youth and teachers. They found that high school students need more foundational information than their college counterparts, such as knowledge and dispelling of rape myths. The researchers modified the scenarios to be more reflective of the contexts and situations in which sexual assault and relationship violence occur for the high school population. They also found that pop culture and mass media contribute to the normalization of sexual assault and relationship violence, which can hinder bystander intervention, so they added activities and discussions to encourage media literacy.

In the high school context, parents and teachers play a critical role in preventing sexual assault and relationship violence among high school students, so the revised program includes a one-hour teacher workshop and fact sheet for parents.

There is scant research that directly compares sexual assault and relationship violence among high school students to those same experiences among college students, but, in terms of frequency, severity, and reporting, Edwards says that she would not expect to see major differences between the two groups. Research shows that individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 experience intimate partner violence at higher rates than any other age group. Furthermore, says Edwards, individuals who experience sexual assault and relationship violence in high school are at greater risk for those experiences in college than individuals who did not have those experiences in high school.

The [University of New Hampshire](#), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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