

Media Relations

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UNH Research Finds While Majority of High School Students Could Have Intervened in a Case of Dating or Sexual Aggression One-Third Did Nothing

DURHAM, N.H. – More than 90 percent of high school students reported having the opportunity to intervene in situations of dating or sexual aggression but they did in less than two-thirds of the incidents, according to new research from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. Research also found girls were more likely to intervene than boys as were youth with a history of dating and sexual aggression.

Currently there is little research that focuses on dating and sexual aggression bystander intervention among high school students. This data was gathered via surveys and focus groups with 218 high school youth from three New England high schools.

In addition to recommending changes to programming, including role playing, which focus on bystander intervention and increased education, the researchers note that district and state policies should be revised to include evidence-based bystander education in the high school health curricula.

“Although most curricula include lessons on healthy relationships and dating and sexual aggression, it is less common to bystander intervention education included,” the researchers said. “Given the mounting evidence that bystander education is a critical component of prevention, we urge policy makers and educators to enhance the presence of this type of education.”

Focus group data found that barriers to bystander intervention include avoidance of drama or a desire to fuel drama, social status and personal repercussions, closeness with the victim and/or perpetrator, the victim being male and the perpetrator female, the failure of the dating or sexual aggression to meet a certain threshold, the aggression occurring online, anticipated negative reactions from the perpetrator or victim, and an inability to relate to the situation.

The research was conducted by Katie Edwards, assistant professor of psychology and women’s studies and faculty fellow of the Carsey School and the Prevention Innovations Research Center at UNH; Robert Eckstein, senior lecturer in psychology and justice studies and leader trainer and curriculum development specialist at the Prevention Innovations Research Center; and Kara Anne Rodenhizer-Stämpfli, a doctoral student in social psychology.

Full analysis can be found here:

<https://carsey.unh.edu/publications/dating-and-sexual-aggression>

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