

Bystander Interventions to Reduce Violence

As Missouri's consortium dedicated to preventing higher education substance abuse, Partners in Prevention (PIP) promotes healthy behaviors on college campuses. PIP implements the Missouri Assessment of College Health and Behaviors (MACHB), previously referred to as the Missouri College Health and Behavior Survey, in order to gain a better understanding of health behaviors and experiences on campuses across Missouri. The survey also gathers information on bystanders that witness sexually coercive and abusive behaviors on Missouri college campuses. A bystander can be described as someone who witnesses or is aware of a harmful situation that is happening to someone else. They can either choose to intervene (helpful bystander) or ignore the problem (hurtful bystander)¹. The MACHB includes questions that allow students to report their own experiences with bystander interventions, whether or not they choose to intervene, and resources they may utilize to help the situation. Further, bystander interventions have been reported as one of the most promising prevention strategies to reduce violence on college campuses.²

Discussion

In the MACHB, which gathers comprehensive data from 21 colleges and universities across Missouri, three questions were utilized to gather information about the likelihood of student bystander intervention on campus (How likely are you to: Tell someone if I heard what sounded like yelling or fighting through my residence hall/apartment walls, speak up and express concern if I heard a stranger talking about coercing someone to have sex, or speak up and express concern if I heard a friend talking about coercing someone to have sex). Approximately 48% of surveyed individuals would tell someone about fighting overheard through apartment/residential hall walls. Further, 78% of individuals would intervene if they witnessed their friend coercing an individual to have sex, and 62% if someone was coercing a stranger.

National research indicates students consistently perceived that helpful bystander intentions of others is lower than it actually is. Students perceived 55% of peers would choose to intervene; whereas 81% of students report they would be a helpful bystander¹. These misperceptions can create barriers towards bystander interventions due to fears of violating social norms.



81% of students would be a helpful bystander.

Resources and Programs for Intervention

The majority of students (64%) who would intervene stated they would reach out to another student for help with the situation, 19% would go to the police, and 5% would choose the Health/Wellness/Counseling Center for support.

Individuals that choose not to intervene in hostile situations most commonly attribute it to their inherent personality traits, such as being shy or disliking conflict. In order to encourage these individuals to become involved, several programs have been developed to promote bystander intervention, such as Green Dot, Step UP!, and STOP SV. One in particular, Green Dot, has developed methods to intervene if one is shy or nervous to approach the situation directly. This training suggest³ different means to

For more information, visit pip.missouri.edu

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

be a helpful bystander; Direct, Delegate or Distract. Taking individual action to intervene and prevent or stop the harm would be considered a Direct approach. Another option would be to Delegate³. Delegate differs from directly approaching a situation by requesting or assisting other individuals to diffuse a situation. An example would be finding friends of the individual in danger or by contacting the authorities for assistance. Finally, students can also use the Distract method, which entails redirecting focus away from the situation in a manner that stops or reduces

chances of harm. A common example is telling the individual causing harm that their car is being towed in order for the situation to be averted³. Many college campuses around the country are beginning to encourage students to complete bystander intervention training. The intervention programs may be a key role in reducing violence on campus and creating a safe environment for students². **For more information on Green Dot, please refer to their website: www.livethegreendot.com.**

¹Insight Report. (2010). EverFi. Retrieved from http://pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP_4_11.pdf

²White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. (April, 2014). Retrieved from <https://www.notalone.gov/assets/report.pdf>

³Green Dot. (2010). Retrieved from https://www.livethegreendot.com/gd_research_science.html

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551. Report prepared by Shannon Braida, Dan Reilly, and Wendy Walden, Partners in Prevention Research & Evaluation Staff, in consultation with the Prevention Staff in the RSVP Center at the University of Missouri.

The three D's of Green Dot

Direct. Take action.

Delegate. Request help.

Distract. Remove focus.

For more information, visit pip.missouri.edu

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health