

Everyone's Responsibility: The Potential for Bystander Intervention at The University of Melbourne

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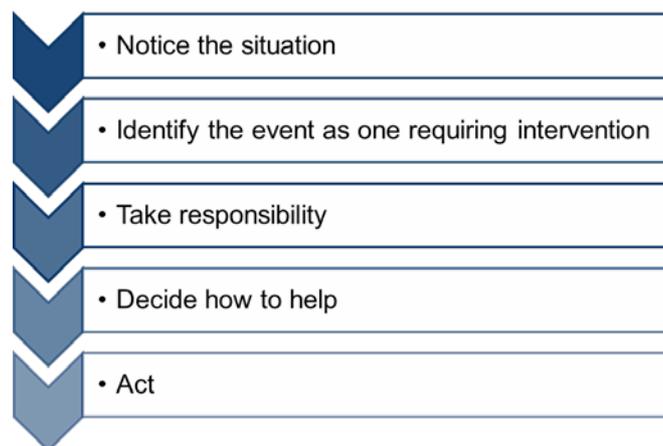
Gender-based violence is a society-wide problem, and is a reflection of broader cultural norms. The recent survey findings of the Australian Human Rights Commission *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities (2017)* highlights the responsibility of Universities to prevent these incidents, provide support to victims and create a culture where such behaviour is clearly unacceptable.

We believe a comprehensive bystander intervention program should be a core component of the University of Melbourne response to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Such an approach aligns with the core values of our University, promotes a strengthened relationship between the University and our communities, and provides a vehicle by which the University can champion sustainable change for the good of our students, our staff and society as a whole.

What is a Bystander Intervention Program?

Bystander intervention is an approach to prevent violence and support those who are the targets of violence. Theories of bystander intervention have been developed within fields such as criminology and psychology and more recent work has focused on its potential to reduce sex-based violence, particularly against women. The immediate purpose of bystander intervention programs is to increase the likelihood that those who observe incidents will act (when safe to do so) by providing them with knowledge, skills and confidence about what to do, and how to do it. For a bystander to intervene, they need to:

Part of the work of bystander programs then, is changing what is viewed as 'normal' or acceptable behaviour, particularly by men towards women, in relation to sexual activity and consent. However, they also seek to change more general expressions of negative attitudes towards women and those who do not conform to mainstream heterosexual or gender categories (such those who identify as LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex). Bystander intervention programs thus have the potential to change broader cultural norms about gender and the acceptance of gender-based violence.



What are the essential components of an effective bystander intervention program?

Recent reviews of bystander intervention programs - both as an approach to preventing violence against women and more specifically as an approach to gender-based violence in university settings - provide helpful guidance as to the ideal approach. These reviews reinforce the importance of adopting an 'ecological' or 'whole system' approach to bystander intervention rather than just focusing on responses to critical incidents. This is due to the complexity of changing gender-based norms of which sexual harassment and sexual assault are one expression.

The reviews also suggest a bystander intervention program should involve activities at multiple levels rather than a one-off, discrete training program. For example, a social media campaign, posters, multiple training sessions delivered in various format and forms and mechanisms to embed a focus on gender-based respect in the day-to-day operations of the University

Most reviews advise that programs should be delivered in person by trained facilitators (usually male and female), and that student involvement in the both design and local adaptation of programs is essential. In addition, a number of successful programs have specifically targeted student leaders as early program participants.

Most university based programs have been developed in the United States or in the United Kingdom. This is important because contexts vary in their cultural norms around gender, gender equality and standards of acceptable behaviour. Any bystander intervention program at The University of Melbourne needs to be designed or adapted to suit our staff and our diverse (local and international) student cohorts.

Implementation of bystander intervention programs should be carefully piloted, monitored and evaluated. Careful consideration of appropriate outcome measures is fundamental to program evaluation. While the incidence of violence is notoriously difficult to measure reliably, numerous other outcomes are being developed and used to measure behaviours, knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions.

Strategic Partnerships

There are many groups and individuals, both internal to The University of Melbourne and external, who could collaborate in developing and implementing a bystander intervention program. These include the following:

Partners within The University of Melbourne

University Services

Graduate Student Services

Student Union & student society representatives

HR & OH&S representatives

People and Culture representatives

Residential Colleges

Intercollege Council

Stand Up!

Stand Together!

Partners with the community and university sector

University Colleges Australia

Universities Australia

Public Transport Victoria

City of Melbourne

Crimestoppers Victoria

VicHealth

OurWatch

Victoria University (already has a multi-dimensional approach to bystander intervention underway)

The Intervention Initiative (UK)

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