

## Best Practices in Elder Abuse Prevention

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## Topics

- Overview of critical issues related to elder abuse prevention
- Bystander intervention research and theory
- Social norms and bystander behavior
- Bystander intervention skills
- Case study and recommendations

*Note: the research cited is drawn from sexual assault prevention and extrapolated to elder abuse prevention*

## Assumptions

- Prevention programs must be theory based and research driven and adapt appropriately
- Interventions must be based on a correct understanding of the problem
- Barriers and challenges must be addressed
- Infra-structures must be created to deliver the product
- Leadership must model what we want for the community
- Prevention is a community-wide process and efforts must be adapted and modified over time

*Culture change is the responsibility of all*

## Overall Strategy

Develop mutually reinforcing, synergistic programs to foster a comprehensive environment of change that reduces harassment and assaults

One intervention alone or disconnected interventions will not change the climate sufficiently to reduce violence against older adults

Avoid %scattershot+programming

## Questions

- What attitudes and behaviors do we want to encourage?
- What attitudes and behaviors do we want to discourage?
- How can leadership incentivize what we want and dis-incentivize what we don't want?
- What channels can be created to identify warning signs of problem behavior and respond to them?

## Some Underlying Issues to Consider

- Relation of ageism to ableism
- Materialism and glorification of the body (i.e. what gives %value+to a person+?)
- Denial/prejudices about vulnerability (individual and cultural)
- Protective and self-sacrificing parental values

*All of these issues are "in" us as well as "in" the situations we are trying to address and each one also has a cultural component*

## Bystanders can make a difference

- A passive bystander is someone who stands by and does not do anything when they notice a problematic situation or behavior even though they may find it to be problematic.
- For almost all health, social justice problem, and academic misconduct problems there are bystanders
- Bystanders who act have the ability to create an inhospitable climate for risk behaviors and their perpetrators and to intervene to prevent harm

Are elder abuse bystander scenarios different from other violence situations?

## What We Know

- Most of the studies and evidence for the social norms approach relate to substance abuse prevention and is very strong. For sexual harassment and assault prevention the social norms approach can be considered as a promising practice and as untested and un-researched for elder abuse.
- Most of the studies and evidence for bystander intervention relate to sexual assault prevention and are preliminary. There are few applications to elder abuse prevention.
- Fear tactics and legalistic approaches are not effective
- Risk reduction/rape avoidance is effective (is there a parallel for elder abuse?)

## State of the Research

- Programs may successfully increase bystander confidence and intention but not necessarily behavior
- Bystander intervention is subject to rebound
- Misperceptions of norms predict perpetration and intervention
- Preliminary research supports combining the social norms approach with bystander intervention

## Levels of Bystander Behavior

- To an individual
- To a group
- To a system or institution

## Stages of Bystander Behavior

- Notice the event
- Interpret it as a problem
- Feel responsible for dealing with it
- Have the necessary skills to act

What is the event for elder abuse?

## Reasons for Being a Passive Bystander

- Assume that it isn't a problem because others are not observed intervening (social influence)
- Fear of embarrassment (audience inhibition)
- Assume that someone else will do something (diffusion of responsibility)
- Believe that others aren't bothered (social norms)
- Fear of retaliation or negative outcomes
- Confusion about what elders want and need

**The presence of others can serve to inhibit the desire to help (the “bystander effect”) or to support the desire to intervene**

## Social Norms

- **Social norms** refer to the acceptability of an action or belief
- Are unspoken rules about what is **normal** for that group or setting
- Perceptions of social norms predict what people say and do
- For a norm to be real, it is not necessary for the majority to believe it, but only for the majority to believe that the majority believes it.

## Effects of Norm Misperceptions

- Perceptions of what others believe and do are strongly correlated with problem behavior, predicting subsequent alcohol use, substance use, sexual behavior, gambling, seat belt use, academic performance, etc.
- Abusers/misbehavers over-perceive negative attitudes and behavior the most and use this to justify their own behavior
- Interventions to correct misperceptions with individuals, groups, and communities have been successful in reducing use and abuse of alcohol, cigarette smoking, to increase seat belt use, and to inhibit sexual aggression.

## Social Norms: Underlying Beliefs

- **Pluralistic Ignorance:** the incorrect belief that one's private attitudes, judgments or behavior are different from others
- **False Consensus:** the incorrect belief that one represents the majority when one is actually a minority

## Misperceptions Influence Behavior

- Men and women over-estimate others' negative behaviors and under-estimate positive behaviors.
- Women and men under-estimate others' willingness to intervene, discomfort with risk behaviors, sympathy for victims, respect for someone who intervenes, etc.
- Leaders' language can reinforce and promote the misperception? Who are the carriers of the misperception?
- Research has documented that misperceptions occur and influence behavior in middle and high schools, colleges, universities, communities and the military, in numerous countries and for a multiplicity of issues and that social norms media campaigns and group interventions can shift behavior.

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## College Men's Attitudes about Rape Florida State University

	% who disagree	
	Actual Norm (Self)	Perceived Norm (Most guys)
It is only women who dress suggestively that are raped	79%	44%
If a woman is willing to go home with a man consent to have sex is implied	73%	35%
A lot of women lead a guy on and then cry rape	61%	45%

Florida State University Sexual Violence Prevention Survey

## Misperceptions and Bystander Behavior

- Individuals are bothered by problem behaviors but underestimate others' discomfort with them and desire to have someone intervene
- Intervention is more likely when others are perceived as willing to intervene
- Problem individuals use the misperception to justify their behavior and keep others from intervening

## False Consensus Norms

Individuals who engage in problem behavior overestimate others' support for their attitudes and actions, i.e.

- Perpetrators of domestic violence
- Men who sexually assault
- Problem drinkers
- Gamblers
- People who engage in risk behaviors

Perpetrator overestimations predict subsequent problem behavior.

A false consensus norm constitutes a self-serving bias+

## Conclusion

Underestimating others' concern results in less chance of intervening on the part of bystanders (*pluralistic ignorance*)

Overestimating others' comfort with problem behavior results in more chance of problem behavior (*false consensus*)

## Part 2

## Strategies for Responding to Unwelcome Remarks and Behaviors

## Intervention Options

- Direct versus Indirect: Talk to the person directly or to the others who are present
  - On the spot or later: Do something right away or wait
  - Types of interventions
    - Confront the person/impose consequences, express feelings
    - Shift the focus (change the situation)
    - Shift the person (change the person)
    - Talk to or inform a third party
- Goal: To have more options for responding and feel better about your response

## Confrontation

Make it clear that certain behaviors and remarks are not appropriate and will not be tolerated

and/or

Forcefully tell the other person how you feel about their actions

## Shifting the Focus (Changing the Situation)

- Non-participation
- Deflection (change the subject)
- Shift the focus  
(address the underlying assumption)

## Changing the Person ("Shifting Attitudes")

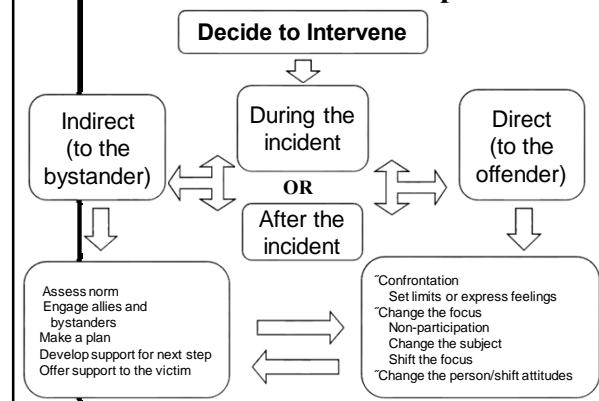
- Is non-confrontational
- Uses open conversation+
- Helps the person understand *why* the behavior is problematic
- Fosters deeper change

(www.ncbi.org)

## Example Responses

- Grandson: "You're very very old!"  
"Thank you for the compliment!"  
"Yes, I've learned a lot in all these years!"
- Family: "Keep working, it will keep you young!"  
"I stopped trying to be young years ago!"  
"I would have to lose so much wisdom to be young!"
- Caretaker: "He just can't think for himself anymore!"  
"Really, last night he beat me at bridge bad!"

## Positive Intervention Options



## Case Example: 4-month outcomes for men in an SNA small-group intervention

- Perceived that their peers would be more likely to intervene (including sexually aggressive men)
- Perceived less reinforcement from peers for sexually aggressive behavior (among sexually aggressive men)
- Associated less with sexually aggressive peers
- Less likely to engage in sexually aggressive behavior (1.5% experimental versus 6.7% control)
- Reduced victimization among women (7-month)
- **But assaults rebounded at 7-month follow-up**

Preventing Sexual Aggression Among College Men:  
An Evaluation of a Social Norms and Bystander Intervention Program\*  
Violence Against Women, 2011, 17(6): 720-42

## A Model Social Norms Marketing Campaign to Address Dating Violence

Gateway High School  
(Springfield, MASS)

Special Thanks to Monica Moran

## Boys Attitudes and Perceptions of “Trash Talking” Girls

%don't like to hear boys talk trash about girls or women.+

- 83% of male students agree or strongly agree with the above statement.
- 63% of male students agree or strongly agree that most other male students agree with the above statement.

## 4 Out of 5 Gateway Guys Really Don't Want To Hear Trash Talk About Girls.



Here's what they do about it:

- TELL THEM TO STOP
- LEAVE THE CONVERSATION
- CHANGE THE SUBJECT
- WARN THEIR FRIENDS ABOUT THE PERSON
- WARN THE PERSON BEING TALKED ABOUT

### YOUR SURVEY. YOUR RESULTS.

In a survey taken by Gateway High School students in January 2006, 83% of male students agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: "I don't like to hear other guys talk trash about girls or women."

This campaign is a collaboration between Gateway High School students and the Southern Illinois Community Violence Task Force. Sponsored by Gateway High School.

Project funded in part by a grant awarded to the Office of Children for the Southern Illinois Community Violence Task Force. Sponsored by the Illinois State Police and the Illinois State Department of Children and Family Services.

More than 80% of you agree that in most relationships at Gateway...

- Couples share decision making
- Each Person is allowed to have outside friendships
- Each Person chooses how and where they spend their free time

Data from a survey taken by 349 out of 419 Gateway High School students in January 2006.



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## Outcomes

- Boys more likely to perceive other boys' concern
- Boys more likely to intervene against trash talk
- More students report noticing an abusive relationship


## Recommendations

- Start where you are
- Identify critical ingredients and mechanisms of change and diffuse across programs
- Ensure consistent messages and outcomes
- Design multiple programs that are interactive and synergistic across agencies
- Adapt social norms and bystander models to elder abuse prevention

## Recent Articles

- Getting in Touch with My Isms: Lessons Learned in the Journey of an Aspiring Ally
- Fostering Healthy Norms to Prevent Violence and Abuse: The Social Norms Approach
- How College Men Feel about Being Men and Doing the Right Thing+
- RESPONSE ABILITY: The Complete Guide to Bystander Behavior
- A Grassroots Guide to Fostering Healthy Norms to Prevent Violence in Our Communities: A Social Norms Toolkit (NJCASA)
- With CA Gidycz, and LM Orchowski. Preventing sexual aggression among college men: An evaluation of a social norms and bystander intervention program. *2011 Violence Against Women*, 17(6):720-742.
- With LF Salazar, A, Vivolo-Kantor, & J Hardin. A Web-Based Sexual Violence Bystander Intervention for Male College Students: Randomized Control Trial. *2014 Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 16(9):e203.

Available at [www.alanberkowitz.com](http://www.alanberkowitz.com)



**Thank you for your  
willingness to lead by  
expressing values in action**



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