

**Serial number** 0211  
**Title** Bystander intervention: Gender based sexual coercion and domestic violence and abuse, its impact on higher education students and the strategies to manage this.  
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### **Context – ‘laddism’ and sexual violence (?)**

Anti-social, anti-intellectual ‘laddish’ behaviour and its impact on students and the teaching and learning environment has long been a topic of study in school settings (e.g. Connolly 1997; Delamont 2000; Francis 1999) but until relatively recently was effectively an unexplored phenomenon in higher education.

Recent studies examining this include Phipps and Young (2012, 2015a and 2015b) Jackson et al. (2015) and Jackson and Sundaram (2015) and the issue has come to the fore with media coverage too, with elements of sexism in the ‘laddish’ behaviour being highlighted in universities. A report from the NUS (2014) on sexuality which surveyed 4,000 students across 80 HE institutions also identified homophobia as being part of ‘lad culture’, with it being targeted toward both male and female students identifying with or as LGBT+. A range of other research has examined negative gender role attitudes and their impact, such as permissive attitudes toward emotional partner abuse or dating violence (Schwartz et al 2001; Adams-Curtis and Forbes 2004; McNaughton Reyes et al 2015).

For Fenton et al (2016:10) gender based sexual coercion and domestic violence and abuse refers:

To violence and abuse against women, with a particular, but not exclusive, focus upon sexual assault, rape, harassment, stalking and intimate partner violence as reported in student surveys and bystander programme literature.

Gender based sexual coercion and domestic violence and abuse is recognised as a continuum, for example: sexism, hostility, verbal abuse, social isolation, victim-blaming, sexual assault and rape. It is also recognised as impacting upon boys and men, Tran’s men and women, and occurring within traditional relationships, same-sex relationships, and families. It is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Strategies to manage the impact of ‘misperceived cultural norms’ also operate within a socioculturally relevant environment and, as such, all other forms of inequality such as racism, honour crimes, inciting religious violence, or socio-

economic violence related to the concept of a 'false consensus' are recognised within this (Berkowitz 2003, 2010, 2013).

## Bystander interventions

A bystander is a person who witnesses an event but is not involved, a prosocial bystander is a person who intervenes when a problematic situation emerges, a passive bystander does not intervene (Fenton et al 2016). Bystander intervention is a programme or strategy which enables students to develop skills for becoming prosocial bystanders, the phases of which are: noticing an event, recognition that it is problematic, taking responsibility for appropriate action, developing the skills required to act (or act at a later stage or through referral if a situation is perceived as dangerous, or outside of a bystander's capacity to support) (Berkowitz 2003; Fenton et al 2016).

Edwards et al (2000) community-readiness model explores the implementation of effective prevention strategies which emerge when an issue transitions from a point of little or no awareness to one of acknowledging a problem exists, to one of implementing permanent prevention strategies in response e.g. in Fenton et al who suggested:.

In the last two years there have been campaigns by the NUS (NUS, 2015), *The Telegraph*, the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW, 2015) and a test legal case (R. (on the application of Ramey) v University of Oxford, 2015). With the heightened awareness of the university sector as a significant site for action, pressure has been placed on universities to acknowledge, prevent and respond fairly to violence against women (Fenton et al 2016: 13).

Universities UK (2015: 1) has endorsed the bystander intervention of Fenton et al, used as the bases for this research as the only evidence based initiative and states:

The conclusion from our work is that a sustainable, whole-institutional strategy will be needed to tackle gender-based violence among students, underpinned by an evidence-based approach that places the issues within the wider context in society.

## Methods

This paper presents early findings from an ongoing project looking into the impact of gender based coercion and sexual violence and abuse on both male and female undergraduates. Data is gathered from evaluations of a bystander intervention delivered at a post-92 university with questionnaires from up to 100 year 1 students before, during and after the intervention to determine what impacts the intervention may have had upon the participants. Single sex male or female focus groups from the bystander intervention and follow up one-to-one interviews will also form part of the findings here.

### Research questions

1. What, if any, are the impacts of bystander intervention upon behaviour change? Particularly focusing on challenges to cultural misperceptions and the capacity of such programmes to encourage prosocial bystander intervention.
2. What are the differences and similarities of the impact of bystander interventions upon men as well as women, as well as those identifying as LGBT+?
3. How do programmes such as this help to challenge other forms of violence and inequality such as racism?
4. How do programmes such as this foster the development of other qualities and attributes in participants such as empathy, compassion and kindness toward others; confidence and assertiveness in day to day life?

### Policy implications

Gender based sexual coercion and domestic violence and abuse is a public health issue and prevention of this type of violence is a priority of UK policy (HM Government, 2010). 'The cost, in both human and economic terms, is so significant that even marginally effective interventions are cost effective' (NICE 2014: 6). Part of the 'future directions' advocated by PHE (2016: 57) is to establish a firmer research base for effectiveness of bystander programmes within UK universities, as has been seen in the rolling out of such programmes in the United States. This research aims

to contribute to this body of knowledge to more fully understand what impact such programmes might have and to make recommendations of potential 'future directions' that UK universities might take in challenging this issue.