

## Bystanders, sexual harassment, and building gender equality at work

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## Bystanders

- A bystander: a person who observes or is aware of unacceptable behaviour.  
"The standard you walk past is the standard you accept."  
Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, AO, 13 June 2013  
"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."  
Dr Martin Luther King Jr.
- A bystander approach asks: How could *we* let this happen in our community? What can *we* do to prevent this?

## Bystanders

- Individuals may be bystanders to violence and abuse in many ways.
- When someone harasses or assaults or rapes someone else, there are hundreds of comments, behaviours, and interactions which lead up to the violent or abusive act.

## The continuum of sexual harm

Beliefs & attitudes	Comments and jokes	Invasions of space	Unwanted touch	Rape & sexual assault
E.g., beliefs that: Victims are to blame Violence is normal Males should be in control Males are entitled to sex Females are sex-objects Females are less valuable Etc.	Sexist and violence-supportive comments Inappropriate jokes and comments	Unwanted or uninvited sexual attention (harassment) Looks / leers Obscene calls and texts Voyeurism (peeping)	Grabbing / touching Forced or coerced kissing	Sexual penetration without consent (rape) Sexual touching without consent (sexual assault)

## The continuum of sexual harm

- Beliefs and attitudes >> Comments and jokes >> Invasions of space >> Unwanted touch >> Rape and sexual assault
- Each of the behaviours on the continuum is an opportunity to intervene, *before* a behaviour moves further towards sexual violence.

## Bystanders can...

1. Stop the perpetration of a specific incident of violence;
2. Reduce the risk of violence escalating, and prevent the physical, psychological and social harms that may result;
3. Strengthen the conditions that work against violence occurring.

## Be an active bystander

- If you do not speak up or take action, then you are *consenting to or condoning* this behaviour.
- Inaction – whether by individuals or organisations – implies agreement.
- Speaking up and stepping in makes a difference.

## Sexual harassment

- Behaviour which is *sexual* and *unwelcome* or *unwanted* and which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.
- Sexual harassment is:
  - Sexual behaviour
  - unwanted
  - with a negative impact



**One in five women experience harassment within the workplace.**

Australian Human Rights Commission (2008). *Sexual Harassment Guide*. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/1upBypH> © White Ribbon Australia 2014

## How gender inequalities are maintained

- Sexual harassment is just one form of workplace gender discrimination.
- Workplace gender inequalities also are maintained by other, subtle and overt forms of sexism.
- There are a wide variety of forms of 'everyday sexism' – daily acts of sexism which are often unseen and taken-for-granted (Becker and Swim 2011).
- Gender microaggressions: "intentional or unintentional actions or behaviors that exclude, demean, insult, oppress, or otherwise express hostility or indifference toward women" (Basford *et al.* 2014: 341).
  - Range from subtle to overt discrimination. From microinvalidations, to microinsults, to microassaults.

## Bystander intervention in workplace SH

- A focus on bystander intervention is valuable because targets of SH often do not report the behaviour.
- In the workplace, bystanders include witnesses but also others who know of the conduct through other means.
- Substantial proportions of employees witness SH at work.
- Bystanders experience 'bystander stress', with negative outcomes similar to those for the direct targets.

## What bystanders to sexual harassment do

- Bystanders' likelihood of involvement is shaped by a variety of factors...
- Bystanders are more likely to act if they: notice there is a problem, feel a responsibility to act, and have the skills and confidence to act.
- The justice violation model (from the report, *Encourage. Support. Act!*):

(1) When an observer is similar to the target of the injustice, they will identify with them. (2) When an observer identifies with the target this increases the likelihood that an event will be noticed and perceived as an injustice. (3) When an injustice is perceived, the observer's decision to respond to or report the injustice is influenced by the organizational environment. (4) The observer's decision on whether to use individual strategies or collective strategies depends on the perceived benefits and costs of these options.

## What bystanders to sexual harassment do: Issues

- Issue: Whether behaviour is seen as unjust. (Perceived thresholds for sexual harassment.)
- Issue: Men's fears of being seen as unmasculine can constrain them from intervening.
- Issue: The organisation's systems and climate
- Other reasons people do not act: diffusion of responsibility, pluralistic ignorance, etc.

## Bystanders and whistle blowers

- Bystanders and whistle blowers both respond to workplace injustices.
- There are similar challenges in encouraging bystander intervention and whistle blowing:
  - Risks of victimisation or retaliation
  - Quality of evidence.
- Attention to and support for whistle blowing can be used to leverage bystander intervention.

## Barriers to men's bystander action

- Support for sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and norms
- Overestimation of *other* men's comfort with violence and their unwillingness to intervene
- Fears of others' reactions to intervention
- Negative reactions to violence prevention efforts
- Lack of knowledge of or skills in intervention
- Lack of opportunity or invitation

(Flood, 2010, *Where Men Stand*)



Victorian data shows only 1 in 6 men surveyed would say or do something to show their disapproval if a man told a sexist joke about a woman at work.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2012). More than ready: Bystander action to prevent violence against women in the Victorian community. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/KQp7Lp> p.22 © White Ribbon Australia 2014

## Building respectful relationships: What you can do

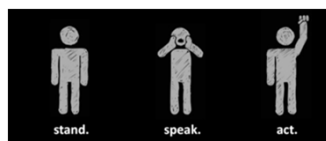
1. Put your own house in order.
2. Take action among other women and men.
3. Take wider collective action.

## Start with yourself

- Don't use violence.
- Build respectful and non-violent relations with others.
- Boycott and resist sexist and violence-supportive culture.
- Inform yourself of the realities of men's violence against women.

## Be an active and involved bystander

- Intervene in violent incidents.
- Challenge perpetrators and potential perpetrators.
- Support victims and survivors.
  - Listen
  - Believe
  - Respect



## What can I say or do?

"Do you need help?"

"Can I walk you home?"

"Are you alright?"

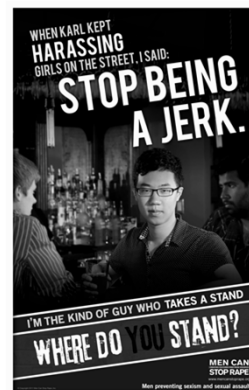
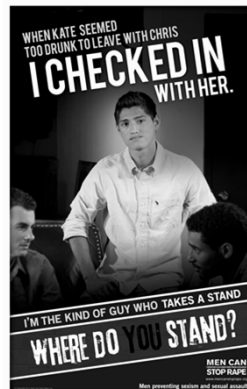
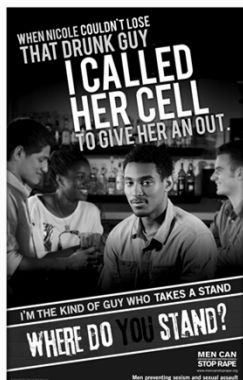
"Do you want me to call someone for you?"

"Should I call the police?"

"Do you want me to talk to so-and-so for you?"

"What can I do to help you?"

"Is everything OK?"



## Be an active bystander *cont'd*

- Be an egalitarian role model.
- Challenge the social norms and inequalities which sustain men's violence against women.

## What can I say or do?

"What you said earlier really bothered me..."

"I don't like what you just did."

"I know you well enough to know that you would not want to hurt someone..."

"I wonder if you realize how that feels/comes across."

"How would you feel if someone did that to your sister?"

"I am saying something because I care about you..."

## Be an active bystander *cont'd*

- Challenge violence-supportive or sexist comments and jokes:
  - Make your concern plain.
  - Personalise the violence or injustice.
  - Provide information.
  - Convey your feelings and principles.
  - Use humour,
  - Ask for an explanation.
  - Remind him of his 'best self'.
  - Invite group pressure.



## Personal strategies for strength, support, and inspiration

- Be bold.
- Learn a language for speaking about violence against women.
  - Speak from the heart
- Get comfortable with the F-word and the G-word.
- Find and build communities of support.

- Hold yourself and others to standards which are higher, but not impossible. Walk the walk.
- Acknowledge your mistakes.
- Celebrate your successes.
- Remind yourself of what you are *for*.
  - And of how you and others benefit from non-violence and gender equality.
- Make use of resources. Do your homework.

## Adapting bystander intervention for workplace sexual harassment

- Develop strategies for challenging sexual harassment (and its precursors) in particular.
- Give greater emphasis to work and organisational climates.
- Encourage bystanders to be agents of organisational change.

## Adapting bystander intervention for workplace sexual harassment

- Lower the threshold of recognition of sexual harassment.
  - Highlight mundane, 'dripping tap', harassment.
  - Emphasise the behaviour of the harasser, not the victim and her responses.
  - Link sexual harassment to wider inequalities.

## Adapting bystander intervention for workplace sexual harassment

- Empower bystanders in their workplaces.
- Establish well-functioning voice systems in organisations.
- Adopt other management strategies to encourage whistle blowing.

## Increasing bystander capacity

- Increase people's knowledge of the problem and awareness of its impact.
- Increase people's skills to intervene effectively.
- Increase the perceived benefits of intervening and reduce the perceived costs.
- Increase organisational support for intervention – through cultures, programs, and leadership

## Preventing violence against women in the workplace

- The principle of prevention: The most effective way to prevent violence against women (VAW) is to address its underlying causes and conditions.
- Above all, by:
  1. Promoting gender-equitable roles and relations
  2. Building respectful (non-violent) social norms and practices
  3. Improving access to resources and systems of support

## Preventing violence against women in the workplace

- There is only a small body of research on the effectiveness of workplace-based prevention.
- But key principles of best (better) practice are clear...

**94%**

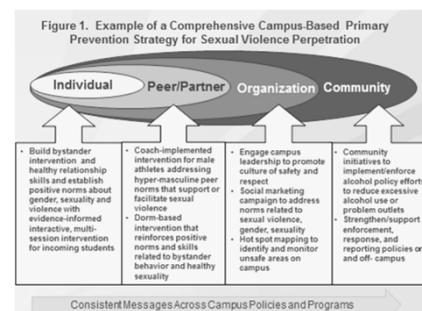
**94% of employees agree employers should take a leadership role in educating their workforce about respectful relationships between men and women.**

Penney, D. & Powell, A. (2013). The role of bystander knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in preventing violence against women: A full technical report. The Social Research Centre, Melbourne. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/1ouZjT1> © White Ribbon Australia 2014

## Effective approaches

- *Are comprehensive:* Address all aspects of the system.
  - Take a whole-of-organisation approach to promoting gender equality and a respectful workplace culture.
- *Involve primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions*
- *Are intensive:* Interactive learning opportunities, sustained over time, with multiple points of contact with reinforcing messages;
- *Are relevant to the context and participants:*
  - Based on an audit of the workplace.
- *Are based on positive messages:* Build on and reinforce healthy behaviors and norms.
- *Rely on effective leadership*
  - Especially from senior men
- Etc.

## Building respectful relationships: An organisational example



### Take-Home Points

- **You** have a role to play in preventing violence.
  - There are many opportunities all day long to make a difference in small ways.
  - There are many ways to speak up or take action, not just one “right” way.
- Your institutions must adopt comprehensive prevention strategies.

### Resources: Bystander intervention

- Flood, M. (2010). *Where Men Stand: Men's roles in ending violence against women*. Sydney: White Ribbon Prevention Research Series, No. 2. <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/resources/research>
- Flood, M. (2011). *Men Speak Up: A toolkit for action in men's daily lives*. Sydney: White Ribbon Prevention Research Series, No. 3. <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/resources/research>
- McDonald, P., and M. Flood (2012). *Encourage. Support. Act! Bystander Approaches to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*. Sydney: Human Rights Commission. URL: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/encourage-support-act-bystander-approaches-sexual-harassment-workplace-2012>

### Resources: Workplace violence prevention

- Chung, D., C. Zufferey, and A. Powell. (2012). *Preventing Violence Against Women in the Workplace (An evidence review: full report)*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).
- Holmes, S., and M. Flood. (2013). *Genders at Work: Exploring the role of workplace equality in preventing men's violence against women*. Sydney: White Ribbon Foundation.
- Victorian Community Council Against Violence (VCCAV). (2004). *Family Violence is a Workplace Issue: Workplace Models to Prevent Family Violence*. Melbourne: Victorian Community Council Against Violence.
- Women's Health Victoria. (2012). *Everyone's Business: A guide to developing workplace programs for the primary prevention of violence against women*. Melbourne: Women's Health Victoria.
- VicHealth. (2014). *Stepping in: A bystander action toolkit to support equality and respect at work – A resource for State Sporting Associations*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).