School Personnel's Bystander Action in Situations of Teen Relationship Abuse and Sexual Assault: Prevalence and Correlates

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research study focuses on relationship abuse (RA) and sexual assault (SA), two major issues for high school youth. RA refers to physical, sexual, and psychological harassment between current or previous dating partners, and SA refers to nonconsensual sexual behaviour. The article suggests that school personnel (i.e., administrators, teachers, coaches etc.) can have a profound impact on preventing this type of behaviour because they can get involved when they see situations of RA and SA happening between youth. Unfortunately, there is little to no research that has examined the connections between school personnel bystander (i.e., intervention) behaviour, and these troubling situations, especially in a high school setting. Therefore, this study examined issues associated with bystander intentions among school personnel in cases of RA and SA.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- This research highlights the need for high school staff members to intervene in situations of RA and SA.
- It suggests that prevention programs need to be put into action in the school setting, in order to improve the overall school climate.
- Schools could create programs that increase the staff's sense of responsibility to intervene in these situations and provide enough resources so that teachers have the opportunity to support curriculum that is inclusive of positive bystander actions.
- This research illuminates the importance of reducing RA and SA among high school youth, and how school staff members can have an important impact in these circumstances.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

In this study, the researchers wanted to find out whether school personnel feel confident to intervene or stop RA and SA from occurring, and whether they help students after these problems have occurred. Further, they explored the relationships that contribute to school personnel taking action in these situations. Specifically, the researchers surveyed 1150 high school personnel from 25 schools in northern New England in order to evaluate their RA and SA knowledge, their perceptions of their school climate, and their confidence in intervening in RA and SA situations.

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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found that the majority of school personnel reported that they would intervene in situations of RA and SA. Further, they discovered that school personnel who felt more confident in their ability to intervene, who held more positive views about their school climate and who saw less barriers to taking bystander action in situations of RA and SA had higher intentions to intervene.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research is applicable to educators, researchers, schools, policy makers, and parents who are interested in lowering the rate of relationship and sexual abuse among high school students. Moreover, this work can provide support for schools that are looking to put into place strategies that create positive norms and values throughout the entire school. Indeed, by understanding factors that contribute to school personnel taking responsibility during situations of RA and SA, school polices can be adjusted to incorporate prevention strategies for staff. Additionally, researchers can use this work to continue to evaluate what approaches work best for supporting school staff bystander action and reducing RA and SA among high school youth.

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