

Sexual Harassment Bystander Intervention Program: Targeting Leaders to Enhance Organizational Culture

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What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment manifests in three forms which often overlap and act as antecedents of one another: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (NASEM, 2018). **Gender harassment** is the most common form of sexual harassment and is characterized by crude behavior, hostility, objectification, and exclusion rooted on the basis of gender (NASEM, 2018). Examples of gender harassment include insults based on one's gender and remarks about one's physicality. **Unwanted sexual attention** includes sexual advances, either physical or verbal, that are unwanted, including sexual assault and pressure for a sexual or romantic relationship (NASEM, 2018). Finally, **sexual coercion** is when employment status or opportunities are conditional on engaging in sexual relations or activities (NASEM, 2018).

Targeting Organizational Leaders

This bystander intervention program will rely on a top-down approach and target organizational leaders to be the catalysts and models for organizational change. The more that an organization is perceived to be tolerant of sexual harassment, there is a higher likelihood for sexual harassment to occur (NASEM, 2018). Therefore, training leaders to *confront* harassment will lead to:

- The creation of organizational norms, beliefs, and expectations that sexual harassment will not be tolerated in the workplace.
- Higher perceptions that those behaviors will reduce sexist events in the future (Gervais & Hillard, 2014).
- An increase in the likelihood that participants will take action in confronting perpetrators because people are more likely to confront someone with equal or lesser power, resulting in a lower cost-to-benefit ratio for leaders to confront subordinates than vice-versa (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014).
- Leaders serving as models on which employees will base their future behaviors.

Steps to be an Effective Bystander

1. Noticing an event
2. Interpreting it as harmful
3. Taking responsibility to intervene
4. Determining how to act
5. Taking action

Reasons People Fail to Confront

1. Inability to recognize harassing behaviors
2. Not identifying harassment as dangerous
3. Neglecting responsibility to act
4. Inadequate intervention skills
5. Not intervening because of group norms

Bystander Intervention

I am developing a bystander intervention program to reduce the occurrences and prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace through establishing a community that takes responsibility for eliminating sexual harassment and creating an organizational culture of mutual respect and civility. Bystander intervention programs teach and empower individuals to interfere when observing behaviors and situations indicative of sexual harassment and discrimination (Orchowski & Gidycz, 2018).

Session 1

The first session will be aimed at defining sexual harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions, and how they negatively affect the workplace. Participants will be provided with examples and scenarios demonstrating examples of each and why they are harmful in the workplace. This section will also include an experiential learning activity called WAGES where participants are shown the impacts of sexism and implicit biases at work. WAGES has been shown to increase participants' recognition and knowledge of the harmful effects of sexism and unintentional biases (Shields et al., 2011). Increasing knowledge on what constitutes sexual harassment is important as it allows individuals to identify it when it happens and understand its detrimental nature to the workplace.

Session 2

The second session will provide strategies to confront sexual harassment and prejudices where participants will get a chance to enhance their skills through role play and modeling. In this session participants will also be shown the benefits of confronting instances of sexual harassment. This section will encourage participants to take action by providing them with behaviors they can use to intervene in harmful situations. As such, the second training session will increase participant bystander self-efficacy, thus enhancing desired intervention behaviors and actions. For this session, men and women will receive programming and training separately. Men will be taught what it means to be an effective ally, their unique role in preventing harassment in an environment that is safe and non-accusatory, and will be educated on potential gender biases (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). Women will be introduced to various techniques and strategies to be more influential when confronting, for example, how to demonstrate to coworkers the negative effects of sexual harassment.

Session 3

The third session will focus on creating a community where individuals take personal responsibility to reduce the occurrence of sexual harassment as well as reviewing the organization's sexual harassment reporting policies. This bystander intervention program is designed with the intent to create a workplace culture where employees feel responsible for one another's well-being and where harassment of any sort is not tolerated or accepted.

Session 2: Single-Gender Groups

Session 2 will be administered to men and women in separate groups so that each gender can be provided with relevant and targeted information. This has been shown to be more effective than mixed-gendered groups because men and women tend to differ on sexual harassment knowledge and beliefs (Berkowitz, 2002; Lonsway et al., 2009).

Men:

- Recognize sexist behavior and discrimination at lower rates than women, suggesting that men would be less likely to confront an incident involving sexual harassment because they are less likely to recognize it as a harmful event (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). Therefore, attempts should be made to increase their sensitivity to recognizing sexism.
- Are more receptive, less defensive, and more likely to talk openly and honestly in single-gender groups (Banyard et al., 2004; Berkowitz, 2002).

Women:

- Benefit because they do not have to give additional attention or resources to defending or challenging male participants (Lonsway et al., 2009).

Program Evaluation

To measure these changes and the program's effectiveness, variations of the following scales will be given to participants before the program starts, at the conclusion of the program, and then 6 months after the program's completion.

- Sexual Harassment Attitudes Scale (Mazer & Percival, 1989)
- Organizational Tolerance of Sexual Harassment Inventory (Hulin et al., 1996)
- Sexual Harassment Definitions Questionnaire (Foulis, & McCabe, 1997)
- Sexual Experiences Questionnaire – W (Fitzgerald et al., 1995)

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