

# Barriers to Bystander Interventions for Sexual Assault: Impact of Personal History of Sexual Victimization

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# Statistics

Incidence of sexual victimization as of September 2019<sup>2</sup>

- Women: 20-26%
- Men: 5-7%
- Other genders: 6.6%
- All students: 13%

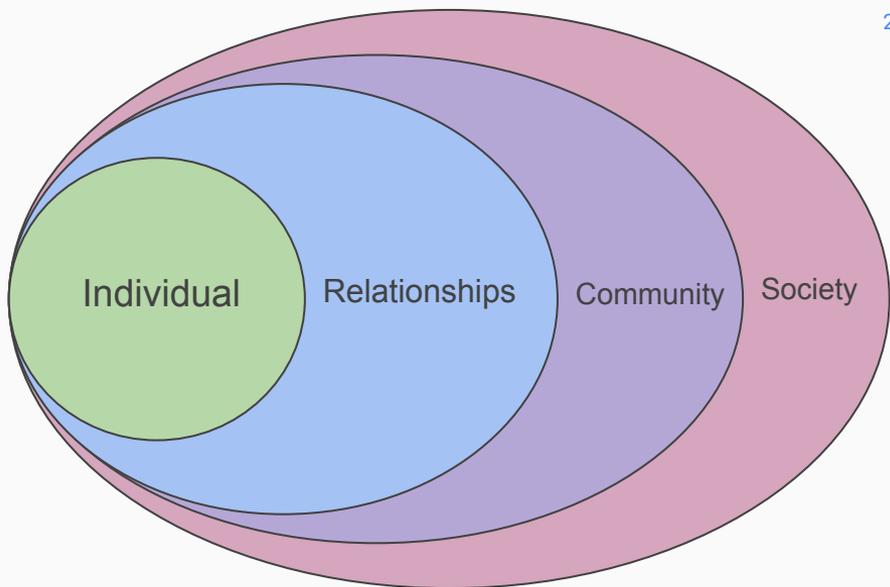
3% increase from 2015<sup>1 2</sup>

# The Impact of Sexual Assault

Correlated with...

- Mental Illness (depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.)<sup>4-10</sup>
- Physical symptoms<sup>10 13 14</sup>
- Risk Taking Behavior (smoking, sexual promiscuity, alcohol/drug use, and decreased academic performance and retention)<sup>14-17</sup>
- 2-3 times more likely to be victimized again<sup>18</sup>

# Bystander Intervention



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## Ecological Approach

- Change at the community/societal level <sup>19 20 25 26</sup>  
29

## Focus on :

- Awareness and rejection of rape myths <sup>19 22-24</sup>
- Empathy for survivors of assault <sup>19 24</sup>
- Tools and skills to combat assault <sup>22 29</sup>
- “Us” vs. “You” mentality <sup>25-28</sup>

# Effectiveness of Bystander Intervention

- Increased:
  - Knowledge about sexual assault <sup>19 22-24</sup>
  - Self-efficacy to intervene in risky scenarios <sup>22 29 30</sup>
  - Self-reported intervention behavior <sup>31 32</sup>
- Improved attitudes regarding sexual assault and intervention as a bystander <sup>31 32</sup>
- Elevated desire to engage in helping behavior <sup>22 29 30</sup>

# Issues with Current Research

- *Opportunities* to intervene compared to *actual* interventions
  - Individuals may be noticing more risky situations than they are intervening <sup>34 35</sup>
  - Example: Bystander Behavior Scale <sup>33</sup>
    - Measures intervention history without examining number of opportunities to do so
- Bystander's personal history of sexual victimization
  - Current data is inconsistent
    - Some sources claim victims may be more sensitive to and more able to notice/intervene assault scenarios <sup>36-38</sup>
    - Some sources claim victims may be less able to notice these situations due to having a higher threshold for what is considered "risky" <sup>39</sup>

# Goals/Hypotheses

- Goals:

- To determine...
  - Relationship between bystander's history and their:
    - Perceived barriers to intervention
    - Actual intervention behavior
- Opportunity vs. actual intervention behavior
  - High risk
  - Low risk
  - Post assault

- Hypotheses:

- Both victims and non-victims will report observing more scenarios than they intervene in
- Individuals with a history of sexual victimization will perceive more barriers to intervention
  - They will be *less* likely to notice and intervene as a result

# Methods

## Sample:

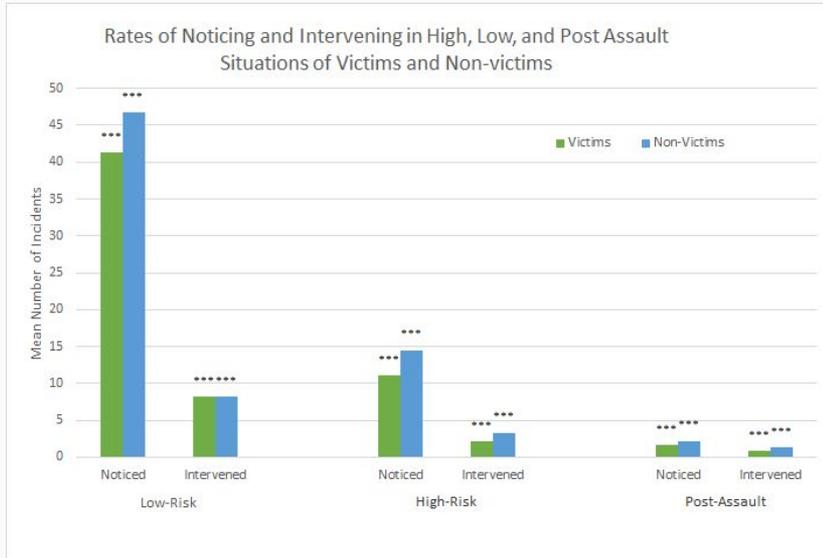
- Undergraduate students (N=393) recruited from psychology courses who received partial course credit
  - Gender: 79.7% female, 18.2% male, and 1.0% other
  - 36% reported experiencing at least one form of sexual victimization
  - Average age: 19.02 years (must be 18 or older to participate)
  - Identified Race: Caucasian (89.6%), African American (3.9%), Asian (1.3%), Native American (.5%), Middle Eastern (.0 %), and multiracial/identified as more than one race (3.1%)
  - 94% reported dating a gender different from their own

# Methods

## Measures:

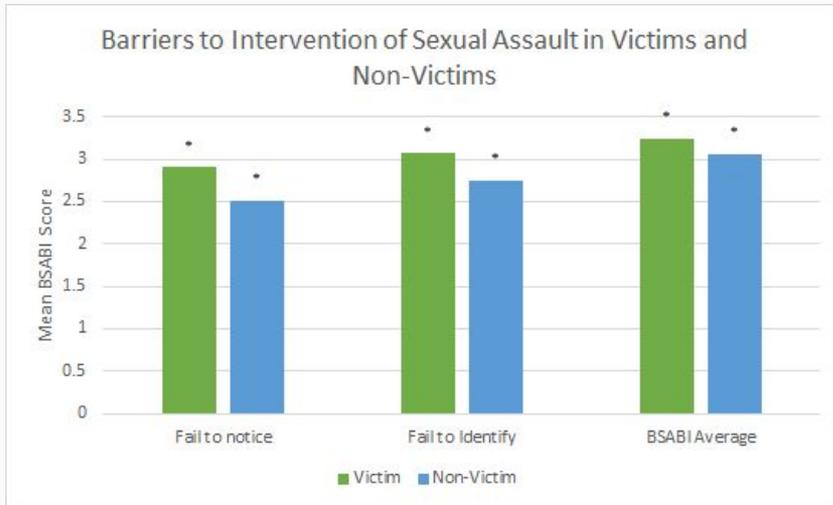
- All measures were administered in Qualtrics using anonymous reporting and disabling IP address collection
- *Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2;  $\alpha = .927$ )*<sup>40</sup>
  - Measures physical, psychological, and sexual victimization and perpetration
  - Only the sexual victimization items were used for the purposes of this study
- *The Bystander Opportunity and Intervention Scale ( $\alpha = .68$ )*<sup>35 42</sup>
  - Assesses the number of opportunities a participant has had to intervene in high, low, and post-assault scenarios and how many times they actually intervened
- *Barriers to Sexual Assault Bystander Intervention (BSABI;  $\alpha = .83$ )*<sup>41</sup>
  - Measures participants perceived barriers to intervening in a potentially dangerous situation

# Results



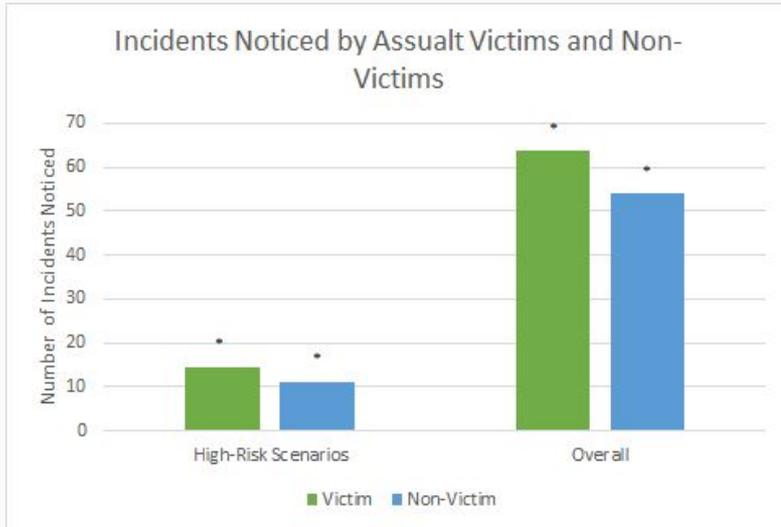
- As we hypothesized...
  - Both victims and non-victims observed more high ( $t(367)=11.675$ ,  $p=.000$ ), low ( $t(368)=15.411$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and post-assault ( $t(368)=7.381$ ,  $p=.000$ ) situations than they intervened

# Results



- As we hypothesized...
  - Victims reported experiencing more barriers to intervention
  - Exhibited by higher BSABI scores ( $F(1, 353)=4.31, p=0.04$ )
- Victims perceived themselves especially unable to *notice* a risky situation ( $F(1, 353)=5.85, p=0.02$ ) and correctly *identify* a situation as dangerous ( $F(1, 353)=5.98, p=0.02$ )

# Results



- Contrary to our hypothesis...
  - Victims reported noticing more risky scenarios on average than non-victims ( $t(523)=2.042$   $p=0.04$ )
  - Especially in high risk scenarios ( $t(523)=2.04$   $p=0.04$ )

# Discussion

- Results suggest...
  - Individuals (victims and non-victims) are observing more than they are intervening in high, low, and post-assault scenarios
  - Victims perceive more barriers to intervention
    - They see themselves as less likely to notice and identify sexual assault
    - However, they were *more* likely than non-victims to actually notice, on average

# Discussion

- Previous data examined previous victimization and its effect on *ability* to notice, identify, and intervene in risky situations (risk detection) <sup>38 39</sup>
- Our data suggests perhaps a *self-efficacy* problem rather than an *ability* problem
  - Victims appeared to believe they were unable to notice or identify risky situations
  - BUT they displayed a greater ability to notice risky situations than non-victims

# Discussion

- Moving forward, we need to acquire a focus on recognizing the **social variables** that affect a bystander's willingness to intervene-- including history of sexual victimization
- Future intervention programs must incorporate...
  - Points that victims are not to blame for what happened to them
  - Techniques and skills to boost self-efficacy to intervene
  - Focus on **empowerment** and **efficacy** for potential victims

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