

Missouri College Student Bystander Behavior

As Missouri's consortium dedicated to preventing higher education substance use, Partners in Prevention (PIP) promotes healthy behaviors on college campuses. PIP implements the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) to gain a better understanding of health behaviors and experiences on campuses across Missouri. Bystander Intervention is a strategy for prevention of various types of violence, including bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. The MACHB gathers information on the bystander behavior of college students on Missouri campuses. Specifically, the survey gathers data about students that witness sexually coercive and abusive behaviors. The survey includes questions regarding how likely students are to intervene in possibly hostile situations, where they would seek assistance, and reasons they may choose not to intervene. By providing educational trainings about bystander interventions, colleges across Missouri are hoping to reduce incidences of harmful situations.

Bystander Interventions to Prevent Violence

According to the MACHB, a majority of college students are willing to intervene in a variety of hostile situations. This number has steadily increased over the years, likely due to bystander intervention training programs, such as Green Dot or Step Up. For instance, when students are posed with the question, "how likely are you to intervene if you heard what sounded like fighting through my res hall/apartment walls?", approximately 84% indicated they would intervene. Last year, this number across the state was 79%.

Even more impressively, the 'definitely would intervene' selection has risen around 9% from 2016 (26%) to 2017 (35%). This trend continues through other bystander questions; for example, "likeliness to speak up and express concern if I heard a stranger talking about coercing someone to have sex"

The number of college students in Missouri that would intervene has risen over the past year:

In 2016, **79%** said they would intervene if they heard fighting versus **84%** in 2017.

In 2016, **36%** said they would intervene if they heard a stranger talking about coercing someone to have sex versus **52%** in 2017.

prompted 92% of students to indicate they would intervene compared to 86% in 2016.

Interpersonal Violence Bystander Behavior, "Definitely Would" response

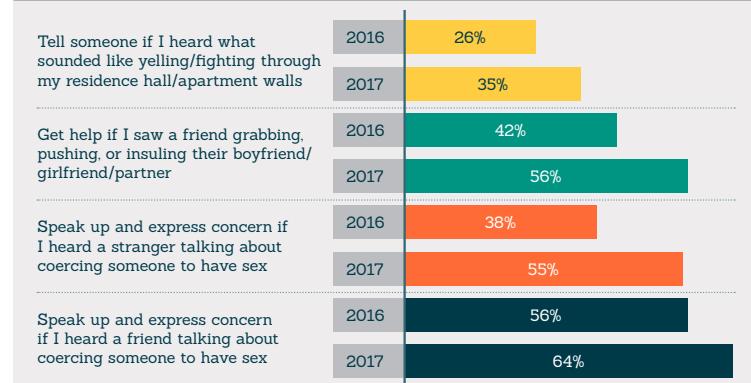


Table 1: The number of students who "definitely would respond" has risen from 2016-2017

Resources and Barriers to Interventions

When asked where students would seek assistance for situations that elicit intervention, Missouri college students indicated: Friends/Peers (73%), Campus Police (66%), and Campus Staff/Faculty (45%), and Residence life staff (40%) most frequently. Although bystander behaviors are becoming increasingly common among college students, barriers exist that may prevent someone from getting involved. For instance, the MACHB indicates that 'my personality traits would make it hard' (35%), 'fear of looking

'stupid' (30%), 'I could get physically hurt' (24%), and 'I don't think it's a problem' (21%) as the top reasons individuals may not intervene.

Bystander intervention programs, such as Green Dot, suggest multiple ways to be a helpful bystander in their trainings to overcome these barriers. The three D's of Green Dot - **Direct, Delegate, Distract** - encompass a variety of approaches that a student may use based on their comfort level with the situation. For example, if a student notices two individuals loudly yelling at each other and wishes to intervene before it escalates further, they could; 1) intervene directly by approaching the two individuals, 2) find someone that is a friend of the

two individuals to intervene or 3) Ask one of the individuals for directions to distract them from their current argument.

Conclusion

Bystander intervention programs educate students and other members of the campus community about how to engage in a variety of positive bystander behaviors, despite potential barriers to action. By increasing the number of students engaging in behaviors such as intervening or distracting in potentially hostile situations, helping a friend, or referring to campus resources, our Missouri college campuses can achieve healthier outcomes for their communities.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Brief prepared by Shannon Braida and Dong Ding, Graduate Research Assistants. Data prepared by Dong Ding, Graduate Research Assistant.

