

GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies

Learning Brief: Risks and Opportunities for Adopting ‘Bystander Intervention’ Approaches to Discourage, Prevent, or Interrupt Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings



Jeanne Ward | June 23, 2022

Background

This learning brief focuses on bystander interventions, with the aim of providing GBV actors with basic information about what constitutes bystander interventions and whether they may be used in humanitarian contexts. The learning brief begins with an overview of key concepts related to bystander programs, including some historical background to the evolution of bystander programming. It goes on to describe the basics of bystander interventions, with some examples of programs from around the world that have been evaluated. The brief then focuses on a few of the critical safety concerns related to implementing bystander intervention programs, and discusses key considerations for designing, monitoring, and evaluating bystander intervention programs in humanitarian contexts. The learning brief concludes with several key takeaways for GBV actors who are considering undertaking bystander intervention programming as part of the wider GBV prevention and response programming being undertaken in humanitarian settings.

Introduction to Key Concepts

In the context of gender-based violence (GBV), the term **bystander** is frequently used to describe individuals who observe an act of violence but are not directly involved in it. Bystanders are neither the perpetrators nor victims of a particular act of violence but have the choice to intervene through their words or actions to interrupt the harmful behavior.¹ The term “active” or “pro-social” bystander refers to those individuals who take action to discourage, prevent, or interrupt an act of GBV.²

Bystander: An individual or community which witnesses an act of GBV or the social norms which perpetuate it but is not directly involved in the harmful behavior.

Bystander Action: Actions taken by a bystander to discourage, prevent, or interrupt an act of GBV.

Bystander Interventions: Programs which seek to encourage bystander action to prevent GBV.

¹ Burn, S.M. (2009). A situational model of sexual assault prevention through bystander intervention. *Sex Roles*, 60, 779-792.

² Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/>

Bystanders can also be individuals and groups who witness the conditions that perpetuate violence, namely, the widespread social, political, and/or economic inequality between men and women. In this context, the term bystander is applied to the community in which acts of GBV take place, emphasizing the role of societies' norms and culture in perpetuating GBV.³

Bystander action can be defined as any action taken by individuals not directly involved in an act of GBV to “identify, speak out about or seek to engage others in responding to specific incidents of violence and/or behaviors, attitudes, practices or policies that contribute to violence.”⁴ **Bystander interventions** refer to programs which seek to encourage bystander action as a means to prevent and respond to GBV. Bystander interventions may have multiple goals, including the prevention of specific violent incidents witnessed by the bystander and the disruption of harmful social norms which perpetuate GBV in the community.⁵

Theoretical Origins of Bystander Intervention

The theory of bystander intervention first emerged in late 1960s and is often associated with the story of Kitty Genovese, a young woman who was murdered in New York in 1964. A *New York Times* article published at the time stated that 38 witnesses saw the murder, but none intervened or called the police; although this number was incorrect, the sensationalist story prompted popular and academic inquiry into what is now understood as the bystander effect.⁶

The **bystander effect** refers to a range of psychological phenomena that prevent bystanders who witnesses harmful or dangerous situations from intervening, even in situations where intervention seems both necessary and possible. As described by Latané and Darley in 1970, the first of these phenomena is the *diffusion of responsibility*—when there are multiple bystanders, each feels responsible for only a fraction of the total harm which may result from a lack of intervention and thus chooses not to act.⁷ Another is *evaluation apprehension*, in which potential active bystanders fear judgement from other onlookers who may disagree with their assessment of the situation or fault them for the way they choose to intervene. A third phenomenon is the process of *pluralistic ignorance*, and can inform bystanders' perceptions of the situation before they can make a choice whether to intervene—if other onlookers appear unconcerned or hesitate to engage in the situation for the reasons outlined above, the bystander may not even recognize the need for action, having absorbed or incorporated the lack of overt reactions from their peers into their own assessment of the situation.⁸

Later research in social psychology and criminology has further explored other theories of bystander behavior, including the **Theory of Planned Behavior** and **Social Norms Theory**.⁹ The Theory of Planned Behavior notes that

[/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D88BFEA31815FB64.](#)

³ “The Role of Bystander (Part One): Intervention During Different Stages of Violence.” (2021, January 11). UNDP South Africa. https://www.za.undp.org/content/south_africa/en/home/blog/2020/the-role-of-bystander-part-one--intervention-during-different-st.html.

⁴ Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds. [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D88BFEA31815FB64.](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D88BFEA31815FB64)

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Blagg, R. D. (2019, January 7). *bystander effect*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bystander-effect>.

⁷ Fischer, P., Krueger, J. I., Greitemeyer, T., Vogrinic, C., Kastenmüller, A., Frey, D., Heene, M., Wicher, M., & Kainbacher, M. (2011). The bystander-effect: A meta-analytic review on bystander intervention in dangerous and non-dangerous emergencies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 517–537. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023304>.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds. [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D88BFEA31815FB64.](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D88BFEA31815FB64)

individual attitudes are often poor predictors of future behavior, and the likelihood of bystander action is influenced by other microsystem and macrosystem variables, including social norms, perceived behavioral control, and pre-existing intentions to act. It suggests that bystander interventions should seek to identify and address a broad range of attitudes, beliefs, social norms, and perceived capacities which may support or inhibit bystander action. Likewise, Social Norms Theory highlights the unique role of individual perceptions of social norms—such as those surrounding social responsibility and the acceptability of GBV—which directly impact the likelihood of bystander action when witnessing acts of violence.¹⁰ For example, if it is a common norm or belief that a woman who is drinking at a bar is asking for sexual attention from men (and/or forgoing her right to not to be sexually harassed), then a bystander may be less likely to intervene in a scenario where a woman at a bar is subjected to harassment.

Building on this understanding of bystander behavior, bystander interventions which emphasize community-level awareness and responsibility often rely on Urie Bronfenbrenner’s **Social Ecological Model**.¹¹ This model describes the concentric systems which impact individual behavior from the specific circumstances of individual action to the social norms and historical trends which encourage or discourage it. Effective bystander interventions generally promote pro-social bystander action on multiple levels within this framework, for example, by providing specific skills for bystander action *and* working to shift social norms that perpetuate GBV broadly. These different components of bystander intervention will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

The Basics of Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention is an umbrella term for programming which seeks to encourage those who witness GBV or other harmful acts to intervene to prevent the occurrence of violence. Bystander intervention involves both prevention and response. Prevention focuses on changing social norms in the community related to the acceptability of violence, and response provides strategies for how bystanders can intervene safely and effectively when an incident of violence may be occurring or at risk of occurring. While there are many examples of the bystander approach, there are several common elements across different programs and contexts. These may include:^{12, 13}

- **Increasing awareness and knowledge of GBV**
- **Promoting social responsibility and pro-social community norms**
- **Correcting inaccurate perceptions of peer beliefs about the acceptability of GBV and support for bystander action**
- **Boosting the perceived efficacy of individual and collective bystander action**
- **Providing skills for specific kinds of bystander action**
- **Teaching survivor-centred approaches**

One of the most common tools of English-language bystander interventions is the “5 D’s” mnemonic which lists five skills bystanders can use to intervene in potentially dangerous situations: Distract, Delegate, Direct, Delay, Document. The following table summarizes each of these strategies and outlines key examples and limitation in their application.¹⁴

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¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Rutgers University (2020). Prevention and Education: Bystander Intervention. Accessed July, 2020.

<http://endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu/prevention-and-education/bystander-intervention/>

¹³ Slaby, R. (2019, October 2). 5 Ways to Foster Cultures of Active Bystanders at Home and in the Community. Retrieved from <https://melissainstitute.org/cultures-of-active-bystanders/>.

¹⁴ Hollaback! (2017). Bystander Intervention Training. https://www.ihollaback.org/bystander-resources/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI1f6NjpHQ6giVklInICh3zPgV0EAAAYASABEgIWGvD_BwE

Skill	Description	Examples	Potential Risks (where applicable)
Distract	This skill is used to diffuse a potentially dangerous event by drawing the attention of those involved away from the present situation. It may include creative tactics designed to de-escalate the situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretend to be lost. Ask for the time. Pretend you know the person being harassed. Talk to them about something random and take attention off the perpetrator. • Physically step between the perpetrator and the target. • Accidentally-on-purpose spill your coffee, the change in your wallet, or make a commotion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing oneself between the perpetrator and the survivor poses safety risks to the bystander, and should only be done selectively.
Delegate	This skill involves asking for help from an additional third-party. This person can be someone in a position of authority or another bystander who may be able to assist in one of the other approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a store employee, teacher, security guard, bus driver, or a transit employee and ask them to intervene. • Speak to someone near you who notices what's happening and might be in a better position to intervene. • Call emergency services (if it is safe) to request help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before contacting the police or emergency medical services, 'distract' strategies should be used to check in with the person being targeted to make sure they want you to do this. Some people may not be comfortable or safe with the intervention of law enforcement.
Direct	This skill involves directly engaging with the perpetrator using short, concise statements which demonstrate disapproval for their actions and encourage them to cease the harmful behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State clearly "that's not okay" or "leave them alone." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful when using this strategy not to escalate the situation and be cognizant of the physical and psychological safety risks to oneself and others.
Delay	Some situations may be over quickly, or it may not be possible to intervene in the moment. However, bystanders can still make a difference using the delay tactic to support the survivor after an instance of harm occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the survivor if they're okay and tell them you're sorry about what happened to them. • Ask them if there's any way you can support them. • Offer to accompany them to their destination or sit with them for a while. • Share resources with them and offer to help them make a report if they want to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic about what you can offer in terms of your time and support.
Document	If other bystanders are already helping the person being targeted, consider documenting the situation in an appropriate manner. This can be helpful for future legal action against the perpetrator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you've documented the incident, ask the survivor if they want you to send it to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never share an audio or video recording of a harmful situation without the express consent of the survivor. • Do not force the survivor to make a report or use documented evidence to go against their wishes.

Adapted from "Hollaback!" (2017) Bystander Intervention Training.

Examples of Bystander Interventions

This section presents an overview of the evidence base for bystander interventions targeting GBV. While most programming has been implemented in high- and middle-income countries, examples were also identified from humanitarian settings, as described below. Many programs have undergone peer-reviewed evaluations; however, these evaluations are typically heavily quantitative, and few, if any, identify specific aspects of the program that are effective at preventing violence. In addition, although programs tend to show significant effects on participant attitudes and knowledge, the impact on reported bystander action and violence perpetration are mixed. Kerr-Wilson et al. (2020), conclude in a global review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls that

“There is good evidence that brief bystander interventions are ineffective in preventing the perpetration of violence. Shorter, single- or two-session interventions show no evidence of impact.”¹⁵

Bystander Interventions in High- and Middle-Income Countries

Many large-scale bystander interventions have been implemented in the United States and Europe based on the theory of bystander intervention which originated with Latané and Darley. Evaluations of these tend to show promising results. Among the most-widely cited is the Green Dot program developed by Dr. Dorothy Edwards and targeting sexual, dating, and stalking violence on college campuses. The module distinguishes between “red dots” which tolerate or perpetuate acts of violence and “green dots” which seek to mitigate and de-escalate harmful situations.¹⁶ Evidence from observational and cluster-randomized control trials show that the program is effective at reducing sexual, dating, and staking violence, with an estimated 120 instances of sexual violence prevented in the third year of program implementation and 88 instances of sexual violence prevented in fourth year across three campuses in the United States (Universities of Kentucky, Cincinnati and South Carolina).¹⁷

Bringing in the Bystander (BITB) program is a one or two-session intervention focused on sexual violence on college campuses. The intervention is delivered by two trained peer educators (one male and one female) and includes the development of a “bystander plan” and signed pledge to be active, pro-social bystanders in the campus community.¹⁸ While quasi-experimental research on the program found few statistically significant effects, results from a randomized-control trial (RCT) suggest positive outcomes across measures of attitudes, knowledge, and behavior which were robust for both men and women and at 4-month and 12-month follow-ups.^{19 20}

RealConsent is another bystander intervention that has been implemented at a large, public university in the United States. RealConsent is a six-session online module focusing on knowledge of informed consent, sexual communication skills, the role of alcohol and male socialization in sexual violence, empathy for rape victims, and bystander education. An RCT of RealConsent showed that the program had beneficial and statistically significant effects on bystander action,

¹⁵ Kerr-Wilson, A.; Gibbs, A.; McAslan Fraser E.; Ramsoomar, L.; Parke, A.; Khuwaja, HMA.; and Jewkes, R. (2020). *A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls*. What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme, Pretoria, South Africa.

¹⁶ Benner, Jennifer, 2013. *Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Assault: A Guide for Preventionists*. Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center. https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2013-09/publications_nsvrc_guide_engaging-bystanders-prevent-sexual-violence_0.pdf

¹⁷ Coker, A. L., Fisher, B. S., Bush, H. M., Swan, S. C., Williams, C. M., Clear, E. R., & DeGue, S. (2015). Evaluation of the Green Dot Bystander Intervention to Reduce Interpersonal Violence Among College Students Across Three Campuses. *Violence Against Women, 21*(12), 1507–1527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801214545284>.

¹⁸ Elias-Lambert, N., & Black, B. M. (2016). Bystander Sexual Violence Prevention Program: Outcomes for High- and Low-Risk University Men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(19), 3211–3235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515584346>.

¹⁹ Banyard, V. L., Moynihan, M. M., Plante, E. G. (2007). Sexual violence prevention through bystander education: An experimental evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*, 463-481. <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Sex%20Violence%20Prevention%20through%20Bystander%20Education.pdf>.

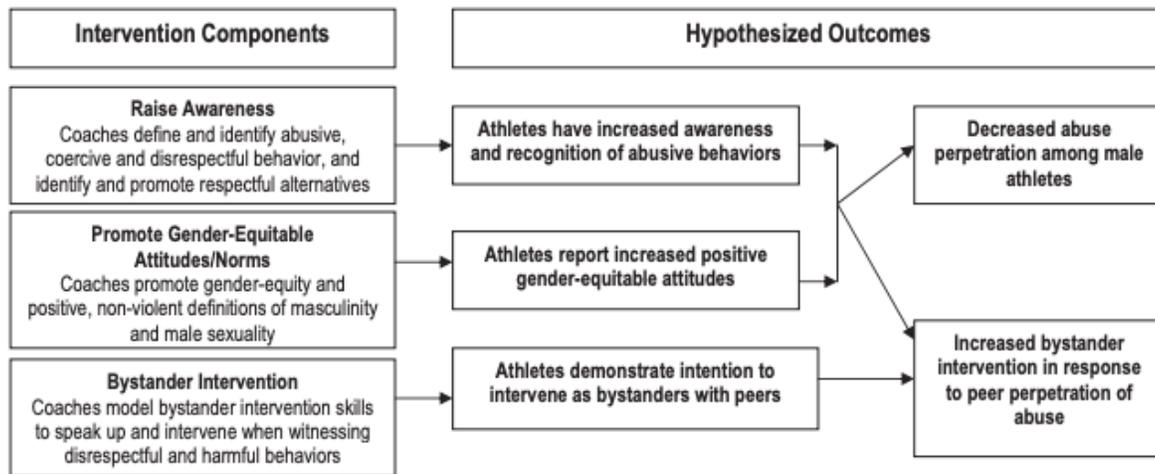
²⁰ Elias-Lambert, N., & Black, B. M. (2016). Bystander Sexual Violence Prevention Program: Outcomes for High- and Low-Risk University Men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(19), 3211–3235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515584346>.

beliefs in rape myths, and attitudes towards women.²¹

Another program targeting adolescents and young adults is Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM), which focuses on bystander approaches to preventing domestic violence among adolescent male athletes. The intervention operates as a training-of-trainers program, teaching coaches how to lead 10-to-15-minute weekly presentations with their athletes over an 11-week period. The following diagram created by Miller et al. (2012) outlines the theory of change for this program:²²

There have been multiple evaluations of the CBIM program. Research from the original program shows positive and statistically significant changes in bystander intentions and actions as well as significant reductions in the perpetration of dating abuse at 12 months post-baseline.²³

E. Miller et al. / *Journal of Adolescent Health* 51 (2012) 431–438



While many bystander intervention programs have focused on high school and college students in the United States, efforts have been made to adapt these programs to different settings and contexts, including bars and sports teams. In 2015, the bystander approach was adapted to create a training for bartenders in Florida, United States. The BarTAB program was a 2-hour session for staff at alcohol-serving establishments who engage with customers. An evaluation by Powers et al. (2018) found that BarTAB was “successful at decreasing rape myth acceptance and barriers to intervention while increasing willingness to intervene.”²⁴ An important aspect of this adaptation was its specific focus on alcohol in the context of sexual violence: the program highlighted rape myths related to alcohol consumption and drinking culture, and the examples provided centered around the kinds of situations a bartender might encounter in a bar.²⁵

The “Take a Stand” program targeted adult male athletes in the Australian Football League. Despite promising efforts to address harmful cultural norms among male athletes, the results of this intervention were mixed, with only about half of respondents reporting that they would be comfortable speaking up in a group of men who were talking disrespectfully about women.²⁶

²¹ *ibid*

²² Miller, E., Tancredi, D. J., McCauley, H. L., Decker, M. R., Virata, M., Anderson, H. A., O'Connor, B., & Silverman, J. G. (2013). One-year follow-up of a coach-delivered dating violence prevention program: a cluster randomized controlled trial. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 45(1), 108–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2013.03.007>.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Powers, R. A., & Leili, J. (2018). Bar Training for Active Bystanders: Evaluation of a Community-Based Bystander Intervention Program. *Violence Against Women*, 24(13), 1614–1634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801217741219>.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Corboz, J., Flood, M., & Dyson, S. (2016). Challenges of Bystander Intervention in Male-Dominated Professional Sport: Lessons

The bystander approach has also been applied in developing countries, often as adaptations of successful programs. For example, the CBIM noted above has been adapted in Mumbai, India, and is called Parivartan. However, results from a study of the Parivartan program showed no statistically significant changes in positive bystander behavior or sexual violence perpetration.²⁷ One promising adaptation of an existing bystander intervention currently underway is GlobalConsent in Vietnam.²⁸ The intervention is based on the RealConsent program noted above. While it remains to be seen whether the positive outcomes of the US-based program can be replicated in the adapted intervention, GlobalConsent offers a promising model for applying proven bystander interventions to new contexts.

Case Study: Your Moment of Truth (YMOT) Program in Nairobi, Kenya

Your Moment of Truth is a 6-week bystander intervention and GBV awareness-raising program targeting adolescent boys in Nairobi, Kenya.²⁹ Each session focuses on a different theme, including skills to prepare for their “moments of truth,” the importance of awareness and identifying red flags in potentially dangerous situations, sexual consent, rape myths, and personal and communal responsibility.

A comparison study of the program by Sinclair et al. (2020) found that boys who participated in the program were more likely to successfully intervene in acts of verbal harassment, physical threat, or physical or sexual assault by between 40 and 48 percentage points, more than doubling the rate of successful intervention among the comparison group who received the standard of care. The program also resulted in significantly higher positive attitudes towards women at follow up, and these attitudes were found to be good predictors of successful bystander action for those in the treatment group.³⁰

A different approach to bystander intervention is HarassMap, which provides an online platform for users to anonymously report acts of sexual harassment in Egypt.³¹ The resulting crowdsourced map of incidents of sexual harassment serves as the basis for advocacy efforts and an information campaign designed to reduce the bystander effect. According to Abdelmonem and Galán (2017) in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*:

HarassMap seeks to end the bystander effect in relation to sexual harassment by convincing bystanders (al-nas illi waqifa), or those who “play stupid” (i'mal 'abit), to view it as a crime that is everyone's responsibility to counteract. “Play stupid” appeared as a caption in a cartoon circulated on HarassMap's (2013) Facebook page, showing a faceless woman on a crowded metro car being harassed while others ignored the situation. Bystanders, HarassMap activists argue, contribute to the social acceptability of sexual harassment.³²

While there do not appear to be any program evaluations of HarassMap to date, it offers a novel approach to bystander intervention that uses technology to reach a broad audience and change widespread social norms.³³ Harassmap has also spread in influence globally with the concept inspiring initiatives in several other countries.³⁴

from the Australian Football League. *Violence Against Women*, 22(3), 324–343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215602343>.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Yount, K.M., Minh, T.H., Trang, Q.T. *et al.* Preventing sexual violence in college men: a randomized-controlled trial of *GlobalConsent*. *BMC Public Health* **20**, 1331 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09454-2>.

²⁹ Sinclair, J., Githua, O. W., Omondi, B., Kapphahn, C., Sinclair, L., Mulinge, M., & Golden, N. H. (2014). The Impact of a Six-week School Curriculum on Boys' Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Kenya. *Journal of Adolescent Health Platform Abstracts*, 54.2, S1-S16.

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Abdelmonem, A. & Galán, S. (2017). Action-Oriented Responses to Sexual Harassment in Egypt: The Cases of HarassMap and WenDo. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 13 (1): 154–167. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3728767>.

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ See [Around the world \(harassmap.org\)](http://aroundtheworld.harassmap.org)

The approaches described above illustrate an important point about bystander approaches: there is no one-size-fits-all model, and each context requires unique adaptations to increase the odds of successful outcomes and minimize the risks of unintended consequences. This highlights the importance of rigorous design, monitoring and evaluation of context-specific adaptations. This includes designing and monitoring for potential risks, described further below.

Addressing Potential Risks of Bystander Interventions

Despite the promise of bystander approaches to prevent and discourage GBV, there are also many potential risks which may not receive sufficient attention in program design. Bystander interventions can have unintended consequences that cause harm to survivors, bystanders, and communities who witness or experience GBV. Many of these risks have been summarized by Robyn Yaker (2020) in previous research on sexual harassment prevention strategies in humanitarian settings and are summarized in the table below.³⁵

<p>Risks to survivors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bystander interventions may encourage bystanders to involve the police or report acts of GBV without the consent of the survivor, violating key principles of survivor-centered approaches and risking further harm to those who have experienced GBV.³⁶ • Bystander approaches that rely on online crowdsourcing may lack data security and risk exposing the identity of survivors who shared their experiences anonymously.³⁷
<p>Risks to bystanders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bystanders may be exposed to physical safety risks, and these risks may not be experienced equally by all potential bystanders. For example, research by Liebst et al. (2018) in Copenhagen, Denmark found that social group membership with victims of violence increases the likelihood of bystander victimization.³⁸ In the context of interventions to interrupt GBV, this suggests that bystander programmes may disproportionately increase safety risks for members of already marginalized groups (e.g. sex workers, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women) who participate in the training as they are more likely to share social characteristics with those who are GBV survivors.
<p>Risks to the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bystander interventions that do not reflect the lived experiences of power imbalance may inadvertently support harmful gender norms by reinforcing stereotypes about men as protectors and women as victims.³⁹ • One-off bystander interventions may discourage other actions to address GBV if communities believe that the problem has already been sufficiently addressed by the intervention.⁴⁰

While it is impossible to preempt all possible unintended consequences of bystander interventions, good planning and careful program design can help reduce many of these risks. **Most importantly, bystander approaches should never be**

³⁵ Yaker, Robyn. Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies in Humanitarian Settings: Learning from Existing Evidence and Programs. GBV AoR Helpdesk.

https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/GBV%20AoR%20Research%20Paper_Sexual%20Harassment%20Prevention%20in%20Humanitarian%20Settings_final.pdf.

³⁶ Yaker, Robyn. Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies in Humanitarian Settings: Learning from Existing Evidence and Programs. GBV AoR Helpdesk.

https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/GBV%20AoR%20Research%20Paper_Sexual%20Harassment%20Prevention%20in%20Humanitarian%20Settings_final.pdf.

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ Liebst, L. S., Heinskou, M. B., & Ejbye-Ernst, P. (2018). On the Actual Risk of Bystander Intervention: A Statistical Study Based on Naturally Occurring Violent Emergencies. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 55(1), 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427817710776>.

³⁹ Yaker, Robyn. Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies in Humanitarian Settings: Learning from Existing Evidence and Programs. GBV AoR Helpdesk.

https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/GBV%20AoR%20Research%20Paper_Sexual%20Harassment%20Prevention%20in%20Humanitarian%20Settings_final.pdf.

⁴⁰ ibid

attempted without proper training and background on GBV issues, as doing so may expose survivors to greater harm.⁴¹

This is especially true in humanitarian contexts where the breakdown of social services and criminal justice systems creates a particularly challenging environment for GBV survivors. Short-term funding and limited human resources can also make it a challenge to provide sufficient training and oversight to bystander programs. For example, in one humanitarian emergency, a male community watch group adopted a bystander approach with limited training or ongoing support and ended up coercing survivors to report acts of GBV to the police even when the survivor did not want to.⁴²

Considerations for Designing Effective Bystander Interventions in Humanitarian Settings

Learning and evidence make it clear that bystander interventions designed to address GBV in humanitarian emergencies should emphasize the importance of physical safety and under no circumstances encourage bystander action that would further jeopardize the survivor or bystander.⁴³ Bystander interventions should be part of a consistent, long-term, and multi-pronged strategy to address GBV and shift the social norms. Bystander interventions should never be used as a stand-alone intervention. Programs should adopt a survivor-centered approach and focus on educating community members about available GBV response services. Lastly, bystander interventions should be cognizant of broader social trends and be avoided if increased bystander action would exacerbate existing social instabilities and risk additional harm to women and girls in the affected community.⁴⁴

Based on previous experience and learning in the field, researchers have identified a number of common elements of effective bystander interventions. These are important to consider in humanitarian contexts, and include:^{45, 46, 47}

- Sustainable, integrated, and long-term programming
- Community engagement
- Gender-sensitive design
- Strong theoretical foundations
- Context-specific adaptations
- Skilled and supported program facilitators
- Focus on peer attitudes and behavior
- Monitoring and evaluation

Several of these elements are explored in further detail below, beginning with community engagement.

⁴¹ Jayakumar, Kirthi, 2020. 'Bystander Intervention Under Lockdown.' The Gender Security Project.

<https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/2020/04/bystander-intervention-under-lockdown.html>.

⁴² Yaker, Robyn. Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies in Humanitarian Settings: Learning from Existing Evidence and Programs. GBV AoR Helpdesk.

https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/GBV%20AoR%20Research%20Paper_Sexual%20Harassment%20Prevention%20in%20Humanitarian%20Settings_final.pdf.

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Benner, Jennifer, 2013. Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Assault: A Guide for Preventionists. Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center. https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2013-09/publications_nsvrc_guide_engaging-bystanders-prevent-sexual-violence_0.pdf

⁴⁶ Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds. https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D8BFEA31815FB64.

⁴⁷ Murphy Austin, M. J., Dardis, C. M., Wilson, M. S., Gidycz, C. A., & Berkowitz, A. D. (2016). Predictors of Sexual Assault-Specific Prosocial Bystander Behavior and Intentions: A Prospective Analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 22(1), 90–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215597790>.

Sustainable, Integrated and Long-term Programming

According to Powell (2011), a bystander approach should be designed so that it is sustainable, rather than a one-off program intervention. Impacting social norms is a long-term process. Integrating bystander interventions into existing and on-going prevention work can help ensure support for the program or approach over time. It is important that organizations and the staff that work in them understand that bystander approaches are only one part of a larger effort to prevent GBV. Powell suggests that “In order to foster the commitment to bystander intervention in an agency, it is necessary to first establish prevention as a key foundational aspect of the organization.”⁴⁸ Bystander interventions are one tool in a larger toolbox.

Community Engagement and Readiness

Involving community members and organizations in bystander interventions—especially women-led groups—is essential to effectively identifying targets for change and building sustainable, long-term programming. Moreover, community engagement is a crucial first step towards assessing whether a bystander intervention is an appropriate choice for a given community in the first place.⁴⁹ Research suggests that communities may differ in their receptiveness to bystander interventions, and it is important to tailor messaging differently for communities with no or little readiness for change compared to those with significant prior investments in GBV prevention efforts.

Those designing bystander interventions should also take into consideration existing policy and legislation, community attitudes, and prior engagement on GBV by civil society and the private sector.⁵⁰ This is especially important because many bystander interventions in humanitarian settings—unlike those on college campuses—rely on voluntary participation. Without adequate community support, these programs may be labelled as “taboo” because of the topics discussed and alienate potential participants as well as the broader community.⁵¹

Gender-Sensitive Design

Bystander interventions must carefully consider how to engage both men and women as bystanders. For male bystanders, interventions should seek to engage men as allies in preventing GBV and shift harmful social norms. It may be particularly important to focus on peer attitudes and beliefs as men are more likely to intervene in potentially harmful situations if they believe other men are likely to intervene as well. For female bystanders, interventions should be cognizant of existing power imbalances that limit women’s participation in public dialogue, and also take into account risk of harm to women for intervening. Support to female bystanders must also avoid shifting responsibility for addressing GBV to women and girls. While few bystander interventions specifically target women, these programs can be important in increasing women’s sense of agency in speaking out about violence and contributing to shifts in broader gender norms.⁵² For these reasons, it is suggested that bystander interventions include a mix of single-sex and mixed-sex delivery to achieve the best possible outcomes for all participants.⁵³

⁴⁸ Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds, p 32. https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D8BFEA31815FB64.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Powers, R. A., & Leili, J. (2018). Bar Training for Active Bystanders: Evaluation of a Community-Based Bystander Intervention Program. *Violence Against Women*, 24(13), 1614–1634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801217741219>.

⁵² New York Health Department. Stop Sexual Violence: A Sexual Violence Bystander Intervention Toolkit. <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2040>.

⁵³ Powell, A. (2011). Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 8th eds. https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Review-of-bystander-approaches-3-May_FINAL_with-cover.pdf?la=en&hash=E56A43C815392E8CE911EF0C7D8BFEA31815FB64.

Adaptations of Bystander Interventions to Local Context

Given the available evidence on bystander interventions, it may be advisable to adapt existing programs which have shown success in developed countries to humanitarian settings. As noted previously, however, it is important to consider local context to fit the program to the specific values and needs of an affected community. In a study of a communications campaign to promote bystander action in India, La Ferle et al. (2019) found that print advertisements (i.e. posters) that featured emotional appeals to guilt and shame were more effective than those with a more neutral emotional tone. This difference was only seen among research participants with an interdependent self-view, supporting the authors' hypothesis that appeals to guilt and shame would resonate more with Eastern audiences based on cultural norms which promote an interdependent self-view.⁵⁴

In adapting evidence-based bystander interventions to the local context, there is often a trade-off between fidelity to the original program and appropriate cultural and context-specific adaptation. Guidance from the US Department of Health and Human Services on adapting evidence-based programs suggests five key steps towards confronting this trade-off:⁵⁵

- 1. Conduct a preliminary assessment of the target community.**
- 2. Understand the original program.**
- 3. Identify potential adaptation challenges (i.e., reasons why adaption may be necessary).**
- 4. Select and plan adaptations.**
- 5. Pilot and monitor adaptations, including for evaluation and continued improvement in implementation.**

By going through these steps, practitioners can effectively identify “green light,” “yellow light,” and “red light” adaptations. “Green light” adaptations alter the program to match the demographic, cultural, and contextual background of the target population but do not change any of the core components of the original program; these should be implemented. “Yellow light” adaptations may be important to aligning the intervention to the local context but also represent a significant deviation from the original program and its essential components; program designers should proceed with caution and consider consulting additional experts on program adaptation and bystander intervention. “Red light” adaptations totally change the original program and risk reducing its effectiveness as shown in previous evaluations; these adaptations should be avoided.⁵⁶

Other resources such as Brenner (2013) provide additional guidance on designing and adapting effective bystander interventions. Most importantly, Brenner emphasizes the importance of correctly identifying and understanding the target audience of the intervention and encourages program designers to consider a wide range of potential settings for intervention, including organized recreational team activities, places of worship, community centers, health care facilities, homes, prisons and other correctional facilities, residential care facilities, schools and child-care programs, workplaces, public transportation, restaurants and bars, culturally-specific organizations, youth-serving organizations.⁵⁷ Once the target audience has been identified, it is then possible to consider the appropriate community organizations to partner with and the best messaging and mediums to employ to reach that audience.

⁵⁴ La Ferle, C., Muralidharan, S., & Kim, E. (A.). (2019). Using guilt and shame appeals from an eastern perspective to promote bystander intervention: A study of mitigating domestic violence in India. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(5), 555–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1668893>.

⁵⁵ Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.) “Making Adaptations Tip Sheet.” https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Health-Education/Exemplary-SHE/Curriculum-Materials/making_adaptations_to_evidence_based_programs.pdf.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Benner, Jennifer, 2013. *Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Assault: A Guide for Preventionists*. Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center. https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2013-09/publications_nsvrc_guide_engaging-bystanders-prevent-sexual-violence_0.pdf

Considerations for Monitoring and Evaluating Bystander Interventions in Humanitarian Settings

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of any GBV prevention programming, including bystander interventions. Ongoing evaluation serves many goals, such as informing decisions to continue, expand, or modify a program; increasing funding and community support; promoting long-term sustainability; and ensuring accountability.⁵⁸ However, monitoring and evaluation may also be particularly challenging for bystander interventions due to the nature of the intervention and the kinds of outcomes it seeks to achieve. The following are some key challenges in monitoring and evaluation as well as potential ways to address them.

To accurately analyze effectiveness of interventions, evaluations of bystander interventions must consider the issue of bystander opportunity (i.e., the number of potentially harmful situations a trained bystander may witness over a given period of time in which they could have intervened). If this variable is not included in the analysis, it risks underestimating the true causal effect of the program; for example, even a program that is 100 percent successful at ensuring active bystander intervention in potentially harmful situations may look ineffective if only 15 percent of participants in the program witnessed a potential harmful act during the study period. This limitation can be addressed by including a measure of bystander opportunity in the survey instrument, but this should itself be considered a potential outcome of the program as good bystander interventions will likely increase participants ability to recognize potentially harmful situations. Note, however, that some bystander interventions may also encourage personal risk reduction strategies that may decrease bystander opportunity on the part of the participants.⁵⁹

Another challenge is accurately defining and measuring bystander action and intent. Here there is a trade-off between providing the broadest number of categories of potential actions and limiting attrition rates due to long or difficult-to-complete surveys. This can be partially addressed through the inclusion of an “other” category in questions about bystander action. Banyard et al. (2008, 2014) have also developed standardized measurement scales to assess bystander intent and perceived efficacy for both sexual violence and intimate partner violence.^{60 61} While the degree to which bystander intent predicts action remains unclear, these instruments offer an important starting point for evaluating bystander interventions in humanitarian settings. Equally important, evaluations should also take into consideration the success of potential bystander action and include questions designed to provide information on this question.⁶²

Properly defining the scope and size of the treatment and comparison groups are also essential to good evaluations. It is likely that many bystander interventions will have differential effects on different subgroups of the population (e.g., men and women), and understanding these differences requires larger sample sizes to obtain appropriately powered statistical estimates. It may also be appropriate (and in many cases necessary) to expand the unit of analysis from the individual to the community. This enables the researcher to capture effects on overall community norms and prevalence of GBV as well as capturing important positive spillover effects of the intervention (e.g., individuals who participate in bystander training may share their knowledge with others in the community). Lastly, while most evaluations of bystander interventions focus on short-term effects (12 months or less), it is also important to consider longer-term outcomes to assess the durability of effects on attitudes and bystander intent as well as community-level outcomes on violence perpetration and victimization.⁶³

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Bush, H. M., Bell, S. C., & Coker, A. L. (2019). Measurement of bystander actions in violence intervention evaluation: Opportunities and Challenges. *Current epidemiology reports*, 6(2), 208–214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40471-019-00196-3>.

⁶⁰ Banyard, V. L. (2008). Measurement and correlates of pro-social bystander behavior: The case of interpersonal violence. *Violence and Victims*, 23, 83-97.

⁶¹ Banyard, V. L., Moynihan, M. M., Cares, A. C., & Warner, R. A. (2014). How do we know if it works? Defining measurable outcomes in bystander-focused violence prevention. *Psychology of Violence* 4, 101-115.

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ *ibid*

Key Takeaways on Implementing Bystander Intervention Programs in Humanitarian Settings

Several key takeaways have emerged in the above summary relating to developing bystander intervention programs in humanitarian settings:

- **Bystander intervention programs have shown promise in a variety of contexts. They must not be stand-alone interventions, but rather part of a larger multi-pronged effort to address GBV.**
- **Risks of bystander interventions exist for survivors, bystanders, and the community, especially in contexts where rule of law has broken down. Bystander approaches should never be attempted without proper training and background on GBV issues as doing so may expose survivors to greater harm.**
- **There is no one-size-fits-all model, and each context requires unique adaptations to increase the odds of successful outcomes and minimize the risks of unintended consequences.**
- **It seems possible to adapt bystander interventions to humanitarian contexts, as long as safety considerations are paramount in the design, monitoring and evaluation of programs.**
- **Design of programs must also be gender-sensitive and support women's leadership and engagement, while not shifting responsibility for GBV to women and girls.**
- **Any adaptations of bystander interventions to local contexts should proceed with caution, ensuring that the original approach remains somewhat intact.**
- **Monitoring and evaluation must be integral to the design and delivery of bystander intervention programs.**

Recommended Additional Resources

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The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBVAoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBVAoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

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