

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



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Dear Colleague,

Given the tragedy unfolding at Penn State, we wanted to choose an article that would shine light on many of the important questions about why people act or don't act when they see behaviors that concern them.

This article is a classic article examining how people respond to child abuse or the warning signs of abuse. The researchers identified four broad categories that affect whether someone will act, including characteristics of the situation, of the bystander him/herself, of the victim and for the first time, also looked at characteristics of the perpetrator. They found that people were much more likely to intervene if they had been abused themselves, if they had a relationship to the victim, and if they felt personally responsible for protecting children.

We also wanted to highlight some resources, many of them free for you to use as you consider your role in making the protection of children your

Why Do (And Don't) People Intervene When They See Child Abuse?

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

Question

With the sexual abuse scandals emerging at Penn State, Syracuse, and other institutions, why did it take so long for people to act?

The Research

In 1994, Christy and Voigt were among the first researchers to look at how witnesses respond to child abuse. Based upon the wealth of bystander literature, they developed a model for determining whether a witness would intervene based on four broad categories. From 567 college students and faculty, these researchers found that 48% of respondents had witnessed child abuse in a public setting, yet only 26% intervened. Data analyses identified 40 statistically significant factors related to whether a bystander intervened. Among the significant findings in each of the four broad categories:

- **Bystander Characteristics:** The typical intervening witness was someone who: believed that the way a parent treats a child "is my business" and felt personally responsible to act; was certain about what to do and how to do it; and typically had been victimized as a child or had witnessed abuse.
- **Situational Characteristics:** The typical situation where someone intervened had: less confusion about what was happening and the intervening witness felt some connection to or communicated with the other witnesses if present.
- **Victim Characteristics:** Victims were more likely to get help if they: had some connection with the witness and if the bystander felt some connection or similarity to the victim.
- **Perpetrator Characteristics:** The data showed bystanders

personal responsibility. Last, we are excited to announce the release of a new book by Anna Hanson, poems and writing through her dealing with and healing from rape.

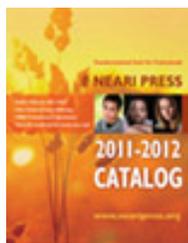
As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at

info@nearipress.org or call us at 413-540-0712 x14.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

www.nearipress.org



FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES

Free online courses offered by NEARI Press include:

[Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention](#)

by Joan Tabachnick

This one-hour online course will help you understand the dynamics of bystanders and offer you a number of concrete exercises you can use to help train any number of staff, volunteers or friends about what they can do to keep families, communities and colleges safe.

Time: 3-4 hours

Cost: Free

[Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations](#)

who took action: typically knew the people who were abusive and were more likely to act if they observed a situation involving more than one perpetrator.

Finally, the research showed that people intervened both directly (e.g., talked with the person who may be abusive) and indirectly (e.g., called authorities about what they saw) and that the characteristics for direct intervention varied across all four categories.

Implications for Professionals

It is vital for practitioners crafting a safety plans to give friends and family members the tools they need to step in, intervene and help guide a youth towards a healthier lifestyle. This includes:

1. Supporting people and organizations in a youth's social support network to foster an attitude that "it is my business" to talk with the teen or child whenever he/she begins to step away from the safety plan
2. Teaching the skills needed to intervene
3. Providing organizations working with that teen with information needed to develop policies about both appropriate boundaries and effective responses when an adolescent begins to test those boundaries.

Finally, clinicians can help send a clear message that the more connected an adolescent feels to those around him/her, the more likely others will help maintain everyone's safety.

Implications for the Field

Through a variety of institutional crises in the last decade from the Catholic Church to the Penn State tragedy, unique opportunities are emerging. People are asking for more information about both those who perpetrate sexual abuse and those who remain silent. Because of these questions, clinicians now have the opportunity to influence a broader range of professionals concerned with community safety. Working in a community-based environment can offer enhanced broader range of resources to youth in treatment and open the door for clinicians to share their expertise about assessment, treatment, management, and prevention.

Abstract

Bystander responses to public episodes of child abuse were surveyed among 269 self-reported witnesses. Respondents completed an 80-item self-report questionnaire which inquired into a broad range of events, experiences, and behaviors surrounding naturally occurring incidents of perceived child abuse witnessed in public places. Almost one-half of the sample reported having witnessed at least one event of child abuse in public, but only one out of four witnesses acted to intervene. Data analyses identified 40 statistically significant variables across four categories: characteristics of the bystander, situation, victim, and perpetrator.

by Rev. Debra Haffner and
Joan Tabachnick

This course highlights a unique policy developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association to keep congregations safe, and create a safe and welcoming space for survivors; this course finds ways to safely welcome offenders who have committed themselves to staying safe.

Time: 1-2 hours

Cost: Free

New Publication

For Now: Words from a Girl who Fought Back

by Anna Nettie Hanson

Hanson has written a book that vividly describes the pain and trauma of rape by someone she thought was a friend. Her unique daily journal was written during the immediacy following her rape and reflects raw and powerful emotions, shared by many who have endured such attacks.

ISBN: 9781929657599

96 pages

Cost: \$12.95+ S&H

To learn more and order, click the title of the NEARI Press resource or contact info@nearipress.org or call 413-540-0712 x14.

Results were generally consistent with predictions and findings from previous research on bystander intervention, but a number of new and significant variables were identified that characterized intervention events. Direct and indirect forms of intervention were also distinguished. Implications of the findings are discussed, and educating people to intervene on behalf of abused children is proposed.

Citation

- Christy, C. A. and Voigt, H. (1994), Bystander Responses to Public Episodes of Child Abuse. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24: 824-847.

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