It’s not my place: Formative evaluation research to design a bystander intervention campaign

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Background

Sexual misconduct remains a problem on college campuses despite years of documentation and research, and program development and implementation. The incidence of sexual assault through verbal coercion, attempted rape, and forcible rape increases during the college years. The U.S. Department of Education’s 2011 Dear Colleague Letter on sexual harassment and sexual violence and President Obama’s recently established White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault and bystander intervention programs are increasing at colleges and universities. As a result, rape prevention programs are increasing at colleges and universities as institutions of higher education address the need to provide more effective prevention and intervention programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to conduct systematic theory-based formative audience research to explore how college women and men understand sexual assault and bystander intervention. A secondary purpose was to design an effective health communication and promotion campaign strategy to increase bystander intervention and prevent sexual misconduct.

Methods

- **Phase I: Focus Groups Discussions**
  - 8 2-hour focus group discussions
  - 69 male and female participants
  - Poster, email, and in-person recruitment
  - $30 incentive for time and efforts, and light refreshments
  - Focus group discussions
  - SoundNote iPad App used to audio record

- **Phase II: Data Analysis and Interpretation**
  - All SoundNote audio files transcribed verbatim
  - HyperRESEARCH 3.5.2 facilitated data analysis
  - A constant comparative method of open and axial coding used to analyze data
  - Research team met frequently to discuss emergent themes and findings

- **Phase III: Campaign Proposal**
  - Mixed-media campaign
  - Use of social media, text messaging, and posters
  - Development of video series featuring real life scenarios
  - Mobile application adopted for student body to report and track acts of sexual misconduct, crime, and bystander intervention

Conclusions

Our study is the first of its kind to use formative research to influence campaign and program development. Overall, the research points to the need for a large, mixed media, repeated message campaign, including integrated, ongoing prevention promotion. A mixed media social marketing campaign will merge existing programming and limited campus training. Traditional and new media will provide the most serviceable access to the target audience.

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