

Young People and Sexualized Violence: the experience and work of the Project Bystanders - Developing Bystanders Responses to Sexual Harassment Among Young People

*Maria José Magalhães, Ana Guerreiro,
Cátia Pontedeira e Raquel Felgueiras*
mjm@fpce.up.pt; bystanders_pt@fpce.up.pt



Outline:

- Sexual harassment and sexualized violence
- Brief presentation of the Project Bystanders
- Brief review of SH in the four countries partners of the Project
- Brief presentation of young people's perception about sexual harassment
- The Pilot Programme that it is being applied in high schools

Sexualization of violence:

- Sexualized violence is embedded in the sexual contract (Pateman, 2002), in spite of gender equality policies;
- The social construction of masculinity (hegemonic) and femininity (emphasized) (Connell 2005);
- The social construction of men's desire as opposite of the embodiment of female sexuality (Holand et al. 1994);
- Sexualized violence is not about sex, it is about power (Brownmiller 1976);

Sexual harassment:

- Sexual harassment (SH) is perhaps the most widespread direct* VAWG - FRA (2014) identified 52% of women being target / suffering or having suffered SH;
- It is part of the continuum of violence (Kelly 1988) and part of the social mechanisms for social reproduction of the gender regimes
- For girls (and some boys) it begins soon as they are leaving infancy and crossing over the adolescence to young and adult status;

Sexual harassment (cont.):

- It is a mechanism to ensure the continuous hetero female body scrutiny and assertion of women and girls as commodity - sexual objects for sexual market.
- It has a crucial role as part of the social surveillance and control on human bodies and sexualities;

The concept of ‘bystander’:

- Someone who observes;
- Some authors refer to “the bystander effect”;
- By ‘observing’, people do not feel responsible;
- Bystanders, sometimes do not act because they think someone else will;
- In car accidents, for instance, the advice is not to do anything (that can be worse).

The main focus of the Project Bystanders:

The Project Bystanders is about building a (common) culture against sexual harassment, learning and teaching how intervening as bystanders and producing (local) educational policies to combatting and preventing SH.

The focus of the Project is to work with young women and young men, teachers and school staff to build a culture of intervening in sexual harassment as bystanders.

The 4 countries: Portugal, UK, Malta and Slovenia.

Objectives of the Project Bystanders:

- increase knowledge and awareness of SH in students and staff;
- develop, pilot and deliver a training program for students and school staff to enable them to intervene in situations of SH;
- increase the motivation of bystanders to stop SH in high schools;
- develop a manual and materials adapted to each country;
- develop school policies and protocols on SH;
- compare the implementation and effectiveness of the program in the four countries.

Main activities:

- Literature review and background research;
- Focus groups with young women and young men + conversations with teachers and school staff;
- Focus group analysis
- Draft and piloting an intervention programme with students and teachers+staff;
- Evaluation of the piloting and producing the Intervention Programme
- Implementation of the Intervention Programme - with students and teachers+staff;
- Evaluation of the implementation
- Implementation of local educational policies combating and Preventing SH

What we have learnt so far (1):

From the focus groups with young people:

- Young people are aware of SH as part of the continuum of violence; But simultaneously - a discourse of minimization of the violence;
- Victim blaming (boys and girls); the process of othering of *other girls* (girls); ideology of (heteronormative) complementarity (boys);
- Female body sexualization (boys);
- Discomfort of the girls because of the female body sexualization;

What we have learnt so far(2):

From the focus group with young people (about the bystanders):

- Bystanders minimize SH (girls) - usually they see it like a joke;
- Bystanders do not intervene either because they are afraid of the consequences, or being called 'snitch', either because they don't know what to do;

Questions for debate:

- Country context: How is sexual harassment framed in legislation and social policy in the country's participants? Are there any policies for preventing SH in schools?
- Possible intervention: What are the main obstacles to intervening in schools (high schools?) to prevent sexual harassment?

References:

Magalhães, et al (2010)

FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey - Main Results*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Pateman, Carol (2002) *The Sexual Contract* [tradução portuguesa na *ex aequo*]

Brownmiller, Susan (1976) *Against Our Will*

Holand, Janet; Ramazonoglu, Caroline; Sharpe, Sue & Thomson, Rachel (1994) *Power and Desire: The embodiment of female sexuality*,

Connell, Raewin

Messerschidt, James ()

Kelly, Liz