A Qualitative Evaluation of Bystander Training: What Works?

Abstract: Research shows that bystander training has the potential to reduce violence and abuse. It is not clear how and why the training works. We evaluated bystander training to find out what works. We found that interactive techniques, such as group discussions, 'the video', and the use of real-world examples were the best ways of delivering the training because they stood out and were remembered by participants. These findings add to the paucity of research on what works in bystander training, and in doing so, raises implications for the design and delivery of future training.

Keywords: abusive and violent behaviours, design and delivery of bystander training, what works, interactive techniques

In 1993, two 10-year-old boys, led a 2-year old toddler, Jamie Bulger, from a shopping centre in Liverpool while members of the public looked on (Weinman 2016). Some of them questioned the two boys about the toddler's distress and injury (Levine 1999). However, he was subsequently found, murdered (Weinman 2016). 'Viv', a domestic violence victim, was viciously assaulted by an intimate partner. The attack was seen by two witnesses, who were reluctant to give evidence to the police. They were subsequently re-interviewed, and the perpetrator was convicted and given a custodial sentence (The Prosecutors 2016). In 2020, a video was uploaded to social media showing a schoolboy, who was Sikh, being physically attacked by two schoolboys. Other school children were seen in the video watching the incident. Many vehicles also drove past, while the attack was ongoing. The school took 'appropriate action' against the perpetrators and the police investigated the incident as a hate crime (Nsubuga 2020, unpaginated). In 'Viv's' and the 'Sikh schoolboy' attacks, onlookers were perceived not to intervene. This has become known as the bystander effect where onlookers, who are observing

an incident, are thought not to intervene when in a group setting because of diffused responsibility amongst the group. The inaction of other onlookers can lead individuals to perceive the behaviour they are witnessing as not a problem (e.g., in the case of Jamie Bulger, Levine 1999) or an emergency, and/or, that others are intervening/have intervened (Darley and Latane 1968; Garcia *et al*. 2002; Manning *et al*. 2007). Bystander training has been developed to overcome the bystander effect. It aims to develop a culture of intolerance to violence and abuse in the community (Universities UK 2016), so that the community are compelled to feel responsible for preventing violence and abuse (Jewkes *et al*. 2014; Levine *et al*. 2020). This paper begins by reviewing the research about how, when and why bystanders intervene. This will set the context for understanding the design and delivery of bystander training. Yet most evaluations of bystander training have assessed the outcomes of the training rather than what works in the training. This leads us into outlining our methods of evaluating bystander training. We then present our findings about what works in bystander training with a discussion of the implications for future training.

The Bystander Effect: When, How and Why do Bystanders Intervene

Recent research has sought to further elucidate the bystander effect to understand when, how and why bystanders intervene. In Fischer *et al.*'s (2011) meta-analytic review, they found that the bystander effect can be less pronounced in situations perceived as an emergency because such situations are more likely to be clearly defined as requiring help, which enhances bystander intervention. In Witte *et al*.'s (2017, p.149) research, in the US, 321 university students completed a survey asking them about 'risky situations' they had observed. Most students had witnessed at least one risky incident: most common were aggressive or sexually abusive behaviours between dating/pre-dating couples. On average, 50% of students said they intervened into such incidents. Philpot *et al.'s* (2020) research analysed 219 videotapes captured by surveillance cameras and found that bystanders intervened by physically holding, blocking, pulling or pushing the perpetrator, and used gestures that calmed the perpetrator or

consoled and helped the victim. They found 'that in 9 of 10 public conflicts, at least 1 bystander, but typically several, will do something to help' (Philpot *et al*. 2020, p.66). Levine *et al*. (2011, p.407), in their analysis of CCTV images 'in public drinking spaces' found that bystanders, particularly those using calming approaches and in connection with other bystanders, are more likely to de-escalate aggressive situations. Levine and Crowther (2008, p.1437) found that when bystanders are viewed as friends and the group size increases, bystander intervention is more likely when the victim is perceived to be 'an ingroup member' (Levine and Crowther 2008, p.1437). This concurs somewhat with Storer *et al*.'s (2021) research. They conducted focus group interviews with young people aged 17-22, living in a volatile community in the US, who were regularly exposed to racial abuse perpetrated by the police, and domestic abuse. They aimed to investigate how young people engaged with their communities, in terms of if and how they became involved in community and dating violences. The authors found that bystander intervention was more likely if the incident was serious for its potential to cause physical harm and if there was a familial relationship to the victim or perpetrator. Research has also identified barriers to bystander intervention. In interviews with first-year students at a university in the US, Gleckman-Krut *et al*. (2019) found that bystanders were reluctant to name the problem of sexually violent behaviours from their peers, and consequently, failing to call them out on it. Additionally, while Fischer *et al.*'s (2011) review found that the bystander effect was less pronounced if bystanders were friends, it was more pronounced with increasing numbers of bystanders present. Storer *et al*. (2021) found that bystanders were inhibited from intervening because of fear of reprisals from 'snitching' in a hostile community, although some individuals were willing to report incidents confidentially (Storer *et al*. 2021, p.5). Research has shown bystanders experiencing psychological harm after intervening, due to the stress of witnessing and intervening into traumatic events (Witte *et al*. 2017). Yet other research has shown that victimisation from intervening is low, and that generally, intervention is more helpful than harmful for bystander and victim (Levine *et al*. 2020).

In summary, research has shown that bystander intervention is influenced by the size of the bystander group, the relationships of the members in the group, the incidents observed, and the

environment in which they are observed. In light of this, and taking the case of Jamie Bulger as an example, where 38 bystanders were identified (Levine 1999), there needs to be more focus on understanding what makes intervention successful (Levine *et al*. 2020). This has implications for the design and delivery of bystander training to recognise the influence of the dynamics of bystander groups in varying contexts in bystander intervention. It is therefore important to review the evaluations that have been carried out on bystander training to ascertain what works.

Evaluations of Bystander Training: What Works?

Bystander training seeks to raise participants' knowledge about violent and abusive behaviours, raise their confidence so that they challenge the social norms underpinning such behaviours by intervening safely into incidents, thereby reducing violent and abusive behaviours (Fenton *et al*. 2015; Labhardt *et al*. 2017; Levine *et al*. 2020). Many evaluations have been carried out on bystander training to ascertain if they meet their aims. Most evaluations have been carried out in the US (Fenton and Mott 2017; Labhardt *et al*. 2017) and are statistical evaluations. The training has focused largely on disrupting sexual and dating violences on college campuses. The evaluations show that bystander training has the potential to reduce violence and abuse (see Coker *et al*. 2016; Jouriles *et al*. 2018; Katz and Moore 2013; Kettrey *et al*. 2019; McMahon *et al*. 2015; Senn and Forrest 2016; for British studies see Fenton and Mott 2018; Gainsbury *et al*. 2020; Roberts and Marsh 2021). A literature review of 9 bystander training, which aimed to disrupt dating violence, showed that training increased participants' confidence and willingness to intervene (Storer *et al*. 2016). Qualitative evaluations of bystander training in the US have found similar results. Using qualitative data obtained from surveys completed by 498 students one year after they had engaged in bystander training to address sexual violence, McMahon *et al*. (2018) found that they: had increased awareness of sexual violence including changed attitudes (e.g., increased victim-empathy); and had increased willingness to help in sexual violence situations, including in sexual verbal abuse. Although not all students said they would intervene; they were likely to be more proactive

in their bystander actions, for example, being more alert to situations, take further classes, and to reflect upon their own thoughts and behaviours regarding sexual violence. As part of a larger quantitative study, using focus groups with high-school children aged 15-18 to assess the effectiveness of bullying bystander training, Johnston *et al*. (2018) found that they: had increased awareness of bullying, which led to increased responsibility; were empowered to act, which led to positive feelings; had strategies to intervene, yet some were fearful of intervening, because of reprisals. While these existing evaluations of bystander training show increases in participants' awareness, confidence and willingness to intervene in incidents after the training, it is not clear whether they actively intervene in incidents after the training (Katz and Moore 2013; Kettrey *et al*. 2019; Levine *et al*. 2020; Storer *et al*. 2016; Stojanov *et al*. 2021).

Stojanov *et al*. (2021) carried out an evaluation of bystander training centred around sexual violence prevention for first-year students in New Zealand. They administered surveys to participants immediately before the training and 3 months after the training. To support this quantitative data, they also carried out focus groups with participants, and staff who were integral to the training. In the absence of data indicating a positive change in participants' bystander behaviour after the training, Stojanov *et al*. (2021) pointed to some aspects of the bystander training that facilitated participants' understanding of sexual violence *and* that also reduced bystanders from actively intervening in sexual violence. They found that the training helped increase participants' knowledge about sexual violence behaviours as existing on a continuum *and* that failure to challenge verbally abusive sexual violence behaviours can lead to physically violent sexual behaviours. The training therefore widened their knowledge of what participants considered as inappropriate behaviours, and in doing so, increased their confidence about knowing when to intervene. Stojanoy *et al.* (2021) also found that the context of the sexual violence and the dynamics of the group in which incidents take place influences bystander intervention. Participants said that more serious acts of sexual violence might present a threat to their safety, thereby preventing them from intervening. On the other hand, 'a one-off joke' might not be actively challenged (p.442). Participants also said that their bystander intervention would be influenced by who the perpetrator was because challenging a stranger would be more difficult than challenging a familiar person. But

challenging a familiar person also presents difficulties because friendships maybe affected. For example, participants thought that challenging the social norms that underpin sexually violent behaviours that exist on a broad continuum was 'a difficult mission' if the lead member of the group and/or majority of the group perceive the behaviour to not be inappropriate (p.442). These findings have implications for the design and delivery of bystander training in terms of understanding what needs to be unpicked to enhance bystander intervention. Yet while the findings of these evaluations' present examples of the context to be unpacked when designing and delivering bystander training for sexual violence prevention, they do not inform about why or how the training increases participants' awareness, confidence and willingness to intervene (Levine *et al*. 2020; McMahon *et al*. 2015; Storer *et al*. 2016). Stojanoy *et al*. (2021) for example recommend that future bystander training incorporate role plays so participants can rehearse how to safely intervene in sexual violence behaviours thereby overcoming the barriers to bystander intervention. Yet more research is needed outside the US context (Fenton and Mott 2017; Kettrey *et al*. 2019; Labhardt *et al*. 2017), and that moves beyond a focus on sexual violence bystander prevention training, to assess what aspects of bystander training work. There are few qualitative evaluations on adults who have completed bystander training, in the UK. The next section outlines our methodology of evaluating such training, with the aim to assess what aspects work in bystander training.

Methods

The bystander training which was evaluated was a 90-minute session, delivered at a university in the north of England, to new students. It was developed from *The Intervention Initiative* model (cited in Donovan and Corr 2018, p.2). The training focuses on a broad spectrum of violence and abuse, ranging from physical violence to verbal abuse, for example bullying (including body shaming), hate acts (e.g., racism, homo-bi-transphobia, disablism, Islamaphobia) and sexual harassment. The training had four aims to: i) 'increase knowledge about and confidence to be active bystanders'; ii) 'increase knowledge

and awareness about harms/impacts of interpersonal violence/abuse'; iii) 'raise knowledge and awareness about services provided by the University'; and iv) 'encourage reporting/help-seeking regardless of where incident(s) take place' (Donovan and Corr 2018, p.6). The training was delivered by two 'in-house' facilitators, academic and non-academic staff, using power-point slides as the focal point of the presentation, interspersed with group discussions, hand-outs, and a YouTube clip. After introductions, setting of ground rules, and outlining the aims of the training, participants were asked what a bystander is, whether they had been an active bystander, and what had prevented them from being an active bystander. Participants' examples were explored in an interactive discursive manner between other participants and the facilitators. Then the facilitators, using the power-point slides to illustrate, spoke about the importance of active bystanders, drawing-in the participants by using two hand-outs, which showed firstly, real-world examples of verbal abuse and bullying, and secondly, the impact of these. The group discussed the content of the hand-outs and other similar incidents that they had observed and/or intervened in. Then facilitators spoke about how participants could safely intervene. To reinforce the importance of active bystander intervention, facilitators presented slides on the legal stance of sexual and domestic violent behaviours and hate crime. A YouTube clip was then played, which showed alternate perspectives of 'being a bystander' and 'being an *active* bystander'. This was followed by more group discussions about what participants can do to be an active bystander, the different techniques that can be used, and the varying scenarios of violent and abusive behaviours in which they can be used, including reporting the violence and abuse, and highlighting key services at the university to support students. Our statistical evaluation of the training in 2018/19 showed that the training met its aims. Residing within a positivist paradigm, this evaluation found statistically significant differences between the scale-scores, which measured the aims of the training, before and after the training. Yet while the statistical evaluation was valuable in showing that the training had the potential for participants to become active bystanders, because of the changes in the scale-scores, it could not tell us how or why the changes came about (Roberts and Marsh 2021). Thus, to contextualise the results from the quantitative evaluation, in this qualitative evaluation of the training, we adopt a post-positivist

realist stance to ask: why does the session meet its aims focusing on what facilitates this, how, when and for whom? A realist perspective to evaluation asks what are the circumstances that bring about the changes and for whom. Such evaluations use more than one method of data collection (Pawson and Tilley 1997) as the next section shows.

Data Collection and Analysis

The university research ethics group approved the research. All participants read a study information sheet, confirmed that they understood this, and consented to take part in the study. Qualitative data was gathered from them, over two years, and from a range of sources. Table 1 illustrates this.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The open-ended questions asked on the surveys gathered in the 2018/19 statistical evaluation immediately after the training was administered to 152 students, primarily level 3 students, who were new to the university. This method provided a source of data about what stood-out in the training session for the students and conversely what could have been improved. The surveys completed 3 and 6 months after the training also provided this data in terms of what they remembered, and whether they would recommend the session. The bystander training was observed as it was delivered. In 2019/20, 2 'train the trainer' (TTT) bystander training sessions were observed. Here, the bystander training was delivered in real-time to trainee facilitators. In the first session, there were 2 trainers, 2 trainee facilitators. In the second session, there were 2 trainers, 2 trainee facilitators and 1 participant observer, who was an existing facilitator there to provide additional input. All were members of staff (academic and non-academic) at the university. Two bystander training sessions, which were delivered to students, who had had the training embedded into their curriculum, were also observed. In the first session, there were

2 facilitators and 6 students. In the second session, there were 2 facilitators, 11 students and 1 participant observer, who was a member of academic staff to the students in the training session, there to learn and provide additional input. All the students in these observed sessions were female. The data gathered from the observation of the sessions provided field notes taken in situ of the bystander training as it was delivered, noting the material used, facilitators' and students' responses, therein. In doing so, this enhanced our understanding of what happens during the training. Finally, data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with 4 facilitators (2 male and 2 female, all were 'white', 3 were also observed) of the bystander training, and with 2 students (1 male and 1 female who was also observed, both were 'white') who had undertook the bystander training. The interviews provided a flexible way of gathering open in-depth data about how and why the bystander training works, from the facilitators' and participants' perspective because we were able to follow-up and expand upon early findings from the survey data and observation field notes. Interviews ranged in time from 31 to 78 minutes, with the facilitators having more to say in interviews than the students.

All qualitative data, responses from the surveys, field notes from observations, the material used in the bystander training session and the interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo to manage and analyse the data. A thematic analysis was carried out to find out how, when, why, and for whom the training had met its aims. We were looking specifically at the design of the training and the techniques used in the delivery of the training. The data was initially coded, then codes were developed into categories (Gibson and Brown 2009; Rivas 2018) to find patterns in the data (Seal 2016). These patterns are our themes presented in the findings as: meeting the aims of the training; stand-out techniques; and knowing when to act. To preserve the authenticity of the data, we present the accounts as they have been said/written, and the accounts presented are typical of other accounts that could have been presented.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the study. Firstly, all the students in the observed bystander training sessions were female. This is because the programme of study, which had the training embedded into the curriculum, is predominantly studied by females. Given the nature of the bystander training, a mixed-sex group of students may have generated alternative discussions during the observations. Secondly, observation field notes were expanded upon after the observation of the bystander training sessions. While these field notes were written-up as soon as feasible after the observation, such field notes relied upon the memory of the researcher (Jupp 2006). Thirdly, the evaluation would have benefited from more in-depth data from students. Yet despite numerous attempts to engage students in interviews, they were not forthcoming.

Findings

Meeting the Aims of the Training

There is evidence to indicate that aims i), ii) and iv) of the bystander training was met. For the first aim of i) increase knowledge about and confidence to be active bystanders, there was a rich level of knowledge shown by students:

> You dont necessarily have to be confrontational to do something (female, social science/law student, survey).

> That we all have the capability to be an active bystander or most have taken on this role at some point In their lives without realising (female, social science student, survey, 3 months post bystander)

The student in the last quote also commented upon this 6-months after the session. Students at 3 and 6 months after the session, were also asked if they recommended the session, and in doing so, showed

how the training had met aim ii) increase knowledge and awareness about harms/impacts of interpersonal violence/abuse:

> I feel that all students would benefit from this session i certainly did. It makes you more aware of what's going on around you every day and how you could help (female, psychology student, survey, 3 months post bystander).

> I believe it's important for people to understand what bullying is like t receive. I think that people may do such things believing it harmless until they are helped to understand what it is to receive such attention (male, computing student, survey, 6 months post bystander).

Students who took part in the bystander training session were likely then to have increased knowledge and confidence to be an active bystander and awareness about the harms and impacts of interpersonal violence and abuse.

There was also evidence to suggest that aim iv) encourage reporting/help-seeking regardless of where incident(s) take place had been met, as these students explain:

> The ways to report incidents (male, computer science student, survey).

> *Interviewer*: What do you think the impact would be if all students undertook Bystander?
> I think more people would be aware of what needs to be done about reporting things or intervening, obviously only when it's safe (student 2, interview).

However, while the over-arching aim of bystander training is to develop a culture of intolerance to violence and abuse (Universities UK 2016), so that the community feel responsible for preventing violence and abuse (Jewkes *et al*. 2014; Levine *et al*. 2020), the low numbers of students who undertook the bystander training sessions in 2018/19, approximately 6% of all new students (Roberts and Marsh 2021), means that the reach of the training in developing responsibility in the student community for preventing violence and abuse is limited. Moreover, the homogeneity of students engaging in the

training may also limit the efficacy of the session, as this student said when he reflected upon his participation in the bystander training in 2018/19:

> [..] I think there were just too many men and not enough diversity in the audience to be able to have any meaningful debates […]. Even if we have debates on things like women being taken advantage of what good is a bunch of mostly white men in a room in university talking about stuff like that, […] (student 1, interview).

In a similar vein, the bystander training sessions we observed in 2019/20, all the students were female, and mostly 'white', raising further questions about the heterogeneity of the student body in the training sessions.

There was little evidence to support aim iii) raise knowledge and awareness about services provided by the University being met, as our observation notes suggest:

> There was one power-point slide, right at the end of the session, that listed the names, weblinks and telephone numbers of four key services at the university of who to report incidents to and where to get the necessary support on campus. It was delivered in a rather didactive way (Observation notes, student session 2).

That said, in both bystander training sessions, a facilitator used an interactive real-world example illustrating how reports of incidents had been made to the Campus Police and the positive outcome of these. There was an overwhelmingly amount of evidence to indicate that interactive techniques were the best way for the aims of the training session to be met, as the next section shows.

What Works: 'Stand-out' Techniques as Interactive

Students and facilitators particularly commented upon three types of ‘stand-out’ techniques that made the session work: group discussions, the video, real-world examples.

Space and time for group-discussions were thought important to allow students and facilitators to learn from one another, as this student explains:

> The lecturer's views on handling certain Situations they wernt the same as mine and offered perspective (male, business student, survey).

As the student says the group discussions allowed for an alternative perspective, as this facilitator corroborates:

> […] it allows them [students] to have conflicting opinions, which is good, because we want to hear both sides of the argument rather than them all agreeing that this is the most appropriate method […] (facilitator 3, interview).

Group-discussions were important for students to air the issues they were presented with, as the following student says:

> more discussion on certain aspects (female, business student, survey).

Students also mentioned this 3-months after the bystander, and it was also recommended by facilitators:

> […] more discussion led and less slides. (facilitator 2, interview).

In a similar vein, ‘the video’ (i.e., YouTube clip), which was aired during the session, helped students’ learning as this facilitator says and corroborated by a student:

> […] I think the video gets a reaction, it shocks people but also it makes people understand […] (facilitator 3, interview).

> The assault video, it was very hard hitting and made me consider what could happen to people on nights out and what I should do in those situations (male, ‘technology’ student, survey).

The 8-minute video presents students with two scenarios of a young woman, who while out drinking with her friends, becomes progressively ‘drunk’. In the first scenario, it shows the journey of the woman’s night in stages: i) she is ‘befriended’ by a male friend, dancing; ii) with him, she is served alcohol; iii) she leaves the club with him; and iv) is taken back to her flat, where he sexually assaults her. The second scenario, shows how at each stage of the journey, different bystanders intervene to circumvent the sexual assault: i) her best friend takes her home; ii) the bartender calls her best friend over to help her; iii) a patron, queuing for the club, takes her away from the man, and gets her into a taxi; and iv) her flatmate gets the man ‘a blanket for the couch’ (www.whoareyou.co.nz 2011, 5:10). The video was thought of as a good example, as this student says:

> Show better examples like a video (male, sport science student, survey).

Real-world examples were also thought of as good examples used during the session that stood-out for students. As this student explains:

> Reading incedents of other students (male, engineering student, survey)

These were also remembered 3 and 6 months after the training, as the next student says:

> Details from anonymous students who reported verbal, sexual or racial abuse (female, ‘drama’ student, survey, 3 months post bystander).

During the bystander training session, students were given two handouts to read together, and then to discuss, as a group. The first handout are students’ experiences of interpersonal violence and abuse, mostly verbal abuse and bullying, which were reported to a survey. The second handout is the impact of their experiences (see Roberts *et al*. 2019, 2020). Examples of students’ experiences of abuse on the hand-out were:

> Being locked out on the balcony at midnight in the freezing cold because I refused to explain how 'lesbian sex’ worked, a common question always directed towards me, usually with lewd comments and assumptions.

> a man targeted my friend who wears a hijab and asked if there was a bomb on the [name of train] on the way to [name of] Uni
>
> A girl on my course told me that the scar I have on my arm was disgusting. This was right in front of a uni tutor who did nothing about it.

These examples of homophobia, racism, and body-shaming, respectively, were thought by students as good real-world examples to use, yet one facilitator suggests otherwise:

> […] I just don't think we've got enough really good examples of what we mean by inappropriate language or stuff like that […] (facilitator 2, interview).

Instead, suggesting the following:

> […] I think for me the more relatable things would have been more […] examples and case studies where they could discuss and talk about whether it was appropriate or not appropriate, rather than the law says that you mustn't do this or you can't do this, […] (facilitator 2, interview).

The facilitator's comment about the law is important, as the next section illustrates.

Knowing When to Act: From Verbally Abusive Behaviours to Criminal Behaviours

In the part of the session about how participants can safely intervene, they are shown a strategy that begins by 'noticing the problem' of abusive and violent behaviours. The second part of this strategy is to 'interpret it as a problem' based on the impact of the abusive and violent behaviours. Consequently, students were referred to the second hand-out, which detailed the impact of students' real-world experiences of violent and abusive behaviours:

> I have not attended University in several months and have fallen behind.
>
> I was very upset and I am now on medication.
>
> Makes me worried about walking home alone.

Students were also shown slides on the criminal nature and legal implications of hate-based crimes, harassment, sexual assault, rape, threats to kill, and murder. One slide stated the maximum penalty for sexual assault Thus participants notice serious harmful behaviours and interpret them as a problem, as one trainee said:

> I phoned 111 and was put through to 999 because of a drunk girl in traffic on a bridge (trainee 1, observation notes, training session 1).

Showing legal implications of violent and abusive behaviours is, on the one hand, beneficial because it reinforces the interpretation of such behaviours as inappropriate, but on the other hand, it may downplay the real-world impact of verbally abusive behaviours, as one student said:

> if physically violent and it escalates, then intervene, but not if arguing (student, observation notes, student session 1).

This may be because most students' experiences of violence and abuse shown in hand-out one to students, are unlikely to meet the threshold of a criminal offence and thus are without legal implications. The next section discussions the implications of what worked in the bystander training session, when, why and for whom.

Discussion

There was evidence to suggest that three of the four aims of the bystander training had been met: i) increase knowledge about and confidence to be active bystanders; ii) increase knowledge and awareness about harms/impacts of interpersonal violence/abuse; and iv) encourage reporting/help-seeking regardless of where incident(s) take place. Our realist evaluation has pointed to *what* works, *when, why* and for *whom*. There was some evidence to suggest that groups of participants on bystander training need to be of different genders and ethnicities to facilitate 'meaningful debates' about violent and abusive behaviours (the *when*). A broad range of students, in terms of their gender and programme of

study, and the facilitators (the *whom*) thought the real-world examples, video and group discussions (the *what*) were stand-out techniques that facilitated the efficacy of the training, and they recommended more of these in the training. There are a number of reasons *why* these techniques worked. Firstly, it is important to show the real-world examples of students' experiences of verbal abuse and bullying because the existing research has shown that bystanders are more likely to intervene when the behaviours observed are an emergency, life-threatening (Fischer *et al*. 2011), and serious, in their potential to cause physical harm (Storer *et al*. 2021; Witte *et al*. 2017). This is because such dangerous situations are more clearly defined as requiring bystander intervention (Fischer *et al*. 2011). The bystander training session evaluated in this paper may inadvertently reinforce this message by showing the criminal nature of violent and abusive behaviours together with the severity of the criminal justice penalty warranted. However, the techniques used in the bystander training can alleviate this concern because in showing students real-world examples of students' experiences of homophobia, racism, and body-shaming, which are likely to fall below the threshold of a criminal offence, it raises students' awareness of a broader range of abusive behaviours, which are not physical or criminal in nature, as well as their impact. Secondly, group discussions worked because they allowed space for students to unpick and challenge the social norms underpinning abusive and violent behaviours. This is integral to bystander training and bystander intervention (Fenton *et al*. 2015; Labhardt *et al*. 2017; Levine *et al*. 2020) because young people do not hold static binary perceptions of abusive and violent behaviours (Burman and Cartmel 2005; Burton and Kitzinger 1998; McCarry 2010), neither do perpetrators (Hearn 1998) or victims (Wood 2001). Rather, a continuum of abusive and violent behaviours exists, which is influenced by gendered expectations, context of the violence and abuse, and relationships between those involved (Sundaram 2018), which the existing research on the bystander effect (Levine and Crowther 2008; Storer *et al*. 2021) and bystander evaluations (Johnston *et al*. 2018; McMahon *et al*. 2018; Stojanoy *et al.* 2021) have shown. Consequently, observing abusive and violent behaviours does not mean that bystanders will intervene. This was evident in the observation field notes with respect to verbally abusive behaviours and evident in the existing research and cases with respect to physically

abusive behaviours of sexual physical assault (Gleckman-Krut *et al*. 2019), physical domestic violence (The Prosecutors 2016) and common assault (Nsubuga 2020). In Hennelly *et al.'s* (2019, p.419) survey research with students in the UK, they found that some students did not consider verbal harassment as harmful because it 'constrains one's freedom of speech'. In other research on sexual violence at universities in the UK, there was confusion amongst students about what constituted sexual harassment (Brook 2019). While Stojanoy *et al.* (2021, p.442) found that the training helped increase participants' knowledge about sexual violence behaviours as existing on a continuum, 'a one-off joke' might not be actively challenged, particularly if the lead member of the group and/or majority of the group perceive the behaviour to not be inappropriate. Therefore, it is important that participants on bystander training have the space and time to unpick the social norms underpinning the justifications of violent and abusive behaviours so that they 'notice the problem' and 'interpret it as a problem' to enhance bystander intervention. To facilitate noticing and interpreting the problem of abusive and violent behaviours, there is some evidence from students that diversity in the participants, in terms of their gender and ethnicity, on the bystander training is needed to better challenge the justifications for violent and abusive behaviours and to discuss the implications of these for bystander intervention. This is because abusive and violent victimisation is linked to an individual's gender and ethnic group, as well as to their sexuality, disability, and age (House of Commons 2021; Office for National Statistics 2018, 2021). Thirdly, the video worked because it showed students alternative perceptions of dating and courtship in the night-time economy. The first scenario depicted the sexual assault of the young woman. The second scenario challenged the normality of this perception of dating and courtship in the night-time economy by showing varying stages of how bystanders intervened to ensure the woman's safety. In a similar vein, the perception of the boys as a 'family' in the Jamie Bulger case led bystanders to perceive the behaviours observed as normal, i.e., two young boys walking across Liverpool with a toddler (Levine 1999). Therein lies the essence of bystander training to re-think and challenge perceptions of normality in the context of violent and abusive behaviours.

These findings point to recommendations for enhancing this and other bystander training. The 90-minute bystander training session may need to be longer in time and/or the use of didactive approaches reduced, such as reading from power-point slides, to allow for more interactive group discussions, real-world examples, and videos. An additional supplement to the video could be role-plays, so that participants rehearse how to intervene safely (Stojanoy *et al*. 2021). These interactive approaches should be applied to aim iii) raise knowledge and awareness about services provided by the University, to ensure it is met.

Conclusion

This paper has presented findings from our qualitative evaluation of bystander training. The data shows that most of the aims of the training were met for a broad range of students who took part in it. We did not explicitly find evidence to support aim iii) raise knowledge and awareness about services provided by the University, being met. If the university were to develop the bystander training session, then some thought should be given to how this aim links with aim iv) encourage reporting/help-seeking regardless of where incident(s) take place to better embed the take-home messages therein, and to enhance the efficacy of the training using more interactive techniques of group discussions, videos, real-world examples and role-plays. The university has since implemented an online bystander training module, where students work through the training themselves. It is thought that this will 'efficiently' deliver the training to the student community. However, there is no capacity for participants to engage in group discussions, so that they can make sense of the continuum of abusive and violent behaviours, and to unpick and challenge the social norms and justifications that underpin such behaviours, to ultimately enhance bystander intervention. Some thought and action should also be given to enhance the diversity and numbers of students who take part in bystander training. This may entail research to assess the support mechanisms at the university for bystander training from both staffs' and students' perspectives. For example, practices, such as bystander training, are ordinarily driven by individuals with significant

responsibility and passion for bettering the student experience and enhancing the safety of the student community. More research is needed from the perspective of such individuals to explore the barriers to and enabling factors driving the design and delivery of bystander training to the student community.

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TABLE 1

Gathering the Data

Method	**Year**		**Sample**
	2018/19	*2019/20*	n
Survey Data – immediately after the session	What stood out for you most in today's session?		83
	What could have been better in today's session?		65
Survey Data – 3 months after the session	What do you remember from the session, what stood out, could have been better, how the session impacted upon you, being a bystander, reporting incidents, recommending the session?		18
Survey Data – 6 months after the session	What do you remember from the session, what stood out, could have been better, how the session impacted upon you, being a bystander, reporting incidents, recommending the session?		4
Observation Notes – Train the Trainer (TTT) 1		Bystander session	4
Observation Notes – TTT 2		Bystander session	5
Observation Notes – student bystander 1		Bystander session	8
Observation Notes – student bystander 2		Bystander session	14
Bystander Material		PPT slides, hand-outs, 'the video'	n/a
Interviews		Facilitators of the bystander sessions	4
Interviews	Student who undertook the bystander session	Student who undertook the bystander session	2