Evaluation of USVReact: a staff training program to counter sexual violence at university

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EVALUATION OF USVreact: A STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Interventions addressing the endemic of sexual violence at European universities are scarce, particularly those that take a bystander focus to sexual violence prevention and involve university staff. Evidence-based data on their effectiveness are also lacking. This paper reports the description of a pilot evaluation study of the USVreact Italian training program addressed to university staff for counteracting sexual violence.

We assessed initial (T1) representations of gender-based violence, rape myth acceptance, and attitudes to bystander intervention (172 participants), and evaluated the effectiveness of the course by comparing via paired sample T-tests the responses before and after (T2) training (66 participants). Comparison between pre- (T1) and post-training (T2) responses indicated that the participants' ability to recognize subtle forms of violence and reduce rape myth acceptance was increased after training. Relatively few training programs based on the bystander approach to prevent gender-based violence at university have been performed to date in Europe and data on their effectiveness are scarce. Several limitations notwithstanding, the present pilot evaluation study provides suggestions for a more systematic evaluation of training interventions that address cultural legitimation of gender-based violence and that sustain bystander interventions in sexual assault prevention.

Impact statement: training program evaluation, countering sexual violence, bystander intervention, university, staff training.

Introduction

Sexual violence can be defined as "any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting, including but not limited to home and work." (WHO, 2002). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) about 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical or sexual violence from partners or non-partners at some point during their lives. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union (EU), about 215,000 violent sexual crimes were reported to the police in the EU in 2015 alone. In Italy, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2015) reported that 31% of women aged between 16 and 70 years have experienced some form of violence during their lives: physical violence in 20%, sexual violence in 21%, and sexual harassment in 74% of cases. As Kelly (1987) underlined, sexual violence can assume several forms, from the most serious, such as rape, to the more subtle, such as verbal harassment. These different behaviors need specific interventions. The World Health Organization (WHO) specifies the three prevention levels to counteract forms of sexual violence: primary, secondary, and tertiary (WHO, 2010; Banyard, 2015). Secondary, focalized prevention actions should be activated in specific risky situations, and tertiary prevention is necessary after a violent episode. Primary prevention should act as extensively as possible to reduce the occurrence of any form of violence. The aims of primary prevention are to remove the

conditions that allow episodes of violence from happening, i.e., to promote a cultural change towards stigmatizing sexual dominance and violence, in any form. In the United States, bystander interventions are often proposed to counteract sexual violence (focused on primary and secondary prevention). As clearly exposed by Banyard (2015), bystander-based intervention can be useful in counteracting violence. Bystanders can be proactive in supporting the victim of a violent episode and can stigmatize the action of the perpetrator: in this way, the bystander can contribute to enhance a culture of respect.

To prevent sexual violence, the European Commission finances international projects with targeted actions addressed to the different forms of violence, to various different social contexts (workplace environment, schools, universities) and social stakeholders (e.g., healthcare personnel, law enforcement agencies, teachers, etc.) with the aim to both support victims of violence and reduce sexist and discriminatory behavior (see Daphne Funding Programme and Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme – European Commission).

The training program presented and evaluated here is part of the European project entitled "USVreact: University Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence" (www.usvreact.eu) [1]. Why the university context? Because sexual violence is an entrenched problem in higher education institutions, especially in the United States and northern European countries: 68% of female students in the UK (NUS, 2010) declared having experienced at least one episode of harassment or sexual violence on campus (Perkins & Warner, 2017). While the prevalence in Italy is far lower - 30% according to the Eu-Project *Gender-based Violence, Stalking and Fear of Crime* (2012) - there are worrying signals of a culture that seriously underrates many forms of sexual violence in society at large and in university settings. Newspaper reports,

television programs, and posts on social networks show that sexual violence is often treated as a joke or attributed to provocations by the victim (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003; Ward, 2016; Krongard, & Tsay-Vogel, 2018).

Our project was entitled "USVreact" to emphasize the need to avoid stigmatizing the victim of sexual violence and to change a culture that tends to justify violence, perpetuate shame and self-stereotyping. The goal was to foster a culture of supportive reaction: people should no longer be passive observers but rather active and reactive subjects. The project title underscores the need to involve local and higher education institutional communities so that they can react to behaviors that harm or risk harming an individual's dignity. Indeed, the moral responsibility of violent acts resides with the whole community. Unfortunately, very few projects contradict cultural legitimation of sexual violence in the university setting or involve higher education organizations (students, faculty, administrative staff) in Europe or in Italy in particular (Fenton & Mott, 2017).

A project designed to bring about cultural change in the university setting should be addressed to students (or their representatives) and staff alike. Staff can contribute to the construction of an organizational and educational environment conducive to building respect. Moreover, because they belong to the organization longer than students do, staff can maintain and foster a respectful culture over time. These are the main reasons why our work presents a pilot test for the implementation and evaluation of a training program targeted chiefly to administrative staff.

Theoretical basis of the intervention

Training and education interventions to contrast sexual violence aim to change gender stereotype, to raise awareness about the different forms that sexual violence can

assume and to sensitize people to be active subject to react to it (see, for example, the role that a bystander could have). Despite national and international legislation against sexual violence and despite the numerous initiatives to prevent it, sexual violence is still justified and underestimated. Undervaluing the problem or attributing it to actions by minority groups or isolated cases maintains the status quo and justifies the system, particularly as regards gender relations, and reiterates gender inequality (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; 2014).

Jost & Banaji (1994) advanced the System Justification Theory to explain that the consequence of "identification" with the culture to which subjects belong is the "defense" of the status quo and the affirmation that differences between groups are right. This theoretical model has been used to account for attitudes towards gender differences (*Gender System justification*). For many studies on System Justification Theory this belief underlies different forms of discrimination and sexual violence against women. Jost & Kay (2005) showed a relationship between system justification, gender stereotypes, and sexism. Chapleau & Oswald (2014) found that system justification is related to moral outrage and stated that the phenomenon reiterates a system of sexual violence. Other scholars (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) focused on a specific form of sexual violence - rape - and analyzed so-called “rape myths”: shared attitudes and beliefs that tend to justify violence, to underestimate the brutality of a violent act, or to deny male sexual assault to the detriment of a woman. Underestimating and justifying any form of violence (including rape) are expressions of a cultural attitude that maintains, or does not perceive, gender inequality (Payne et al., 1999). Research underlines the strong link between gender system justification, rape myth acceptance (e.g., Chapleau & Oswald, 2014) and their relationship with the efficacy of intervention. Joseph, Gray, & Mayer

(2013) defined gender system justification as a "barrier" that in a college campus culture can reduce the effectiveness of prevention actions against sexual assault. A change of perspective is needed to change behavior at the individual and the social level.

Training at the Universities of Turin

The training program on sexual violence prevention involved mainly university staff, some faculty members, student dormitory directors, and student representatives of the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin.

While bystander interventions in the United States have usually been developed with students, we chose to involve primarily administrative staff because:

(1) staff are already involved in operating direct-contact services for students; if they are adequately trained, they can be observers of inappropriate behaviors, either being themselves references for students directly or by signposting to the appropriate services at the university and in the community

(2) once appropriately trained, staff can become a guarantor of "good practices" in the workplace, contributing to the dissemination of a culture of respect at all organizational levels

(3) staff turnover is low, whereas students complete their studies within 3 to 5 years, graduate, and leave the institution.

Participation in the program was voluntary and recognized as on-the-job training for university staff, in agreement with the administration of the two universities and the human resource departments. The staff of the University of Turin was informed of the training course by the University General Direction; an invitation to participate was sent by e-mail to all staff members, and voluntary enrollment in the training program

was collected. We had planned to involve 80 participants per university, but since we received 90 registration requests from the University of Turin alone, we raised the number of participants to 90 for the University of Turin and 80 for the Polytechnic of Turin. The participants attended the training course during working hours without loss of salary. They signed an attendance sheet at each training session.

The course ran for a total of 16 hours: two plenary sessions (one at the beginning and one at the end of the course) and two small group meetings (about 10-15 participants per group). In order to involve all participants, the small groups met 13 times. Overall, the training program lasted 4 months from the initial to the final plenary session. The first plenary session introduced the project and presented the university- and community-based services currently operating against abuse and discrimination. Course participants then met in small groups (2 half days, for a total of 8 hours of training) to discuss: gender equality/inequality in society and at the University; what sexual violence is; how to recognize behaviors that express discrimination; how to intervene in case of violence disclosure; laws and policies concerning sexual violence, stalking, and harassment. The groups reviewed case studies and vignettes, viewed movies, and received theoretical input about gender stereotypes and sexism. At the concluding plenary session, data on rape myth acceptance and sexual violence perception in the University context, involving students, were presented and commented with the participants. Finally, a post-training evaluation (T2) was conducted.

Training evaluation

The present paper describes the process and reports the results of the pilot evaluation study of the training course addressed to university staff within the USVreact project. The study had two main objectives:

O1) to describe, at the beginning of the program (T1), participants' representations of sexual violence, their attitude to intervention as a "bystander" to counter sexual violence, and their acceptance of rape myths. In line with Jost & Banaji (1994), Chapleau & Oswald (2013) and Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi (2010), we expected that, also for the course participants, higher gender system justification corresponds to higher rape myth acceptance; also, we expected an inverse correlation between rape myth acceptance and attitude to intervene to counter violence (coherently with McMahon, 2010).

O2) to compare participants' representations and attitudes before and after the course and to highlight pre- and post-training differences and check for training effectiveness.

We hypothesized that gender system justification and rape myth acceptance scores would be lower at post-training assessment; participants would show greater awareness of different forms of sexual violence and greater intention to intervene as a bystander if a witness to such acts.

Material and method

Procedure

At the beginning of the first plenary session, after registration, participants received a copy of the questionnaire along with a short description of the evaluation procedure and information on the processing of personal data. They were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously and to leave it in a box in the hallway outside the room

before the start of the training presentation. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete.

In order to compare participant answers before (T1) and after (T2) the training course, the participants completed the same questionnaire at the final plenary session. The procedure for completing the second questionnaire and providing information on processing of personal data were the same as at T1. Participants were told to write the same self-generated ID code on the T1 and the T2 questionnaire to permit matching T1 and T2 answers, while allowing the participants to remain anonymous. The self-generated ID code was composed of a simple data combination (e.g., a birthday) familiar to the respondent.

Measures

The questionnaire, approved by the University Bioethics Committee (Approval No. 234687, 20th October 2016), consisted of a brief socio-demographic section and the following scales:

- *System Justification – Gender* (Jost & Kay, 2005): 8 items (e.g., "In general, relations between men and women are fair") on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree);
- *Identification of Sexual Violence Experience*: adaptation of the 8 items that Konik & Cortina (2008) selected from Fitzgerald et al. (1988; 1995): participants had to choose which behaviours they felt are forms of sexual violence (multiple choice scale; e.g., "Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable");
- *Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myth* proposed by McMahon & Farmer (2011) in its Italian adaptation (SRMA-IT) by Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli

(*in press*): 20 items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is made up of four factors that express different rape myths: "She asked for it", 6 items (e.g., "When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble"); "He didn't mean to", 4 items (e.g., "When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex"); "It wasn't really rape", 5 items (e.g., "A rape probably didn't happen if the girl has no bruises or marks"); "She lied", 5 items (e.g., "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys");

- *Bystander intention to intervene scale* (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2002; 2005): Likert scale from 0 (not at all confident to act) to 10 (completely confident to act); participants had to state how confident they felt as a bystander about undertaking the 14 actions to counter sexual violence (e.g., "Express my discomfort if someone makes a joke about a woman's body").

Participants

At T1

At the beginning of the course (T1) (first plenary session), 177 people received the questionnaire and 172 completed it adequately: 88 from the University, 80 from the Polytechnic, and 4 from student dormitory directors or workers. In detail, 81.7% were staff, 8.9% student representatives, 7.1% faculty, 2.4% student dormitory directors or workers; 89.3% were women, 10.1% men, 0.6% declared "other"; the average age was 44.46 years (SD 9.81).

At T2

The T2 questionnaire was completed by 98 participants: all trainees who were present at the final session completed it appropriately. Because about 70 T1 participants did

not attend the final plenary session and because some participants did not indicate correctly their self-generated ID code, as they did not remember the data they had chosen to use at T1, we were able to match the T1 and the T2 questionnaires for only 66 participants. As the T1 sample was composed of 172 respondents, the attrition rate (U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences - IES) was unfortunately high (62%).

Of the 66 matching respondents, 36 were from the University and 30 from the Polytechnic: 87.5% were staff, 9.4% faculty, 1.6% student representatives, and 1.6% dormitory directors or workers; 92.4% were women and 7.56% were men; the average age was 45.67 years (SD 7.87).

As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked if the attrition rate had an effect on the characteristics of the sample at T1 and at T2 by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.

No statistically significant differences in socio-demographics between the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents were found. The chi-square test showed no differences in percentages: between women and men (p = .49); between respondents from the University and the Polytechnic (p = .73); between staff/faculty/students (p = .06). The independent samples T-test showed no differences in average age (p = .14).

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS Statistics version 24. After exploratory factor analysis via eigenvalues greater than 1, the internal consistency of each scale

and subscale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to verify the structure of the scales.

In order to fulfil objective 1 of the present study, descriptive analyses (mean – *M* – and standard deviation – *SD*) for summed score of each scale were carried out to show respondents' system justification – gender level, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to intervene. Relationships between the concepts were then analysed by bivariate correlations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to check for differences in constructs between groups. Specifically, we compared via independent samples t-test the responses from the participants from the University and from the Polytechnic and via one-way ANOVA the participants by their roles (staff, student representatives, faculty, and student dormitory directors/workers) at the two universities.

In order to highlight pre- and post-training differences in participants' representations and attitudes (objective 2), we used a paired sample t-test to compare the questionnaire responses at T1 and T2 and to check whether, after participation on the course, there were changes in the representation of sexual violence, in gender system justification, in rape myth acceptance, and in bystander intention to intervene. The effect of the attrition rate was also checked.

Results

T1 Sample

Participants' representations and attitude

In order to evaluate participant representations and attitudes at the beginning of the program (T1), we analysed gender system justification, i.e., the degree to which respondents judge the system of gender relationships as being fair. As higher values

express agreement with equity of the system, the media of answers (Table 1) means that participants at T1 were slightly critical of the fairness of relationships between genders.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1

To understand respondents' representations of sexual violence, we asked them to select from a list of behaviours which ones they considered violent and to express their agreement with statements that express rape myths (rape myth acceptance). At the beginning of the training course (T1; Table 2), the majority of participants (83.3%) defined violence as the act of someone who "attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite the other person's efforts to discourage it", but very few (23.7%) considered violence as the act of someone "telling sexually coloured stories or offensive jokes". Surprisingly, less than half of respondents (45.5%) defined "Being stared or leered at in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable" as violence.

Rape myth acceptance was not very high; lower values express refusal of myths (Table 1) though higher acceptance was noted for the myth "He didn't mean to" (*M* 1.87) that justifies assault by a man, affirming that he did not really intend to commit rape. Regarding bystander intention to intervene, respondents stated they would act to counter the assault (*M* 8.43).

As Table 1 shows, gender system justification was related strongly to acceptance of the two rape myths "It was not really rape" and "She lied" acceptance and quite strongly with acceptance of the rape myth "He didn't mean to": perceiving fairness in

relationships between genders was associated with higher acquiescence with stereotypes and false beliefs about sexual violence. A strong inverse relation was evident between acceptance of the rape myth "She asked for it" and bystander intention to intervene: if respondents believed that the woman provoked the rape, they would be less disposed to intervene to help her.

Differences between groups

The independent samples t-test showed no differences between participants from the University and those from the Polytechnic. One-way ANOVA showed no differences between work roles.

Sample 1 and Sample 2

Effect of the attrition rate

As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked the effect of the attrition rate by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.

No statistically significant differences were found at the beginning of the training program between the two groups in gender system justification, acceptance of the four rape myths or bystander intention to intervene (Table 2; Independent samples t-test). We can state confidently that the data at T1 and at T2 can be compared, despite the substantially smaller sample at T2.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2

Evaluation of Training Program Effects

Comparison between the T1 and the T2 data showed that the number of respondents who labelled different forms of behaviours as "violent" increased between T1 and T2 (Table 3): post-training identification of subtle forms of violence was higher.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 3

gender system justification

The post-training data showed lower gender system justification and lower acceptance of the rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied" (Table 2: Paired samples t-test). No significant pre- and post-training differences were found for the acceptance of the myths "He didn't mean to" and "It wasn't really rape". There were no significant differences in bystander intention to intervene to prevent or counter a sexual assault.

Discussion

The present paper reports the process and main results of a pilot evaluation study of the Italian training program of the USVreact European project for university staff, faculty, and student representatives to prevent sexual violence inside universities. We wanted to show the process of the evaluation and the first evidence of effectiveness of the training intervention in promoting cultural change and bystander willingness to intervene in a university setting. Assessment of participants' representations of sexual violence, gender system justification, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to intervene was performed at the beginning of the training course. Effectiveness of the course was then measured by comparing participants' responses pre- and post-training to determine whether changes had occurred.

Results of the evaluation study showed that participants at the beginning of the training expressed quite a low acceptance of rape myths and a reasonable degree of

willingness to intervene to counter sexual violence. This observation is coherent with the fact that participation on the course was voluntary, that participants were probably already quite aware of sexual violence before starting the course, and that the training course attracted mostly women. As reported in previous studies (Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli, *in press*; Papp & Erchull, 2017), women showed lower system justification and rape myth acceptance and higher intention to intervene. Although the participants were already aware of the seriousness of sexual violence, pre-training responses showed they were less able to recognize the more subtle forms of violence. This finding suggests the need to develop sensitivity to recognize violence also in its subtle and hidden forms. Finally, consistent with previous work (McMahon, 2010), high inverse correlations emerged between rape myth acceptance and bystander intention to intervene.

The present results suggest that a training course designed to raise recognition of stereotypes of sexual violence and of more subtle forms of violence (e.g., harassment) could be helpful to foster attitudes to counter sexual violence in university settings. As suggested by Banyard (2015), to prevent the occurrence of violent and discriminatory situations, it is necessary to change the representations and attitudes towards sexual violence. The perpetuation of gender-based violence is fueled by false beliefs and stereotypes related to violence itself and to gender relationships. These attitudes help to justify the abuse or the individuals who act on them and affect the identification of a situation as risky or violent (Burn, 2009; Bennet, Banyard, & Garnhart, 2014; Banyard, 2015). That said, in order to activate bystander intervention, the first step is to enable an individual to recognize a situation as violent or risky and then to make the individual feel responsible for intervening (Banyard, 2015). Comparison of pre- and post-training responses revealed some differences. Paired sample t-test analysis

showed a significant increase in participants' ability to identify more subtle kinds of violence and a reduction in gender system justification and in acceptance of the two rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied". This change suggests an impact of the training course.

Summarizing, we can state that by the end of the training program, the participants were more aware of what violence is and were better able to identify its subtle forms and that they were less disposed to blaming the victim, as the attitude of attributing responsibility for violence to the victim was considerably reduced. Reflection on the subtle shades of violence and false beliefs about sexual assault probably helped raise participants' awareness of the pervasiveness of a culture that legitimizes violence and their ability to recognize it. No significant changes were observed for the other dimensions in part because the participants were already quite aware of the problem of violence against women and in part because deep cultural change probably takes longer to manifest than the few months of a course program. Moreover, it is also possible that the instrument we used to measure the intention to intervene, originally designed for students, needs to be adapted for faculty and staff or, generally, for workers. In future studies, we plan to develop a scale that captures situations more relevant to the lifestyle of staff and/or teachers.

This pilot study, like the evaluation design, has several limitations. First, it has no control group. This weakness needs to be addressed when planning future training courses. Second, the sample of respondents who completed both questionnaires was small, also due to a problem with the coding process; greater attention will be paid to avoiding errors in the identification coding process on future courses: a possible solution is to indicate clearly which data are to be reported to generate the ID code (e.g., first letter of mother's surname; month of father's birth; third letter of her/his

name). After the plenary introduction to the program, some participants did not participate in the training and did not fill in the T2 questionnaire. The attrition rate (i.e., matching the respondents to the T1 and T2 questionnaires) was quite high, which is a serious weakness of the present study. For this reason, the results for the effectiveness of the training course cannot be generalized as we had intended. In future training courses, it would be interesting to ask participants why they did not attend the course; it could be useful to try to foster attendance to the entire program. Third, though women make up 68% of the administrative staff at the University of Turin and 60% at the Polytechnic of Turin, women accounted for more than 90% of the training course participants, whereas men were strongly underrepresented. A further limitation is that we did not administer a follow-up post-training questionnaire to analyse the stability of changes over time; this step will be included in future research designs.

These limitations notwithstanding, the pilot evaluation study suggests several thematic areas that would be appropriate to develop in a training course on combating gender-based violence. For example, two future areas of focus could be on contrasting the tendency to blame the victim of sexual violence and on assessing the different forms that violence can take. The data collected at T1 show that acceptance of the myth "She asked for it" was inversely related to the bystander intervention attitude. The same significant negative relationship between acceptance of the myth "She asked for it" and the bystander intervention attitude was found by a previous study (Martini & De Piccoli, *2020*), with a sample of about 3000 university students. Moreover, because the intention to intervene hinges on recognizing a potentially harmful situation for the victim (Darley & Latanè, 1968), a program designed to prevent sexual violence needs to sustain the ability to recognize the different faces of violence.

Other variables may certainly come into play in motivating a bystander to intervene against any form of violence; we believe that the present study findings provide a preliminary basis on which to develop training courses. Keeping in mind critical issues and some weaknesses in the design, this work can offer some suggestions to implement evaluation of bystander-based interventions. Very few projects to date have tested the effectiveness of bystander-based intervention involving university staff. This specific approach, which originated in the United States (Banyard, 2015) but is not yet common in Europe, may promote adequate first response to sexual assault and prevention of more subtle violence. Bystander intervention can be fostered by promoting cultural change, countering false beliefs such as rape myth acceptance, and helping to identify violence. To reach this goal it is necessary to involve more men. In Italy, gender-based violence is often considered a female issue. But as previous studies have shown (Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017; Russell & Hand, 2017), because men and women express different attitudes towards these problems, men cannot remain passive spectators in counteracting sexual violence. A cultural change can be more effective the more both men and women cooperate as active subjects in counteracting all forms of violence and discrimination. Along this line, university management should include among the compulsory courses for all administrative staff and, in perspective, for all teachers, a program like USVreact which is aimed at preventing sexual violence in the academic setting. In this way, more men would be involved in the reflection (and in the action) on this topic and would contribute to spreading a culture of respect and non-abuse, which is the basis of the primary prevention as indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010).

Conflict of Interests Statement

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

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EVALUATION OF USVreact:

A STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Interventions addressing the endemic of sexual violence at European universities are scarce, particularly those that take a bystander focus to sexual violence prevention and involve university staff. Evidence-based data on their effectiveness are also lacking. This paper reports the description of a pilot evaluation study of the USVreact Italian training program addressed to university staff for counteracting sexual violence.

We assessed initial (T1) representations of gender-based violence, rape myth acceptance, and attitudes to bystander intervention (172 participants), and evaluated the effectiveness of the course by comparing via paired sample T-tests the responses before and after (T2) training (66 participants). Comparison between pre- (T1) and post-training (T2) responses indicated that the participants' ability to recognize subtle forms of violence and reduce rape myth acceptance was increased after training. Relatively few training programs based on the bystander approach to prevent gender-based violence at university have been performed to date in Europe and data on their effectiveness are scarce. Several limitations notwithstanding, the present pilot evaluation study provides suggestions for a more systematic evaluation of training interventions that address cultural legitimation of gender-based violence and that sustain bystander interventions in sexual assault prevention.

Impact statement: training program evaluation, countering sexual violence, bystander intervention, university, staff training.

Introduction

Sexual violence can be defined as "any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting, including but not limited to home and work." (WHO, 2002). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) about 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical or sexual violence from partners or non-partners at some point during their lives. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union (EU), about 215,000 violent sexual crimes were reported to the police in the EU in 2015 alone. In Italy, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2015) reported that 31% of women aged between 16 and 70 years have experienced some form of violence during their lives: physical violence in 20%, sexual violence in 21%, and sexual harassment in 74% of cases. As Kelly (1987) underlined, sexual violence can assume several forms, from the most serious, such as rape, to the more subtle, such as verbal harassment. These different behaviors need specific interventions. The World Health Organization (WHO) specifies the three prevention levels to counteract forms of sexual violence: primary, secondary, and tertiary (WHO, 2010; Banyard, 2015). Secondary, focalized prevention actions should be activated in specific risky situations, and tertiary prevention is necessary after a violent episode. Primary prevention should act as extensively as possible to reduce the occurrence of any form of violence. The aims of primary prevention are to remove the

conditions that allow episodes of violence from happening, i.e., to promote a cultural change towards stigmatizing sexual dominance and violence, in any form. In the United States, bystander interventions are often proposed to counteract sexual violence (focused on primary and secondary prevention). As clearly exposed by Banyard (2015), bystander-based intervention can be useful in counteracting violence. Bystanders can be proactive in supporting the victim of a violent episode and can stigmatize the action of the perpetrator: in this way, the bystander can contribute to enhance a culture of respect.

To prevent sexual violence, the European Commission finances international projects with targeted actions addressed to the different forms of violence, to various different social contexts (workplace environment, schools, universities) and social stakeholders (e.g., healthcare personnel, law enforcement agencies, teachers, etc.) with the aim to both support victims of violence and reduce sexist and discriminatory behavior (see Daphne Funding Programme and Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme – European Commission).

The training program presented and evaluated here is part of the European project entitled "USVreact: University Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence" (www.usvreact.eu) [1]. Why the university context? Because sexual violence is an entrenched problem in higher education institutions, especially in the United States and northern European countries: 68% of female students in the UK (NUS, 2010) declared having experienced at least one episode of harassment or sexual violence on campus (Perkins & Warner, 2017). While the prevalence in Italy is far lower - 30% according to the Eu-Project *Gender-based Violence, Stalking and Fear of Crime* (2012) - there are worrying signals of a culture that seriously underrates many forms of sexual violence in society at large and in university settings. Newspaper reports,

television programs, and posts on social networks show that sexual violence is often treated as a joke or attributed to provocations by the victim (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003; Ward, 2016; Krongard, & Tsay-Vogel, 2018).

Our project was entitled "USVreact" to emphasize the need to avoid stigmatizing the victim of sexual violence and to change a culture that tends to justify violence, perpetuate shame and self-stereotyping. The goal was to foster a culture of supportive reaction: people should no longer be passive observers but rather active and reactive subjects. The project title underscores the need to involve local and higher education institutional communities so that they can react to behaviors that harm or risk harming an individual's dignity. Indeed, the moral responsibility of violent acts resides with the whole community. Unfortunately, very few projects contradict cultural legitimation of sexual violence in the university setting or involve higher education organizations (students, faculty, administrative staff) in Europe or in Italy in particular (Fenton & Mott, 2017).

A project designed to bring about cultural change in the university setting should be addressed to students (or their representatives) and staff alike. Staff can contribute to the construction of an organizational and educational environment conducive to building respect. Moreover, because they belong to the organization longer than students do, staff can maintain and foster a respectful culture over time. These are the main reasons why our work presents a pilot test for the implementation and evaluation of a training program targeted chiefly to administrative staff.

Theoretical basis of the intervention

Training and education interventions to contrast sexual violence aim to change gender stereotype, to raise awareness about the different forms that sexual violence can

assume and to sensitize people to be active subject to react to it (see, for example, the role that a bystander could have). Despite national and international legislation against sexual violence and despite the numerous initiatives to prevent it, sexual violence is still justified and underestimated. Undervaluing the problem or attributing it to actions by minority groups or isolated cases maintains the status quo and justifies the system, particularly as regards gender relations, and reiterates gender inequality (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; 2014).

Jost & Banaji (1994) advanced the System Justification Theory to explain that the consequence of "identification" with the culture to which subjects belong is the "defense" of the status quo and the affirmation that differences between groups are right. This theoretical model has been used to account for attitudes towards gender differences (*Gender System justification*). For many studies on System Justification Theory this belief underlies different forms of discrimination and sexual violence against women. Jost & Kay (2005) showed a relationship between system justification, gender stereotypes, and sexism. Chapleau & Oswald (2014) found that system justification is related to moral outrage and stated that the phenomenon reiterates a system of sexual violence. Other scholars (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) focused on a specific form of sexual violence - rape - and analyzed so-called “rape myths”: shared attitudes and beliefs that tend to justify violence, to underestimate the brutality of a violent act, or to deny male sexual assault to the detriment of a woman. Underestimating and justifying any form of violence (including rape) are expressions of a cultural attitude that maintains, or does not perceive, gender inequality (Payne et al., 1999). Research underlines the strong link between gender system justification, rape myth acceptance (e.g., Chapleau & Oswald, 2014) and their relationship with the efficacy of intervention. Joseph, Gray, & Mayer

(2013) defined gender system justification as a "barrier" that in a college campus culture can reduce the effectiveness of prevention actions against sexual assault. A change of perspective is needed to change behavior at the individual and the social level.

Training at the Universities of Turin

The training program on sexual violence prevention involved mainly university staff, some faculty members, student dormitory directors, and student representatives of the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin.

While bystander interventions in the United States have usually been developed with students, we chose to involve primarily administrative staff because:

(1) staff are already involved in operating direct-contact services for students; if they are adequately trained, they can be observers of inappropriate behaviors, either being themselves references for students directly or by signposting to the appropriate services at the university and in the community

(2) once appropriately trained, staff can become a guarantor of "good practices" in the workplace, contributing to the dissemination of a culture of respect at all organizational levels

(3) staff turnover is low, whereas students complete their studies within 3 to 5 years, graduate, and leave the institution.

Participation in the program was voluntary and recognized as on-the-job training for university staff, in agreement with the administration of the two universities and the human resource departments. The staff of the University of Turin was informed of the training course by the University General Direction; an invitation to participate was sent by e-mail to all staff members, and voluntary enrollment in the training program

was collected. We had planned to involve 80 participants per university, but since we received 90 registration requests from the University of Turin alone, we raised the number of participants to 90 for the University of Turin and 80 for the Polytechnic of Turin. The participants attended the training course during working hours without loss of salary. They signed an attendance sheet at each training session.

The course ran for a total of 16 hours: two plenary sessions (one at the beginning and one at the end of the course) and two small group meetings (about 10-15 participants per group). In order to involve all participants, the small groups met 13 times. Overall, the training program lasted 4 months from the initial to the final plenary session. The first plenary session introduced the project and presented the university- and community-based services currently operating against abuse and discrimination. Course participants then met in small groups (2 half days, for a total of 8 hours of training) to discuss: gender equality/inequality in society and at the University; what sexual violence is; how to recognize behaviors that express discrimination; how to intervene in case of violence disclosure; laws and policies concerning sexual violence, stalking, and harassment. The groups reviewed case studies and vignettes, viewed movies, and received theoretical input about gender stereotypes and sexism. At the concluding plenary session, data on rape myth acceptance and sexual violence perception in the University context, involving students, were presented and commented with the participants. Finally, a post-training evaluation (T2) was conducted.

Training evaluation

The present paper describes the process and reports the results of the pilot evaluation study of the training course addressed to university staff within the USVreact project. The study had two main objectives:

O1) to describe, at the beginning of the program (T1), participants' representations of sexual violence, their attitude to intervention as a "bystander" to counter sexual violence, and their acceptance of rape myths. In line with Jost & Banaji (1994), Chapleau & Oswald (2013) and Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi (2010), we expected that, also for the course participants, higher gender system justification corresponds to higher rape myth acceptance; also, we expected an inverse correlation between rape myth acceptance and attitude to intervene to counter violence (coherently with McMahon, 2010).

O2) to compare participants' representations and attitudes before and after the course and to highlight pre- and post-training differences and check for training effectiveness.

We hypothesized that gender system justification and rape myth acceptance scores would be lower at post-training assessment; participants would show greater awareness of different forms of sexual violence and greater intention to intervene as a bystander if a witness to such acts.

Material and method

Procedure

At the beginning of the first plenary session, after registration, participants received a copy of the questionnaire along with a short description of the evaluation procedure and information on the processing of personal data. They were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously and to leave it in a box in the hallway outside the room

before the start of the training presentation. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete.

In order to compare participant answers before (T1) and after (T2) the training course, the participants completed the same questionnaire at the final plenary session. The procedure for completing the second questionnaire and providing information on processing of personal data were the same as at T1. Participants were told to write the same self-generated ID code on the T1 and the T2 questionnaire to permit matching T1 and T2 answers, while allowing the participants to remain anonymous. The self-generated ID code was composed of a simple data combination (e.g., a birthday) familiar to the respondent.

Measures

The questionnaire, approved by the University Bioethics Committee (Approval No. 234687, 20th October 2016), consisted of a brief socio-demographic section and the following scales:

- *System Justification – Gender* (Jost & Kay, 2005): 8 items (e.g., "In general, relations between men and women are fair") on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree);
- *Identification of Sexual Violence Experience*: adaptation of the 8 items that Konik & Cortina (2008) selected from Fitzgerald et al. (1988; 1995): participants had to choose which behaviours they felt are forms of sexual violence (multiple choice scale; e.g., "Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable");
- *Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myth* proposed by McMahon & Farmer (2011) in its Italian adaptation (SRMA-IT) by Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli

(*in press*): 20 items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is made up of four factors that express different rape myths: "She asked for it", 6 items (e.g., "When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble"); "He didn't mean to", 4 items (e.g., "When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex"); "It wasn't really rape", 5 items (e.g., "A rape probably didn't happen if the girl has no bruises or marks"); "She lied", 5 items (e.g., "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys");

- *Bystander intention to intervene scale* (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2002; 2005): Likert scale from 0 (not at all confident to act) to 10 (completely confident to act); participants had to state how confident they felt as a bystander about undertaking the 14 actions to counter sexual violence (e.g., "Express my discomfort if someone makes a joke about a woman's body").

Participants

At T1

At the beginning of the course (T1) (first plenary session), 177 people received the questionnaire and 172 completed it adequately: 88 from the University, 80 from the Polytechnic, and 4 from student dormitory directors or workers. In detail, 81.7% were staff, 8.9% student representatives, 7.1% faculty, 2.4% student dormitory directors or workers; 89.3% were women, 10.1% men, 0.6% declared "other"; the average age was 44.46 years (SD 9.81).

At T2

The T2 questionnaire was completed by 98 participants: all trainees who were present at the final session completed it appropriately. Because about 70 T1 participants did

not attend the final plenary session and because some participants did not indicate correctly their self-generated ID code, as they did not remember the data they had chosen to use at T1, we were able to match the T1 and the T2 questionnaires for only 66 participants. As the T1 sample was composed of 172 respondents, the attrition rate (U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences - IES) was unfortunately high (62%).

Of the 66 matching respondents, 36 were from the University and 30 from the Polytechnic: 87.5% were staff, 9.4% faculty, 1.6% student representatives, and 1.6% dormitory directors or workers; 92.4% were women and 7.56% were men; the average age was 45.67 years (SD 7.87).

As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked if the attrition rate had an effect on the characteristics of the sample at T1 and at T2 by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.

No statistically significant differences in socio-demographics between the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents were found. The chi-square test showed no differences in percentages: between women and men (p = .49); between respondents from the University and the Polytechnic (p = .73); between staff/faculty/students (p = .06). The independent samples T-test showed no differences in average age (p = .14).

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS Statistics version 24. After exploratory factor analysis via eigenvalues greater than 1, the internal consistency of each scale

and subscale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to verify the structure of the scales.

In order to fulfil objective 1 of the present study, descriptive analyses (mean – *M* – and standard deviation – *SD*) for summed score of each scale were carried out to show respondents' system justification – gender level, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to intervene. Relationships between the concepts were then analysed by bivariate correlations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to check for differences in constructs between groups. Specifically, we compared via independent samples t-test the responses from the participants from the University and from the Polytechnic and via one-way ANOVA the participants by their roles (staff, student representatives, faculty, and student dormitory directors/workers) at the two universities.

In order to highlight pre- and post-training differences in participants' representations and attitudes (objective 2), we used a paired sample t-test to compare the questionnaire responses at T1 and T2 and to check whether, after participation on the course, there were changes in the representation of sexual violence, in gender system justification, in rape myth acceptance, and in bystander intention to intervene. The effect of the attrition rate was also checked.

Results

T1 Sample

Participants' representations and attitude

In order to evaluate participant representations and attitudes at the beginning of the program (T1), we analysed gender system justification, i.e., the degree to which respondents judge the system of gender relationships as being fair. As higher values

express agreement with equity of the system, the media of answers (Table 1) means that participants at T1 were slightly critical of the fairness of relationships between genders.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1

To understand respondents' representations of sexual violence, we asked them to select from a list of behaviours which ones they considered violent and to express their agreement with statements that express rape myths (rape myth acceptance). At the beginning of the training course (T1; Table 2), the majority of participants (83.3%) defined violence as the act of someone who "attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite the other person's efforts to discourage it", but very few (23.7%) considered violence as the act of someone "telling sexually coloured stories or offensive jokes". Surprisingly, less than half of respondents (45.5%) defined "Being stared or leered at in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable" as violence.

Rape myth acceptance was not very high; lower values express refusal of myths (Table 1) though higher acceptance was noted for the myth "He didn't mean to" (*M* 1.87) that justifies assault by a man, affirming that he did not really intend to commit rape. Regarding bystander intention to intervene, respondents stated they would act to counter the assault (*M* 8.43).

As Table 1 shows, gender system justification was related strongly to acceptance of the two rape myths "It was not really rape" and "She lied" acceptance and quite strongly with acceptance of the rape myth "He didn't mean to": perceiving fairness in

relationships between genders was associated with higher acquiescence with stereotypes and false beliefs about sexual violence. A strong inverse relation was evident between acceptance of the rape myth "She asked for it" and bystander intention to intervene: if respondents believed that the woman provoked the rape, they would be less disposed to intervene to help her.

Differences between groups

The independent samples t-test showed no differences between participants from the University and those from the Polytechnic. One-way ANOVA showed no differences between work roles.

Sample 1 and Sample 2

Effect of the attrition rate

As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked the effect of the attrition rate by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.

No statistically significant differences were found at the beginning of the training program between the two groups in gender system justification, acceptance of the four rape myths or bystander intention to intervene (Table 2; Independent samples t-test). We can state confidently that the data at T1 and at T2 can be compared, despite the substantially smaller sample at T2.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2

Evaluation of Training Program Effects

Comparison between the T1 and the T2 data showed that the number of respondents who labelled different forms of behaviours as "violent" increased between T1 and T2 (Table 3): post-training identification of subtle forms of violence was higher.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 3

gender system justification

The post-training data showed lower gender system justification and lower acceptance of the rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied" (Table 2: Paired samples t-test). No significant pre- and post-training differences were found for the acceptance of the myths "He didn't mean to" and "It wasn't really rape". There were no significant differences in bystander intention to intervene to prevent or counter a sexual assault.

Discussion

The present paper reports the process and main results of a pilot evaluation study of the Italian training program of the USVreact European project for university staff, faculty, and student representatives to prevent sexual violence inside universities. We wanted to show the process of the evaluation and the first evidence of effectiveness of the training intervention in promoting cultural change and bystander willingness to intervene in a university setting. Assessment of participants' representations of sexual violence, gender system justification, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to intervene was performed at the beginning of the training course. Effectiveness of the course was then measured by comparing participants' responses pre- and post-training to determine whether changes had occurred.

Results of the evaluation study showed that participants at the beginning of the training expressed quite a low acceptance of rape myths and a reasonable degree of

willingness to intervene to counter sexual violence. This observation is coherent with the fact that participation on the course was voluntary, that participants were probably already quite aware of sexual violence before starting the course, and that the training course attracted mostly women. As reported in previous studies (Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli, *in press*; Papp & Erchull, 2017), women showed lower system justification and rape myth acceptance and higher intention to intervene. Although the participants were already aware of the seriousness of sexual violence, pre-training responses showed they were less able to recognize the more subtle forms of violence. This finding suggests the need to develop sensitivity to recognize violence also in its subtle and hidden forms. Finally, consistent with previous work (McMahon, 2010), high inverse correlations emerged between rape myth acceptance and bystander intention to intervene.

The present results suggest that a training course designed to raise recognition of stereotypes of sexual violence and of more subtle forms of violence (e.g., harassment) could be helpful to foster attitudes to counter sexual violence in university settings. As suggested by Banyard (2015), to prevent the occurrence of violent and discriminatory situations, it is necessary to change the representations and attitudes towards sexual violence. The perpetuation of gender-based violence is fueled by false beliefs and stereotypes related to violence itself and to gender relationships. These attitudes help to justify the abuse or the individuals who act on them and affect the identification of a situation as risky or violent (Burn, 2009; Bennet, Banyard, & Garnhart, 2014; Banyard, 2015). That said, in order to activate bystander intervention, the first step is to enable an individual to recognize a situation as violent or risky and then to make the individual feel responsible for intervening (Banyard, 2015). Comparison of pre- and post-training responses revealed some differences. Paired sample t-test analysis

showed a significant increase in participants' ability to identify more subtle kinds of violence and a reduction in gender system justification and in acceptance of the two rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied". This change suggests an impact of the training course.

Summarizing, we can state that by the end of the training program, the participants were more aware of what violence is and were better able to identify its subtle forms and that they were less disposed to blaming the victim, as the attitude of attributing responsibility for violence to the victim was considerably reduced. Reflection on the subtle shades of violence and false beliefs about sexual assault probably helped raise participants' awareness of the pervasiveness of a culture that legitimizes violence and their ability to recognize it. No significant changes were observed for the other dimensions in part because the participants were already quite aware of the problem of violence against women and in part because deep cultural change probably takes longer to manifest than the few months of a course program. Moreover, it is also possible that the instrument we used to measure the intention to intervene, originally designed for students, needs to be adapted for faculty and staff or, generally, for workers. In future studies, we plan to develop a scale that captures situations more relevant to the lifestyle of staff and/or teachers.

This pilot study, like the evaluation design, has several limitations. First, it has no control group. This weakness needs to be addressed when planning future training courses. Second, the sample of respondents who completed both questionnaires was small, also due to a problem with the coding process; greater attention will be paid to avoiding errors in the identification coding process on future courses: a possible solution is to indicate clearly which data are to be reported to generate the ID code (e.g., first letter of mother's surname; month of father's birth; third letter of her/his

name). After the plenary introduction to the program, some participants did not participate in the training and did not fill in the T2 questionnaire. The attrition rate (i.e., matching the respondents to the T1 and T2 questionnaires) was quite high, which is a serious weakness of the present study. For this reason, the results for the effectiveness of the training course cannot be generalized as we had intended. In future training courses, it would be interesting to ask participants why they did not attend the course; it could be useful to try to foster attendance to the entire program. Third, though women make up 68% of the administrative staff at the University of Turin and 60% at the Polytechnic of Turin, women accounted for more than 90% of the training course participants, whereas men were strongly underrepresented. A further limitation is that we did not administer a follow-up post-training questionnaire to analyse the stability of changes over time; this step will be included in future research designs.

These limitations notwithstanding, the pilot evaluation study suggests several thematic areas that would be appropriate to develop in a training course on combating gender-based violence. For example, two future areas of focus could be on contrasting the tendency to blame the victim of sexual violence and on assessing the different forms that violence can take. The data collected at T1 show that acceptance of the myth "She asked for it" was inversely related to the bystander intervention attitude. The same significant negative relationship between acceptance of the myth "She asked for it" and the bystander intervention attitude was found by a previous study (Martini & De Piccoli, *2020*), with a sample of about 3000 university students. Moreover, because the intention to intervene hinges on recognizing a potentially harmful situation for the victim (Darley & Latanè, 1968), a program designed to prevent sexual violence needs to sustain the ability to recognize the different faces of violence.

Other variables may certainly come into play in motivating a bystander to intervene against any form of violence; we believe that the present study findings provide a preliminary basis on which to develop training courses. Keeping in mind critical issues and some weaknesses in the design, this work can offer some suggestions to implement evaluation of bystander-based interventions. Very few projects to date have tested the effectiveness of bystander-based intervention involving university staff. This specific approach, which originated in the United States (Banyard, 2015) but is not yet common in Europe, may promote adequate first response to sexual assault and prevention of more subtle violence. Bystander intervention can be fostered by promoting cultural change, countering false beliefs such as rape myth acceptance, and helping to identify violence. To reach this goal it is necessary to involve more men. In Italy, gender-based violence is often considered a female issue. But as previous studies have shown (Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017; Russell & Hand, 2017), because men and women express different attitudes towards these problems, men cannot remain passive spectators in counteracting sexual violence. A cultural change can be more effective the more both men and women cooperate as active subjects in counteracting all forms of violence and discrimination. Along this line, university management should include among the compulsory courses for all administrative staff and, in perspective, for all teachers, a program like USVreact which is aimed at preventing sexual violence in the academic setting. In this way, more men would be involved in the reflection (and in the action) on this topic and would contribute to spreading a culture of respect and non-abuse, which is the basis of the primary prevention as indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010).

Conflict of Interests Statement

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

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Table 1. Bivariate correlations (*r* values), descriptive statistics (M, SD) and Cronbach's alpha at T1 (172 respondents)

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1. Gender system justification	-					
2. Rape myth "She asked for it" acceptance	.106	-				
3. Rape myth "He didn't mean to" acceptance	.160*	.303**	-			
4. Rape myth "It was not really rape" acceptance	.255**	.375**	.511**	-		
5. Rape myth "She lied" acceptance	.217**	.404**	.530**	.601**	-	
6. Bystander efficacy	.041	-.243**	-.128	-.069	-.148	-
M	4.27	1.66	1.87	1.35	1.77	8.43
SD	1.04	.59	.95	.68	.77	1.11
Cronbach's alpha	*.76*	*.72*	*.83*	*.90*	*.89*	*.81*

* $p<.05$

** $p< .001$

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Table 2. Percentages of respondents at T1 and at T2 who define the described behaviours as violence and Independent T-test values between answers at T1 and T2 (66 matching respondents)

(Yes, it is violence = 1 *No, it is not violence = 0)*	**% of Yes at T1**	**% of Yes at T2**	***T-test values***
Someone makes you afraid you would be treated poorly if you didn't cooperate sexually	84.8	95.3	*t(64)= -2.12, p=.038*
Someone attempts to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite your efforts to discourage it	83.3	87.7	*t(64)=-.73, p=.471*
Someone touches you (for example put an arm around you) in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable	63.3	81.5	*t(64)=-2.82, p=.006*
Someone makes crude and offensive remarks, either publicly or privately	60.6	81.5	*t(64)=-2.86, p=.006*
Someone makes unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters	50.0	86.2	*t(64)=-5.56, p<.001*
Someone displays, used or distributed sexist or suggestive materials	46.9	76.9	*t(64)=--4.60, p< .001*
Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable	45.5	64.6	*t(64)=-3.19, p=.002*
Someone tells sexually suggestive stories or offensive jokes	23.7	53.8	*t(64)=-3.40, p .001*

Table 3. Independent sample t-test at T1, between the group of 66 matching respondents and the group of 106 T1-only respondents and Paired sample t-test at T1 and T2 for the 66 matching participants

		Independent sample t-test		**Paired sample T-test**	
	T1	**T1**	***Matching / only-T1***	***T2***	***T1/T2***
	66 Matching	**106 Only-T1**	***T-test values***	**66 Matching**	***T-test values***
	M *(SD)*	**M *(SD)***		**M *(SD)***	
Gender system justification	4.11 *(.98)*	4.37 *(1.07)*	*t(170)=-1.60, p=.11*	4.68 *(1.51)*	*t(65)=-2.73, p=.01*
Rape myth "She asked for it" acceptance	1.63 *(.54)*	1.68 *(.62)*	*t(17)=-.56, p=.55*	1.84 *(.61)*	*t(65)=-3.11, p=.01*
Rape myth "He didn't mean to" acceptance	1.80 *(.88)*	1.91 *(.99)*	*t(168)=-.74, p=.46*	1.72 *(.69)*	*t(64)= .96, p=.34*
Rape myth "It was not really rape" acceptance	1.33 *(.57)*	1.36 *(.74)*	*t(168)=-.30, p=.76*	1.31 *(.62)*	*t(64)= .19, p=.85*
Rape myth "She lied" acceptance	1.77 (.69)	1.78 *(.82)*	*t(168)=-.14, p=.89*	1.56 *(.64)*	*t(64)=2.61, p=.01*
Bystander efficacy	8.42 *(1.09)*	8.43 *(1.13)*	*t(170)=-.05, p=.96*	8.63 *(.95)*	*t(65)=-1.68, p=.10*

Table 3. Independent sample t-test at T1, between the group of 66 matching respondents and the group of 106 T1-only respondents and Paired sample t-test at T1 and T2 for the 66 matching participants

	T1 **66 Matching** **M *(SD)***	**Independent sample t-test** **T1** **106 Only-T1** **M *(SD)***	***Matching / only-T1*** ***T-test values***	**Paired sample T-test** ***T2*** **66 Matching** **M *(SD)***	***T1/T2*** ***T-test values***
Gender system justification	4.11 *(.98)*	4.37 *(1.07)*	*t(170)=-1.60, p=.11*	4.68 *(1.51)*	*t(65)=-2.73, p=.01*
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