

The Socio-Ecological Model of Sexual Violence Prevention: How it relates to Active Bystander Intervention on our University Campuses

The below diagram is based on the four-level Social-Ecological Model used by the CDC to understand and prevent violence and the expanded Socio-Ecological Model developed by Black Women’s Blueprint. It also incorporates the University Community level discussed by Alteristic (Green Dot Bystander Intervention Program) found in the, It’s Your Business! HBCU Bystander Intervention Curriculum, and the Simon Fraser University Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office diagram found in the BCcampus Active Bystander Intervention Training.

Diagram 1

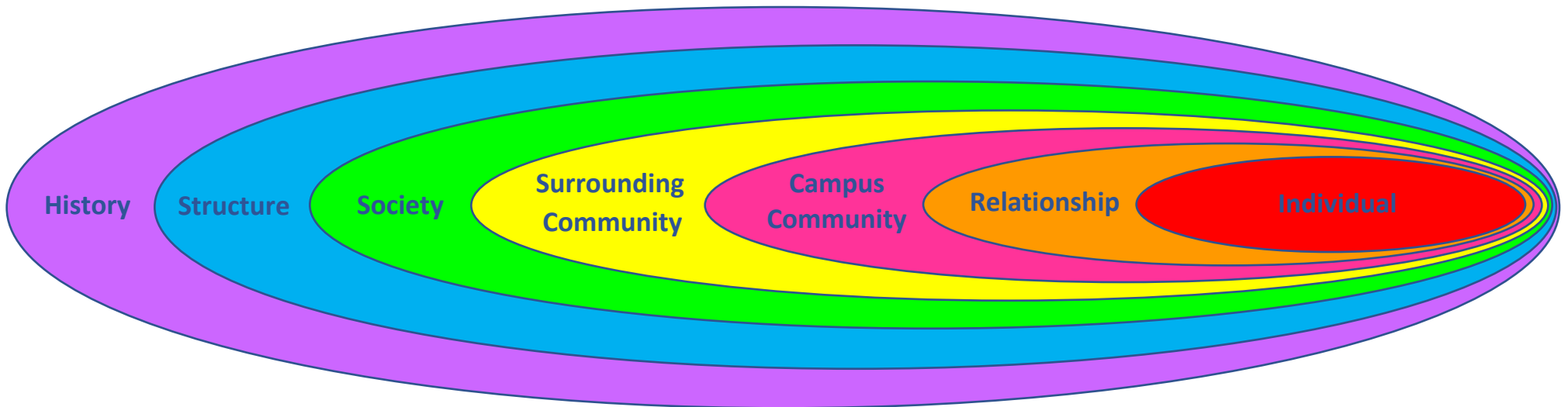


Image Credit: *University of Waterloo Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office – SVPRO – March 2022*

Community can be described as a feeling of fellowship with others based on the sharing of common values, goals, and interests. For example, the pursuit of knowledge is a goal often found on a university campus. Our Campus Community is one sphere where we can take action to prevent sexual violence and be part of building a safe, caring, supportive and healthy society for all to grow and flourish. Active bystander intervention training views sexual violence as a collective problem in which everyone can play a role in prevention across the various spheres.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – CDC (2022) uses the evidence-based Socio-Ecological Model to better understand violence and the effects of potential prevention strategies. According to the CDC this model considers the complex interplay between four factors: the individual, relationship, community, and society. This model helps us to understand the range of factors that put people at risk for violence, including sexual violence, or protects them from experiencing or perpetrating violence, including sexual violence. The overlapping spheres in the model illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level.

Diagram 2



Image Credit: CDC, *The Social-Ecological Model*

According to the CDC the model helps to clarify these factors but also suggests that it is necessary to act across multiple spheres of the model at the same time to prevent violence such as sexual violence and sustain prevention efforts over time and achieve population-level impacts.

The CDC lists and describes the four factors as such:

1. Individual
 - Identifies biological and personal history factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing harm or causing harm
 - Includes factors such as age, education, income, substance use, and history of abuse
 - Prevention strategies at this level promote attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that prevent violence
 - Prevention strategies may include: conflict resolution classes, life skills training, social-emotional learning, safer dating and healthy relationships skills programs

2. Relationship

- Close relationships that may increase the risk of experiencing harm or causing harm
- A person's closest social circle such as peers, friends, partners, and family members, influence their behaviour and contribute to their experience
- Prevention strategies may include: parenting or family-focused prevention programs; mentoring programs designed to strengthen parent-child communication, promote positive peer norms, and promote healthy relationships

3. Community

- Explores the settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with experiencing harm or causing harm
- Prevention strategies focus on improving the physical and social environment in these settings by for example creating safe places where people live, learn, work, and play
- Prevention strategies also address other conditions that give rise to violence in communities such as neighborhood poverty, and residential segregation and instability

4. Society

- Looks at the broad social factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited
- Factors include social and cultural norms that support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts
- Large social factors include the health, economic, educational, and social policies that help maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society
- Prevention strategies include: efforts to promote societal norms that protect against violence as well as efforts to strengthen household financial security, education, and employment opportunities, and other policies that affect the structural determinants of health

Black Women's Blueprint – Recommended Socio-Ecological Model of Prevention

According to Black Women's Blueprint (BWB) they are, "an organization using civil and human rights approaches to organize and develop a culture where women of African descent are fully empowered and where gender, race and other disparities are erased."

BWB expanded the above four-factor Socio-Ecological Model used by the CDC after conducting qualitative research with staff and students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), as well as communities with legacies of slavery. They recognized there were factors beyond the control of the individual – the structures that shape our society and the historical context in which we are located. According to the BWB the addition of these two factors – structure and history – are especially important to Black people, women, and Black women in particular, because it is impossible to prevent violence without understanding the history of how we got here – a history of white supremacy, patriarchy and misogyny.

The BWB lists and describes the 2 additional factors as such:

5. Structure

- Focus on accountability by those persons/leaders who make the policies and the groups who benefit from the policies which directly or inadvertently uphold racism and other oppression that perpetuates violence
- By looking at the structural we can name racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism which are not simply societal beliefs, but factors that impact rates of violence – policies which perpetuate violence are often the product or manifestation of the structural “isms”
- BWB addresses structural factors that perpetuate violence through base building, community organizing, and policy advocacy both at the local and federal level
- Prevention strategies at this level place the power back into the hands of people and survivors and address entrenched structural inequalities that continue to exist regardless of social policy

6. History

- A focus on historical issues goes a long way in helping Black communities (and other communities who have been harmed by violence) understand the particular historical experiences that are relevant to their circumstances, how that history has impacted the individual and the collective and can allow for more transformative processes and strategies, which can then lead to shifts in culture and community priority where issues like sexual violence are concerned
- Focusing on past legacies of harm and oppression can frame action in the present that holds harm-doers accountable
- It can also hold communities and social systems accountable and allow human rights processes and demands

BWB is working on two more factors – environmental and a spiritual line that goes through all spheres.

Canadian Context

When looking at sexual violence prevention in Canada specifically these two extra layers provided by BWB allow us to take a closer look at colonization and the fact that Canada as a nation is built upon a fundamental lack of consent of Indigenous Peoples. Sexual violence was used to assimilate the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and is intimately intertwined in their past and ongoing trauma. Traumas such as residential schools, the 60's scoop, occupation of land and stripping of natural resources without consent, forced sterilization of Indigenous women, and the thousands of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit people as victims of sexual violence, physical violence, and death as highlighted in the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls. Although this is part of Canada's history, we must also recognize this continues today as a tool of colonization and war and exists within the structures settlers created.

All the spheres, but especially the spheres of structure and history, also force us to look at the history of slavery in Canada and the discrimination and erasure of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. Our structures, including university structures, continue the discrimination against marginalized and oppressed groups of people and increase, erase, and normalize their experiences of sexual violence.

Active Bystander Intervention

The above six factors influence everyone – people who are harmed by sexual violence, people who cause harm through sexual violence, as well as people who are bystanders to sexual violence.

According to the Active Bystander Intervention Training and Facilitation Guide (2021) developed by BCcampus, a bystander is someone who is a witness to an event or situation, and active bystander intervention training aims to provide all members of a campus community with the skills to recognize and respond to sexual violence. Active bystander intervention training views sexual violence as a societal problem – not an individual problem – in which everyone can play a role in preventing. One of its goals is to change social norms, such as victim blaming and slut shaming, and encourage people to be both proactive and reactive to situations in which sexual violence may occur.

By basing bystander intervention in the socio-ecological model it allows learners to consider how actions and interactions across the spheres can both perpetuate violence and also be places for intervention. The University of Waterloo has a Bystander Intervention Program that was recently developed (2022) for students, staff, and faculty in part to build a stronger sense of belonging and support across campus, as well as demonstrate how sexual violence can be prevented across spheres and encourage safety, caring and health across our campus community. Bystander intervention training allows individuals to see in concrete ways how they can make meaningful change, not only on their campus, but within themselves, across their relationships, in their larger communities, and in society in general within systems and structures, while acknowledging the harm and interventions that took place historically.

Applying the Socio-Ecological Model to the University Campus

The Socio-Ecological Model (diagram 1) at the beginning of the document includes the original CDC Model which includes individual, relationship, community, and society spheres, as well as the expanded version developed by the BWB which also includes spheres for structure and history. However, this model also includes a separate sphere specifically for the Campus Community as it exists separately, although a part of, its surrounding community. This sphere was discussed by both the Sexual Violence Support and Prevention Office at Simon Fraser University and Alteristic also known as Green Dot Bystander Intervention Program.

Alteristic, also known as Green Dot Bystander Intervention Program, adapted the CDC social-ecological model to college campuses from the perspective of “one person, one choice, different levels of impact.” It is explained as follows:

“Individual actions carry influence and create change across all levels of the socio-ecological model. Regardless of the level, ultimately change is created when an individual takes a specific action. The scope of the influence – from individual to societal – is determined by the access and sphere of influence of the individual. Mateo, the freshmen college student makes the single choice to write a paper on violence prevention, increasing his knowledge and making an impact at the individual level. Paul, a team captain, makes the single choice to have a conversation with his teammates about the importance of getting involved in prevention efforts, making an impact at the relational level. Chair of the Faculty Senate proposes that all faculty include a statement of safety and prevention on their syllabi, impacting the university level. Juanita, president of the alumni association, makes the single choice to organize a training for students, parents, and alums impacting at the community level. One person, one choice, different levels of impact.” (*It's Your Business! HBCU Bystander Intervention Curriculum, 2018*)

Similarly, Simon Fraser University in British Columbia created the below diagram which visually describes how the socio-ecological model works to prevent sexual violence and incorporates examples of active bystander intervention. This diagram is found in the BCcampus Training and Facilitation Guide, 2021.

Diagram 3

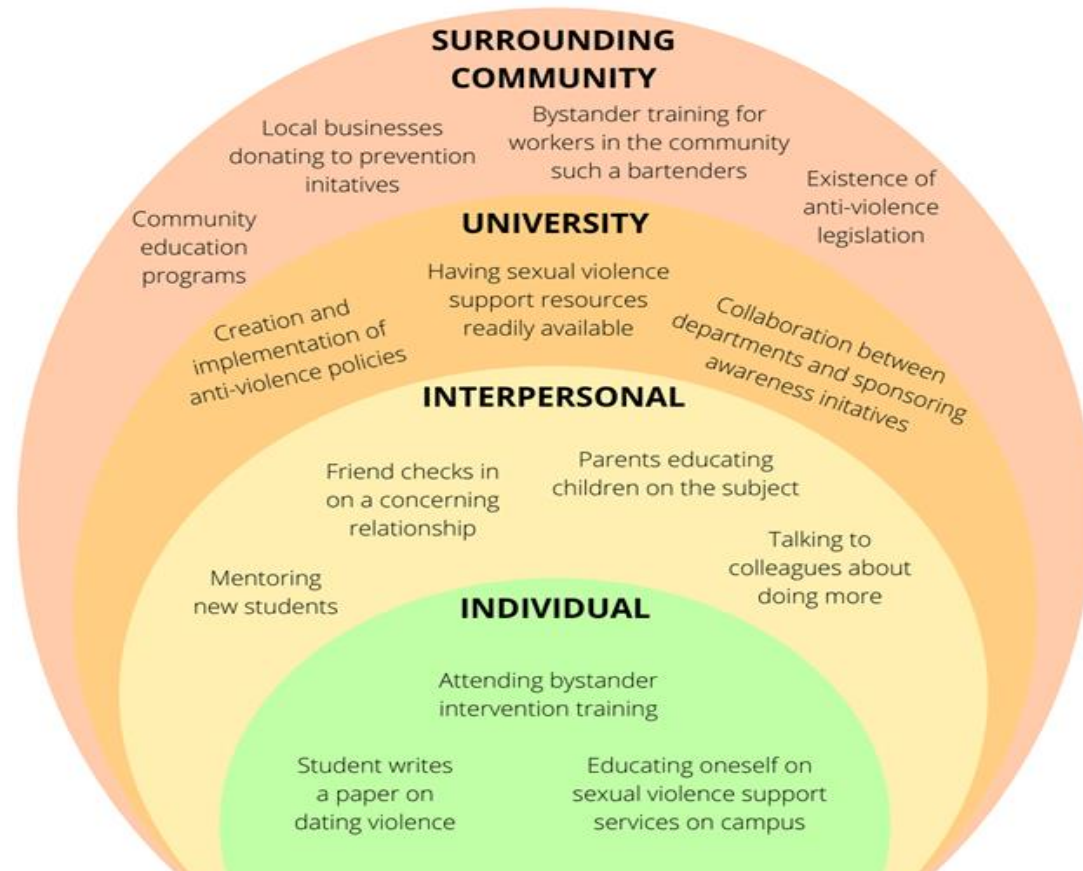


Image Credit: Social-Ecological model and Active bystander intervention © SFU SVSPO

According to It's Your Business! HBCU Bystander Intervention Curriculum (2018) using the Socio-Ecological Model we can see how sexual violence prevention addresses the multifaceted interaction between individuals, relationships, communities, and societies while influencing those who have experienced harm, those who have caused harm, and those who are bystanders.

1. **On the individual level** – certain factors will determine whether a bystander is active or passive, depending on their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy
Examples: attend bystander intervention training, student writes a paper about sexual violence, educating oneself on campus sexual violence support services, parent does research on the effects of sexual violence on campuses, new faculty and staff learn about sexual violence resources for students, residence assistant takes a responding to disclosures training

2. **On the relationship level** – a bystander may be more likely to intervene if they have a supportive social circle
Examples: team captain suggests to teammates they take bystander intervention training, faculty member talks to colleagues about organizing a responding to disclosures training, friend checks in about a concerning relationship, volunteer on the sexual violence crisis line, post prevention suggestions on social media, parent talks to child about supporting and looking out for others

3. **On the campus community level** – bystanders may be more likely to intervene if the campus supports sexual violence prevention through resources, messaging, and education, and encourages bystander intervention training programs for students, staff, and faculty
Examples: funding made available for bystander intervention training development and facilitation across campus, facilitation of train-the-trainer responding to disclosures of sexual violence workshops, sexual violence support services readily available, updating of university sexual violence policy with input from many stakeholders including students, collaboration between departments on sexual violence awareness campaigns, alumni association sponsors a sexual violence prevention and awareness event, university President discusses sexual violence prevention as a priority on campus in a speech, athletics trains all players on consent and emphasizes their zero tolerance policy, students organize a rally supporting survivors called “We Believe You”, students organize an evening of healing for survivors and an afternoon of consent education for all students, a professor develops a class about sexual violence open to all students

4. **On the community level** – bystanders may be more likely to intervene if the school, church, workplace, or other social environment encourages intervention
Examples: bystander training for those in the community such as bartenders, local networks run PSAs highlighting bystander intervention tips, university students’ mentor local high school students and educate them about bystander intervention and consent, local non-profit organizations host community education programs, student clubs on campus host fundraiser for local sexual assault support organization, local businesses donate to sexual violence prevention efforts, local organization begins a 24 hour support line

5. **On the society level** – bystander intervention can begin to change social norms and expectations about what is considered acceptable behaviour in society
Examples: public health campaigns promoting consent and community responsibility, government resource allocation to sexual assault support centers, clinical guidelines for survivors accessing medical care, government investment of time, money, and resources to sexual violence prevention, grade and high school curriculums add information about consent for all grade levels, grade and high school

curriculums add age appropriate information about sexual violence and human trafficking, teacher college curriculums add information about sexual health and sexual violence

- 6. On the structure level** – bystanders may be more likely to intervene if structural factors are addressed within the context of bystander intervention

Examples: engaging in advocacy work to end gender-based violence, updating, changing, or creating policies about sexual violence, updating existing laws that harm sex workers and survivors of sexual violence

- 7. On the history level** – bystanders may be more likely to intervene if they understand the particular history that is relevant to their communities and can develop a new sense of regard for themselves and others based on that history of violence

Examples: an accurate history is taught in grade schools, high schools, colleges and universities – it acknowledges and addresses the history of sexual violence and harm and discusses the implications of that violence and harm today on groups such as Indigenous folks, Black folks, people of colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and sex workers, bystander intervention programs address this history and discuss interventions such as calling the police and why for some people a harmful history with law enforcement and the court system may make this intervention more harmful than helpful

References

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