

## Educating Young People to Shift Culture on Sexual Violence

February 2019 | Lee Hasselbacher, Ci3 Senior Policy Researcher

While there has been increased focus on the incidence of sexual harassment and assault on college campuses and in the workplace, less attention is paid to the experiences of adolescents. During the 2010-2011 school year, one study found that 48% of middle and high students experienced sexual harassment at least once.<sup>1</sup> Among teens aged 15-18 who have dated, 20.5% of girls and 18.2% of boys reported experiencing sexual abuse in a relationship.<sup>2</sup> A 2017 national high school survey conducted by the CDC found that that 9.7% of students had been forced to do “sexual things” (e.g., kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sex) in the past year.<sup>3</sup> In another study, 52.5% of female high school students and 26.3% of male students reported experiencing some form of sexual assault. In that same study, 40% of acquaintance sexual assault occurred on school grounds.<sup>4</sup>

The effects of sexual harassment and assault can have lasting influence. Increased alcohol and substance use, depression, suicidal ideation, and risk of future victimization have been associated with having experienced some form of sexual violence among adolescents.<sup>5,6,7,8,9,10,11</sup> Condom and contraceptive use at the last sexual encounter is also lower among adolescent females who report either dating violence or forced sex.<sup>10</sup>

These troubling statistics call for a shift in the culture around sexual violence, with education starting at an early age before young people begin to navigate relationships. Ci3’s mission is to create a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. Ci3 supports efforts to educate young people about consent, healthy relationships, and how to prevent sexual violence in their community.



Ci3 at the University of Chicago created [Bystander](#), a serious game and health curriculum for sexual violence prevention among high school students. *Bystander* aims to shift knowledge, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intention around bystander behaviors in sexual violence prevention. *Bystander* is divided into sections that cover sexual harassment, supporting assault survivors, consent and laws around sexual violence, and bystander behaviors, all delivered in classroom sessions by trained facilitators.

According to pilot research, youth who played *Bystander* were significantly more likely to support a survivor and engage in sexual assault prevention.<sup>12</sup> Of the 46 students who completed the game, 97.6% believed the program to be “valuable”; 83.3% thought it taught new information, and 60% found it personally relevant. Dr. Melissa Gilliam, an adolescent obstetrician-gynecologist at the University of Chicago and founder of Ci3, observed, “The feedback from students and their reactions to the game confirmed for us that young people want education on this issue. As adolescents, they are actively learning what healthy relationships and communication can look like and they need our support.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hill C, Kearl H. Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School. American Association of University Women, Washington DC, 2011. Available at: <https://www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line/>.  
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<sup>3</sup> Kann L, McManus T, Harris WA, et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2017. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2018;67(No. SS-#): <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2017/ss6708.pdf>.  
<sup>4</sup> Young AM, Grey M, Boyd CJ. Adolescents’ experiences of sexual assault by peers: Prevalence and nature of victimization occurring within and outside of school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 2009;38, 1072-1083.  
<sup>5</sup> Olshen E, McVeigh KH, Wunsch-Hitzig RA, Rickert VI. Dating violence, sexual assault, and suicide attempts among urban teenagers. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*. 2007;161, 539-545.  
<sup>6</sup> Stappenbeck CA, Fromme K. Alcohol use and perceived social and emotional consequences among perpetrators of general and sexual aggression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 2010;25, 699-715.  
<sup>7</sup> Banyard VL, Cross C. Consequences of teen dating violence understanding intervening variables in ecological context. *Violence against Women*. 2008;14, 998-1013.  
<sup>8</sup> Exner-Cortens D, Eckenrode J, Rothman E. Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. *Pediatrics*. 2013;131, 71-78.  
<sup>9</sup> Buzi RS, Tortolero SR, Roberts RE, et al. Gender differences in the consequences of a coercive sexual experience among adolescents attending alternative schools. *Journal of Scholary Health*. 2003;73, 191-196.  
<sup>10</sup> Hanson MJ. Health behavior in adolescent women reporting and not reporting intimate partner violence. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, & Neonatal Nursing*. 2010;39, 263-276.  
<sup>11</sup> Foshee VA, Reyes HLM, Gottfredson NC, et al. A longitudinal examination of psychological, behavioral, academic, and relationship consequences of dating abuse victimization among a primarily rural sample of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2013;53, 723-729.  
<sup>12</sup> Rowley J, Hill BJ, Berman R, et al. Exploring the feasibility and acceptability of a high-school-based digital sexual assault prevention program: *Bystander*. *Contraception*. 2017;96:4, 298.