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BYSTANDER INTERVENTION AT STFX: INSIGHTS FROM THE WAVES OF CHANGE PROGRAM

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Executive Summary

During the 2024-2025 academic year, data were collected from 269 StFX students to examine their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to bystander intervention for campus sexual violence. Data were collected during the first six weeks of the Fall semester (Wave 1), with follow-ups during the second six weeks of the Fall semester (Wave 2) and once during the Winter semester (Wave 3). This research also served as a preliminary evaluation of the Waves of Change bystander intervention program. Below we summarize the results of the surveys:

Participation in Healthy Relationships Programming

- Over half (58%) of the sample reported that they had received some form of healthy relationships and/or sexual violence prevention programming *before* joining StFX.
- About half of participants (49%) reported taking part in Waves of Change during their time at StFX, while 36% said they had never participated and 15% could not recall. This pattern likely reflects the study's inclusion of all current StFX students, as upper-year students would not have received Waves of Change in its current form, which is delivered during orientation week.
- Indeed, of those who did participate in *Waves of Change*, most received it during the most recent orientation week (Fall 2024 semester).

Student Opinions about Waves of Change and Sexual Violence Prevention

- Most students agreed or strongly agreed that the content covered within *Waves of Change* was important to them (84%) and relevant to their life as a student at StFX (86%).
- Almost all participants (>90%) agreed or strongly agreed that students would benefit from more training about sexual violence and bystander intervention.
- Approximately three-quarters (>75%) of the sample agreed that the group delivery of the intervention facilitated their learning, with most other students feeling neutral about the format.
- Students were asked about what they think StFX and the community should do to help address and reduce sexual violence. Several themes emerged, including:
    - More frequent training for students in all years
    - Increased severity of punishment for perpetrators
    - Increased nighttime security on campus
    - Improved visibility of resources available to students

Knowledge of Sexual Violence and Bystander Intervention

- Participants who completed the *Waves of Change* program reported knowing more about sexual violence and how to intervene as a bystander compared to what they knew before the program. This increase in knowledge was also maintained over the academic year.

- Participants who completed *Waves of Change* also had significantly higher knowledge scores than those who did not complete the program.

Attitudes Related to Bystander Intervention

- Overall, participants viewed themselves as having a high level of self-efficacy to intervene against sexual violence. In other words, most participants felt that taking action was something that they *could* do successfully.
- Participants who completed *Waves of Change* reported a higher level of self-efficacy to ask a stranger at a party if they need help, relative to those who did not take the program.
- In terms of perceived risks and benefits associated with bystander intervention, most participants viewed it as both a highly risky and highly rewarding activity.

Prevalence of Witnessing Sexual Violence

- Campus sexual violence was highly prevalent, with most participants (>88% across all waves) witnessing at least one form of sexual violence during the study.
- The most common forms of sexual violence participants witnessed included sexual jokes (83%), unwanted sexual attention (69%), inappropriate sexual comments (59%), and sexual activity without consent (56%).
- Participants who completed *Waves of Change* were slightly more likely to have witnessed sexual violence at least once (95%) relative to those who did not participate in the program (89%), possibly due to a heightened awareness of the behaviours that constitute sexual violence.

Bystander Intervention Behaviors

- Of the participants who witnessed sexual violence at least once, most participants (94%) reported that they engaged in at least one form of bystander intervention.
- Bystander intervention behaviours were highly variable and depended on the type of sexual violence witnessed. There was a general trend towards more direct forms of intervention (e.g., asking the perpetrator to stop) for less severe forms of violence (e.g., sexual jokes). For more severe forms of violence (e.g., non-consensual sexual activity), bystander intervention tended to involve more emotion-focused coping and supporting survivors in accessing resources.
- Participants who completed *Waves of Change* engaged in more bystander intervention relative to non-completers when unwanted sexual attention and unwanted physical contact was witnessed.

Overall implications

- These results provide promising, preliminary support for the effectiveness of Waves of Change in improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to bystander intervention.
- More research is needed to see whether these results replicate with a more diverse sample (e.g., more men) and a true pre-post design, which would provide higher quality evidence of the program's effectiveness.

Participant Demographics

A total of 269 participants completed at least one wave of the survey. Specifically, Wave 1 had 249 participants (93% completion), Wave 2 had 165 participants (61% completion), and Wave 3 had 94 participants (35% completion). Given the high level of attrition over the study period, this report largely presents data from Wave 1.

Sample demographics were collected in Wave 1. The average age of participants was 19.2 years, with a range from 18 to 31 years of age. Participants were mostly assigned female at birth (90.4%). Participants primarily identified as women (88%), with 10% identifying as men, and 2% identifying as gender non-binary. In terms of sexual orientation, respondents were also majority heterosexual (65%), with other identities including 15% bisexual, 5% questioning, 3% lesbian, 3% pansexual, 2% asexual or aromantic, 1% gay, 1% queer, 1% sexually fluid, and 3% self-described as another sexual orientation.

The sample described their ethnicity as follows:

Ethnicity	Percentage
White	91.0%
Mixed ethnicity	5.1%
Indigenous peoples of Canada	3.0%
Black	2.7%
Chinese	2.4%
Latin, Central, or South American	2.4%
Self-reported “other”	2.0%
South Asian	2.0%

Participants were majority in their first year of study (54.5%), with 14.5% being in their second year, 12.9% in third year, 16.9% in their fourth year, and 1.2% in their fifth year or greater. A small percentage of participants were student athletes (11.0%).

Participants described their living situation as follows:

Living situation	Percentage
Residence	63.5%
In an apartment or house with roommates	26.7%
In an apartment or house with a partner/spouse	3.5%
With parents	3.1%
In an apartment or house alone	2.4%

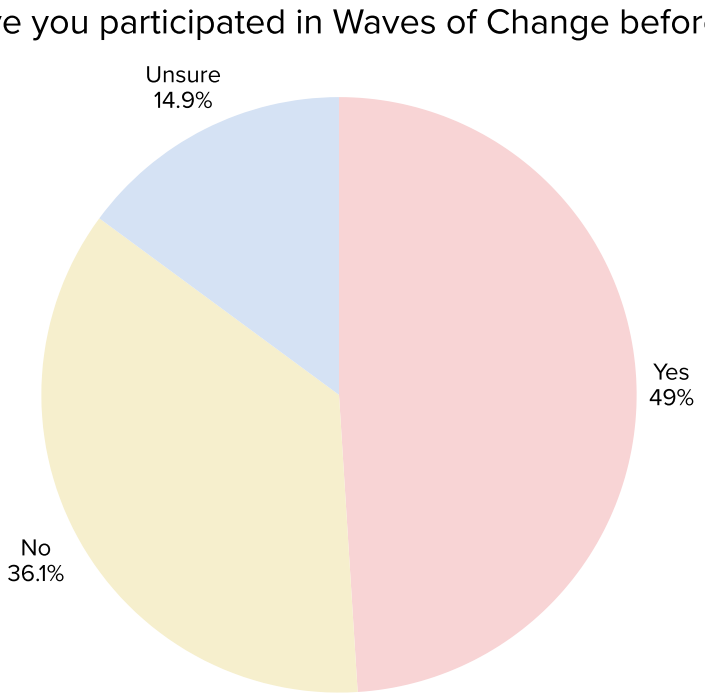
Key Findings

Previous Healthy Relationships Training

In Wave 1, participants were asked *"Have you ever received training on healthy relationships or dating violence before coming to StFX?"* Over half of the sample (58.4%) reported yes to previous training, with most of this coming from high school (54.1%).

Waves of Change Participation

In Wave 1, approximately half (49.0%) of study participants self-reported that they received Waves of Change training. Of the others, 36.1% reported that they had not received it, and 14.9% reported that they were unsure. Note that this study was open to all current StFX students, so it is possible that upper-year students (especially those who started their university experience during the COVID-19 pandemic) did not participate in Waves of Change or do not remember this programming.

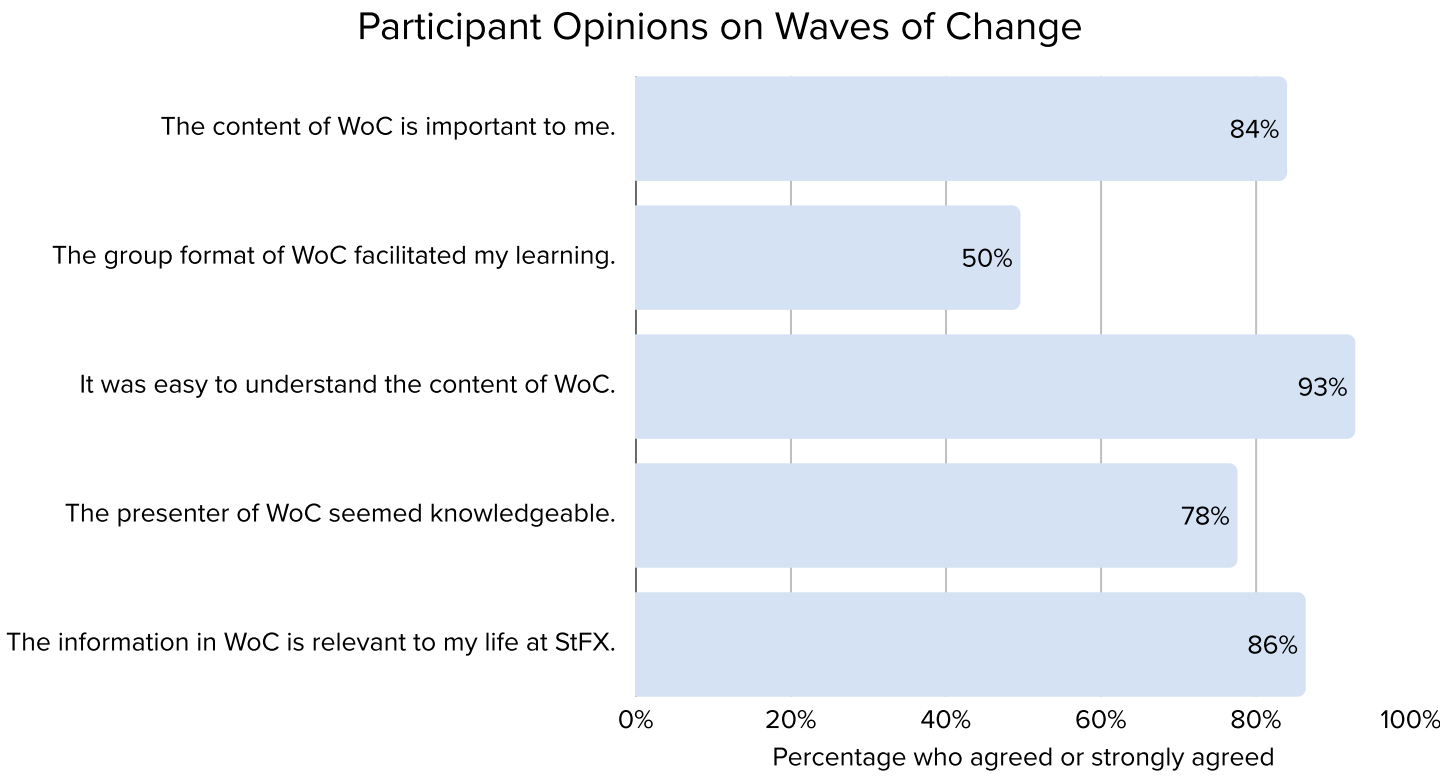


Of the study participants who reported having received Waves of Change, more than half (53.6%) received it in the Fall 2024 semester, with a further 16.0% each having received it last year (2023-2024 academic year) or two years ago (2022-2023 academic year).

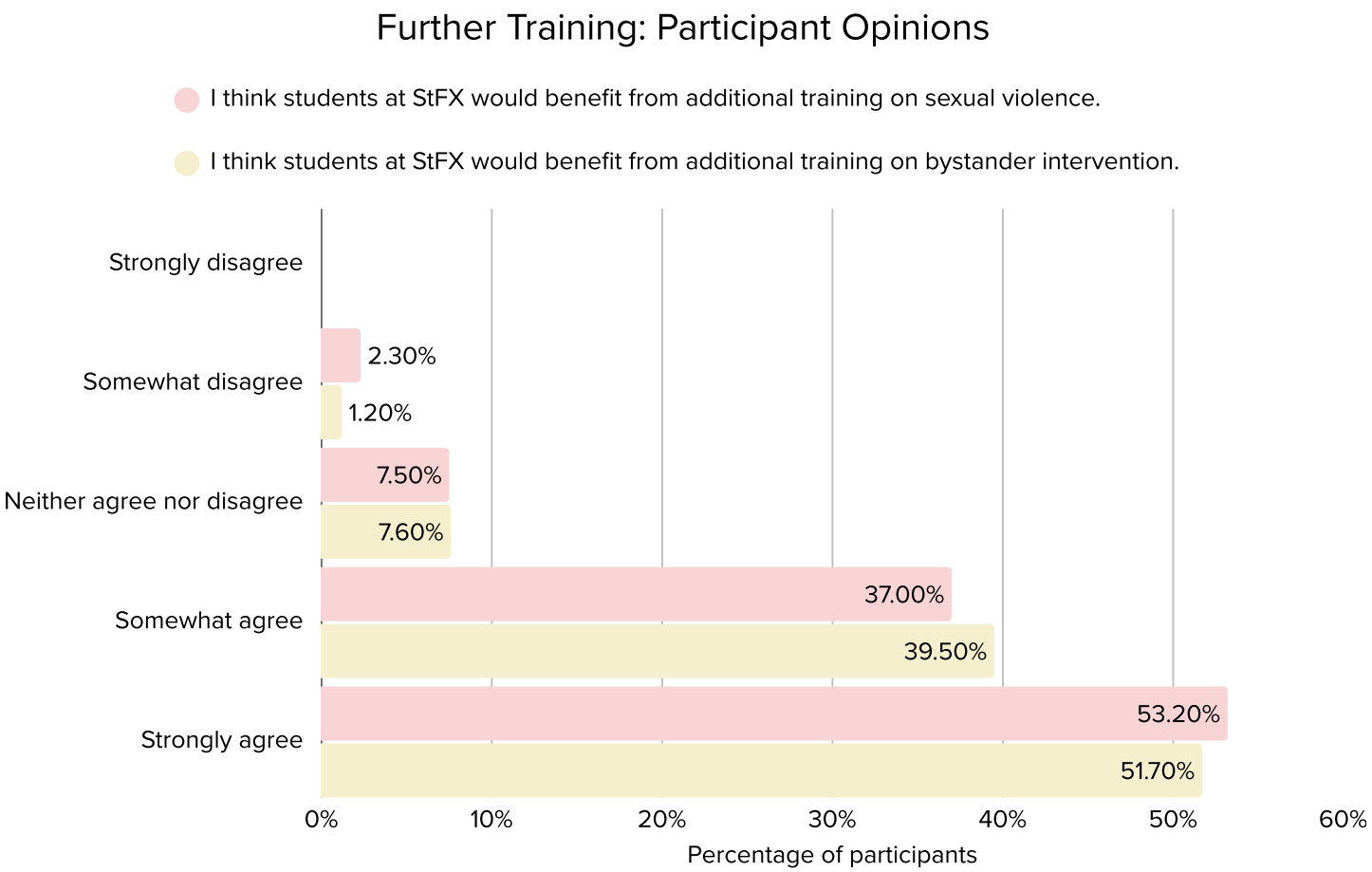
Participant Opinions on Waves of Change

Participants who reported that they received Waves of Change were asked their opinions about the program, content, and relevancy to their lives. As shown below, most participants viewed the program very positively. One slight exception was regarding the group delivery of the program. While most

participants agreed that the group delivery facilitated their learning (49.6% agreed or strongly agreed, another 25.6% slightly agreed), a smaller proportion felt neutral (16%) or disagreed (8.8%) with the helpfulness of group delivery.



Furthermore, participants expressed interest in further training relating to the content of Waves of Change. As shown below, most participants strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that students would benefit from additional training on bystander intervention and sexual violence.



In wave 2 of the survey, participants were asked an open-ended question about what they think StFX and the community can do to help address, reduce, and end sexual violence. Several key themes emerged:

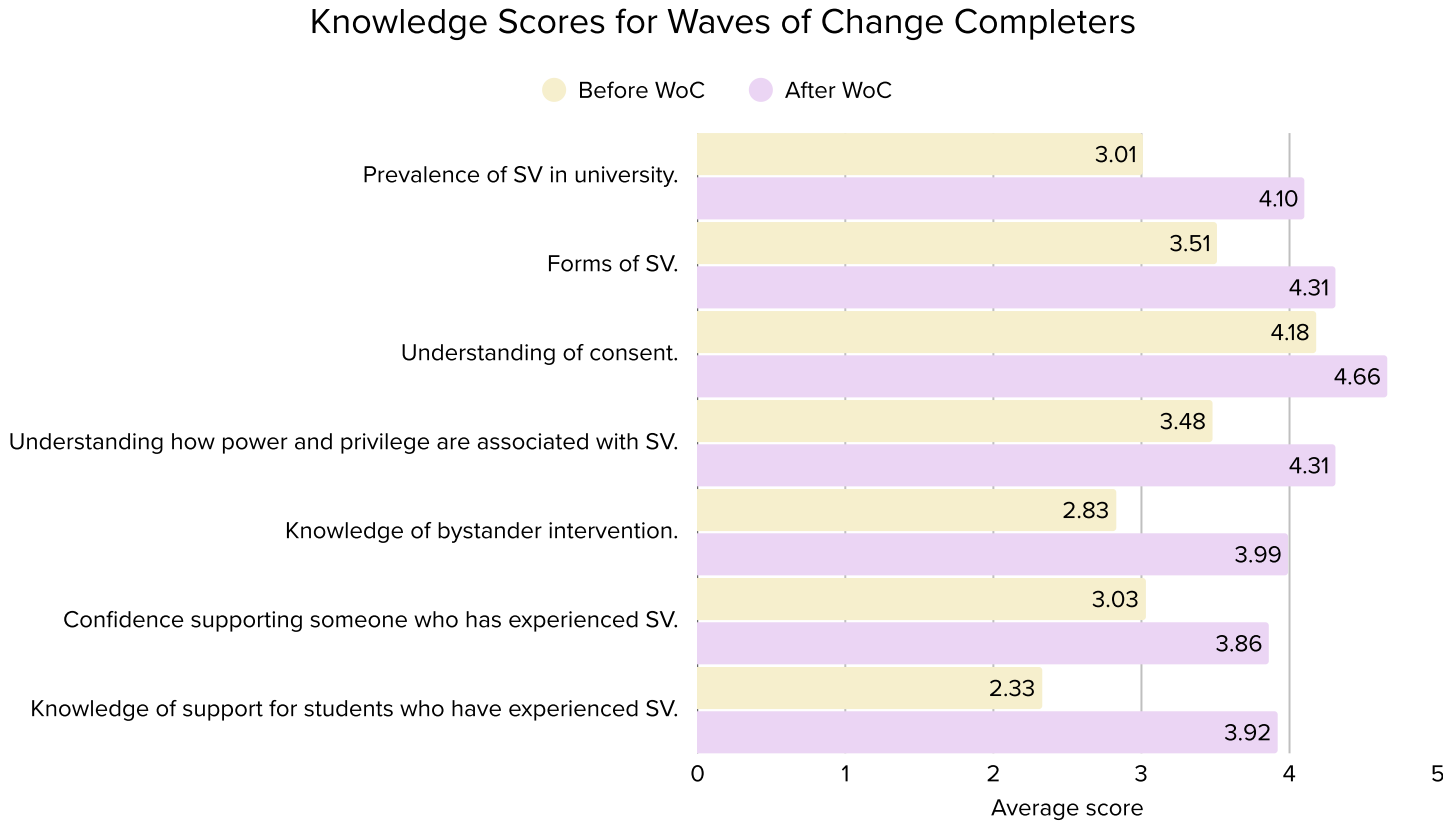
Theme	Examples
Need to increase the severity of punishments for perpetrators.	Many comments on athletes receiving little to no consequences for their involvement with sexual violence.
	Removing offenders from campus, encouraging a zero-tolerance rule.
Increased security on campus at nighttime	Better lighting and more security presence.
	Security buttons around campus.
More frequent training for students in all years.	More mandatory training and programs for students in upper years (not just incoming students).
	Refresher courses and more frequent reminders of what was learned in Waves of Change.
Improved visibility of resources available to students.	Clearer and more accessible reporting channels.
	More diverse options for reporting, especially for first years in residence.

Knowledge About Sexual Violence and Bystander Intervention

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skill about several topics covered in Waves of Change using a 1 (Very low knowledge/skill) to 5 (Very high knowledge/skill) scale. For participants who completed Waves of Change, we used a retrospective pre-post design for this question, meaning that participants who indicated they had received Waves of Change were asked to retrospectively rate their knowledge from before the training and their current knowledge, allowing us to better assess if the program improves students' knowledge on these topics. This question design allows us to overcome the response shift bias, which occurs when individuals change how they interpret or evaluate a concept over time (e.g., in a traditional pre-post design, some participants overestimate how much they actually know about sexual violence, making it hard to detect post-intervention changes). A retrospective question allows us to capture change in knowledge or an attitude the way the participant perceives the change.

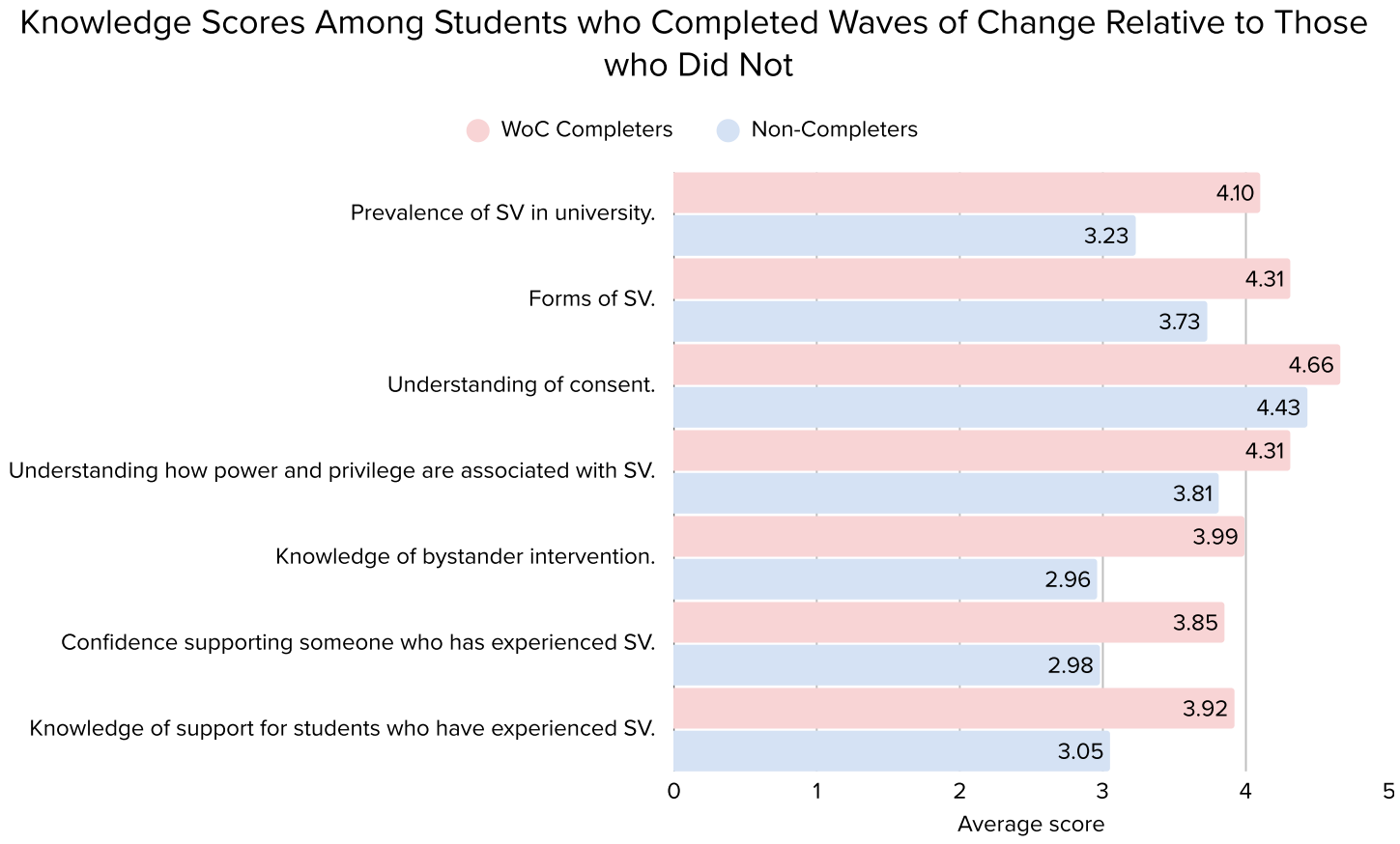
As shown below, participants who completed Waves of Change had significantly[1] higher knowledge scores after the program relative to their retrospective pre-intervention scores.

[1] Paired samples t-tests indicated that these comparisons were all statistically significant, *ps* < .001.



Note: SV = Sexual Violence.

We also compared knowledge scores between participants who reported they received *Waves of Change* to those who reported they did not. As shown below, *Waves of Change* completers knowledge scores were significantly[2] higher than non-completers.



Note: SV = Sexual Violence.

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[2] Paired samples t-tests indicated that these comparisons were all statistically significant, *p*s < .01.

Additionally, the knowledge scores for Waves of Change completers in the second and third waves stayed consistently higher than their retrospective pre-intervention scores.

- Average knowledge score pre-intervention: 3.19
- Average knowledge score post-intervention: 4.16
- Average knowledge score at wave two (6 weeks later): 3.79
- Average knowledge score at wave three (winter semester): 3.68

This suggests that while there was a slight dip in knowledge over time, most knowledge and skills participants gained from Waves of Change were maintained over time.

Bystander Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's own skills and abilities to succeed in a certain task, in this case intervening against sexual violence. Participants were asked to rate their confidence intervening against 14 types of sexual violence using a 0-100 scale. As shown below, participants rated their self-efficacy quite highly on average, such that most participants believed they could successfully intervene across the various situations. There was a trend such that participants viewed themselves as more confident to intervene in situations where their friend needed help, relative to situations with strangers, which is a common theme in bystander intervention work. Participants were least confident in their ability to speak up in class if a professor was providing misinformation about sexual assault, likely reflective of power imbalances within the classroom context.

There was only one significant[3] difference between participants who completed Waves of Change and those who did not – completers rater their self-efficacy to ask a stranger at a party if they needed help as higher (82%) relative to non-completers (75%).

Perceived Risks and Benefits of Bystander Intervention

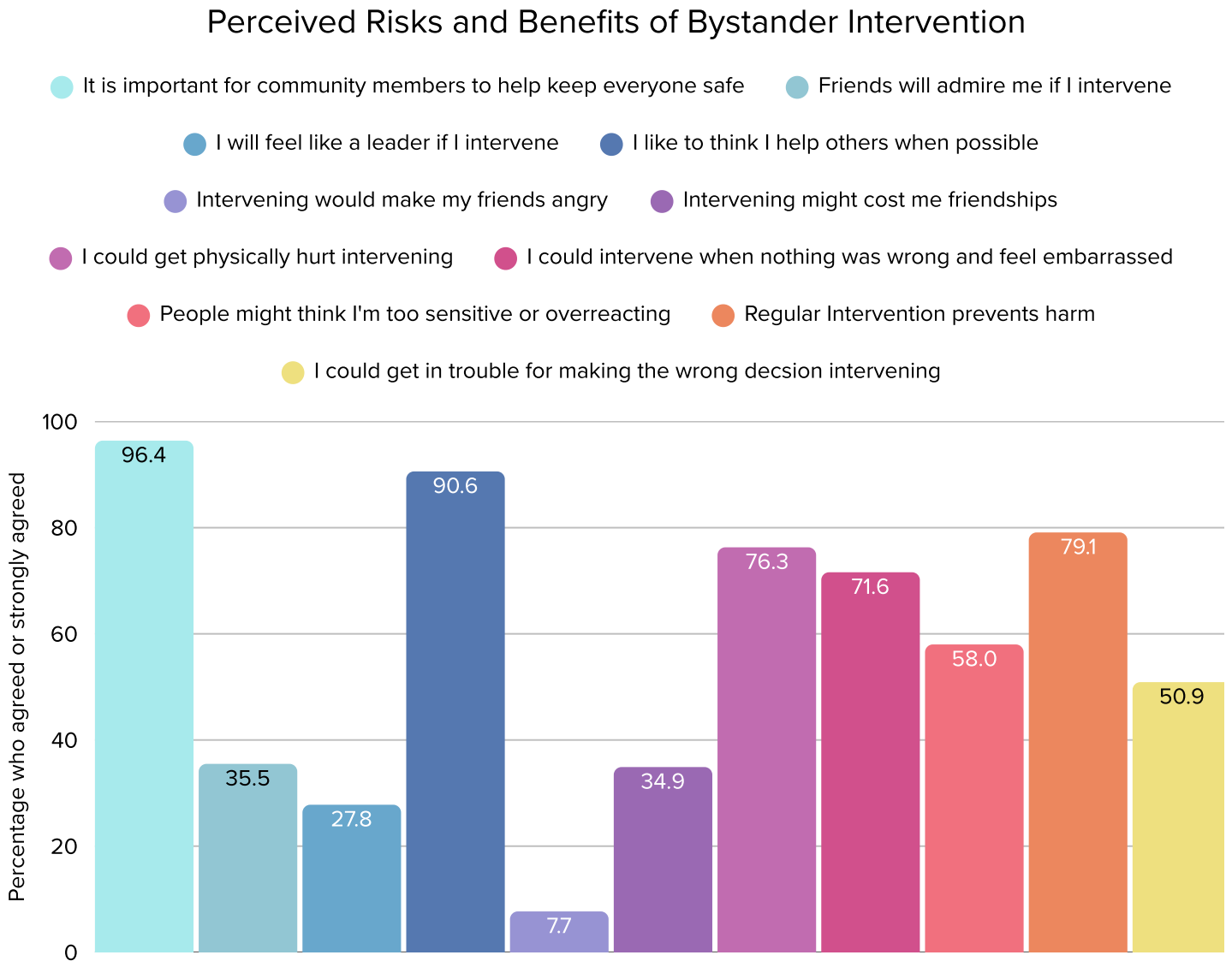
Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements related to the potential risks and benefits bystander intervention. As shown below, participants viewed bystander intervention as *both* a highly risky and highly beneficial activity. There were no significant differences found when looking at rates of agreement for participants who completed versus did not complete *Waves of Change* training.

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[3] $t(187) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. All other comparisons $p > .05$.

Average Participant Self-Efficacy Score

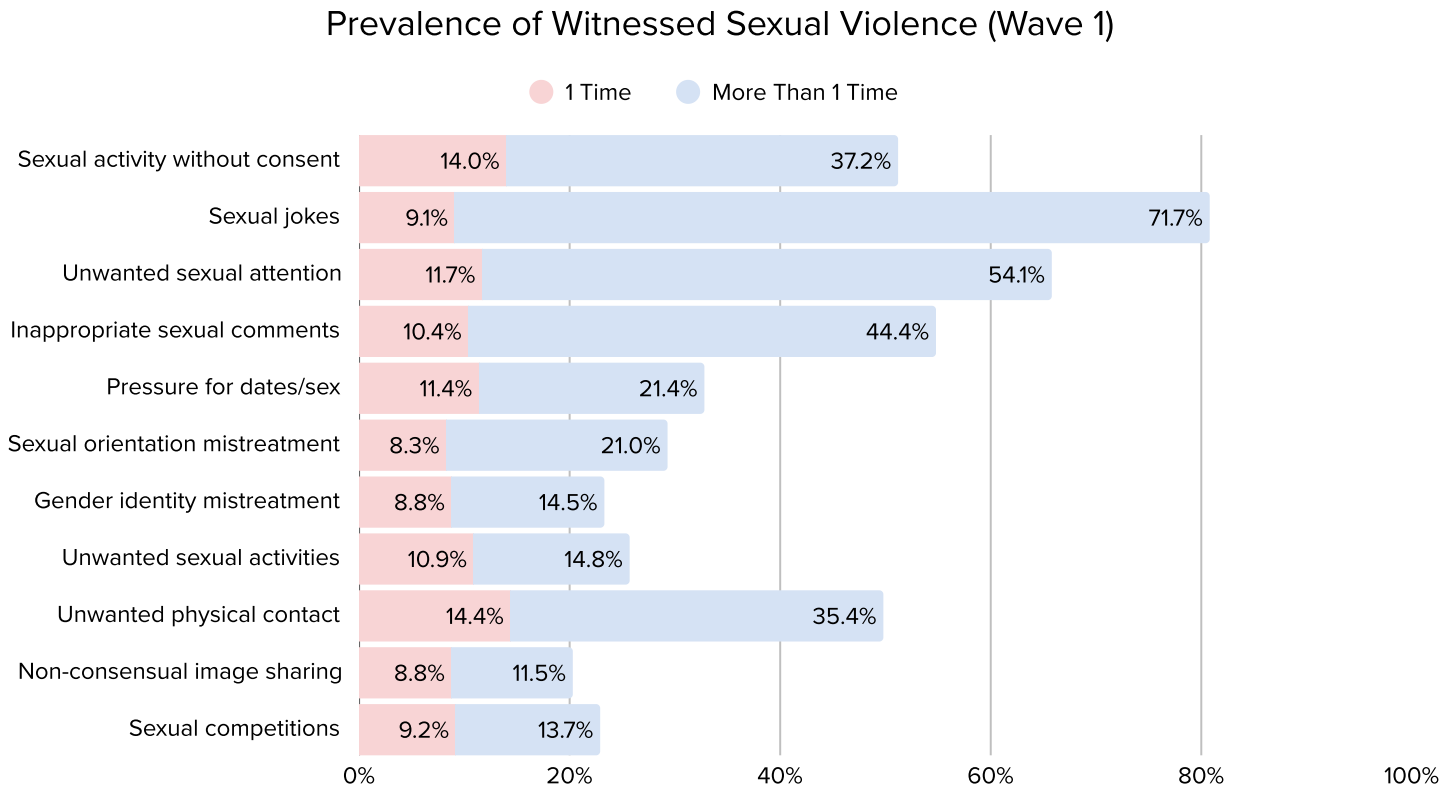
Ask a friend if they need to be walked home from a party **95% confident**
Criticize a friend who tells me that they had sex with someone who was passed out or who didn't give consent **91% confident**
Get help and resources for a friend who tells me they have been raped **90% confident**
Express my discomfort if someone says that rape victims are to blame for being raped **90% confident**
Talk to a friend who I suspect is in an abusive relationship **80% confident**
Do something if I see a woman surrounded by a group of men at a party who looks very uncomfortable **79% confident**
Call for help (i.e. call 911) if I hear someone in my dorm yelling "help." **79% confident**
Able to ask a stranger who looks very upset at a party if they are ok or need help **79% confident**
Do something to help a very drunk person who is being brought upstairs to a bedroom by a group of people at a party **78% confident**
Tell an RA or other campus authority about information I have that might help in a sexual assault case even if pressured by my peers to stay silent **76% confident**
Get help if I hear of an abusive relationship in my dorm or apartment **70% confident**
Ask a stranger if they need to be walked home from a party **70% confident**
Express my discomfort if someone makes a joke about a woman's body **70% confident**
Speak up in class if a professor is providing misinformation about sexual assault **44% confident**



Sexual Violence Witnessed

In all three waves, participants reported the frequency with which they witnessed 11 types of sexual violence over the past several weeks while on StFX campus or in a university-related setting. Overall, 91.3% of the sample witnessed at least one type of sexual violence in wave 1, 94.0% in wave 2, and 88.2 % in wave 3. Participants who completed *Waves of Change* were more likely to have witnessed sexual violence at least once (94.6%) relative to those who did not participate in the program (89.0%), possibly due to a heightened awareness of the behaviours that constitute sexual violence.

The graph below shows the percentage of respondents who witnessed each form of sexual violence once (pink) or more than once (blue) in the first several weeks of the 2024 academic year (wave 1). Sexual jokes (83%), unwanted sexual attention (69%), and inappropriate sexual comments (59%) were the most common forms of sexual violence that participants witnessed. Over half of the sample (56%) reported that they have seen or heard about sexual activity without consent (e.g., kissing, sexual touching, oral or anal sexual acts, intercourse) at least once since the start of the 2024 academic year.



Bystander Intervention

For each type of sexual violence witnessed, participants were also asked to report if and how they intervened. Of the participants who witnessed sexual violence at least once, 94% engaged in at least one bystander intervention behavior. Across all forms of sexual violence witnessed, telling a friend, roommate, or romantic partner was the most common forms of bystander intervention.

Below, we showcase respondents' intervention behavior to witnessing 2 forms of sexual violence: sexual activity without consent and sexual jokes. These forms of sexual violence were chosen to demonstrate how the type of bystander intervention varies depending on the situation. For example, for more severe forms of violence (e.g., sexual activity without consent) asking the person involved if they needed help, trying to comfort them, and encouraging them to report the situation were most common. For less severe forms of violence (e.g., sexual jokes), other forms of intervention such as trying to change the subject and asking the person to stop were more common.

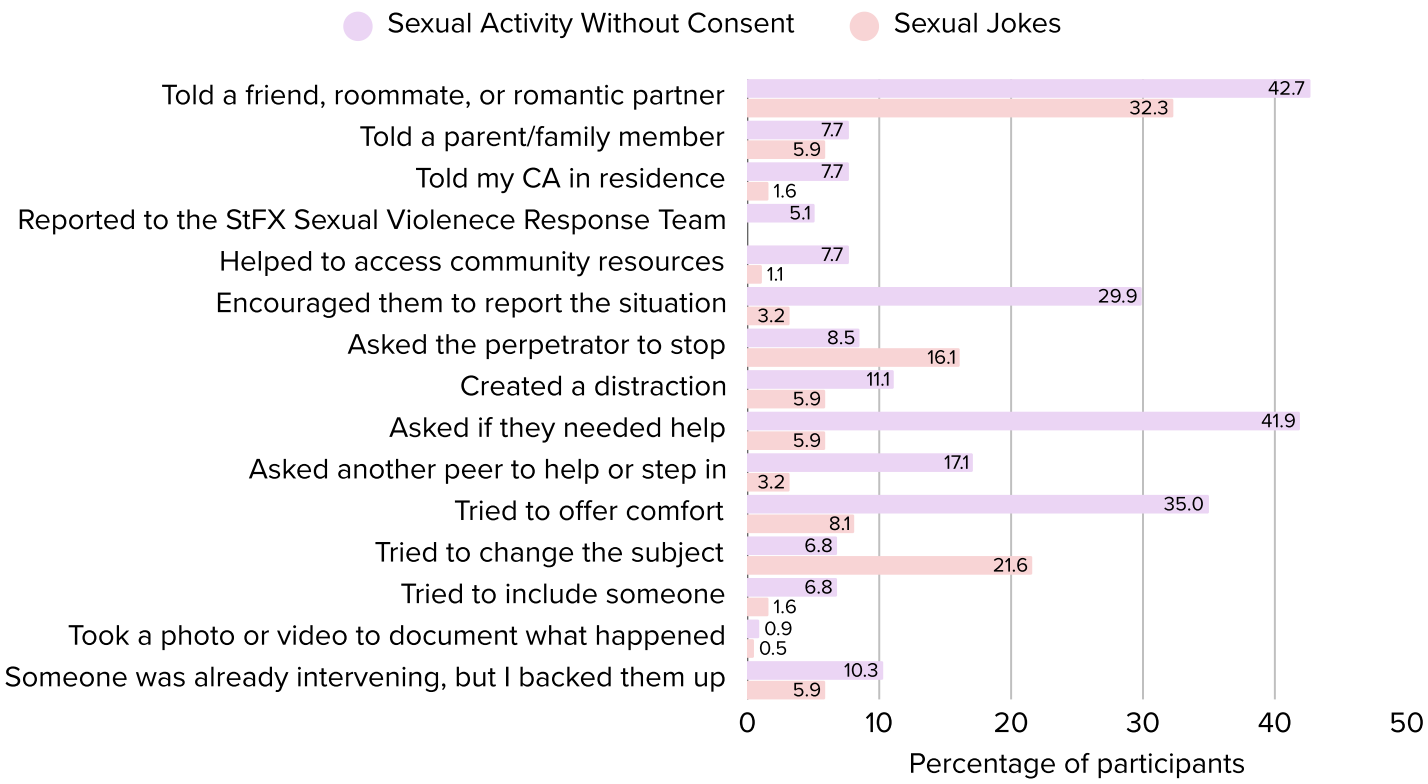
Lastly, we examined whether bystander intervention behaviour varies by program completion. In general, participants who completed *Waves of Change* engaged in significantly more bystander intervention behavior (M = 1.76, SD = 1.37) than participants who did not (M = 1.44, SD = 1.15)[4]. Additionally, when looking at each type of sexual violence, participants who completed *Waves of Change* engaged in significantly more bystander intervention when unwanted sexual attention[5] was witnessed, as well as when unwanted physical contact[6] was witnessed.

[4] t(177) = 1.57, one-sided p = .06.

[5] t (128) = 2.24, p < .05; completers M = 1.94, SD = 1.82; non-completers M = 1.30, SD = 1.26.

[6] t (92) = 2.50, p < .05), completers M = 2.10, SD = 1.89; non-completers M = 1.20, SD = 1.28.

Frequency of Bystander Intervention Behaviours by Type of Sexual Violence Witnessed



Key Messages and Implications

This study aimed to examine StFX students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to bystander intervention for campus sexual violence, and to explore whether these differed based on participation in the Waves of Change program. While this study was open to all current students at StFX, most (90%) participants identified as women. This demographic detail is crucial when interpreting results, as findings might not apply to men or gender non-binary individuals.

Results of this project underscore a persistent concern: **sexual violence remains a prevalent issue within the StFX campus community**. Most participants witnessed sexual violence at least once, and this exposure did not change substantially over the course of the academic year. Encouragingly, **bystander intervention was also highly prevalent**. An overwhelming 94% of participants reported engaging in at least one form of bystander intervention when they have witnessed campus sexual violence. This suggests that our campus community is actively embodying the Xaverian spirit of social justice and community mindedness to stand up against sexual violence.

It is possible that the high rate of bystander intervention is related to the robust implementation of the *Waves of Change* bystander intervention program at StFX, which is currently delivered to all incoming students as part of orientation week, as well as to other targeted campus groups (e.g., athletes, bar staff). Although this study lacked a true control group—limiting our ability to draw definitive conclusions about the program's effectiveness—we were able to compare students who self-reported completing the program with those who did not.

Preliminary findings suggest that students who completed *Waves of Change* showed increases in knowledge and skills related to bystander intervention, both compared to their own pre-program levels and to those who did not participate. These gains were sustained over time, **offering early evidence that *Waves of Change* is likely effective in equipping students with the knowledge needed to intervene**. Having knowledge and skills to intervene are important first steps in effective bystander intervention. These outcomes are consistent with the short-term goals of the *Waves of Change* program (see program logic model in Appendix A).

Beyond knowledge, most prevention programs including *Waves of Change* ultimately hope to change attitudes and behaviors, which are more challenging to influence. One such attitude is bystander self-efficacy, which refers to one's confidence in intervening. Most participants in this study rated their bystander self-efficacy quite high, suggesting there is **a generally positive attitude towards bystander intervention on campus, where students have confidence in their ability to stand up against sexual violence.** There were no differences in self-efficacy between *Waves of Change* completers and non-completers. While it is possible the program does not lead to changes in self-efficacy, it is also possible that our study design was not sensitive to capture these changes (e.g., we do not have pre-post intervention data).

Most importantly, however, are the actual behavioural outcomes – *is Waves of Change associated with more bystander intervention on StFX campus?* Our results suggest this is the case, as **students who**

completed *Waves of Change* engaged in more bystander intervention than those who did not. While more research is needed to track changes over time, these findings offer promising early signs that the program may be contributing to a more proactive and supportive campus environment.

Implications

- **Promising impact of *Waves of Change*:** The results of this study highlight the encouraging outcomes associated with *Waves of Change*. However, **additional program evaluation research** is needed to continue examining the effectiveness of *Waves of Change* using a true pre-post test design. A more robust research design will allow us to make stronger claims about causality (e.g., does *Waves of Change* *cause* an increase in bystander intervention?) that is not possible with the current data.

- **Positive student reception:** Nearly all participants expressed satisfaction with the current form of *Waves of Change*, describing it as **relevant, informative, and engaging**. The use of peer facilitators, small groups, and interactive role-playing exercises are likely central to this success. To maintain and enhance program fidelity, future iterations could benefit from a **fidelity checklist** to ensure consistent delivery across sessions. Additionally, exploring what makes a peer facilitator particularly effective (e.g., such as communication style, relatability, training) could further strengthen the program's impact.

- **Visibility and recall challenges:** A notable proportion of students, especially those in upper years, were unsure whether they had participated in *Waves of Change*. This likely reflects changes in program delivery over time, but it also points to a broader issue of **program visibility and branding**. Increasing campus-wide awareness through posters, tabling events (e.g., with Visible@X), and **collaborations with community organizations like the Antigonish Women's Centre** could help reinforce the program's presence and clarify its role in campus safety efforts.

- **Desire for continued learning:** Open-ended responses revealed a strong student interest in **ongoing training opportunities**, particularly among upper-year students. While resource constraints may limit the feasibility of additional in-person workshops, **online booster modules or self-paced learning tools** could offer a scalable solution. These could reinforce key concepts, introduce new scenarios, and provide flexible access to learning without overburdening the Sexual Violence Education and Prevention Office.

- **Navigating risk and reward in bystander intervention:** Students perceive bystander intervention as both risky and rewarding, highlighting the emotional and social complexity of intervening in real-world situations. Future outreach efforts could address this by **normalizing a variety of intervention strategies**, from direct confrontation to subtle, emotion-focused approaches. Emphasizing that intervention doesn't always mean stepping into conflict, but can also involve supporting survivors, redirecting attention, or seeking help, may empower more students to act. A useful metaphor might be equipping students with a "toolbelt of bystander intervention strategies," recognizing that different situations call for different tools.

- **Opportunity for broader cultural change:** Finally, these findings highlight how *Waves of Change* is part of a larger cultural shift towards community accountability and proactive engagement, an approach that **aligns directly with recommendation C.17 of Nova Scotia's Mass Casualty Commission Report**. This recommendation calls for the integration of bystander intervention and violence prevention education into institutional and community settings, including post-secondary campuses. At StFX, long-term success will depend on making bystander intervention a core part of campus culture. In doing so, StFX can serve as a model for how post-secondary institutions can respond meaningful to systemic issues such as sexual and gender-based violence and the meet the call for evidence-based, preventive action.

Appendix A: Logic Model

