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Bystander Intervention for Sexual Violence Prevention at StFX: **Findings from the 2025-2026 Waves of Change Evaluation**

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Executive Summary

During the 2025-2026 academic year, students from St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) participated in a three-wave study led by Dr. Laura Lambe and Dr. Elvira Prusaczyk. This study examined students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to bystander intervention for campus sexual violence. The study also served as the research team's second phase of an evaluation of *Waves of Change (WoC)* — a peer-led bystander intervention program in Nova Scotia designed to increase university students' knowledge of sexual violence, strengthen their ability to recognize it, and build the skills needed to intervene safely.

Survey data with students were collected across three time points:

1. Wave 1 (pre-WoC): during the six weeks prior to the start of the 2025 academic year
2. Wave 2 (post-WoC training): during the first six weeks of the Fall semester
3. Wave 3 (post-WoC): during the first six weeks of the Winter semester

In addition to collecting survey data, interviews were conducted with current and former WoC facilitators, and questionnaires were completed by institutional partners across Nova Scotia to better understand program implementation, strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Building on the preliminary findings from the Phase 1 WoC evaluation, which relied primarily on retrospective participant reports, this phase introduced a true pre-post component at Wave 1 to provide stronger evidence of program effectiveness and examine changes in student knowledge, confidence, and intervention behaviours over time. The current evaluation also focused exclusively on incoming students who all received WoC during the 2025 orientation week at StFX.

At a Glance:

- **Waves of Change works**. Students who participated demonstrated increased knowledge of sexual violence, consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention.
- **Confidence to intervene increased**. Participants reported greater confidence in their ability to act when witnessing sexual violence.
- **Most students support the program**. The majority found WoC important, relevant, and believed students would benefit from additional training.
- **Sexual violence remains common**. More than 86% of participants reported witnessing at least one form of sexual violence during the study.
- **Students are taking action**. Over 90% of students who witnessed sexual violence reported engaging in at least one bystander intervention behaviour.
- **Expansion is needed**. Students, facilitators, and institutional partners identified opportunities to strengthen and broaden sexual violence prevention efforts across campuses.

Key Findings

Participation in Healthy Relationships Programming

- Most participants (73.5%) reported receiving healthy relationships or dating violence education prior to attending StFX.
- Approximately two-thirds of participants (66.5%) reported having completed WoC training during their time at StFX, while 29.8% reported they had not.

Student Opinions on WoC and Sexual Violence Prevention

- Students responded positively to the program content, with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing it was important to them, and 78% finding it relevant to their life as a student at StFX.
- Support for the group-based learning format improved substantially compared to the 2024-25 report, with 70% agreeing that it facilitated learning, compared to 50% previously. This difference may reflect the current sample's focus on incoming students.
- Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that students would benefit from more training about sexual violence (83.5%) and bystander intervention (85.3%).
- When asked how StFX and the broader community could better address sexual violence, students highlighted several priorities:
    - Strengthening awareness and depth of understanding sexual violence
    - Expanding and reinforcing training across the academic year
    - Enhancing the delivery and engagement of WoC programming
    - Increasing awareness of survivor supports and reporting options
    - Strengthening accountability and consequences for perpetrators
    - Improving campus safety measures and environmental supports

Knowledge of Sexual Violence and Bystander Intervention

- Participants reported significant increases in knowledge of sexual violence, consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention following completion of WoC.
    - This finding was robust – it was observed across methodologies (e.g., pre-post, retrospective pre-post, WoC completers to non-completers), with gains maintained across the academic year.

Confidence in Bystander Intervention

- Participants reported significantly greater confidence in their ability to intervene as a bystander following participation in WoC.

Prevalence of Witnessing Sexual Violence

- Campus sexual violence remained highly prevalent, with 86% or more of participants across all waves reporting they had witnessed at least one form of sexual violence during the study.

- The most witnessed behaviours included sexual jokes (82.4%), sexual activity without consent (60.4%), unwanted sexual attention (58.1%), and inappropriate sexual comments (52.4%).

Bystander Intervention Behaviour

- Of those who witnessed sexual violence, 91.5% reported engaging in at least one form of bystander intervention.
- Intervention strategies varied by situation. For more severe forms of sexual violence, students most often supported the individual involved, encouraged access to resources, or created a distraction. For less severe behaviours, students most often addressed the behaviour directly or attempted to change the subject.
- Participants reported intervening more frequently following participation in WoC.
    - This pattern appeared across different methodologies (e.g., pre-post, and retrospective pre-post), although the pre-post increase was not statistically significant.

Facilitator Perspectives

- Facilitators described WoC as a meaningful and rewarding program to deliver. The peer-led model, facilitator diversity, and strong co-facilitator relationships were consistently identified as key strengths.
- Areas for growth included additional training in facilitation skills, participant engagement strategies, and the research base underlying program content.

Institutional Perspectives

- All post-secondary institutions administered WoC during the 2025-26 academic year, in various capacities. Some institutions are reaching entire cohorts of students (e.g., 900+ students annually) while others may reach only a single classroom.
- Institutional partners across Nova Scotia described WoC as engaging, adaptable, and well-received. The peer-led delivery model and flexible content were noted as the main strengths, helping make discussions more relevant and relatable for students.
- Challenges to implementation included limited resources, the ongoing need to recruit and support facilitators, and difficulties reaching large and diverse student populations.

Overall Implications

- Current findings suggest that WoC is effective in educating students about sexual violence and equipping them with the skills to intervene.
- More funding and resources are needed to reach broader audiences, expand trainings, and to evaluate which context or institutional-specific factors make the programming more or less effective.

Full Report

Waves of Change (WoC) was developed by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association, with support from Justice Canada and in collaboration with post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia, to address sexualized violence on campus. WoC is a peer-led bystander intervention program designed to increase students' knowledge about sexual violence, strengthen their ability to recognize it, and build the skills needed to intervene safely. Based on research led by Dr. Laura Lambe and Dr. Elvira Prusaczyk, this report discusses the findings of 1) a second longitudinal evaluation of WoC at St. Francis Xavier University (StFX); 2) interview data from StFX WoC student facilitators; and 3) a survey assessing WoC implementation at other post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia. Together, these results build upon an initial program evaluation conducted at StFX in the 2024-2025 academic year (report available online, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada). The current research was funded by the Nova Scotia Universities and the Nova Scotia Community College Sexual Violence Prevention Grant.

Research Design

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to examine the implementation and impact of WoC at StFX and across Nova Scotia. Data were collected using three complementary approaches: a three-wave longitudinal survey of students, interviews with current and former WoC facilitators, and a questionnaire completed by post-secondary institutional partners. Together, these approaches provided insight into student outcomes, facilitator experiences, and institutional implementation of the program.

Three-Wave Longitudinal Student Survey

During the 2025-2026 academic year, incoming students at StFX participated in a three-wave study examining their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to bystander intervention for campus sexual violence.

Survey data with students were collected across three time points:

1. Wave 1 (pre-WoC): during the six weeks prior to the start of the 2025 academic year
2. Wave 2 (post-WoC): during the first six weeks of the Fall semester
3. Wave 3 (follow-up): during the first six weeks of the Winter semester

By collecting survey data before and after WoC (pre-post data), we can have increased confidence that the program is leading to the intended outcomes, while follow-up data allows us to determine if these changes are maintained over time. At StFX, WoC is delivered during orientation week, among the first few days that incoming students arrive on campus. While this is important from a program perspective, it makes it difficult to recruit participants prior to program delivery. Thus, for participants that joined the study at Wave 2, they had “retrospective pre-post" data, where they reflected on their knowledge and attitudes before and after WoC.

Interviews with WoC Facilitators

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former undergraduate peer facilitators of WoC at StFX. Interviews explored facilitators’ experiences delivering the program, including their training and preparation, approaches to facilitation, perceived strengths and challenges, and recommendations for future implementation.

Survey of Institutional Partners Across Nova Scotia

An online questionnaire was distributed to all 11 post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia. The questionnaire examined how WoC was implemented across institutions, including program delivery, evaluation practices, perceived strengths, challenges, and areas where additional support may be needed.

Student Survey Findings

Participant Demographics

A total of 24 students completed Wave 1, 218 completed Wave 2, and 102 completed Wave 3. Demographic information was collected during both Waves 1 and 2. Given that Wave 2 captured the largest sample, demographic information from Wave 2 is reported here. Demographic information was available for a subset of 113[1] participants from Wave 2, and all following demographic data reflect this subset.

Participants were, on average, 18.04 years old, with a range from 16-29. The sample was largely composed of individuals assigned female at birth (88.5%). Most participants identified as women (81.4%), while 12.4% identified as men. A smaller proportion (5.3%) reported another gender identity, including non-binary, genderqueer, and bigender. The predominance of women in the sample should be considered when interpreting the findings, specifically regarding the limited generalizability of results to the broader student population.

Participants reported a range of sexual orientations. While the majority identified as heterosexual (73.5%), a notable proportion identified as bisexual (15.0%) or queer (6.2%). Smaller proportions identified as asexual (2.7%), lesbian (2.7%), and pansexual (2.7%).

The sample described their ethnicity as follows:

Ethnicity	**Percentage**
White	91.2
Mixed Ethnicity	3.5
Indigenous peoples of Canada	2.7
Black	2.7

Note. Due to ethical limitations, groups with very small cell sizes (< 3 participants) are not reported.

The sample was primarily composed of domestic students, with only a small percentage identifying as international students (3.5%). Similarly, a small percentage of students identified as student athletes (8.8%).

Key Findings

The findings presented below are based on responses from the Wave 2 survey (*N* = 218). Findings from the pre-post sample and Wave 3 follow-up data are identified where relevant.

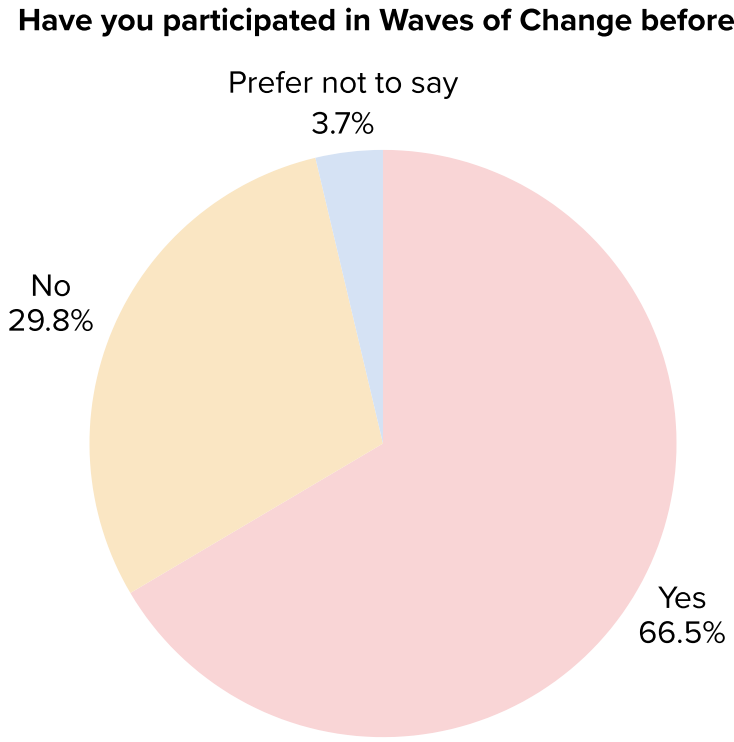
[1] Demographic data were not available for all participants due to a survey routing issue in which some respondents were not presented with demographic questions.

Participation in Healthy Relationships Programming

A substantial proportion of participants reported prior exposure to healthy relationships or dating violence education before arriving at StFX. Specifically, 70.8% reported having received prior training in a high school setting, and 2.7% reported receiving training in other contexts, such as college or workplace settings. In contrast, 16.8% reported no prior training, while 9.7% were unsure.

WoC Participation

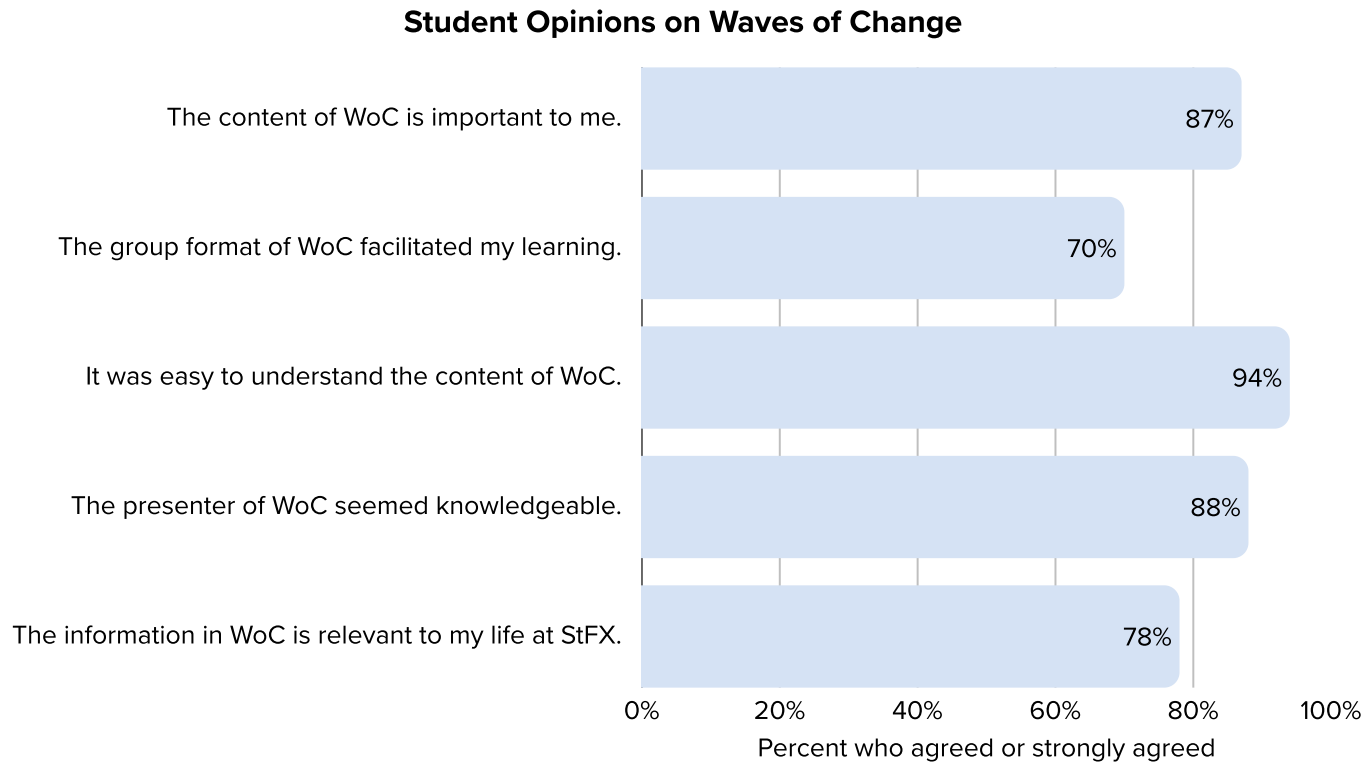
Approximately two-thirds of participants (66.5%) reported having completed WoC training, while 29.8% reported they had not. A small percentage of participants (3.7%) selected “prefer not to say.” Importantly, these data are based on self-reported participation, not objective attendance records.



Student Opinions on WoC

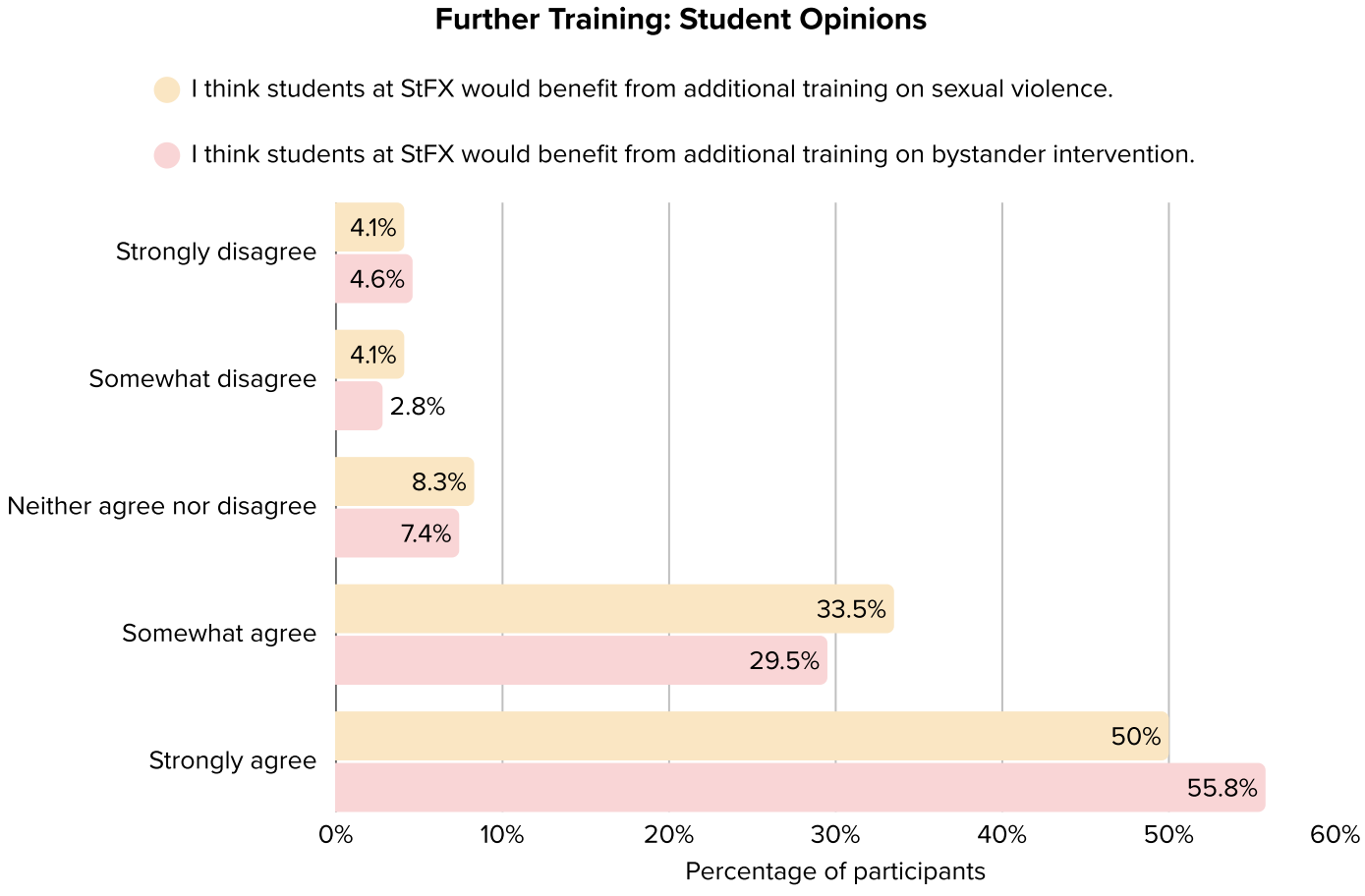
Participants who reported that they received WoC (n = 145) were asked their opinions about the program, content, and relevancy to their lives. As shown below, most participants viewed the program very positively.

Perceptions of the group format improved markedly from Phase 1: 70% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the group-based approach facilitated their learning, up from 50% in the previous evaluation. Given that the participants from the initial Phase 1 evaluation consisted of students across all years of study, it is possible that the group-based approach is especially effective for incoming students.



Further Training: Student Opinions

Participants expressed strong support for continued education on sexual violence and bystander intervention. As shown below, most participants strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that students would benefit from additional training on bystander intervention and sexual violence.



Student Perspectives on Reducing Sexual Violence

In addition to quantitative findings, participants were asked to provide open-ended feedback on how StFX and the broader community can better address, reduce, and prevent sexual violence. Several key themes emerged, reflecting both strengths of current efforts and areas for improvement.

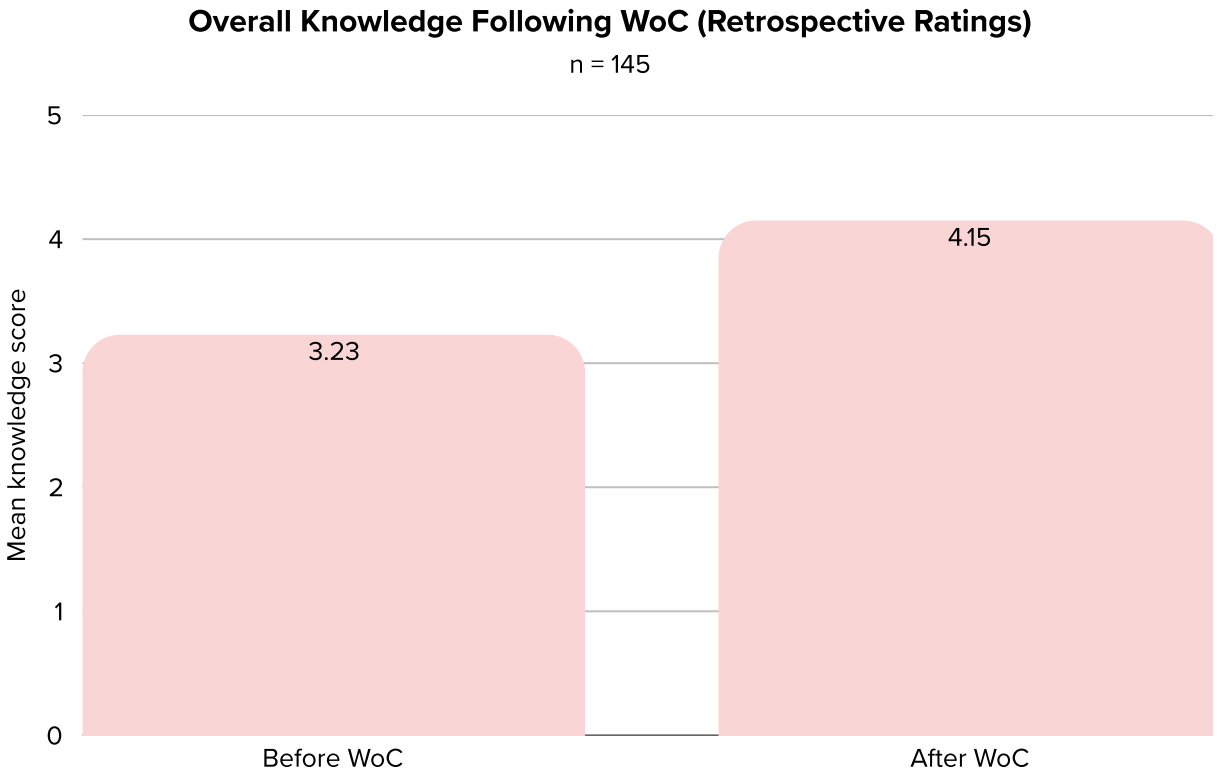
Theme	**Examples**
Strengthening awareness and depth of understanding of sexual violence	Educate people on the effects it can cause.
	Broadening the understanding of consent and harmful behaviours.
Expanding and reinforcing training across the academic year	Offering additional sessions outside of orientation, and including mid-year refreshers.
	More mandatory training and programs for students in all years (not just incoming students).
Enhancing the delivery and engagement of WoC programming	Feedback highlighted a preference for smaller group discussions, or breakout sessions.
	Incorporating survivor testimonies, student experiences, and real-life examples to make the content more impactful.
Increasing awareness of survivor supports and reporting options	Promoting help lines, or confidential methods of reporting for students.
	Clearer and more accessible reporting channels.
Strengthening accountability and consequences for perpetrators	Policies that reinforce a zero-tolerance approach, such as campus bans.
	Students commented on the need for faster institutional responses to reports.
Improving campus safety measures and environmental supports	Increased security presence both on and off campus, particularly around high-risk settings such as house parties.
	Suggestions included emergency call buttons and stricter residence entry protocols.

Knowledge of Sexual Violence and Bystander Intervention

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills across several topics addressed in the WoC program using a 1 (very low knowledge/skill) to 5 (very high knowledge/skill) scale. For participants who joined the study at Wave 2, a retrospective pre-post approach was used. These participants were asked to reflect on their level of knowledge prior to the training and compare it to their current level, allowing for an accurate assessment of perceived change. This approach helps address response shift bias, where individuals may initially overestimate their understanding of a topic and later adjust their self-evaluations after gaining new insight. By reflecting on their prior knowledge from their current perspective, participants may provide a more meaningful estimate of perceived change.

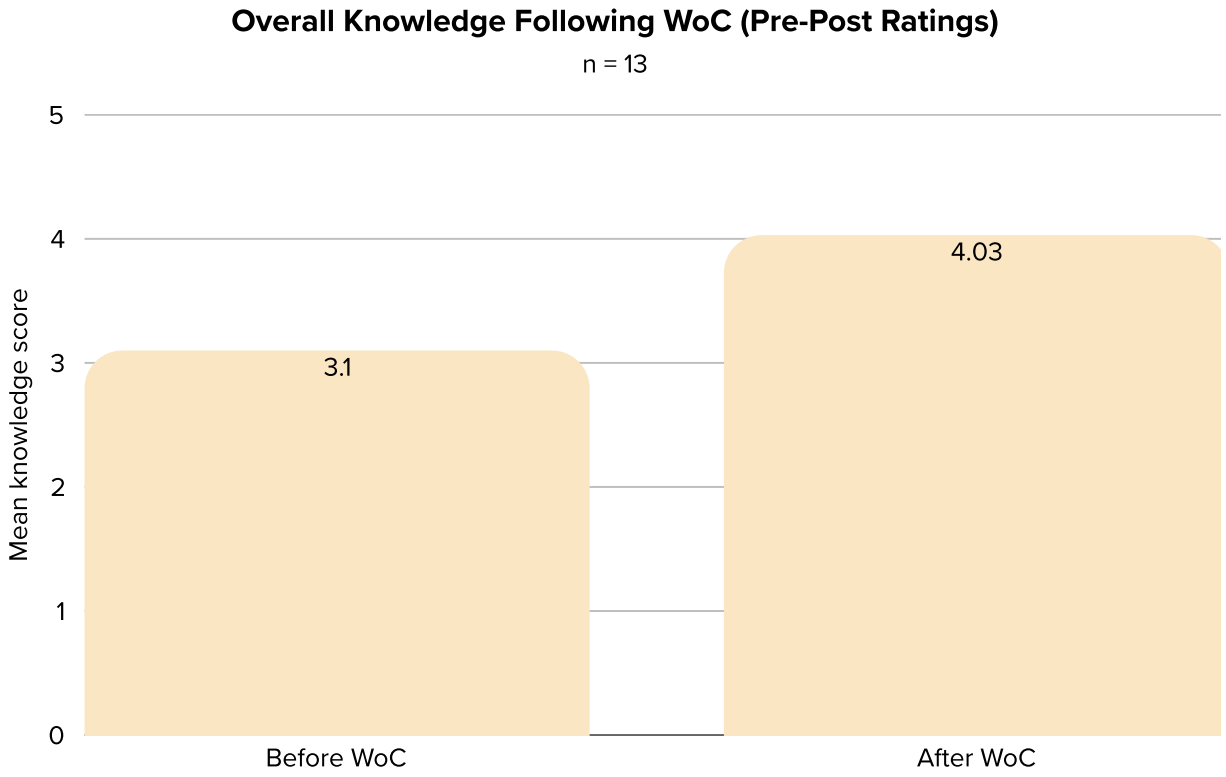
Participants reported significantly[2] higher overall knowledge following participation in WoC compared to their retrospective pre-program ratings. Findings also suggest that these knowledge gains were sustained over time. Although average knowledge scores declined slightly between the post-intervention assessment and the 6-week follow-up (a decline typical in intervention research), they remained consistently higher than their retrospective pre-intervention scores.

- Average knowledge pre-intervention: 3.23
- Average knowledge post-intervention: 4.15
- Average knowledge score 6 weeks later: 4.04



[2] A paired samples t-test indicated that this comparison was statistically significant, $p < .001$.

Significant[3] knowledge improvements were also observed among participants who completed both pre-intervention (Wave 1) and post-intervention (Wave 2) surveys (n = 13)[4]. Together, this suggests that WoC is effective in increasing participants' knowledge of sexual violence.



The mean ratings for individual knowledge domains are presented below. Participants reported significantly[5] higher knowledge scores across all domains following participation in WoC compared to their retrospective pre-program scores.

Participants who completed both the pre-intervention (Wave 1) and post-intervention (Wave 2) surveys demonstrated similar knowledge increases across all seven domains assessed. Six of these increases were statistically significant[6].

We also compared knowledge scores between participants who completed WoC and those who did not (n = 65). As shown below, participants who completed WoC reported significantly[7] higher overall knowledge scores relative to non-completers.

WoC completers also had significantly[8] higher knowledge scores than non-completers across six of the seven domains. No significant difference was observed for understanding of consent for sexual activity, with both groups reporting similarly high levels of knowledge.

[3] A paired samples t-test indicated that this comparison was statistically significant, $p < .001$.

[4] Participants included primarily female students (77%), with male students comprising 23% of the sample. The majority of students identified as White (92.3%). Additionally, 7.7% of participants identified as international students, and 7.7% identified as student athletes.

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

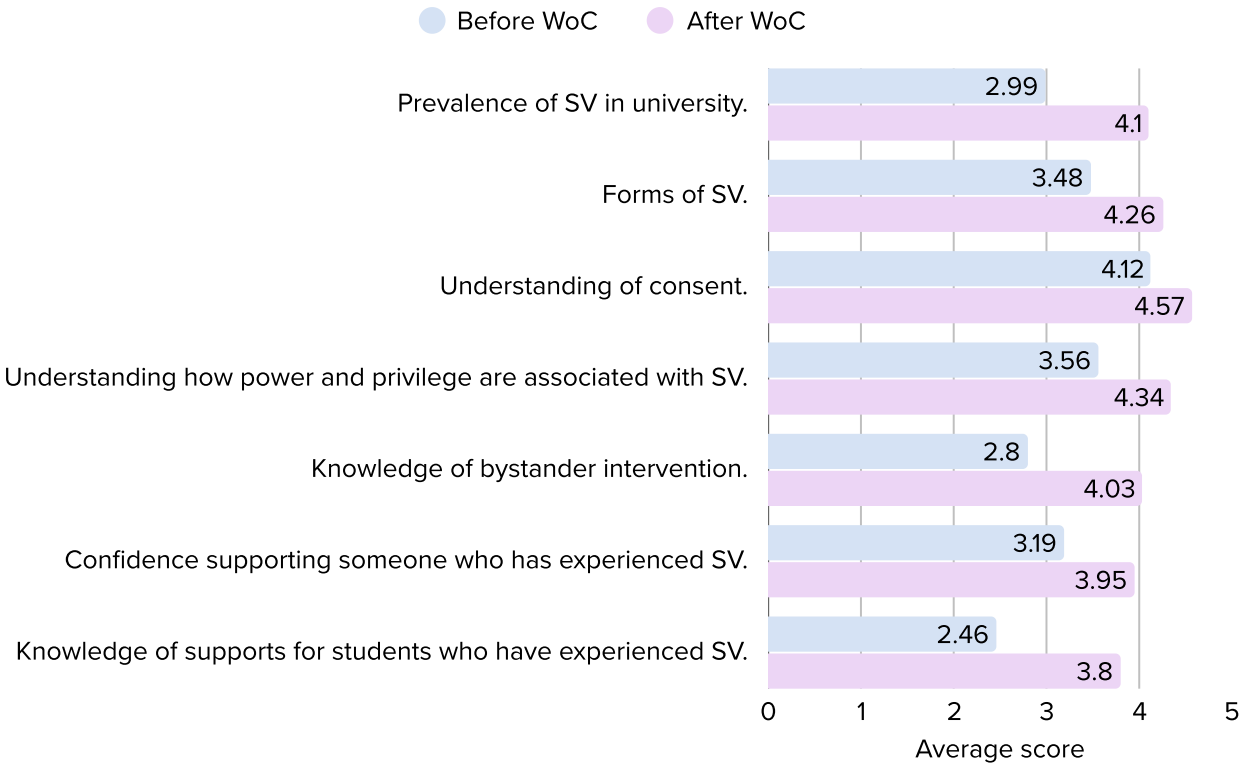
[6] Paired samples t-tests indicated that these comparisons were all statistically significant, ps < .05.

[7] An independent samples t-test indicated that this comparison was statistically significant, $p < .001$.

[8] Independent samples t-tests indicated that these comparisons were statistically significant, $p < .001$.

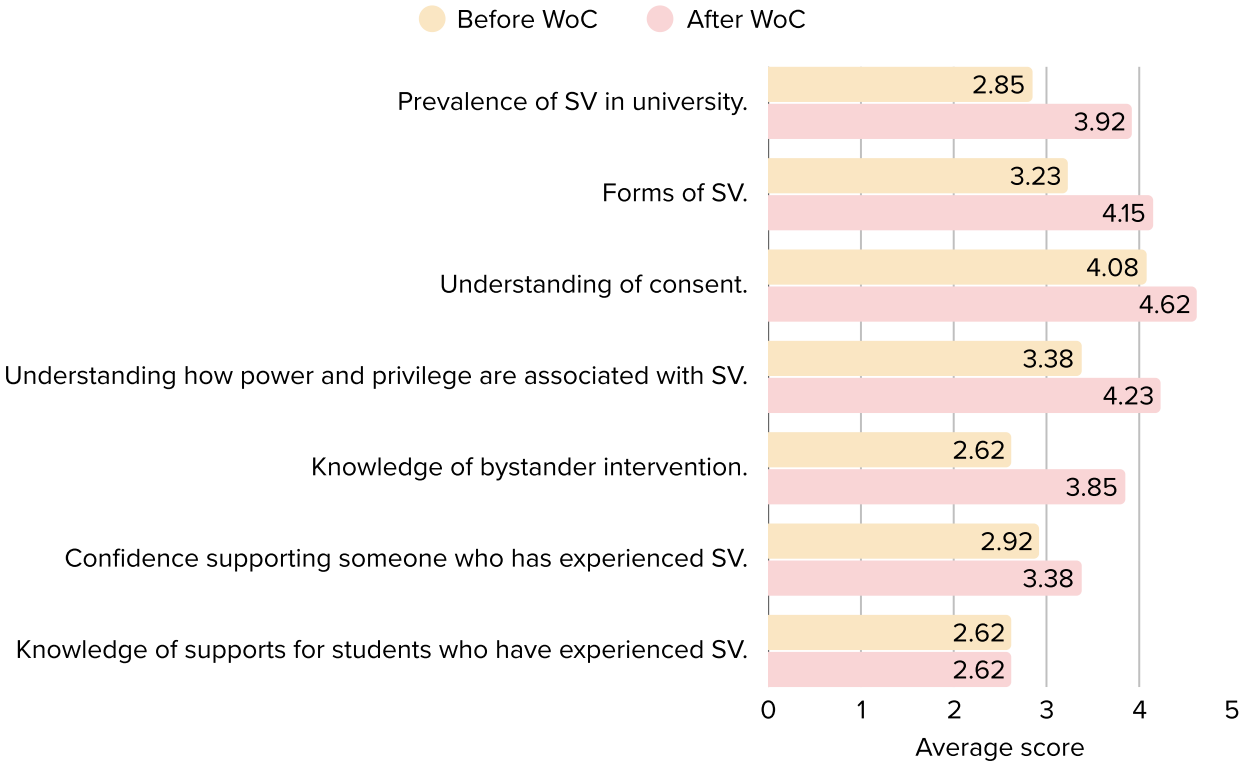
Knowledge Domains Following WoC (Retrospective Ratings)

n = 145

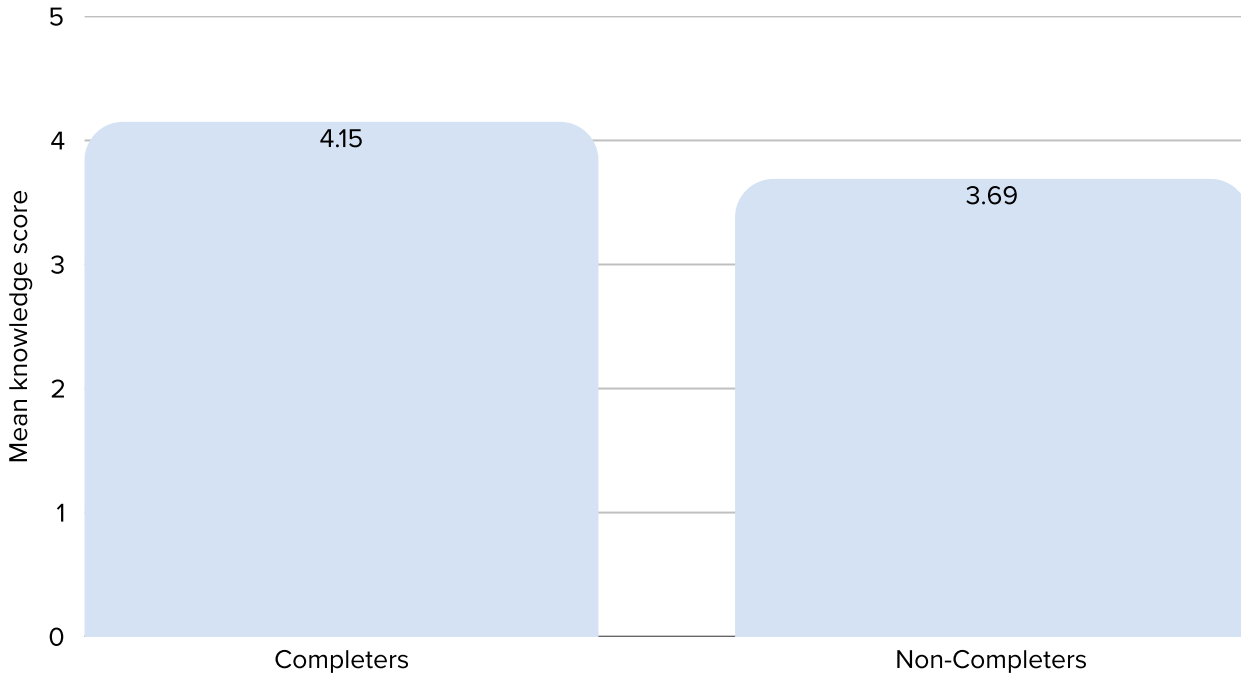


Knowledge Domains Following WoC (Pre-Post Ratings)

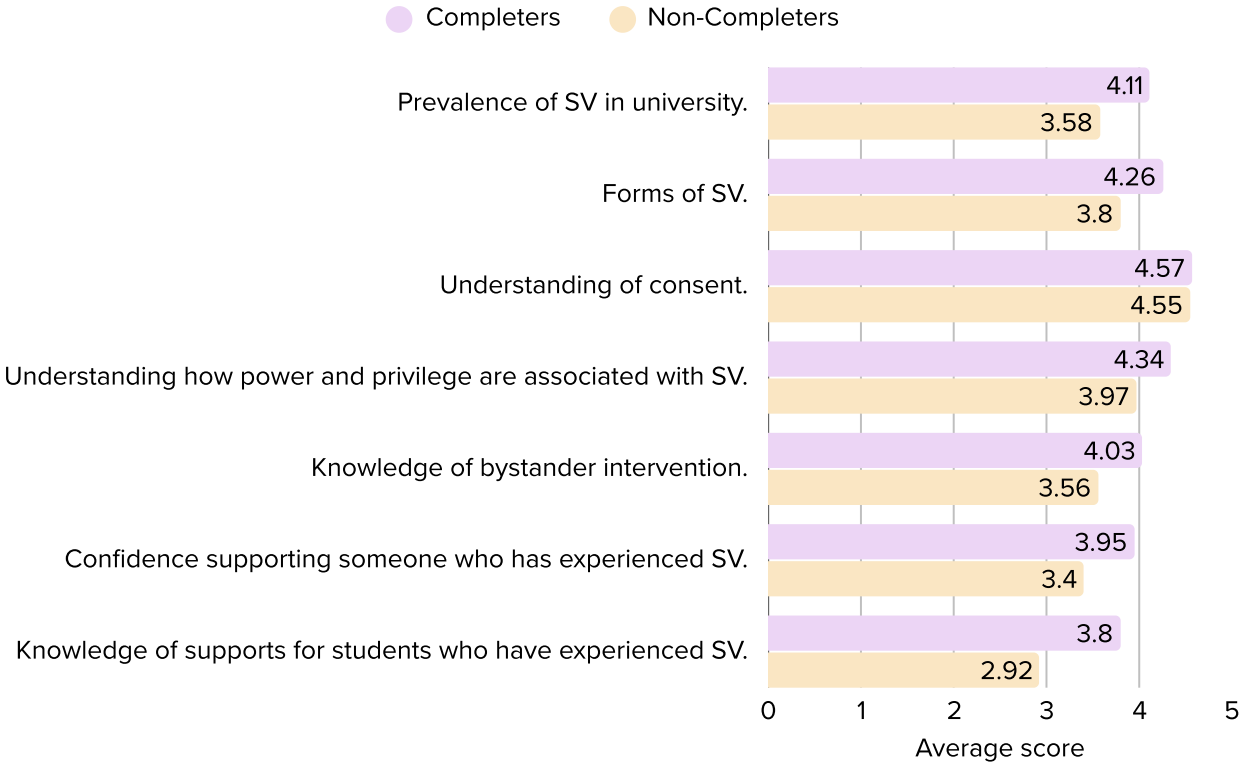
n = 13



Overall Knowledge Scores for WoC Completers vs Non-Completers

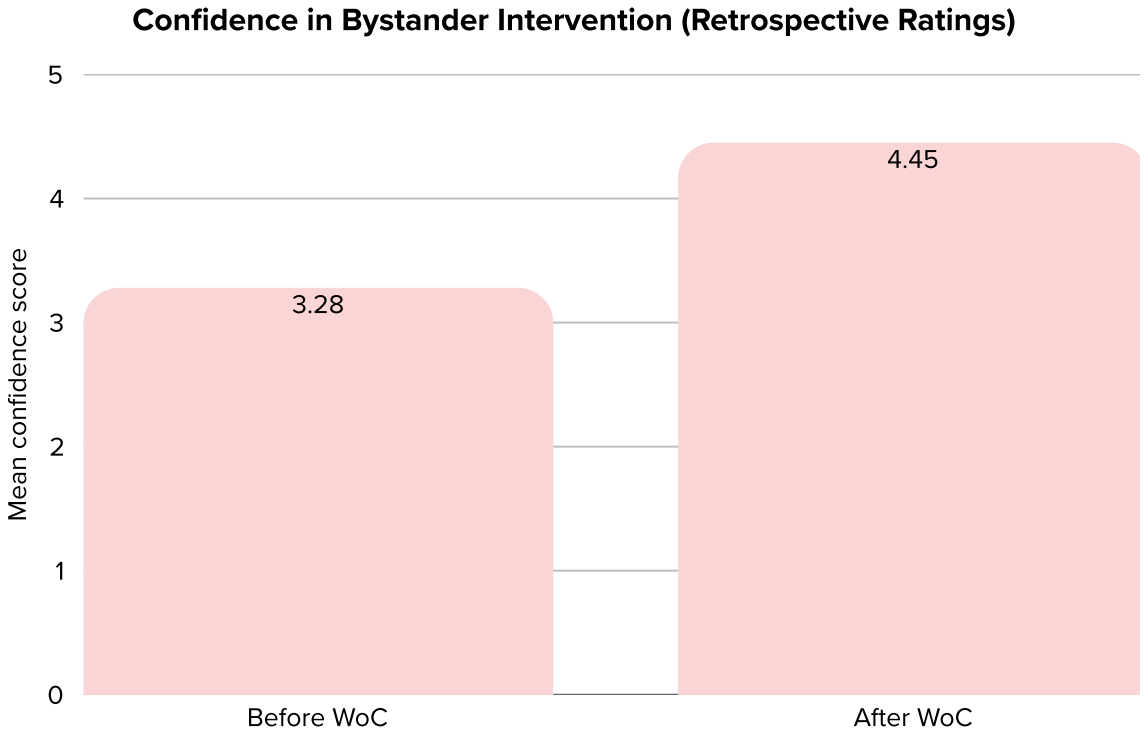


Knowledge Domain Scores Among WoC Completers vs Non-Completers



Confidence in Bystander Intervention

Participants also reflected retrospectively on changes in their confidence to intervene as a bystander before and after participating in WoC. As seen below, participants reported significantly[9] greater confidence in their ability to intervene as a bystander following participation in the program.



Prevalence of Witnessing Sexual Violence

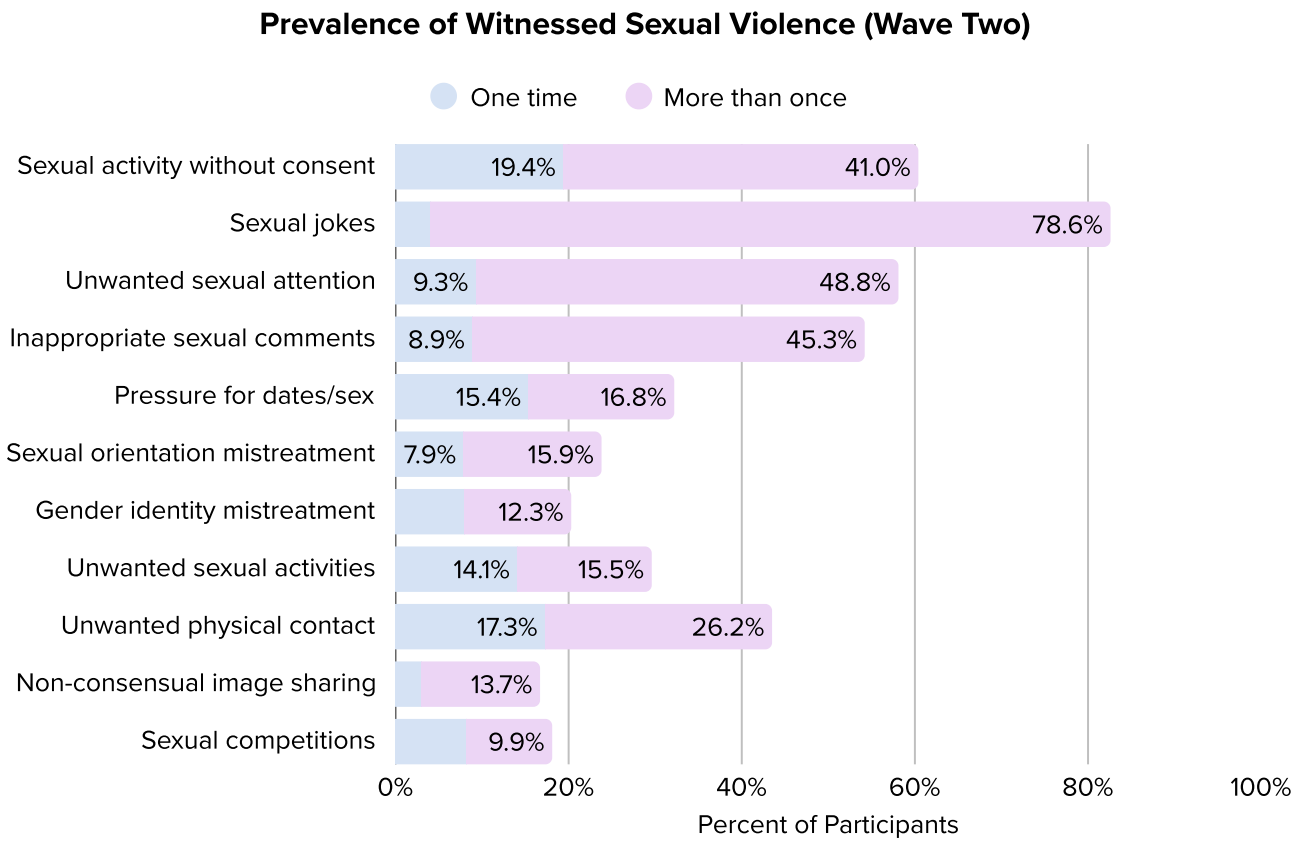
In all three waves, participants reported the frequency with which they witnessed 11 types of sexual violence over the past several weeks while on StFX campus or in a university-related setting. Overall, 86.7% of the sample witnessed at least one type of sexual violence in wave 1, 91.7% in wave 2, and 88.9 % in wave 3.

High rates of witnessing were reported by both participants who had completed WoC (89.7%) and those who had not completed the program (95.4%), suggesting that exposure to these behaviours was widespread regardless of program participation[10].

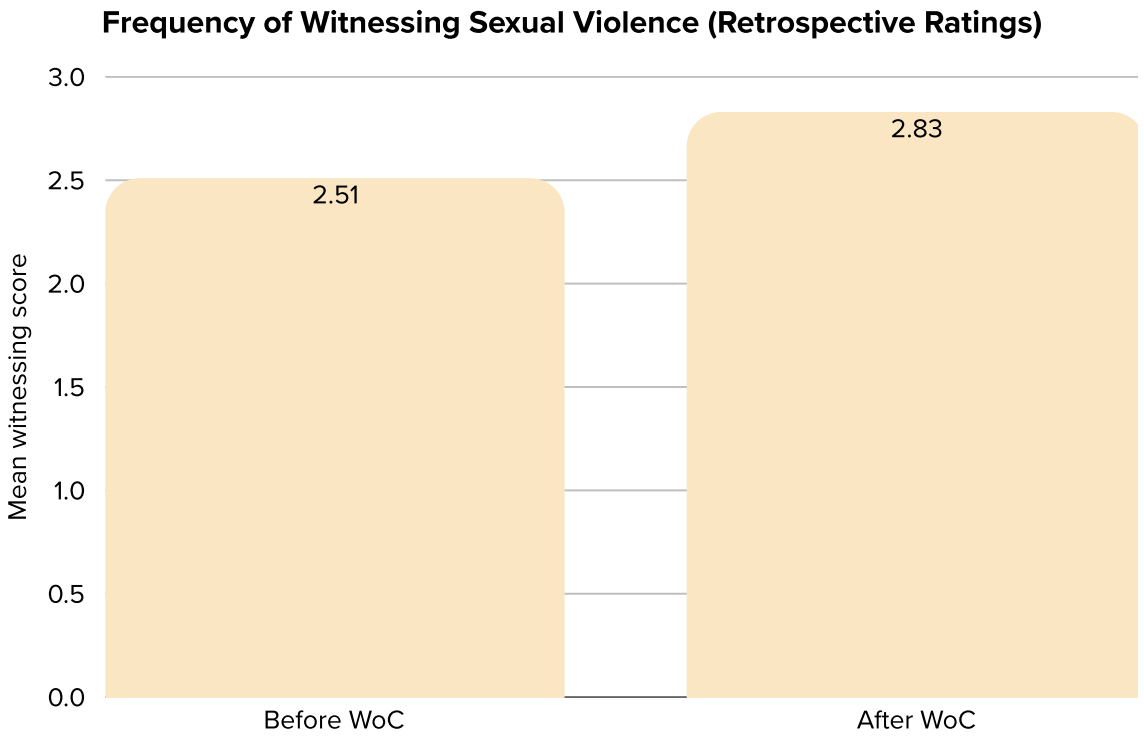
The graph below shows the percentage of respondents who witnessed each form of sexual violence once (blue) or more than once (purple) in the first several weeks of the 2025 academic year. Sexual jokes (82.4%), sexual activity without consent (60.4%), unwanted sexual attention (58.1%), and inappropriate sexual comments (54.2%) were the most common forms of sexual violence that participants witnessed.

[9] A paired samples t-test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $p < .001$.

[10] A chi-square test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $p = .170$.



Participants were also asked to retrospectively reflect on how frequently they witnessed incidents of or signs of sexual violence before and after participating in the WoC. As shown in the figure below, participants reported witnessing signs or incidents of sexual violence significantly[11] more frequently following WoC participation relative to their retrospective ratings before the program. This increase might reflect greater awareness and recognition of behaviors associated with sexual violence following participation in WoC. Alternatively, this increase might also reflect a greater exposure to sexual violence once arriving on campus.



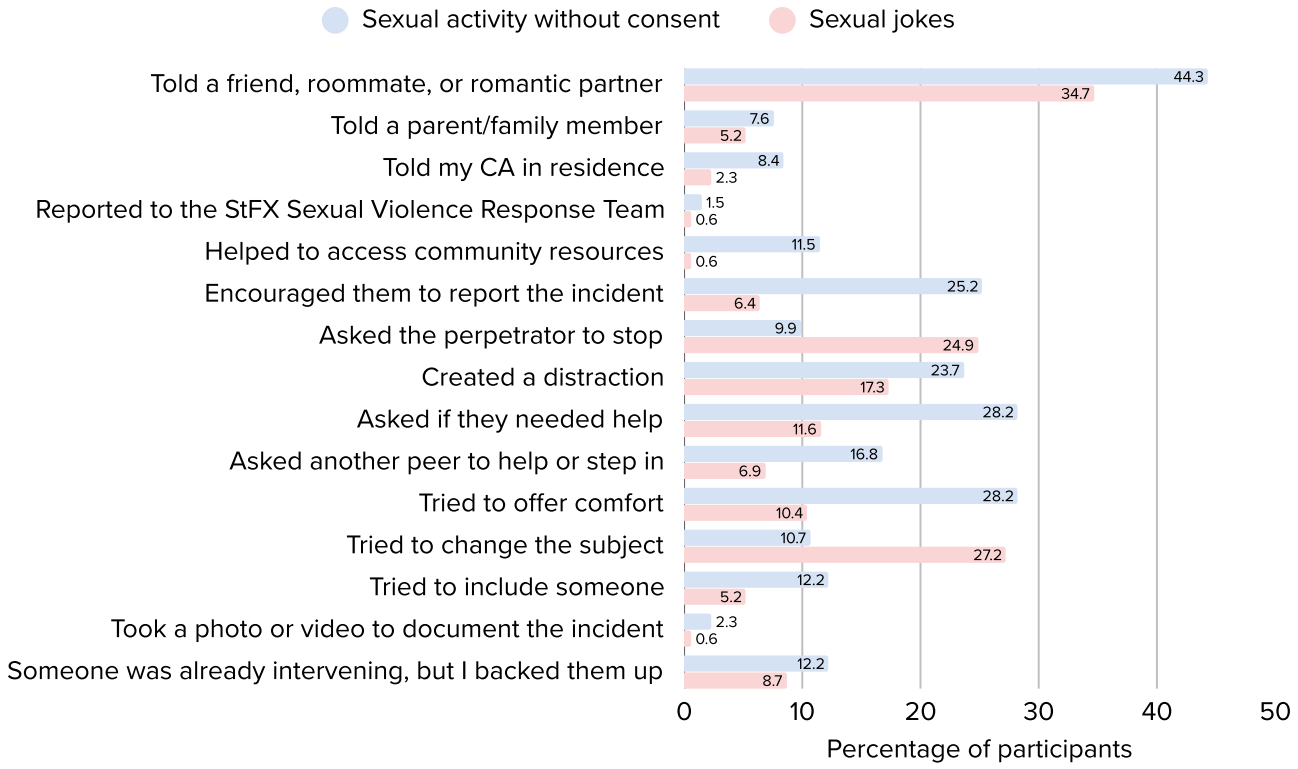
[11] A paired samples t-test indicated that this difference is significant, $p < .001$.

Bystander Intervention Behaviour

For each type of sexual violence witnessed, participants were also asked to report if and how they intervened. Across the full Wave 2 sample, 91.5% of participants who witnessed sexual violence at least once engaged in at least one bystander intervention behaviour. Across nearly all forms of sexual violence witnessed, the most reported bystander intervention behaviour was telling a friend, roommate, or romantic partner. The only exception was witnessing unwanted sexual activities, for which telling a friend, roommate, or romantic partner and trying to comfort the person being victimized were equally common responses.

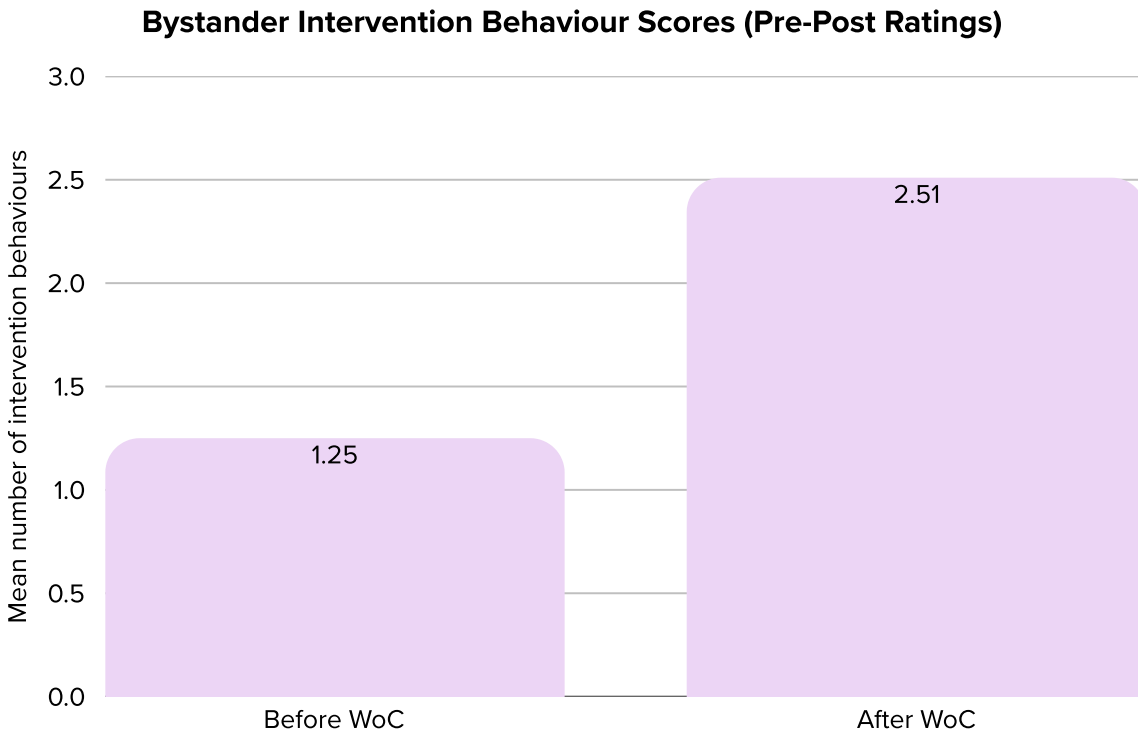
Below, we showcase respondents' intervention behavior to witnessing two forms of sexual violence: sexual activity without consent and sexual jokes. These forms of sexual violence were chosen to demonstrate how the type of bystander intervention varies depending on the situation. For example, for more severe forms of violence (e.g., sexual activity without consent) asking the person involved if they needed help, trying to comfort them, encouraging them to report the situation, and creating a distraction 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.

Frequency of Bystander Intervention Behaviours by Type of Sexual Violence Witnessed

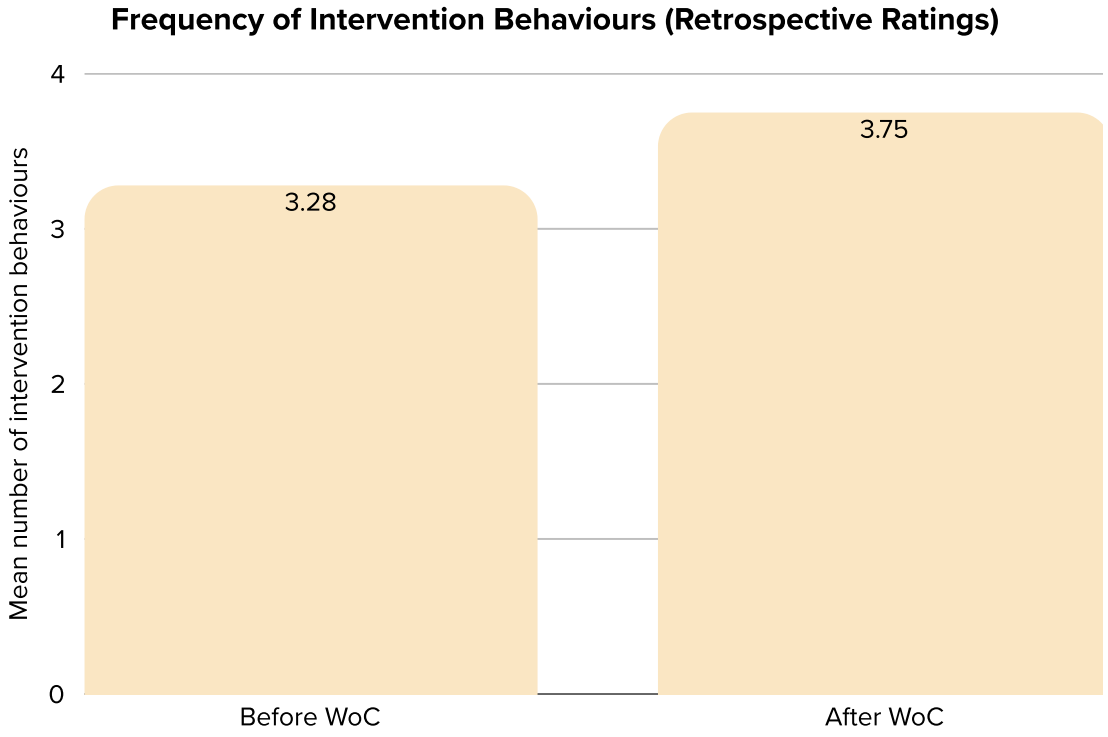


To examine whether intervention behaviours changed following participation in WoC, analyses were conducted among participants who completed both the pre-intervention (Wave 1) and post-intervention (Wave 2) surveys. An overall intervention score was calculated by combining responses across the 11 intervention items. Participants reported engaging in more bystander intervention behaviours after completing WoC compared to before participation in the program. Although intervention scores increased following participation in WoC, this difference was not statistically significant[12].

[12] A paired sample t-test indicated that this difference was not significant, $p = .143$.



Participants were also asked to retrospectively reflect on how frequently they intervened when witnessing sexual violence before participating in WoC and how frequently they intervened after the program. As shown below, participants reported intervening significantly[13] more often following participation in the program.



Lastly, bystander intervention behaviours were compared between participants who completed WoC and those who did not. Participants who completed WoC reported slightly higher intervention scores than participants who had not completed the program. However, this difference was not statistically significant[14].

[13] A paired samples t-test indicated that this difference is significant, $p < .001$.

[14] Indicated by an independent samples t-test, $p = .707$; completers $M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.42$; non-completers $M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.58$.

Program Implementation

Facilitator Perspectives

To compliment participant survey findings, interviews were conducted with nine current and former WoC facilitators to better understand their experiences delivering the program and to identify opportunities to strengthen implementation.

Overall, facilitators spoke positively about the program and described facilitation as both meaningful and rewarding. Several common themes emerged across interviews related to program delivery, facilitator preparation, and participant engagement.

What Facilitators Value

Facilitators consistently described the peer-led nature of WoC as a key strength. They felt that being close in age and experience to participants helped create a comfortable and relatable learning environment. Facilitators also emphasized the value of diverse facilitation teams (e.g., in terms of gender, race, and lived experiences) and noted that strong rapport between co-facilitators contributed to smoother delivery and increased confidence during sessions.

What is Working Well

Facilitators viewed the program script as a valuable foundation for delivery, while noting that experience allowed them to become more flexible and confident over time. Many described using personal examples and stories to make content more engaging, particularly when discussing practical applications of bystander intervention concepts.

Next Steps

Facilitators expressed interest in receiving additional background knowledge on the research and theory underlying program content to help them respond to participant questions more confidently. They also identified a need for additional training related to facilitation skills and participant engagement strategies (e.g., how to engage quiet groups) to promote greater consistency across sessions and reduce reliance on improvised approaches.

Institutional Perspectives

To better understand institutional experiences with the implementation of the WoC program, a brief questionnaire was distributed to all post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia. The questionnaire included open-ended items assessing program delivery, evaluation practices, perceived strengths, challenges, and areas where additional support may be needed. A total of 17 responses were received,

representing a range of post-secondary contexts. Responding institutions included Acadia University, Atlantic School of Theology, Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, Université Sainte-Anne, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Nova Scotia Community College, Saint Mary's University, St. Francis Xavier University, and the University of King's College.

All post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia reported implementing WoC — a notable achievement for the program. Implementation, though, looks very different across campuses, ranging from delivery in a single class to integration across an entire incoming student cohort. This diversity in approach underscores the need for program evaluation to understand how outcomes vary across institutional contexts and to assess whether results can be generalized. Despite this need, formal evaluation efforts were identified only at two of the 11 institutions. This gap presents a clear opportunity for ongoing and future evaluation efforts, both to strengthen understanding of program outcomes and to guide continued program development.

What is Working Well

When asked to describe what is working well in program implementation, several consistent themes emerged. WoC was widely described as engaging, well-received, and relatively easy to deliver. Respondents attributed this in part to its peer-led delivery model, noting that student facilitators enhance relatability.

Respondents also highlighted the program's adaptability as a key contributor to participant engagement. Facilitators can tailor scenarios and discussions to specific groups (e.g., first-year students, athletes), making the content more relevant and meaningful for participants.

In addition to program-level strengths, respondents highlighted the value of collaborating with campus partners, such as student groups and institutional departments. These partnerships were described as facilitating broader reach and supporting the integration of the program into existing campus initiatives (e.g., orientation week).

Challenges to Implementation

Despite these strengths, institutions identified several challenges associated with implementation. Resource and funding constraints were among the most reported barriers, particularly in relation to training and supporting peer facilitators and provincial coordinators.

Many institutions reported challenges related to student participation, particularly in reaching large and diverse student populations. These responses suggest that when the program is not embedded within broader campus culture or institutional structures, its reach might be limited.

Key Messages and Implications

Key Messages

This evaluation sought to better understand students' experiences with sexual violence, bystander intervention, and participation in WoC, while also exploring how the program is being experienced by facilitators and institutions across Nova Scotia.

Results of this project highlight a continuing reality: **sexual violence remains a visible and prevalent issue within the StFX campus community.** Across all three waves of data collection, over 86% of participants reported witnessing at least one form of sexual violence. The most witnessed behaviours included sexual jokes, sexual activity without consent, unwanted sexual attention, and inappropriate sexual comments. This finding is consistent with Phase 1 observations in 2024-25, and it serves as an important reminder that creating safer campus communities requires sustained attention to sexual violence prevention and response.

Despite the prevalence of harmful behaviours, **students are not standing by – they are actively intervening to create a safer campus community.** The vast majority (91.5%) of students who witnessed sexual violence reported engaging in at least one bystander intervention behaviour. Their responses varied depending on the situation, from supporting individuals who may have been harmed to directly addressing problematic behaviour. These patterns reflect a campus culture where students appear willing to step in, embodying the values of community responsibility and care that are central to both StFX and WoC.

WoC appears to be strengthening these foundations for intervention. Across both the retrospective and pre-post samples, students who participated in the program showed increases in knowledge of sexual violence and bystander intervention —both compared to their own pre-program levels and to those who did not participate. Importantly, these gains were also sustained over time, offering evidence consistent with Phase 1 that **WoC is effective in equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to intervene against sexual and gender-based violence.**

Alongside knowledge, confidence is one of the most consistently identified contributors to bystander action. **Students reported feeling significantly more confident in their ability to intervene as bystanders after participating in WoC**, providing further evidence that the program is helping prepare students to respond to situations involving sexual violence.

The natural next question is whether these gains in knowledge and confidence are translating into action. Findings from the current evaluation provide promising indications that they are. **Students retrospectively reported intervening more frequently after participating in WoC.** Students in the pre-post sample also reported increases in intervention behaviours after completing the program, though these increases did not reach statistical significance. Given the small size of the pre-post sample, the evaluation may have had limited ability to detect changes in behavioural outcomes. While larger

samples are needed to draw firm conclusions, these early patterns suggest that WoC is contributing to a more active, responsive campus community.

Beyond the numbers, the voices of students, facilitators, and institutional partners paint a consistent picture. Across groups, WoC was consistently described as engaging, relevant, and valuable. Facilitators and institutional partners further highlighted the strengths of the peer-led model and flexibility in program delivery, which create more relatable and supportive learning environments. Collectively, these findings suggest that **WoC has established itself as a valued component of sexual and gender-based violence prevention efforts at StFX and across Nova Scotia.**

At the same time, results from our provincial scan indicate that there is **a high level of variability in WoC implementation across post-secondary institutions**. Some universities, like StFX and Saint Mary's University, have embedded WoC within their orientation week activities, use a peer-led delivery model, and have a wide reach in their campus communities. Other post-secondary institutions do not have this reach, largely due to limited resources. This means that while the findings of the current evaluation at StFX are very promising, they likely do not apply to other institutions where WoC is being implemented differently.

Important Limitation

One important limitation of the current evaluation is that the participant sample was mainly composed of women. Although this reflects who chose to participate in the research, it limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to male students. This imbalance is not entirely surprising. Sexual and gender-based violence has historically been framed and discussed primarily as a women's issue, which could contribute to greater interest and engagement among women in both prevention programming and related research (Katz, 2006). At the same time, there is growing recognition that effectively preventing sexual violence requires the meaningful engagement of men and boys, particularly through work on healthy masculinities, gender norms, and shared responsibility for prevention (Casey et al., 2018; Wells & Fotheringham, 2021). Because men were underrepresented in the current sample, it remains unclear whether male students would report similar levels of knowledge, confidence, awareness of sexual violence, witnessing of problematic behaviours, or willingness to intervene as bystanders. Future evaluations should prioritize strategies to increase male participation so that potential gender differences in program engagement and outcomes can be better understood. Doing so will strengthen the evidence base for Waves of Change and help ensure the program is meeting the needs of all students.

Implications

WoC is a highly promising program with demonstrated effectiveness.

- The convergence of findings across both the prospective pre-post sample, the substantially larger retrospective pre-post sample, and our initial 2024-2025 evaluation provides encouraging evidence that **WoC is associated with meaningful improvements in students' knowledge of sexual violence, confidence to intervene, and bystander intervention behaviours.** The consistency of positive findings across multiple cohorts and data collection approaches strengthens confidence that the program is achieving its intended objectives.
- Critically, WoC continues to demonstrate positive outcomes **when delivered during orientation week by trained peer facilitators**. These findings suggest that the program represents a promising and scalable approach to sexual violence prevention on post-secondary campuses. The success of implementation at StFX and Saint Mary's University also demonstrates the feasibility of embedding bystander intervention training into existing campus programming. As such, these institutions may serve as model sites for other post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia seeking to strengthen their sexual and gender-based violence prevention efforts while maximizing student reach.

WoC has a positive impact from the perspectives of participants, facilitators, and institutions.

- An important strength of the current evaluation is that positive findings emerged not only from student outcome data but also from qualitative feedback gathered from participants, peer facilitators, and institutional representatives. **Across stakeholder groups, WoC was consistently described as relevant, informative, engaging, and valuable**. This broad-based support suggests that the program is both acceptable and feasible within post-secondary settings.
- The positive perceptions of peer facilitators are particularly noteworthy, given their central role in program delivery. Facilitators reported gaining valuable leadership, communication, and intervention skills through their involvement, suggesting that **the benefits of WoC may extend beyond program participants themselves**. At an institutional level, the program appears to provide a structured and evidence-informed mechanism for meeting commitments related to student safety, well-being, and sexual violence prevention.

Attendance and engagement challenges.

- Despite the positive reception of the program, the evaluation also identified important **challenges related to attendance, awareness, and engagement.** Approximately 30% of surveyed students reported that they had not participated in WoC, despite the program being integrated into orientation week programming for incoming students at StFX. This finding raises concerns about whether all students are being successfully reached through current implementation practices.
- It is also possible that some students attended the program but did not recall doing so at the time of the evaluation, as participation data from StFX indicates that over 900 students attended the orientation week sessions. While this explanation would suggest higher attendance rates than reported, it raises a different concern regarding the memorability of the program. In either case, the findings point to **opportunities for strengthening program branding, promotion, and integration within campus culture**. Increasing the visibility of WoC through campus-wide messaging, social media campaigns, follow-up activities, and connections to other student initiatives may help reinforce key messages and ensure that students recognize and remember their participation.

Desire for continued learning and resources.

- A consistent theme across student and facilitator feedback was the desire for continued opportunities to learn about sexual violence prevention and bystander intervention beyond a single session. Participants viewed WoC as an important starting point rather than a comprehensive educational experience, expressing interest in additional workshops, discussions, and opportunities to build intervention skills over time.
- This finding suggests that **bystander intervention training may be most effective when conceptualized as part of a broader continuum of prevention rather than a one-time event.** While orientation week programming provides an important opportunity to reach students early in their university experience, ongoing reinforcement may be necessary to maintain knowledge, confidence, and intervention behaviours. Institutions may therefore wish to explore opportunities to integrate WoC principles into residence programming, student leadership training, academic courses, awareness campaigns, and other campus initiatives throughout the year. Indeed, institutions like StFX already do this by targeting additional student groups (e.g., student athletes) for WoC programming.
- Importantly, participants and institutional partners also recognized that **sustained prevention efforts require dedicated resources**. Expanding programming beyond orientation week would necessitate continued investment in facilitator recruitment and training, program coordination, evaluation, and partnership development. Ensuring adequate institutional and provincial support will be critical for maintaining and expanding these efforts over time.

Alignment with institutional and provincial recommendations.

- The findings of the current evaluation demonstrate how Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions are actively contributing to provincial efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and foster safer campus communities. These efforts **directly align with Recommendation C.17 of the Mass Casualty Commission Report**, which calls for evidence-based bystander intervention training across educational settings, including post-secondary institutions. The positive outcomes observed in the current evaluation suggest that WoC represents one example of how this recommendation can be operationalized in practice. Continued implementation and evaluation of the program may therefore contribute not only to safer campus environments but also to broader provincial goals related to sexual and gender-based violence prevention.

Continued evaluation is warranted.

- While the current findings are encouraging, **continued evaluation will be important to strengthen the evidence base for WoC**. Future research should examine whether program-related gains are maintained over time, identify the mechanisms through which the program influences behaviour change, and explore factors that promote or hinder implementation across different institutional contexts.
- Future research should focus on obtaining larger samples of pre-intervention data, which remains an on-going challenge for our team despite best efforts with participant recruitment, compensation, and stakeholder involvement.
- Additionally, larger longitudinal studies would help determine whether improvements in knowledge and self-efficacy translate into sustained bystander intervention behaviours and, ultimately, reductions in sexual and gender-based violence on campus.
- Last, future research and evaluation efforts should consider how to better engage men in both WoC programming and program evaluation, given the increasing emphasis on the role of men and healthy masculinities in sexual and gender-based violence prevention.

Additional Resources

Mass Casualty Commission Final Report

Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission. Nova Scotia, Canada. https://masscasualtycommission.ca/files/documents/Turning-the-Tide-Together-List-of-Recommendations.pdf

Phase 1 Waves of Change Evaluation

Bystander Intervention at StFX: Insights from the Waves of Change Program. https://osf.io/p8u4v

More Information on the Waves of Change Program at StFX

Waves of Change: Creating Campus Responses to Sexual Violence. https://www.stfx.ca/student-services/support-services/visible-at-x/prevention-awareness/waves-change

Academic Articles

Casey, E., Carlson, J., Two Bulls, S., & Yager, A. (2018). Gender Transformative Approaches to Engaging Men in Gender-Based Violence Prevention: A Review and Conceptual Model. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *19*(2), 231–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838016650191

Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Sourcebooks, Inc.

Mujal, G. N., Taylor, M. E., Fry, J. L., Gochez-Kerr, T. H., & Weaver, N. L. (2021). A systematic review of bystander interventions for the prevention of sexual violence. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 22*(2), 381–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019849587

Pfaff, J., Jönsson, S., & Muhonen, T. (2024). Bystander intervention programs focusing on sexual violence in academia—a scoping review. *Sage Open, 14*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241259156

Wells, L., & Fotheringham, S. (2021). A global review of violence prevention plans: Where are the men and boys? *International Social Work, 65*(6), 1232–1248. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820963430

Wong, J. S., Bouchard, J., & Lee, C. (2023). The effectiveness of college dating violence prevention programs: A meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *24*(2), 684–701. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211036058