

Article

Bystander Intervention in the Ivory Coast: The Role of Personality Traits and Rape Myth Acceptance

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Abstract

The present study attempts to understand factors that influence bystanders' decisions to intervene in risky sexual situations in the Ivory Coast. The study aimed to examine the influence of personality traits, history of sexual violence victimization, sense of community, and rape myths on bystander intervention among college students. Two hundred college students from one of the major cities in the Ivory Coast were invited to participate in the study using a convenience sampling approach. Using an OLS framework, our analysis revealed that extroversion is associated with a willingness to intervene, whereas prior sexual assault experience undermines the desire to intervene. Moreover, we found that students' demographic characteristics influence their willingness to intervene. Policy implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: bystander intervention; college sample; personality traits; rape myths acceptance; sexual violence

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of the current study is to explore bystanders' behavior in the context of sexual violence in a post-colonial African society. Specifically, the authors are interested in understanding the factors that influence a bystander's decision to intervene in sexually violent situations in the Ivory Coast. Historically, sexual violence has been a widespread problem in the country, and most experts attribute this occurrence partly to the country's decade-long civil conflict. Generally speaking, bystander intervention concerns an individual's likelihood of helping in a critical situation (Fischer et al. 2011; Mennicke et al. 2023), and it is considered to be an important crime prevention tool (McMahon 2015; Banyard et al. 2007; Coker et al. 2016; Storer et al. 2016; Rudnicki et al. 2023).

Past studies on bystander intervention have examined individuals and situational factors that influence people's willingness to intervene in violent situations (Bennett et al. 2014; Kuntz and Searle 2023). For instance, personality traits (Abbey et al. 2001), rape myth acceptance (Gable et al. 2021), prior sexual victimization (Banyard et al. 2004), and demographic characteristics such as gender and education (Bennett et al. 2014; Rose 2013) predict whether a person will intervene in sexually violent situations or not. These efforts are remarkable because they help to understand how bystanders behave, whether they will intervene, and what influences their decision to intervene. That said, most of these studies were conducted using data from the Global North and from the more developed nations,



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with limited effort to understand the phenomenon of bystander attitudes and behavior in the less developed nations and the Global South. The dearth of research, therefore, creates room for further exploration in other contexts to develop a holistic view of bystanders' behavior. Furthermore, such exploration can help augment existing knowledge, drive pragmatic policymaking, and provide direction for future studies.

Ivory Coast, the setting for this endeavor, is a postcolonial African country marred by conflicts, gender inequality, and patriarchal practices. Culturally, the Ivory Coast adheres to practices that support male dominance over females, with a clear distinction between gender roles. Society has different expectations for men and women, and women generally perform limited roles outside the "kitchen". Their participation in the political and economic affairs of the country is highly limited, with only 9% and 19% serving as parliamentarians and cabinet members, respectively (Simon et al. 2022).

Given the cultural background of the country and its high rates of sexual violence, the study purports to understand the conditions that influence bystanders to step in to prevent sexual assault incidents from happening. To the best of our knowledge, this study has not been examined in this context before, and therefore, findings from the study will help researchers understand how people from this part of the world behave in sexual assault situations. Also, the findings will be meaningful for policymakers to make policies that are tailored to segments of the Ivorian population. Bystander intervention is an important sexual violence prevention tool; however, to be effective, prevention programs and policies need to be focused on specific populations instead of the "one-size-fits-all" approach.

2. Factors Influencing Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention concerns an individual's likelihood of helping in a critical situation (Fischer et al. 2011; Mennicke et al. 2023). Bystander intervention is an important tool for preventing crime, especially sexual violence and assault (McMahon 2015; Banyard et al. 2007; Coker et al. 2016; Storer et al. 2016; Rudnicki et al. 2023). Some studies on bystander intervention have examined individuals and situations that influence intervention and its success (Bennett et al. 2014; Kuntz and Searle 2023). Bystander intervention, according to the current literature, can be passive (i.e., standing by and not intervening) or active (i.e., not standing by but willing to intervene). Whether passive or active, the goal of bystander intervention is to reduce crime (Banyard 2011, 2015; Breiding et al. 2014). The following sections discuss the factors that influence bystanders' intervention in sexual violence situations.

2.1. Rape Myth and Bystander Intervention

Rape myths are widely held but false ideas about sexual assault that excuse or minimize male-perpetrated violence against women and shift blame away from the offender (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). Although the specific definition of rape myths can differ between societies, their influence is particularly strong in communities where patriarchal values are deeply entrenched (Taslitz 1995). In many African contexts, for instance, sexual violence within marriage is frequently ignored or minimized due to cultural norms that prioritize male authority and view marital sexual entitlement as acceptable. These beliefs contribute to the underreporting of such assaults and perpetuate a social environment in which victims' experiences are often dismissed or invalidated.

Despite this belief in Africa, several scholars have examined rape myths from different cultural perspectives and settings (Boateng et al. 2024; Edwards et al. 2011; Johnson and Beech 2017; Payne et al. 1999). For instance, Edwards et al. (2011) explained that much of the research, including surveys measuring rape myth endorsement, has been conducted with college student samples. While some studies include non-college populations, the

study emphasizes that college students are the primary focus in much of the existing research. Furthermore, [Payne et al. \(1999\)](#) investigated the structure of beliefs surrounding rape myths and found that these beliefs are consistent across different groups and methods of analysis. Specifically, two studies showed that participants rated the similarity of various rape myth statements in a similar way, regardless of their gender.

In another study, [Boateng et al. \(2024\)](#) explored the relationships among date rape attitudes, rape myths, and sexual violence. The findings revealed a unidirectional relationship between rape myths and date rape attitudes, indicating that one variable influences the other. Additionally, experiences of sexual harassment were found to influence the acceptance of rape myths, while forced sexual experiences did not predict the endorsement of such myths. The study contributes to the understanding of violence-supportive attitudes among college students in a non-Western context, highlighting the need for awareness programs to address the negative impacts of rape myths and improve attitudes towards victims of sexual violence.

Despite receiving much research attention, the relationship between rape myths and bystander intervention has not been adequately explored. The few available research studies show that rape myths influence bystander intervention. Specifically, bystanders who do not uphold false beliefs about rape are more likely to intervene than those who do ([Gable et al. 2021](#); [Zelin et al. 2019](#)).

2.2. Personality Trait and Sexual Violence Interventions

Research on personality traits and sexual violence consistently shows that certain dispositional characteristics are linked to a higher risk of perpetration, particularly traits associated with impulsivity, callousness, hostility toward women, and a desire for dominance ([Abbey et al. 2001](#); [Seto and Lalumière 2010](#)). For instance, studies grounded in the five-factor model have found that low agreeableness and low conscientiousness are associated with greater acceptance of rape myths and higher self-reported likelihood of sexual aggression ([Abbey et al. 2001](#)). In addition, men who score high on narcissism and psychopathy report more sexually coercive behavior and greater endorsement of beliefs that justify forced sex. Longitudinal work further indicates that antisocial traits and early conduct problems predict later sexual aggression, even after controlling for substance use and peer influences ([Seto and Lalumière 2010](#)). These findings suggest that personality is not the sole cause of sexual violence, but it contributes to patterns of cognition and behavior that increase risk.

Furthermore, hostile masculinity and adversarial sexual beliefs have also received strong empirical support. In a study of college men, [Abbey et al. \(2001\)](#) found that hostile attitudes toward women, combined with heavy alcohol use and a history of delinquency, predicted subsequent sexual aggression. Similarly, [Malamuth et al. \(1991\)](#) tested the confluence model and showed that the interaction between hostile masculinity and impersonal sex was associated with a higher risk of sexually aggressive behavior. This indicates that personality traits linked to hostility, dominance, and emotional detachment shape how individuals interpret sexual situations and respond to perceived rejection.

Intervention research has increasingly considered how personality traits influence responsiveness to prevention programs. For example, meta-analyses of sexual assault perpetration programs show modest but significant effects, particularly for interventions that address cognitive distortions, empathy deficits, and emotion regulation ([Cannon et al. 2019](#); [Kettrey and Marx 2019](#)). Specifically, programs that incorporate cognitive-behavioral components tend to reduce rape-supportive attitudes and, in some cases, self-reported coercive intentions. However, individuals high in psychopathic or narcissistic traits often

show weaker treatment gains, suggesting that stable personality features may limit the impact of brief educational programs (Gannon et al. 2019).

Past research that has examined the relationship between personality traits and bystander intervention has made interesting conclusions. For instance, research reveals that an individual's personality influences behaviors and attitudes, such as intervening as bystanders (Banyard et al. 2007; Heaven 1996; Mammadov 2022). For instance, individuals with extroverted personalities—talkative, assertive, and gregarious—are more likely to help and intervene (Banyard 2008; Bennett et al. 2014). Vrugt and Vet (2009) suggest that extraversion personalities tend to be in a good mood, which increases the propensity to intervene.

Also, it has been found that neurotic personalities are characterized by anxiety, anger, nervousness, worry, feelings of insecurity, and self-blame, and are often in a bad mood. Such a mood limits their ability to intervene (Barbaranelli et al. 2003; Pronk et al. 2016). Although conscientious personalities tend to show a low inclination to intervene, the presence of extroversion qualities can lead to the desire to intervene (King et al. 2005; Franklin et al. 2017). Moreover, agreeableness personality, that is, individuals with the tendency of cooperation, social harmony, empathy, and trust, have a reduced tendency to intervene (Soto and Jackson 2013; Sutton and Smith 1999), whereas individuals with openness personality, that is, creativity, open-mindedness, and thinking outside the box, tend to intervene by questioning existing ways of doing things (Berdan et al. 2008; Janošová et al. 2018).

2.3. Other Factors That Influence Bystander Intervention

In addition to the effects of personality traits and rape myths, several other factors predict the likelihood of an individual intervening in sexual violence situations. These factors include sense of community, self-efficacy, decisional balance, and sociodemographic characteristics (Mainwaring et al. 2023; Powell 2014). Specifically, bystander intervention is influenced by a sense of community or belonging, that is, peers, family, and association in groups (Banyard et al. 2016; Pozzoli et al. 2012). As research has noted, individuals' desire to conform to the community they belong to can either hinder or aid their ability to intervene (Hofstede 1991; Triandis et al. 1990). However, in certain circumstances, an individual's desire can outweigh that of the community, which can also aid or hinder bystander intervention (see Oyserman et al. 1998). Pozzoli et al. (2012) suggest that societies that punish antisocial behaviors such as sexual assault and reward bystander intervention tend to see more interventions than those that do not (also see Banyard et al. 2016; Edwards et al. 2014; Pozzoli et al. 2012).

The effect of a sense of community and belonging on bystander intervention can be explained through the relationship and ties model as well as the norms and collective efficacy model (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2008; Swisher 2008; Shinn and Toohey 2003). The relationship and ties model argues that the personal relationships of individuals are sources of bystander intervention behaviors. Although this relationship does not directly place a demand on the individual to intervene, the unwritten rule is to intervene because such trust has been established between members of this relationship (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2008; Thoits 2011). On the contrary, the norms and collective efficacy model places more emphasis on the community as opposed to individual intervention. Thus, the model posits that communities with strong social capital, formal and informal social controls, and those that prohibit sexual violence and assault can harness resources to promote intervention within the community (Swisher 2008; Shinn and Toohey 2003).

Similarly, bystander efficacy and decisional balance influence intervention or the lack of intervention (Banyard et al. 2016; Pradipto et al. 2016). Bystander efficacy deals with the

perception of the bystander regarding their ability to intervene and accomplish the goal of intervening (Kim and Muralidharan 2020). For instance, increased efficacy and confidence of the bystander have been observed to be associated with increased interventions (Banyard et al. 2007; Evans et al. 2019; Kim and Muralidharan 2020; Moynihan et al. 2010).

Furthermore, Banyard et al. (2007) found in their study that bystander intervention can effectively empower individuals to intervene in situations of sexual violence, challenge rape-supportive attitudes, and promote a culture of active bystanderism. Additionally, the study showed that participants in the treatment groups experienced significant improvements, with a notable 25% increase in bystander efficacy, a 20% rise in knowledge about sexual violence prevention, and a 15% decrease in acceptance of rape myths compared to the control group. Furthermore, the results indicated that the length of the program played a role, as the three-session program led to a 30% greater increase in positive bystander attitudes than the one-session program. Also, Evans et al. (2019) found that intervention education programs targeting first-year college students have been successful in increasing bystander intentions, confidence, and behaviors related to sexual violence prevention. Therefore, decisional balance enables bystanders to assess all the situational and environmental factors before deciding to intervene.

Decisional balance, if carefully and thoughtfully done, optimizes an intervention, but if not well done, can de-optimize an intervention (Pradipto et al. 2016; Kuntz and Searle 2023; Leone et al. 2021). For example, Pradipto et al. (2016) found in their study that bystander efficacy significantly predicts the tendency of teenagers in Jabodetabek to intervene in cases of domestic violence, aligning with previous research. However, there was no empirical support for the relationship between decisional balance and bystander intervention. This highlights the importance of considering cultural differences and the need for further research to tailor intervention programs effectively in Indonesia, particularly focusing on enhancing bystander efficacy to increase the likelihood of bystander intervention in domestic violence situations. Experience with victimization as well as bystander fear of violence increases the propensity to intervene (Jacobson and Eaton 2018; Reynolds-Tylus et al. 2019).

In terms of the influence of prior sexual victimization, studies have suggested that people with a history of past victimization tend to intervene in violent sexual situations (Banyard et al. 2004; Barnett et al. 1986; Christy and Voigt 1994; McMahon 2010). Specifically, Christy and Voigt (1994) found a correlation between childhood abuse and willingness to help. Also, Barnett et al. (1986) believed that persons who had previously been raped tend to show greater empathy for rape victims than those who had never been raped. According to these authors, prior victimization may increase empathy and risk recognition, thereby motivating intervention behaviors. On the contrary, recent studies suggest that survivors may experience trauma-related responses such as fear, avoidance, and self-protective withdrawal, which can reduce willingness to intervene in potentially risky situations (Orchowski et al. 2016; Kennedy and Prock 2018).

The discussion on the factors that influence bystander intervention will be incomplete without examining the effect of demographic characteristics. A plethora of studies have found that demographic characteristics influence bystander intervention (Bennett et al. 2014; Rose 2013). For instance, some studies suggest that men are more likely to intervene in sexual violence and assault situations than women (Bennett et al. 2014; Eagley and Crowley 1992). However, Burn (2009) found that women are more likely to have the intention to intervene than men, although when it comes to the actual act of intervening, men are more likely to do it than women. Furthermore, Prinstein and Dodge (2008) observed that the gender differences found in bystander intervention can be explained by the influence of peer pressure. Males intervene by confronting the perpetrators, providing physical interruption,

and finding someone else to intervene, while females intervene with victims and provide post-assault intervention (Franklin et al. 2017; Hoxmeier et al. 2015). Although age has not generally been found to influence bystander intervention, a few studies have found that older individuals are more likely to intervene (Collazo and Kmec 2019; Hoxmeier et al. 2020). Education and income have also been observed to influence bystander intervention. Higher levels of education and income correlate with a willingness to intervene (Taylor et al. 2010; Rose 2013).

2.4. Sexual Violence: The Ivorian Experience

Sexual violence can be defined as a broad range of attitudes, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse (Mainwaring et al. 2023). Sexual violence involves any sexual act, attempt at a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts of sexual trafficking, or other acts directed at obtaining a sexual act using force or coercion (Mainwaring et al. 2023). On the other hand, sexual assault is the use of threats, force, coercion, or incapacitation to attempt to penetrate and/or touch a bodily opening of a victim by using any part or object of the perpetrator without the consent of the victim (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; Franklin et al. 2017).

Several studies have examined the prevalence and patterns of sexual violence in the Ivory Coast (Peltzer and Pengpid 2016; Zinsstag 2013). Using survey-based and exploratory research approaches, these studies document both the scale of the problem and the context in which it occurs. For instance, Zinsstag (2013) focused on conflict-affected regions of the country, and the findings showed that sexual violence was widespread in areas heavily impacted by the civil war, with women and girls facing heightened vulnerability due to insecurity, displacement, and the breakdown of social and legal protections. Additionally, Okereke et al. (2012) in their study on crime and punishment in the Ivory Coast found that the political conflict in the country has led to widespread incidents of rape and sexual violence, predominantly affecting women and girls. Specifically, victims reported severe assaults, including gang rapes and sexual torture, often resulting in lasting physical and psychological harm. Also, the Ivorian legal system is weak, lacking a clear definition of rape and failing to criminalize spousal rape, which, combined with societal stigma, discourages victims from seeking justice and perpetuates a culture of impunity for offenders.

Furthermore, research conducted in the aftermath of the 2010–2011 post-election crisis has examined conflict-related sexual violence using population-based survey methods. For example, Hossain et al. (2014) carried out a cross-sectional household survey in conflict-affected regions, employing cluster sampling to obtain a representative sample of men and women. Specifically, data were collected on exposure to violence, including sexual assault outcomes on women's health. The findings showed increased levels of sexual violence during periods of armed conflict, particularly in areas with active militia presence. The study also documented strong associations between exposure to sexual violence and symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress, indicating that mental health burden was linked to conflict-related abuse.

Aside from conflict and wars, some studies have assessed the extent to which IPV and dating with the opposite sex result in sexual violence in the country (Boateng et al. 2023; Gupta et al. 2013; Lyons et al. 2017). For instance, Gupta et al. (2013) explored the level of sexual violence among intimate sexual partners using a two-armed randomized controlled pilot trial in rural Ivory Coast, specifically from 2010 to 2012. While the overall reduction in physical and sexual IPV was not statistically significant, there were notable improvements in attitudes towards the justification of physical IPV, indicating a potential shift in social norms. While IPV remains a significant factor regarding the rise of sexual violence in the country, existing research has focused on high-risk groups (Marquez et al. 2024; Gupta et al.

2013). For example, [Marquez et al. \(2024\)](#) examined sexual violence among female sex workers in urban Ivory Coast by assessing their vulnerability to sexual violence, mental health status, and substance use. The study found that nearly one-third of participants reported lifetime sexual violence, and those with such experiences had significantly higher odds of suicidal ideation and recent drug use. Also, the study reveals that some perpetrators use drugs or alcohol as a means of coercion or control before engaging in sexual acts, further increasing the vulnerability of women and girls.

2.5. Current Study

The present study attempts to understand factors that influence bystanders' decisions to intervene in risky sexual situations in the Ivory Coast. The study aimed to examine the influence of personality traits, history of sexual violence victimization, sense of community, and rape myths on bystander intervention among college students. Based on the above objectives, we tested the following hypotheses:

Individual personality traits will determine whether a person will intervene in risky sexual violence situations. The expectation is that (a) people who possess extrovert characteristics, such as assertiveness, being talkative, and having full energy, will be more willing to intervene in risky situations such as sexual assault, and (b) introverts, such as people who are reserved, quiet, and shy, will be less likely to intervene in such situations.

Prior sexual violence experiences will influence bystanders' decisions to intervene in sexual violence situations. With this hypothesis, we expected students who reported experiencing sexual assault or harassment to be more likely to intervene due to their experience.

A sense of community is a psychological concept that is defined as the "feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to being together" ([McMillan and Chavis 1986](#), p. 9). We believe that students who have a greater sense of community on campus will also be willing to step in to prevent sexual violence against another person.

Also, we expect rape myths to influence bystander intervention among students. Specifically, we believe that students who strongly adhere to false and stereotypical beliefs about rape will be less likely to step in and stop sexual violence, whereas those who do not adhere to these beliefs will be more likely to intervene in sexual violence situations.

3. Method

To achieve the purpose of the study, we obtained data from students attending one of the largest universities in Abidjan, the Ivory Coast, in 2021. The study used a convenience sampling strategy due to students' busy schedules, the limited resources available to the researchers, and the restraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the researchers made efforts to obtain a sample that represents the demographics of the student population at the university. The research was conducted at four residences affiliated with the university. These residences were randomly selected from the number of residences that were affiliated with the university at the time of the survey. Students in the selected residences were contacted for participation in the survey. Those who agreed to participate were given the questionnaires to complete.

Despite using a non-probability approach in selecting our respondents, the students who completed the survey came from different backgrounds. For instance, these students were enrolled in courses such as Agriculture, Art, Biology, Criminology, Communication, etc. Four research assistants were recruited to assist in the fieldwork. They were trained in the modalities of survey administration and were strictly supervised by the research team. Before completing the questionnaires, students were given full assurance that participation

was voluntary and that refusal would not have any effect on their status at the university or the courses they were enrolled in. Confidentiality was assured by asking students not to write their names or anything that would identify them anywhere on the questionnaires.

During the fieldwork, the research team distributed 200 questionnaires, and 187 were returned. Of the returned questionnaires, 19 were destroyed because they were unusable, leaving 168 usable questionnaires for analysis. The descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in Table 1. More than half of the participating students (51 percent) identified as females; 73 percent identified as Christians; and 27 percent were from the southern region of the country. The students were quite young, with an average age of 24 years; the youngest was 17 years, and the oldest was 36 years.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 168).

	Min.	M (SD)/%	Max.
Gender—Female	-	51	-
Religion—Christianity	-	73	-
Region—South	-	27	-
Age	17.00	24.41 (3.42)	36.00
Sense of community	4.00	9.86 (2.65)	15.00
Extroversion	5.00	17.43 (3.77)	25.00
Introversion	3.00	9.67 (2.63)	15.00
Rape myth acceptance	4.00	12.56 (6.67)	28.00
Bystander efficacy	5.00	24.61 (4.61)	30.00
Willingness to intervene	4.00	14.94 (3.65)	20.00
Self-efficacy	5.00	15.98 (2.51)	20.00
Prior sexual victimization	0.00	1.54 (1.66)	5.00

3.1. Measures

3.1.1. Outcome Variable

Bystander intervention is the behavior of interest in the study. The willingness to intervene dimension assessed students' preparedness to intervene in sexual violence incidents. The variable was measured using four items adopted from Banyard et al.'s (2004) bystander attitudes scale. These items were measured on a five-point scale, from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (extremely likely), and had the same lead-in question: Please read the following list of behaviors and check how likely you are to engage in each. The items were "Speak up against sexist jokes", "Speak up in class if a professor explains that women like to be raped", "Speak up if I hear someone say she deserved to be raped", and "when I hear a sexist comment, indicate my displeasure". A factor analysis revealed that the items measure the same construct (factor loadings ranged from 0.64 to 0.81; the cumulative total variance explained was 58%). As a result, the responses to these items were summed up to form the willingness scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, indicating high internal consistency among the items used to construct the scale.

3.1.2. Independent Variables

Four main independent variables were assessed on each of the two dimensions of bystander intervention. These variables were personality traits, prior sexual victimization experience, sense of community, and rape myths. The effects of two personality trait variables were examined. The items used for personality traits were adapted from Srivastava et al. (2010). The first was an *extroversion* personality, measured using five personality trait items assessed on a five-point scale, with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items had the same lead-in statement: "I see myself as someone who is 'talkative', 'full of energy', 'generates a lot of enthusiasm', 'has an assertive personality', and 'outgoing

and sociable". A factor analysis revealed these items measure the same construct (factor loadings ranged from 0.58 to 0.70; Cumulative Variance Explained = 41%) and the scale had an alpha value of 0.64. Second, *introversion* personality was assessed using three items: I see myself as someone who is "reserved", "tends to be quiet", and "sometimes shy and inhibited". The factor loadings were 0.73, 0.67, and 0.73, respectively (Cumulative Variance Explained was 50%), and the scale had an alpha of 0.51.

The prior *sexual violence* variable measures occasions where students experienced any type of sexually motivated crime, and it was measured using five items (no or yes). The items were "someone stared at or eyed the sexual parts of my body", "someone exposed themselves to me", "someone called me a name connected with sexuality or sexual parts of the body", "someone pinched my behind", and "someone slapped my behind". The factor loadings ranged from 0.58 to 0.82 (cumulative total variance explained was 51%), and Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.74.

Sense of community was measured using three items to assess the extent to which students feel a sense of community on campus and the importance they attach to such feelings. Two of these items, rated on a five-point scale, with 1 = not at all to 5 = very important, were "How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with people on this campus?" and "Some people care a lot about the kind of campus they live on. For others, the campus is not important. How important is the campus to you?" The third item, also rated on a five-point scale (1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal), was "Do you feel a sense of community with other people on campus (for example, do you share interests and concerns with them)?" These items were combined (factor loadings ranged from 0.76 to 0.81; Cumulative Variance Explained = 61%) to form the sense of community scale, with an alpha value of 0.68.

Rape myth acceptance was measured using four items adapted from Payne et al. (1999) to gauge students' stereotyped and false beliefs about rape: "it is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped", "women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them", "when women are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was ambiguous", and "a woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex". The items were rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (not at all agree) to 7 (very much agree). The factor loadings for the items ranged from 0.73 to 0.75 (cumulative total variance explained was 56%), and Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.73. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater rape myth acceptance.

In addition to the main independent variables of interest, we also assessed the effects of decisional balance, self-efficacy, bystander efficacy, and four demographic characteristics. For *decisional balance*, we used five items to measure decisional balance. The items were: "Intervening might cost me friendships", "I could get physically hurt by intervening", "I could make the wrong decision and intervene when nothing was wrong and feel embarrassed", "People might think I'm too sensitive, and am overreacting to the situation", and "I could get in trouble by making the wrong decision about how to intervene". The factor loadings for the items range from 0.54 to 0.80 (cumulative total variance explained was 50%), and Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.75.

Self-efficacy was also measured using four items: "I can help prevent violence against women in my community", "I have the skills to help support someone who is in an abusive relationship", "I believe my peers will listen to me if I speak out against sexual violence", and "I have the confidence to say something to a guy who is acting inappropriately toward a woman". A five-point scale, ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree, was used to assess each item. The factor loadings for the items range from 0.62 to 0.79 (cumulative total variance explained was 47%), and Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.61.

Bystander efficacy was assessed using five items. The items were “People’s violent behavior can be prevented”, “There are certain things a person can do to help prevent violence”, “I can make a difference in helping to prevent violence”, “People can be taught to help prevent violence”, and “Doing or saying certain kinds of things can work to help prevent violence”. The factor loadings for the items range from 0.69 to 0.82 (cumulative total variance explained was 60%), and Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.83.

Demographic characteristics included in the model were age, gender, region, and religion. The *age* of respondents was measured as a continuous variable, asking respondents to indicate their age at the time of the study. *Gender* was measured as a dichotomous variable (0 = male, 1 = female). The *region* students live in was measured as 0 = other regions and 1 = Southern region. *Religion* was measured as 0 = other and 1 = Christianity.

3.2. Analytic Strategy

To test the study’s hypotheses, we conducted several analyses. First, we conducted descriptive statistics to assess the distribution of the data and used a correlation analysis to examine the relationship among the latent variables at the bivariate level. The analysis also helped to check for collinearity issues within our data, and as reported in Table 2, there was no concern about multicollinearity because the correlation coefficient among the variables never exceeded the 0.70 cutoff (Barbaranelli et al. 2003). This observation is supported by the collinearity statistics reported in Appendix A. The VIFs of the variables were all below the threshold (<10), and the tolerance values were significantly greater than zero. Finally, OLS regression was conducted to estimate the effects of the predicting variables on willingness to intervene.

Table 2. Correlation analysis examining the relationship among variables (N = 168).

	Y	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12
Y: Willingness to intervene	1.00												
X1: Extroversion	0.37 **	1.00											
X2: Introversion	−0.07	−0.28 **	1.00										
X3: Sense of Community	0.32 **	0.27 **	0.05	1.00									
X4: Rape Myth Acceptance	−0.22 **	0.00	0.06	0.02	1.00								
X5: Prior Sexual Violence Vict	−0.04	0.24 **	−0.07	−0.01	−0.02	1.00							
X6: Decisional balance	−0.21 *	−0.03	0.03	0.13	0.24 **	0.05	1.00						
X7: Self-efficacy	0.44 **	0.35 **	0.02	0.11	−0.08	−0.11	−0.34 **	1.00					
X8: Bystander Efficacy	0.25 **	0.27 **	0.26 **	0.27 **	−0.05	−0.24 **	−0.03	0.25 **	1.00				
X9: Age	0.14	0.01	0.02	0.29 **	−0.15	0.00	−0.08	0.15	0.14	1.00			
X10: Female	0.23 **	0.02	0.03	−0.24 **	−0.29 **	0.12	−0.18 *	0.14	−0.07	−0.21 **	1.00		
X11: Regional Loc.—South	−0.24 *	−0.07	−0.10	−0.05	−0.02	−0.01	0.18 *	−0.21 *	−0.11	−0.10	−0.06	1.00	
X12: Religion—Christian	0.14	0.00	0.08	0.04	−0.13	0.06	−0.03	0.05	0.04	0.09	0.07	0.19 *	1.00

Note: * $p < 0.05$ and ** $p < 0.01$.

4. Results

Factors Predicting Bystander Intervention

The OLS regression technique was used to explore factors that influence bystander behavior among college students in the Ivory Coast. The results are presented in Table 3. The model is significant ($F = 5.506$, $p < 0.001$) and explains 50 percent of the variance in the outcome variable—willingness to intervene. After controlling for the effects of other variables, extroversion personality positively predicted students’ willingness to intervene ($b = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$). This observation indicates that students who identified as extroverts demonstrated a greater likelihood of intervening in sexual violence incidents. Moreover, prior sexual violence experience ($b = -1.99$, $p < 0.05$) negatively predicted willingness to

intervene among the students. This observation implies that students who have a history of sexual victimization have a lower likelihood of intervening in sexual violence situations.

Table 3. Estimates of Respondents' Propensity to Intervene in Sexual Assault Incidents (N = 168).

Variables	Willingness to Intervene	
	b (SE)	t
Personality Traits		
Extroversion	0.25 (0.11)	2.16 *
Introversion	−0.18 (0.15)	−1.17
Sense of community	0.15 (0.15)	1.04
Rape Myth Acceptance	−0.10 (0.06)	−1.66
Decisional balance	−0.08 (0.09)	−0.92
Self-efficacy	0.27 (0.16)	1.70
Bystander efficacy	0.07 (0.10)	0.70
Sexual violence victimization experience	−0.45 (0.23)	−1.99 *
Age	0.07 (0.11)	0.67
Female	1.93 (0.82)	2.35 *
Regional location—Southern	−2.11 (0.84)	−2.51 *
Religion—Christianity	2.06 (0.96)	2.15 *
Constant	3.65 (4.63)	
Model fit		
F-test		5.506 ***
R ²		0.50

Note: * $p < 0.05$ and *** $p < 0.001$.

In addition to the above observations, two demographic variables significantly influenced willingness to intervene. Gender—Female ($b = 2.35, p < 0.01$) positively predicted students' likelihood of intervening in risky situations. Specifically, female students, compared to their male counterparts, tend to be more willing to intervene. Regional location—Southern ($b = -2.51, p < 0.01$) negatively predicted bystanders' willingness to intervene. Specifically, students from the Southern part of the Ivory Coast were less likely to intervene than those from other parts, such as the Northern and Central. Moreover, Christianity ($b = 2.15, p < 0.05$) positively predicted students' likelihood of intervening in risky situations. Specifically, students who identified as Christians, compared to others, tend to be more willing to intervene.

5. Discussion

Bystander intervention during sexual violence and assault has been of interest to researchers and practitioners for years. This interest has led to the proliferation of scientific studies understanding the complex nature of bystander behavior (Franklin et al. 2017; Mainwaring et al. 2023; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). However, most of these studies have focused mainly on the global north, with little to no research from the global south. The lack of empirical evidence and studies from the Global South hinders the attempt to develop a holistic perspective of bystander behavior and prevents policymakers from making pragmatic policies. To attempt to understand the behavior of bystanders in the global south, the present study analyzed data from the Ivory Coast, a country with a rich culture but a dark history of conflict, to ascertain the factors that influence bystander intervention during sexual assault situations. More specifically, we assessed the effects of four variables: personality traits (introversion and extroversion), prior sexual assault victimization, sense of community, and rape myths. In addition to these variables, we also controlled for many variables found in previous studies to influence bystander intervention. Important observations were made, and these deserve further attention.

Past research has explored the relationship between personality and intervention in sexual violence incidence. Consistent with the existing findings (Bennett et al. 2014; Vrugt and Vet 2009), extroversion personality influenced Ivorian students' willingness to intervene in situations such as sexual assault. This observation suggests that individuals with an outgoing, talkative, and assertive personality are more comfortable stepping in to stop a sexual assault incident and to help the victim. Although direct intervention might not be appropriate in every situation, this underscores the role extroverts play in primary intervention and reducing sexual violence and assault. While introverts may utilize indirect approaches, such as asking for help from others to intervene and distracting the perpetrator so the victim can escape, confrontation by extroverts cannot be underestimated (Banyard 2008). The finding presented here supports the study's first hypothesis and demonstrates the important role that personality traits play in bystanders' decisions to intervene, especially among college students.

Moreover, previous studies suggest that prior victimization amplified empathy and fear (Jacobson and Eaton 2018; Reynolds-Tylus et al. 2019; Woods et al. 2016). In the present study, victimization significantly influences bystander intervention in the Ivory Coast. This result supports our second hypothesis. However, the direction of the effect was not as expected. Based on prior research, we expected students who reported experiencing sexual assault or harassment to be more likely to intervene due to their past experiences. Additionally, victims' prior experience can help them pick up on clues that others might not notice. Picking up on these clues can empower prior victims to intervene promptly or ask for help from other bystanders. Contrary to our initial expectation, the findings suggest that students who have experienced sexual violence are less likely to intervene in sexual assault incidents. While this was unexpected, it also makes sense for Ivorian students with past sexual violence experience to not intervene, given that prior victimization can lead to fear, which can prevent individuals from intervening because of the fear of being victims again (Lamb and Attwell 2019).

Another important observation made was the lack of effect for rape myth acceptance on bystanders' willingness to intervene in sexual assault incidents. Rape myths are false beliefs and stereotypes that people have about rape and rape victims (Bennett et al. 2014; Burt 1980). Rape myth acceptance has been found to influence individuals' behavior, including promoting sexual violence and aggression among men (Bennett et al. 2014). Contrary to prior research (Gable et al. 2021; Zelin et al. 2019), our analysis found a nonsignificant relationship between rape myth acceptance and bystander intervention. This observation, which is inconsistent with the study's last hypothesis, indicates that rape myths and bystander intervention are unrelated. This is surprising because in the Ivory Coast, rape myths are high due to the country's strong adherence to patriarchal cultural norms (Bennett et al. 2014). In this society, there are clear gender roles, and women are expected not only to perform certain duties at home but also to dress decently. A violation of the decent dress code results in societal blame if such violations lead to sexual assault against the woman. It is therefore surprising that individuals who hold false beliefs about rape do not differ from those who do not hold false beliefs in terms of their willingness to help the victim or engage in a behavior that will stop further assault against the victim.

Affiliations and a sense of belonging have been found to either increase or decrease a bystander's likelihood of intervening (Banyard et al. 2007; Edwards et al. 2014; Pozzoli et al. 2012; Franklin 2016). For instance, Franklin (2016) observed that affiliation with Greek organizations leads to negative attitudes toward women and decreases the likelihood of intervening during sexual violence and assault. Surprisingly, our analysis found that a sense of community does not impact bystander intervention. That is, a student's sense of community does not influence that student's ability or decision to intervene. While

this observation is contrary to existing evidence, it also failed to support the study's third hypothesis, which expected that a greater sense of community on campus would increase students' willingness to step in and prevent sexual violence against other people. This observation is surprising, especially given the strong ties that people have within the Ivorian communities. As has been noted, ties with a community that has strong social capital, formal and informal social controls, and frowns on anti-social behaviors empower individuals to have a higher tendency to intervene (Swisher 2008; Shinn and Toohey 2003).

Finally, we observed the importance of three demographic characteristics of the respondents in explaining bystander intervention. Gender predicted bystander intervention, and this was contrary to what previous studies found. The likelihood of intervention is greater among female students than their male counterparts. Although Ivorian female students were found to be more likely to intervene in sexual assault incidents than men, research suggests that women mostly intervene post-incident to help the victim and hardly intervene in the actual incident to stop the attack (Franklin et al. 2017; Hoxmeier et al. 2015). Also, we observed that the regional location and Christianity are critical in students' willingness to intervene in sexual assault. More specifically, students from the southern part of the Ivory Coast are less likely than their counterparts from the Northern, Central, and Eastern parts to intervene. This regional element of bystander intervention is critical because it tells us how geographical location influences people's behavior, especially when someone needs help.

6. Limitation, Policy Implications, and Conclusions

The current analysis made important observations about Ivorian students' willingness to intervene in sexual violence situations. However, there are a few limitations that we would like to acknowledge. First, the selection of students for participation in the study did not follow a random procedure, and we would therefore caution readers against further interpretation of the results. We, however, recommend that future research consider using a random approach to enhance the chances of each student being recruited. Second, our sample was not large enough to generalize our findings to the entire student population in Abidjan. Finally, for some of our variables, we used scales that, though they have been well validated, were developed a long time ago and may not consider current changes. For example, in measuring rape myth acceptance, we used Payne and colleagues' validated scale, which was developed several decades ago. We suggest that further research consider using more recent but validated scales to assess the variables included in our current analysis to account for recent events.

The implications of this research for policy are discussed below. First, the findings suggest that personality extroversion, prior victimization, and demographic characteristics influence bystander intervention. Policies and training formulated to improve bystander intervention must focus on these important areas. These trainings can provide bystanders with primary, secondary, and tertiary skills to intervene and prevent sexual violence and assault. Additionally, using these results can help reinvent the cultural and historical norms and gender-specific roles of the Ivory Coast. This can help empower bystanders to intervene and reduce sexual violence and assault.

Bystander intervention and the factors that influence such intervention are of tremendous importance to both scholars and practitioners. Although bystander intervention has been studied from numerous perspectives and academic orientations, the fundamental argument is that bystander intervention, if well understood and implemented, can help reduce crimes such as sexual violence and assault. The current research, therefore, examines the factors that influence bystander intervention in the Ivory Coast to augment the existing literature. Overall, our analysis made remarkable and intriguing observations

that strengthen the existing scholarship, push the boundaries of current research by recommending new paths for future studies, and provide policymakers with empirical evidence for effective policy formulation in the Ivory Coast and the sub-region.

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Informed Consent Statement: There is no informed consent form, but this is the text included on the first page of the questionnaire: “This survey assesses students’ opinions about sexual violence and their willingness to help those who have been assaulted. Your response is very important to us because we want to make sure that all views are represented and included. Your participation is VOLUNTARY. You can refuse to answer any questions and stop responding at any time. By completing and returning this questionnaire, you agree to be part of this research.”.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Collinearity Statistics.

Variables	Willingness to Intervene	
	Tolerance	VIF
Extroversion	0.702	1.424
Introversion	0.723	1.384
Sense of community	0.729	1.371
Rape Myth Acceptance	0.810	1.234
Decisional balance	0.846	1.182
Self-efficacy	0.761	1.314
Bystander efficacy	0.713	1.402
Sexual violence victimization experience	0.819	1.221
Age	0.756	1.323
Female	0.696	1.437
Region location—Southern	0.856	1.168
Religion—Christianity	0.803	1.245

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