

# Specialist training transforms football coach attitudes towards intervening to prevent violence and abuse, study shows

June 17 2024

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Specialist training is helping sports coaches to safely and effectively intervene when witnessing abusive behavior towards females, a study

shows.

Football Onside is the first evidence-led bystander intervention program in the UK designed for those involved in professional sports. During the program people working in sport are trained to be 'active bystanders' and positive role models for their teams.

The program is designed help people intervene safely and effectively when they witness unacceptable behavior—from sexist jokes or demeaning "locker-room" banter to assault or physical [violence](#).

Researchers have now carried out a nine-month analysis into the effectiveness of their training, with 50 [football](#) coaches and club members answering questionnaires about their views on rape and domestic abuse myths.

They were also asked about their bystander behaviors, their knowledge about the law and their peer helping.

The analysis shows the training has had a positive impact on their willingness and confidence to take action when they see bad and disrespectful behavior towards women and girls.

The study also shows that coaches can be positive role models who promote respectful attitudes and actions towards women among their players.

The program was developed by Dr. Fenton and Dr. Nathan Eisenstadt, experts from the University of Exeter Law School. It was also a collaboration with Exeter CITY Community Trust and supported by partners Public Health England, Devon County Council, Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services, Hollie Gazzard Trust and Plymouth Argyle FC.

[The study](#) on the impact of the training, by Dr. Anastasiia Kovalenko and Dr. Fenton, is published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Dr. Fenton said, "Athletes are role models, shaping [social attitudes](#). Their engagement in bystander violence prevention could be an effective tool to tackle violence against women. This is promising evidence to support the use of the Football Onside program and that [professional sports](#) may be an appropriate and positive platform preventing violence against women and girls."

Those who had taken part in the training were less likely to believe myths about rape and domestic violence, and more likely to think bystander intervention could be effective, and to put this into practice. The overall satisfaction with the program content was high.

The study was conducted with two professional Football Club Community Trusts in the South West from June 2018 to February 2020. Those involved in one trust received the intervention and the other acted as a control group. Those who took part were coaches and managers, football academy students, members of a national personal and social development program, and the regional Football Association.

There was only a short-term improvement on people not believing myths about [domestic violence](#), which may be because the program focused more explicitly on rape myths rather than domestic abuse myths.

Football Onside is now being delivered within the Premier League by University of Exeter spinout company Kindling Transformative Interventions, founded by Professor Fenton and Dr. Eisenstadt.

**More information:** Anastasiia G. Kovalenko et al, Bystander Intervention in Football and Sports. A Quasi-Experimental Feasibility Study of a Bystander Violence Prevention Program in the United

Kingdom, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2024). DOI: [10.1177/08862605241239452](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241239452)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Specialist training transforms football coach attitudes towards intervening to prevent violence and abuse, study shows (2024, June 17) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-06-specialist-football-attitudes-intervening-violence.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.