

WHITE RIBBON



12. What is primary prevention?

The main focus of the White Ribbon campaign is primary prevention on the issue of violence against women. By engaging men as part of the solution, the White Ribbon aims to challenge the cultural norms that inform the attitudes and behaviours that 'give licence' to some men to be violent towards women.

Primary prevention efforts complement work with victims and survivors, but do not replace or take priority over it. Activities to prevent and respond to sexual violence can be classified in a number of ways. One of the most common is a three-part classification of activities according to when they occur in relation to violence:¹

- Before the problem starts: *Primary* prevention
 - Activities which take place *before* sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration or victimisation.
- Once the problem has begun: *Secondary* prevention
 - Immediate responses *after* sexual violence has occurred to deal with the short-term consequences of violence, to respond to those at risk, and to prevent the problem from occurring or progressing.
- Responding afterwards: *Tertiary* prevention
- Long-term responses *after* sexual violence has occurred to deal with the lasting consequences of violence, minimise its impact, and prevent further perpetration and victimisation.

¹ This summary combines and modifies the accounts given by the CDC (2004, p.3) and Chamberlain (2008, p.3). See both documents for more sophisticated matrices of various strategies of prevention.

Primary prevention strategies are implemented before the problem ever occurs. In relation to sexual violence by boys and men against girls and women, primary prevention strategies aim to lessen the likelihood of boys and men using violence or girls and women suffering violence in the first place. They strive to circumvent violence before it occurs (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007, p.363). They are successful when the first instance of sexual violence is prevented (Foshee, et al., 1998, p.45).

Primary prevention strategies seek to remove the causes or 'determinants' of sexual violence, to prevent the development of risk factors associated with violence, and/or to enhance the factors protective against violence (Chamberlain, 2008, p.3). To give some examples, prevention efforts may address rape-supportive attitudes and norms through public information and awareness campaigns in mass media or in particular contexts such as sports and workplaces, education programs, or 'edutainment'. They may address gender inequalities and patriarchal power relations through policies promoting gender equality, skills training in respectful relationships, or community development and the mobilisation of women's and men's networks for change (Harvey, Garcia-Moreno, & Butchart, 2007).

Secondary prevention focuses on early identification and intervention, targeting those individuals at high risk for either perpetration or victimisation and working to reduce the likelihood of their further or subsequent engagement in or subjection to violence. Secondary prevention aims "to identify the problem before it becomes evident and to intervene as soon as possible to *prevent* the problem from occurring or progressing" (Chamberlain, 2008, p.3). It is intended to reverse progress towards sexual violence and to reduce its impact. For example, activities may focus on reducing opportunities for sexual violence by supporting the men who are at risk of perpetrating violence. Secondary prevention efforts are successful "when victims stop being victimized [e.g. by leaving violent relationships] or perpetrators stop being violent" (Foshee, et al., 1998, p.45).

Tertiary prevention is centred on responding after sexual violence has occurred. Activities focus on responding to or treating the problem by minimising the impact of violence, restoring health and safety, and preventing further victimisation and perpetration (Chamberlain, 2008, p.3). Mostly, these activities include: crisis care, counselling and advocacy; referral for victims and survivors of sexual violence; efforts to prevent additional abuse (Chrisler & Ferguson, 2006, p.245); and criminal justice and counselling responses to perpetrators of violence

aimed at punishment, rehabilitation, and the prevention of further violent behaviour.

Some would suggest that 'tertiary' activities are not strictly about 'prevention' but are really forms of 'intervention', as they take place after sexual violence already has occurred. Certainly, tertiary activities such as work with perpetrators or victims should not be all we do in the name of prevention. However, they do contribute directly to the prevention of sexual violence. For example, rapid and coordinated responses to individuals perpetrating sexual violence can reduce their opportunities for and likelihood of further perpetration, while effective responses to victims and survivors can reduce the impact of victimisation and prevent revictimisation (Chamberlain, 2008, p.4).

Tertiary responses also contribute indirectly to prevention. For example, when community members perceive that the criminal justice system intervenes in and punishes domestic violence, they are also more likely to have supportive attitudes towards victims and towards legal responses to violence (Salazar, Baker, Price, & Carlin, 2003). Tertiary activities therefore are legitimate components of the prevention spectrum. Their effective and systematic application complements and supports primary prevention.

In a second method of classifying prevention activities, efforts are grouped according to the population they address. Again, this is a three-part classification. *Universal* prevention measures are aimed at the general public or at all members of a specific group such as adolescents or young men. *Selective* measures are aimed at individuals or groups that have a higher risk of developing a problem. For example, a school program may be aimed at young people who have histories of delinquency or other risk factors relevant to sexual violence. *Indicated* measures are aimed at high-risk individuals or groups that have detectable signs of the problem, in other words, who show any identifiable risk factor or condition that makes it highly likely that they are experiencing or perpetrating sexual violence (Chamberlain, 2008, p.4-5). Thus, a universal strategy targets an entire population without regard to their exposure to sexual violence, a selective strategy targets those who have a heightened risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence, and an indicated strategy targets those who are victims or perpetrators (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention., 2004, p.6).

In so far as there exists some overlap between these two methods of classifying prevention activities, it should be noted that this is not always the case:

Universal preventive measures are usually primary prevention strategies...
Selective prevention measures typically focus on secondary prevention strategies while indicated prevention measures usually involve tertiary prevention strategies directed to high-risk groups (Chamberlain, 2008, p.5).

While the classification of prevention work into three types – primary, secondary, and tertiary – is widely used, there are some complications to note. First, the distinction between primary and secondary prevention is blurred. In some instances this is because the rationale for the activity spans both primary and secondary prevention. For example, an education program among young people in school may be seen as primary prevention in seeking to prevent sexual violence in young people's relationships before it occurs, but as secondary prevention in targeting a group seen as at higher risk of both perpetration and victimisation. In addition, while primary prevention efforts are intended to prevent initial perpetration or victimisation, in many cases the actual activities take place with groups which include individuals who have *already* perpetrated or experienced sexual violence. This is also true of work with secondary school classes: in any general class, there are likely to be some individuals who have assaulted or been assaulted. This means that prevention workers must be prepared to respond to instances of disclosure, whether of victimisation or perpetration, drawing on strategies and resources which are associated more strongly with secondary and tertiary prevention activities.

Second, in some accounts there are only two categories of prevention, not three, corresponding to efforts before or after violence has occurred. Here the third category, 'tertiary', is merged with the second, such that only two categories of activity are used, primary and secondary. 'Secondary' prevention then becomes a wider term for activities which aim to stop violence from recurring, e.g. by targeting known perpetrators or victims (Whitaker, et al., 2007).

Reference:

© Carmody, M., Evans, S., Krogh, C., Flood, M., Heenan, M., & Ovenden, G. (2009). *Framing best practice: National Standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault through education, National Sexual Assault Prevention Education Project for NASASV*. University of Western Sydney, Australia.