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**Evaluation of USVReact: a staff training program to counter sexual violence at university**

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(Article begins on next page)

# Health Education & Behavior

## EVALUATION OF USVreact: A STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT UNIVERSITY

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**EVALUATION OF USVreact:**  
**A STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT**  
**UNIVERSITY**

**Abstract**

Interventions addressing the endemic of sexual violence at European universities are scarce, particularly those that take a bystander focus to sexual violence prevention and involve university staff. Evidence-based data on their effectiveness are also lacking. This paper reports the description of a pilot evaluation study of the USVreact Italian training program addressed to university staff for counteracting sexual violence.

We assessed initial (T1) representations of gender-based violence, rape myth acceptance, and attitudes to bystander intervention (172 participants), and evaluated the effectiveness of the course by comparing via paired sample T-tests the responses before and after (T2) training (66 participants). Comparison between pre- (T1) and post-training (T2) responses indicated that the participants' ability to recognize subtle forms of violence and reduce rape myth acceptance was increased after training. Relatively few training programs based on the bystander approach to prevent gender-based violence at university have been performed to date in Europe and data on their effectiveness are scarce. Several limitations notwithstanding, the present pilot evaluation study provides suggestions for a more systematic evaluation of training interventions that address cultural legitimization of gender-based violence and that sustain bystander interventions in sexual assault prevention.

**Impact statement:** training program evaluation, countering sexual violence, bystander intervention, university, staff training.

## Introduction

Sexual violence can be defined as “any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” (WHO, 2002).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) about 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical or sexual violence from partners or non-partners at some point during their lives. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union (EU), about 215,000 violent sexual crimes were reported to the police in the EU in 2015 alone. In Italy, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2015) reported that 31% of women aged between 16 and 70 years have experienced some form of violence during their lives: physical violence in 20%, sexual violence in 21%, and sexual harassment in 74% of cases. As Kelly (1987) underlined, sexual violence can assume several forms, from the most serious, such as rape, to the more subtle, such as verbal harassment. These different behaviors need specific interventions. The World Health Organization (WHO) specifies the three prevention levels to counteract forms of sexual violence: primary, secondary, and tertiary (WHO, 2010; Banyard, 2015). Secondary, focalized prevention actions should be activated in specific risky situations, and tertiary prevention is necessary after a violent episode. Primary prevention should act as extensively as possible to reduce the occurrence of any form of violence. The aims of primary prevention are to remove the

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2  
3 conditions that allow episodes of violence from happening, i.e., to promote a cultural  
4  
5 change towards stigmatizing sexual dominance and violence, in any form. In the  
6  
7 United States, bystander interventions are often proposed to counteract sexual violence  
8  
9 (focused on primary and secondary prevention). As clearly exposed by Banyard  
10  
11 (2015), bystander-based intervention can be useful in counteracting violence.  
12  
13 Bystanders can be proactive in supporting the victim of a violent episode and can  
14  
15 stigmatize the action of the perpetrator: in this way, the bystander can contribute  
16  
17 to enhance a culture of respect.  
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21 To prevent sexual violence, the European Commission finances international projects  
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23 with targeted actions addressed to the different forms of violence, to various different  
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25 social contexts (workplace environment, schools, universities) and social stakeholders  
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27 (e.g., healthcare personnel, law enforcement agencies, teachers, etc.) with the aim to  
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29 both support victims of violence and reduce sexist and discriminatory behavior (see  
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31 Daphne Funding Programme and Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme –  
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33 European Commission).  
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37 The training program presented and evaluated here is part of the European project  
38  
39 entitled "USVreact: University Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence"  
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41 (www.usvreact.eu) [1]. Why the university context? Because sexual violence is an  
42  
43 entrenched problem in higher education institutions, especially in the United States  
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45 and northern European countries: 68% of female students in the UK (NUS, 2010)  
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47 declared having experienced at least one episode of harassment or sexual violence on  
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49 campus (Perkins & Warner, 2017). While the prevalence in Italy is far lower - 30%  
50  
51 according to the Eu-Project *Gender-based Violence, Stalking and Fear of Crime*  
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53 (2012) - there are worrying signals of a culture that seriously underrates many forms  
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55 of sexual violence in society at large and in university settings. Newspaper reports,  
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3 television programs, and posts on social networks show that sexual violence is often  
4 treated as a joke or attributed to provocations by the victim (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri,  
5 & Grasselli, 2003; Ward, 2016; Krongard, & Tsay-Vogel, 2018).  
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10 Our project was entitled “USVreact” to emphasize the need to avoid stigmatizing the  
11 victim of sexual violence and to change a culture that tends to justify violence,  
12 perpetuate shame and self-stereotyping. The goal was to foster a culture of supportive  
13 reaction: people should no longer be passive observers but rather active and reactive  
14 subjects. The project title underscores the need to involve local and higher education  
15 institutional communities so that they can react to behaviors that harm or risk harming  
16 an individual’s dignity. Indeed, the moral responsibility of violent acts resides with the  
17 whole community. Unfortunately, very few projects contradict cultural legitimization of  
18 sexual violence in the university setting or involve higher education organizations  
19 (students, faculty, administrative staff) in Europe or in Italy in particular (Fenton &  
20 Mott, 2017).  
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35 A project designed to bring about cultural change in the university setting should be  
36 addressed **to students (or their representatives) and staff alike**. Staff can contribute to  
37 the construction of an organizational and educational environment conducive to  
38 building respect. Moreover, because they belong to the organization longer than  
39 students do, staff can maintain and foster a respectful culture over time. These are the  
40 main reasons why our work presents a pilot test for the implementation and evaluation  
41 of a training program targeted chiefly to administrative staff.  
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### 53 ***Theoretical basis of the intervention***

54 Training and education interventions to contrast sexual violence aim to change gender  
55 stereotype, to raise awareness about the different forms that sexual violence can  
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3 assume and to sensitize people to be active subject to react to it (see, for example, the  
4 role that a bystander could have). Despite national and international legislation against  
5 sexual violence and despite the numerous initiatives to prevent it, sexual violence is  
6 still justified and underestimated. Undervaluing the problem or attributing it to actions  
7 by minority groups or isolated cases maintains the status quo and justifies the system,  
8 particularly as regards gender relations, and reiterates gender inequality (Stahl, Eek, &  
9 Kazemi, 2010; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; 2014).

10  
11  
12 Jost & Banaji (1994) advanced the System Justification Theory to explain that the  
13 consequence of "identification" with the culture to which subjects belong is the  
14 "defense" of the status quo and the affirmation that differences between groups are  
15 right. This theoretical model has been used to account for attitudes towards gender  
16 differences (*Gender System justification*). For many studies on System Justification  
17 Theory this belief underlies different forms of discrimination and sexual violence  
18 against women. Jost & Kay (2005) showed a relationship between system justification,  
19 gender stereotypes, and sexism. Chapleau & Oswald (2014) found that system  
20 justification is related to moral outrage and stated that the phenomenon reiterates a  
21 system of sexual violence. Other scholars (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne,  
22 Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) focused on a specific form of sexual violence - rape -  
23 and analyzed so-called "rape myths": shared attitudes and beliefs that tend to justify  
24 violence, to underestimate the brutality of a violent act, or to deny male sexual assault  
25 to the detriment of a woman. Underestimating and justifying any form of violence  
26 (including rape) are expressions of a cultural attitude that maintains, or does not  
27 perceive, gender inequality (Payne et al., 1999). Research underlines the strong link  
28 between *gender system justification*, rape myth acceptance (e.g., Chapleau & Oswald,  
29 2014) and their relationship with the efficacy of intervention. Joseph, Gray, & Mayer  
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3 (2013) defined **gender system justification** as a “barrier” that in a college campus  
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5 culture can reduce the effectiveness of prevention actions against sexual assault. A  
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7 change of perspective is needed to change behavior at the individual and the social  
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9 level.  
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### 11 12 13 14 ***Training at the Universities of Turin***

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16 The training program on **sexual** violence prevention involved mainly university staff,  
17  
18 some faculty members, student dormitory directors, and student representatives of the  
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20 University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin.  
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22  
23 While bystander interventions in the United States have usually been developed with  
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25 students, we chose to involve primarily administrative staff because:  
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- 27  
28 (1) staff are already involved in operating direct-contact services for students; if  
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30 they are adequately trained, they can be observers of inappropriate behaviors, either  
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32 being themselves references for students directly or by signposting to the appropriate  
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34 services at the university and in the community  
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36 (2) once appropriately trained, staff can become a guarantor of "good practices" in  
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38 the workplace, contributing to the dissemination of a culture of respect at all  
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40 organizational levels  
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42 (3) staff turnover is low, whereas students complete their studies within 3 to 5  
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44 years, graduate, and leave the institution.  
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49 Participation in the program was voluntary and recognized as on-the-job training for  
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51 university staff, in agreement with the administration of the two universities and the  
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53 human resource departments. The staff of the University of Turin was informed of the  
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55 training course by the University General Direction; an invitation to participate was  
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57 sent by e-mail to all staff members, and voluntary enrollment in the training program  
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3 was collected. We had planned to involve 80 participants per university, but since we  
4 received 90 registration requests from the University of Turin alone, we raised the  
5 number of participants to 90 for the University of Turin and 80 for the Polytechnic of  
6 Turin. The participants attended the training course during working hours without loss  
7 of salary. They signed an attendance sheet at each training session.  
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14 The course ran for a total of 16 hours: two plenary sessions (one at the beginning and  
15 one at the end of the course) and two small group meetings (about 10-15 participants  
16 per group). In order to involve all participants, the small groups met 13 times. Overall,  
17 the training program lasted 4 months from the initial to the final plenary session. The  
18 first plenary session introduced the project and presented the university- and  
19 community-based services currently operating against abuse and discrimination.  
20  
21 Course participants then met in small groups (2 half days, for a total of 8 hours of  
22 training) to discuss: gender equality/inequality in society and at the University; what  
23 sexual violence is; how to recognize behaviors that express discrimination; how to  
24 intervene in case of violence disclosure; laws and policies concerning sexual violence,  
25 stalking, and harassment. The groups reviewed case studies and vignettes, viewed  
26 movies, and received theoretical input about gender stereotypes and sexism. At the  
27 concluding plenary session, data on rape myth acceptance and sexual violence  
28 perception in the University context, involving students, were presented and  
29 commented with the participants. Finally, a post-training evaluation (T2) was  
30 conducted.  
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### 52 53 ***Training evaluation*** 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 The present paper describes the process and reports the results of the pilot evaluation  
4 study of the training course addressed to university staff within the USVreact project.  
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8 The study had two main objectives:  
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10 O1) to describe, at the beginning of the program (T1), participants'  
11 representations of sexual violence, their attitude to intervention as a “bystander” to  
12 counter sexual violence, and their acceptance of rape myths. In line with Jost & Banaji  
13 (1994), Chapleau & Oswald (2013) and Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi (2010), we expected  
14 that, also for the course participants, higher gender system justification corresponds to  
15 higher rape myth acceptance; also, we expected an inverse correlation between rape  
16 myth acceptance and attitude to intervene to counter violence (coherently with  
17 McMahon, 2010).  
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28 O2) to compare participants' representations and attitudes before and after the  
29 course and to highlight pre- and post-training differences and check for training  
30 effectiveness.  
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34 We hypothesized that gender system justification and rape myth acceptance scores  
35 would be lower at post-training assessment; participants would show greater  
36 awareness of different forms of sexual violence and greater intention to intervene as a  
37 bystander if a witness to such acts.  
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## 47 **Material and method**

### 48 *Procedure*

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50 At the beginning of the first plenary session, after registration, participants received a  
51 copy of the questionnaire along with a short description of the evaluation procedure  
52 and information on the processing of personal data. They were asked to complete the  
53 questionnaire anonymously and to leave it in a box in the hallway outside the room  
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3 before the start of the training presentation. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes  
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5 to complete.  
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8 In order to compare participant answers before (T1) and after (T2) the training course,  
9  
10 the participants completed the same questionnaire at the final plenary session. The  
11  
12 procedure for completing the second questionnaire and providing information on  
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14 processing of personal data were the same as at T1. Participants were told to write the  
15  
16 same self-generated ID code on the T1 and the T2 questionnaire to permit matching  
17  
18 T1 and T2 answers, while allowing the participants to remain anonymous. The self-  
19  
20 generated ID code was composed of a simple data combination (e.g., a birthday)  
21  
22 familiar to the respondent.  
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### 28 *Measures*

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30 The questionnaire, approved by the University Bioethics Committee (Approval No.  
31  
32 234687, 20th October 2016), consisted of a brief socio-demographic section and the  
33  
34 following scales:  
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- 37 • *System Justification – Gender* (Jost & Kay, 2005): 8 items (e.g., “In general,  
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39 relations between men and women are fair”) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9  
40  
41 (strongly agree);  
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- 44 • *Identification of Sexual Violence Experience*: adaptation of the 8 items that  
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46 Konik & Cortina (2008) selected from Fitzgerald et al. (1988; 1995): participants had  
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48 to choose which behaviours they felt are forms of sexual violence (multiple choice  
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50 scale; e.g., “Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel  
51  
52 uncomfortable”);  
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- 55 • *Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myth* proposed by McMahon &  
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57 Farmer (2011) in its Italian adaptation (SRMA-IT) by Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli  
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3 **(in press)**: 20 items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

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5 The scale is made up of four factors that express different rape myths: “She asked for  
6 it”, 6 items (e.g., “When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for  
7 trouble”); “He didn’t mean to”, 4 items (e.g., “When guys rape, it is usually because of  
8 their strong desire for sex”); “It wasn’t really rape”, 5 items (e.g., “A rape probably  
9 didn’t happen if the girl has no bruises or marks”); “She lied”, 5 items (e.g., “Rape  
10 accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys”);

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19 • *Bystander intention to intervene scale* (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2002;  
20 2005): Likert scale from 0 (not at all confident to act) to 10 (completely confident to  
21 act); participants had to state how confident they felt as a bystander about undertaking  
22 the 14 actions to counter sexual violence (e.g., “Express my discomfort if someone  
23 makes a joke about a woman’s body”).  
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### 33 ***Participants***

#### 34 *At T1*

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37 At the beginning of the course (T1) (first plenary session), 177 people received the  
38 questionnaire and 172 completed it adequately: 88 from the University, 80 from the  
39 Polytechnic, and 4 from student dormitory directors or workers. In detail, 81.7% were  
40 staff, 8.9% student representatives, 7.1% faculty, 2.4% student dormitory directors or  
41 workers; 89.3% were women, 10.1% men, 0.6% declared “other”; the average age was  
42 44.46 years (SD 9.81).  
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#### 53 *At T2*

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56 The T2 questionnaire was completed by 98 participants: all trainees who were present  
57 at the final session completed it appropriately. Because about 70 T1 participants did  
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3 not attend the final plenary session and because some participants did not indicate  
4 correctly their self-generated ID code, as they did not remember the data they had  
5 chosen to use at T1, we were able to match the T1 and the T2 questionnaires for only  
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10 66 participants. As the T1 sample was composed of 172 respondents, the attrition rate  
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12 (U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences - IES) was  
13  
14 unfortunately high (62%).

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16 Of the 66 matching respondents, 36 were from the University and 30 from the  
17  
18 Polytechnic: 87.5% were staff, 9.4% faculty, 1.6% student representatives, and 1.6%  
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20 dormitory directors or workers; 92.4% were women and 7.56% were men; the average  
21  
22 age was 45.67 years (SD 7.87).  
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28 As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked if  
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30 the attrition rate had an effect on the characteristics of the sample at T1 and at T2 by  
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32 comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching  
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34 respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.  
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38 No statistically significant differences in socio-demographics between the group of the  
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40 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents were found.  
41  
42 The chi-square test showed no differences in percentages: between women and men ( $p$   
43  
44 = .49); between respondents from the University and the Polytechnic ( $p$  = .73);  
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46 between staff/faculty/students ( $p$  = .06). The independent samples T-test showed no  
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48 differences in average age ( $p$  = .14).  
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### 52 53 **Data analysis**

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55 Data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS Statistics version 24. After exploratory  
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57 factor analysis via eigenvalues greater than 1, the internal consistency of each scale  
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3 and subscale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to verify the structure  
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5 of the scales.  
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8 In order to fulfil objective 1 of the present study, descriptive analyses (mean –  $M$  – and  
9  
10 standard deviation –  $SD$ ) for summed score of each scale were carried out to show  
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12 respondents' system justification – gender level, rape myth acceptance, and bystander  
13  
14 intention to intervene. Relationships between the concepts were then analysed by  
15  
16 bivariate correlations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to check for  
17  
18 differences in constructs between groups. Specifically, we compared via independent  
19  
20 samples t-test the responses from the participants from the University and from the  
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22 Polytechnic and via one-way ANOVA the participants by their roles (staff, student  
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24 representatives, faculty, and student dormitory directors/workers) at the two  
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26 universities.  
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31 In order to highlight pre- and post-training differences in participants' representations  
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33 and attitudes (objective 2), we used a paired sample t-test to compare the questionnaire  
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35 responses at T1 and T2 and to check whether, after participation on the course, there  
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37 were changes in the representation of sexual violence, in **gender system justification**,  
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39 in rape myth acceptance, and in bystander intention to intervene. The effect of the  
40  
41 attrition rate was also checked.  
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## 46 **Results**

### 47 ***T1 Sample***

#### 48 *Participants' representations and attitude*

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51 In order to evaluate participant representations and attitudes at the beginning of the  
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53 program (T1), we analysed **gender system justification**, i.e., the degree to which  
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55 respondents judge the system of gender relationships as being fair. As higher values  
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3 express agreement with equity of the system, the media of answers (Table 1) means  
4 that participants at T1 were slightly critical of the fairness of relationships between  
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6 genders.  
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12 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1  
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17 To understand respondents' representations of sexual violence, we asked them to  
18 select from a list of behaviours which ones they considered violent and to express their  
19 agreement with statements that express rape myths (rape myth acceptance). At the  
20 beginning of the training course (T1; Table 2), the majority of participants (83.3%)  
21 defined violence as the act of someone who "attempted to establish a romantic or  
22 sexual relationship despite the other person's efforts to discourage it", but very few  
23 (23.7%) considered violence as the act of someone "telling sexually coloured stories or  
24 offensive jokes". Surprisingly, less than half of respondents (45.5%) defined "Being  
25 stared or leered at in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable" as violence.  
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40 Rape myth acceptance was not very high; lower values express refusal of myths (Table  
41 1) though higher acceptance was noted for the myth "He didn't mean to" ( $M 1.87$ ) that  
42 justifies assault by a man, affirming that he did not really intend to commit rape.  
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44 Regarding bystander intention to intervene, respondents stated they would act to  
45 counter the assault ( $M 8.43$ ).  
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53 As Table 1 shows, **gender system justification** was related strongly to acceptance of  
54 the two rape myths "It was not really rape" and "She lied" acceptance and quite  
55 strongly with acceptance of the rape myth "He didn't mean to": perceiving fairness in  
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3 relationships between genders was associated with higher acquiescence with  
4 stereotypes and false beliefs about sexual violence. A strong inverse relation was  
5 evident between acceptance of the rape myth “She asked for it” and bystander  
6 intention to intervene: if respondents believed that the woman provoked the rape, they  
7 would be less disposed to intervene to help her.  
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### 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 *Differences between groups*

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19 The independent samples t-test showed no differences between participants from the  
20 University and those from the Polytechnic. One-way ANOVA showed no differences  
21 between work roles.  
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### 26 27 28 **Sample 1 and Sample 2**

#### 29 30 *Effect of the attrition rate*

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32 As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked the  
33 effect of the attrition rate by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of  
34 the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.  
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38 No statistically significant differences were found at the beginning of the training  
39 program between the two groups in gender system justification, acceptance of the four  
40 rape myths or bystander intention to intervene (Table 2; Independent samples t-test).  
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46 We can state confidently that the data at T1 and at T2 can be compared, despite the  
47 substantially smaller sample at T2.  
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53 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2  
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#### 56 57 58 *Evaluation of Training Program Effects* 59 60



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3 Comparison between the T1 and the T2 data showed that the number of respondents  
4 who labelled different forms of behaviours as “violent” increased between T1 and T2  
5  
6 (Table 3): post-training identification of subtle forms of violence was higher.  
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12 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 3  
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#### 14 **gender system justification**

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16 The post-training data showed lower **gender system justification** and lower acceptance  
17 of the rape myths “She asked for it” and “She lied” (Table 2: Paired samples t-test).  
18  
19 No significant pre- and post-training differences were found for the acceptance of the  
20 myths “He didn’t mean to” and “It wasn’t really rape”. There were no significant  
21 differences in bystander intention to intervene to prevent or counter a sexual assault.  
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### 30 **Discussion**

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32 The present paper reports the process and main results **of a pilot evaluation study** of  
33 the Italian training program of the USVreact European project for university staff,  
34 faculty, and student representatives to **prevent** sexual violence inside universities. We  
35 wanted to show the process of the evaluation and the first evidence of effectiveness of  
36 the training intervention in promoting cultural change and bystander willingness to  
37 intervene in a university setting. Assessment of participants’ representations of sexual  
38 violence, **gender system justification**, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to  
39 intervene was performed at the beginning of the training course. Effectiveness of the  
40 course was then measured by comparing participants’ responses pre- and post-training  
41 to determine whether changes had occurred.  
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55 Results of the evaluation study showed that participants at the beginning of the  
56 training expressed quite a low acceptance of rape myths and a reasonable degree of  
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3 willingness to intervene to counter sexual violence. This observation is coherent with  
4  
5 the fact that participation on the course was voluntary, that participants were probably  
6  
7 already quite aware of sexual violence before starting the course, and that the training  
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9 course attracted mostly women. As reported in previous studies (Martini, Tartaglia, &  
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11 De Piccoli, *in press*; Papp & Erchull, 2017), women showed lower system justification  
12  
13 and rape myth acceptance and higher intention to intervene. Although the participants  
14  
15 were already aware of the seriousness of sexual violence, pre-training responses  
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17 showed they were less able to recognize the more subtle forms of violence. This  
18  
19 finding suggests the need to develop sensitivity to recognize violence also in its subtle  
20  
21 and hidden forms. Finally, consistent with previous work (McMahon, 2010), high  
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23 inverse correlations emerged between rape myth acceptance and bystander intention to  
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25 intervene.  
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30 The present results suggest that a training course designed to raise recognition of  
31  
32 stereotypes of sexual violence and of more subtle forms of violence (e.g., harassment)  
33  
34 could be helpful to foster attitudes to counter sexual violence in university settings. As  
35  
36 suggested by Banyard (2015), to prevent the occurrence of violent and discriminatory  
37  
38 situations, it is necessary to change the representations and attitudes towards sexual  
39  
40 violence. The perpetuation of gender-based violence is fueled by false beliefs and  
41  
42 stereotypes related to violence itself and to gender relationships. These attitudes help  
43  
44 to justify the abuse or the individuals who act on them and affect the identification of a  
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46 situation as risky or violent (Burn, 2009; Bennet, Banyard, & Garnhart, 2014;  
47  
48 Banyard, 2015). That said, in order to activate bystander intervention, the first step is  
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50 to enable an individual to recognize a situation as violent or risky and then to make the  
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52 individual feel responsible for intervening (Banyard, 2015). Comparison of pre- and  
53  
54 post-training responses revealed some differences. Paired sample t-test analysis  
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3 showed a significant increase in participants' ability to identify more subtle kinds of  
4 violence and a reduction in **gender system justification** and in acceptance of the two  
5 rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied". This change suggests an impact of the  
6 training course.  
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11 Summarizing, we can state that by the end of the training program, the participants  
12 were more aware of what violence is and were better able to identify its subtle forms  
13 and that they were less disposed to blaming the victim, as the attitude of attributing  
14 responsibility for violence to the victim was considerably reduced. Reflection on the  
15 subtle shades of violence and false beliefs about sexual assault probably helped raise  
16 participants' awareness of the pervasiveness of a culture that legitimizes violence and  
17 their ability to recognize it. No significant changes were observed for the other  
18 dimensions in part because the participants were already quite aware of the problem of  
19 violence against women and in part because deep cultural change probably takes  
20 longer to manifest than the few months of a course program. Moreover, it is also  
21 possible that the instrument we used to measure the intention to intervene, originally  
22 designed for students, needs to be adapted **for faculty and staff or, generally, for**  
23 **workers**. In future studies, we plan to develop a scale that captures situations more  
24 relevant to the lifestyle of staff and/or teachers.  
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44 **This pilot study, like the evaluation design**, has several limitations. First, it has no  
45 control group. This weakness needs to be addressed when planning future training  
46 courses. Second, the sample of respondents who completed both questionnaires was  
47 small, also due to a problem with the coding process; greater attention will be paid to  
48 avoiding errors in the identification coding process on future courses: **a possible**  
49 **solution is to indicate clearly which data are to be reported to generate the ID code**  
50 **(e.g., first letter of mother's surname; month of father's birth; third letter of her/his**  
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3 **name**). After the plenary introduction to the program, some participants did not  
4 participate in the training and did not fill in the T2 questionnaire. The attrition rate  
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6 participate in the training and did not fill in the T2 questionnaire. The attrition rate  
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8 (i.e., matching the respondents to the T1 and T2 questionnaires) was quite high, which  
9  
10 is a serious weakness of the present study. For this reason, the results for the  
11  
12 effectiveness of the training course cannot be generalized as we had intended. In future  
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14 training courses, it would be interesting to ask participants why they did not attend the  
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16 course; it could be useful to try to foster attendance to the entire program. Third,  
17  
18 though women make up 68% of the administrative staff at the University of Turin and  
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20 60% at the Polytechnic of Turin, women accounted for more than 90% of the training  
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22 course participants, whereas men were strongly underrepresented. A further limitation  
23  
24 is that we did not administer a follow-up post-training questionnaire to analyse the  
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26 stability of changes over time; this step will be included in future research designs.  
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30 These limitations notwithstanding, **the pilot evaluation study** suggests several thematic  
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32 areas that would be appropriate to develop in a training course on combating gender-  
33  
34 based violence. For example, two future areas of focus could be on contrasting the  
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36 tendency to blame the victim of sexual violence and on assessing the different forms  
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38 that violence can take. The data collected at T1 show that acceptance of the myth “She  
39  
40 asked for it” was inversely related to the bystander intervention attitude. The same  
41  
42 significant negative relationship between acceptance of the myth “She asked for it”  
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44 and the bystander intervention attitude was found by a previous study (Martini & De  
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46 Piccoli, 2020), with a sample of about 3000 university students. Moreover, because the  
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48 intention to intervene hinges on recognizing a potentially harmful situation for the  
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50 victim (Darley & Latané, 1968), a program designed to **prevent sexual** violence needs  
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52 to sustain the ability to recognize the different faces of violence.  
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3 Other variables may certainly come into play in motivating a bystander to intervene  
4 against any form of violence; we believe that the present study findings provide a  
5 preliminary basis on which to develop training courses. Keeping in mind critical issues  
6 and some weaknesses in the design, this work can offer some suggestions to  
7 implement evaluation of bystander-based interventions. Very few projects to date have  
8 tested the effectiveness of bystander-based intervention involving university staff. This  
9 specific approach, which originated in the United States (Banyard, 2015) but is not yet  
10 common in Europe, may promote adequate first response to sexual assault and  
11 prevention of more subtle violence. Bystander intervention can be fostered by  
12 promoting cultural change, countering false beliefs such as rape myth acceptance, and  
13 helping to identify violence. To reach this goal it is necessary to involve more men. In  
14 Italy, gender-based violence is often considered a female issue. But as previous studies  
15 have shown (Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017; Russell & Hand, 2017), because men and  
16 women express different attitudes towards these problems, men cannot remain passive  
17 spectators in counteracting sexual violence. A cultural change can be more effective  
18 the more both men and women cooperate as active subjects in counteracting all forms  
19 of violence and discrimination. Along this line, university management should include  
20 among the compulsory courses for all administrative staff and, in perspective, for all  
21 teachers, a program like USVreact which is aimed at preventing sexual violence in the  
22 academic setting. In this way, more men would be involved in the reflection (and in  
23 the action) on this topic and would contribute to spreading a culture of respect and  
24 non-abuse, which is the basis of the primary prevention as indicated by the World  
25 Health Organization (WHO, 2010).

### Conflict of Interests Statement

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

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## EVALUATION OF USVreact: A STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT UNIVERSITY

### **Abstract**

Interventions addressing the endemic of sexual violence at European universities are scarce, particularly those that take a bystander focus to sexual violence prevention and involve university staff. Evidence-based data on their effectiveness are also lacking. This paper reports the description of a pilot evaluation study of the USVreact Italian training program addressed to university staff for counteracting sexual violence.

We assessed initial (T1) representations of gender-based violence, rape myth acceptance, and attitudes to bystander intervention (172 participants), and evaluated the effectiveness of the course by comparing via paired sample T-tests the responses before and after (T2) training (66 participants). Comparison between pre- (T1) and post-training (T2) responses indicated that the participants' ability to recognize subtle forms of violence and reduce rape myth acceptance was increased after training. Relatively few training programs based on the bystander approach to prevent gender-based violence at university have been performed to date in Europe and data on their effectiveness are scarce. Several limitations notwithstanding, the present pilot evaluation study provides suggestions for a more systematic evaluation of training interventions that address cultural legitimization of gender-based violence and that sustain bystander interventions in sexual assault prevention.

**Impact statement:** training program evaluation, countering sexual violence, bystander intervention, university, staff training.

## Introduction

Sexual violence can be defined as “any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” (WHO, 2002). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) about 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical or sexual violence from partners or non-partners at some point during their lives. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union (EU), about 215,000 violent sexual crimes were reported to the police in the EU in 2015 alone. In Italy, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2015) reported that 31% of women aged between 16 and 70 years have experienced some form of violence during their lives: physical violence in 20%, sexual violence in 21%, and sexual harassment in 74% of cases. As Kelly (1987) underlined, sexual violence can assume several forms, from the most serious, such as rape, to the more subtle, such as verbal harassment. These different behaviors need specific interventions. The World Health Organization (WHO) specifies the three prevention levels to counteract forms of sexual violence: primary, secondary, and tertiary (WHO, 2010; Banyard, 2015). Secondary, focalized prevention actions should be activated in specific risky situations, and tertiary prevention is necessary after a violent episode. Primary prevention should act as extensively as possible to reduce the occurrence of any form of violence. The aims of primary prevention are to remove the

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3 conditions that allow episodes of violence from happening, i.e., to promote a cultural  
4 change towards stigmatizing sexual dominance and violence, in any form. In the  
5 United States, bystander interventions are often proposed to counteract sexual violence  
6 (focused on primary and secondary prevention). As clearly exposed by Banyard  
7 (2015), bystander-based intervention can be useful in counteracting violence.  
8 Bystanders can be proactive in supporting the victim of a violent episode and can  
9 stigmatize the action of the perpetrator: in this way, the bystander can contribute to  
10 enhance a culture of respect.

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12 To prevent sexual violence, the European Commission finances international projects  
13 with targeted actions addressed to the different forms of violence, to various different  
14 social contexts (workplace environment, schools, universities) and social stakeholders  
15 (e.g., healthcare personnel, law enforcement agencies, teachers, etc.) with the aim to  
16 both support victims of violence and reduce sexist and discriminatory behavior (see  
17 Daphne Funding Programme and Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme –  
18 European Commission).

19  
20 The training program presented and evaluated here is part of the European project  
21 entitled "USVreact: University Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence"  
22 ([www.usvreact.eu](http://www.usvreact.eu)) [1]. Why the university context? Because sexual violence is an  
23 entrenched problem in higher education institutions, especially in the United States  
24 and northern European countries: 68% of female students in the UK (NUS, 2010)  
25 declared having experienced at least one episode of harassment or sexual violence on  
26 campus (Perkins & Warner, 2017). While the prevalence in Italy is far lower - 30%  
27 according to the Eu-Project *Gender-based Violence, Stalking and Fear of Crime*  
28 (2012) - there are worrying signals of a culture that seriously underrates many forms  
29 of sexual violence in society at large and in university settings. Newspaper reports,  
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3 television programs, and posts on social networks show that sexual violence is often  
4 treated as a joke or attributed to provocations by the victim (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri,  
5 & Grasselli, 2003; Ward, 2016; Krongard, & Tsay-Vogel, 2018).  
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10 Our project was entitled “USVreact” to emphasize the need to avoid stigmatizing the  
11 victim of sexual violence and to change a culture that tends to justify violence,  
12 perpetuate shame and self-stereotyping. The goal was to foster a culture of supportive  
13 reaction: people should no longer be passive observers but rather active and reactive  
14 subjects. The project title underscores the need to involve local and higher education  
15 institutional communities so that they can react to behaviors that harm or risk harming  
16 an individual’s dignity. Indeed, the moral responsibility of violent acts resides with the  
17 whole community. Unfortunately, very few projects contradict cultural legitimization of  
18 sexual violence in the university setting or involve higher education organizations  
19 (students, faculty, administrative staff) in Europe or in Italy in particular (Fenton &  
20 Mott, 2017).  
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35 A project designed to bring about cultural change in the university setting should be  
36 addressed to students (or their representatives) and staff alike. Staff can contribute to  
37 the construction of an organizational and educational environment conducive to  
38 building respect. Moreover, because they belong to the organization longer than  
39 students do, staff can maintain and foster a respectful culture over time. These are the  
40 main reasons why our work presents a pilot test for the implementation and evaluation  
41 of a training program targeted chiefly to administrative staff.  
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### 53 ***Theoretical basis of the intervention***

54 Training and education interventions to contrast sexual violence aim to change gender  
55 stereotype, to raise awareness about the different forms that sexual violence can  
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3 assume and to sensitize people to be active subject to react to it (see, for example, the  
4 role that a bystander could have). Despite national and international legislation against  
5 sexual violence and despite the numerous initiatives to prevent it, sexual violence is  
6 still justified and underestimated. Undervaluing the problem or attributing it to actions  
7 by minority groups or isolated cases maintains the status quo and justifies the system,  
8 particularly as regards gender relations, and reiterates gender inequality (Stahl, Eek, &  
9 Kazemi, 2010; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; 2014).

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19 Jost & Banaji (1994) advanced the System Justification Theory to explain that the  
20 consequence of "identification" with the culture to which subjects belong is the  
21 "defense" of the status quo and the affirmation that differences between groups are  
22 right. This theoretical model has been used to account for attitudes towards gender  
23 differences (*Gender System justification*). For many studies on System Justification  
24 Theory this belief underlies different forms of discrimination and sexual violence  
25 against women. Jost & Kay (2005) showed a relationship between system justification,  
26 gender stereotypes, and sexism. Chapleau & Oswald (2014) found that system  
27 justification is related to moral outrage and stated that the phenomenon reiterates a  
28 system of sexual violence. Other scholars (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne,  
29 Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) focused on a specific form of sexual violence - rape -  
30 and analyzed so-called "rape myths": shared attitudes and beliefs that tend to justify  
31 violence, to underestimate the brutality of a violent act, or to deny male sexual assault  
32 to the detriment of a woman. Underestimating and justifying any form of violence  
33 (including rape) are expressions of a cultural attitude that maintains, or does not  
34 perceive, gender inequality (Payne et al., 1999). Research underlines the strong link  
35 between gender system justification, rape myth acceptance (e.g., Chapleau & Oswald,  
36 2014) and their relationship with the efficacy of intervention. Joseph, Gray, & Mayer  
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3 (2013) defined gender system justification as a “barrier” that in a college campus  
4 culture can reduce the effectiveness of prevention actions against sexual assault. A  
5 change of perspective is needed to change behavior at the individual and the social  
6 level.  
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### 14 ***Training at the Universities of Turin***

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17 The training program on sexual violence prevention involved mainly university staff,  
18 some faculty members, student dormitory directors, and student representatives of the  
19 University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin.  
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24 While bystander interventions in the United States have usually been developed with  
25 students, we chose to involve primarily administrative staff because:  
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- 28 (1) staff are already involved in operating direct-contact services for students; if  
29 they are adequately trained, they can be observers of inappropriate behaviors, either  
30 being themselves references for students directly or by signposting to the appropriate  
31 services at the university and in the community  
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- 34 (2) once appropriately trained, staff can become a guarantor of "good practices" in  
35 the workplace, contributing to the dissemination of a culture of respect at all  
36 organizational levels  
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- 39 (3) staff turnover is low, whereas students complete their studies within 3 to 5  
40 years, graduate, and leave the institution.  
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49 Participation in the program was voluntary and recognized as on-the-job training for  
50 university staff, in agreement with the administration of the two universities and the  
51 human resource departments. The staff of the University of Turin was informed of the  
52 training course by the University General Direction; an invitation to participate was  
53 sent by e-mail to all staff members, and voluntary enrollment in the training program  
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3 was collected. We had planned to involve 80 participants per university, but since we  
4 received 90 registration requests from the University of Turin alone, we raised the  
5 number of participants to 90 for the University of Turin and 80 for the Polytechnic of  
6 Turin. The participants attended the training course during working hours without loss  
7 of salary. They signed an attendance sheet at each training session.  
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10 The course ran for a total of 16 hours: two plenary sessions (one at the beginning and  
11 one at the end of the course) and two small group meetings (about 10-15 participants  
12 per group). In order to involve all participants, the small groups met 13 times. Overall,  
13 the training program lasted 4 months from the initial to the final plenary session. The  
14 first plenary session introduced the project and presented the university- and  
15 community-based services currently operating against abuse and discrimination.  
16 Course participants then met in small groups (2 half days, for a total of 8 hours of  
17 training) to discuss: gender equality/inequality in society and at the University; what  
18 sexual violence is; how to recognize behaviors that express discrimination; how to  
19 intervene in case of violence disclosure; laws and policies concerning sexual violence,  
20 stalking, and harassment. The groups reviewed case studies and vignettes, viewed  
21 movies, and received theoretical input about gender stereotypes and sexism. At the  
22 concluding plenary session, data on rape myth acceptance and sexual violence  
23 perception in the University context, involving students, were presented and  
24 commented with the participants. Finally, a post-training evaluation (T2) was  
25 conducted.  
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### 51 ***Training evaluation***

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3 The present paper describes the process and reports the results of the pilot evaluation  
4 study of the training course addressed to university staff within the USVreact project.  
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8 The study had two main objectives:  
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10 O1) to describe, at the beginning of the program (T1), participants'  
11 representations of sexual violence, their attitude to intervention as a "bystander" to  
12 counter sexual violence, and their acceptance of rape myths. In line with Jost & Banaji  
13 (1994), Chapleau & Oswald (2013) and Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi (2010), we expected  
14 that, also for the course participants, higher gender system justification corresponds to  
15 higher rape myth acceptance; also, we expected an inverse correlation between rape  
16 myth acceptance and attitude to intervene to counter violence (coherently with  
17 McMahon, 2010).  
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28 O2) to compare participants' representations and attitudes before and after the  
29 course and to highlight pre- and post-training differences and check for training  
30 effectiveness.  
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34 We hypothesized that gender system justification and rape myth acceptance scores  
35 would be lower at post-training assessment; participants would show greater  
36 awareness of different forms of sexual violence and greater intention to intervene as a  
37 bystander if a witness to such acts.  
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## 47 **Material and method**

### 48 *Procedure*

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50 At the beginning of the first plenary session, after registration, participants received a  
51 copy of the questionnaire along with a short description of the evaluation procedure  
52 and information on the processing of personal data. They were asked to complete the  
53 questionnaire anonymously and to leave it in a box in the hallway outside the room  
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3 before the start of the training presentation. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes  
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5 to complete.  
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8 In order to compare participant answers before (T1) and after (T2) the training course,  
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10 the participants completed the same questionnaire at the final plenary session. The  
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12 procedure for completing the second questionnaire and providing information on  
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14 processing of personal data were the same as at T1. Participants were told to write the  
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16 same self-generated ID code on the T1 and the T2 questionnaire to permit matching  
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18 T1 and T2 answers, while allowing the participants to remain anonymous. The self-  
19  
20 generated ID code was composed of a simple data combination (e.g., a birthday)  
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22 familiar to the respondent.  
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### 28 *Measures*

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30 The questionnaire, approved by the University Bioethics Committee (Approval No.  
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32 234687, 20th October 2016), consisted of a brief socio-demographic section and the  
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34 following scales:  
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- 37 • *System Justification – Gender* (Jost & Kay, 2005): 8 items (e.g., “In general,  
38 relations between men and women are fair”) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9  
39 (strongly agree);  
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- 43 • *Identification of Sexual Violence Experience*: adaptation of the 8 items that  
44 Konik & Cortina (2008) selected from Fitzgerald et al. (1988; 1995): participants had  
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46 to choose which behaviours they felt are forms of sexual violence (multiple choice  
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48 scale; e.g., “Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel  
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50 uncomfortable”);  
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- 53 • *Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myth* proposed by McMahon &  
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55 Farmer (2011) in its Italian adaptation (SRMA-IT) by Martini, Tartaglia, & De Piccoli  
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3 (in press): 20 items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

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5 The scale is made up of four factors that express different rape myths: “She asked for  
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7 it”, 6 items (e.g., “When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for  
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9 trouble”); “He didn’t mean to”, 4 items (e.g., “When guys rape, it is usually because of  
10  
11 their strong desire for sex”); “It wasn’t really rape”, 5 items (e.g., “A rape probably  
12  
13 didn’t happen if the girl has no bruises or marks”); “She lied”, 5 items (e.g., “Rape  
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15 accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys”);  
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19 • *Bystander intention to intervene scale* (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2002;  
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21 2005): Likert scale from 0 (not at all confident to act) to 10 (completely confident to  
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23 act); participants had to state how confident they felt as a bystander about undertaking  
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25 the 14 actions to counter sexual violence (e.g., “Express my discomfort if someone  
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27 makes a joke about a woman’s body”).  
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### 33 ***Participants***

#### 34 *At T1*

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36 At the beginning of the course (T1) (first plenary session), 177 people received the  
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38 questionnaire and 172 completed it adequately: 88 from the University, 80 from the  
39  
40 Polytechnic, and 4 from student dormitory directors or workers. In detail, 81.7% were  
41  
42 staff, 8.9% student representatives, 7.1% faculty, 2.4% student dormitory directors or  
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44 workers; 89.3% were women, 10.1% men, 0.6% declared “other”; the average age was  
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46 44.46 years (SD 9.81).  
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#### 53 *At T2*

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55 The T2 questionnaire was completed by 98 participants: all trainees who were present  
56  
57 at the final session completed it appropriately. Because about 70 T1 participants did  
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3 not attend the final plenary session and because some participants did not indicate  
4 correctly their self-generated ID code, as they did not remember the data they had  
5 chosen to use at T1, we were able to match the T1 and the T2 questionnaires for only  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10 66 participants. As the T1 sample was composed of 172 respondents, the attrition rate  
11  
12 (U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences - IES) was  
13  
14 unfortunately high (62%).

15  
16 Of the 66 matching respondents, 36 were from the University and 30 from the  
17  
18 Polytechnic: 87.5% were staff, 9.4% faculty, 1.6% student representatives, and 1.6%  
19  
20 dormitory directors or workers; 92.4% were women and 7.56% were men; the average  
21  
22 age was 45.67 years (SD 7.87).  
23  
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26  
27  
28 As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked if  
29  
30 the attrition rate had an effect on the characteristics of the sample at T1 and at T2 by  
31  
32 comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of the 66 matching  
33  
34 respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.  
35  
36

37  
38 No statistically significant differences in socio-demographics between the group of the  
39  
40 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents were found.  
41  
42 The chi-square test showed no differences in percentages: between women and men ( $p$   
43  
44 = .49); between respondents from the University and the Polytechnic ( $p$  = .73);  
45  
46 between staff/faculty/students ( $p$  = .06). The independent samples T-test showed no  
47  
48 differences in average age ( $p$  = .14).  
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### 52 53 **Data analysis**

54  
55 Data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS Statistics version 24. After exploratory  
56  
57 factor analysis via eigenvalues greater than 1, the internal consistency of each scale  
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3 and subscale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to verify the structure  
4  
5 of the scales.  
6

7  
8 In order to fulfil objective 1 of the present study, descriptive analyses (mean –  $M$  – and  
9  
10 standard deviation –  $SD$ ) for summed score of each scale were carried out to show  
11  
12 respondents' system justification – gender level, rape myth acceptance, and bystander  
13  
14 intention to intervene. Relationships between the concepts were then analysed by  
15  
16 bivariate correlations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to check for  
17  
18 differences in constructs between groups. Specifically, we compared via independent  
19  
20 samples t-test the responses from the participants from the University and from the  
21  
22 Polytechnic and via one-way ANOVA the participants by their roles (staff, student  
23  
24 representatives, faculty, and student dormitory directors/workers) at the two  
25  
26 universities.  
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30  
31 In order to highlight pre- and post-training differences in participants' representations  
32  
33 and attitudes (objective 2), we used a paired sample t-test to compare the questionnaire  
34  
35 responses at T1 and T2 and to check whether, after participation on the course, there  
36  
37 were changes in the representation of sexual violence, in gender system justification,  
38  
39 in rape myth acceptance, and in bystander intention to intervene. The effect of the  
40  
41 attrition rate was also checked.  
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## 46 **Results**

### 47 ***T1 Sample***

#### 48 *Participants' representations and attitude*

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51 In order to evaluate participant representations and attitudes at the beginning of the  
52  
53 program (T1), we analysed gender system justification, i.e., the degree to which  
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55 respondents judge the system of gender relationships as being fair. As higher values  
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3 express agreement with equity of the system, the media of answers (Table 1) means  
4 that participants at T1 were slightly critical of the fairness of relationships between  
5  
6 genders.  
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12 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1  
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17 To understand respondents' representations of sexual violence, we asked them to  
18 select from a list of behaviours which ones they considered violent and to express their  
19 agreement with statements that express rape myths (rape myth acceptance). At the  
20 beginning of the training course (T1; Table 2), the majority of participants (83.3%)  
21 defined violence as the act of someone who "attempted to establish a romantic or  
22 sexual relationship despite the other person's efforts to discourage it", but very few  
23 (23.7%) considered violence as the act of someone "telling sexually coloured stories or  
24 offensive jokes". Surprisingly, less than half of respondents (45.5%) defined "Being  
25 stared or leered at in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable" as violence.  
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40 Rape myth acceptance was not very high; lower values express refusal of myths (Table  
41 1) though higher acceptance was noted for the myth "He didn't mean to" ( $M 1.87$ ) that  
42 justifies assault by a man, affirming that he did not really intend to commit rape.  
43  
44 Regarding bystander intention to intervene, respondents stated they would act to  
45 counter the assault ( $M 8.43$ ).  
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54 As Table 1 shows, gender system justification was related strongly to acceptance of  
55 the two rape myths "It was not really rape" and "She lied" acceptance and quite  
56 strongly with acceptance of the rape myth "He didn't mean to": perceiving fairness in  
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3 relationships between genders was associated with higher acquiescence with  
4 stereotypes and false beliefs about sexual violence. A strong inverse relation was  
5 evident between acceptance of the rape myth “She asked for it” and bystander  
6 intention to intervene: if respondents believed that the woman provoked the rape, they  
7 would be less disposed to intervene to help her.  
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9

### 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 *Differences between groups*

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19 The independent samples t-test showed no differences between participants from the  
20 University and those from the Polytechnic. One-way ANOVA showed no differences  
21 between work roles.  
22  
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### 26 27 28 **Sample 1 and Sample 2**

#### 29 30 *Effect of the attrition rate*

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32 As the attrition rate between the T1 and the T2 sample was quite high, we checked the  
33 effect of the attrition rate by comparing via the independent samples t-test the group of  
34 the 66 matching respondents and the group of the 106 T1-only respondents.  
35  
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38 No statistically significant differences were found at the beginning of the training  
39 program between the two groups in gender system justification, acceptance of the four  
40 rape myths or bystander intention to intervene (Table 2; Independent samples t-test).  
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44 We can state confidently that the data at T1 and at T2 can be compared, despite the  
45 substantially smaller sample at T2.  
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53 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2  
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#### 56 57 58 *Evaluation of Training Program Effects* 59 60

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3 Comparison between the T1 and the T2 data showed that the number of respondents  
4 who labelled different forms of behaviours as “violent” increased between T1 and T2  
5  
6 (Table 3): post-training identification of subtle forms of violence was higher.  
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12 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 3  
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14 gender system justification  
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17 The post-training data showed lower gender system justification and lower acceptance  
18 of the rape myths “She asked for it” and “She lied” (Table 2: Paired samples t-test).  
19  
20 No significant pre- and post-training differences were found for the acceptance of the  
21  
22 myths “He didn’t mean to” and “It wasn’t really rape”. There were no significant  
23  
24 differences in bystander intention to intervene to prevent or counter a sexual assault.  
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### 30 **Discussion**

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33 The present paper reports the process and main results of a pilot evaluation study of  
34  
35 the Italian training program of the USVreact European project for university staff,  
36  
37 faculty, and student representatives to prevent sexual violence inside universities. We  
38  
39 wanted to show the process of the evaluation and the first evidence of effectiveness of  
40  
41 the training intervention in promoting cultural change and bystander willingness to  
42  
43 intervene in a university setting. Assessment of participants’ representations of sexual  
44  
45 violence, gender system justification, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intention to  
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47 intervene was performed at the beginning of the training course. Effectiveness of the  
48  
49 course was then measured by comparing participants’ responses pre- and post-training  
50  
51 to determine whether changes had occurred.  
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56 Results of the evaluation study showed that participants at the beginning of the  
57  
58 training expressed quite a low acceptance of rape myths and a reasonable degree of  
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3 willingness to intervene to counter sexual violence. This observation is coherent with  
4  
5 the fact that participation on the course was voluntary, that participants were probably  
6  
7 already quite aware of sexual violence before starting the course, and that the training  
8  
9 course attracted mostly women. As reported in previous studies (Martini, Tartaglia, &  
10  
11 De Piccoli, *in press*; Papp & Erchull, 2017), women showed lower system justification  
12  
13 and rape myth acceptance and higher intention to intervene. Although the participants  
14  
15 were already aware of the seriousness of sexual violence, pre-training responses  
16  
17 showed they were less able to recognize the more subtle forms of violence. This  
18  
19 finding suggests the need to develop sensitivity to recognize violence also in its subtle  
20  
21 and hidden forms. Finally, consistent with previous work (McMahon, 2010), high  
22  
23 inverse correlations emerged between rape myth acceptance and bystander intention to  
24  
25 intervene.  
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30 The present results suggest that a training course designed to raise recognition of  
31  
32 stereotypes of sexual violence and of more subtle forms of violence (e.g., harassment)  
33  
34 could be helpful to foster attitudes to counter sexual violence in university settings. As  
35  
36 suggested by Banyard (2015), to prevent the occurrence of violent and discriminatory  
37  
38 situations, it is necessary to change the representations and attitudes towards sexual  
39  
40 violence. The perpetuation of gender-based violence is fueled by false beliefs and  
41  
42 stereotypes related to violence itself and to gender relationships. These attitudes help  
43  
44 to justify the abuse or the individuals who act on them and affect the identification of a  
45  
46 situation as risky or violent (Burn, 2009; Bennet, Banyard, & Garnhart, 2014;  
47  
48 Banyard, 2015). That said, in order to activate bystander intervention, the first step is  
49  
50 to enable an individual to recognize a situation as violent or risky and then to make the  
51  
52 individual feel responsible for intervening (Banyard, 2015). Comparison of pre- and  
53  
54 post-training responses revealed some differences. Paired sample t-test analysis  
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3 showed a significant increase in participants' ability to identify more subtle kinds of  
4 violence and a reduction in gender system justification and in acceptance of the two  
5 rape myths "She asked for it" and "She lied". This change suggests an impact of the  
6 training course.  
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11  
12 Summarizing, we can state that by the end of the training program, the participants  
13 were more aware of what violence is and were better able to identify its subtle forms  
14 and that they were less disposed to blaming the victim, as the attitude of attributing  
15 responsibility for violence to the victim was considerably reduced. Reflection on the  
16 subtle shades of violence and false beliefs about sexual assault probably helped raise  
17 participants' awareness of the pervasiveness of a culture that legitimizes violence and  
18 their ability to recognize it. No significant changes were observed for the other  
19 dimensions in part because the participants were already quite aware of the problem of  
20 violence against women and in part because deep cultural change probably takes  
21 longer to manifest than the few months of a course program. Moreover, it is also  
22 possible that the instrument we used to measure the intention to intervene, originally  
23 designed for students, needs to be adapted for faculty and staff or, generally, for  
24 workers. In future studies, we plan to develop a scale that captures situations more  
25 relevant to the lifestyle of staff and/or teachers.  
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44 This pilot study, like the evaluation design, has several limitations. First, it has no  
45 control group. This weakness needs to be addressed when planning future training  
46 courses. Second, the sample of respondents who completed both questionnaires was  
47 small, also due to a problem with the coding process; greater attention will be paid to  
48 avoiding errors in the identification coding process on future courses: a possible  
49 solution is to indicate clearly which data are to be reported to generate the ID code  
50 (e.g., first letter of mother's surname; month of father's birth; third letter of her/his  
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3 name). After the plenary introduction to the program, some participants did not  
4  
5 participate in the training and did not fill in the T2 questionnaire. The attrition rate  
6  
7 (i.e., matching the respondents to the T1 and T2 questionnaires) was quite high, which  
8  
9 is a serious weakness of the present study. For this reason, the results for the  
10  
11 effectiveness of the training course cannot be generalized as we had intended. In future  
12  
13 training courses, it would be interesting to ask participants why they did not attend the  
14  
15 course; it could be useful to try to foster attendance to the entire program. Third,  
16  
17 though women make up 68% of the administrative staff at the University of Turin and  
18  
19 60% at the Polytechnic of Turin, women accounted for more than 90% of the training  
20  
21 course participants, whereas men were strongly underrepresented. A further limitation  
22  
23 is that we did not administer a follow-up post-training questionnaire to analyse the  
24  
25 stability of changes over time; this step will be included in future research designs.  
26  
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30 These limitations notwithstanding, the pilot evaluation study suggests several thematic  
31  
32 areas that would be appropriate to develop in a training course on combating gender-  
33  
34 based violence. For example, two future areas of focus could be on contrasting the  
35  
36 tendency to blame the victim of sexual violence and on assessing the different forms  
37  
38 that violence can take. The data collected at T1 show that acceptance of the myth “She  
39  
40 asked for it” was inversely related to the bystander intervention attitude. The same  
41  
42 significant negative relationship between acceptance of the myth “She asked for it”  
43  
44 and the bystander intervention attitude was found by a previous study (Martini & De  
45  
46 Piccoli, 2020), with a sample of about 3000 university students. Moreover, because the  
47  
48 intention to intervene hinges on recognizing a potentially harmful situation for the  
49  
50 victim (Darley & Latané, 1968), a program designed to prevent sexual violence needs  
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52 to sustain the ability to recognize the different faces of violence.  
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3 Other variables may certainly come into play in motivating a bystander to intervene  
4 against any form of violence; we believe that the present study findings provide a  
5 preliminary basis on which to develop training courses. Keeping in mind critical issues  
6 and some weaknesses in the design, this work can offer some suggestions to  
7 implement evaluation of bystander-based interventions. Very few projects to date have  
8 tested the effectiveness of bystander-based intervention involving university staff. This  
9 specific approach, which originated in the United States (Banyard, 2015) but is not yet  
10 common in Europe, may promote adequate first response to sexual assault and  
11 prevention of more subtle violence. Bystander intervention can be fostered by  
12 promoting cultural change, countering false beliefs such as rape myth acceptance, and  
13 helping to identify violence. To reach this goal it is necessary to involve more men. In  
14 Italy, gender-based violence is often considered a female issue. But as previous studies  
15 have shown (Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017; Russell & Hand, 2017), because men and  
16 women express different attitudes towards these problems, men cannot remain passive  
17 spectators in counteracting sexual violence. A cultural change can be more effective  
18 the more both men and women cooperate as active subjects in counteracting all forms  
19 of violence and discrimination. Along this line, university management should include  
20 among the compulsory courses for all administrative staff and, in perspective, for all  
21 teachers, a program like USVreact which is aimed at preventing sexual violence in the  
22 academic setting. In this way, more men would be involved in the reflection (and in  
23 the action) on this topic and would contribute to spreading a culture of respect and  
24 non-abuse, which is the basis of the primary prevention as indicated by the World  
25 Health Organization (WHO, 2010).  
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### Conflict of Interests Statement

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

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Table 1. Bivariate correlations (*r* values), descriptive statistics (M, SD) and Cronbach’s alpha at T1 (172 respondents)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender system justification	-					
2. Rape myth “She asked for it” acceptance	.106	-				
3. Rape myth “He didn’t mean to” acceptance	.160*	.303**	-			
4. Rape myth “It was not really rape” acceptance	.255**	.375**	.511**	-		
5. Rape myth “She lied” acceptance	.217**	.404**	.530**	.601**	-	
6. Bystander efficacy	.041	-.243**	-.128	-.069	-.148	-
M	4.27	1.66	1.87	1.35	1.77	8.43
SD	1.04	.59	.95	.68	.77	1.11
<i>Cronbach’s alpha</i>	.76	.72	.83	.90	.89	.81

\* *p*<.05

\*\* *p*< .001

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\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2. Percentages of respondents at T1 and at T2 who define the described behaviours as violence and Independent T-test values between answers at T1 and T2 (66 matching respondents)

<i>(Yes, it is violence = 1</i> <i>No, it is not violence = 0)</i>	<b>% of Yes</b> <b>at T1</b>	<b>% of Yes</b> <b>at T2</b>	<b><i>T-test values</i></b>
Someone makes you afraid you would be treated poorly if you didn't cooperate sexually	84.8	95.3	$t(64) = -2.12, p = .038$
Someone attempts to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite your efforts to discourage it	83.3	87.7	$t(64) = -.73, p = .471$
Someone touches you (for example put an arm around you) in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable	63.3	81.5	$t(64) = -2.82, p = .006$
Someone makes crude and offensive remarks, either publicly or privately	60.6	81.5	$t(64) = -2.86, p = .006$
Someone makes unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters	50.0	86.2	$t(64) = -5.56, p < .001$
Someone displays, used or distributed sexist or suggestive materials	46.9	76.9	$t(64) = -4.60, p < .001$
Someone stares or leers at you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable	45.5	64.6	$t(64) = -3.19, p = .002$
Someone tells sexually suggestive stories or offensive jokes	23.7	53.8	$t(64) = -3.40, p = .001$

Table 3. Independent sample t-test at T1, between the group of 66 matching respondents and the group of 106 T1-only respondents and Paired sample t-test at T1 and T2 for the 66 matching participants

	Independent sample t-test			Paired sample T-test	
	T1 66 Matching M (SD)	T1 106 Only-T1 M (SD)	Matching / only-T1 T-test values	T2 66 Matching M (SD)	T1/T2 T-test values
Gender system justification	4.11 (.98)	4.37 (1.07)	$t(170)=-1.60, p=.11$	4.68 (1.51)	$t(65)=-2.73, p=.01$
Rape myth “She asked for it” acceptance	1.63 (.54)	1.68 (.62)	$t(17)=-.56, p=.55$	1.84 (.61)	$t(65)=-3.11, p=.01$
Rape myth “He didn’t mean to” acceptance	1.80 (.88)	1.91 (.99)	$t(168)=-.74, p=.46$	1.72 (.69)	$t(64)=.96, p=.34$
Rape myth “It was not really rape” acceptance	1.33 (.57)	1.36 (.74)	$t(168)=-.30, p=.76$	1.31 (.62)	$t(64)=.19, p=.85$
Rape myth “She lied” acceptance	1.77 (.69)	1.78 (.82)	$t(168)=-.14, p=.89$	1.56 (.64)	$t(64)=2.61, p=.01$
Bystander efficacy	8.42 (1.09)	8.43 (1.13)	$t(170)=-.05, p=.96$	8.63 (.95)	$t(65)=-1.68, p=.10$



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