

U-M researchers, students take sexual assault prevention program to Ghana

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Blaming the victim, usually a female, is common in sexual assault cases, but in some places it's more prevalent than others.

So, when University of Michigan researchers adapted Relationship Remix—the [sexual violence](#) prevention program delivered to incoming U-M students—for use at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, they tailored it to address the rape myths and other specific issues facing students there.

Researchers hope that the program changes attitudes about [assault](#) and victim blaming at Cape Coast, with the goal of adapting and implementing it in other universities in Ghana and worldwide to help curtail sexual violence.

Like the Relationship Remix program here, the Ghanaian version is delivered for students by students, said Michelle Munro-Kramer, U-M assistant professor in nursing and one of the project's principal investigators. But, researchers tweaked the content and message to better address specific issues more prevalent in Ghana.

For instance, while alcohol is a huge factor in campus sexual assaults in the United States, that's not the case in Ghana, Munro-Kramer said. And here, the focus is on assaults by peers, while in Ghana many assaults are committed by people in power, such as professors or graduate instructors.

Preliminary results are positive: feedback from students who've gone through the program suggests they're rethinking aspects of gender relations.

"We are beginning to see initial changes in rape myth acceptance. In Ghana, there are some pretty severe gender equality issues and large endorsement of rape myths," Munro-Kramer said. "Even during the program we could see students starting to think about things and challenge each other and ask questions, even if they didn't wholeheartedly change their attitudes. This is a good sign."

One great thing about adapting Relationship Remix for different locations and cultures is that it avoids reinventing the wheel, Munro-Kramer said. That's important because resources for [sexual assault](#) and relationship counseling are scarce.

"We think this can be quickly adapted to partners and universities around the world," she said.

To that end, Munro-Kramer and co-investigator Sarah Rominski, assistant research professor in the U-M Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, took six students from the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center and Sexperteam to Ghana to train 10 Ghanaian students. Sexperteam is the peer education group housed at University Health Services.

Caitlin Choi, a former nursing student on the team, said it gave her valuable experience in the field.

The U-M students led sessions on the background of sexual violence, talking about [sexual health](#), recognizing biases, self-care, facilitation skills and answering difficult questions. The students then practiced administering the program to one another.

"As a nursing [student](#), it is rare to find experience outside of a clinical setting," Choi said. "During our stay in Cape Coast, I saw how nursing research extends beyond the hospital walls. It has broadened my idea of what it means to be a [health care provider](#) and health advocate."

Munro-Kramer said the next step is to formally evaluate attitudes toward sexual violence among students in Ghana who participated in the program, and whether incidents of sexual violence have decreased.

"There are many outcomes for sexual violence," she said. "There are health effects and economic consequences because victims use more health and counseling services. They may even drop out of school. Being able to work as a community to prevent sexual [violence](#) is really important."

The research appears in the journal *Violence Against Women*.

More information: Michelle L. Munro-Kramer et al, Adapting a Sexual Violence Primary Prevention Program to Ghana Utilizing the ADAPT-ITT Framework, *Violence Against Women* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1077801219828533](#)

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