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Violence Against Women: Synthesis of Research for Secondary School Officials

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The 1990s witnessed an explosion of research on the topic of adolescent dating violence. Information on prevalence continues to shift the focus to younger ages, from college to high school to middle school (e.g., Foshee et al., 1998; Makepeace, 1981). The most recent trends include prevention initiatives for middle-school-age students (typically 11 to 14 years old), which for some populations still seem too late to prevent the first occurrences of adolescent dating violence. These findings underscore the need for school administrators and teachers to understand the nature, prevalence, and causes of teen dating violence as well as how to stop or curtail it in their schools. The purpose of this report is to provide a practical background to enable school personnel to take preventive action.

How can research inform secondary school officials about teen dating violence and programs to prevent it? This report has four goals, three of which aim to provide general knowledge of the following:

- Existing theory and research on the prevalence and prediction of adolescent dating violence.

- Existing models of primary and secondary prevention of teen dating violence and their effectiveness, focusing on both community- and school-based program models and the outcomes they have achieved regarding changes in knowledge, attitudes, behavioral intention, and behavior itself.

- Urban and rural secondary school teachers' knowledge of and attitude toward teen dating violence, as well as their perceptions about the importance of and motivation to teach about teen dating violence prevention.

This report concludes with the fourth goal: recommendations for best practice training and school-based programs.

This report is intended for secondary school administrators and teachers. When possible, we use examples from our experiences to bring the concepts and research findings "to life" in ways that may be consistent with readers' professional experiences with students. This review focuses on material from published literature and presented at peer-reviewed national and international conferences. Unfortunately, this focus excludes populations that have not been represented in these venues, such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescent relationships; students with disabilities; and certain racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Native Americans).

What Is Dating Violence?

Dating violence is defined here as various behaviors that may take place in a heterosexual dating relationship. Dating violence behaviors may be grouped into four broad categories: verbal and psychological aggression, domination and coercion, physical aggression, and sexual aggression.

Verbal and psychological aggression between dating partners includes yelling, insults, putdowns, name calling, swearing or cursing, and threatening.

Domination and coercion are more complex concepts that typically involve one person trying to force his or her will on another. Examples of domination and coercion include intimidation, perceptions of entitlement, jealous actions, and possessiveness. Intimidation may be either verbal (e.g., spoken threats) or nonverbal (e.g., threatening gestures, stares, angry grimaces). Entitlement refers to one person's belief that he or she has the "right" to force his or her will onto a partner. Jealous actions, a common form of domination and coercion among adolescents, include monitoring where the person has been, checking up on him or her, and accusing him or her of being with another person (Schwartz, O'Leary, and Kendziora, 1996). Possessiveness, which involves expecting one's partner to spend all the time with him or her, often results in social isolation.

Physical aggression includes actions against a partner, such as pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, hitting with a fist, punching, choking, and threatening with a knife or gun. Physical aggression may also occur between peers because of conflicts over dating concerns, which often arise from jealous feelings.

Sexual aggression is another form of relationship violence; behaviors range from harassment (e.g., brushing up against someone in a deliberate and sexual way) to rape. Any unwanted touching of a sexual nature may also be included in this category.

What is the relationship between violence against women and teen dating violence? Many forms of violence are identical in the two populations. This report, however, uses a broad definition of dating violence. Sexual harassment and aggression with peers about dating concerns are included in this definition because these behaviors occur often in school settings and are part of a continuum of aggression in a dating context. It is important to recognize the existence and significance of aggression with peers stemming from dating concerns, such as girls fighting over boys, as well as sexual harassment among adolescents. This report reviews research findings that support the recommendation that these behaviors should be targeted as part of an effective dating violence prevention effort.

Developmental Trends: Does Dating Violence Vary Throughout the Adolescent Years?

Before beginning a discussion on teen dating violence, it is helpful to first review variations in the definition of dating as well as how peer networks change in early adolescence. School administrators and teachers may wonder whether their students date, let alone experience dating violence. How school officials think about dating will strongly influence their perceptions of and ability to notice teen dating violence. Our experiences with school personnel suggest that many maintain strong, and often opposing, views about whether and how preteens and adolescents date. The word "dating" often conjures romantic images of two people spending time alone at dinner or a movie. It is therefore not uncommon for some school personnel to claim youths as

young as age 10 do not date. However, for youths, “dating” behavior can include a variety of actions, from spending time with a friend at school to hanging out in mixed-gender groups with a special friend to having sexual intercourse. Connolly and Konarski (1994) found that although few adolescents ages 11 to 14 years reported “dating,” they did report substantial changes in the composition of their peer networks, with greater inclusion of opposite-sex peers during those middle years. Data collected from middle and high school students suggest that they consider themselves to have their first boyfriend or girlfriend sometime between 9 and 11 years of age (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, and O’Brien, 1999a; Avery-Leaf et al., 1999b). Professionals therefore are encouraged to attend to both traditional dating situations and cross-gender contact, particularly because aggressive behavior that takes place in the context of cross-gender contact may portend dating violence in later years, as discussed below.

There is a limited amount of research on the forms of dating violence, or its precursors (e.g., bullying), at different developmental points. One way to inform our understanding of this phenomenon is to cull from a model underlying a dating violence prevention effort for elementary students. Expect Respect, an antibullying program for fifth graders in Austin, Texas, adopts the view that bullying and harassing peer behaviors (e.g., teasing, name calling) are precursors to dating violence (A Safe Place, 1997). Some evidence for the link between harassment and dating violence comes from the work of Connolly et al. (1997). They studied the sexual harassment of more than 1,000 youths ages 10 to 13 years in Toronto, Ontario. Among the behaviors studied were name calling (e.g., slang for homosexual); sexual comments, looks, and gestures; touching, grabbing, and pinching in a sexual way; and flashing and mooning (American Association of University Women, 1993). From one-fifth to one-third of students reported perpetrating or experiencing these sexual harassment behaviors; they were most likely to occur among more physically mature students and those who socialized in mixed-gender peer networks. Further, these sexual harassment behaviors were significantly associated with physical aggression in a dating relationship. More recent work (e.g., Avery-Leaf et al., 1999b; Foshee et al., 1996) indicates that physical aggression takes place in dating relationships among middle-school-age youths. Such aggression is initiated and reciprocated by both males and females. However, girls’ use of physical aggression is reported to be less severe than that of boys, whose aggression is more likely to be severe or sexual in nature with few exceptions (e.g., Stets and Henderson, 1991).

Our experience suggests that teachers and administrators often believe that boys and girls at this age simply do not know how to interact with one another in nonaggressive ways and that they use these aggressive or harassing actions as a means of flirtation. Irrespective of interpretation, newly emerging data point out that these aggressive and harassing behaviors are likely to portend more serious problems with dating violence if they are not addressed directly. For example, data from college students indicate a considerable amount of rape—3.8 percent of college-aged females (Koss et al., 1988)—and sexual coercion by both males and females (Waldner-Haugrind and Magruder, 1995). Physical aggression toward a partner is also evident in samples of young married couples (O’Leary et al., 1989). Although the overall rate of marital aggression decreases with age, the problem is more difficult to treat among those for whom aggression persists and becomes more serious in adulthood.

Prevalence: How Common Is Adolescent Dating Violence?

The answer depends on how adolescent dating violence is defined and what age group is studied. For each type of behavior—verbal aggression, psychological aggression, dominance and coercion, physical aggression, and sexual harassment—rates will be reviewed where data exist. In general, rates of physical aggression tend to be highest when both threats of physical aggression and aggression expressed with objects, such as throwing something, are included in the definition (Bookwala et al., 1992; O'Keefe, 1997). Moreover, rates of all forms of behavior tend to be highest when people are asked questions about multiple types of behavior—such as on the Conflict Tactics Scale (which asks about psychologically and physically aggressive behaviors) (Straus, 1979; O'Keefe, 1997)—instead of single, global questions (for example, "Have you ever been hurt physically by your partner?") (Bergman, 1992).

Middle School Students

Behaviors in this age group have only recently been investigated. Data indicate that between 28 and 45 percent of students have experienced some form of sexual harassment by a peer or group of peers (Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, and O'Brien, 1998; Connolly et al., 1997). These data report on students from a Canadian urban community of primarily European descent and a U.S. urban community of predominantly African-American students. Rates of perpetration of physical aggression against a dating partner vary considerably by region: 5 percent in urban Canada (Connolly et al., 1997), 21 percent in the rural United States (Foshee, 1996), and more than 45 percent in urban (inner city) U.S. areas (Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, and O'Brien, 1998). Across all studies, females reported higher rates of perpetration of aggression than males; however, females also reported receiving more injuries (Foshee, 1996). Only one published study reports rates of sexual aggression, with 1 to 5 percent of students reporting perpetration of sexual aggression (e.g., forced sex by a dating partner) and 7 to 15 percent reporting sexual victimization (Foshee et al., 1996). Foshee (1996) reports that psychological aggression (threats, monitoring, insults, and manipulation) occurs with some frequency; manipulation occurs most often. Females reported significantly more psychological victimization than males. Except for manipulation, however, which was reported more often by females, the amount of perpetration of these behaviors for males and females was similar.

High School Students

A study by the American Association of University Women (1993) found that 81 percent of high school youths reported being a victim of sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual comments, looks, gestures, and touching from peers. Similar rates of harassment were reported by males and females. Rates of verbal and psychological aggression are reported in 66 to 75 percent of dating relationships (Cascardi et al., 1999). Like studies of middle school students, studies of high school students report a large range in the rate of physical aggression in a dating relationship, from 9 to 52 percent (Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, and O'Leary, 1994; Roscoe and Callahan, 1985). Most estimates tend to cluster either between 10 and 20 percent (e.g., Henton et al., 1983; Roscoe and Kelsey, 1986) or 30 and 40 percent (e.g., O'Keefe, 1997; Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel, 1997). From these data, many researchers conclude that physical aggression occurs

in 33 percent of teens' dating relationships. The rate of sexual violence in a multiethnic, economically diverse sample was 16 percent (Bergman, 1992).

Physical aggression among high school students appears to be reciprocal. Moreover, females consistently report higher rates of aggression than males; rates of reported victimization are similar for males and females. However, girls are more likely to report injury and negative emotional consequences of aggression than boys. Our experience with high school students and reports from teachers indicate that many students perceive jealous and possessive actions (e.g., wanting to limit time spent with others or in other activities) as indications of love and care (Makepeace, 1986). And, as will be reviewed later, jealous feelings and behaviors are an oft-noted motivation for aggression against a partner and a factor consistently reported to coincide with physical aggression against a dating partner. Another common report from school personnel is that same-sex students are equally likely to be physically aggressive against one another over dating concerns, such as jealous accusations.

College Students

A discussion of aggression among college students is included to point out that physical aggression does not decrease as students mature, further underscoring the need for prevention at the secondary school level. Rates of verbal and psychological aggression among college students are similar to those reported by high school students (e.g., Riggs and O'Leary, 1996). Physical aggression in a dating relationship occurs with notable frequency among college students, with rates ranging from 21 percent (Makepeace, 1981) to 65 percent (Bookwala et al., 1992). Most estimates are between 21 and 40 percent (e.g., Arias, Samios, and O'Leary, 1987; Billingham, 1987; Pederson and Thomas, 1992; Riggs and O'Leary, 1996). Again, females typically report engaging in higher rates of aggression than males, although injuries and negative emotional consequences are more severe for females (e.g., Makepeace, 1986).

Students From Different Racial or Ethnic Backgrounds

Limited attention has been directed to the study of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in the perpetration or prevention of dating violence. O'Keefe (1997) reported that African-American high school students inflicted significantly more dating aggression than whites, Latinos, and Asians in an urban community. Makepeace (1987) and O'Keefe, Brockopp, and Chew (1986) also reported higher rates of dating aggression among African-American teens. Of note, however, is a study of dating violence across different racial, income, and occupation groups in which Bergman (1992) found almost double the rate of dating violence in the suburbs, composed primarily of white students, than in the inner city, which included mostly African-American students, and almost triple the rate than in rural areas, also predominantly made up of white students. More recently, Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel (1997) found that the effects of ethnicity were accounted for by exposure to community and family violence. Specifically, although Malik and colleagues predicted dating aggression by African-American racial/ethnic identity, once the level of exposure to community and family violence was considered, the effect of race/ethnicity disappeared. Thus, it is unclear what effect if any racial and ethnic identity per se has on dating aggression. Rather, it is likely a complex picture; that is, stressors, such as

community violence, which may be more likely in urban or impoverished communities, increase the likelihood of dating aggression.

Why Do Females Report Higher Rates of Aggression Than Males? Are Girls More Violent?

These are extremely difficult questions to answer. Pederson and Thomas (1992) suggest that males may underreport their aggressive behavior as a form of denial while females may overreport their aggressive behavior because of their readiness to accept blame. Others argue that girls may be more willing to report aggressive behaviors because there are fewer social sanctions against their aggressive actions. For boys, there are strong societal messages that "boys do not hit girls." In keeping with this social norm, boys may be more reluctant to report socially sanctioned behavior. Alternatively, girls may indeed be more aggressive, especially during the adolescent years. One possible explanation for girls' aggressiveness may be that they do not perceive their actions as harmful. Some support for this interpretation comes from the laboratory work of Harris and colleagues, which suggests that aggression from a male is perceived as more serious, harmful, and culpable than that from a female (e.g., Harris and Knight-Bohnhoff, 1996). Foshee (1996) reported that females were more likely to report perpetrating mild and severe forms of physical aggression, whereas males were more likely to report engaging in sexual aggression, such as forced sex. In sum, the most appropriate interpretation of females' higher rate of reporting physical aggression is unclear. However, it is evident that the "victim/abuser" model, in which females are victims and males are abusers, does not characterize most adolescents' experience of dating violence. Numerous studies document that from 43 to 72 percent of aggression is characterized as mutual combat (e.g., Bookwala et al., 1992; Henton et al., 1983; O'Keefe, Brockopp, and Chew, 1986) in which both partners engage in physical aggression. Therefore, when working with teens, it is important to recognize that both males and females can be victims and perpetrators.

Risk Factors and Predictors: Who Is at Risk for Teen Dating Violence?

In the 1990s, the media reported on domestic and dating violence with greater frequency. Such media coverage serves as a key source of information for many. An advantage of increased coverage is greater public awareness of domestic and dating violence. There is, however, a disadvantage: a proliferation of myths about what "causes" domestic and dating violence. It is often difficult to discern the difference between myth and reality when information is filtered by the media. Reviewed below are a common set of assumptions or beliefs that many maintain about the "causes" of or risk factors for dating violence and some prosocial skills to teach children, integrated with current findings from the research literature.

Common Assumptions or Beliefs

Violent youths learn to use aggression from seeing their parents' violence. Overall, there has been consistent but weak support for the idea that youths who grow up in homes in which they either witness or experience violence are more likely to use violence in their intimate relation-

ships. While it is true that youths who grow up in violent home environments are at greater risk for relationship violence, it is not the only explanation. Not all youths who come from homes in which there is violence use or tolerate it in their own relationships. The research literature has produced mixed results in regard to the effects of witnessing parental violence. Witnessing parental violence has more consistently been associated with males' use of dating aggression than with females' (e.g., Foo and Margolin, 1995; O'Keefe, 1997; Smith and Williams, 1992). Riggs and O'Leary (1996) found that the effect of witnessing parental aggression affected females' use of dating aggression by increasing their acceptance of dating aggression as a means of conflict resolution. In contrast, O'Keefe (1998) found that the relationship between witnessing parental violence and dating aggression was mediated by acceptance of dating aggression for males. At least one study found no effect from witnessing parent violence (Schwartz, O'Leary, and Kendziora, 1996).

Some youths are just violent; that is how they are with everyone, not just their dating partners. Youths who use physical aggression with their peers or show a general tendency toward aggressiveness are also more likely to use aggression with a partner. There has been consistent support for the link between dating aggression and aggression against peers for both males and females (Riggs and O'Leary, 1996; Riggs, O'Leary, and Breslin, 1990). However, Bookwala et al. (1992) reported that general use of aggression only predicted males' use of dating aggression. This finding was supported in a study of high-risk adolescents who attended an alternative high school: Only males' use of peer aggression was significantly associated with their use of dating aggression (Chase et al., 1998).

When youths act in traditional male and female roles—he is "macho," she is "passive"—males will be abusive and females will be victims. The literature is mixed in regard to the importance of sex-role socialization. A few studies support the view that females who maintain traditional views about women's roles in society are more likely to be victims of dating aggression while males who adopt traditional beliefs about men's roles are more likely to perpetrate dating aggression (Currie, 1983; Sigelman, Berry, and Wiles, 1984). To the contrary, some studies show no relationship between sex-role socialization and dating aggression (Bernard and Bernard, 1983). In another study, females' use of dating aggression was predicted by traditional views on women's roles while males' use of dating aggression was predicted by less traditional views on men's roles (Bookwala et al., 1992).

In this culture, youths think that aggression is "cool" and a good way to "show who's boss." Youths' attitudes or beliefs about how acceptable it is to use aggression is one of the most consistent factors associated with the use of physical aggression in dating relationships for males (Bookwala et al., 1992; Cano et al., 1998; Cate et al., 1982; Henton et al., 1983; Riggs, 1990; Schwartz, O'Leary, and Kendziora, 1996). For females, some studies report a positive relationship (e.g., Cate et al., 1982), but most show no relationship (e.g., Bookwala et al., 1992; Schwartz, O'Leary, and Kendziora, 1996). Those that report an association between attitudes and dating aggression for females include measures that tap acceptance of females' use of dating aggression (rather than a measure that does not specify gender) (e.g., O'Keefe, 1997; Riggs, 1990) and those that evaluate the acceptance of dating aggression, such as humiliation, in

provocative situations (e.g., Foo and Margolin, 1995). More recent work shows that students who are more accepting of verbal aggression and jealousy in dating situations are more likely to use them in their dating relationships as well (Slep et al., 1999).

“Sticks and stones . . . ” is a myth. Verbal aggression, such as insults or spiteful words, predicts the first occurrence of physical aggression among young couples (Murphy and O’Leary, 1989) and is consistently associated with adolescents’ use of physical aggression against a dating partner (e.g., Bookwala et al., 1992; Cano et al., 1998). Jealous and controlling behaviors and a partner’s use of physical aggression also predict one’s own use of physical aggression (e.g., Cano et al., 1998; O’Brien, Cascardi, and Avery-Leaf, 1999). Bookwala et al. (1992) found an association between dating aggression and jealousy only for females. Because verbal aggression, jealousy, and attempts to control one’s partner often happen before physical aggression is used, it is important to educate students that these actions are warning signs that a relationship is or may become harmful.

Prosocial Skills

Good communication skills are important tools for people to use instead of aggression. Skill deficiencies, such as an inability to communicate one’s thoughts and feelings, difficulty solving problems, and trouble managing anger, increase the likelihood that youths will turn to relationship violence to solve problems. Bird, Stith, and Schladale (1991) found that students with an insulting and disagreeable manner and a domineering negotiation style and who blamed others and engaged in limited advice seeking were more likely to perpetrate dating aggression than those who did not.

Youths need to learn nonviolent ways of handling conflict and anger. The more arguments a couple has, the more likely they are to use relationship violence. Disagreements or conflict in a relationship often set the stage for relationship violence. In fact, O’Keefe (1997) and Riggs (1990) found that greater relationship conflict was associated with males’ and females’ use of dating aggression. The data also reveal that students with a history of using dating aggression to resolve conflicts in past relationships are at heightened risk to continue to use aggression to resolve conflicts in current relationships (e.g., Bookwala et al., 1992; Cano et al., 1998).

What Do Youths Say About Their Use of Dating Violence?

Although our knowledge about this issue continues to develop, many students claim that they were provoked into using physical aggression. These provocations include feeling jealous, humiliated, and vengeful. For example, if a boy sees his girlfriend flirting with his best friend, he may feel jealous and think that she is cheating on him and may react by grabbing or slapping her. If a girl thinks her boyfriend has insulted or degraded her, she may respond by slapping or hitting him. Studies show that jealousy, anger, and retaliation against physical or emotional harm (such as “saving face”) are common reasons given to explain the use of violence (e.g., O’Keefe, 1997).

How Do These Risk Factors Compare With One Another?

Are some risk factors more important than others? If more risk factors are present, is there a greater likelihood of dating aggression? We are only starting to learn the answer to these questions. First, it is important to describe how researchers choose the variables included in their studies. Most researchers target factors that coincide with dating aggression and embed their variables in social learning theories (e.g., Cano et al., 1998; Riggs and O'Leary, 1996). Simply put, the social learning model posits that youths learn to use aggression as a means of resolving conflict by modeling what they observe at home, at school, or in their community. These influences affect not only how youths behave but also what they believe about acceptable forms of behavior in their relationships (e.g., Riggs, 1990). Most studies include at least one variable based on social learning principles, such as aggression observed or experienced in one's family (e.g., Foo and Margolin, 1995; O'Keefe, 1997; Tontodonato and Crew, 1992) and/or aggression experienced in one's school or community (e.g., Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel, 1997; O'Keefe, 1997). A majority of studies include some measure of acceptance of dating aggression as well as various relationship concerns, such as level of conflict, verbal aggression, jealousy, and being the recipient or target of physical aggression by one's partner (e.g., Bookwala et al., 1992; Cano et al., 1998; Riggs, 1990).

Across studies, these social learning variables explain 40 to 60 percent of students' use of dating aggression (e.g., Cano et al., 1998; O'Keefe, 1997). Verbal aggression and being the victim of aggression by one's partner emerge as consistent predictors of dating aggression (e.g., Cano et al., 1998). Most studies support the idea that aggressive models in the home or community increase the likelihood of dating aggression (e.g., Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel, 1997). Moreover, in one study, the negative effects of school and community violence were most evident among youths who witnessed violence in their homes; a relationship between dating aggression and other forms of violence was more likely among these youths (O'Keefe, 1998). Other factors less consistently studied but deemed to be important predictors of dating aggression include alcohol and drug use (e.g., O'Keefe, 1997), parental marital status (divorce is associated with use of dating aggression; Billingham and Notebaert, 1993; Tontodonato and Crew, 1992), history of aggression against a dating partner (e.g., Cano et al., 1998), and aggression against peers (e.g., Riggs, 1990).

Taken together, dating violence studies point to several factors amenable to change that can and should be targeted by programs aimed at preventing dating violence. The next section discusses these programs and reviews the research evaluating the effects of dating violence prevention efforts to help schools select appropriate programs.

Challenges in Addressing Teen Dating Violence in a School Setting

Addressing teen dating violence in a school setting is complex and therefore poses more challenges to both teachers and administrators than many other academic topics. Classroom discussion of dating violence can be emotionally charged; many individuals, adults and adoles-

cents alike, are uncomfortable with this topic, which makes communication about it difficult at the outset. Because teen dating violence is a controversial topic in ways similar to sex education or HIV programs, introducing a dating violence prevention program into a school's curriculum may precipitate strong negative reactions from parents, school board members, and other community members in addition to students and teachers.

In the classroom, there is strong potential for defensiveness and/or anxiety on the part of both students and instructors of the program when the topic is introduced. These emotional reactions may seriously interfere with or compromise the efficacy of the program itself. Moreover, any given group of students will undoubtedly require several different levels or approaches; a primary prevention approach to dating violence may apply only to a subset of students because the group may also include individuals who are already involved in violent dating relationships.

To succeed in initiating and maintaining a dating violence prevention program, it is important that proactive efforts occur on three levels:

- Decisional: selecting the program.
- Community: garnering support of relevant stakeholders.
- Instructional: providing sufficient preparation for classroom instruction.

The first step in including a dating violence prevention program in a secondary school curriculum is to select a program appropriate to both the student population and the school setting. The next step is to have clear communication with stakeholders in the wider school community about the program details to facilitate its planning and management. Finally, and most important, effective and comprehensive training of program instructors is essential. Well-prepared teachers will be significantly better able to successfully implement a dating violence prevention program and meet the challenges inherent in talking to teens about dating concerns (DeFronzo et al., 1999).

Choosing a Program

The following section discusses four criteria that may be used to choose a dating violence prevention program: focus, length, setting, and program instructor.

Focus

Does the program focus on males as perpetrators/batterers and females as victims/battered teens, or does it emphasize that both males and females can be either victims or perpetrators? One of the most important as well as controversial issues pertaining to school-based partner violence prevention lies in the theory on which the program is based. Some programs frame partner violence in "gendered" terms, focusing on males as perpetrators and females as victims. Several published evaluations investigated programs based on this gendered model (Jaffe et al., 1992; Jones, 1987; Krajewski et al., 1996; Lavoie et al, 1995). For example, two evaluations of Barrie Levy's (1984) domestic violence prevention program, Skills for Violence-Free Relationships, have been undertaken (Jones, 1987; Levy, 1984). In its entirety, this program is a multisession curriculum for adolescents based on the notion that beliefs in and adherence to

traditional sex roles and acceptance of male dominance in a relationship are at the root of partner violence. Both studies failed to demonstrate change in high school students' attitudes toward the use of violence. Another evaluation of a presentation by several community speakers, including police and domestic violence agency personnel, indicated significant positive attitude changes for most students, but it also showed a "backlash" effect; that is, attitude changes showing increased acceptance of violence for some of the male students (Jaffe et al., 1992). These findings may suggest choosing gender-neutral materials rather than those based on a model of domestic violence in which males are described as perpetrators and females as victims.

Does the program focus on adult domestic violence concerns, such as legal action to prevent battering or the serious consequences of battering (i.e., "scare tactics"), or does the program focus on issues more specific to adolescent dating relationships? Many domestic violence agencies use personal and often in-person testimony of a formerly battered woman as the focus of school-based prevention efforts. However, studies across various topic areas, such as dental hygiene, drunk driving, and cigarette smoking, consistently demonstrate that scare tactics, such as showing gruesome pictures of car accidents to prevent drunk driving, simply do not work. In our experience, interventions are most effective when students perceive that the message is directly relevant to some aspect of their own experience.

Does the program focus only on the most serious and obvious forms of aggression, such as wounds requiring emergency medical attention, or does it focus on more subtle forms of aggression, such as verbal and psychological aggression? Does it offer a balance across all forms of aggression and control in intimate relationships? Many programs focus on more serious forms of violence. Although this focus seems compelling from a public health perspective, an argument may also be made for targeting more subtle forms of aggression; that is, the "lesser" forms are strongly associated with more severe aggressive behaviors. For example, verbal aggression is one of the most consistently reported predictors of physical aggression (Murphy and O'Leary, 1989). If the earlier, lesser forms of aggression are causally linked to later, more severe forms, then interventions that reduce lesser aggression should result in a reduction of severe violence. Moreover, verbal aggression is far more prevalent than physical aggression; thus, program participants may perceive that the program message is more relevant to their own experience and "buy in" to the program. Another problem with targeting severe aggression is that these behaviors may be more difficult to change. A more intensive and individually tailored intervention may be needed for the few students who engage in these extreme behaviors.

Different behaviors targeted for prevention will necessitate different intervention strategies. For example, stressing more extreme aggressive behaviors calls for an emphasis on safety and may generate intense emotional reactions from those who are involved in violent situations. Alternatively, a focus on more normative levels of conflict allows for the teaching and practicing of both communication skills and anger management strategies. These latter approaches are more universally applicable to students and may be more appropriate lessons for the general classroom.

Length

How much time is needed for an effective dating violence prevention program? Programs vary from a day or less to semester- or year-long, and actual classroom time devoted to the program varies as well. Program length will also vary according to the instructional goals. For example, skills-based programs need to be longer to allow for practice time, while programs that emphasize increasing awareness of the problem of domestic or dating violence may be shorter (e.g., one class session or a half-day assembly).

Despite agreement as to the importance of preventing intimate partner violence, surprisingly little time has been devoted to these efforts in the classroom. Programs range in length from a low of 2.5 hours (Lavoie et al., 1995) to a high of 10 classroom sessions (Foshee et al., 1998; Krajewski et al., 1996), which still represents a relatively short amount of time. Further, only two studies specifically reported making comparisons between a longer and a shorter intervention (Jaffe et al., 1992; Lavoie et al., 1995). In the Jaffe et al. (1992) study, results were reported for all students who received either a half-day or a full-day program, but no comparisons were made to evaluate which program was more effective. The study's results were also complicated by the fact that the two groups differed before the program began, and both groups showed changes after taking part in the program (Lavoie et al., 1995). What this means is that it is still unclear whether longer programs show more lasting effects on students' use of aggression and aggression-related behaviors.

Another unresolved issue has to do with the effects of violence prevention programs over time. As these programs are cumbersome and extremely costly to evaluate, most do not include a long-term followup assessment. In the only evaluations reviewed that used a longitudinal design, results were mixed. One study reported initial effects on both knowledge and attitudes, but these washed out at the 5-month followup (Krajewski et al., 1996). Among middle school students, modest effects on violent behaviors washed out at the 1-month followup, but students retained gains in awareness and some of the skills measured (Foshee et al., 1998). In our own work, attitude gains washed out after 3 months, but gains in knowledge and intentions to seek help were retained at followup (Cascardi et al., 1997).

Does the program advocate same-gender or mixed-gender sessions? There are costs and benefits to both same- and mixed-gender sessions. Because the research literature does not demonstrate that one method is more effective than the other, it is probably best to select the grouping that seems most appropriate for a particular school or community. Some of the advantages of same-gender sessions are that they allow students to express themselves without fear, shame, or embarrassment and may also be more likely to increase self-disclosures. Same-gender groups may also have an added advantage of decreasing males' defensiveness if they feel that the program characterizes males as perpetrators and females as victims. Mixed-gender programs also have some advantages: They allow males to learn what females think and vice versa. They also provide for healthy exchange, with proper facilitation, between males and females about gender stereotypes and double standards regarding dating behavior and acceptance of aggression in relationships. A sequential approach in which students meet first in same-gender groups and then in mixed-gender groups may be a compromise approach.

Setting: Which Is Best to Implement the Program?

Most programs are classroom based to reach the maximum number of students from a range of levels and experiences. This strategy is particularly important when the students most at risk are those least likely to volunteer to participate in an extracurricular program. However, there are also advantages to using a small group approach in other settings, such as guidance offices and in correctional facilities, mental health programs, afterschool programs, or churches.

Because most of the program evaluations in the area of dating violence prevention have been conducted in a school setting, more is known about the effectiveness of school-based programs than those used in other contexts. However, it may be less fruitful to pursue the question of whether school or community efforts are superior and instead focus on how to best combine prevention strategies in the two arenas. While more community involvement is likely to increase the potential for positive change, there is considerable cost in terms of time, effort, and money as the program scope broadens from the classroom to the larger community. (See Foshee et al. [1996, 1998] for an example of a combined school and community initiative in rural North Carolina.)

Program Instructor: Who Should Implement the Program?

Perhaps the most important key to successful programs is the competence of the facilitator. Dating violence is an emotionally sensitive issue and some teachers may not be sufficiently prepared to effectively manage student reactions to it. Although many programs are available in manuals, and thus anyone can obtain and use the program, research points to the importance of specialized training in program implementation. A recent study demonstrated that student response is significantly linked to teachers' knowledge of and performance teaching a dating violence prevention program (e.g., DeFronzo et al., 1999). Moreover, teachers who receive training are significantly more motivated to implement such programs and feel more comfortable with and knowledgeable about the material (Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, 1999).

Several pros and cons are associated with choosing an existing teacher to implement a program as opposed to hiring an "outside" person (e.g., a domestic violence/battered women's advocate). The advantage of using a teacher is that this person is likely to be a skilled educator with polished pedagogical as well as classroom management skills. Moreover, teachers have an ongoing relationship with their students and can incorporate a program on dating violence into the existing academic curriculum. A teacher can continue to implement the program with new classes at no additional cost to the school. Alternatively, there are also advantages to using an advocate. Advocates' area of expertise is in domestic violence, and they probably have a larger knowledge base and emotional sensitivity toward students who self-disclose during class. An advocate will be able to educate students about community resources for those involved in dating violence. Furthermore, someone trained in domestic violence should also be available to help students recognize whether their relationship is abusive or harmful and cope with violence at home and to provide support and referral, if needed, for students suffering emotionally from abuse they have experienced.

Evaluating Dating Violence Prevention Programs

How are outcomes measured? Were measures reliable and valid? The questions asked and the manner in which they are asked are key issues when trying to estimate the scope of the problem in a school, interpreting the results of program evaluation studies, and collecting data. Because data collection is expensive as well as time and labor intensive, it is important to choose measures carefully. The measures or surveys used should produce truthful and consistent results. Otherwise, school officials might question whether the findings are in fact meaningful.

The way questions are asked can produce different results. For example, how dating violence is defined can alter both the overall rate of dating violence and how much change in dating violence can be detected. One study might show that few students report any violence at the outset. When this happens, it is also difficult to show any change. Another study might report high rates of dating violence and be more likely to show change after a program has been implemented. These differences might be due to how dating violence was measured. As mentioned previously, global, subjective questions often produce lower rates, while questions directed at specific behaviors are likely to produce higher rates. When measuring attitudes justifying dating violence, which are an important predictor of aggressive behavior, the type of questions will affect the results. Specifically, when students are asked about the acceptability of responding aggressively to provocative situations, such as public humiliation, jealousy-arousing behavior, or being hit first, there is more variation in students' responses. Therefore, attitudes measured this way are more likely to change than attitudes about aggressive behaviors with no contextual details (Slep et al., 1999).

Are there research studies that explain which programs are effective? How can a school official become a good consumer of program evaluation results? Although the research addressing these questions is limited, a number of studies test dating violence prevention programs. An overview of existing program evaluation study results is presented in the exhibit, which lists a brief description of the program, methods, and results. The extent to which study results are helpful is limited by the quality of the measures used as well as several other aspects of research design, such as the use of a control group, training of implementers and implementation itself, and the number of time points at which students are assessed. These aspects are discussed in more detail below.

Evaluations of School-Based Programs

Author(s)	Program Title/ Location of Study	Length/ Description of Program	Sample and Design (Pre-Post Only Unless Noted)	Evaluation Results	Females' Attitudes
Jones, 1987	Skills for Violence Free Relationships/suburban Minnesota	Five class periods/focus on domestic violence and male battering	566 junior high students, 598 high school students; quasi-experimental control group design	Knowledge changed but not attitudes (both schools)	Better
Krajewski et al., 1996	Skills for Violence Free Relationships/urban Wisconsin	Ten health classes/led by teacher and counselor from women's shelter	239 seventh graders; quasi-experimental control group design, pre-post and 5-month followup	Effects on knowledge and attitudes changed, but these washed out by followup	Better
Jaffe et al., 1992	No title/urban and rural Ontario	1.5-hour auditorium presentation by community speakers, plus half day of student action plans (e.g., play, fundraiser)	637 high school students; pre-post, 6-week followup for half the sample	Girls increased knowledge and changed attitudes; boys had backlash effect on attitudes	Better
Lavoie et al., 1995	No title/Quebec City	2.5 hours of classroom material, plus two supplemental class periods	417 10th graders at two schools; one school received auditorium presentation, other received auditorium plus student action	Attitude change for students in both program groups	Better
Kantor and Jasinski, 1995	No title/rural New Hampshire	Five weekly sessions plus media blitz, focus group, and community involvement	390 high school students; program school-control school comparison	Knowledge and attitude change among males only	Better
Avery-Leaf et al., 1997	Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum/suburban New York	Five class periods led by trained health teacher	193 11th- and 12th-grade health students; quasi-experimental control group design	Attitude change for students who received program only; no change in control group	Better
Foshee et al., 1998	Safe Dates Project/rural North Carolina	Ten-session curriculum, student play, poster contest, and training for community service providers	1,886 eighth and ninth graders from 14 schools; quasi-experimental control group design	Changed dating violence norms, stereotyping, and constructive conflict management skills; increased awareness of help	Better

Author(s)	Program Title/ Location of Study	Length/ Description of Program	Sample and Design (Pre-Post Only Unless Noted)	Evaluation Results	Females' Attitudes
				seeking, decreased psychological abuse, sexual violence, and dating violence; not all effects sustained at 1-month followup	
Macgowan, 1997	A dating violence prevention program developed by Domestic Violence Intervention Services/urban Florida	Five daily classes led by trained teacher	440 sixth to eighth graders from one school; quasi-experimental control group design	Effects on knowledge and attitudes toward nonphysical violence (jealousy) changed	No effects
Cascardi et al., 1997	Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum/suburban New York	Five class periods led by trained health teacher	2,300 10th- to 12th-grade health students from 7 schools; quasi-experimental control group design; pre-, post-, and 3-month followup	Knowledge, attitude, help-seeking intentions changed; decrease in emotional abuse tactics at followup; change in help-seeking intentions and knowledge maintained at followup	Better

Was a control or comparison group used? Why is this important to know? Students sometimes may show change on the program outcomes studied just by repeated testing or the passage of time. It is therefore important to compare how students who did not participate in a program changed on the program outcomes to determine whether changes in the group that participated in the program are due to the program or to something else, such as testing or time. To make the comparison between students who did and did not participate, these groups must be as similar as possible. In this way, school officials can ensure that group differences are due to the program and not some extraneous factor, such as differences between the two groups in age, race/ethnicity, region, or socioeconomic status.

Of the nine program evaluations summarized in the exhibit, only two did not use a control group (Jaffe et al., 1992; Lavoie et al., 1995). Although these studies report significant changes from pre- to postprogram, it is unknown whether these changes are beyond the improvements that may be documented among students who participate in no activities other than two sessions filling out questionnaires. However, school officials can have more confidence in the changes reported in the controlled studies (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Cascardi et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 1998; Jones, 1987; Kantor and Jasinski, 1995; Krajewski et al., 1996; Macgowan, 1997) because these effects are not shown among students who complete identical questionnaires at the same time points.

How was the program implemented? What type of training was provided? When making decisions, such as which program to select, as well as whom to designate as program facilitator, it is important to understand how the program works specifically with the implementer a school is considering using. In other words, choosing a program that has been tested using outside professionals will not necessarily predict success using in-house teachers, especially those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the topic of dating violence. A few evaluations have been conducted that have used in-house teachers who have received specialized training in the dating violence prevention program (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Cascardi et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 1996; Macgowan, 1997). All trainees were health teachers who received a 20-hour (Foshee et al., 1996), 8-hour (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997), 3-hour (Macgowan, 1997), or 16-hour (Cascardi et al., 1997) training workshop in program implementation. The results from these studies may apply more to health teachers than to those using outside professionals as implementers.

Was the program implemented as planned? Knowing that the program was implemented as it was intended can help school officials determine whether changes in student knowledge, attitude, and behavior were due to the program. Moreover, having a clear sense of how implementers tend to use program materials can help officials anticipate barriers or obstacles that may prevent successful implementation to ensure optimal planning for future prevention efforts. Unfortunately, monitoring teacher performance is cumbersome and, to our knowledge, these data have not yet been published. Our own classroom observations indicate that on average, teachers were able to complete 70 percent of program objectives and activities in both middle school and high school settings (DeFronzo et al., 1999). These findings lend support to conclusions that effects are due to the program and not to factors unique to individual teachers.

How many times were participants assessed? Assessing program participants at more than two time points enables school officials to determine not only the immediate program effects but also the long-term impact of the intervention. As indicated in the exhibit, most program evaluations have demonstrated immediate postprogram effects, but few improvements are sustained over time (Cascardi et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 1998; Krajewski et al., 1996). Although the effects of "booster" sessions (i.e., additional program sessions implemented at strategic time points months and/or years after program implementation) are not yet known, school officials may want to consider including this approach.

Which dating violence-related outcomes were assessed? Surprisingly, aggression itself was not measured in the majority of the studies reviewed (Jaffe et al., 1992; Jones, 1987; Krajewski et al., 1996; Lavoie et al., 1995; Macgowan, 1997). Studies that used measures of dating violence either gathered these data only at baseline (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997) or showed no significant or long-term changes in rates of aggressive behaviors as a result of the program (Cascardi et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 1996; Kantor and Jasinski, 1995). Because the measurement of violent dating behaviors is quite complex, several reasons may exist for these discouraging findings. Dating relationships are sporadic, and dating violence is a low-frequency set of behaviors that may not be captured adequately by a "snapshot" assessment approach. Another possible explanation is that although programs help teens avoid violent relationships, they are less successful at helping to stop students who already are engaged in aggression.

One of the most common outcomes assessed in dating violence prevention program evaluations is that of knowledge and awareness of the topic of dating violence. Programs aim to teach students how to recognize and define violent relationships, and evaluators want to know how much students learn in this area. It is also essential that prevention programs target factors shown to be predictive of dating violence that are also amenable to change because they are more likely to be changed in a classroom setting. Some factors that have been evaluated include peer aggression, verbal aggression, attitudes justifying the use of aggression, and physical aggression used in retaliation for a dating partner's aggression. Another important outcome is whether a program is effective in increasing awareness of services and rates of help seeking among teens. Although schools provide an array of support services, students faced with violent dating situations do not always avail themselves of them, nor do they turn to parents or other adults in the community for help (Watson et al., 1998). Prevention programs should help teens identify appropriate sources of help and support as well as provide them with model ways to talk about issues around dating conflict.

Finally, other outcomes that have not been examined in any published literature at the time of this writing may represent an important new direction in the dating violence prevention area. Specifically, program-related efforts such as teacher training may have an impact on teacher comfort with and their likelihood of intervening effectively, referring students to guidance, or taking disciplinary action when students fight. We have recently noted similar effects in our own work; we found that teachers who complete an 8-hour training workshop feel more comfortable with the topic of student dating aggression and more confident addressing the topic in the classroom (Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, 1999). Adding a dating violence prevention program to the

school curriculum may increase dialogue and enhance planning and policy to more appropriately and consistently address dating violence on a schoolwide level.

Conclusions

Foremost, secondary school officials should underscore the crucial importance of creating commitment and buy-in among staff before embarking on a dating violence prevention program. Without support from key stakeholders in the school and the community, a program may not be given the best chance for success. Relatedly, it is important to understand one’s own philosophy as well as that of those with whom one works regarding tackling social issues in the school setting. Some educators are reluctant to move away from traditional academic topics and believe social issues, such as dating violence, are best left to be addressed by parents or others in the community. However, the data suggest that schools may be an optimal setting to address these matters because a large percentage of sexual harassment takes place on school grounds and youths spend the vast majority of their day at school, with many opportunities for cross-gender contact and aggression. Creating a school atmosphere in which dating violence is not accepted may be facilitated by policy as well as classroom instruction. Consider the following minimum standards when evaluating various programs:

- What results were achieved?
- Is this consistent with what my school needs?
- What population was used?
- Is the population similar to my student body?
- How flexible is the program model?
- Can teachers adopt the information easily and integrate it with their existing lesson plans?

Finally, seek training from skilled professionals who can sensitize educators to the social and emotional concerns arising from teaching about teen dating violence prevention and can maximize educators’ familiarity with the topic. It is critical to bear in mind that the program evaluations reviewed previously were conducted with specific types of populations; for example, northeastern suburbs and the rural Southeast. It is not clear whether any programs will achieve the same results when used with a group of students who are different from those originally studied.

In studying the prevention of partner violence among adolescents, a few elements have been found that maximize a positive response from young daters participating in a prevention program. It is recommended that prevention programs be implemented with an entire population (e.g., all students, all incoming college freshmen) so as not to exclude those at risk. Further, it is recommended that school-based programs include a skills component and use a group format for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Specific recommendations based on the evaluation literature are fivefold:

- ♦ Program evaluation results to date suggest that partner violence prevention programs need to adopt a gender-neutral focus to avoid creating resistance to the program message, particularly if one is targeting mixed-sex groups.

- ♦ It is essential to introduce skills training early (specific areas include effective communication, conflict resolution, and anger management) because these skills require practice and can provide benefits in reducing conflict both within and outside the dating context.

- ♦ It is beneficial to retain the focus on attitude change because this has consistently been proven to be a successful program objective.

- ♦ It is recommended that booster sessions be included in the program because they have been shown to retain the changes evident immediately postprogram.

- ♦ Including a peer counseling component is important because studies have shown that teen victims seek help from friends far more often than from professionals (Watson et al., 1998). It is also important, however, to provide referrals to other resources, such as hotlines, support groups geared specifically to teens, and shelters.

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