

Fostering healthy teen intimate relationships through an in-school violence prevention program

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The sample of the Relationships Without Violence (RWV) Prevention Program consists of ninth- through twelfth-grade students in one Salt Lake City high school health class. The RWV was conducted between the Fall of 2008 to Fall of 2010 academic year. The RWV was designed to fit the curriculum in health classes regarding dating violence, consequences of dating violence, healthy ways to deal with conflict, and healthy relationships. The RWV curriculum consists of four different sessions, which covered the topics of sexual coercion, violent behaviors, violent attitudes, socialization of violence, and substance abuse while promoting prosocial behaviors, positive peer culture, healthy masculinities/femininities, consent, and help-seeking behaviors. The RWV used a quasi-experimental design with a control group and treatment group. Pretests were administered before the program began and posttests were administered 2 weeks to 1 month after the program ended.

Participants experienced physical intimate partner violence (33.7%), emotional/psychological violence (46.2%), followed by sexual coercion at 16.5%. Additionally, boys and girls did not differ on intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration and victimization. Results reveal that there was no significant difference from pretest to posttest when comparing control group and treatment group. However, multivariate analysis found that controlling behaviors significantly predicted violent attitudes, which significantly predicted partner violence and victimization. Additionally, results suggest that controlling behaviors partially mediated the relationship between violent attitudes and IPV perpetration and IPV victimization. Interestingly, when controlling for controlling behaviors, violent attitudes had a negative effect on female IPV perpetration and IPV victimization.

Findings from the study reveal the powerful effects of controlling behaviors on adolescents, and the difference between violent attitudes only and violent behaviors to an intimate partner. The study revealed that coercive control did mediate the predictive relationship between controlling behaviors on IPV perpetration and IPV victimization. Interestingly, if the participants had controlling behaviors and only had violent attitudes, their IPV perpetrations reduced. These findings suggest that coercive control not only leads to violent perpetration but also leads to violent victimization. Professionals working with adolescents should be aware of the adverse consequences of dating violence that may negatively affect academic achievement. The findings of this study reveal that controlling behaviors present in adolescent dating relationships must be addressed by social workers working with adolescent populations.