

Research in Brief:  
**School Based Interventions to Reduce  
Dating and Sexual Violence**

Teen dating and sexual violence is a concern for researchers as 1 in 10 teen relationships involve violence. Adolescents who experience dating violence are at risk for decreased mental and physical health including being more likely to experience depression and suicidal thoughts. In addition to health problems, dating violence is associated with poor performance in school, and can lead to continued abuse later in life.

Prevention programs early in adolescence can help teens establish what a healthy, safe relationship is and can help them deal with conflict resolution. Prevention programs also teach students of resources available to them if they do experience abuse. Programs are needed that produce change in attitude, which leads to a change in behaviour, including perpetration of violence.

Researchers in this systematic review set out to find the effects of school based dating and sexual violence prevention programs on dating violence knowledge and attitudes, rape myth acceptance, violence perpetration, violence victimization, and conflict tactics.



**What is a Systematic Review?**

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

***Why does this matter?***

- ⇒ 1 in 10 teen relationships involve violence.
- ⇒ Adolescents who experience dating and sexual violence are more likely to have decreased mental health, physical health, experience lower life satisfaction, and poorer performance in school than adolescents who do not.
- ⇒ Prevention programs that produce positive outcomes in behaviour including perpetration and victimization are still needed.



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# School Based Interventions to Reduce Dating and Sexual Violence

## What Did the Researchers Do?

The researchers conducted a search of electronic bibliographic resources, government databases, grey literature databases, citations in other reviews, and contacted researchers who had done work in the specific field. The results were narrowed down to 23 prevention programs that were school based (from grades 4–12), included a control group comparison, with a goal of reducing or preventing teen violence or sexual violence, and measured the impact on attitude change, frequency of partner violence or victimization, teen dating violence knowledge, or the ability to recognize safe and unhealthy dating behaviours. There was no restriction on language nor date.

## What Did They Learn?

*Dating Violence Knowledge:* intervention program participants displayed significantly more knowledge about dating and sexual violence than did controls, a pattern which continued at follow up

*Dating Violence Attitudes:* prevention programs aimed at improving attitudes of dating and sexual violence showed a small, significant effect in the intervention group both at test and at follow up.

*Rape Myth Acceptance:* Participants in programs aiming to educate students about rape myths were significantly less likely to accept rape myths at post-test. No follow up information was available

*Dating Violence Perpetration:* Intervention groups and control groups participating in programs aimed to reduce the amount of teen dating violence perpetration did not differ in the amount of violent cases at post-test or follow up.

*Dating Violence Victimization:* Programs aimed to reduce teen dating and sexual violence victimization had a positive effect. Intervention participants were less likely to experience victimization, but the effect was no longer present at follow up.

*Conflict Tactics Scale:* Participants in the intervention programs aiming to improve students' conflict tactics scale showed a positive effect.

Overall, the researchers found that most dating and sexual violence prevention programs had a positive effect on intervention students' attitudes and knowledge, but not their behaviour. The researchers stress the need to create programs that change attitudes in a way that has an effect on behaviour as well.

The researchers also express the need for school implemented programs because if students learn about dating and sexual violence at a young age, it can prevent the emergence of violent behaviour in adulthood. Violent behaviour and victimization in teenage years likely leads to violent behaviour and victimization in adulthood.

The researchers suggest future research involve prevention programs use a longitudinal study measuring dating and sexual violence attitudes, victimization, and perpetration throughout participants' lifetimes. Researchers feel the role of bystanders in dating and sexual violence needs more research. They also stress the need for more research of specific prevention programs to create and employ interventions that best meet the needs of students.



This brief summary was prepared from:

De La Rue, L., Polanin, J. R., Espelage, D. L., Pigott, T.D. (2014). *School-Based Interventions to Reduce Dating and Sexual Violence: A Systematic Review*. Campbell Collaboration Systematic Reviews 2014:7, 111. doi: 10.4073/csr.2014.7

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