

Teen Dating Violence Prevention: Cluster-Randomized Trial of *Teen Choices*, an Online, Stage-Based Program for Healthy, Nonviolent Relationships

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This study highlights the ongoing problem of teen dating violence (TDV). TDV is physical, sexual, or psychological abuse to a current or previous dating partner. Youth who experience TDV are at risk for mental health problems like substance abuse and suicidal thoughts, as well as risky sexual behaviours and unplanned pregnancy. Because of this, schools are working very hard to address TDV among youth via classroom-based prevention programs. Indeed, there has been positive outcomes from various programs that have been tested throughout schools and communities in the US. However, there remain some challenges when trying to implement these programs in a school setting, including time constraints, lack of resources, and inadequate teacher training. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a universal, online dating violence prevention program called Teen Choices, which is designed to address these barriers.

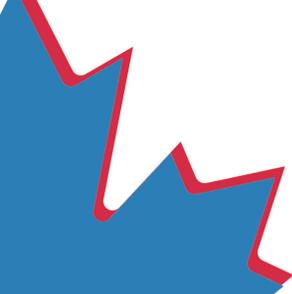
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- This research provides evidence for the effectiveness and ease of accessibility of an online TDV prevention program
- Supports the use of Teen Choices, a universal, evidence-based, online program that is practical, tailored to each student, and can be administered quickly and effectively

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Twenty Rhode Island high schools participated in this study. Pairs of schools were matched to make sure they were comparable on factors like dropout rate, school size, ethnicity, students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and test performance. After matching the schools, one of the schools was randomly picked to take part in the Teen Choices intervention program, and the other was picked to act as the comparison school (receiving an online intervention called Health in Motion, which explores physical activity, screen time, and healthy eating for obesity prevention). In addition to participating in either the Teen Choices program or the Health in Motion program, all schools received the standard TDV curriculum that was being offered at their school.

Teen Choices is an online, multimedia computer program that measures users' dating history, experience with dating violence, and peer violence. Based on the answers provided, the program categorized users as "high-risk" victims, "high-risk" daters, "low-risk" daters, "high-risk" non-daters, and "low-risk" non-daters. These groups are then used to tailor the intervention. Youth classified as "high risk" victims receive information focused on keeping safe in relationships, and all other groups receive content focused on healthy relationship skills training. The three Teen Choices sessions are offered one month apart.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

First, the researchers found that schools who participated in the Teen Choices program reported less TDV. Specifically, they found a significant reduction in emotional victimization, emotional perpetration, physical victimization and physical perpetration in intervention vs. comparison schools one year after the program. Youth who participated in Teen Choices also reported significantly more consistent use of healthy relationship skills and improved TDV attitudes one year following the intervention. Second, they discovered that students with a past year history of TDV (reported in the first session of the program) and who were assigned to the intervention track of the Teen Choices program benefitted from the program most. Since this program is administered using a computer, these findings were achieved without any influence from teachers or school staff.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Since this study provides evidence that the program Teen Choices is related to reductions in TDV victimization and perpetration, this work can be used by school administrators looking to implement a more convenient and resource-friendly TDV prevention program into their schools. It is also very promising that this program is especially effective for teens who have experienced dating violence. Further, this program can be used by instructors/educators to teach communities, parents, and youth shelters about the benefits of using an online multimedia TDV program as a prevention strategy.

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FULL REFERENCE

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