

Adolescent Dating Violence Prevention Programmes: a Global Systemic Review of Evaluation Studies

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Because of its prevalence and negative association with youth wellbeing, adolescent dating violence has been identified as an important public health and human rights issue in countries around the world. There is a need to identify effective adolescent dating violence prevention programs. The goal of this paper was to review past studies that have evaluated the effects of such programs. The authors synthesized findings from these studies. They also examined how these studies were designed, with the goal of identifying gaps in the research literature that can be addressed in future studies.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

- Half of the 52 studies on adolescent dating violence prevention programs found a significant improvement in at least one measure of dating violence (e.g., perpetrating verbal violence, or experiencing sexual violence). This proportion was the same for studies conducted in high-income versus low- and middle-income countries.
- Few studies identified why certain prevention programs were effective, or whether the programs were more effective for certain subgroups of youth compared to others.
- There is a need for research on prevention programs that involve peers, family, and communities and that effectively reach subgroups of youth who are particularly vulnerable for dating violence.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers identified 52 studies that evaluated the effects of dating violence prevention programs. They identified different characteristics of the prevention programs, such as where the prevention programs were implemented (e.g., school, community, home), the number of sessions in the program, and the program content. They synthesized the research findings from these studies, such as changes in youth-reported dating violence perpetration.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers categorized studies based on the country in which they were conducted, according to World Bank classifications of high- or low- and middle-income countries. In the past decade, there has been a growing body of research showing the effects of adolescent dating violence prevention programs, starting in high-income countries (primarily in the U.S.). Since 2015, this research has also taken place in low- and middle-income countries, such as Kenya and South Africa. (continued on next page...)



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Half of the identified studies in this study reported a significant improvement on at least one adolescent dating violence outcome (defined as either perpetrating or being victimized by some form of dating violence, such as physical or sexual). This proportion was the same across high-income versus low- and middle-income countries. 10 of the 26 studies that showed improvements in dating violence also reported improvement in another area of violence or wellbeing, such as bullying and substance use.

The majority of research on dating violence prevention has been school-based. In high-income countries, research tended to include a range of measured outcomes, such as perpetrating and being victimized, among all genders. Research in low- and middle-income countries tended to focus on girls' experiences of being victimized.

Programs in low- and middle-income countries tended to have more of a focus on changing gender inequitable norms, compared to programs in high-income countries. Few programs included activities that targeted the role of peers, families, or communities in preventing dating violence.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This work can be used by service providers, decision-makers, and researchers to understand the state of the research on dating violence prevention programming around the world. The authors identified a number of gaps for future work, including a need to build the evidence base for programs in low- and middle-income countries. They further recommend that future prevention research focus on including peers, families, and communities; understanding why certain activities and strategies work to prevent violence; and demonstrating for whom different programs work best.

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