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Strategies for reducing dating and relationship violence in schools

Findings from a systematic review of 247 reports on school-based interventions for dating and relationship violence and gender-based violence.



A summary of findings from
Melendez-Torres and colleagues,
2024

This report summarizes findings from:

Melendez-Torres, G. J., Noreen Orr, Caroline Farmer, Naomi Shaw, Annah Chollet, Andrew J. Rizzo, Fraizer Kiff et al. "School-based interventions TO Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-Based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV systematic review." *Public Health Research* 12, no. 3 (2024).

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Schools serve as an important setting for violence prevention and intervention.

Nearly 14% of teens in the United States reported experiencing dating and relationship violence in 2021. Female, racial and ethnic minority, and sexual minority youths were disproportionately affected by these forms of violence in adolescence.¹



Violence negatively affects both perpetrators and victims, all of whom report increased risky sexual behavior, substance use and depressive symptoms in adolescence, as well as longer-term poorer mental and physical health.²⁻⁴

Dating and relationship violence (DRV) includes any physical, sexual, or emotional violence in relationships between youth.

Gender-based violence (GBV) includes harassment or bullying based on gender or sexuality, sexual violence, coercion and assault including rape, within or outside dating relationships.

Dating and relationship violence prevention programs may benefit students.

Programs reduced the odds of long-term DRV **perpetration** by 22%

Benefits were greater for boys, particularly for reducing emotional and physical DRV perpetration.
[OR 0.78, 95% CI (0.64 to 0.94)]

22%

reduced odds of
DRV perpetration

18%

reduced odds of
DRV victimization

Programs reduced the odds of long-term DRV **victimization** by 18%

[odds ratio (OR) 0.82, 95% confidence interval (CI) (0.68 to 0.99)]

Overall, there was no evidence for changes to GBV victimization or perpetration, but interventions improved violence acceptance, knowledge and individual self-efficacy in the short term, and violence acceptance in the long-term

High-quality, single-component interventions may be more important than complex approaches.

Findings showed that approaches may work best if they used what the authors called **“basic safety”**, which involves destabilizing or interrupting violent behaviors via communicating the unacceptability of violence.

These basic safety focused interventions may be particularly effective for boys and those with previous experiences of perpetration.

Many factors can affect the success of program implementation.

The authors identified eight factors related to program implementation:

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- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | School resources and infrastructure | 5 | Intervention interactivity and development of positive relations among students |
| 2 | Space and supplies | 6 | Facilitator content knowledge and availability of external support |
| 3 | School organization and leadership | 7 | Ease of delivery |
| 4 | Perceived importance of addressing DRV/GBV | 8 | Ease of modification of interventions to fit specific school needs |
-

Significant barriers to implementation included time constraints and competing priorities, but strong staff commitment to prevention of DRV/GBV could offset time and resource limitations.

Additional Resources

[CDC - Violence Prevention](#)

[Children's Hospital of Philadelphia - Dating Violence Prevention](#)

[unicef - Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence](#)

Insights from Youth:

Researchers also consulted with youth and key interest-holders to contextualize and understand the findings, including youth from the Association for Young People's Health specialist youth advisory group, and a group of youth with lived experience.

1

GBV seems to be everywhere in ways DRV is not.

- GBV was described as feeling targeted by older men when in school uniforms, experiencing gendered physical harassment but also gendered comments about appearance (including from teachers) and, homophobic harassment, such as rumors about LGBTQ youth looking at people naked.
- DRV was described as more hidden, for example, inappropriate relationships between students and older adults.

2

Teacher responses impact students.

- Youth described the awkwardness as being driven by student behavior and teacher discomfort, which sometimes further manifested as a perceived lack of safety in classrooms.
- Many youth reported that staff were unprepared or unwilling to acknowledge the trauma of DRV and GBV.

3

Programming feels reactive and limited.

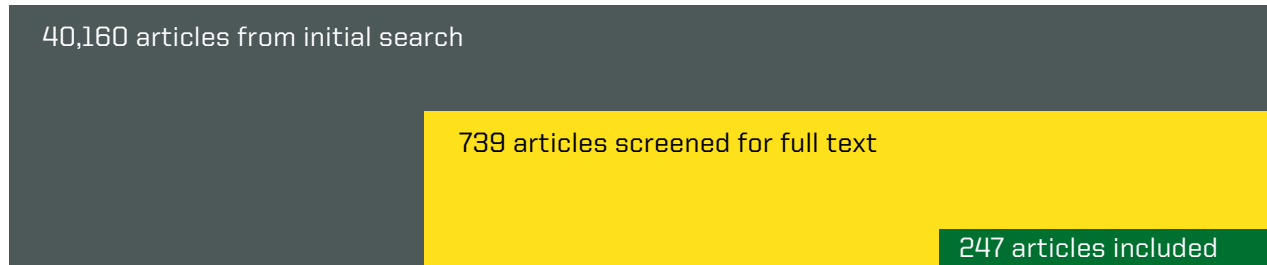
- Interventions often seemed tokenistic and reactive, rather than thoughtfully planned. Specifically, all-school assemblies did not appear to be responsive to the needs of survivors who might be in the audience.
- Youth also noted the remarkable 'straightness' of school lessons on DRV and GBV, commenting that existing programming erases LGBTQ youth in their descriptions of DRV and GBV.

Example Programs:

Name	Description	Clearinghouse Information
<u>Expect Respect</u>	A teen-dating violence-prevention program designed to help participants build safe and positive relationships and learn how to prevent dating and peer abuse and violence.	<u>Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness: "Promising"</u>
<u>The Fourth R</u>	A universal prevention program designed to encourage the development of healthy, non-violent relationships and reduce interpersonal violence, dating violence, substance use, and unsafe sexual behaviors.	<u>CASEL: "Promising Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness: Unclear"</u>
<u>Green Dot</u>	A program designed to change social norms related to violence, increase proactive bystander behaviors, reduce acts of personal violence, and promote safe communities.	<u>Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness: "Promising"</u>
<u>SafeDates</u>	A program for teens that provides skills to prevent dating violence by changing dating violence norms and gender stereotyping, improving conflict-management skills, help-seeking behavior, and other factors associated with help-seeking.	<u>Blueprints: "Promising"</u>
<u>Shifting Boundaries</u>	An intervention that aims to reduce peer violence and sexual harassment in middle schoolers by emphasizing consequences and increasing surveillance of unsafe areas.	<u>National Institute of Justice: "Promising"</u>

Methods

From the 247 reports that were identified as eligible for inclusion, 68 were coded for outcome evaluations and 137 for process evaluations.



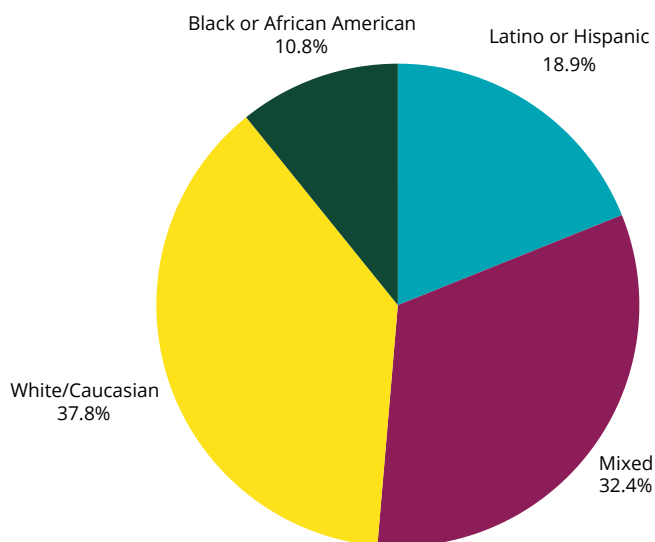
Study Characteristics

- Most studies took place in North America (62% of outcome studies and 55% of process evaluation studies)
- Sample size ranged from 6 to 89,707 students
- Most studies (84%) included students in middle and high school (defined as students 11-16 years old)

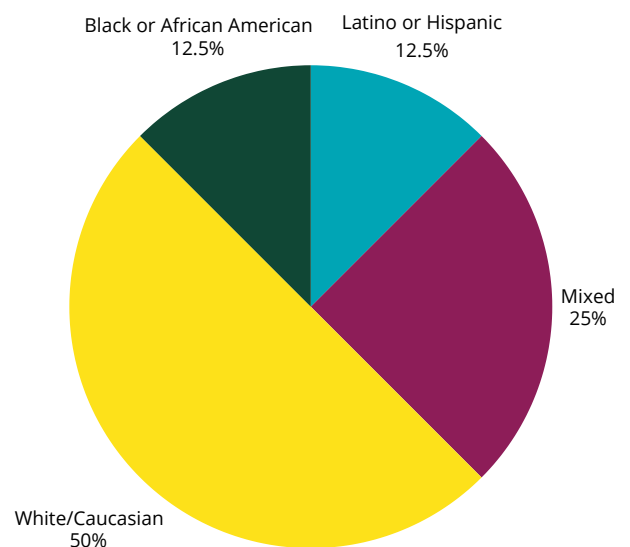
Student Race/Ethnicity

When reported, most studies had a majority white/Caucasian racial/ethnic group.

For outcome evaluations:



For process evaluations:



Certainty of the Evidence

The authors used GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation) to assess the certainty of the evidence for each outcome. The table below lists these assessments, along with a summary statement of the finding given the impact and certainty rating for each outcome.

Outcome		No. of studies	Impact	Certainty	Summary Statement
Dating and Relationship Violence	Victimization: short-term	17	OR = 0.90 (0.80 to 1.02)	Very Low	The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of interventions on short-term DRV victimization.
	Victimization: long-term	13	OR = 0.82 (0.68 to 0.99)	Low	The evidence suggests these interventions may reduce long-term DRV victimization.
	Perpetration: short-term	18	OR = 0.91 (0.80 to 1.04)	Very Low	The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of interventions on short-term DRV perpetration.
	Perpetration: long-term	16	OR = 0.78 (0.64 to 0.94)	Very Low	The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of interventions on long-term DRV perpetration.

Gender-Based Violence	Victimization: short-term	13	OR = 0.88 (0.76 to 1.02)	Very Low	The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of interventions on short-term GBV victimization.
	Victimization: long-term	11	OR = 0.93 (0.80 to 1.08)	Low	The evidence suggests these interventions may result in little to no difference in long-term GBV victimization.
	Perpetration: short-term	11	OR = 0.95 (0.85 to 1.07)	Low	The evidence suggests these interventions may result in little to no difference in short-term GBV perpetration.
	Perpetration: long-term	9	OR = 0.90 (0.73 to 1.12)	Low	The evidence suggests these interventions may result in little to no difference in long-term GBV perpetration.

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