

Prevention Program Effective at Reducing Teen Couple Violence: The trend is increasing at an alarming rate

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Over the past few years, an alarming rise in couple violence incidence has prompted experts to look for solutions to this serious problem. What is even more concerning is the fact that teen couples have also joined the trend. This means that, later on in life, partners that now abuse or are abused will translate this behavior in other relationships too. A recent investigation has revealed that a simple intervention program, inserted in the 9th grade curriculum, reduces the number of such incidents, and also prompts the use of condoms two and a half years later.

Expert David A. Wolfe, PhD, who works at the Center for Addiction, the Mental Health Center for Prevention Science, in London, Ontario, and at the University of Toronto, in Canada, followed a number of lessons delivered to ninth graders by specialized teachers, between 2004 and 2007. The 21 classes dealt primarily with issues related to the dynamics of dating violence and healthy relationships. The scientist and his colleagues report that the program, entitled "Fourth R: Skills for Youth Relationships," was taught to about 968 students at ten randomly selected high schools.

"Dating violence prevention was integrated with core lessons about healthy relationships, sexual health and substance use prevention using interactive exercises. Relationship skills to promote safer decision making with peers and dating partners were emphasized," the researchers write in the August issue of the JAMA/Archives journal Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine. From ten other schools, 754 students were selected to be part of a control group. They were presented with the same objectives as the study group, but were not given training or related materials.

Two years later, as the children finished the 11th grade, the results of the program were analyzed. The researchers found that those in the control group exhibited a higher tendency towards engaging in bad behavior within the couple (9.8 percent), as opposed to those who attended the intervention program (7.4 percent). Amazing differences appeared when the scientists used gender as a separating factor. From the control group, 7.1 percent of boys hit their partners, while only 2.7 percent of the study participants did so. As far as the girls go, 12.1 percent of those in the control group and 11.9 percent of those in the intervention group engaged in negative behavior in the relationships.

“The present evaluation of the Fourth R: Skills for Youth Relationships suggests that methods developed for single-focused interventions (e.g., skills-based, interactive delivery) can be combined effectively from a core relationship perspective. As in related trials, teachers with supplementary training can implement evidence-based prevention programs with sufficient fidelity and effectiveness to garner significant improvements over status quo classroom methods. Similar to efforts made with academic subjects, the best policy may involve earlier introduction of these important topics at a lower grade level, with increasing knowledge and practice introduced in core courses throughout high school,” the experts conclude, quoted by e! Science News.