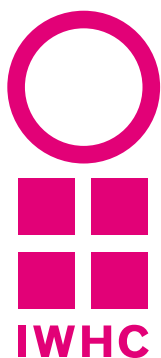


PREVENTING SEXUAL AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS: WHAT WE KNOW

Based on Rebecka Lundgren and Avni Amin, "Addressing Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Among Adolescents: Emerging Evidence of Effectiveness," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, January 2015



WHAT IS SEXUAL AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim. It can occur at any age and is most often perpetrated by family members, intimate partners, teachers, peers, or acquaintances.

Intimate partner violence refers to behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors. It occurs primarily from middle-to-late adolescence onwards. Globally, an estimated 30 percent of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 experience intimate partner violence. Both intimate partner and sexual violence have major sexual and reproductive health consequences for adolescent girls.

Risk factors among adolescents are similar to those identified for adults, including: exposure to violence as a child, prior victimization, bullying and homophobic teasing, poor parental practices, harmful alcohol and substance use, unequal social norms that condone gender-based violence, lack of empowerment among women and girls, controlling male behavior, and laws and policies that perpetuate gender inequality.

REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

Key Elements of Effective Programs

The following approaches have demonstrated promising results in reducing sexual and intimate partner violence among adolescents:

School-based Interventions: Interventions targeting primary and secondary school students show emerging evidence for improving gender-equitable attitudes and increasing likelihood to intervene in situations of bullying and partner violence. Such programs aim to teach adolescents about healthy relationships, improve interpersonal communication skills, promote nonviolent conflict resolution, decrease tolerance of rape and sexual violence, and foster gender equitable norms. In particular, “dating violence programs” have been effective in preventing physical, sexual, and emotional violence among adolescent dating relationships and may also help prevent intimate partner and sexual violence among adults. Among “sexual violence prevention programs” (which aim to challenge acceptance of male sexual dominance and include education and discussion on rape myths and self protection), researchers found the programs were able to decrease acceptance of rape myths and increase ability to correctly identify rape scenarios, but only the longer-term programs were able to reduce violence. Overall, school-based interventions showed minimal changes in girls’ perceived ability to cope with sexual violence, suggesting that creating environments where violence is unacceptable may be more effective than placing the burden on girls to protect themselves by teaching them self-protection skills.

Community-based Programs: Community-based interventions are the most common programs implemented in low-and middle-income countries. Some target boys and men, others target both sexes. Popular interventions include social norm marketing, media campaigns, mentorship, community mobilization, group education, and identification of safe spaces. Several of these community-based programs have been effective in decreasing self-reported perpetration of violence and increasing equitable gender norms, awareness of sexual

violence, and likelihood of intervening in violent situations. In particular, group education and community mobilization programs with boys and young men have been shown to reduce self-reported violence perpetration. Sports-focused programs with men and boys, however, have not demonstrated a similar reduction, although participants report changes in attitudes.

Parenting Programs: Parenting programs and interventions with children exposed to maltreatment seek to prevent future perpetration of partner violence. These programs focus on harsh or dysfunctional parenting, violent discipline and child maltreatment, partner communication, anger management, and healthy masculinities. Most of the programs reviewed were implemented in higher income settings, although parenting programs, particularly fatherhood programs, are emerging in developing countries as well. There is strong evidence that parenting programs reduce conduct disorders and anti-social behaviors among children—common risk factors that lead to acts of sexual and intimate partner violence later in life. Psychological interventions that directly target children and adolescents who have been maltreated or witnessed parental violence have been shown to improve cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, and reduce perpetration and experience of dating violence. Such interventions are often resource intensive, however, and their effectiveness in low- and middle-income countries has not yet been established.

Next Steps

Program designers and implementers should partner with parents and guardians, teachers, religious leaders, and community members to raise awareness of the need to prevent gender-based violence, challenge social norms which condone gender-based violence, and take actions to build safer communities for adolescents. At the policy level, efforts are needed to promote gender equality including legal reforms, enforcing existing legislation, national curricula development, and dedicating resources to effective programs.

Engaging parents and supporting safe homes can prevent child mistreatment and abuse, thus breaking the cycle of violence and making future intimate or sexual partner violence less likely once the child grows up.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

GOVERNMENTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS HAVE MADE A SERIES OF COMMITMENTS TO RESPOND TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Beijing PFA (1995) para 117: Acts or threats of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, or perpetrated or condoned by the State, instill fear and insecurity in women's lives and are obstacles to the achievement of equality and for development and peace. The fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. In many cases, violence against women and girls occurs in the family or within the home, where violence is often tolerated. The neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and rape of girl children and women by family members and other members of the household, as well as incidences of spousal and non-spousal abuse, often go unreported and are thus difficult to detect. Even when such violence is reported, there is often a failure to protect victims or punish perpetrators.

Beijing PFA (1995) para 113: The term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following: Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

Beijing +5 (2000) para 14: This makes women and girls vulnerable to many forms of violence, such as physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

Beijing +5 (2000) para 69(d): Establish legislation and/or strengthen appropriate mechanisms to handle criminal matters relating to all forms of domestic violence, including marital rape and sexual abuse of women and girls, and ensure that such cases are brought to justice swiftly.

Stresses that "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

CSW 2013 para 10: The Commission affirms that violence against women and girls is rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, and persists in every country in the world as a pervasive violation of the enjoyment of human rights. Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Violence against women and girls is characterized by the use and abuse of power and control in public and private spheres, and is intrinsically linked with gender stereotypes that underlie and perpetuate such violence, as well as other factors that can increase women's and girls' vulnerability to such violence.

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At the policy level, efforts are needed to promote gender equality, including enforcing laws that prevent child and forced marriage, increasing women's access to education and economic opportunities, and providing safe spaces for girls.

POLICY FRAMEWORK *(continued)*

CSW 2013 para 11: The Commission stresses that “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The Commission also notes the economic and social harm caused by such violence.

General Assembly (2013) Resolution 68/191, PP4: Emphasizing the importance of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private spheres.

KEY RESOURCES

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
HEALTH COALITION

The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) promotes and protects the sexual and reproductive rights and health of women and young people, particularly adolescent girls, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

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