



RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Preventing gender-based violence among adolescents and young adults: Lessons from 25 years of program development and evaluation.



What you need to know

Effective prevention programming is a key component of a comprehensive strategy to reduce gender-based violence. Significant gaps exist on effective prevention for marginalized groups (i.e., Indigenous youth, LGBTQ+ youth, etc.) despite these groups being at an elevated risk for violence. These gaps need to be addressed to promote healthy relationships for all youths and ensure access to meaningful and effective prevention programs.

What is the research about?

Effective prevention programming is a key component of a comprehensive strategy to reduce gender-based violence. Some youth (i.e., Indigenous youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning+ [LGBTQ+] youth; and young women with disabilities) are at an elevated risk for experiencing violence but no evidence based strategies exist to prevent intimate partner violence against these populations.

This paper aims to investigate what is known about effective GBV prevention programs for youth. Then, identify some of the gaps in the existing literature and the underlying reasons for these gaps.

What did the researchers do?

A literature search was performed to obtain relevant research. The researchers developed a research strategy which included the use of two online databases (PsychoInfo and PubMed) and a search for information that was produced outside traditional channels (i.e., government and funding websites, and “best-evidence” databases compiled by government and national health organizations). Keywords used in the searches included: prevention, healthy relationships, domestic violence, dating violence, intimate partner violence, GBV, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment.

The final sample included 42 websites and 104 peer-reviewed journal articles.



What did the researchers find?

The researchers identified that the goals of programs that are effective at preventing GBV are:

- To end violence
- To empower girls, and
- To promote respectful relationships by targeting knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

GBV prevention programs are typically delivered in schools (i.e., elementary, secondary and university/college). In addition to targeting school aged youth, these programs often focus on specific populations at increased risk of perpetrating and/or experiencing violence (i.e., by race, class, family background, etc., boys/men and other youth such as those in child protection). Although many of these programs are effective and evidence based, it has been identified that youth vulnerable to experiencing high levels of GBV (i.e., Indigenous women, LGBTQ2+, etc.) have been largely overlooked in intervention research.

Our findings showed that girls/women from particular groups are disproportionately more likely to experience violence. These groups include those with a disability; girls/women in contact with institutions (i.e., criminal justice); racialized and Indigenous girls/women; sexually diverse women and girls; women/ girls in poverty, including those who are precariously housed; newcomer and migrant women; sex workers; trans*/gender-queer women; and women abused as children. But although research has identified groups at increased risk for GBV, it has failed to work with these marginalized groups to design, implement and evaluate GBV programs.

Some of the roots of this knowledge gap include: (1) A focus on prevention of negative health outcomes instead of the promotion of wellbeing still dominates GBV literature; (2) researchers being inflexible in epistemology, methods and approaches and; (3) lack of mandate and resources for rigorous evaluations.



This paper identified that a lot of research exists on preventing GBV for cisgendered, heterosexual, white youth but many gaps in our knowledge remain. These gaps must be addressed to promote healthy relationships for all youth and ensure access to meaningful and effective prevention programs.

How can you use this research?

This paper has identified that large gaps exist in our knowledge of effective programming for adolescents and young adults. The analysis of these gaps highlights that many of these root causes require structural changes to occur. However, at a micro level some adjustments can be made. The researchers suggest when developing GBV prevention programs, consultation with groups disproportionately at risk for violence needs to occur. Next, research needs to move away from a deficit-based understanding towards a strengths-based approach. Finally, when working with marginalized populations, the research design needs to be flexible and innovative (i.e., do not prioritize positivist science over collective community wisdom) as some methods may be impractical, culturally insensitive or unethical.



About this summary:

This summary was prepared by Keri Rempel, a research assistant for the HOPE Lab at the University of Calgary. The HOPELab collaborates with a number of community and research partners with the goal of building healthy relationships as a foundation for child and adolescent well-being



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