

'Coaching Boys into Men' an effective tool for stopping teen dating violence

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Male high school athletes' ability to recognize and intervene to stop dating violence -- the physical, sexual and emotional aggression prevalent in adolescent romantic relationships -- is improved with the intervention of some of the most important role models in young men's lives: their coaches.

A new study conducted in Sacramento, Calif., led by UC Davis researchers has found that a structured program delivered by coaches, called "Coaching Boys into Men," is effective for discouraging adolescent dating violence. The research is published online today in the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#).

"The high school male athletes whose coaches delivered this easy-to-implement program reported more positive bystander behaviors, meaning that these boys were more likely to say or do something to stop disrespectful and harmful behaviors towards girls which they witnessed among their male peers," said Elizabeth Miller, a member of the faculty of the UC Davis School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics.

"Previous violence-prevention efforts have not generally included coaches as partners, yet coaches can be such important role models for their athletes," said Miller, who is now chief of the division of [adolescent medicine](#) at the University of Pittsburgh. "With the right training and support, coaches can encourage their athletes to be positive leaders in their communities and to be part of the solution."

In the United States, one in three adolescent girls experiences physical, emotional or verbal abuse by a dating partner. Promoting non-violent attitudes among teen boys toward girls is recognized as a critical step to reduce the incidence of violence in these relationships.

"Coaching Boys into Men" (CBIM) is a high school athletics-based program that seeks to reduce dating violence by engaging athletic coaches as positive role models to deliver violence-prevention messages to young male athletes. It is a national program created by Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund, in 2000. For the program, the coaches are trained in the use of the "Coaches Kit," a series of training cards that offers strategies for opening conversations about dating violence and appropriate attitudes toward women with young athletes.

The study was conducted among over 2,000 young male athletes in 16 high schools in four urban school districts in Sacramento County, Calif., between winter 2009 and fall 2010. Eight of the schools were randomly selected to receive the program, while the other eight schools served as comparisons. Of the coaches approached, 87 percent agreed to participate in the study. The ninth- through twelfth-grade student athletes who agreed to participate were administered a 15-minute baseline survey at the beginning of their sports season, which assessed their attitudes about dating violence and behaviors toward [adolescent girls](#). A similar survey was administered at the end of the sports season (the study included fall, winter and spring sports).

For example, questions sought to assess teens' perceptions of abusive behaviors such as "telling girls which friends they can or cannot see or talk to" and "telling them they're ugly or stupid." Responses were assessed using a five-point scale that ranked answers from "not abusive" to "extremely abusive." Additional survey items assessed the athletes' level of agreement with statements such as "If a girl is raped it is often

because she did not say no clearly enough" or "A boy/man will lose respect if he talks about his problems." Youth were also asked about how likely they would be to intervene when witnessing various abusive behaviors, such as hearing a peer make derogatory comments about a girl's appearance.

The surveys also asked whether the athletes had witnessed any abusive behavior and actually intervened. The young men who had ever dated were asked whether they themselves had participated in any of 10 abusive behaviors including physical, sexual and emotional abuse toward a female partner in the past three months. Eighteen percent of the male athletes who had ever dated reported perpetrating any abusive behavior toward a female partner in the past three months, with verbal and emotional abuse being most common.

The study found that the young males who were exposed to the Coaching Boys into Men program said that they were more likely to intervene when observing abusive behavior toward a peer when compared with the control group of teens, while the likelihood that control athletes would intervene diminished overall during the course of the sports season. And the youth who were exposed to Coaching Boys into Men were significantly more likely to report actually doing something to stop disrespectful and [harmful behaviors](#) among their male peers, when compared with controls.

"There are too few dating violence prevention programs that have demonstrated effectiveness using a rigorous research design. This study offers important evidence on the violence-reducing potential of a practical program that can be integrated into school and community-based dating violence prevention efforts," said Daniel Tancredi, assistant professor in pediatrics at UC Davis and co-investigator for the study.

"This study reminds us that in order to prevent violence before it

happens, we need to take advantage of the positive influence that coaches have in shaping young athletes' attitudes towards women and girls." said Esta Soler, president of Futures Without Violence. "We hope these findings will spotlight the importance of [dating violence](#) and sexual assault prevention and encourage other schools to implement similar programs."

The Coaching Boys into Men program is available for free download through Futures Without Violence (www.coachescorner.org). In Sacramento, WEAVE (a partner in this research study) is continuing to provide training and support to coaches in area high schools. The study was funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Provided by University of California - Davis

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