

## **It's Your Game ... Keep It Real reduces dating violence among minority youth**

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New research from The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) shows that It's Your Game...Keep it Real (IYG), a health education program designed to delay sexual behavior and promote healthy dating relationships, can significantly reduce dating violence behaviors among minority youth.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 10 percent of high school youth are victims of physical dating violence and other studies suggest that more than 20 percent are victims of emotional dating violence. Previous studies have shown that adolescent dating violence begins in middle school and that ethnic-minority students are disproportionately affected by this form of violence.

Researchers looked at four areas of dating violence: physical victimization, emotional victimization, physical perpetration and emotional perpetration.

"In the study, we found a significant decrease in physical dating violence victimization, emotional dating violence victimization and emotional dating violence perpetration by the time students reached ninth grade," said Melissa Peskin, Ph.D., lead author and assistant professor of health promotion and behavioral sciences at the UTHealth School of Public Health.

While there was no change in physical dating violence perpetration, Peskin believes that is because IYG did not contain as much content

related to managing emotions and coping. A new version of the program that includes information and skills training on these topics is currently being tested in schools.

"The foundation of looking at adolescent sexual health is helping young people understand what healthy relationships look like," said Peskin.

"Unfortunately, most schools do not implement evidence-based dating violence curricula."

The study, recently published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, examined 766 students in 10 middle schools in a large, urban school district in southeast Texas. Forty-four percent of the students were African American and 42 percent were Hispanic.

IYG had previously shown to be effective in delaying sexual initiation and reducing sexual risk behavior. The program includes both classroom and computer-based activities and is geared toward [middle school](#) students. The lessons include identifying the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships, skills training for evaluating relationships, strategies for reducing peer pressure, obtaining social support, setting personal limits and respecting others' limits.

"It's Your Game is already being widely disseminated for teen pregnancy prevention, so it's another bonus that the program reduces [dating violence](#) as well," said Peskin.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

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