

App for young boys aims to prevent domestic violence

May 25 2016, by Niki Widdowson

A concept for an app aimed at engaging boys aged 10 to 15 to teach them respectful relationships with girls has been developed by a QUT social marketing expert as "another part of the jigsaw" to prevent domestic violence against women.

The [app](#), however, never mentions the words "domestic violence" or "violence against women," says social marketing expert Professor Rebekah Russell-Bennett from QUT Business School's School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, who developed the concept with Logan-based (Brisbane) non-profit community organisation YFS.

"Interventions at this stage of life can change young people's personal and relationship trajectories, preventing problems in adulthood," Professor Russell-Bennett said.

"However, we are careful to steer clear of using the words 'domestic violence' anywhere in the app because, at that age, many young boys would not find it relevant. This may deter them from downloading and using the app.

"Instead the app focuses on what they do want to know: about how to talk to girls, dating, having respectful relationships and supporting their friends, in order to promote health relationships among young people and positive male attitudes.

"Making these positive behaviours normal is key for this group because

social connections and belongingness are high priorities for them."

YFS CEO Cath Bartolo said YFS supported the development of respectful relationships education as a preventative strategy to address domestic and family violence.

"The [National Survey of Youth Attitudes](#) reported very disturbing findings about young men's attitudes and behaviours," she said.

"Evidence shows that boys and young men are not clear on where to draw the line on what constitutes respect in relationships and what crosses the line in to harm. For example, many do not get that coercing a girl into sex is rape."

"We welcome the development of creative technology and apps that can change the understanding young men have of consent and where their behaviour crosses the line into harmful and illegal actions."

Professor Russell-Bennett said the app concept was developed using social marketing principles.

"Social marketing uses business marketing principles to promote positive changes in behaviour to benefit the individual and society in general," she said.

"Social marketers are increasingly using digital technology such as smartphone games, apps, social media and texting as tools to reach their target markets.

"Ten to 15 year olds have a preference for online and mobile rather than face-to-face communication and most of them have a phone.

"We want to take this concept and develop a game-oriented app to

stimulate positive levels of self-efficacy and strong social bonds which are extremely important to young adolescents.

"Gaming apps have unique features such as 'achievement', 'badges', and 'point features' which help motivate and excite users to encourage new behaviours."

Professor Russell-Bennett said there was no silver bullet for stopping domestic violence.

"This app cannot address the full problem but it can be an intervention that could change behaviour by giving young boys an opportunity to set up respectful relationships early in their lives that carry through into their long-term relationships.

"The next stage is to secure funding to develop and trial the app."

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Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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