

Researchers develop program aimed at reducing dating violence among students

September 30 2019



Melissa Peskin, PhD. Credit: UTHealth

A program developed to encourage healthy relationships and reduce dating violence was effective among early middle school students, according to results of a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* by researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth).

The intervention program, named Me & You: Building Healthy Relationships, was one of the first created to reduce dating violence perpetration and victimization among early middle school ethnic-minority students. The program, created by researchers at UTHealth School of Public Health, uses a life skills decision-making model, which is important for improving [cognitive skills](#) needed for healthy youth relationships.

"These [life skills](#) are necessary for increasing abilities related to developing and maintaining healthy relationships with [dating partners](#), but also with friends and family members. These skills help teach youth better communication and problem-solving." said Melissa Peskin, Ph.D., the study's first and corresponding author. She said it is also one of the only intervention programs that includes interactive technology.

According to a 2018 study, nearly half of urban early middle school youth in dating relationships reported being victimized either physically or emotionally by a dating partner and a third reported perpetrating dating violence. If left unaddressed, consequences of adolescent dating violence can lead to substance abuse, depression, suicidal ideation, and adult domestic violence.

The randomized controlled trial was conducted in a large, urban, southeast Texas school district. Sixth graders in the district who were taking either a health or physical education class, spoke English, and were not enrolled in special education classes, were eligible to participate. Parental consent was required.

Of the 921 students who had parental permission, 826 completed the baseline survey, 736 completed the follow-up survey, and 709 completed the second follow-up survey.

The study had three components: student, school, and parent. The school component included instructor training where educators were given instruction on effective teaching, how to recognize and respond to instances of dating violence, and how to refer students to appropriate resources if dating violence was suspected.

The parental portion involved take-home lessons with interactive discussions to help promote better communication about dating expectations, healthy relationships (both friendship and dating), and advice on how to get out of an unhealthy [relationship](#).

"It's important for parents to talk with their children about their expectations related to dating and the importance of [healthy relationships](#)," said Peskin.

At the first follow-up, compared to other students, intervention students reported a greater negative perception of dating violence, more negative attitudes regarding sexting, and greater conflict-resolution skills.

At the second follow-up, about one year later, incidence of dating violence perpetration among youth who received the intervention was 54% lower than among youth who did not receive the intervention. Also, the likelihood of threatening dating violence/victimization and sexual [dating violence](#)/victimization was lower among intervention students.

Peskin reiterated the value of changing attitudes towards violence. "When a youth has less favorable perceptions about violence and more skills for solving conflicts, they may be less likely to perpetrate [violence](#)," said Peskin.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

Citation: Researchers develop program aimed at reducing dating violence among students (2019, September 30) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-09-aimed-dating-violence-students.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.