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Building an Evidence-Based Approach to Address Dating Violence Prevention

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A proxy for understanding and addressing behavioral morbidity and mortality among adolescents, especially those who are at risk, is to document their behaviors with evidenced based approaches.[1-3]. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS)[4] conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides longitudinal affirmation that dating violence is a significant risk for both adolescent males and females. Building on this database one can also postulate that, sas with other unacceptable youth behaviors, dating violence may begin early, co-vary with sexual and non-sexual risk,[5] increase over time, and in one form or another continue into adulthood.

The information provided by Temple and associates in their review suggests that such a paradigm can provide a useful framework in understanding this problem. With the majority of the cited literature focusing on adolescence, a strong case is made that the onset of violent behavior indeed begins early during high school. Its impact is further emphasized with their reporting of statistics that document both males and females as being targeted victims. Such information is important, as it validates broad-based curricular information that is relevant to both genders. This behavioral framework continues to align their review with the description of long-term sexual and nonsexual issues often associated with post-traumatic stress which continues into adulthood.

While a strong case is made for programs to prevent or mitigate the problem, what is not so evident by the authors' own admission is the identification of strong evidence-based approaches that empirically demonstrate that dating violence can be eliminated. The absence of a broad array of such scientifically proven interventions creates a conundrum that has relevance to the authors' basic position: the need for the institutionalization of efforts to end such behaviors especially among students using school-based interventions. Without proof that an intervention works beyond attitudinal changes, it is hard to argue for its adoption in school venues.[6]

The case for access to the target population using school venues, however, is valid. While the manner in which to logistically integrate dating violence programs or any new subject matter into the school day is problematic, what is more difficult is documenting characteristics of effective evidence-based interventions for diverse school populations. The authors justify this inclusion in that such school-based prevention initiatives can potentially address the long-term consequences of dating violence. However, the list of effective long-term interventions is relatively short. Temple and colleagues have made the first part of the process of change clear: this behavior cannot be allowed. Their work now calls for

the logical next step, the initiation of studies to develop evidence-based remedies that are proven effective in school settings.

Returning to the YRBSS behavioral benchmarks may aid in finding the eventual answer to the question of efficacy. Interventions can apply such concepts to programs in a reverse methodology. One could therefore ask whether certain training can diminish early dating violence onset, reduce covariance with other risky behaviors or terminate those behaviors during adulthood.

The authors have established that we know what the problem is; what is not clear is the solution. Such a review is a call to action for further investigations so that a curricular-based remedy may be seen as a valid way to address dating violence.

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