

Shifting Boundaries

A Summary of Findings from a National Institute of Justice Experimental Evaluation of a Youth Dating Violence Prevention Program in New York City Middle Schools

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Overview

The research team randomly assigned 30 New York City middle schools (two 6th and two 7th grade classrooms in each, with a final total of 117 participating classrooms) to one of four conditions: (1) a classroom-based intervention, (2) a building intervention, (3) both classroom and building interventions, or (4) a no-treatment control group. The *classroom curriculum* included six sessions emphasizing the consequences for perpetrators of dating violence/harassment (DV/H); state and federal laws for DV/H; the setting and communicating of boundaries in relationships; and the role of bystanders as interveners. The *building intervention* included the introduction of temporary school-based stay-away orders; assignment of faculty and school safety personnel to monitor unsafe areas identified through the use of student “hot spot mapping”; and the use of posters to increase awareness and reporting of DV/H to school personnel. We collected program evaluation data from about 2,700 students who completed surveys administered before the intervention, immediately afterwards, and about six months post-intervention.

Shifting Boundaries improves DV/H knowledge and intentions and reduces violent behavior

Compared to the control group which received no interventions...

- The combination of the classroom and building interventions increased student knowledge about laws and consequences about dating violence and sexual harassment.
- The students receiving the building intervention were more likely to intend to avoid perpetrating violence (more pro-social behavioral intentions) immediately after the intervention.
- The building intervention alone was associated with more positive intentions to intervene as a bystander (e.g., reporting an incident of violence to a teacher) six months post intervention.
- The combination of the classroom and building interventions and the building intervention alone reduced sexual harassment (victimization and perpetration) by 26-34% six months post follow-up.
- The building intervention reduced victimization and perpetration of physical and sexual dating violence by about 50% up to six months after the intervention.
- The combination of the classroom and building interventions and the building intervention alone led to 32-47% lower peer sexual violence victimization and perpetration up to six months after the intervention.
- While the preponderance of results indicates that the interventions were effective in improving students’ awareness/knowledge and behavioral intentions, as well as reducing violent incidents, three anomalous results (e.g., reported declines in total peer violence frequency which were contradicted by higher prevalence estimates) are still under review.
- Overall, the building intervention alone and the combination of the classroom and building interventions were effective strategies to reduce DV/H. However, classroom sessions alone were not effective.

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