To Protect Students, Campuses Must Reduce Rates of Dating Violence

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In order to protect students on campuses nationwide, institutions must focus on dating violence

Summary: The prevalence of dating violence among college students is high: one in three college students experience dating violence committed by a current or former partner. The harmful effects of dating violence, which includes a range of abuses, warrant urgent action by institutions of higher education including using evidence-informed programming, tailoring programming to campus culture, and addressing risk and protective-factors, in order to truly reduce rates of campus interpersonal violence, as mandated under federal law.

Considerations for campus dating violence programming

- Campuses should ensure that prevention programming is evidence-informed and effectively addresses dating violence.
- Increasingly, bystander interventions are being used on campuses and show potential for reducing interpersonal violence.
- In order to tailor programming to campuses’ needs and unique cultures, campus climate surveys should assess dating violence.
- Risk factors associated with perpetration of dating violence should be addressed.
- Protective factors can be bolstered to promote healthy relationships among college students.

Dating violence can include multiple forms of abuse. Dating violence can be complex and may include a range of types of abuse including: digital abuse, physical, psychological/emotional, financial, sexual abuse, and stalking. Any of these types of dating violence can be committed by a current or former romantic partner including a dating partner, spouse, or causal partner.

Figure 1:
Types of Dating Violence
Taken from: [1]
How many students will be a victim of campus dating violence?

Dating violence is a serious problem on campuses. Research finds at least 20-25% of women experience dating violence in college with even higher rates in some studies. While both men and women can be a victim of dating violence, men often perpetrate more serious and harmful effect of dating violence, compared to women. Generally, younger women, including those who are traditionally college age, are at the highest risk for experiencing violence within a relationship, at nearly double the national average rate for women.

How does campus dating violence affect students?

The effects of dating violence can be severe and long lasting. College students who have been victimized experience decreased academic performance including dropout. Dating violence is harmful to victims and includes injuries, disability, increased risk for mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, and addiction. Dating violence can even end with death as was the case for Yeardley Love and Lauren McCluskey, both college athletes killed by ex-boyfriends. Given the impact of dating violence on students, only by addressing dating violence can institutions of higher learning reduce the rates of interpersonal violence on campuses.

Implementing federal and local mandates

Currently, dating violence is not widely addressed on campuses in the USA. However, federal and local mandates, such as the Clery Act, which includes the Campus SaVE act, lay out obligations institutions of higher education have regarding dating violence. For campuses to comply with legal mandates, programming addressing dating violence prevention should be provided for students. Campus sexual assault recently captured the public’s attention and campuses nationwide implemented measures to address this issue. However, campus dating violence has been largely ignored in efforts to reduce rates of campus interpersonal violence. Both the high rates of dating violence on campuses and the potential for detrimental impacts to students, indicate that campuses can no longer ignore the issue.

Campuses can implement programs today in order to prevent dating violence.

Campuses do not necessarily need to implement new costly programs but, can instead update existing programs to ensure that they adequately address dating violence alongside other forms of interpersonal violence. Immediate steps institutions can take include: 1) implement policies regarding reporting dating abuse; 2) educate the campus on policies and resources related to dating violence; 3) enforce protective/restraining orders; 4) train faculty and staff on how to recognize and respond to dating violence; and 5) provide services for victims.

Importantly, institutions should also implement prevention programming for all students focusing on dating violence. Many such programs exist with varying levels of evidence as to their effectiveness. Institutions implementing prevention programming should evaluate all potential programs to ensure they are evidence-informed and effectively address dating violence. Programs that have shown preliminary evidence include Bring in the Bystander, Fourth R, Green Dot, Safe Dates, and Shifting Boundaries. Other programs exist, and others are being currently developed. Institutions may wish to consider these programs but, must examine the research to ensure programs are effective in reducing dating violence and related attitudes and beliefs.

Conclusion: Considerations for campuses to best protect our students.

Only through addressing dating violence can we stem the rates of interpersonal violence on campuses. Dating violence affects many students each year and can have lasting negative effects on students. Institutions should build upon existing programming to ensure that students are educated about and receiving services for dating violence. Some considerations for campuses include:

✓ Ensure that prevention programming is evidence-informed and focuses on dating violence.
✓ Tailoring programming to campuses’ needs through assessing dating violence in campus climate surveys.
✓ Addressing risk factors associated with perpetration of dating violence.
✓ Bolstering protective factors to promote healthy relationships among college students.
References


Taken from the Center on Violence Against Women and Children at Rutgers University, School of Social Work. Teen dating violence: An overview for educators. Retrieved from vawc.rutgers.edu


