

# A long-term view can be effective in reducing dating and relationship violence in schools

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Schools need to take a long-term approach to reducing the global issue of dating and relationship violence in young people, according to the most comprehensive and far-reaching research analysis ever conducted in the area.

Schools across the world can be hotbeds of dating and [relationship violence](#), which is violence between young people in dating or 'boyfriend/girlfriend' relationships. Conservative estimates suggest that up to a third of school-age children experience dating and relationship violence, such as physical, sexual and [psychological abuse](#), including online abuse and coercive control. Young people who experience or perpetrate dating and relationship violence are at greater risk for [domestic violence](#) as adults.

As a result, schools across the world are under increasing pressure to teach healthy relationships. Large number of programs have sought to address these issues and reduce violence, yet so far, no evidence has been available on what approached work. Now, researchers at the University of Exeter have reviewed 68 trials across the world, to try to gain a clearer picture of what patterns are effective in reducing dating, relationship and gender-based violence including [sexual harassment](#), homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the findings indicate that school-based programs are more effective at preventing dating and relationship violence than preventing gender-based violence. The research also shows that a long-term view over more than one [school year](#) is needed to be effective, as impact is not always immediate. The research also found that a simple approach works best. To be effective long-term, programs needed to be straightforward and easy to implement, straightforward and highly relevant to both teacher and students.

Lead author Professor G.J. Melendez-Torres, of the University of Exeter Medical School, said, "There's an urgent need to reduce dating and relationship violence, for the safety of students and to foster healthier relationships beyond the school gates. This review is the most comprehensive research of programs carried out in school to reduce dating and relationship violence. Importantly, it shows that efforts to reduce dating and relationship violence can be effective, but schools need to take a long-term view."

The research found more evidence on the effectiveness of programs for dating and relationship violence than it did for gender-based violence, indicating that new strategies and more research are needed.

Ann Hagell, Research Lead at the Association for Young People's Health, said, "Young people tell us that dating, relationship and gender based violence are all much more common among [school-aged children](#) than we might think or hope. It makes huge sense to target solutions to this global problem around schools. Our research has shown is that this is not easy to achieve. However, this review is a critical first step in helping to identify how we improve outcomes for our [young people](#), to improve their safety and ability to foster healthier relationships in school grounds, and well beyond."

**More information:** School-based interventions to prevent dating and relationship violence and gender-based violence: systematic review and network meta-analysis, *American Journal of Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.2105/ajph.2022.307153](https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2022.307153)

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