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The Break the Cycle Evaluation Project

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Introduction

Break the Cycle is a private, nonprofit organization that seeks to end domestic violence by working proactively with youth. Founded in 1996, it includes a preventive education and outreach program, a legal services program, and a peer leadership program. All three programs focus exclusively on youth aged 12–22 years. In 2000, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded a five-year demonstration project to implement the program and study its impact on Latino youth in Los Angeles, California. The evaluation of the Break the Cycle program for Latino youth described in this paper had the

following goals: a) to enhance programmatic cultural competence so Latino youth could be better served; b) to implement a process evaluation and a rigorous experimental outcome evaluation to provide data on program efficacy regarding knowledge, attitudes, help-seeking behaviors, and exposure to and perpetration of dating violence; and c) to provide a model for expansion of this program to other parts of the nation. Lessons learned from this evaluation are expected to inform other prevention efforts and to guide policy on the prevention of dating violence among youth.

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Dating Violence: A Public Health Issue

Violence against women is a substantial health problem for countries around the globe (1,2). The highest rates of many types of violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV) (3,4), occur among young women, with the highest rate of intimate victimization occurring among persons aged 16–24 years (2,4).

Recently, considerable attention has been given to the problem of violence in dating relationships among adolescents and young adults. Over a decade ago, 16%–26% of youth report having dated someone who became physically violent with them (5-7). Frequently, these abusive relationships persist despite this violent behavior, and additional violent encounters commonly occur (7).

More recent national studies on the prevalence of dating violence among teens have produced widely disparate estimates (8). For instance, the National Crime Victimization Survey shows prevalence of dating violence to be relatively low for boys and girls aged 12–15 years, but higher for those 16–19 years of age (4). This survey revealed that during 1993–1998, the average annual percentage of girls and boys aged 12–15 years who were victims of violence by an intimate partner was 0.3% and 0.1%, respectively. However, these percentages became more disparate with increasing age—among adolescents aged 16–19 years, 1.7% and 0.2% of girls and boys, respectively, reported violent physical or sexual victimization by an intimate

partner. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System demonstrated different findings. According to this survey, in 2001, 9.8% of girls and 9.1% of boys reported experiencing physical violence over the previous 12 months at the hands of a dating partner (9). Among those who had previously had sexual intercourse, this number increased to almost one in five teenage girls (10).

Although some researchers have reported that young women are more likely than men of the same age to report physical aggression in their relationships (6,11,12), homicide data show girls to be at much higher risk than boys for being victims of the most extreme form of partner violence. Specifically, about 10% of 12- to 15-year-old girls and 22% of 16- to 19-year-old girls murdered during 1993–1999 were killed by an intimate partner, whereas only about 1% of the perpetrators of homicides among males were intimate partners (13). The gender distribution of dating violence victimization and perpetration is complex, with studies showing widely varying estimates of prevalence (8).

Victims of dating violence are not only at increased risk for injury, but also are more likely to engage in substance abuse, have unhealthy weight control, experience poorer health, engage in risky sexual behavior, become pregnant, and engage in suicidal behavior (14,15). Thus, the need for prevention and early intervention programs is clear. Several such programs have been evaluated (8); the largest evaluation has focused on the Safe Dates program (16), which aims to prevent violence by changing dating violence norms, gender stereotyping, conflict management skills, and help-seeking behaviors. This evaluation demonstrated that the Safe

Dates program is associated with substantial primary and secondary effects. Safe Dates treatment group participants who reported no dating violence at baseline showed less initiation of psychological abuses, and those who were experiencing dating violence at baseline showed less psychological abuse and sexual violence perpetration (16). Moreover, a four-year follow-up showed sustained impact of the program, with reduced physical and sexual dating violence victimization and perpetration among program participants compared with controls (17). Despite the demonstrated success of the Safe Dates program, which involved a predominately white population, only a few dating violence prevention programs have been developed specifically for ethnic minorities (African Americans) (18,19), and none have focused on Latino youth.

The Social Learning Theory and Dating Violence

Several theories have been offered to explain relationship violence (e.g., dating violence), the predominant one being *social learning theory* (20,21). This theory focuses on observational learning as the key to acquiring adult interactional skills. In this model, witnessing or experiencing domestic violence as a child teaches children that this is an acceptable and even useful strategy for solving problems, expressing emotions, and interacting with intimate partners. The theory can also encompass the way that children learn from media and cultural factors such as the problematic portrayal of sexist and coercive relationships (22), peer norms about dating violence, and adolescent subculture (23).

Thus, in the social learning theory, youth views of intimate relationships and violence are formed on at least four levels: personal history

of violence exposure, family norms, peer norms, and cultural norms. Moreover, recent immigrants have two potential sets of cultural norms: those from their countries of origin and those from the United States. Immigrant teenagers exposed to domestic violence before being involved in a dating violence intervention may believe that violence in intimate relationships is acceptable and normal; in addition, those immersed in family, peer, or cultural groups that explicitly or implicitly accept domestic violence will share those norms, regardless of whether they have been exposed to domestic violence themselves.

Break the Cycle Program

Break the Cycle is a Los Angeles-based national nonprofit organization that seeks to end domestic violence by working proactively with youth. It provides youth (i.e., those aged 12–22 years) with preventive education, peer leadership opportunities, free legal services, advocacy, and support. Break the Cycle was founded in 1996 in response to a critical, unmet need for domestic violence services focused exclusively on youth. Its preventive education programs and early-intervention legal services are designed to meet the unique needs of adolescents. Break the Cycle's goal is to alter learned behaviors associated with domestic violence. This prevention effort will reduce the number of youth victims or perpetrators of abuse by providing them with tools to create healthy futures. To date, staff attorneys in Break the Cycle's Los Angeles office have distributed vital domestic violence information to more than 40,000 youth and have provided free and confidential legal services to more than 2,000 victims of violence as they sought to put an end to their abusive relationships. In response to the growing national need for domestic violence services geared

Table 1. *Ending Violence* curriculum

<u>Hour 1: Domestic Violence 101</u>	<u>Hour 2: Domestic Violence Law</u>
<p>Introduction Overview of program, explanation of attorney-client confidentiality, and explanation of the prevalence and seriousness of dating and domestic violence</p>	<p>Lisa and Robert Story Story about two teenagers in a dating relationship that becomes abusive</p>
<p>Video Presentation Presentation of a video that introduces Break the Cycle and the issue of dating and domestic violence and its impact on youth</p>	<p>Legal Options: The Criminal & Civil Justice System Expansion of the two legal systems available to protect victims of violence</p>
<p>Forced Choice Scenarios Interactive questions to stimulate discussion among the students, while debunking myths that are pervasive among teens about dating and domestic violence.</p>	<p>The Game: Crimes and Restraining Orders A game that teaches about rights and responsibilities under the law surrounding domestic violence</p>
<p>Types of Abuse Discussion of the different types of abuse (i.e., physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional)</p>	<p><u>Hour 3: The Legal Process, Safety Planning & Healthy Relationships</u> Obtaining a Restraining Order Explanation of the process through which a person uses the civil legal system to obtain a restraining order</p>
<p>Cycle of Violence Explanation of the three-stage cycle often seen in abusive relationships</p>	<p>Mock Hearing for a Restraining Order Role-play exercise in which students play the parts of Lisa and Robert (from the previous day's story), witnesses and court personell to explain and demystify the legal process for obtaining a restraining order.</p>
<p>Warning Signs of Abuse Disscussion of common warning signs of a potentially abusive relationship.</p>	<p>Safety Planning Group exercise to plan a strategy for ways a victim of abuse could increase his or her safety</p>
<p>Obstacles to Getting Help Exercise to help students think of and understand why someone experiencing abuse might have trouble leaving the violent relationship (countering myths about why victims of abuse remain in relationships.</p>	<p>Healthy Relationships Exercise to discuss the characteristics of a healthy relationship</p>
	<p>Conclusion/Wrap-up Review of the program and reminder of Break the Cycle's services</p>

toward youth, Break the Cycle expanded its work to other communities nationwide beginning in 2003.

Education and Outreach Program

Break the Cycle's curriculum, *Ending Violence: A Curriculum for Educating Teens on Domestic Violence and the Law*, teaches youth in middle schools, high schools, colleges, juvenile detention facilities, and community organizations about domestic violence, healthy relationships, and legal rights and responsibilities. *Ending Violence* is a three-day interactive program that uses visual aids, games, and role-playing activities to educate and engage students (Table 1). Instead of focusing on reactionary measures in response to individual incidents of violence, Break the Cycle's *Ending Violence* curriculum helps young people make lasting changes in their lives and their safety. *Ending Violence* teaches youth that domestic violence is not only wrong and hurtful but also illegal, that the choice to use violence carries serious consequences, and that the law can protect teenage victims as well as adults. Students learn that confidential help is available from Break the Cycle if they are experiencing abuse. Through its Education and Outreach Program, Break the Cycle also trains service providers to recognize signs of abuse and encourages young victims to seek help. All of these prevention efforts aim to end the cycle of violence at the community level and encourage young people to develop safe and healthy futures.

Legal Services Program

Just as Break the Cycle's Education and Outreach Program teaches youth about their legal rights, the organization's Legal Services Program

encourages them to exercise those rights. Break the Cycle's Legal Services Program provides early intervention services in Spanish and English; services include free legal advice, counsel, and representation to persons aged 12–22 years who are experiencing abuse in their relationships or homes. The legal services are designed to empower clients by informing them of their options, helping them to decide what course of action is best for them, and then guiding and supporting them through that process. The goal is to make the clients' experience of freeing themselves from abuse an empowering one that restores their confidence.

Break the Cycle's staff attorneys assist clients in successfully filing temporary restraining orders and provide full representation to clients at hearings for permanent restraining orders and other domestic violence-related family law court proceedings. Through broader client advocacy services, Break the Cycle also provides post-hearing advocacy tailored to the individual needs of each client (e.g., speaking to a client's family, school, or employer about their responsibilities in enforcing a restraining order and helping a client connect with other agencies to obtain needed support services). Break the Cycle advocates for young clients in their transition from victim to survivor, thereby helping to secure lasting change and safe and healthy futures.

Peer Leadership Program

Begun in 2003, Break the Cycle's Peer Leadership Programs (including the Barter, Student Liaison, and Youth Voices programs) empower young people to become the next generation of leaders in the movement to end domestic violence. The Barter Program gives legal

services clients the opportunity to volunteer with the organization. Through volunteering, they contribute to Break the Cycle's mission and help others escape abuse and create healthy futures. Break the Cycle's Student Liaison Program trains college students to raise awareness about dating and domestic violence on their campuses. Finally, Break the Cycle's Youth Voices Program mobilizes high school students to educate their peers about domestic violence by leading education workshops and speaking publicly about dating violence and Break the Cycle's programs.

Cultural Competency

As a first step in the programmatic implementation of this demonstration project, Break the Cycle and the RAND Corporation (a nonprofit research institute) convened a panel of expert advisors to help promote the cultural competency of the project, specifically its sensitivity and relevance to Latino culture. These advisors included a Department of Children and Family Services social worker; a clinical psychologist and professor specializing in mental health, culture, race and ethnicity; a physician specializing in obstetrics and gynecology; a professor of psychiatry and psychology; and an expert in youth corrections and probation from the California Youth Authority. The advisory panel also included two young Latina women who served as consumer experts; one was a former client of Break the Cycle's Legal Services Program, and the other was a volunteer for Break the Cycle whose teenage cousin was murdered by her abusive boyfriend. All expert advisors had personal and professional experience with the Latino community and were knowledgeable about the issues and challenges facing Latino youth. The advisors reviewed and provided feedback on Break

the Cycle's *Ending Violence* curriculum about ways to make it more responsive to the needs and realities of Latino youth. On the basis of their feedback, Break the Cycle made some refinements to the language and approach in its curriculum. For example, the expert panel suggested more clear discussion of sanctions related to dating violence that might affect these urban teens and suggested that changes be made to the main scenario used in the program (e.g., the names of the main characters). Expert advisors also identified the need to strengthen the competence of Break the Cycle staff regarding youth culture in general. Feedback from the advisory panel was incorporated into the training of staff attorneys to make sure that they were cognizant of and sensitive to the issues raised by these experts.

How Break the Cycle Works

The Ending Violence curriculum helps youth reconsider family, peer, and cultural norms in several ways. First, youth are exposed to bilingual curriculum teachers who model an alternative view of domestic violence in which violence is unacceptable, though common, and one for which the teachers have obvious disdain. This exposure helps counteract other role models (e.g., familial, peer, and cultural) that implicitly endorse violence through acceptance. Second, participants are taught that the American legal system has codified specific acts that youth may view as normal as being illegal and punishable with fines, imprisonment, and other sanctions. Such education helps youth realize that violent behavior is not legal or formally accepted in American culture, despite it having been treated as legal in their countries of origin and despite popular American culture that condones domestic violence in many ways. Teaching participants about the

legal system definitions and sanctions provides them with more balanced views of cultural norms. Third, youth are taught about their own rights and responsibilities regarding violence exposure and perpetration. This knowledge also is imparted to participants to counteract the implicit acceptance and endorsement of violence that may be present in their culture and families. Fourth, by acting out a court procedure and coaching youth about ways to seek help, participants are given a new model for assertive help-seeking behavior that is expected to counteract the more common model of passivity. Finally, the group discussion about violence that occurs during the curriculum helps youth express their feelings about violence to one another, serving to counteract the implicit acceptance of violence among youth.

Design of the Evaluation

This evaluation aimed to evaluate Break the Cycle's *Ending Violence* curriculum for Latino youth in Los Angeles high schools. The curriculum was evaluated via an experimental design using random assignment of tracks within schools (i.e., groups of students following different year-round school calendars) to one of two groups: the intervention group and a wait-list control group. Both groups were followed for six months.

Break the Cycle's *Ending Violence* curriculum attempts primary prevention of domestic violence by changing knowledge about legal rights and responsibilities, attitudes, and behavioral intentions to lower the likelihood that young men and women will experience future violence in their homes or intimate relationships. In addition, *Ending Violence* encourages help-seeking behaviors among those already experiencing domestic

violence through knowledge about community resources, referrals into its own legal services program, and increasing propensity to seek help. To evaluate the program's impact, we sought to measure these outcomes. We planned a controlled experimental design to enable comparison between outcomes observed among students who participated in the curriculum and those with similar demographics who did not. Because school administrators wanted to involve as many students as possible in *Ending Violence*, a wait-list control group was used in which students in the comparison group were offered the curriculum at the end of the school year, after the evaluation had concluded.

For the evaluation, high schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District whose student population consisted of 80% or more Hispanic students were identified. From the 15 schools that met this requirement, 11 were recruited on the basis of willingness to participate. The program was implemented and evaluation data were collected over three academic calendar years; the impact of the program was assessed on three cohorts of students. Six schools participated in the first cohort of the study, five participated in the second cohort, and six participated in the third cohort (including five schools that had participated in the first cohort and one that had participated in the second cohort).

The ethnic distribution of students in the 11 participating schools ranged from 81%–99% Hispanic, with no more than 9% of the population represented by any other ethnic group. All but one school operated on a year-round academic calendar, in which students are assigned to one of three school calendars (referred to as “tracks”); student population for these schools ranged from 2,900–4,900. The remaining school

operated on a traditional calendar and had approximately 2,800 students.

Originally, the design plan for the evaluation was to randomize schools as being either immediate recipients of the *Ending Violence* curriculum or serving as wait-list comparison schools. This plan called for pairing similar schools and then randomizing within each pair. However, in the process of gathering information to pair the schools for randomization (based on size of school, percentage of students with limited proficiency in English, stability, transience, attendance, suspensions/expulsions, and school achievement information), we discovered that tracks within these large schools were based on zip code, Advanced Placement status, and sports participation; this grouping resulted in a dramatic difference in the population characteristics of each track. Therefore, we revised our plan to allow randomization of tracks in year-round schools. This plan increased our power to detect changes while still controlling for clustering within tracks and schools. For schools that participated in the project twice, their intervention status for their second participation was assigned to the opposite of the one randomized during their first randomization to achieve balance across conditions.

After the initial phase of recruitment, three tracks withdrew from the study because of logistical problems; to preserve randomization within the study, the corresponding track within the randomization block also were excluded, leaving 40 tracks in 10 schools (55 classes in each condition) to participate in the outcome evaluation. Letters of introduction and parental permission forms in both English and Spanish were given to all students to take home to their parents. Because the violence

prevention program met the school district's curriculum requirements for health instruction, the intervention component of this study did not require active parental consent (i.e., parents were notified of the program in the materials that were sent home with students and could call to request that their child not participate in the program). However, active parental consent was required for participation in the research study component (i.e., the surveys). In addition, student assent for participation in the study was also required. Parents returned consent forms for 78% of students, and among these, 93% of parents consented to the study. Among those present for survey administration, 98% of youth assented to complete each survey; however, absenteeism rates were high (nearly 10% each for the pre- and post-test surveys). The overall participation rate (after accounting for active and passive refusals, absenteeism, drop-out, and unusable data) was 67% of students enrolled in the class.

Program Challenges and Lessons Learned

From a program perspective, one valuable lesson learned was associated with cultural competency. When the project was undertaken, cultural competency was defined as involving sensitivity to and ability to identify with Latino youth, especially their Latino culture. Early study findings supported the idea that acculturation was related to attitudes and knowledge about dating violence (24), emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity to engage students less skilled in English, including recent U.S. immigrants. However, as the project was implemented in broader communities of youth throughout Los Angeles County, it became apparent that the prevailing culture affecting the targeted program

population was *youth* culture; youth-based cultural competency was what was needed to ensure program success.

From its inception, Break the Cycle has involved youth in the design of its programs to ensure that services are responsive to the needs of the population served. In the earliest years of the organization, youth focus groups played an integral role in informing the design of programs and refining the content to reflect what worked with “real-world” youth. In addition, young Break the Cycle volunteers routinely review the curriculum to ensure its relevance to the quickly changing demographic that the program serves. Despite these efforts, however, only through this demonstration project was the profound importance of youth cultural competency identified and incorporated as an essential component of all program efforts. Fortunately, although advisory panel members were recruited specifically because of their competency of the Latino culture, much of the feedback received from them was equally tied to issues of youth cultural competency. For example, advisory panel members provided feedback that youth generally are reluctant to talk to their friends about difficult issues, and therefore, the program should place greater emphasis on participants’ responsibility as friends to speak up when they are concerned about a friend’s relationship. Information gathered in focus groups within the project also demonstrated that youth are even more reluctant to talk with authority figures, tending to rely more on informal sources of support (e.g., family and friends) (25). This type of information led to the creation of the Peer Leadership Program component of the *Ending Violence* curriculum. Additionally, feedback indicated that greater emphasis should be placed on communicating the deadly potential of domestic violence because

many youth, regardless of ethnicity, do not recognize that the abusive behavior that they experience and accept as normal is not only unhealthy, but can escalate into serious, even deadly, danger. These examples illustrate that study feedback was more tied to youth culture in general than specifically to Latino culture.

The students’ feedback received by our staff attorneys also proved to be similar regardless of a student’s ethnicity or race. Thus, the need to maintain competence for youth-related issues as well as Latinos has become a top priority for the organization.

Evaluation Challenges and Lessons Learned

Various challenges were encountered when evaluating the *Ending Violence* curriculum. Many were posed by the logistics of working with large urban schools that face their own challenges on a daily basis. Others were associated with the sensitivity of the data collected, the need to maintain privacy, and the adherence to mandatory reporting laws on child abuse (26).

The first challenge encountered concerned privacy. To ensure privacy, we developed an alternate survey that contained nonsensitive questions about hobbies and activities. Those who chose not to participate in the research were provided the alternate survey, whereas participants were given an evaluation survey.

No students were aware of the type of survey being completed by their peers. Unfortunately, this effort to protect privacy added an extra layer of complexity to the classroom survey administration process and occasionally resulted in errors such as giving the wrong survey to a

Table 2: Number of Classrooms Participating in the Project

Cohort Participation		Intervention					Wait-List				
School	Year Included	Track					Track				
		A	B	C	Trad	Total	A	B	C	Trad	Total
School 1	1		3	2		5	2				2
School 2	1,3	2	2	**		4	3	3	*		6
School 3	1,3	3	3	3		9	1	2	2		5
School 4	1,3	3	3	3		9	3	2	2		7
School 5	1,3	2	2	*		4	3	3	**		6
School 6	1,3	2	2	2		6	3	3	3		9
School 7	2,3				4	4				4	4
School 8	2			4		4	3	3			6
School 9	2	3		4		7		3			3
School 10	2	**	**			0			*		0
School 11	2		3			3	3		4		7
TOTAL		15	18	18	4	55	21	19	11	4	55

* denotes randomization and subsequent withdrawal from study

** denotes removal of this track to balance design subsequent to with draws

student. Over time, these errors were corrected through elaborate safeguards in the classroom such as adding an additional staff member to the survey administration team and color-coding the surveys (the two surveys appeared in three colors, so participation was still masked) to catch errors more easily. In retrospect, concerns about privacy and research participation might not have been important enough to warrant the possibility of data collection errors and the expensive

procedures and safeguards that were ultimately included. Students are not used to that level of privacy in their normal school activities, and a simpler approach might have been acceptable to all parties.

Another challenge was associated with mandates requiring that any detected child abuse be reported to authorities. In California, the state in which the study took place, child abuse

is defined broadly and would include dating violence victimization. To protect the privacy of students and increase the validity of data, the survey section about personal dating violence experience was made anonymous; further, this information was removed from the section of the survey containing identifiers before it was handed in. Thus, students and parents could be guaranteed that their responses about dating violence victimization would be kept anonymous. Unfortunately, ensuring anonymity reduced the ability of the researchers evaluating the program to detect program-related changes; individual surveys could no longer be linked over time for this part of the survey, and outcomes could only be examined at the classroom level.

Multiple logistical challenges were encountered throughout the project, particularly the major challenge of retrieving consent forms because the active refusal rate was low. Coupled with absenteeism and drop-out, participation rates, especially at follow-up, suffered. Challenges also included teachers who withdrew from the project, last-minute schedule changes, fire alarms, student protests, and space constraints. These issues were compounded by communication problems with busy administrators and with teachers who had no access to telephones during the work day. Flexibility and adaptability were therefore key elements in the project. We built in make-up days for survey administration when possible, learned to inquire about certain persistent scheduling and space problems, and built in buffers to allow for last-minute rescheduling. In addition, the staggering of data collection over three years allowed us to attempt to balance the study design over time. For instance, in the first cohort, two tracks (both of which were Track C) withdrew from the study unexpectedly. Therefore, in the second and third

cohorts, we sampled more classrooms from Track C to achieve balance.

We also encountered differing enrollment rates between the immediate intervention classrooms and the wait-list classrooms. Classrooms were assigned as being either participating or wait-list prior to the consent process, and teachers were not blinded to the condition. As a result, the enrollment rates between participating and wait-list classrooms differed by about 10%, likely because of varying levels of teacher motivation to retrieve the consent forms. Various ways to boost enrollment were considered, including providing classroom-level incentives and having research staff introduce the study and hand out the consent packets. These activities successfully increased enrollment rates for participating classes, but the enrollment gap between the two types of classrooms persisted. Keeping teachers blind to condition until after enrollment may have been helpful, but the tight school calendar and schedule made this logistically unfeasible.

Finally, we were concerned that students might not take the classroom-administered survey seriously and would provide false answers. To ensure candid and sincere student responses, survey administrators put a sticker on the surveys of students they suspected of “fooling around” based on their classroom behavior; the sticker enabled administrators to closely scrutinize flagged surveys. The data also was examined. Each student was given a “data flag” in the following circumstances: a) if students’ answers were all in the extreme and socially undesirable end of the scales, b) if students responded in a way that seemed they did not notice a reverse-scored item, or c) if students indicated that their English reading or writing were poor. Flags for

each student were then counted, and surveys with more than one flag were further examined. Only about five students were given more than two flags, and in a few cases, the answers were implausible, even on demographic items; we therefore discarded the surveys obtained from these students as “bad data.”

Findings

Our findings of the impact of the program are provided in detail elsewhere (27). In summary, the curriculum had a short- and long-term impact on student knowledge about attorneys, proclivity to seek help from them, and perceived helpfulness of these professionals. Several other short-term effects were observed, particularly regarding attitudes about female-on-male violence (i.e., violence in which the female is the perpetrator) and many other aspects of help-seeking behavior. No changes in attitudes were detected concerning male-on-female violence (i.e., violence in which the male is the perpetrator) or on dating violence exposure or perpetration. This was not unexpected, given that the intervention was a three-session educational intervention. Nonetheless, it points out the need for additional services and programs.

Much was learned from this evaluation in addition to elucidating the effectiveness of the *Ending Violence* curriculum. Regarding assessment tools for attitudes about violence, we found that the students in our study generally disagreed strongly with survey items about violence *before* the prevention program was implemented, making it difficult to detect changes. We hypothesize, however, that some teenagers have attitudes that if changed, might help to prevent dating violence, but that the tools we used were not precise enough to measure them. In addition,

we detected differential item functioning by sex, indicating that males and females were interpreting survey questions differently. Such measurement issues must be resolved to enable the nuances in teen attitudes toward violence to be more thoroughly understood. We have undertaken some additional studies that employ qualitative or quantitative techniques to determine when youth are more or less accepting of violence (25). This information may lead to better assessment tools in the future.

Finally, the experimental design of this study allowed us to observe changes in attitudes and knowledge over time in the control group of students who took surveys but did not attend the curriculum. For instance, both the intervention and wait-list participants reported declines in their perceptions of others as being helpful if the participant were to become involved in a violent relationship at posttest compared with pretest, though the intervention group reported significantly less of a decline; the experience of taking the survey, waiting a few days, and taking it again appeared to result in a decrease in perceptions of others’ helpfulness. Thus, although the experimental design was challenging to implement, it resulted in the collection of valuable information that would not otherwise have been detected.

Conclusions

The need for dating violence programs geared toward youth is evident. The development of school-based health promotion programs necessitates thinking carefully about how to implement programs addressing violence prevention. The community, ethnic group, family, and peers have an effect on an individual’s

acceptance and perpetration of violence (28), and thus school programs cannot stand alone. To ensure a successful program, the effects of each of these influences on individual behavior must be carefully considered.

Break the Cycle, an expanding program with a legal focus, shows promise. One common impediment to successful school-based programs is the failure to create a program that is acceptable to youth (29). Youth culture has specific language, beliefs, and standards of behavior that should be incorporated into any program intending to promote healthy behaviors (e.g., nonviolence). The *Ending Violence* curriculum appropriately involved youth in matters that interested them and gave them information about the consequences of being violent. Students who received the *Ending Violence* curriculum had a better realization of how violent behavior could get them into legal trouble, improved attitudes about seeking help, and a perception of the legal system as being a more viable option for obtaining help. The adolescents who received the *Ending Violence* curriculum hopefully will make better decisions about the avoidance of violence in the years to come.

The *Ending Violence* curriculum serves as a key prevention tool for high-school students and compliments Break the Cycle's other programs for youth who are experiencing violence. Similar programs that are introduced into the normal school curriculum likely can play a key role in increasing awareness of dating violence among Latino youth. Augmenting the curriculum through additional school- or community-wide activities might expand the program's reach and impact on public health. In addition, to overcome some difficulties associated with implementing school-based programs, innovative methods of

program delivery (CD-ROM, video tapes) should be investigated.

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