

A school intervention for 13- to 15-year-olds to prevent dating and relationship violence: the Project Respect pilot cluster RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Gemma S Morgan has been a member of the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Research Funding Board (2017) and reports personal fees from South Gloucestershire Council outside the submitted work. Steve Morris has been a member of the following National Institute for Health Research committees: Health Services and Delivery Research Funding Board (2014–19); Health Services and Delivery Research Commissioning Board (2014–16); Health Services and Delivery Research Evidence Synthesis Sub-board (2016–present); Health Technology Assessment Clinical Evaluation and Trials Board (associate member) (2007–10);

Health Technology Assessment Commissioning Board (2009–13); and Public Health Research Funding Board (2011–17). Kate Hunt has been a member of the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Research Funding Board (2016–17) and the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Prioritisation Group (2016–17). Rona Campbell is a member of the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Research Funding Board (2015–present) and reports personal fees from DECIPHer IMPACT Ltd (Bristol, UK) outside the submitted work. Chris Bonell has been a member of the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Research Funding Board (2013–19).

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published March 2020

DOI: 10.3310/phr08050

Plain English summary

The Project Respect pilot cluster RCT

Public Health Research 2020; Vol. 8: No. 5

DOI: 10.3310/phr08050

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Plain English summary

Dating violence is abuse of an intimate partner during adolescence. Among dating adolescents in England, around 70% of girls and 40% of boys experience this. Programmes in schools are a promising approach to preventing this. We developed and piloted one such programme, Project Respect, and piloted methods for studying it in secondary schools in England. We assessed the value of conducting a larger study that could examine the impact of the programme. We were guided by pre-set criteria, including how well the programme was delivered and its acceptability to staff and students. We worked with four schools to finalise programme content, then piloted it with students aged 13–15 years in four other schools. Two additional schools continued with their usual practice, acting as comparisons. Project Respect involved staff training, mapping of ‘hotspots’ in school for dating violence, changing staff patrols of the school site, school policy review, information for parents, an application supporting student help-seeking and lessons. We surveyed students and staff in all six schools before and after the programme, conducted interviews and asked staff delivering the programme to complete logbooks. We assessed intervention costs. Around one-third of students reported dating violence in the past year. Training occurred in all four schools, but did not address all topics. Lessons were delivered well in three of the four schools. Other components were delivered inconsistently. Acceptability among students and staff was mixed, with staff reporting that lesson materials were insufficiently flexible. Comparison schools also addressed dating violence, but not in a co-ordinated way. Our findings of inconsistent delivery and limited acceptability suggest that there should not be a larger study of this intervention yet. The programme could be refined by providing more support to enhance delivery by schools and enhancing curriculum materials. Future studies should have a longer lead-in before delivery begins.

Public Health Research

ISSN 2050-4381 (Print)

ISSN 2050-439X (Online)

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Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 15/03/09. The contractual start date was in March 2017. The final report began editorial review in April 2019 and was accepted for publication in November 2019. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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