

# PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR YOUTH THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE TELL US?

**Erin Laverty**

*Project Officer, CPHA*

[elaverty@cpha.ca](mailto:elaverty@cpha.ca)

pronouns: she/her/hers

**Erin Henriksen**

*Education Program Manager, CfS*

[ehenriksen@centreforsexuality.ca](mailto:ehenriksen@centreforsexuality.ca)

pronouns: she/her/hers

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# Disclosure Statement

- We have no affiliation (financial or otherwise) with a pharmaceutical, medical device or communications organization.

# INTRODUCTION



- Project based on partnership with CPHA and CfS, funded until September 2023

- Working with existing Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSE) Curriculum. Aim to adapt, implement and evaluate the program with respect to preventing youth dating violence



***What factors contribute to the effectiveness, feasibility, and acceptability of CSE as an intervention for youth dating violence prevention in Canada?***

# PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## PREVENTING DATING VIOLENCE

### COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION (CSE)

#### True or False:

→ Dating violence prevention/healthy relationship programs are usually offered through the school system, but are distinct from CSE programming.

**True.** (e.g. Taylor et al., 2010)

→ CSE content is focused on sexual health and does not cover topics like healthy relationships or communicating/talking about sex.

**False.** 61% report learning about healthy relationships and communicating/talking about sex in their sexual health classes or workshops (Causarano et al., 2010)

→ When reporting on middle school sexual health education experiences, men tend to report more positive experiences compared to women.

**True.** (Byers, Dawn Hamilton, & Fisher, 2017; Causarano et al., 2010)

# PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## PREVENTING DATING VIOLENCE

### COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION (CSE)

→ Young adults who identify as LGBTQ2s+ are more likely to report obtaining sexual health information from the Internet compared to young adults who identify as heterosexual.

**True.** (Charest et al., 2017)

→ Indigenous youth; LGBTQ2S+ youth; and young women with disabilities are at elevated risk for experiencing dating violence, and the majority of research and evidence-based strategies have focused on working with these populations.

**True/False.** (Crooks et al., 2019; Dank et al., 2014)

→ Only 2/3 youth who experience dating violence report seeking help.

**False.** Based on an American sample, only one out of ten teens who experienced physical, psychological or sexual dating violence, reported seeking help (Zweig, Dank, Lackman, & Yahner, 2013) ; & seen in CfS youth questions in “question box”



# YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE DEFINITION

How do you define youth dating violence? Use up to 3 key words or phrases.



\*BASED ON KEY INFORMANTS

# YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE DEFINITION

No universal consensus on a single definition

(Ismail, Berman, & Ward-Griffin, 2007):

***any behavior that is prejudicial to the partner's development or health by comprising his or her physical, psychological, or sexual integrity***



(Center for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2019):

***TDV includes four types of behavior:***

- 1. Physical violence***
- 2. Sexual violence***
- 3. Psychological aggression (verbal and non-verbal)***
- 4. Stalking***

***“Evidence of power, coercion and control being utilized within a relationship dynamic – particularly to serve the interest of one party more than the other. The particularities of how this plays out can look very different.” - Sexual violence researcher definition***



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**QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE  
PRIMARY ISSUES FACED BY  
CANADIAN YOUTH WITH REGARD  
TO DATING VIOLENCE?**

# PRIMARY ISSUES

- Dating violence is not limited to physical abuse
- Factors for dating violence
- Gender differences
- How dating violence is perceived in the media
- Where do teens go to get help?

## What does the evidence tell us?

# YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE PREVALENCE

### Canadian Study

79% psychological violence

27% sexual violence

22% physical violence

in University female sample reporting on  
a previous dating partner.

(Learning Network, 2013)

### Urban Institute Report (U.S.)

89% of transgender youth

43% of LGB youth

29% of heterosexual youth

reported being victimized by physical  
dating violence (Dank et al., 2013)

### Meta-Analytic Literature Review

20% physical dating violence (1 - 61%)

9% sexual dating violence (<1 – 54 %)

in youth 13-18 years old (Wincentak, Connolly, & Card, 2017)

### American Study

22% nonsexual cyber partnered violence  
(e.g. sending threatening text messages)

11% sexual cyber partnered violence  
(e.g. pressured by partner to send sexual/nude photos)

in students in grades 7-12 (Zweig et al., 2013)

## What does the evidence tell us?

# CANADIAN NUMBERS: 2003-2013

960 domestic homicides (Beaupré, 2014)



747/960 (78%) female (Beaupré, 2014)



Highest rates for women between 15 and 24 years old (Sinha, 2013)

Current and former intimate partners as largest category of perpetrator (Coyne-Beasley et al., 2003)

Half of the victims aged between 35 and 44 years old began their relationship with their perpetrator when they were between the ages 13 and 24

(Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Annual Report, 2014)

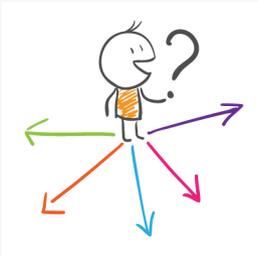
**These numbers highlight the importance of early youth dating violence prevention.**

# PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR YOUTH THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: **WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE TELL US?**

- **Youth are learning from peers.** Middle and high school aged students in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario reported peers as a more importance source of sexual health information than formal education (Byers, Dawn Hamilton, & Fisher, 2017)
- **Young adults (aged 18-21) are dissatisfied with messages they had received about sex in their youth.** E.g. being left with uncertainty and confusion after school sexual education classes, classes not going into as much detail as they would have liked, not being taught about pleasure in school or at home (Cormier & O’Sullivan, 2018)
- **Youth want to learn more.** Torontonians youth (ages 13-17) reported on which sexual health topics they wanted to learn more about; top choices included healthy relationships , HIV/AIDS , sexual pleasure , and communicating about sex (Causarano et al., 2010). LGBTQ+ youth want identity-affirming and strength-based programming that addresses but is not limited to gender-based violence prevention (Crooks et al., 2019)

# COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE)

## DEFINITION



### CSE/RSE – What is it?

- Previously called Comprehensive Sexuality Education, now called Relationship and Sexual Health Education...

### Core Components

- Sexual and Reproductive health promotion and education
- Healthy and respectful relationship education
- Violence prevention and consent skills promotion



# PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR YOUTH THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: **WHAT DOESN'T THE EVIDENCE TELL US?**

“... the dating violence programming is not so in sync with the youth culture ...the Internet and social media didn't even exist when we developed it.”

*University Professor  
Health, Community, and Education  
(Western Canada)*

“The way in which they interact is totally different than how my generation interacted.”

*Researcher  
Epidemiology  
(Northern Canada)*

“...relationships that are depicted in the media where there - the boyfriend is possessive or jealous, and it's written up as this romantic script. How are they perceiving that?”

*Researcher  
Psychology  
(Central Canada)*

“We have not been great at centering youth voice in the work that we are doing... I'm not 14, I don't know what it means to do things... we need to let youth really drive our messaging and what we even consider a problem.”

*Professor  
Social Work  
(Western Canada)*

# YOUTH INFORMED APPROACH

- What is a youth informed approach?
- How does C4S incorporate youths voices into curriculum
- Why is it important?



**Focus group  
discussions with 12-  
19 years old youth  
across Canada**

*What are your general feelings towards sexual health education?*

*What are some of the expectations that someone might have for romantic or sexual relationships?*

*What are some of your preferences in terms of how information is provided??*



# KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: THEMES

Based on 10 semi-structure telephone interview conversations (typically 1 hour in duration).



## KEY INFORMANTS

Current work positions: PhD student, Professor Researcher, Youth Programming Director, Web-based sex educator

Education/Backgrounds: Public Health, Clinical Psychology, Leadership studies, Applied Social Psychology

Regions: Ontario, Nunavut, Alberta, PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia

Results based on preliminary thematic analysis.

# KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: THEMES

## 1. COMPLEX

## 2. PROBLEMATIC MESSAGES

## 3. DISCONNECTS

## 4. EMOTIONS & SUPPORT

**Youth dating violence is not a simple concept**

Broadness in behaviours (e.g. type, means)

Broadness in what's behind the behaviours (e.g. processes)

Can exist in a relationship of any nature in any stage

Occurs on a spectrum, occurs within a broad range (e.g. explicitness and severity)

**Problematic messages, beliefs, and social expectations that exist within the larger Canadian cultural context**

Indirect, yet harmful cultural messages (e.g. in media)

Missing discourse of positive, pleasurable and healthy sexualities

**Disconnects with between the current state of sexual health education and Canadian youth at large**

Exclusion

Outdated, irrelevant, unrelatable content

Insufficient practical and skill-based components

Lacks discussions, feels short

**Need to pay more attention to emotions and interpersonal communication, incorporate trauma-informed approaches to sexual health education, and address the multiple barriers to help seeking and receiving support**

→ can contribute to violent and problematic behaviors normalized, dismissed, downplayed, or ignored in youth interpersonal relationships

# KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: THEMES

## 1. COMPLEX

## 2. PROBLEMATIC MESSAGES

## 3. DISCONNECTS

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“there's just such a broad spectrum of experiences or acts”

“if harm is happening outside whatever is considered dating, it can be really silenced, right? Because I think people may go, well, this is not dating, hence, it's okay

“I do think that there are some problematic ideas and gender stereotypes that are contributing, that happen from quite young. You still hear teachers and parents going, oh, he's just pulling your hair, in elementary school or whatever, because he likes you.... He's pushing you around the playground to make you miserable because he likes you, and he just doesn't know how to express it.... “

Making it more of a conversation rather than an educator saying, I have this knowledge, and you need it and I will impart it to you, whether you want me to or not.

“it has to be relevant to things that are happening and inclusive of all identities through the process as well”

This is a human topic, and it's an emotional topic, and they might need support after this, and we want to encourage them to look after their own emotional and mental health needs.”



# CURRENT BARRIERS

- Time/Program length
- Sustainable Funding
- Gender Based
- Warning Signs
- Youth Language
- Long term effectiveness



# BEST/PROMISING PRACTICES

- Integration of internal/external programs in schools
- Non-Gendered curriculum to reach all students
- Inclusive and Safe
- Evidence informed/research based
- Repeated exposure and dosage
- Facilitation style



# MEDIA

## REFLECT & DISCUSS



*What are the  
underlying  
messages and  
ideas represented  
in this clip?*

Related to:

**THEME 2. PROBLEMATIC MESSAGES**

# WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP SCENARIOS

Problem, requiring intervene = **Red**

Potential problem, check-in and/or monitor = **Yellow**

No indication of problem = **Green**

Related to:

**THEME 1. COMPLEX**

**THEME 4. EMOTIONS & SUPPORT**

# WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP SCENARIOS

**SCENARIO 1:** Your daughter has started dating someone new. Since they started dating you've noticed that she has stopped hanging out with her friends, stays home alone a lot, and is constantly texting her new partner to let them know where she is and who she is with. She has even taken pictures of you and her together to send to her partner while you were out for lunch and running errands together.

**SCENARIO 2:** While walking through the mall you see a young teen-aged couple. One of them looks upset and is shaking their head and the other is pulling at their arm. It looks as though they are pulling their partner away from something and they don't want to go.

# WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP SCENARIOS

**SCENARIO 3:** A 17 year old patient comes in to see you for a checkup at your family practice. While chatting with the patient you notice that they have several bruises on their arm. When you ask about them, the patient says that they screwed up with their partner and it's no big deal.

**SCENARIO 4:** A 15 year old female student of yours has drastically changed their appearance since starting a new relationship with an older male student. She is now wearing less makeup and baggier clothes. She also no longer talk to any other male students and seem nervous when partnered for class projects with a male student. You overheard them telling their friends *"it's just because he loves me so much, and I love him so much, I don't need to talk to any other guys anymore"*.



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# WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

# WORKSHOP ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION: INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT

What are some of the barriers that exist with regards to youth experiencing dating violence seeking help?

What are some interventions to these barriers?

What are some other ways to provide support? What are some other forms of support?

Related to:

**THEME 1. COMPLEX**

**THEME 4. EMOTIONS & SUPPORT**

# QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK

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*Project Officer, CPHA*

[elaverty@cpha.ca](mailto:elaverty@cpha.ca)

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*Education Program Manager, CS*

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# LANGUAGE “POP QUIZ”: TEENS OR ACADEMICS?

(BONUS POINTS FOR DEFINITION)

- “Thirsty” ..... = T
- “Attachment disruptions” ..... = A
- “Sexting” ..... = A
- “Down in the DMs”/“Hit em up in the DMs” ..... = T
- “Curve” ..... = T
- “Thirsty” ..... = T
- “LMIRL” ..... = T
- “GBV” ..... = A
- “PVI” ..... = A

Related to:

**THEME 3.DISCONNECTS,**  
CURRENT BARRIERS,  
YOUTH INFORMED APPROACH