

An Exploration of Dating Violence Norms Among Early Adolescents

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Abstract

Early adolescence is a significant time of development, as many middle schoolers begin to explore dating and relationships, and unfortunately, may experience violence from dating partners. Not only may issues of violence arise, but gender roles and norms may also influence adolescents in a detrimental way. Thus, it is imperative to find preventative programs that educate adolescents about dating violence and healthy dating behaviors and norms. During the 2020-2021 school year, 7th-grade students at a midwestern semi-urban school district participated in a dating violence prevention program. Surveys were conducted before and after the program. The group found two dating violence norms showed negative changes: 1) more students agreed sometimes boys have to hit their partner to get them back under control, and 2) it is okay for a girl to hit someone they are dating if she is hit first. We will explore reasons why these adolescents continue to believe violent dating behaviors are acceptable, even after participating in a prevention program. This exploration has the potential to bring awareness as to why students believe dating violence is justifiable and provide prevention programs with suggestions on strengthening their dating violence prevention programs.

Keywords: dating violence, adolescents, prevention programs

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An Exploration of Dating Violence Norms among Early Adolescents

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Dating Violence Norms

Controlling behaviors one partner uses to gain power and control over another in a relationship

Early Adolescents

Students between the ages of 11 and 13

- This study reviews a program that focuses on middle school students
- Early adolescence is a time where peers are crucial in shaping behavior norms

Dating Violence Prevention Program

Designed to educate and inform teens about dating violence and encourage healthy relationships

- Types of abuse discussed: emotional, verbal, financial, sexual, digital, spiritual, and physical

Current Study

Examine and assess a dating violence prevention program based on the following characteristics:

- 5 sessions, approximately 25 minutes each
- Delivered virtually through Zoom
- Conducted by one facilitator

Discussion Topics:

Week 1: defined domestic violence, discussed different types of domestic violence, & explored domestic violence scenarios

Week 2: reviewed 6 types of abuse, discussed power and control and equality wheel, viewed role-play videos and beginning scene of "Up", briefly discussed resources

Week 3: reviewed six types of abuse, discussed bystander intervention, discussed handling specific dating violence situations, discussed services the program provides

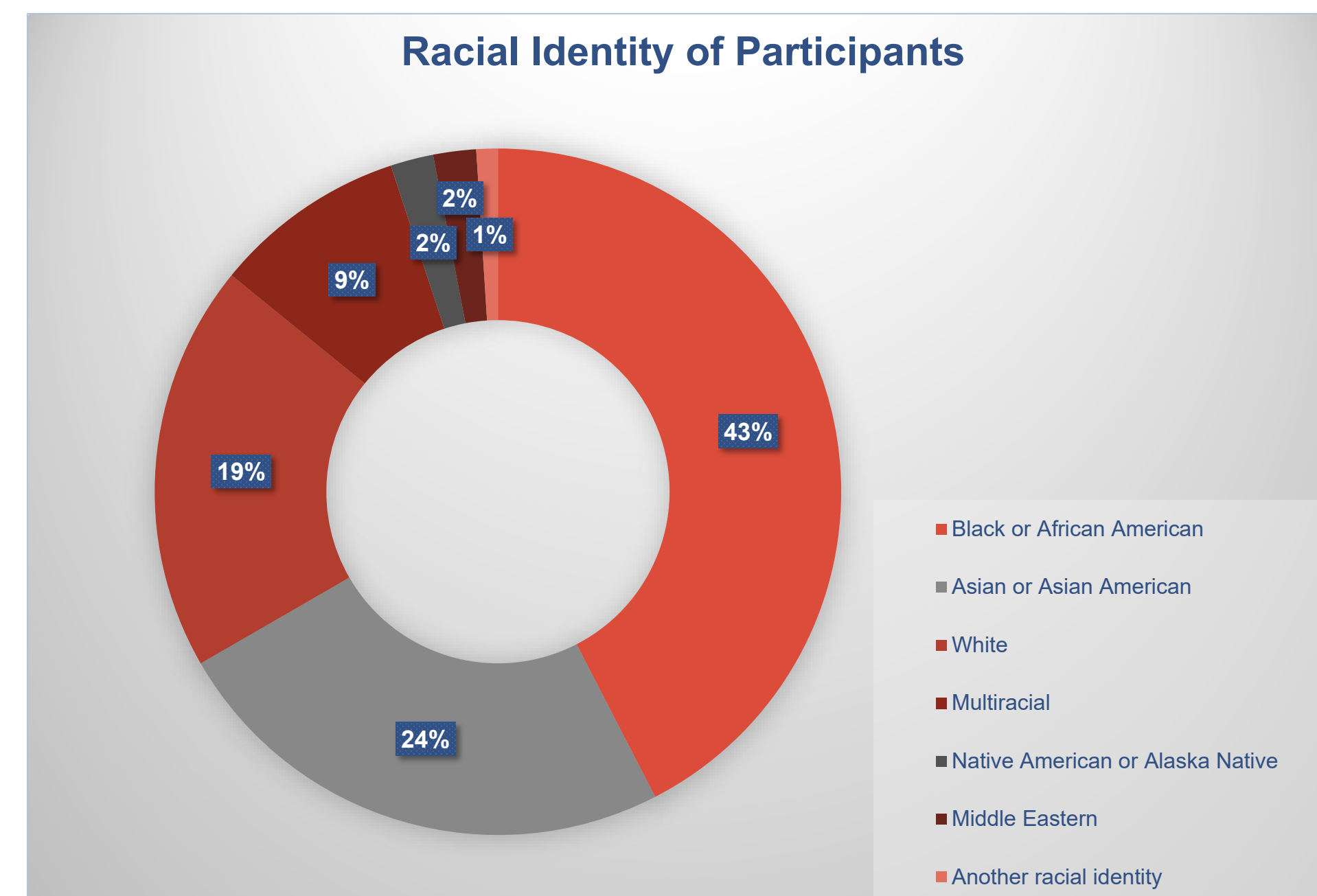
Week 4: reviewed six types of abuse, viewed a dating violence scene from "What Would You Do?", briefly discussed resources

Week 5: reviewed six types of abuse, discussed reactions to different dating violence situations as a victim and as a bystander, briefly discussed resources

METHOD & RESULTS

Participants

- 97 seventh-grade students were included in this study across Quarter 1 (n = 55) and Quarter 2 (n = 42)
- Ages ranged from 11-13 (M = 12.14, SD = 0.39)
- About half (51%) of participants identified as female



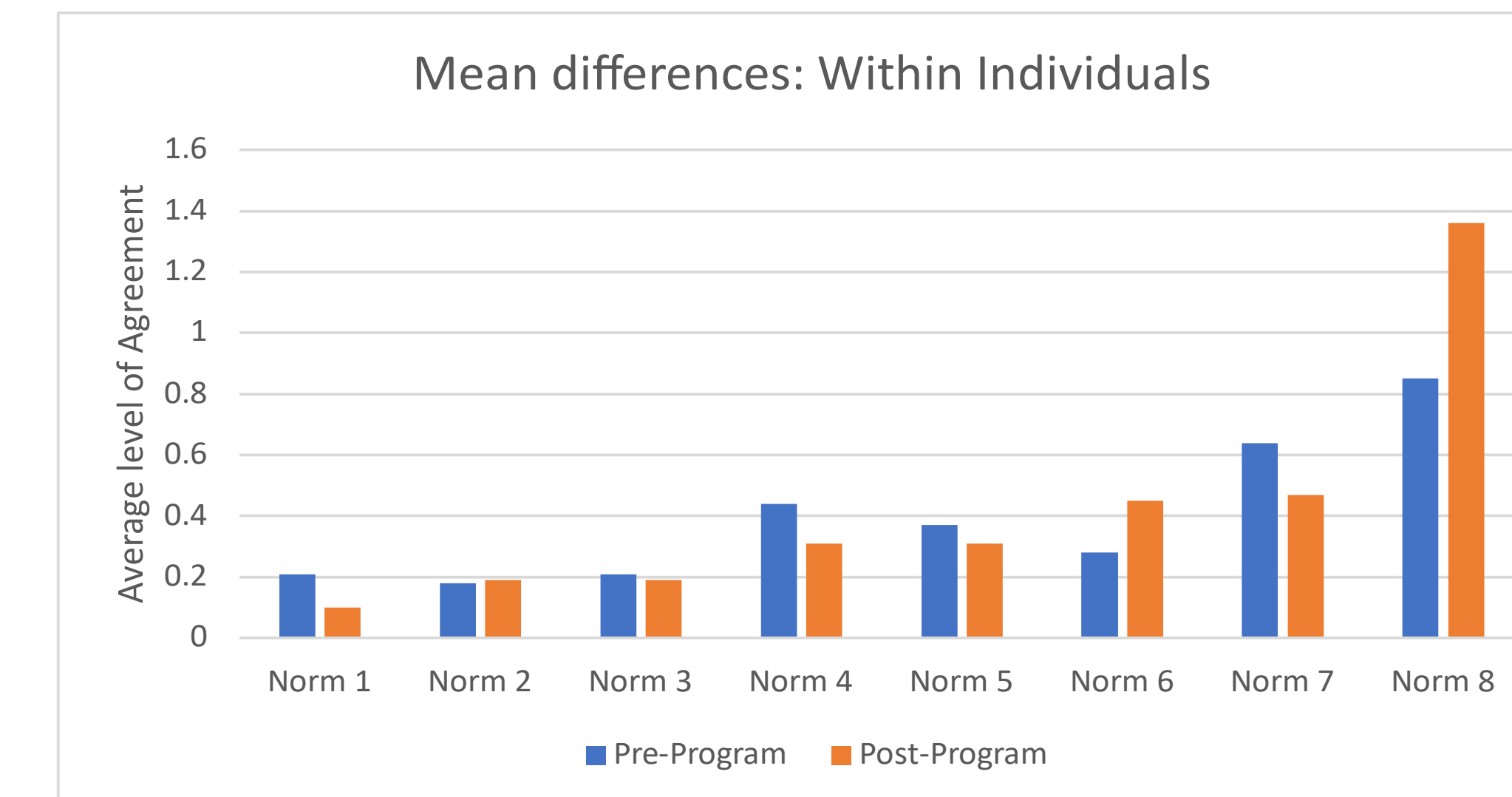
Procedure

- Surveys were administered through a Google form before students started the program (pretest) and after they finished the program (posttest).

Measurements	Pretest	Posttest
<i>Slightly Agree or Strongly Agree...</i>	%	%
1. It is okay for a boy to hit his girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner if they did something to make him mad.	7%	2%
2. It is okay for a boy to hit his girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner if they insulted him in front of friends.	5%	5%
3. Girls sometimes deserve to be hit by the people they date.	3%	3%
4. A girl who makes her boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner jealous on purpose deserves to be hit.	11%	5%
5. Boys sometimes deserve to be hit by the people they date.	12%	5%
6. Sometimes boys have to hit their girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner to get them back under control.	9%	11%
7. It is okay for a boy to hit someone they're dating if they hit him first.	19%	9%
8. It is okay for a girl to hit someone they're dating if they hit her first.	29%	46%

Data Analysis

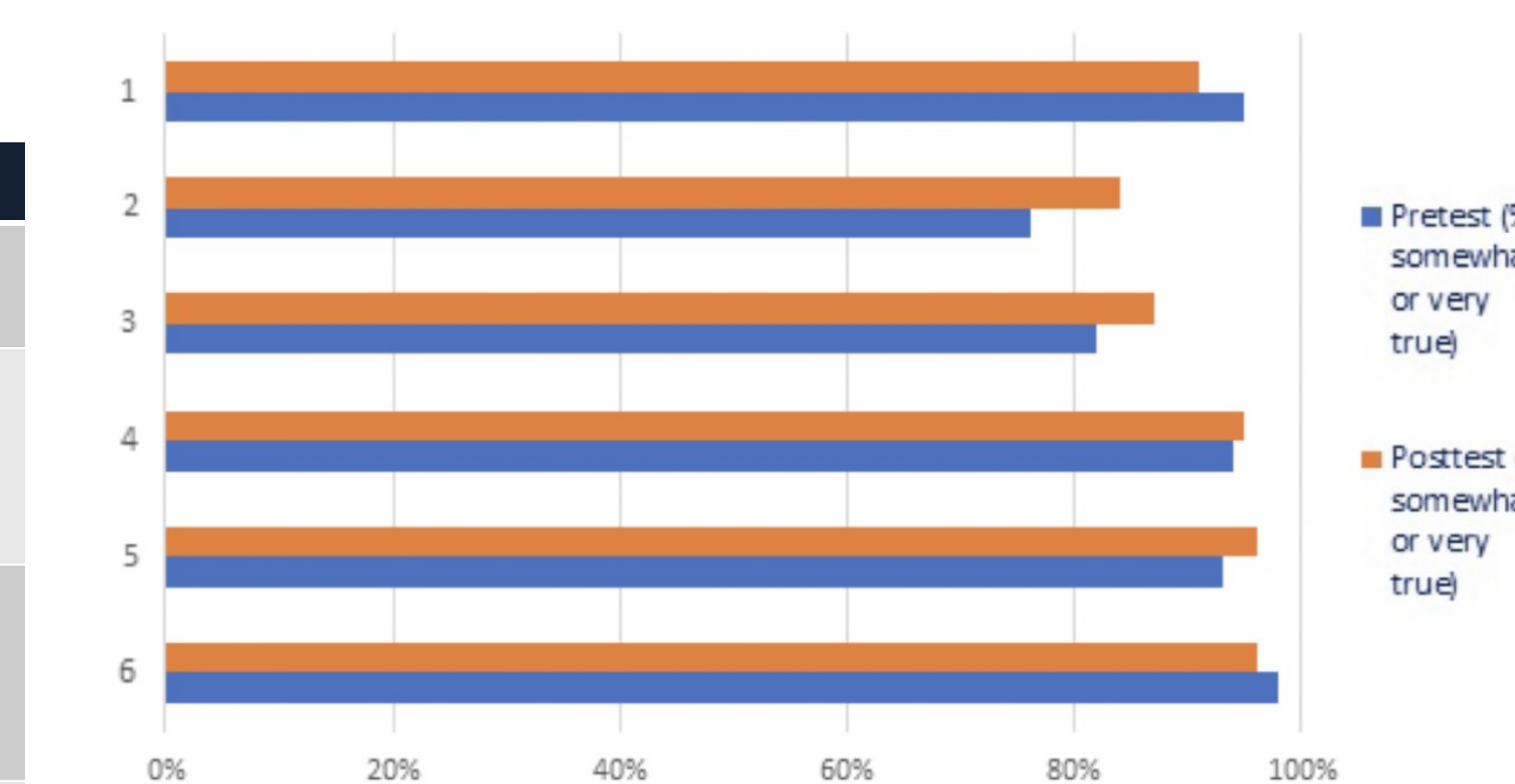
- A series of paired sample t-tests were conducted to assess for mean level differences in dating violence norms within individuals from pretest to posttest.



Two norms saw statistically significant changes in a negative direction:

- Norm 6:** more students agreed or strongly agreed sometimes boys have to hit their girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner to get them back under control
- Norm 8:** more students agreed or strongly agreed it is okay for a girl to hit someone they're dating if they hit her first

Social Support: How true are the following statements?



Social Support

- If something bad happened to me, I would feel safe talking to one of my parents.
- If something bad happened to me, I would feel safe talking to a teacher or another adult at school.
- If something bad happened to me, I would feel safe calling the police.
- There are people I can count on in an emergency.
- There is a trustworthy adult I could turn to for advice if I were having problems.
- There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.

- slight increase in the number of students who felt they could talk to a teacher or another adult at school from pretest (76%) to posttest (84%)
- slight decrease in the number of students who would feel safe talking to one of their parents from pretest (95%) to posttest (91%)
- slight decrease in the number of students who feel they can depend on someone to help them if they really needed it from pretest (98%) to posttest (96%)

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Results show we need to see adjustments to the program: statistically significant increase in norm #8 (it is okay for a girl to hit someone they're dating if they hit her first) from before and after the program

- need to discover why students continue to believe this after completion of the program

Recommendations on Improving the Program

- Early intervention
- Incorporate parents and community members
- Be sure program materials are developmentally appropriate
- Expand program duration and number of sessions
- Create an entire lesson on community resources for dating violence prevention and include trusted adults who students can talk with if they are experiencing dating violence
- Incorporate discussion on gender roles in dating violence and incorporate examples across gender identities
- Connect these results to school social workers
- Expand program with suggested adjustments to all schools (urban and rural)

Limitations

- Small sample size (n = 97)
- Provides a glimpse of what dating violence looks like both pretest and posttest for this specific program and school, but is not generalizable because it only views one school and one group of students
- Conducted in a mid-size urban area, characteristics and norms may be different in rural and suburban communities
- Delivered during COVID-19 pandemic: implication of norms could have been affected by this; it is important to compare these results when students are back to in-person instruction

REFERENCES & CONTACT INFO

References available upon request

For more information on our research, contact:

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References

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