

Dating and Sexual Violence Youth Prevention Education in Durham, North Carolina

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TOPIC:

This paper examines youth dating and sexual violence prevention education in Durham County and evaluates the economic impacts on dating and sexual violence youth education on an individual's opportunities for economic success.

SUMMARY:

In the United States, one in three teens has been a victim of dating violence and 12% of girls in 9th-12th grade have reported being sexually assaulted (“Teen Dating in the United States- A Fact Sheet for Schools,” 2015). Durham, North Carolina is not exempt from the prevalence of dating and sexual violence in the United States. According to Durham County's 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 13.4% of Durham teenagers reported having experienced sexual assault and 15.2% of Durham high school students reported having experienced physical abuse in a dating relationship (“Durham County Department of Public Health,” 2014). The North Carolina Healthy Youth Act of 2009 requires education on healthy relationships and sexual assault starting in the seventh grade, but the current public school curriculum does not include evidence-informed or evidence-based curricula for preventing youth dating and sexual violence and this education is best implemented starting before seventh grade. Youth education related to dating and sexual violence in Durham is limited, with the exception of the implementation of an evidence-based program in select schools due to the work of a nonprofit, Durham Crisis and Response Center. Durham County's neighbor Orange County has incorporated comprehensive dating and sexual violence prevention education into their public schools and provide a potential model for Durham schools. Evidence is clear that Dating and sexual violence affects a person's productivity in school and later in life at work. Possible negative impacts include medical, mental health, and employment costs.

INTRODUCTION:

This research is an investigation of the current dating and sexual violence youth education services in Durham, North Carolina and the economic consequences of dating and sexual violence in order to complement the work of WomenNC, a nonprofit organization in North Carolina dedicated to leading “North Carolina’s young adults in the elimination of injustice against women and girls” and raising “a generation that will honor women’s human rights” (“Women NC,” n.d.). Their current work focuses on convincing Durham City Council to implement Cities for CEDAW, a campaign program that asks cities to create “a gender analysis of city departments and operations, an oversight body to monitor the implementation of a local CEDAW ordinance, and funding to support the implementation of the principles of CEDAW (“About Us,” 2014). CEDAW is an international treaty establishing women’s basic human rights. The original version of CEDAW, drafted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and effective in 1981, did not explicitly state any articles related to preventing and eliminating violence against women (“CEDAW 29th Session 30 June to 25 July 2003,” n.d.). The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has carefully considered reports submitted by participating States and made recommendations to update CEDAW.

In 1992, the Committee established General Recommendation No. 19 that defined gender-based violence as a form of discrimination and included family violence, sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment. The recommendation asks for States to report “statistical data on the incidence of violence against women, information on the provision of services for victims, and legislative and other measures taken to protect women against violence in their everyday lives, including against harassment at the workplace, abuse in the family and sexual violence”

(“General Recommendations,” n.d.). I studied the prevention education of dating and sexual violence in Durham in order to present an example of a gender analysis report that will be helpful to the City of Durham and their potential to conduct their own government analyses when adopting principles of CEDAW and included recommendations that can improve the lives of girls, women, and all people in Durham served by Durham agencies and nonprofits. This research includes information related to the economic impacts of dating and sexual violence because of the theme of this year’s United Nations Commission on the Status of Women conference, “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work.”

FINDINGS:

Durham’s problem

Of the 293,492 people who reside in Durham County, 252,800 live in the City of Durham (“Demographics | Durham, NC,” 2015). This information signifies that approximately 86% of Durham County is the City of Durham. Due to this ratio and the availability of health reports in Durham County rather than the City of Durham, I focused much of my research on Durham County. The results and recommendations are relevant to both the City of Durham government and the Durham County government. Dating and sexual violence is a significant issue within Durham County. The Durham County Community Health Assessment, published in 2014, included the results from a survey in 2013 in which 13.4% of Durham teenagers reported having been forced to engage in sexual intercourse. Of the respondents, 15.2% of Durham high school students reported being hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend. The assessment reported that “child physical or sexual victimization is a risk factor for future interpersonal violence (IPV) perpetration and victimization” (“Durham County Department of Public Health,” 2014). The Durham County Community Health Assessment also stated that

Durham teens believe sexual violence is normal and they had witnessed emotional and physical violence among their peers on a regular basis. Because of the rise of the use of technology, Durham youth have experienced unwanted sexual solicitations online and over 100 have been victims of online harassment. The report also pointed out the vulnerable populations affected by dating and sexual violence including LGBTQ-identified folks, people in poverty, people with disabilities, incarcerated people, and immigrants (“Durham County of Public Health,” 2014).

According to Durham County’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2015, approximately 38% of Durham County high school students have had sexual intercourse and 28% of these students had sexual intercourse by the time they reached the age of 14. Evidence of students engaging in sexual intercourse before the age of 14 shows a need for education on safe and consensual sex starting before this age. Of the students who reported having had sexual intercourse, 59% of them used a condom during their last sexual intercourse and 19% of them reported using drugs or drinking alcohol before their last incidence of sexual activity. Durham County found that 9% of their students have been forced to have sexual intercourse in 2015, which matches the overall statistic in North Carolina. Of the 9% of students who were victims of rape, 59% were female (“Partnership for a Healthy Durham,” 2016).

Durham Crisis Response Center

In Durham County, the local nonprofit that provides services related to domestic and sexual violence is Durham Crisis Response Center (DCRC). According to their website, “DCRC works with the community to end domestic and sexual violence through advocacy, education, support and prevention” (“Durham Crisis Response Center,” n.d.). The Youth Prevention Educator position, currently filled by Shereka Dunston, at the Durham Crisis Response Center coordinates and administers youth education services in Durham County. The position is part-

time and she has served in this role for over two years. Her main mission is to implement Safe Dates, an adolescent dating abuse prevention program, to middle and high school students. She has taught this curriculum to students at Jordan High School, The School for Creative Studies, and Durham School of the Arts. However, she only reached an entire grade level of students at Brogden Middle School, where she was able to address all the eighth grade health classes. Including her work at other nonprofits and religious institutions, between 2014 and 2016, a total of 394 youth in Durham have participated in the Safe Dates program as a result of DCRC's youth prevention outreach efforts.

This staff position is funded from the Durham Alcoholic Beverage Control Board and the organization must reapply for funding every three years. DCRC also receives \$36,912 from the Durham County government according to their budget analyst, but this funding does not support the Youth Prevention Educator's position. Charlene Reiss, the Sexual Assault Response Team Coordinator at DCRC recently started the Youth Relationship Violence Taskforce to address interpersonal violence issues with youth populations in Durham County. The Taskforce includes agencies working with youth, Durham Public Schools, law enforcement, human trafficking organizations, and teen organizations. Currently, they are still forming their vision and deciding what their specific goals are within the broader goal of strengthening youth services and reducing the vulnerability of youth. They have identified new sexual violence issues related to sexting and cyberbullying among youth. They would like for schools to do trainings on "digital literacy and digital citizenship." She emphasizes the importance of school-based education since the kids in after-schools programs or affiliated with religious and nonprofit organizations have access to services that the most vulnerable youth do not have. Her position is funded through the federal Violence Against Women Act.

Public schools in Durham

The Durham Public Schools Board of Education has established a comprehensive health education program that includes sexual assault and abuse awareness. They have published a brief summary of this program as it relates to this topic on their website. “As mandated by law, this program will include a reproductive health and safety education program commencing in the seventh grade which teaches the benefits of sexual abstinence until marriage, and contains instruction in the causes and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, FDA-approved contraception methods, and awareness of sexual assault, sexual abuse, and risk reduction. Materials and information used in this instruction will be age-appropriate, objective, and based on peer-reviewed scientific research” (Durham Public Schools). According to a local fifth grade teacher, students do not receive dating and sexual violence education until middle and high school. In elementary school, they only receive a brief one-time program on puberty and reproductive anatomy. North Carolina’s sexual health and violence education includes information on healthy relationships and sexual assault but the curriculum is brief and not as comprehensive as evidence-based programs such as Shifting Boundaries and Safe Dates. North Carolina’s curriculum focuses on promoting abstinence and preventing pregnancy (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction), rather than encouraging safe and consensual dating and sexual interactions.

Other nonprofits in North Carolina

According to the Chief Development Officer Christina Brewer at InterAct, the nonprofit for domestic and sexual violence in Wake County, their youth education funding comes from grants for which they routinely apply. I interviewed the Rape Prevention Education Coordinator Katie May from Our Voice, the rape crisis center for Buncombe County. She has taught students

the Shifting Boundaries program in some of the local schools, noting the difficulty of maintaining relationships with schools when principals change and the need to develop and implement relationship and sexual violence curricula that is age-appropriate throughout a person's entire education. She has also worked on a pilot education program on healthy relationships and boundaries for students with developmental disabilities. At the Orange County Rape Crisis Center, the Community Education Director Rachel Valentine informed of their educational programming that they administer to students in pre-Kindergarten programs all the way to the 9th grade. They teach students in all Orange County public schools and a few private, charter, and independent schools. Their curricula, Safe Touch for elementary school students and Start Strong for middle and high school students, have been updated routinely through an annual internal review and a community review every few years. Between the Orange County Rape Crisis Center and the Compass Center, Orange County's domestic violence organization, every student in the Orange County public schools receives age-appropriate education on dating and sexual violence prevention every year until 9th grade, the last year that public school students must take a health class in North Carolina. This education includes topics on body rights, privacy rights, boundaries, consent, and how to seek help, among other lessons.

Barriers to youth prevention education:

From interviews with staff members from InterAct, Durham Crisis Response Center, North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Our Voice, and the Orange County Rape Crisis Center, I have compiled the following barriers preventing comprehensive dating and sexual violence education from being administered to all youth in North Carolina:

- Decentralization of schools within each school system and the entire state of North Carolina

- Lack of an oversight body to enforce laws and policies
- Limited time of educators
- Emphasize on preparation for standardized tests over dating and sexual violence education
- Perception that dating and sexual violence does not affect youth
- Potential parental backlash in discussing a topic related to sex
- Principal's attitudes towards dating and sexual violence education
- Scheduling conflicts with the educator and available school times
- Funding youth educators

Durham's potential:

North Carolina's Healthy Youth Act of 2009 promotes abstinence education but also includes a section on healthy relationships, sexual assault, and sexual abuse. It calls for instruction on healthy relationships, sexual assault, and reporting procedures and resources starting in middle school. In Orange County, the educational programming designed by the Orange County Rape Crisis Center complements the North Carolina 7th and 9th grade healthful living standards on bystander behaviors, tolerance, and interpersonal communication in relationships. Referred by the Durham Crisis Response Center, a few elementary schools in Durham have requested education programs from the Orange County Rape Crisis Center, showing an interest from the Durham elementary schools. Aurelia Sands Belle, the executive director of the Durham Crisis Response Center confirmed their interest in expanding educational services to Durham students but noted their lack of capacity to make that happen without further support of and collaboration with local government and public schools. She suggested commitment statements from the city, county, and school board on the need to address gender-

based violence. A partnership between the city, county, and state governments, the Durham Department of Public Health, Durham Public Schools, and the Durham Crisis Response Center might allow for a comprehensive educational program for all students in Durham similar to the program in Orange County.

Connections to economic empowerment in the changing world of work:

There are economic consequences to victims and survivors of interpersonal violence that can be avoided with evidence-based prevention education. One study estimated an average lifetime loss ranging from \$36,000 to \$237,200 for sexual victimization in adolescence, and these numbers come from a study published in 2000 and therefore are possibly low estimates due to inflation. This same research reported that the most immediate consequence of adolescent sexual violence victimization is the decreased commitment to education and concluded with the idea that “preventing violence among adolescents and in schools may be vital to securing the long-term economic futures of today’s youth” (Macmillan, 2000). Another study showed that adolescent victimization results in reduced self-efficacy, lower educational performance, and decreased socioeconomic achievements in later life (Macmillan & Hagan, 2004). Adolescent dating violence was associated with cigarette smoking, suicide attempts, marijuana use, depression, and binge-eating; all of which are public health issues (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). The frequency of rape and sexual violence in the United States is greater than the frequency of “cardiovascular disease, cancer diagnosis, diabetes diagnosis, and contraction of HIV/AIDS combined.” The authors of this study reported that the public health costs of rape and sexual violence are higher than the public health costs of the previously listed health issues. Despite the greater cost, the amount of money spent on public health is greater for these other health concerns than for rape and sexual violence (Waechter & Ma, 2015). Sexual

violence has negative consequences for working women including increased time off, decreased performance, job loss, decreased income, and inability to work (Loya, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Durham city and county governments have the opportunity to take initiative in ensuring that all of their K-12th grade students receive comprehensive, evidence-based or evidence-informed dating and sexual violence prevention education. While the Durham Crisis Response Center and other nonprofits have attempted to expand educational efforts and reach more Durham students, a successful prevention program requires institutional support both from the school system and local government. Local government officials can take the lead in complying with the North Carolina Healthy Youth Act by working to support school systems and nonprofits in implementing sexual assault and dating violence prevention programs. As a result of this research, I have the following recommendations for Durham City Council:

- The City of Durham should pass cities for CEDAW, which involves a resolution to create a framework for gender equity in Durham, creating an oversight committee, and funding efforts to conduct further gender analyses, similar to the one I have written. A further gender analysis on youth dating and sexual violence should incorporate professional research on the extent of the problem in Durham specifically.
- The City of Durham should comply with the North Carolina Healthy Youth Act by expanding educational services for preventing dating and sexual abuse. Specifically, the City of Durham, Durham County Department of Public Health, Durham Public Schools and the Durham Crisis Response Center should form a partnership to expand existing efforts to provide age-appropriate evidence-based or evidence-informed education to all pre-K to 12th grade students.

- The City of Durham should publicly acknowledge the problems of youth dating and sexual violence and adult domestic and sexual violence and then commit to addressing these issues through collaborative action and an expansion of funding dedicated to prevention.

The City of Durham could be one of the first cities to adopt Cities for CEDAW and implement important changes in the pursuit of gender justice in the United States. Dating and sexual violence issues affect girls and women disproportionately (“Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics | National Organization for Women,” n.d.) and Durham could pioneer change for improving gender equity through evidence-informed or evidence-based, community-adapted, comprehensive dating and sexual violence prevention education from pre-K to 12th grade that effectively prevents adolescent interpersonal violence and future adult interpersonal violence.

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