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Addressing Gender-based Violence Against Girl in Australia High School

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Abstract: Gender-based violence refers to violent behaviours based on gender identity or power imbalances between genders. One-third of Australian young women have suffered from different forms of gender-based violence. As the primary front for public health promotion, schools should take measures to prevent gender-based violence. This paper introduces three school-based programs for preventing gender-based violence in Australian high schools. It provides recommendations on school policies and assessments of programs to help prevent gender-based violence.

Keywords: Solving; Australian high schools; Targeting girls

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence refers to violent behaviours based on gender identity or power imbalances between genders. In Australia, violence against women is a widespread issue exacerbated by gender inequality and disrespect towards women. Australian adult women have experienced intimate partner violence since they were 15 years old (Politoff et al., 2019). While violence affects women throughout their entire lives, it is particularly prevalent among younger women. Dembélé et al. (2020) indicate that 14% to 52% of girls experienced sexual abuse and gender-based violence while in school. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), apart from experiences at school, 22-46% of adolescents report being subjected to violence from their siblings. This data shows that young women face the threat of gender-based violence both in their schools and family. This paper discusses programs for preventing gender-based violence in high schools and provides recommendations on school policies and assessments of programs to help prevent gender-based violence.

2. Programs to Gender-based violence

2.1 The fourth R

The Fourth R program is a school-based intervention program that intends to prevent gender-based violence. It focuses on both curriculum and faculty training. The “Fourth R” represents Relationships, Respect, Responsibility, and Resilience (Cissner & Ayoub, 2014). The curriculum influences the students and the teachers, aiming to clarify the misunderstood norms in ordinary life that then create a decline in the incidents of gender-based violence. The Fourth R program integrates gender-based violence prevention in the well-being and physical education curriculum. The program also provides training and support to the school faculties (Cissner & Ayoub, 2014). Such training enhances their ability to handle incidents effectively. A vital benefit of this program is that it follows the ordinary high school course schedule (Wolfe et al., 2009).

2.2 Shifting Boundaries

Shifting Boundaries is a program primarily dedicated to intervention in the context of monitoring unsafe areas within high schools as a clinical strategy towards the prevention of future occurrences of gender-based violence. The program Shifting Boundaries includes a school curriculum towards setting and communication of the boundaries of a relationship, elucidating appropriate and inappropriate behaviour regarding their value system. The program involves identifying “hot spots” or areas within the school where gender-based violence is more likely to occur. The program focuses on boosting adult oversight and surveillance in these regions to prevent incidents of violence. Taylor et al. (2012) indicate that over six-month follow-up research, interventions targeting improvements in identified high-risk areas within schools along with interventions resulted in a decrease in the number of reported sexual violence incidents. The study highlights the effectiveness of the program, especially when schools take action and assign areas leading to a decrease in gender-based violence.

2.3 Expect respect

Expect Respect employs a multilevel approach targeting various aspects of the school community, including students, school staff, and community organisations (Rosenbluth et al., 2002). The program offers a series of classroom presentations to help students expand

their understanding, attitudes and abilities in preventing gender-based violence. These presentations motivate students to question gender stereotypes, recognise signs of an abusive relationship, and develop skills in conflict resolution. Expect Respect offers education theatre for students through which students can have an alternate perspective on themselves and their lives through acting. Apart from proactive prevention, the program has a counselling service to support students victimized by gender-based violence recover from the trauma. The program has training sessions to help the school staff become more informed on the issue of gender-based violence to support students. The program supports the school administration in developing policies that help the school create a safe and respectful environment and promote gender equity. The program also collaborates with local organizations to offer eight-week paid internships for students. This part of the program aims to enhance students' leadership skills, enable them to act as role models and provide support to high school peers.

3. Recommendations

Wolfe et al. (2009) noted that schools function as organisations with both instructional and regulatory orders. Within the three programs mentioned, only Shifting Boundaries monitors gender-based violence incidents in schools, indicating a gap in the regulatory role of schools. Schools need to establish policies to monitor incidents of gender-based violence and impose strict penalties on perpetrators (Taylor et al., 2012; G.J. Melendez-Torres et al., 2024). Schools should also oversee the sustainability of projects to ensure their effectiveness (G.J. Melendez-Torres et al., 2024).

Schools should organise students and parents to monitor areas to prevent incidents of gender-based violence. The direct involvement enhances oversight in specific areas of risky behaviours, thereby supporting the safety of students. According to Taylor et al. (2012), surveillance of targeted areas has proven effective, which reduces the occurrence of gender-based violence incidents. Students engaging in the monitor team will boost surveillance's effectiveness. As the school's key members, the students understand the culture of the school, and they know where the school is more susceptible to gender-based violence (G.J. Melendez-Torres et al., 2024). Engaging them in the process will improve the feasibility of the monitoring team and impress upon the students the need to be accountable for security on the campus (Taylor et al., 2012). Involving students in actions positively affects the students both academically and biologically. The process can help them learn and become knowledgeable about issues related to gender-based violence and allow them to build future leadership (Rosenbluth et al., 2002). The students learn leadership, coordination, and conflict resolution through engagement in reality and practising their interpersonal abilities, enhancing family partnership. According to Ellsberg et al. (2015), successful intervention programs often involve communication between the family members and the students. The guidance given to students' mothers in The Fourth R program indicates the boost in the state of awareness of parents on gender-based violence may lead to supporting the teenagers (Cissner & Ayoub, 2014). These two researches indicate the importance of family members in intervention programs. Engaging parents in the monitor team should enhance the channel of communication and increase cooperation between homes, students, and schools.

There are several challenges to the implementation of a whole school approach program. To achieve the goal of the programs, schools must grant the necessary resources and provide sufficient training to the staff (Quinlan & Hone, 2020). Corporations should also include well-being experts in regular assessments of program implementation and adjust programs according to evaluation feedback. The addition of experts in the assessment of programs provides another set of benign eyes on the provision of programs, evaluates their functioning, detects any difficulties, and makes constructive interventions (G.J. Melendez Torres et al., 2024). Keeping program evaluations regular improves the effectiveness of school-based intervention programs in responding to students' needs and addressing gender-based violence (G.J. Melendez Torres et al., 2024).

4. Conclusion

Gender-based prevention programs against violence should be incorporated into high schools. Schools should monitor the high-risk areas of gender-based violence to sustain these programs. Schools should invite experts to conduct an assessment to ensure the function of prevention interventions against gender-based violence.

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