

School Counselors' Role in Dating Violence Intervention

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Abstract

Dating violence among adolescents is a major public health concern. The purpose of this paper is to examine five factors of which school counselors must be aware in order to recognize, intervene, and report incidence of dating violence. These factors are (a) understanding the diverse definitions of dating violence, (b) recognizing dating violence indicators, (c) having knowledge of the peer influences related to dating violence, (d) understanding the process of the disclosure of dating violence, and (e) various ethical considerations related to dating violence. Also included in this paper are future implications for school counselors.

School Counselors' Role in Dating Violence Intervention

Dating violence, abuse perpetrated by an individual in a current or forming dating relationship, is a serious problem for adolescents and young adults. The implications of dating violence can be wide-ranging and long-lasting. Survivors of dating violence experience both immediate and long-term effects, including physical injury, sexually transmitted diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder, lowered self-esteem, psychosomatic symptoms, and academic problems (Chase, Treboux, & O'Leary, 2002). Incidence of dating violence is also highly correlated with mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and personality disorder development (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer & Hannan, 2003). Additionally, adolescents who experience dating violence are more likely to be re-victimized, re-traumatized, and experience partner violence in their future (Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007).

In spite of the high rates and deleterious effects associated with dating violence, incidences often go undetected and underreported in the schools. School counselors are in the unique position of responding, recognizing and reporting these incidences (Hays, Craigen, Harris, Healey, & Sikes, in press). Thus, they must be aware of the related issues surrounding adolescent dating violence to protect themselves, the student, and others within the school and community settings. Conversely, school counselors' lack of knowledge of adolescent dating violence can lead to poorly informed practices that discourage student disclosure and thus optimal counseling process and outcome (Hays, Craigen, Harris, Healey, & Sikes, in press).

The purpose of this paper is to examine five factors, supported by dating violence research, that school counselors must be aware of to recognize, intervene, and report

incidents of dating violence. These factors are (a) understanding the diverse definitions of dating violence, (b) recognizing dating violence indicators, (c) having knowledge of the peer influences related to dating violence, (d) understanding the process of the disclosure of dating violence, and (e) having knowledge of various ethical considerations related to dating violence. Also included in this paper are future implications for school counselors.

Defining Dating Violence

In order to assist students in need, school counselors must understand the varying definitions and conceptualizations of dating violence. Defining dating violence among adolescents is difficult; there are diverse nomenclatures and definitions used to describe dating violence, making it even more perplexing to detect, to intervene, and to eventually report. For example, Cohall, Cohall, Bannister, & Northridge (1999) defined dating violence to include “a range of physical assaults committed by either partner or both against one another in an ongoing, intimate relationship and is often recurrent (p. 145). In addition, Foshee (1996) identified four different types of psychological abuse in adolescent dating relationships including threatening behavior (e.g., threatening to hurt), monitoring (e.g., not letting the person do things with others), personal insults (e.g., insulting in front of others), and emotional manipulation (e.g., threatening to date someone else).

In addition to the broad definitions of dating violence, the even broader definitions of “dating” among adolescents may hinder the process of detection, intervention, and reporting of dating violence for school counselors (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). For example, a teen dating partner can represent a traditional long-term boyfriend or

girlfriend, a “dating” event, a sexual partner, or members of a group who regularly socialize together (Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff, 2004). Whereas some adolescents may view dating as a relationship in which both parties are committed to each other, others may consider casual interactions in which they spend time with someone they like as dating. Therefore, identifying dating violence and reporting dating violence among adolescents can be a challenge due to the variations in “dating” definitions.

Variations of defining dating violence may also exist among racial and ethnic groups. For example, in examining Hispanic adolescent definitions of dating violence, common responses of “dating” included “emotional feeling for another person” (almost 50%), “hanging out” (15%), “going to the movies” (11%), “going to dinner” (9%), and “engaging in sexual activity” (4%) (Smith, Winokur, & Palenski, 2005, p. 18). Dating and relationship behavior accepted in one culture may not be accepted in another. According to Sherer and Sherer (2008), in traditional Arab society dating usually leads to marriage, and dating for other purposes such as social or entertainment is not encouraged. Further, the concept of dating violence may be omitted altogether in some cultures. As a result, adolescents exposed to violent behaviors may fail to acknowledge the acts as violent or unhealthy due to what is accepted as part of their culture. For example, in Asian languages the term “domestic violence” does not exist (Lemberg, 2002). Further, in Chile, dating violence is called “private violence” (McWhirter, 1999).

Cultural issues are likely to influence the timing and presentation of reporting dating violence. These considerations may include but are not limited to, cultural solidarity, family values, family rules, family structure, religion, gender role socialization, and socioeconomic status (McLeod, Muldoon, & Hays, in press). Overall, factors such

as the impact of culture and the struggle between norms may be important in understanding the definitions of dating and dating violence (Smith, Winokur, & Palenski, 2005).

Dating Violence Indicators

Many school counselors do not understand the complexity of dating violence and fail to recognize its indicators or warning signs, which are likely to interfere with the accurate detection, intervention, and reporting of dating violence (Hays, Craigen, Harris, Healey, & Sikes, in press). In order to effectively intervene, school counselors must be aware of the warning signs that accompany dating violence. Dating violence indicators may be related to academic, interpersonal, and psychological factors.

Academic Factors

Teen dating violence generates a continuum of negative consequences that undermines a school's ability to promote academic growth and achievement. Studies reveal that students who are experiencing dating violence have a difficult time concentrating and learning their academic subjects (Howard, Wang & Yan, 2003). Further, adolescents experiencing dating violence may feel self-conscious and fearful of coming to school. Consequently, these adolescents have high rates of absences (Safe State, 2004). Additionally, Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, and Noonan (2007) found that the prevalence of dating violence was highest among adolescents earning low grades (e.g., Cs, Ds, and Fs).

Interpersonal Factors

As early as eighth grade, adolescents are more likely to be victimized by dating violence if their friends or family members are being victimized, or if they personally

experience verbal or sexual harassment (Foshee, 1996). Thus, adolescents may be simultaneously witnessing violence in the home and are being abused in their own dating relationships, creating minimal outlets for support and making them less likely to report the victimization for others. This creates a vicious trap for those experiencing dating violence.

Additional factors that serve as warning signs include participation in high-risk behaviors, such as having multiple sexual partners (Chase, Treboux & O'Leary, 2002). Further, female students that reported participation in all four risk behaviors measured (smoking behavior, alcohol use, marijuana use, and sexual intercourse) were 15 times as likely and male students almost 9 times as likely to be a victim of dating violence compared with students who had not participated in risk behaviors (Eaton et al., 2007). Finally, physical warning signs due to dating violence include pushing, grabbing, shoving, throwing something, and slapping partners (O'Keefe, 1997).

Psychological Factors

Adolescents exposed to violence in a dating relationship experience a range of mental health outcomes. Specifically, physical dating violence during adolescence is associated with excessive dieting and binge eating (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002), low self-esteem (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, & Hannan, 2003), and feelings of sadness and hopelessness (Howard & Wang, 2003). Additional psychological consequences include higher rates of substance abuse, depression, somatization, and suicidal thought and attempts (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Holt & Espelage, 2005).

Peers and Dating Violence

It would benefit school counselors to be aware of how peer influence and models impede the detection, intervention, and reporting of dating violence. During the middle and high school years, many adolescents begin dating and forming relationships among peers (Adler-Baeder, Kerpelman, Schramm, Higginbotham, & Paulk, 2007).

Approximately 72% of eighth and ninth graders report they are “dating,” a percentage that increases with age. Further, prevalence of dating violence among adolescents ranges from 12%-20% (CDC, 2006). Unfortunately, incidences of dating violence are often underreported due to the students’ general lack of knowledge and awareness regarding dating violence (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001).

Part of this limited knowledge is based on adolescents’ reliance on peers as models of “healthy” dating relationships as well as sources of help in the event of dating violence victimization (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Foshee, 1996). In the middle and high school years, adolescents are expanding their peer groups and experimenting with various types of dating relationships. While some of these personal and social models of dating relationships can be healthy, statistics reveal that 50% to 80% of adolescents report being aware of other friends who have been involved in violent relationships (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). Even with the high rates of witnessing dating violence among their peers, students may not understand the true implications of violence and consequently may misinterpret violence acts as acts of love, commitment, and attempts to improve the relationship (Cohall et al., 1999). This is further complicated when adolescents are witnessing intimate partner violence in the home.

The prevalence of unhealthy dating relationships among adolescents and their peers (assumed to be underreported) is troublesome when one considers that the most commonly sought source of help for both dating violence victims (89%) and perpetrators (83%) were peers (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). To this end, adolescents may be witnessing unhealthy and often violent dating relationships yet relying on these same peers to provide assistance to their own victimization experiences. This could create a cycle in which maladaptive relationship patterns are continually repeated. Thus, school counselors are charged with doing their part for breaking this cycle.

Disclosure of Dating Violence

There are several factors that directly impact the disclosure of dating violence for students. School counselors must have an adequate knowledge and awareness of these specific factors (Hays, Craigen, Harris, Healey, & Sikes, in press). For example, students may decide to disclose dating violence experiences to their peers rather than a school counselor or another administrator out of fear that their situation may not be held in confidence (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). Perpetuating student concerns regarding confidentiality is due to the policy taken by schools regarding such issues as dating violence. Oftentimes, school counselors will deal with this conflict between school policy and maintaining student confidentiality by adopting the attitude that dating violence is “not a school issue” but rather a family or relational matter between the student and their partner. When this stance is adopted, counselors remove themselves from the issue, leaving it to the student to resolve or inform the parents, leaving it to the family to resolve. This approach further reinforces the mistrust students may have in school counselors and should therefore be avoided. Instead, a more therapeutic approach to

the situation must be adopted for early intervention (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). If a school counselor wishes to address dating violence in his or her school, it is important that they not only consider the issue of confidentiality, but also take into consideration the secrecy surrounding this type of violence. Feelings related to dating violence tend to wane between fears of further harm to the self by a partner versus a need to maintain the relationship or fear of rejection (Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2008).

Like school counselors, students may also adopt the viewpoint that dating violence is “not a school issue.” Students may not feel like they can talk to school counselors about non-academic issues and may want to keep their personal and student/academic life separate. Further, students may fear that disclosing issues related to dating violence could impact their academic performance or could lead to disciplinary actions (Moyer & Sullivan, 2008). Overall, student attitudes about the seriousness of dating violence may also impact the reporting of dating violence by school counselors. For example, adolescents may minimize acts of dating violence and are likely to misconstrue violence as something normal, a show of affection. Due to the nature of the relationship, being that it is violent, they may be reluctant to discuss their perceptions with adults, including school counselors. Students may also fear repercussions of informing a counselor of the dating violence they are experiencing (Moyer & Sullivan, 2008). These thoughts and feelings further amplify feelings of mistrust and result in a distancing from those school officials, such as school counselors, that may serve to provide a positive perspective to the student experiencing a violent relationship. It is important that student perceptions of dating violence be brought into discussion through

school-wide interventions as well as providing more comprehensive information on the role of school counselors in relation to students' lives (Hermann & Finn, 2002; Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

Oftentimes school counselors are unaware of the key ethical issues related to counseling adolescents, including adolescent dating violence (Hermann & Finn, 2002). Key ethical issues include consent to treatment, record keeping, and confidentiality.

Consent to Treatment

When counseling minors, conflicts arise between the ethical and legal rights of minors and parents. As stated by Remley and Herlihy (2007), "counselors have an ethical obligation of privacy to minor clients, and a legal obligation to the parents or legal guardians of those same minor clients to keep their children safe" (p. 204). Ethically, counselors are bound to honor the rights of clients, but legally the right belongs to the parents. In general, there is no legal requirement to obtain consent from parents or guardians when counseling minors, but many schools and agencies have policies requiring such consent (Remley, Hermann, & Sikes, 2007).

Due to lack of awareness, school counselors are less likely to respond to disclosure of dating violence by a minor. They may not understand how they can help the student or their role in the prevention of dating violence. As adults, they may choose to disregard the value of the student's relationship. According to Davis and Benschoff (1999), adults frequently fail to take the development of adolescent relationships seriously. Others may view informing the parents or guardians of a student's violent relationship as a breach of confidentiality.

Record Keeping

A common concern for school counselors related to confidentiality and consent to treatment is record keeping. According to Merlone (2005), records that are kept in a school are subject to subpoena. School counselors are generally encouraged to keep notes that lack details, personal thoughts and opinions. Private notes kept by school counselors are not part of the school record, but may be subpoenaed. However, once the notes are shared they are no longer considered private and must be shared with parents at their request (Merlone, 2005). The records should be stored in a secure location. In maintaining client records, Remley et al., (2007) maintains that school counselors are encouraged to document specific behaviors for self-protection, including date, time, and what was said. In addition, it is recommended that school counselors not destroy notes that were developed for self-protection (e.g., reports of child abuse, harm to self or others, and violence (Remley, et al., 2007). Records are developed and maintained to protect the students, as well as the school counselor.

School counselors may use documentation as a preventive measure in assisting adolescents exposed to dating violence. By documenting student self-reports of dating violence, school counselors are in a position to provide services to the victim, the perpetrator, and the victim's family. Although record keeping is a preventative measure, it may be viewed as a hinder to confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a complex issue that counselors face when working with minors in school settings as well as agency settings. The American Counseling Association's (ACA, 2005) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice require that counselors "do not

share confidential information without client consent or without sound legal or ethical justification” (B.1.c.). The code states, “When counseling minor clients or adult clients who lack the capacity to give voluntary, informed consent, counselors protect the confidentiality of information received in the counseling relationship as specified by federal and state laws, written policies, and applicable ethical standards” (B.5.a.).

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2004) Ethical Standards for School Counselors:

The professional school counselor protects the confidentiality of information received in the counseling relationship as specified by federal and state laws, written policies and applicable ethical standards. Such information is only to be revealed to others with the informed consent of the students, consistent with the counselor’s ethical obligations (A.2.f).

In regards to disclosing, A.2.b states:

The professional school counselor keeps information confidential unless disclosure is required for clear and imminent danger to the student or others or when legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed. Counselors will consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt to the validity of an exception.” (p. 1)

Although there is a lack of agreement in the literature regarding confidentiality when working with minors, school counselors are to act in the best interest of the client. Adolescents exposed to dating violence struggle with how to respond to the violence, including whether to disclose to parents, friends, school counselors, or additional significant others. School counselors are in an ideal position to offer counseling and

preventive services to students in violent relationships (Cunningham & Sandhu, 2000). By acknowledging the disclosure of dating violence, school counselors can be a valuable resource in offering support and education to adolescents who are exposed to violent relationships.

To help alleviate some concern by the student, it is important that the school counselor be aware of school policy regarding confidentiality so that it can be clearly and accurately conveyed to the student as well as giving the student an opportunity to ask about 'hypothetical' situations that might be cause for a breach of confidentiality in order to further solidify those boundaries (Hays, Craigen, Harris, Healey & Sikes, in press). With regard to dating violence, the age in which it is typically seen in young adults ranges through teenage years and therefore it is important to note that minors above the age of 14 are considered to be developmentally able to enter into a counseling relationship (Welfel, 2006). This increases the school counselors' responsibility to their student client over the parents (Huey, 1986; Mitchell, Disque, & Robertson, 2002).

Case Vignettes

This paper introduced five factors that influence how school counselors can detect and intervene in violent dating relationships. The following case vignettes are provided so that school counselors can consider the impact and influence of these factors in dating relationships.

Case of Maria

Maria thought her relationship with her partner Audrey was no different from most relationships. The occasional "put-downs" and "slaps" were a normal part of being in a

relationship, especially as a teenager. Maria, a 15-year-old sophomore, had been dating Audrey, a 16-year-old junior, for five months.

Although Audrey had a “bad” temper, Maria looked forward to spending time with her. She had strong feelings for her and believed she felt the same for her. From time to time, Audrey would call Maria names such as “idiot,” “fat head,” and “dumb blond.” She also told her that she would “never amount to anything” and that “no one liked” her. At times, she would push her and slap her on the back. Maria believed this was a natural part of being in a relationship. She felt that this was “okay” and Audrey only did those things when she was angry.

Maria’s friend, Owen, agreed with Maria. He told her “it was no big deal” and Audrey did those things because she “loved her and did not know how to express it.” Maria thought, “If my friend thinks it is okay and I’m not physically hurt then my relationship isn’t violent.”

1. What warning signs are evident in this case?
2. What definitions of dating and dating violence is Maria using?
3. As a school counselor, how would you address the physical and emotional violence occurring in their relationship?
4. What factors might prevent Maria from disclosing the violence to you?
5. If Maria did disclose the dating violence to you, what questions would you have for her?
6. How would you address the issue of dating violence with the entire school population, including administration, teachers, other school personnel, and students?

7. What are the ethical considerations?

Case of Autumn

Autumn is a 16-year-old girl just finishing her sophomore year in high school. She has always felt awkward around the other students, never really fitting in with any particular group. She is constantly concerned about being accepted and liked by others, and so she decided to try out for the cheerleading squad at the start of her school year. She was placed on the team as a second-string performer, but this achievement brought about new concerns for Autumn. She became concerned about her physical appearance and wanted to be 'good enough' for a starting cheerleader next year. She noticed all of the other girls on the team had boyfriends, so she felt it was important to have one as well. At home, Autumn felt ignored by her mother, who worked two jobs to keep the family afloat. Autumn's father left when she was a child and there is no contact with him and the family.

About halfway through the Fall semester, Autumn met Matt. He seemed to be very interested in her, always complemented her, and often waited for her after school so that they could sit together on the bus home. He was friends with several of the other cheerleaders and so Autumn was excited Matt took notice of her. They began dating within weeks of becoming friends. However, about three weeks into their relationship, Matt began to dictate which friends Autumn could spend time with and he insisted on going out with her to any social events she was invited to. If she spoke to any other boys, he would become angry and occasionally hit her if he felt she was not apologetic enough concerning the actions he deemed to be disloyal. Autumn thought that this behavior was typical for boys that really cared about and loved the person they were

with. She felt that he never meant to hurt her and that when he got angry, and it was her fault for not doing as he asked of her. Matt always took her out and bought her gifts when he would hit her, so Autumn thought that he truly never meant any harm and that, deep down, he was a good person that loved her.

Toward the end of her sophomore year, she began to get depressed as Matt's rage and physical abuse became more and more frequent. She felt she could never please him and didn't feel she could talk to her friends about the issue because she felt they would blame her. She told her mother and her friends that she had injured herself trying out new gymnastics techniques and labeled herself as just being "clumsy." However, teachers grew concerned as they noticed Autumn's interactions with Matt in the halls, her absences, and dropping grades. She was sent to the school counselor's office by one of her teachers after she began to cry during a discussion about her grades. Autumn desperately wanted to talk to someone about her situation, but was afraid of what would happen. Autumn had heard about a student last year who was having problems at home and went to the school counselor. That student was not seen in school again shortly after. Autumn feared something similar might happen to her.

1. As a school counselor, what would be the first thing you would do in meeting Autumn, given the information provided by her teacher?
2. Who are Autumn's relationship models?
3. If Autumn revealed her situation to you, would you contact her mother and why?
4. If you choose not to contact Autumn's mother, what steps will you take in assisting Autumn in dealing with her dilemma?

Case of Susan

Despite the increased intensity of violence in Susan's relationship with Richard, she continued to see him. They spent time together before and after school three to four times a week for several months. Her initial feelings of "like" had grown stronger and she believed she was "in love" with Richard. Even though Richard continued to call her names and push her from time to time, she believed he felt the same way.

One day after school, Richard waited for Susan in their regular meeting location outside of the gym. Bobby, a classmate of Susan's, walked with Susan outside as he asked her a question about their homework assignment for Algebra. As Richard was waiting, he saw them walking toward him. When Susan walked up to Richard and greeted him with a big smile and a kiss, he grabbed her by her hair and pulled her to his car in the student parking lot. When they arrived at his car, he opened the passenger door, and pushed her inside. After he got inside the car, he began yelling at her and calling her a "sneaky bitch" and slapped her face. Stunned, Susan began to cry and asked him to stop yelling at her. He began accusing her of cheating on him with Bobby. Susan explained that there were friends and nothing has happened between them. Richard told her to "shut up!" and drove her home.

After the incidence in the car occurred, Susan began to think that their relationship was not "normal" and she didn't know what to do. After careful consideration, she decided that she would speak to her school counselor about her relationship with Richard.

Feeling uncomfortable, Susan entered the school counselor's office and asked to speak with her. The school counselor welcomed Susan and invited her to come in.

Susan discussed her relationship with Richard. She explained that she cared deeply for Richard, but worried about how he treated her. She disclosed episodes of Richard's violent behavior, including the recent incident after school. After listening to Susan, the school counselor suggested it might be helpful to work with her and Richard together. The school counselor asked Susan how she felt about this and Susan agreed it might be helpful. The school counselor expressed an interest in speaking with Richard about his willingness to participate before meeting with both of them at the same time. Susan agreed.

1. As the school counselor, how would you respond to Susan's disclosure?
2. What ethical issues would you consider in working with Susan?
3. What would be your next step with Susan and Richard? What recommendations would you make?

The cases of Maria, Autumn, and Maria are common experiences of adolescents in our schools. While each of their stories are distinct, the constant variable is the specialized role that school counselor can play with each of these students. Given their stories, each of the factors presented throughout the manuscript influenced how school counselors could detect and intervene in the above violent dating relationships.

Implications

Dating violence is a serious problem for a number of adolescents in our schools. School counselors are in the unique position of recognizing, responding, and reporting dating violence. This section will outline the active roles that school counselors can take in the schools with teacher training, systematic interventions, and safety planning/policy.

Teacher Training

There is a definite need for professional development trainings on dating violence to increase knowledge and understanding among school counselors. School counselors play a role in educating personnel on issues related to dating violence. In order to help students in and outside of the classroom, school personnel should receive training on the warning signs of dating violence among the adolescent population. Additionally, the diverse definitions of dating violence, the process of the disclosure of dating violence and ethical considerations related to dating violence should be incorporated into personnel training.

In an effort to effectively train school personnel, including teachers, professional school counselors should feel confident in their ability to recognize indicators of dating violence among adolescents. School counselors may attend workshops or seminars to increase their awareness of adolescent dating violence. Specialized training on the complex issues regarding dating violence is imperative. After increasing their knowledge of dating violence, they may provide in-service or community workshops to school staff. Further, school counselors could create and distribute brochures, brief papers, or announcements to school personnel on the definition, prevalence rates, warning signs, and proper intervention strategies for dating violence.

As student advocates, school counselors are committed to the best interests of the students. However, as employees, school counselors must abide by state laws and school policy. School counselors should remain updated on laws and policies pertaining to common ethical dilemmas related to counseling adolescents, including consent to treatment, record keeping, and confidentiality. According to Bodenhorn (2006), "Ethical

decision making is a daily, ongoing practice for school counselors, and it involves constant vigilance and commitment to serving the best interest of the student” (p. 201).

Systematic Interventions

In order to help prevent dating violence, a systematic approach should be taken by school staff, parents, and students. To reduce violence, school counselors may incorporate (a) cooperative learning, (b) skills training, (c) behavior monitoring and reinforcement, (d) bullying prevention programs, (e) suicide prevention programs, and (f) parent workshops into the school’s curriculum (Hermann & Finn, 2002). Educating students and parents on the warning signs of dating violence may also be effective in reducing violence. Further, school counselors could hold school-wide assemblies concerning dating violence with the aim of educating students about the topic and informing students about the resources school counselors could provide them. Additionally, school counselors can advocate for the addition of education on dating violence into required health classes.

School personnel, including school counselors, have a legal obligation to protect students from danger. Protocols should be established for obtaining help for students identified at risk for dating violence. Referrals within the school and community should be provided to students, parents, and guardians. Ongoing individual counseling and group interventions should be provided as a resource within the school by prepared personnel (Hermann & Finn, 2002).

Safety Planning/Policy

In order for students to feel safe in the school environment, they must feel they can trust school personnel. School counselors can help to establish an environment in

which students feel safe and valued. Students also need to understand that they will be held accountable for their behaviors. According to Hermann and Finn (2002), "School counselors can help create or update school policies related to dating violence, including specific steps to ensure student safety" (p. 52). School staff members are informed of the policies and trained on utilizing these policies effectively. Once a policy has been created, it is necessary that the policy be followed.

Research Implications

While dating violence is a salient and dangerous problem in our schools, research is limited on this topic, especially studies that investigate the role that school counselors play in dating violence intervention. Thus, future research could examine school counselors' perceptions about their role in responding to dating violence. More specifically, a study that examined dating violence intervention strategies would fill a major void in the research. Additionally, investigating the limits and scope of pre-service training on dating violence for school counselors would be beneficial. Further, it would behoove researchers to examine school counselors' perceptions of dating violence, including their definitions of what constitutes a healthy relationship and unhealthy relationship.

Another area of research could examine the concept of screening for dating violence. Screening for dating violence in the school system would be an effective first step in addressing the issues related to partner violence and the development of healthy intimate relationships. However, there are very few screening tools available to screen for adolescent dating violence and those screening tools have little reliability and validity data. Future research concerning the development of screening tools for dating violence

with school-aged children is needed. Program evaluations would also be useful in determining the effectiveness of training programs for school counselors in screening for and addressing intimate partner violence with students.

Summary

While rates of dating violence appear to be increasing, incidences of dating violence continue to be under-recognized and underreported in the schools. This manuscript introduced five factors to facilitate the detection, intervention, and reporting of dating violence; (a) understanding the diverse definitions of dating violence, (b) recognizing dating violence indicators (c) having knowledge of the impact of peer relationships (d) understanding the process of the disclosure of dating violence, and (e) various ethical considerations related to dating violence. These five factors provide school counselors with a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of dating violence, thus, allowing them to play an active and vital role in responding to dating violence in the schools. Further research on the topic of dating violence is needed. Also important are prevention efforts to decrease rates of dating violence in the schools.

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