

It's Abuse! We think so, but do students see it that way?

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Using a repeated measures, crossover, research design this project evaluates the "It's Abuse" program, which is intended to educate college students about relationship abuse. We present data on students' attitudes about relationship abuse and the degree to which the students' attitudes and predicted behavior changed.

BACKGROUND

According to the Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence, approximately one-fifth of college students report experiencing violence from someone that they are currently dating and one-third of college students report that they were in an abusive dating relationship in the past.

Luthra and Gidycz (2006) identify a sex difference in the prevalence of relationship abuse, with 25% of women and 10% of men reporting partner violence.

Using college student samples, Cauffman et al. (2000) report a direct relationship between acceptance of dating violence and the likeliness to engage in dating violence (see also Nabors et al., 2006).

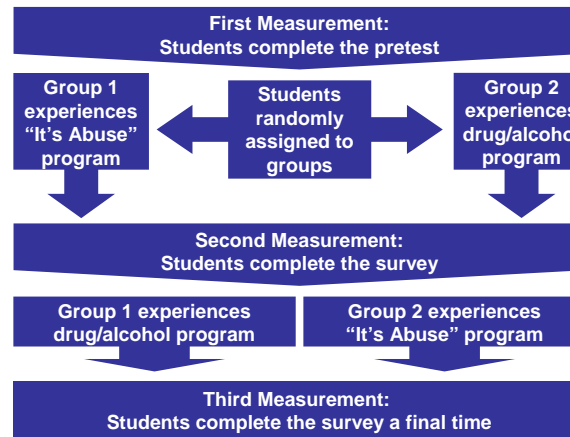
Experiencing abuse in intimate relationships is associated with the tendency to abuse a dating partner (Knox et al., 2000) and to experience abuse in subsequent relationships (Smith et al., 2003).

Abusive dating relationships have adverse consequences for psychological and physical health (Clements et al., 2005; Straight et al., 2003).

The goals of the "It's Abuse" program are to raise awareness of warning signs of an abusive relationship, educate students about maintaining healthy relationships, and generating awareness of resources for victims and perpetrators of relationship violence.

The purpose of this study was to assess the short term effectiveness of the "It's Abuse" program.

METHOD



SAMPLE

- 107 male college athletes
- 77 female college athletes
- 64 first year students
- 65 sophomores
- 42 juniors
- 13 seniors
- 124 students live on campus

SURVEY

- Demographic items
- Items on degree of worry about various threats
- Items on experience with relationship abuse
- Scenarios and how they would respond
- Actions to support anti-abuse campaigns
- Relationship abuse myths

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Students are significantly less worried about abuse in their relationships than they are other threats (i.e., the job market, crime, pollution, AIDS and STDs, and terrorism), $F(5, 915) = 7.847, p < .05$. Their worry about relationship abuse increased across the testing sessions, $F(2, 176) = 9.712, p = .000$, indicating an increased sensitivity toward the topic.

Even though 27.6% of the sample reported experiencing physical abuse from a dating partner and 50.3% reported experiencing psychological abuse from a dating partner, 88.6% of men and 81% of women did not think that abuse in relationships was a problem, consistent with work by Berkel et al. (2005) and Nabors et al. (2006).

"It's Abuse" did not significantly affect constructive responses to abuse scenarios, interaction between group and testing: $F(2, 142) = 0.463, N.S.$; nor willingness to contact authorities in abuse situations, interaction between group and testing: $F(2, 142) = 1.647, N.S.$, possibly due to a ceiling effect.

Students reported more counterproductive responses to abusive scenarios with repeated testing, main effect for testing: $F(2, 142) = 8.894, p = .000$, possibly indicating frustration with the repeated testing, as reported by the students that collected the data.

There was no effect of "It's Abuse" on willingness to support anti-abuse campaigns, interaction between group and testing: $F(2, 118) = .270, N.S.$

Students were less likely to support myths about relationship abuse following the program, interaction between group and testing: $F(2, 118) = 4.160, p = .018$.

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