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Adapting a Violence-Prevention Curriculum to the Haitian Setting: Insights from Focus Group Discussions

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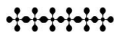


Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Background	2
Objectives	3
Data and Methods	3
Results.....	5
Types of Dating Relationships.....	5
Appropriateness of the Curriculum	7
Usefulness of Training Methods	9
Curriculum Implementation Challenges and Needs	10
Gender Considerations in Curriculum Implementation.....	11
Perceived Parental Reactions	11
Perceived Value of the Curriculum	12
How to Improve the Curriculum	14
Discussion and Recommendations	16
References	17
Appendix 1 Focus Group Discussion Guidelines - High School Students.....	19
Appendix 2 Focus Group Discussion Guidelines - High School Teachers.....	23

Abstract

This report presents qualitative data from focus group discussions held with 10th-12th grade students and teachers in a private high school in Port-au-Prince about how to adapt a violence-prevention curriculum to the Haitian context. The study pointed to some needed changes in order to improve the usefulness of the curriculum in the Haitian setting. Participants pointed out that the social context of adolescent relationships in Haiti is different from that in the United States. Adolescent dating relationships based on economic considerations, transactional sex and security concerns and those involving children and adults, some of whom are employers, are increasingly common in Haiti but are not covered by the Curriculum. In particular, same-sex relationships were not addressed in spite of their increased visibility in society. Participants were unanimous in their preference for administering the curriculum to boys and girls separately, using teachers of the same sex as the students. Students suggested that the curriculum should integrate information on abstinence, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS while the teachers felt that the curriculum could be improved by incorporating information on drugs, alcohol, and acculturation. Teachers expressed a need for parent education on violence prevention and for schools to work hand-in-hand with churches and the community to help parents talk to their children about safe and healthy relationships. There was consensus among teachers that the violence-prevention intervention began too late for 10th to 12th graders and that the curriculum should be administered to earlier grades as well. It was also felt that the use of audiovisual and media technology would improve the reach of the Curriculum and enhance students' understanding. Some teachers suggested that schools should assign a specific course on and appoint a designated instructor for violence prevention while others proposed that teachers should take the opportunity to educate students on violence prevention before teaching existing courses. The study revealed few perceived implementation challenges, the most notable being teachers' own need for training, the availability of an adequate number of copies of the Curriculum for teachers and handouts for students, safety and security concerns due to possible retaliation from adult perpetrators, student application of violence-prevention principles in their daily lives, and follow-up to find out the extent to which students were applying knowledge and skills learned. Finally, participants considered the focus on high school students to be too narrow and expressed a need for all segments of Haitian society to be educated on relationship violence prevention.

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Background

Adolescent relationship violence is a public health concern. According to the Haiti 2012 Demographic and Health Survey, about 1 out of 10 adolescent girls aged 15-19 who had ever been pregnant experienced intimate partner violence during pregnancy. The proportion of 15-19 year old girls who were currently in union and who reported emotional, physical and sexual violence was 27 percent, 28 percent and 24 percent, respectively (Cayemittes et al., 2013). A total of 43 percent of 15-19 years old girls who were currently in union experienced one of these forms of intimate partner violence. Eighteen percent of 15-19 year old girls who were currently in union were also perpetrators of physical violence against their partners. The 2012 Haiti DHS showed a marked increase in reporting of all forms of intimate partner violence victimization among 15-19 year old girls since 2000. In 2012, 29% of women aged 15-49 years in Port-au-Prince had experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and 16 percent of those who were not living in camps had ever experienced sexual violence (Cayemittes et al., 2013).

Although relationship violence affects adolescent as well as adults, the prevention of relationship violence among adolescents has been recognized as a priority intervention for many reasons. Intimate partner physical violence often begins within the first years of a dating or marital relationship. In addition, adolescent dating violence differs from adult intimate partner violence in that rates of perpetration tend to be similar for boys and girls and may be even greater among girls (Odgers et al., 2002; Wolf et al., 2005). Evidence shows that adolescent dating violence increases the risk of substance abuse, multiple sexual partners, inability to negotiate unintended pregnancy, abortion, depression, and STI/HIV transmission (Barnyard and Cross, 2008; Krug et al., 2002). Furthermore, exposure to violence of any kind of violence can also increase an adolescent's long-term risk for violent behavior, with unhealthy relationships leading to future victimization or perpetration in adulthood if unchecked.

Few school-based adolescent violence prevention programs have been implemented and assessed for effectiveness in low-income countries, one exception being a sexual violence prevention program among high school girls in Nigeria, which was found to significantly increase knowledge mean scores but have no influence on attitudes (Ogunfowokan and Fajemilehin, 2012). The existing literature is even more limited in terms of studies that have assessed the acceptability of violence-prevention curricula to intended beneficiaries and stakeholders, not only in terms of curriculum content but also in terms of mechanisms and processes needed for success. One exception was a study by Hamby et al. (2012) which assessed the sociocultural appropriateness of the SAFE Dates Curriculum (Foshee & Langwick, 2010) in Francophone Switzerland. The study found that terms such as "dating violence" and "domestic violence" were unfamiliar to Swiss youth, whose relationships tended to be less monogamous and romantic compared to their American counterparts. Two other studies conducted in the United States revealed a preference among students for role plays and videos compared to worksheets and class presentations (Elias-Lambert et al., 2010) and a perception among students that the violence-prevention curriculum was not helpful because the content was already known (Chandrasekaran and Hamby, 2010, cited by Hamby et al., 2012). These findings suggest that an important first step is to understand the perceived limitations of any violence-prevention curriculum and potential barriers to its implementation

and effectiveness, and then work to address these issues in order to create an enabling environment for curriculum adoption by schools and knowledge and skills transfer to students.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- Assess the cultural appropriateness of a violence prevention curriculum for high school students living in Port-au-Prince, Haiti;
- Obtain insights from teachers and high school students on how best to adapt the violence prevention curriculum for the Haitian environment

The violence-prevention project was based on the second edition of the SAFE Dates Program, which has been found to be effective for the primary and secondary prevention of relationship violence among adolescents in the United States (De Grace and Clarke, 2012; Foshee et al., 1998, 2000, 2012). The objectives of the SAFE Dates program are to:

- Raise students' awareness of what constitutes healthy and abusive relationships
- Raise students' awareness of relationship violence and its causes and consequences
- Equip students with the skills and resources to help themselves or friends in abusive relationships
- Equip students with the skills to develop healthy relationships, including positive communication, anger management and conflict resolution (Foshee and Langwick, 2010).

The SAFE Dates program consists of the following ten 50-minute sessions:

- Session 1: Defining caring relationships
- Session 2: Defining relationship violence and abuse
- Session 3: Why do people abuse?
- Session 4: How to help friends
- Session 5: Helping friends
- Session 6: Overcoming gender stereotypes
- Session 7: How we feel, how we deal
- Session 8: Equal power through communication
- Session 9: Preventing sexual violence
- Session 10: Reviewing the violence prevention program

Data and Methods

We conducted focus group discussions with high school teachers and students in the 10th to 12th grades in order to assess the cultural appropriateness, content and format of the SAFE Dates curriculum and

solicit ideas as to how the curriculum could be improved. Focus group participants were recruited at a high school in Port-au-Prince that had agreed to collaborate with the Research Team on the qualitative component of the study. The School provided space for focus group discussions. Each focus group discussion was conducted by a moderator and a note taker. The moderators and note takers had university education and for ethical reasons were not employed at the treatment and control schools or at the school participating in the focus group discussions. Focus group discussion guidelines were translated into French and Haitian Creole and the discussions held in Haitian Creole. Groups averaged 10 participants. Each focus group discussion lasted approximately 5 hours and covered five sessions of the Curriculum. A social worker was available during the focus group discussion for any participant who wanted to talk privately or who showed signs of distress. The discussions were audio-taped with participants' consent. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Tulane Human Research Protection Program, Biomedical Institutional Review Board. The study also obtained a letter of authorization from the Ministry of National Education and Professional Training, West Department Directorate, Haiti.

High School Students

Two focus group discussions were held among each group of high school students. The high school student focus groups were homogeneous by gender due to the fact that adolescents of middle and high school- age tend to be particularly concerned about "impressions" others have of them and to be less forthcoming or natural in their responses when members of the opposite sex are in the room. The groups were mixed in terms of grade and academic performance. Each focus group discussion included a different set of high school students to minimize respondent fatigue. The Director of the collaborating school sent a letter written by the Principal Investigator and co-Investigator to parents, describing the violence prevention curriculum and the purpose of the focus groups. Parents were asked to sign a consent form to allow their children to participate in the focus groups. In addition, written assent was obtained for high school students who were younger than 18 years and written informed consent for those who are aged 18 years and older. The moderator and note taker for the female student focus group discussions were female while those for the male student focus group discussions were male. The moderators and note takers for the student focus groups were 20-24 years of age in order to increase students' level of comfort with the discussions.

Following a procedure used by Hamby et al. (2012), the student focus groups employed a participant-observer model, whereby youth participated in various roles plays, games and exercises that came with the Curriculum and then provided feedback on the extent to which the Curriculum was appropriate for the Haitian cultural environment. The discussion topics for the student focus group discussions included the following: how well the sessions accounted for the different types of relationships that young people in Haiti have; how useful the activities, games and role plays were for helping students know more about relationship violence and how to prevent it; the most important things learned from the games, role plays and activities and how students would have learned the information if they had not participated in the focus group discussions. In addition, participants were asked to discuss other topics related to relationship violence that students like themselves might be interested in; barriers that students may encounter applying knowledge and skills learned from curriculum; the benefits or

disadvantages of having only boys or only girls in the class when the sessions are taught; whether it would matter if the person teaching the sessions is a man or a woman; and ideas students might have for improving the sessions discussed in the focus group. The focus group discussion guide for high school students is presented in Appendix 1.

Teachers

The curriculum was also discussed with 10 teachers who were asked to comment on the quality of the sessions, their cultural relevance, and the feasibility of implementing the curriculum in high schools in Haiti. Two focus group discussions were held with the teachers. Teachers were provided in advance with a draft of the French Translation of the Curriculum but, unlike the students, were not asked to participate in the activities and exercises. The discussion topics include how well the sessions took into account the different types of relationships that young people in Haiti have and cultural attitudes, values, and expectations regarding relationship violence in Haiti; which aspects of the sessions are inappropriate for high school students and why; which aspects would be challenging to teach and why; what supports schools and teachers would need to effectively implement the violence prevention project; perceived parental reactions to teaching students about how to prevent relationship abuse from happening and how to get help if it does. Teachers were also asked what they learned from the curriculum that they wished they had learned earlier (for example, when they were in high school) and how this information could have helped them in their adult life. Discussion topics also included teachers' views of changes that would be required to the session format, structure and content in order to customize the curriculum for the Haitian context. The focus group discussion guide for teachers is presented in Appendix 2.

Methods of Analysis

Initial data analysis of the focus group discussions included open coding, thematic analysis, and thematic building. The data were manually double-coded to increase the reliability of thematic identification using a grounded theory approach to develop categories and themes emerging from the participants, as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Next, distinct codes were categorized to reflect the commonalities between coders (level 1 coding). Through a constant comparative method, themes and subthemes were identified (level 2 coding). The themes were then be classified into broader categories (level 3 coding). The analysis was conducted using the software NVivo.

Results

Types of Dating Relationships

While dating relationships among young people in western countries might involve other young people, the focus group discussions with teachers highlighted that many adolescent dating relationships in Haiti involve adults and are based on economic considerations: *“Most of the young people love rich people;*

they love adults and rich people”; “Young people always need people who can spend”; “Some people make sex for money; those kinds of behaviors are prostitution;” “Some girls have good behaviors, others have slogans like: “If you don’t have money, you cannot have a girlfriend;” “They always think about people who have more financial possibilities.” Some teachers suggested that girls were active participants in these relationships while others felt that girls were powerless in these relationships as a result of age and power asymmetries between them and their male partners. Economically-motivated relationships were seen as being rooted in family poverty and girls’ relative lack of economic resources and associated with an increase in girls’ risk of dating violence victimization. One participant suggested that since the earthquake, ambivalence by and indirect pressure from parents have been drivers of young girls’ engagement in transactional sex.

Participant 6 - *Grown-ups make too much violence on underage girls of 15 to 17 years old with their money. They always consider girls like objects. They take advantage of the poverty of the parents to abuse the body of women.*

Participant 7 - *When the man is older than the girl, the girl is always under pressure because men often force them to have sexual intercourse and they threaten her not to report this to anybody.*

Security reasons were also said to underlie some dating relations: *“Girls could be with a gangster just to feel safe in her area.”* While girls were seen by some teachers to enter these relationships on their own volition for protection, other teachers suggested that these types of relationships were not consensual and that girls were intimidated into feigning consent to sexual activity.

Participant 1 - *A girl can choose to be in love with a police officer or with a gangster for her protection or with someone older than her or with someone who has a lot of money. This is love for money.*

Participant 3 - *People always use all kinds of violence in men and women relationships in Haiti. Many of these relationships are without agreement above all because of a lack of financial resources of the parents. These relationships are not normal because they are not on the basis of an agreement. It’s neither the will nor the decision of the person.*

Participant 4 - *In popular areas, gangsters terrorize people because they always force young people make love with people they don’t want.*

Relationships based on protection as well as those based on economic considerations tended to be associated with having concurrent sexual partnerships: *“Some girls like a man because he is handsome, others like gangsters to protect them; they always need to have sexual intercourse with several men.”*

Sexual intercourse for pleasure and showing off was also a sub-theme in the teacher focus group discussions, with expressions such as “teenager, nigga, real nigga, brethren, swag, big spender” being reported as used by young people to describe their relationships. Girls were also described as sometimes entering relationships just to have sex for pleasure: *“They have fun to make sex continuously”; “Girls use the expressions ‘I would like to judge this man’ which means they would like to*

make sex with a man but in this case, they always want the man to have sexual endurance, to perform well sexually. If the opposite, this would qualify the man as a chicken.” These types of relationships were viewed as a consequence of lack of parental monitoring, poverty and a decrease in moral values: *“There are no more values in the society, morality doesn’t exist anymore.”*

Students brought in a different perspective. Among male students, words like “Mommy, sweetie, baby, princess” and “honey, baby, sweetie” were included among terms used to refer to dating partners. Female students reported that terms such as *“my golden sugar, my heart, treasure, love, honey, boyfriend, little pappy”* were used among young people to describe dating partners. Students felt that the curriculum addressed mostly “love relationships” and females in particular, pointed to different types of relationships that girls could have with the opposite sex, some of which were not addressed in the curriculum.

Appropriateness of the Curriculum

The curriculum was considered to inadequately account for the different types of relationships that young people in Haiti might have and the prevailing attitudes, values and expectations of the community regarding relationship violence among young people. In the teacher focus group discussions, one participant mentioned precisely that same-sex relationships and transactional sex were not addressed: *“The program doesn’t address relationships that involve girls with girls nor men with men;” “In the past, girls used to fall in love with young boys for their intelligence but today this is no more the case, its money first.”* One female student mentioned that relationships between employers and employees, which have been found in some low-income settings to be sexually exploitative, were not covered by the violence prevention curriculum: *“Yes, we almost talk about everything except the relationship between boss and workers.”*

In general, the curriculum was considered by teachers to be appropriate for students in grades 10, 11, and 12 but it was suggested that the curriculum should be implemented with earlier grades as well and at the family and community levels. Teachers also mentioned that it was important for the curriculum to address violence in same-sex relationships:

Participant 1 - *Nothing is inappropriate for them; in fact, we should start from the very beginning because students of 7th and 8th grade need this too.*

Participant 2 - *This session should start earlier, from the basic, sometimes there are students of 10th grade that have made more experiences than their teachers, and we must go to churches, areas where we live to involve young people in positive activities.*

Participant 3 - *“There is nothing inappropriate or too advanced for our students because students at this level are old enough. This is why we ask that we start these sessions in lower levels.”*

Participant 4 - *These sessions should take place in church too, in family and in community. We should constitute a board in the community and train them so that they can train others.*

Participant 5 - *We should add men with men relationship and girls with girls relationship (homosexual relationship), avoid everyday violence in the community. Always keep training sessions in school and in the community where we live.*

Teachers were also asked to comment on the extent to which the attitudes, values, and expectations regarding relationship values were addressed by the curriculum. One participant commented that the curriculum did not explicitly articulate values in Haitian society. Others talked about how values had changed, with one participant implying that it is difficult to talk about a common set of attitudes and values since these change with time, education, family, and environment. Another noted that *“What young people consider as values nowadays are money, material interests, and riches.”* From the discussions, it was clear that there was a perceived discontinuity in the transmission of cultural values across the generations. Three issues were mentioned in this regard. First, same-sex relationships were perceived to be a more common occurrence nowadays but were not culturally supported: *“We consider that [same-sex relationships] like a cancer for the society nowadays.”* Second, there was a suggestion that parental responsibility for and monitoring and supervision of children had declined over time as has the role of families, churches, and schools in the transmission of cultural values to the younger generation.

Participant 4 - *Nowadays, parents become irresponsible because of the disaster of January 12. All parents let their children do whatever they like. What young people consider as values nowadays are: money, materials interests and riches.*

Participant 6 - *Before, children were under the responsibility and supervision of their parents but now everybody is adult. This is why we have many cases of divorce. One partner doesn't know the other well. Parents always force men to marry their daughters when they get pregnant while they had sexual intercourse just for fun.*

Participant 7 - *There are still values in the society from church, schools and family but values tend to disappear when they don't play their role.*

Participant 8 - *Nowadays all our values are gone. What we used to rebuke before has become fashionable today. If the children don't do wrong things they don't feel comfortable. All this causes the degradation of the society.*

Participant 10 - *There are some young people who don't think about their future and their parents are irresponsible. Back in the days, parents used to keep an eye on their children. Parents' absence causes sexual intercourse of the little girls.*

Third, there was a general perception that the social context of union formation had changed and that these changes were associated with an increased risk of threats of violence, non-marital cohabitation, extramarital relationships, sexual abuse, and teenage pregnancy.

Participant 11 - *A man harasses verbally a woman, he says to her:“ If you are not in love with me, I will kill you”. There is also the disobedience of children who leave their parents' home to go*

live with their partner in another house. They are more likely to be in love emotionally because of the rate of poverty that exists in the area where they live. A girl can be in love with a gangster to protect herself, so another man that she doesn't love cannot threaten her. A child imposes to his/her father to let his/her partner to come in the house -- if it is not the case he/she will kill him.

Participant 12 - *Every environment has its kind of behavior. Morality decreases a lot because children of 13-14 years old get pregnant and most of the time it's due to sexual abuse. In a community, the activity that is the most developed is money.*

Usefulness of Training Methods

The SAFE Dates curriculum used a diversity of teaching methods – lecture, discussion, group work, games, and activities. Teachers and students were asked about the perceived usefulness of these methods, with probes as to why certain methods were considered effective or not. There was overwhelming agreement that the methods used were effective in transmitting information about dating violence and its prevention. Many students talked about what they had learned through the various teaching methods and provided this as justification for the effectiveness of the teaching methods.

Participant 8 - *The reason why it's effective is because we draw many lessons on how to react when our boyfriend is in a situation. It gives many examples on how to avoid some difficulties in a relationship. There must be much communication so that one partner knows that the other one is not his slave. (Female student)*

Participant 9 - *There is a big difference in the method that we use because you explain everything you say so that everyone can understand and then share their own ideas. (Female student)*

Teachers were asked which instructional methods included in the sessions they had used effectively before in their teaching. It appeared that recaps were commonly used before starting a new chapter or topic and class participation were an integral part of teaching: *"We always favor class discussion. When they discuss, they understand the class better and that allows us to know what they think and their level. I always encourage my students to ask questions not only for the benefit of the class but also to help them fight their shyness."* However, based on their comments, it was not clear that teachers typically used group work and some of the other instructional methods, the only indication being one comment stating: *"If we could have some training sessions to help us that could be very good."* One teacher brought up the need to use adult learning methods with the curriculum, a suggestion that was probably prompted by the older age of high school students in Port-au-Prince compared to their counterparts in the United States. As the baseline evaluation study showed, two out of three students in the treatment and control schools were 19 years or older.

Participant 4 - *There is a method that we don't talk about, this andragogy, which is a method that enables adults to learn. Teachers use means that are more reliable to help students to understand better...and keep them alert so that they don't become delinquent.*

Curriculum Implementation Challenges and Needs

Teachers participating in the focus group discussions were asked: "To what extent would schools and teachers feel confident about or challenged by teaching the sessions of the violence prevention curriculum?" Some teachers felt that there would be no implementation challenges because the sessions in the curriculum would help teachers "*prevent young people from doing the wrong things*" and provide advice to students about relationships. One perceived obstacle pertained to follow-up and another to addressing teachers' own need for violence-prevention training: "*We should target not only students...teachers need these sessions too.*" One teacher mentioned safety and security concerns due to possible retaliation from adult partners of children who were involved in transactional sex and resistance from those children if their "livelihood" was questioned: "*Other difficulties could be while teaching children not to give themselves to grown-ups, these grownups could consider us like barriers; so they can threaten us; and some children live from that too, so they can oppose these ideas.*" Other challenges mentioned had to do with students applying the principles around violence prevention (such as anger management and conflict resolution), and providing leisure activities for students. The materials in the curriculum were considered practical and the scenarios, the most useful aspects of the curriculum: "*These scenarios are good examples to better teach children in classrooms; debate and discussion enable children to assimilate the materials, and to master the class better.*"

The focus group discussion guide for teachers also included a general topic on supports that schools and teachers would need to effectively implement the violence-prevention curriculum. While some participants suggested that there should be a designated instructor and course for violence prevention, others felt the curriculum could be somewhat integrated into existing courses if teachers could devote some time before starting their existing courses to talk to students about violence. There was no agreement as to which approach was preferable.

Participant 1 - *Schools should create a class for that and there should be a specific instructor for that. Teachers should take some time to explain to students what violence is, how they can prevent that but it's not only focus on their subjects.*

Participant 3 - *There should be someone special at school to teach that to the students even though it could be like a class of good manners.*

Participant 4 - *Teachers could take some 10 minutes before starting the class to talk with children about violence.*

Gender Considerations in Curriculum Implementation

Participants were asked: “What are the benefits/disadvantages of having only boys or only girls in the sessions?” Teachers were unanimous in the belief that single-sex sessions should be implemented, the primary advantage being that *“there will be more discussions.”* It was felt that boys and girls would feel uncomfortable discussing dating violence in the presence of the other sex. Similarly, teachers felt that it would be better for women to teach girls and for men to teach boys in order to increase students’ level of comfort with expressing their ideas and discussing their perceptions and experiences: *“With a teacher of the same sex as students, they could feel more comfortable to say everything they would like to.”* Only one teacher felt that a mix of boys and girls in the classroom could enrich debates even though there may be more disagreements, a caveat being that shyness could hinder lively debates in mixed sex groups.

Participant 3 - *If they mix boys and girls, debates would be better even though there would be more contradictions, but they could also be shy, which could prevent debates from being lively.*

Participant 4 - *When women teach women and men teach men that allows debates to go further. That prevents quarrel because there are things that either boys or girls would like to say but since they are together, they are afraid to say it.*

Similar views were expressed by students. Male students supported the idea of separate sessions for boys and girls for various reasons including the perception that girls are *“too noisy”*, because *“boys and girls have secrets”* and because in mixed groups *“men will try to give the best answers”*, suggesting the likelihood of a Hawthorne-type effect among male participants in mixed-sex groups. Only one female student felt that it would be a good idea to have mixed sex groups. In general, female students were concerned about how they would be perceived by the opposite sex in mixed-sex training sessions. These concerns were reflected in statements such as *“what girls say must stay between them and boys don’t need to know about that”*; *“boys could intimidate us, they could think badly about us because of our ideas”*; and *“they could make fun of us for our answers if we were together.”* In the same vein, female students felt it was better for students to be taught by a teacher of the same sex, highlighting girls’ increased comfort with discussing sexual violence with a female teacher. One female student also suggested that boys would likely be more attentive if the violence prevention curriculum was administered by a man:

Participant 4 - *...because when a man is teaching a group of men, he gives all possible details to involve them in a convenient atmosphere, in this way men understand better and are more alert.*

Perceived Parental Reactions

Teachers were asked “How do you think parents/guardians of high school students will react to helping adolescents become more aware of what constitutes a healthy relationship and make good choices in their relationship?” The teacher focus group discussions highlighted the difficulty that some parents might have talking to their children about what constitutes healthy relationships and the fact that some parents do not have time for their children. Schools were seen, therefore, as an important partner in helping students develop healthy relationships. It was felt that parents would be pleased to know that their children were being taught how to stay safe in relationships, especially if they saw positive changes in their children upon completion of the training.

Participant 1 - *Parents will always be satisfied; there are things that parents are afraid to say to their children. In the same way, there are things that children are afraid to say to their parents. It's always easier for them to talk to their teachers.*

Participant 4 - *Many parents don't really have time for their children, so when there is someone who is doing this kind of things for them, they will always be happy.*

Teachers also mentioned a role for churches as important partners in helping parents face the challenge of being prepared to discuss healthy relationships with their children and called for parent-specific violence-prevention training to be conducted by schools. One suggestion was to train members of the community who could train parents that cannot be reached by schools, thereby fostering collaborations between schools and communities in violence prevention.

Participant 1 - *Parents should have made sexual, social and cultural education of their children because they need moral support of their parents and friends too. I hope that sessions will be organized for parents too so that the work could be effective. These sessions should be held in churches, popular areas and in all organizations so that the work could be really effective...door-to-door awareness campaigns, broadcast the message so that more people could be aware of this wonderful program.*

Participant 3 - *To motivate parents we can register their names to attend the sessions and then deliver them certificates to encourage them.*

Participant 6 - *As teachers are attending this seminar parents should attend it too, as they are closer to the population. Some members of the community should be trained to keep on training other parents that we cannot reach.*

Participant 7 - *These sessions should be held in churches too. This will help parents to know how to better educate their children.*

Perceived Value of the Curriculum

Teachers were asked: “What did you learn in today’s sessions that you wished you had learned earlier when you were in high school? What do you think would have been the most important things to learn about then?” Responses underscored information that was absent from and needed to be included in the violence-prevention curriculum in order to increase its value: information such as “*drugs, alcohol,*

acculturation, absence of whip at school – we must not whip our children, corruption at school, plus parents' complicity". Although, subsequent discussions made reference to "teacher immorality," it was unclear whether "corruption at school" referred to abuse or coercion of students by teachers: "There are good teachers and bad teachers; there are teachers who are good examples and there are others who are bad ones; they are immoral." In addition, one participant alluded to the age at which adolescents were being trained on violence prevention, suggesting that information on healthy relationships should be provided early in adolescence and teachers were being exposed to this information late in life.

Participant 1 - *I have learned today to give more importance while teaching, to take 10-15 minutes to talk to the students, to help them to know how to protect themselves and prevent them from doing wrong things. I didn't have the opportunity to attend such classes when I was at school. If I had that chance that would have helped me prevent many things.*

Participant 2 - *The session of today allows me to master more what is violence, something that I should have learned since my classical studies because that would help me to better manage my life and help others too.*

Participant 3 - *These sessions come too late because we really needed this kind of training. We really learned a lot of things and that shows us also to take some 5 to 10 minutes while teaching to talk with our students, to teach them how to protect themselves and don't do anything wrong – because if they had this session long before, they would be further in life and that would prevent them from doing wrong things. So it's very important that you came with this activity.*

Participant 10 - *During their crazy period (adolescence) children do everything. This is why we say that we must start from the beginning to prevent children from doing wrong things so that they have no regrets tomorrow.*

The discussions among teachers also highlighted positive aspects of the Curriculum and its potential to build student's self-esteem and "allow students to think, to change their actions, behaviors and this could make us hope for a better tomorrow." The discussions also brought up teacher abuse by students and categories of unreached adolescents such as children employed in domestic work.

Participant 3 - *I see that the focus is on school but you don't take into consideration children in domesticity and this is an abuse – violence against them too. It would be very important if could focus on this category too so many people would be aware of that.*

Participant 4 - *You don't consider situations where teachers are victims of violence from students but teachers must keep their calm in order not to pick a quarrel with students.*

Students were asked: "If you were going to tell someone (e.g., your friends, other high school students) about what you have learned in this session, what top three things would you want to tell them about?" Male students emphasized information learned about jealousy, anger and communication whereas female students mentioned aspects of the curriculum pertaining to victimization, women's rights and

help seeking, probably a reflection of the higher likelihood of females to experience more severe forms of violence and injury inflicted by their intimate partners than males.

Participant 1 – *I have found three elements that are important for me: I should not be harmful for my girlfriend; I must not beat her; and I must improve myself. There must be harmony to understand each other. (Male student)*

Participant 5 – *I would say that communication is the best way to manage a relationship. (Male student)*

Participant 7 – *Try to master our anger and communication. (Male student)*

Participant 2 – *I learned about women’s rights in the society, to avoid violence on women, we are equals to men. (Female student)*

Participant 4 - *Anyone can be a victim of violence in the way you are and the way you will behave. As an abuse, some men treat girls like slaves. They treat them badly. They manipulate them as they wish. (Female student)*

Participant 5 - *The relationship should be equal. For their behavior everyone should have the same rights...They should understand each other so the relationship can work. We would encourage anyone who is victim of violence to go to the police. Victims of violence will never be guilty. (Female student)*

In discussing other topics, female students talked about using lessons learned from the curriculum to counsel victims and perpetrators, to increase awareness of dating abuse, and to guide their own lives. Some female students saw themselves in the potential role of trainer, helping to raise awareness of dating violence and its prevention: *“These sessions allow me to better know myself, to help those who are victims of violence so that we can do it like the trainer. I would like these sessions to continue.”* No student mentioned potential barriers to student’s applying what they learned from the curriculum.

Concerning the question as to what might prevent high school students from using what they learned from the Curriculum, responses focused on how the participants in the focus group would use the information gained. While most students talked about using the curriculum to advise those who are victims of violence, one female student saw perpetrators of violence as her targeted audience: *“I will use it to advise those who abuse, those who are violent or mistreating others.”* There were a few topics for which female students wanted additional information. These topics included preventing sexual abuse, how to treat others, women’s rights in society, and counseling victims of violence and people in abusive relationships.

How to Improve the Curriculum

Suggestions for improving the sessions, handout, class exercises and activities, stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers had adequate copies of the materials: *“When we teach without materials, it’s a waste of time.”* It was also felt that the handouts and class exercises were very important and should be maintained. Most importantly, several teachers stressed that their teaching of the curriculum would be enriched by use of images, videos and media technology, and by the availability of age- and grade-appropriate materials on violence and its prevention.

Participant 1 - *We would ask for projectors, audiovisual device, and many pictures adapted to the age and grade of children in the classroom...*

Participant 2 - *I would say it’s about sound and image, if you come with pictures while teaching that can help students better understand what you say.*

Participant 4 - *We can come with audiovisual device and show the students all kinds of violence, always show them the pictures.*

Participant 5 - *We can perform it as a play, we can project pictures, this is very important to allow students to better understand and this is also a kind of practice. We should do class animations so that we can motivate students too.*

Participant 7 - *While we are teaching children we should have pictures of violent acts to show them so that they can know all kinds of violence someone could be victim of and apply all the good values.*

Use of television to increase awareness of violence and its prevention was discussed both in the context of discussions around the usefulness of the materials introduced in the sessions and how best to meet the violence-prevention information needs of high school students in Haiti. The discussions revealed that teachers felt that the focus on high school students was too narrow and that there was an urgent need to reach individuals who could not read and to educate all segments of Haitian society.

Participant 2 - *we would like that you categorize all the kinds of violence which exist in our society. Sometimes parents are violent with children, we must focus on the case of those who cannot read, by using pictures broadcasting on TV. So you should use audiovisual method to better adapt the document.*

Participant 3 - *Teachers’ proposition is to broadcast these pictures on TV to better educate students, show them all kind of violence that someone should avoid.*

Participant 4 - *I would like that these sessions be available for every category in the Haitian society. Then, we would find the expected results against all kinds of violence when we fight the rate of violence that we are victim of in our society.*

Students did not have many suggestions about how the curriculum may be improved but one issue that came up was the need to integrate sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS information in violence prevention. For example, in response to the question *“When it comes to relationship violence and its*

prevention, what areas/issues would you like to know more about?" a male student remarked: *"You did not talk about abstinence. You didn't talk about how young people should protect themselves. I think there should be more protection in sexual intercourse."* One female student mentioned the need for teachers to use a projector, for the curriculum to include field visits and for integration of information on HIV/AIDS. One male student thought that it was not sufficient to merely provide information but that there was a need to provide counseling and advice as well.

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine high school students' and teachers' perceptions about how a violence prevention curriculum should be adapted to the Haitian setting. There were several significant findings from the focus group discussions. First, the proposed curriculum did not adequately capture the social context of dating and union formation among young people in Haiti. In particular, adolescent-adult dating relationships, economically-motivated relationships and transactional sex, same-sex relationships, and relationships predicated on security considerations were not considered. In addition, employer-employee relationships were not addressed, with children involved in domestic work being singled out as an unreached subpopulation at high risk of abuse.

Another significant finding of this study was the belief that the curriculum should be administered to earlier grades as well and at the family and community levels. Teachers envisaged partnerships between schools, churches and communities to educate parents about violence-prevention and to equip parents who could not be reached by the school system with the skills to communicate with their adolescent children about dating violence prevention. Third, there was a need for teachers themselves to receive training on violence prevention and to address safety and security problems that may arise due to retaliation from the adult partners of school children.

Participants were unanimous in their recommendation that boys and girls should be administered the curriculum separately and by teachers of the same sex. Single-sex sessions were perceived to foster better dialogue and increase student comfort with the topic of violence-prevention. Girls were particularly concerned about the impressions that boys may have of them and their views in mixed-sex sessions.

The most useful aspects of the curriculum for male students were the sessions dealing with anger, jealousy, and communication. For female students, the most useful sessions were those pertaining to victimization, women's rights, and help seeking. Students wanted additional information on sexual abuse prevention, women's rights in society, and how to counsel/advice people in abusive relationships. Students also felt that the violence prevention curriculum should integrate information on abstinence, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS while teachers felt that there was a need for the curriculum to also discuss drugs, alcohol, and acculturation. There was general consensus that the curriculum could be improved by the use of audiovisual and media technology. In the teacher focus group discussions,

television was considered important for reaching not only students but also parents and those who could not read.

Although cost was not identified as a major barrier to the adoption of the curriculum were identified, it would be unrealistic to expect schools to implement the violence prevention program without adequate numbers of copies of the curriculum, handouts, class exercises and activities. The resources required to purchase once copy of the Safe Dates Curriculum (\$225.00 US dollars per teacher) would present a major obstacle to using this evidence-based violence-prevention approach in schools in Haiti, many of which face funding limitations. One limitation of the study should be noted. The study was implemented in only one school in Port-au-Prince, a private religious school, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

To conclude, the curriculum was well received by focus group participants. The findings were generally positive and highlighted an urgent need to address adolescent dating violence in Haiti. Teachers believed that the curriculum would be well received by parents, some of whom had difficulty talking to their children about what constitutes safe and healthy relationships. This belief drove suggestions for schools to work closely with churches and communities in violence-prevention. The SAFE Dates program is available and would be enhanced by integrating information about sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse in order to positively influence adolescents who are at risk for dating violence and its negative consequences and multiple health risk behaviors.

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Appendix 1

Focus Group Discussion Guidelines - High School Students

Introduction by facilitator

Give an explanation

Good afternoon. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We are from the Haiti Research Team, working in collaboration with Tulane University. This focus group is part of a pilot test that Tulane University is conducting to learn about the effectiveness of a violence prevention curriculum and how to best tailor the curriculum to high school students in grades 10, 11, and 12. The curriculum was developed for adolescents in the United States – we want to understand how we might customize the curriculum to better fits the needs of high school students in Haiti.

Present the purpose

We are here today to introduce you to the sessions and group activities in the violence prevention curriculum. We would like to hear from you about the ways in which each session of the curriculum can be customized for Haiti and also of the changes you would like to suggest so that the curriculum can better fit the needs of high school students in Haiti.

Discuss procedure

During this focus group, you will receive the handouts that come with the session we are discussing and participate in the group activities that are associated with the session. Then I will ask questions and facilitate a conversation about how the sessions can be customized for high students in Haiti. We are not here to give you our opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. Please keep in mind that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any of the questions I will ask. There are no desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. We would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. Our goal is to stimulate conversation and hear the opinions of everyone in the room. I hope you will be comfortable speaking honestly and sharing your ideas with us.

_____ (colleague) will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. Your name will not be attached to any comments you make. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately two hours. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit. For some questions, I will go around the room so that everyone will have the opportunity to share their ideas. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Participant introduction

Now, let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name and what grade you are in?

Session role plays and activities

In each session of the violence prevention curriculum there are a number of role plays, games, and activities. In the session we will discuss today, we have _____ [number of] activities/games that deal with various aspects of relationships. We will first perform the role plays/games activities. Then I will ask you questions about the session. Now, let's play the first game, go through the first activity.

Interview

1. How well does this session take into consideration the different types of relationships/friendships that young people in Haiti might have with the opposite sex?

Probes: What kinds of expressions, words, and terms do young people use to describe their relationships?

Probes: Which types of relationships are addressed?

Probes: Which types of relationships are not addressed?

2. How useful were the teaching methods (lecture, discussion, group work, games, activities, etc.) used in this session for increasing your knowledge/understanding of relationship violence and how to prevent it?

Probes: Which teaching methods worked particularly well/were most effective?

Probes: Tell me why you think they have been effective.

Probes: Which teaching methods were least effective/did not work and need to be changed?

Probes: Tell me why you think these teaching methods have not been effective. It's interesting, [Name of participant] found that particular teaching method to be effective. What do you think may account for the difference?

Probes: How can we make these teaching methods better?

3. If you were going to tell someone (e.g., your friends, other high school students) about what you have learned in this session, what top three things would you want to tell them about?

Probes: Tell me why you have chosen these top three things?

Probes: What was the least useful thing you learned from this session?

Probes: *Tell me why you think this thing was not useful?*

- 4. How would you have learned the information in this session if you had not participated in this focus group discussion?**

Probes: *Where would you have gotten this information? Who would have provided this information?*

- 5. When it comes to relationship violence and its prevention, what areas/issues would you like to know more about?**

Probes: *Why do you say that?*

Probes: *What would be the best way(s) for teachers/peer leaders get this message across to high school students?"*

- 6. What do you think will get in the way of a high school student using what they learned from this session?**

Probes: *Tell me more about that.*

- 7. What can we do to make sure that students who take this training keep using the knowledge and skills they learned in this session?**

Probes: *Tell me more about that?*

Probes: *Who would we need to work with? What should we do when we work with them?*

- 8. What are the benefits/disadvantages of having only boys or only girls in this session?**

Probes: *What are some of the benefits of having a mix of boys and girls in this session?*

Probes: *What are some of the disadvantages of having a mix of boys and girls in this session?*

- 9. To what extent would it matter whether the person teaching this session is a man or a woman?**

Probes: *Why do you think it is better for a man to teach this session?*

Probes: *Why is it better for a woman to teach this session?*

Probes: *Why do you think it does not matter if the person teaching this session is a man or a woman?*

Probes: *Though there were many different opinions about _____, it appears unanimous that _____. Does anyone see it differently? It seems most of you agree _____, but some think that _____. Does anyone want to add or clarify an opinion on this?*

10. If you were going to teach this session to high school students in the future, how would you improve the session, its handouts, and activities?

Probes: *Any ideas of how to best do that?*

Probes: *Remember, these improvements can be in many areas: for example, the content of the session, the session length, the time of day it's offered, the teaching style, the handouts/session materials, whether the session is taught by peer leaders or teachers, the lecture, the activities, the handouts, or anything else you can think of.*

11. Is there anything else we haven't discussed yet that you think is important for us to know as we tailor/customize/revise this training session to better meet the needs of high schools students in Haiti?

Closing

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

Appendix 2

Focus Group Discussion Guidelines - High School Teachers

Introduction by facilitator

Give an explanation

Good afternoon. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We are from the Haiti Research Team, working in collaboration with Tulane University. This focus group is part of a pilot test that Tulane University is conducting to learn about the effectiveness of a violence prevention curriculum and how to best tailor the curriculum to high school students in grades 10, 11, and 12. The curriculum was developed for adolescents in the United States – we want to understand how we might customize the curriculum to better fits the needs of high school students in Haiti.

Present the purpose

You are a group of high school teachers. We would like to hear from you about the ways in which the violence-prevention curriculum will meet the needs of high school students in Haiti, and also the changes you would suggest so that the curriculum could better meet their needs.

Discuss procedure

During this focus group, I will ask questions and facilitate a conversation about your perceptions about the curriculum and ideas for improving it. We are not here to give you our opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. Please keep in mind that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any of the questions I will ask. There are no desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. We would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. Our goal is to stimulate conversation and hear the opinions of everyone in the room. I hope you will be comfortable speaking honestly and sharing your ideas with us.

_____ (colleague) will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. Your name will not be attached to any comments you make. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately two hours. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit. For some questions, I will go around the room so that everyone will have the opportunity to share their ideas. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Participant introduction

Now, let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name, whether you have ever taught a course or workshop on violence prevention before, whether you have ever helped someone who is in a violent relationship, and what you did to help that person?

Interview

1. How well do these sessions take into consideration the different types of relationships/friendships that young people in Haiti might have with the opposite sex?

Probes: What kinds of expressions, words, and terms do young people in Haiti use to describe their relationships?

Probes: Which types of relationships are addressed by the session?

Probes: Which types of relationships are not addressed?

Probe: What kind of "pressure or problem" do high school students face in their relationships? Do the sessions discussed today address that kind of "pressure or problem"?

2. How well do the sessions we are discussing today address these attitudes, values, and expectations regarding relationship violence among young people under the age of 25 years?

Probes: What are the prevailing attitudes, values, and expectations of the community regarding relationship violence among young people under the age of 25 years?

Probes: Which attitudes, values and expectations are addressed by the curriculum?

Probes: Which attitudes, values and expectations are not addressed by the sessions but should be? Why should they be addressed?

3. Which instructional methods included in these sessions have you used effectively before in your teaching?

Probes: Tell me about how you have used this method/instructional method?

Probe: For methods not mentioned: Has anyone tried this method? Tell me why not?

Probe: Tell me why you think the instructional methods you have mentioned were effective?

4. What things in the sessions are inappropriate for the Haitian context and for students' in the 10th, 11th or 12th grade?

Probes: Is there any aspect of the sessions discussed today that is inappropriate or "too grown-up" for younger high school students? If so, what aspects are inappropriate?

Probe: *What should be the topics addressed with younger high school students?*

Probe: *What aspects of the sessions are inappropriate for the Haitian context?*

Probe: *What changes are required in the content of the sessions to make them more appropriate for high school students in Haiti?*

5. To what extent would schools and teachers feel confident about or challenged by teaching these sessions of the violence prevention curriculum?

Probes: *What do you see as potential barriers or limitations in teaching these sessions of the curriculum?*

Probes: *What aspects of the sessions will be challenging for teachers?*

Probes: *What are some of the reasons why teachers might find these aspects of the sessions challenging?*

Probes: *How can these challenges be addressed?*

6. What supports would schools and teachers need to effectively implement the violence prevention curriculum?

Probes: *Tell me more about that.*

7. Of the materials introduced in the sessions we are discussing today, which have you found most useful? Which have you found least useful?

Probes: *Tell me more about that.*

Probe: *Tell me why you think the materials you have mentioned have been most useful?*

Probe: You mentioned that these materials _____ (list them) were least useful. *Tell me why you think they are not as useful?*

8. What are the benefits/disadvantages of having only boys or only girls in this session?

Probes: *What are some of the benefits of having a mix of boys and girls in this session?*

Probes: *What are some of the disadvantages of having a mix of boys and girls in this session?*

9. To what extent would it matter whether the person teaching this session is a man or a woman?

Probes: *Why do you think it is better for a man to teach this session?*

Probes: *Why is it better for a woman to teach this session?*

Probes: *Why do you think it does not matter if the person teaching this session is a man or a woman?*

Probes: *Though there were many different opinions about _____, it appears unanimous that _____. Does anyone see it differently? It seems most of you agree _____, but some think that _____. Does anyone want to add or clarify an opinion on this?*

10. How do you think parents/guardians of high school students will react to helping adolescents become more aware of what constitutes a healthy relationship and make good choices in their relationships?

Probes: *Tell me more about that.*

Probes: *Why do you think parents will react that way?*

Probes: *What can we do to make parents more supportive of the violence prevention curriculum?*

11. What did you learn in today's sessions that you wished you had learned earlier when you were in high school? What do you think would have been the most important things to know about then?

Probes: *What did you learn from these sessions that you wished you had learned when you were in high school?*

Probes: *What would have been the most important information to know about then?*

Probes: *Why do you say that?*

Probes: *How could this information have helped you as a young adult (when you were in your early to mid-20s)?*

12. If you were going to teach these sessions to high school students in the future, how would you improve the sessions, handouts, class exercises, and activities?

Probes: *Any ideas of how best to do that?*

Probes: *Remember, these improvements can be in many areas: for example, the content of the session, the session length, the time of day it's offered, the teaching style, the handouts/session materials, whether the session is taught by peer leaders or teachers, the lecture, the activities, the handouts, or anything else you can think of.*

13. Is there anything else we haven't discussed yet that you think is important for us to know as we tailor/customize/revise this training session to better meet the needs of high schools students in Haiti?

Closing

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

[Set an appointment for the next focus group discussion if applicable.]