

Examining Teen Dating Violence (TVD) Prevention and Response Practices within New Jersey Public High Schools

MARCH 2019

Prepared by:

Jose Ricardo Vargas Garcia, M.A.

Abbey DeSilva, BASW

Sarah McMahon, Ph.D., Principal Investigator

Laura Johnson, Ph.D.

Rebecca Glinn

VAWC@SSW.RUTGERS.EDU | 848-932-4390



RUTGERS

School of Social Work

Center on Violence Against Women and Children

Introduction

Dating violence impacts millions of women in the United States (U.S.) each year. New Jersey statutes define dating violence as, “a pattern of behavior where one person threatens to use, or actually uses physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse to control a dating partner” (N.J.S.A. 18A§ 35-4.23a). Adolescents, specifically young women, are at a higher risk of dating violence victimization, often referred to as adolescent dating violence (ADV) (Curva, 2011; Kann et al., 2016). About 1.5 million high school students each year report experiencing physical abuse from a dating partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). In one study of 625 students at a large Midwestern high school, 31.3% of girls and 32.6% of boys reported experiencing some physical violence in a dating relationship (Molidor & Tolman, 2009). Of these, 43% of the reported dating violence incidents occurred on school grounds or property, indicating that schools are important settings to consider for addressing ADV (Molidor & Tolman, 2009).

Low levels of awareness of ADV within family, school, and legal settings contribute to systematic barriers for help-seeking among teens. One study found that of 539 parents from Michigan, only 55% were aware of ADV, with mothers being more aware of the issue than fathers (Black, Weisz, Preble & Sharma, 2015). A national survey of high school counselors concluded that fewer than 10% had ADV training and 81% reported not having a protocol or procedure for responding to a ADV incident (Khubchandani et al., 2012). An analysis of the New Jersey justice system showed that legal protections for victims of domestic violence were historically adult-centered, often leaving no recourse for teens experiencing dating violence (Curva, 2011), although changes have occurred in recent years to make the process more accessible and open to adolescents.

ADV also impacts survivors’ physical and emotional well-being and academic achievement. Female ADV survivors are six times more likely than non-survivors to become pregnant and twice as likely to experience a sexually transmitted infection (Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2005). Survivors of ADV are also significantly more likely to use drugs, smoke, or drink alcohol in comparison to non-survivors (Exner-Curtens, Eckenrode & Rothman, 2012; Foshee, Reyes, Gofferdson, Chang, & Ennett, 2013; Roberts, Klein & Fisher, 2003). Researchers have found that ADV is correlated with increased depressive symptoms such as dysthymic mood, sleep disturbances, hopelessness, and anxiety (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Haynie et al., 2013). ADV also impacts academic performance through lower rates of school attendance and higher truancy and school drop-out rates (Suldo, Gormely, DuPaul, & Anderson-Butcher, 2014; Wilson et al., 2019).

New Jersey Statute on ADV

To address ADV, in 2011 New Jersey passed Revised Statute §18A:37-33, sponsored by Assemblyman David W. Wolfe, requiring each school district and charter school to approve a policy which prevents, responds to, and educates their students and the school community on ADV. The statute identified that students have a right to learn in safe and civil environments that foster high academic achievement and are free from violence. The statute provides guidelines regarding the content of school ADV policies and grants school administrators the ability to adapt policies to their district or charters' unique needs (State of New Jersey, Department of Education). The six mandatory areas of the policy are as follows:

- A statement that dating violence will not be tolerated;
- Procedures for reporting dating violence;
- Guidelines for responding to at-school incidents of dating violence;
- Discipline procedures specific to at-school incidents of dating violence;
- Warning signs of dating violence; and
- Information on safe, appropriate school, family, peer, and community resources available to address dating violence.

Since the passing of the New Jersey statute, there has been no formal research at the state or academic-level on its efficacy or how schools have implemented ADV policies.

The New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board (henceforth referred to as the "Fatality Review Board") reviews domestic violence cases that result in fatality or near fatality and issues reports with recommendations to improve the state systems' responses to domestic violence. The Fatality Review Board has provided repeated recommendations to address ADV, recognizing ADV education as a critical piece of prevention efforts to avoid future domestic violence fatalities. The Fatality Review Board also recommended an evaluation of the implementation of ADV education efforts in secondary schools. For example, in the 2016 report, the Fatality Review Board recommended that a small sample of New Jersey school districts be surveyed on their current ADV awareness and prevention curriculums as well as to research the requirements mandated by law.

To understand the impact of New Jersey's ADV statute in the school setting, the Fatality Review Board worked with the Center on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) at the Rutgers School of Social Work to gather data about how schools have implemented ADV prevention and response policies in the state. The project's goal was to understand how high school principals in New Jersey have implemented mandatory ADV policies, and their opinions and beliefs regarding ADV more generally. The choice to focus on principals in this study is due to the large amount of authority they have in the implementation of policy changes within their schools and the potential they have to set the climate for addressing ADV. For instance, Banyard (2015) discusses how individuals with power in systemic structures can influence the climate setting regarding dating violence.

Methodology

A research team from VAWC developed and administered the survey instrument and collected survey data. All methods were approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of participants.

Recruitment

The research team accessed publicly available email addresses of principals at every high school in New Jersey, except for those that did not meet inclusion criteria, to recruit participants. Using the filtering options on the NCES/Common Core of Data (CCD) “Search for Public Schools” tool, the research team limited the search criteria to “regular” public schools serving grades 9 through 12. The search resulted in a list of 319 public high schools. This data set was cross-checked with information the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) provided. Of the 319 schools listed, the research team excluded a total of 48 schools that did not meet the criteria (see Table 1). Additionally, four schools were added to the sampling frame, as they met the inclusion criteria but were not included in the NCES data for unknown reasons. Ultimately, 283 schools met the inclusion criteria for the study; however, two schools were operating without a principal at the time of recruitment. Further, five principals had inaccurate or inaccessible contact information listed, leaving 275 potential participants.

The principals of all 275 schools were invited to participate in the study through an email invitation from the research team. Six reminder emails were also sent by a third party software system that protected the anonymity of respondents. Those who already completed the survey did not receive any reminder emails. To maximize responses, a single phone call was made to each principal after the initial recruitment email to inform them of the study and respond to any questions or concerns they might have had about participation. If the principal was not available, a message was left with another staff person or on their voicemail. The survey was estimated to take about thirty minutes to complete. The participants had seven weeks to submit the survey.

Informed consent was obtained from participants online before they were able to begin the survey. Respondents were asked to select “Yes, I consent” or “No, I do not consent.” Participants who selected “No, I do not consent” were automatically brought to the end of the survey. Respondents who completed the survey were offered the opportunity to enter their email on a separate survey for a \$10 Amazon gift card to compensate them for their time.

Survey Instrument

Principals’ perceptions of ADV were collected through a 50-item survey that assessed perspectives of: 1) school practices and policies regarding adolescent dating violence prevention; 2) perceived barriers to assisting victims of adolescent dating violence; 3) adolescent dating violence incident response protocol; 4) perceptions on the extent of adolescent dating violence in New Jersey schools and their own school; and 5) adherence to knowledge and interpretation of New Jersey statutes 18A 35-4.23 and 19A:37-33 regarding the implementation of adolescent

dating violence prevention in the core curriculum and protocols for school-wide response to adolescent dating violence. Participants' were also asked about faculty/staff training and demographics. Questions were adapted from two published instruments (Khuchandani et al., 2017; Sessarego et al., 2017) to reflect New Jersey standards and legislation regarding education and response to ADV.

The survey instrument was further modified based on feedback from experts in the field of domestic violence and ADV, members of the Fatality Review Board, an expert on the New Jersey standards and legislation regarding education and response to ADV from the New Jersey Division of Family and Community Partnerships, and two doctoral-level researchers with experience in survey instrument creation.

The first set of survey questions focused on the practices and policies in place within the school regarding ADV prevention, intervention, and education. This section was expanded in order to ask specific questions related to the minimum standards required by New Jersey legislation. Additional questions were added to collect data on schools' policies for educating students, staff, and faculty members on ADV.

The second set of survey questions aimed to analyze the principals' beliefs and perceptions on their schools' ADV education and protocols. This section included a series of items intended to assess the perceived barriers to assisting victims of ADV within schools based on the Stages of Change component of the Trans-Theoretical Model (Khuchandani et al., 2017). Additionally, a series of questions on perceptions of school readiness were included from a measure by Sessarego et al. (2017) to assess school personnel's perceptions of addressing ADV.

The final set of survey questions covered demographics of the respondents' and their respective schools. The principals were asked about their gender, race/ethnicity, and age. They were also asked about their school's location, number of years working as a principal, highest level of education, and formal training on ADV. Principals were also asked about the racial/ethnic make-up of their school and the number of foreign-born students.

Results

Of the 275 New Jersey public high school principals who received the survey, 68 principals responded to the survey. Of these, 6 participants did not provide consent, and 33 participants did not complete nor submit the survey. Thus, the final analytic sample was a total of 29 participants. The categories of results are as follows: demographics of sample, perceptions of the problem, training, student education, procedures to address ADV, and school readiness.

Sample Demographics

Demographics of participants who completed and submitted the survey are presented in Table 1. Participants were overwhelmingly male and White. Most respondents reported no formal training on ADV. The mean age of participants was 46 years with a range of 26 to 71 years of age.

Table. 1 Demographics of principals who completed and submitted the survey ($n = 29$)

	Total #	Percent		
Principals' Gender Identity				
Male	24	83		
Female	4	14		
Another	1	3		
Principals' Self-Identified Race				
White	25	86		
Black	2	7		
Hispanic	2	7		
Principals' Highest Education				
Education specialist degree	1	3		
Master's degree	24	83		
Doctorate degree	4	14		
Are you a certified high school principal?				
Yes	28	97		
No	1	3		
Location of School				
Urban	4	14		
Suburban	19	65		
Rural	6	21		
Do you have formal training in adolescent dating violence?				
Yes	7	24		
No	22	76		
Where was this training received? ($n = 7$)				
In-service education	4	57		
Professional Journals	3	43		
Principals' age				
			Mean	Min
			46	26
				Max
				71
Principals' tenure (years)				
			6	0
				26

Perceptions of the extent of ADV

Participants reported their opinions on how severe the problem of ADV is in three different settings – U.S. schools, New Jersey schools, and in their own school (Figure 1) from a range of 1 (*no problem*) to 5 (*major problem*). The mean reported for both U.S. schools and New Jersey schools was 3.07, right above the midpoint. Participants mean reported opinion on “what extent adolescent dating violence is a problem in your school” was 2.41, right below the midpoint.

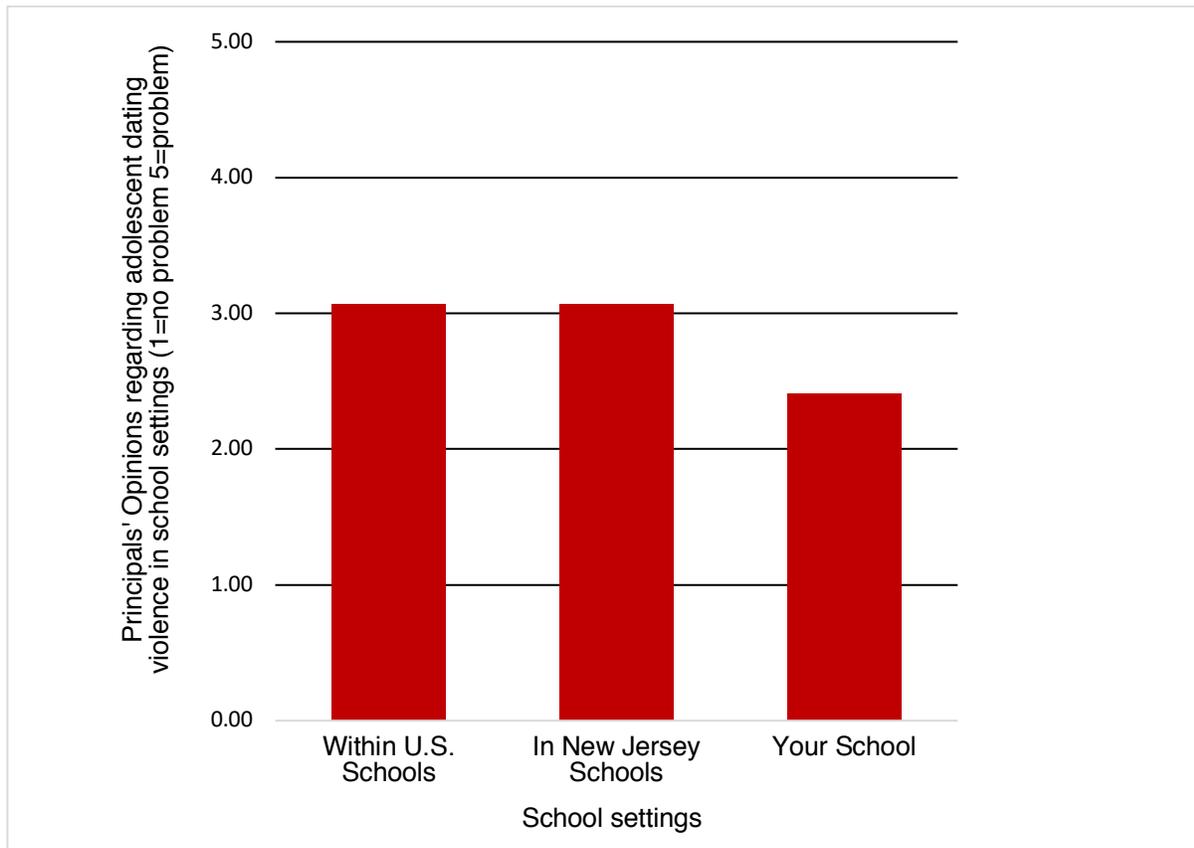


Figure 1. Average principals' opinion regarding adolescent dating violence in three settings. ($n = 29$)

Training

Participants were asked about personnel training specific to ADV (Figure 2). Overall, 59% principals reported that some of their school personnel (e.g., teachers, nurses, counselors, administrative personnel) had participated in training.

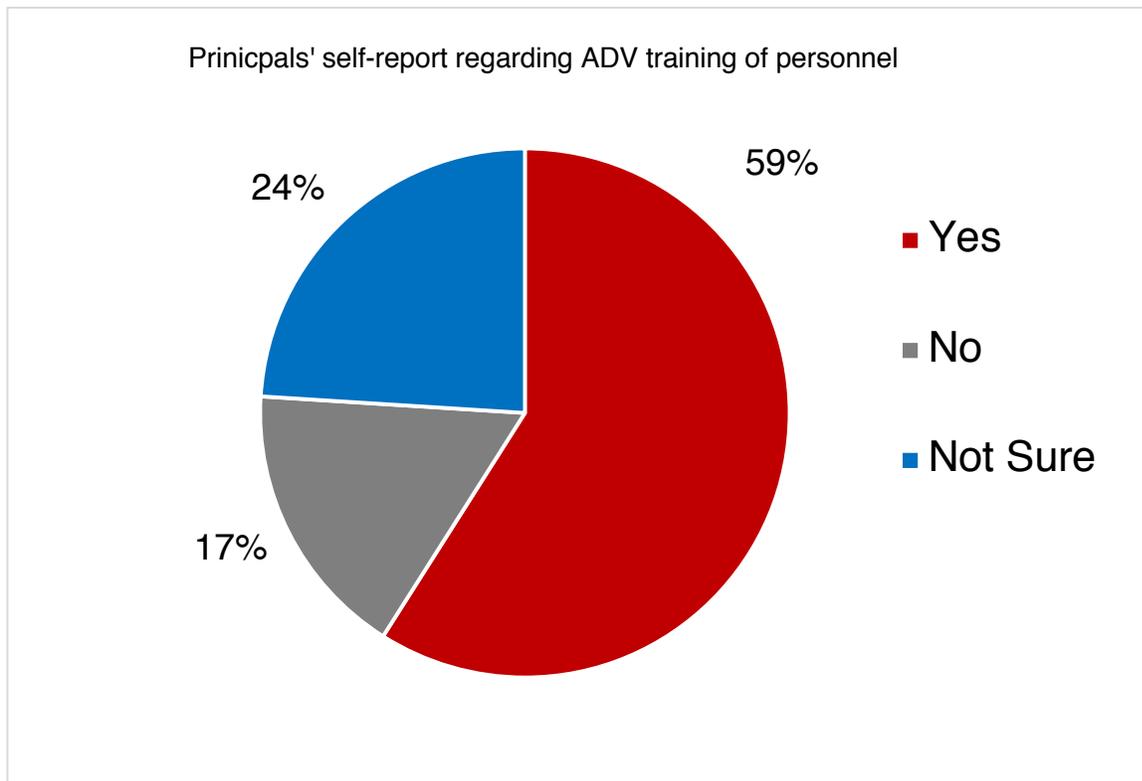


Figure 2. In the past 2 years, have any of your school personnel (e.g. teachers, nurses, counselors, administrative personnel, etc.) been trained to address dating violence? ($n = 29$)



Participants who reported having school personnel trained in adolescent dating violence were asked the percentage of staff trained (Figure 3). The majority reported that 25% or less of their high school’s personnel were trained in addressing ADV.

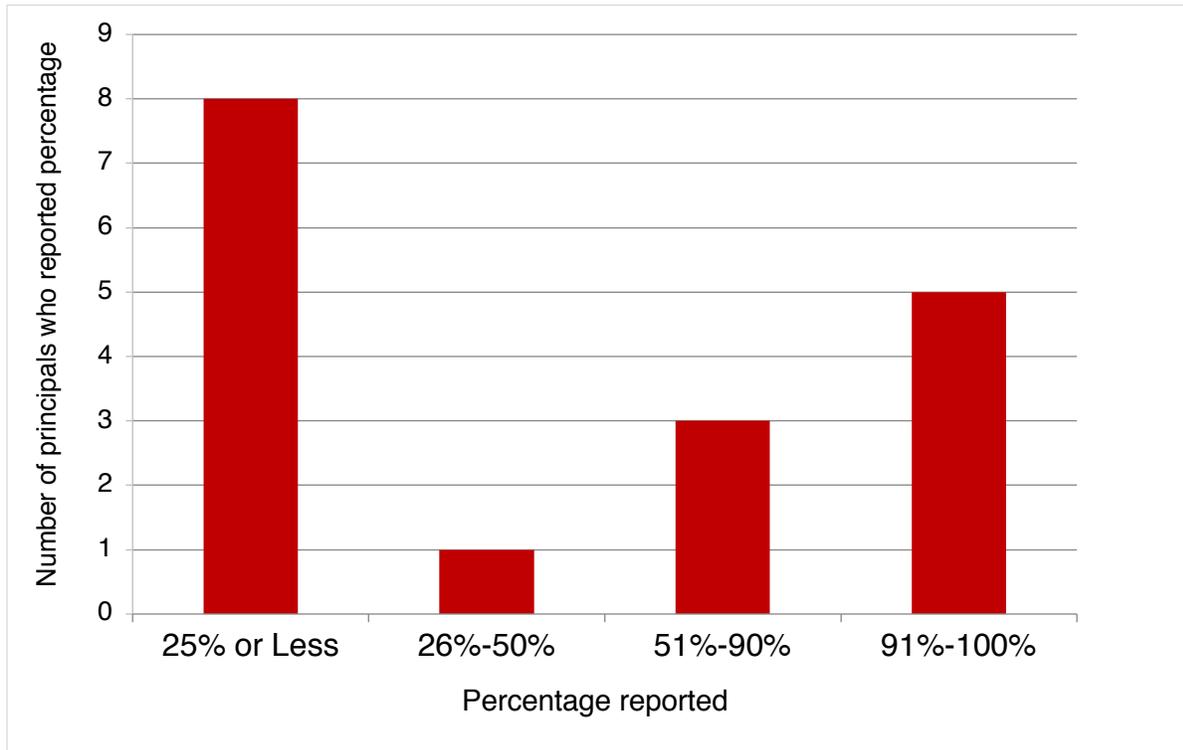


Figure 3. Percentage of school personnel receiving training ($n = 17$)

Participants were also asked if adolescent dating violence training addressed four specific topics (Figure 4). The entire subset of principals ($n = 17$) reported that information about helping victims of ADV was covered. Only three principals reported that they did not cover information about preventing ADV.

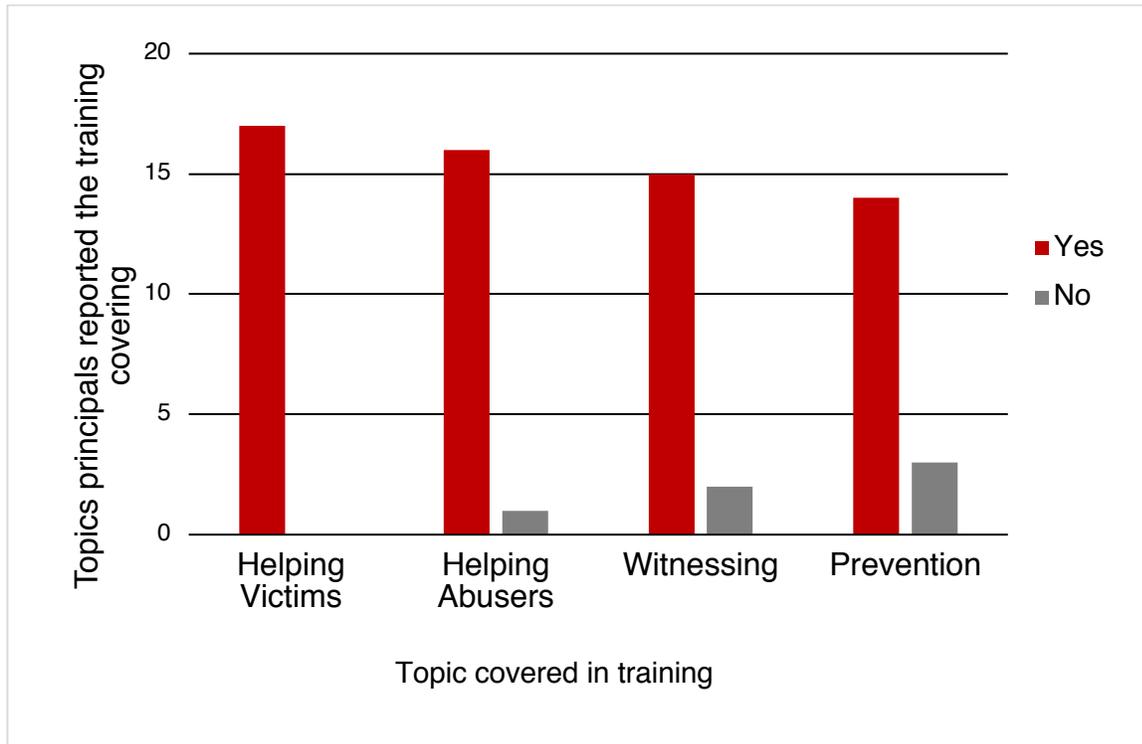


Figure 4. Topics covered in training

Student Education

Participants were asked if their school uses a model or curriculum to educate students on ADV. Slightly over half of participants said no, they do not use a model or curriculum (Figure 5).

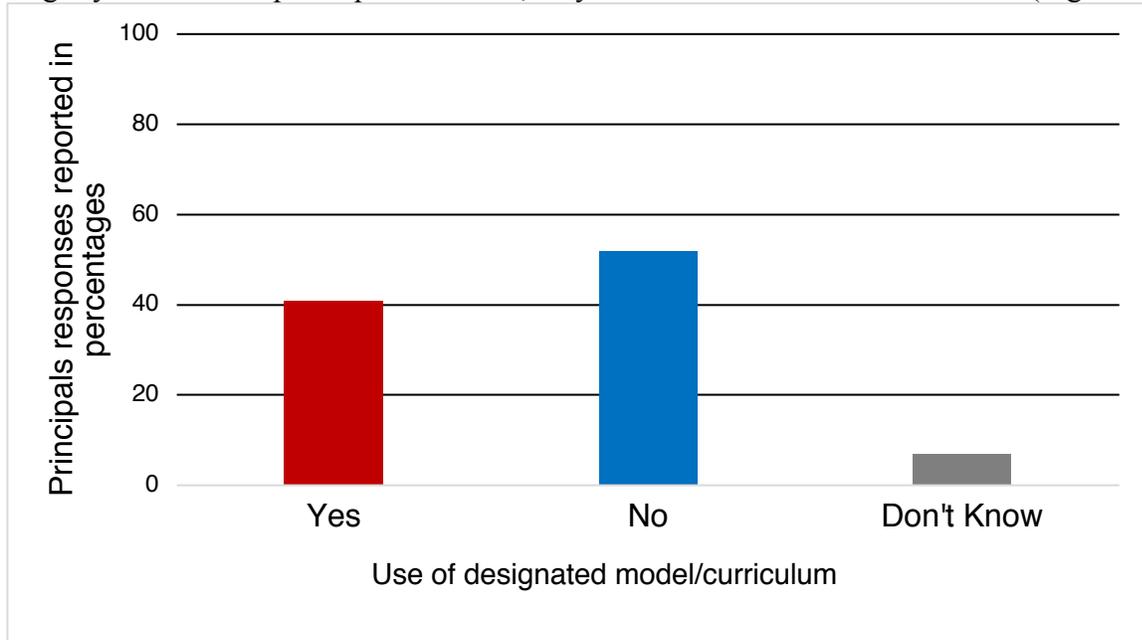


Figure 5. Does your school use a designated model or curriculum for adolescent dating violence education?

Participants who stated their school does use a designated model or curriculum for ADV education were asked to select the topics the model or curriculum contains. Of those who responded, 100 percent said their school's model or curriculum includes both the definition and warning signs of ADV. Almost all of curriculums included information on reporting, seeking assistance, helping a friend, and healthy dating (see Figure 6).

Participants were asked about the availability of information on ADV both in school and online. Overall, almost half of participants said yes, their school does have information posted in school about ADV; slightly over half said yes, their school does have information posted online about ADV (Figure 7).

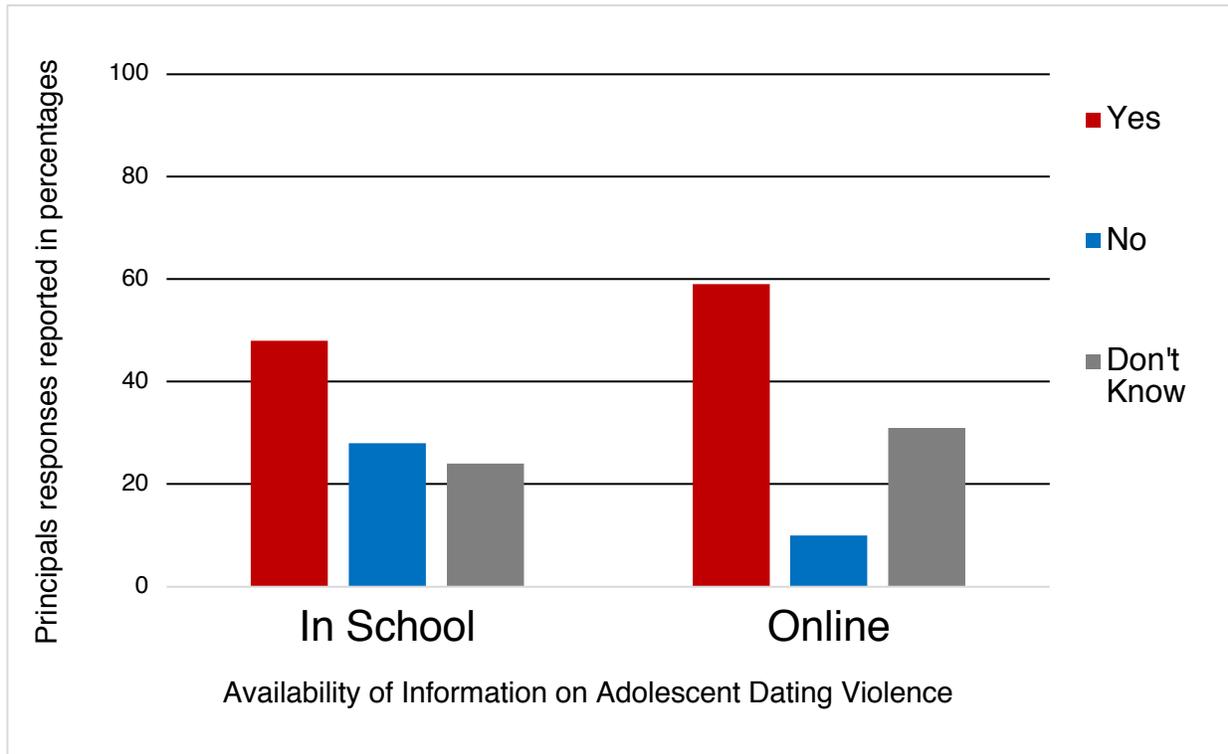


Figure 7. Availability of information on adolescent dating violence

Procedures to address ADV

Participants were asked to approximate the amount of times their school assisted a victim of ADV in the past two years (see Table 2). On average, participants reported that their school assisted three victims in the past two years. Two participants chose not to answer this question.

Table 2. Procedures and Incidents of Adolescent Dating Violence

	Total #	Mean	Min	Max
In the past two years, approximately how many times did your school assist victims?	27	3.07	0	15

In addition, participants were asked to select the statements that best described their school in respect to having a response protocol or procedure in place for reports and incidents of ADV. Slightly under half of the participants follow a response protocol for ADV for more than one school year. Less than 10% started this school year with a response protocol (see Figure 8).

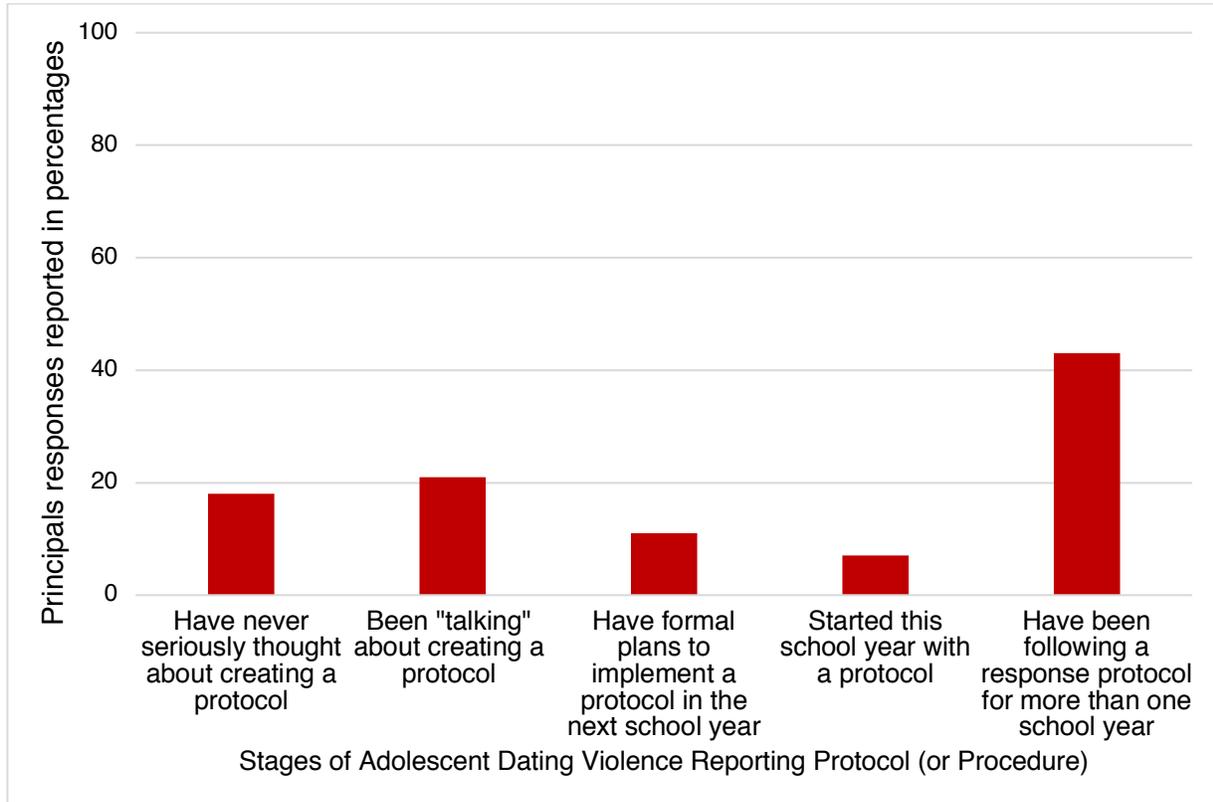


Figure 8. Stages of Adolescent Dating Violence Reporting Protocol (or Procedure)

On a Likert scale of 1 (*not very important*) to 5 (*very important*), participants were asked to rate the importance of ADV as an issue both to them as a principal and to their school community (administrators, teachers, parents, students, and others). The mean rating of importance of dating violence as an issue was on average higher for principals than it was for their school community (Figure 9).

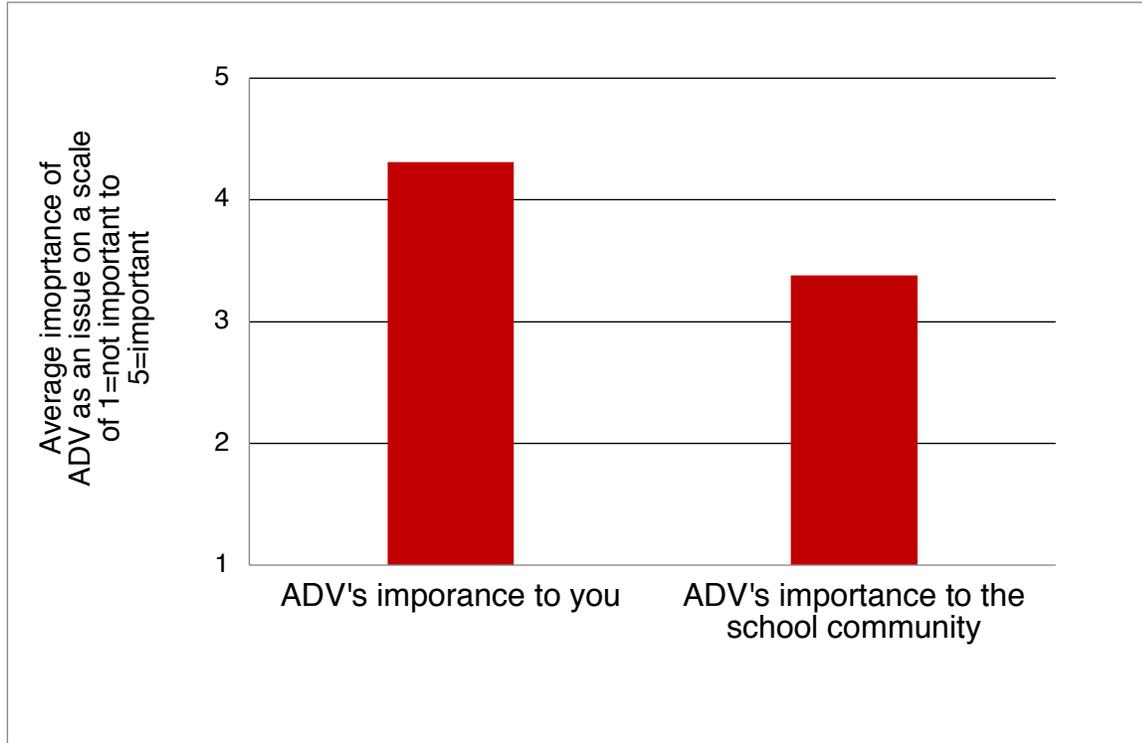


Figure 9. Importance of adolescent dating violence as an issue ($n = 29$)

School Readiness

The Perceptions of School Readiness scale measured five areas of school readiness to address ADV on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Mean scores for each area are reported in Table 3. The area of “Efforts” consisted of two items that asked about programs and policies to prevent and help victims of ADV. A mean score of 2.91 indicated that principals agreed that their school has policies and programs to prevent and help victims of adolescent dating violence. “Knowledge of Efforts” asked principals about knowledge of students and staff concerning its ADV programs. Principals’ mean score of 2.57 was neutral. “Resources” consisted of two statements asking if principals agreed that “a lot of time and money” is available to fund programs and assist victims of ADV. Principals disagreed that enough time or money is being provided to fund programs for ADV or help victims, with a mean score of 2.17. The area of “Climate Related to School Personnel” consisted of four statements asking if principals thought their ADV is an important topic and whether they believed that staff would intervene in situations of ADV for the victim and perpetrator. Principals had a mean score of 3.28, indicating they agreed that their staff views ADV as an important issue and would intervene in situations of violence on behalf of the victim or perpetrator. “Knowledge of the Issue” had a mean score for principals of 2.52, making this result neutral.

Table 3. Perceptions of School Readiness ($n = 29$) on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*)

	Mean	Min	Max
Efforts	2.91	2	3.50
Knowledge of Efforts	2.57	1	3
Resources	2.17	1	4
Climate Related to School Personnel	3.28	2.25	4
Knowledge of the Issue	2.52	1.50	4

Discussion

The small sample size requires using caution when generalizing findings. However, within our sample, the findings indicate useful trends and suggestions for further investigation.

Our study reveals a number of positive findings related to principals and ADV. Principals reported ADV as an important issue. This suggests the opportunity to implement intervention through collaboration with individuals in power to create systemic change (Banyard, 2015). Principals also reported that their staff viewed ADV as an important issue. Although more research is needed, this suggests the capacity for future cooperation between principals and staff when addressing ADV. Principals also believed that if their staff witnessed an act of ADV, they would intervene to stop it. Further, the availability of information regarding ADV through literature and online resources in the school setting is important. This is especially true regarding online information, which may be more conducive to teens that spend more time online. The NJDOE provides educational, policy, and online resources on ADV, including information about recommended curricula. Despite the availability of these resources at least half of the principals (60%) surveyed reported that they did not use a designated curriculum or model. Further research is needed to understand why schools do not select designated curricula, whether it is due to a lack of awareness of models, their preference for other curricula, including home-grown programs, or a lack of curricula altogether. It is also important to determine what key, evidence-based components should compose the ADV education and to communicate those standards with each school. Schools may also need technical assistance, capacity building, or additional resources to successfully implement ADV education. Our findings demonstrate that the lowest area of school readiness to address ADV among principals in this sample is availability of resources. It is possible that principals lack the resources, money, and time necessary to effectively prevent and respond to ADV. Interviews or further exploration with school personnel may be helpful for better understanding the barriers school personnel face when trying to address the issue of ADV.

Under statute N.J.S.A. 18A:37-33, the Board of Education or Board of Trustees in each school district is required to have a policy in place regarding the prevention, response, and education of students along with the school-wide community to address ADV. Additionally, the policy must include a minimum of six components, two of them being dating violence reporting procedures and guidelines for responding to at-school incidents of ADV. The findings from this study reveal that only about half of the participants in this sample have a response protocol for students who report instances of ADV. These response protocols were either implemented at the beginning of this most current school year or have been in place for more than one school year. The rest of the participants were in various beginning stages of implementing plans, discussing plans, or having never seriously thought about a protocol. Given that the sample was small and not representative, further research is needed to determine if this is the case beyond this sample. If so, future research is necessary on why there is a lack of response protocols or procedures to ADV, despite the requirement under New Jersey statute.

This study reveals that over half of the surveyed principals reported that their schools' personnel have received training to address ADV within the past two years. However, at almost half of schools who had training, 25% or less of school personnel participated. These findings demonstrate that while training on ADV may be offered to school personnel, a very small percentage receive the training. This can lead to challenges related to implementing ADV education and prevention. Future research should examine what prevents all faculty and staff from receiving ADV training.

Another area for future research could be exploring whether perceptions on the importance of ADV differ across types of school professionals. For example, our findings showed that the average rating of perceived importance of ADV as an issue was higher for principals than it was for their perceptions of the school community. Further research could assess if there is a significant difference in the principal's perception of the importance of addressing ADV as compared to other members of the school community (e.g. administrators, teachers, parents, students, and others). There could also be exploration to understand how community or neighborhood characteristics impact perceptions of ADV in school settings and any subsequent school guidelines or policies implementation.

In conclusion, while this study is not generalizable, findings reveal significant trends in New Jersey schools' efforts to address ADV. Further research will provide a more comprehensive assessment on the nature of education and prevention efforts in the state.

References

- Ackard, D. M., Eisenberg, M. E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2007). Long-term impact of adolescent dating violence on the behavioral and psychological health of male and female youth. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, *151*(5), 476-481.
- Banyard, V. L. (2015). *Toward the next generation of bystander prevention of sexual and relationship violence: Action coils to engage communities*. New York, New York: Springer.
- Black, B. M., Weisz, A. N., Preble, K. M., & Sharma, B. (2015). Parents' awareness of and anticipated responses to their teens' reports of dating violence. *Journal of Family Social Work*, *18*(1), 3-20.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006). Physical dating violence among high school students – United States, 2003. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2006; *55*, 19.
- Curva, I. (2011). Exposing the Invisibility of Teen Dating Violence in New Jersey. *Women's Rights Law Report*, *33*(4), 471-492.
- Decker, M., Silverman, J., & Raj, A. (2005). Dating violence and sexually transmitted disease/HIV testing and diagnosis among adolescent females. *Pediatrics*, *116*, 272-276.
- Exner-Cortens, D., Eckenrode, J., & Rothman, E. (2013). Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. *Pediatrics*, *131*(1), 71-78.
- Foshee, V. A., Reyes, H. L. M., Gottfredson, N. C., Chang, L. Y., & Ennett, S. T. (2013). A longitudinal examination of psychological, behavioral, academic, and relationship consequences of dating abuse victimization among a primarily rural sample of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *53*(6), 723-729.
- Haynie, D. L., Farhat, T., Brooks-Russell, A., Wang, J., Barbieri, B., & Iannotti, R. J. (2013). Dating violence perpetration and victimization among US adolescents: Prevalence, patterns, and associations with health complaints and substance use. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *53*(2), 194-201.
- Kann, L., McManus, T., Harris W.A., Shanklin, S.L., Flint, K.H., Hawkins, J., ... Zaza, S. (2016). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance- United States, 2015. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*. 2016; *65*(6), 1-50.
- Khubchandani, J., Price, J. H., Thompson, A., Dake, J. A., Wiblishauser, M., & Telljohann, S. K. (2012). Adolescent dating violence: A national assessment of school counselors' perceptions and practices. *Pediatrics*, *130*(2), 202-210.
- Molidor, C., & Tolman, R. M. (1998). Gender and contextual factors in adolescent dating violence. *Violence Against Women*, *4*(2), 180-194.
- Roberts, T. A., Klein, J. D., & Fisher, S. (2003). Longitudinal effect of intimate partner abuse on high-risk behavior among adolescents. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *157*(9), 875-881.
- State of New Jersey, Department of Education (2011) *Model Policy and Guidance for Incidents Involving Dating Violence.*, Trenton, New Jersey: Author.
- Suldo, S. M., Gormley, M. J., DuPaul, G. J., & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2014). The impact of school mental health on student and school-level academic outcomes: Current status of the research and future directions. *School Mental Health*, *6*(2), 84-98.



Wilson, K. L., Szucs, L. E., Shipley, M., Fehr, S. K., McNeill, E. B., & Wiley, D. C. (2019). Identifying the inclusion of national sexuality education standards utilizing a systematic analysis of teen dating violence prevention curriculum. *Journal of School Health, 89*(2), 106-114.