



I Know Trigonometry, But What's a Healthy Relationship?

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Abstract: The standard set by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) of mental health professionals to college and university students is 1 to 1,000-1,500 however the national average is 1 to 1,600. Students are taught history, math, and even art, however many leave school without ever learning what a healthy relationship is. This lack in education is directly correlated with statistics that show that suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24, resulting in roughly 6,769 deaths each year. By teaching children from a young age to have a strong sense of self and how to create and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, I believe we can drastically reduce the statistics on this critical issue facing our youth.

BACKGROUND

The state of New York describes characteristics of a healthy relationship as having 'honesty, trust, respect and open communication.' Furthermore, New York states that the 4 building blocks of a healthy relationship are boundaries, communication, trust, and consent. (3) One's sense of self refers to the way one thinks about and views his or her traits, beliefs, and purpose within the world. (4) Having a strong sense of self and self-worth is the basis of creating and maintaining healthy relationships. Without a strong sense of self, an individual will struggle to create and maintain boundaries and will likely have unhealthy levels of trust in others. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth 10-24 and although depression can be a familial trait, there are a multitude of other contributing factors. Many teens who suffer from depression also tend to have a history of abuse, conflict with family, difficulties academically, or difficulties with interpersonal relationships and can may turn to alcohol or drug use as a coping mechanism (2). The National Research on Domestic Violence, VAWNET, found that 1 in 3 high school students experience physical and or sexual violence by someone they are dating, and nearly half of high school female and 1 in 4 male students who have experienced this have seriously contemplated or attempted suicide. (5) Furthermore, 69.5% of women and 53.6% of men who report having been physically or sexually abused or stalked by a partner, report that they first experienced abuse between the ages of 11-24. (6)

HYPOTHESIS

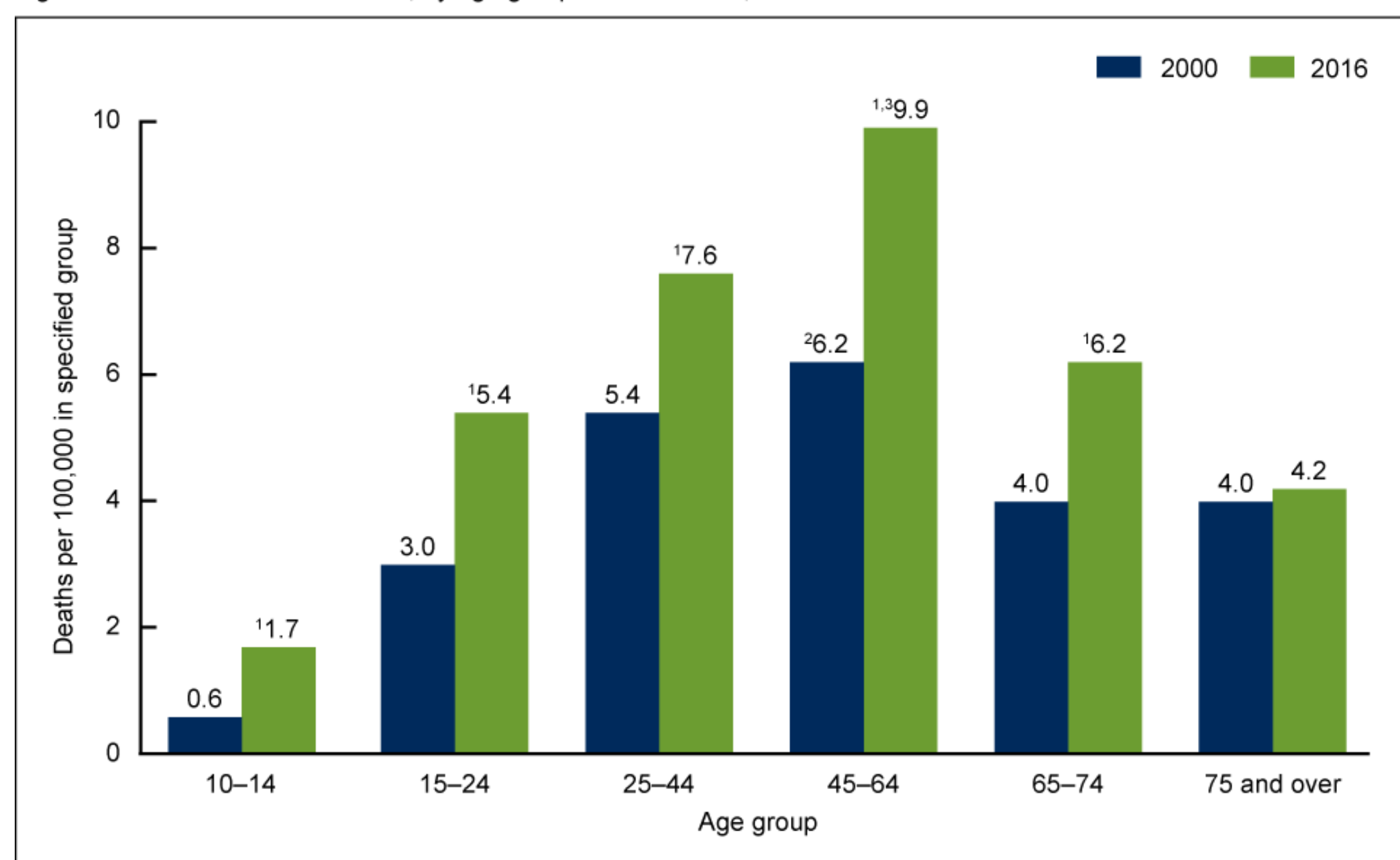
Adding curriculum and programs into grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, teaching students about healthy relationships and emphasizing a strong sense of self will dramatically reduce the statistics surrounding dating violence and suicide in youth ages 10-24.

LIMITATIONS

As mentioned by the IACS, budget and feasibility of having enough mental health professionals per student is a difficulty faced nationwide. The perk in my proposition is that it can be implemented by a travelling team or professionals in the field of Psychology. This will ensure comfortability and familiarity with the subject matter as well as completion of the curriculum. While teaching students once every 2 years will have its benefits, results would be more dramatic if students were given more direct access to mental health resources.

STATISTICS

Figure 2. Suicide rates for females, by age group: United States, 2000 and 2016



¹Significantly higher than 2000 rate, $p < 0.05$.
²Significantly higher than rates for all other age groups in 2000, $p < 0.05$.
³Significantly higher than rates for all other age groups in 2016, $p < 0.05$.
NOTES: Suicides were identified using *International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision*, underlying cause-of-death codes: U03, X60-X84, and Y87.0. Access data table for Figure 2 at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db309_table.pdf#2.
SOURCE: NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality.

PROPOSAL

Beginning with 6th grade students, professionals in the field of psychology should begin teaching students about self-efficacy, and the importance of having a strong sense of self. Along with focusing on oneself, students should also begin to learn about what a healthy relationship looks like; this will include but not be limited to interpersonal relationships with teachers, peers, and family members. In 8th grade the above curriculum will be continued yet more focused on the continuance of a strong sense of self, individuation will be introduced, as well as more of a focus on healthy dating relationships. Tenth grade students will have a refresh of the above and again, the curriculum will be more in depth and in line with the age of the students. Senior year will be the final stage and most intense stage of the study. As students begin to prepare for the next step in their lives, the above curriculum will be covered again and in greater depth and detail. Seniors will spend more time focusing on mindfulness and self efficacy as well as boundaries and the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

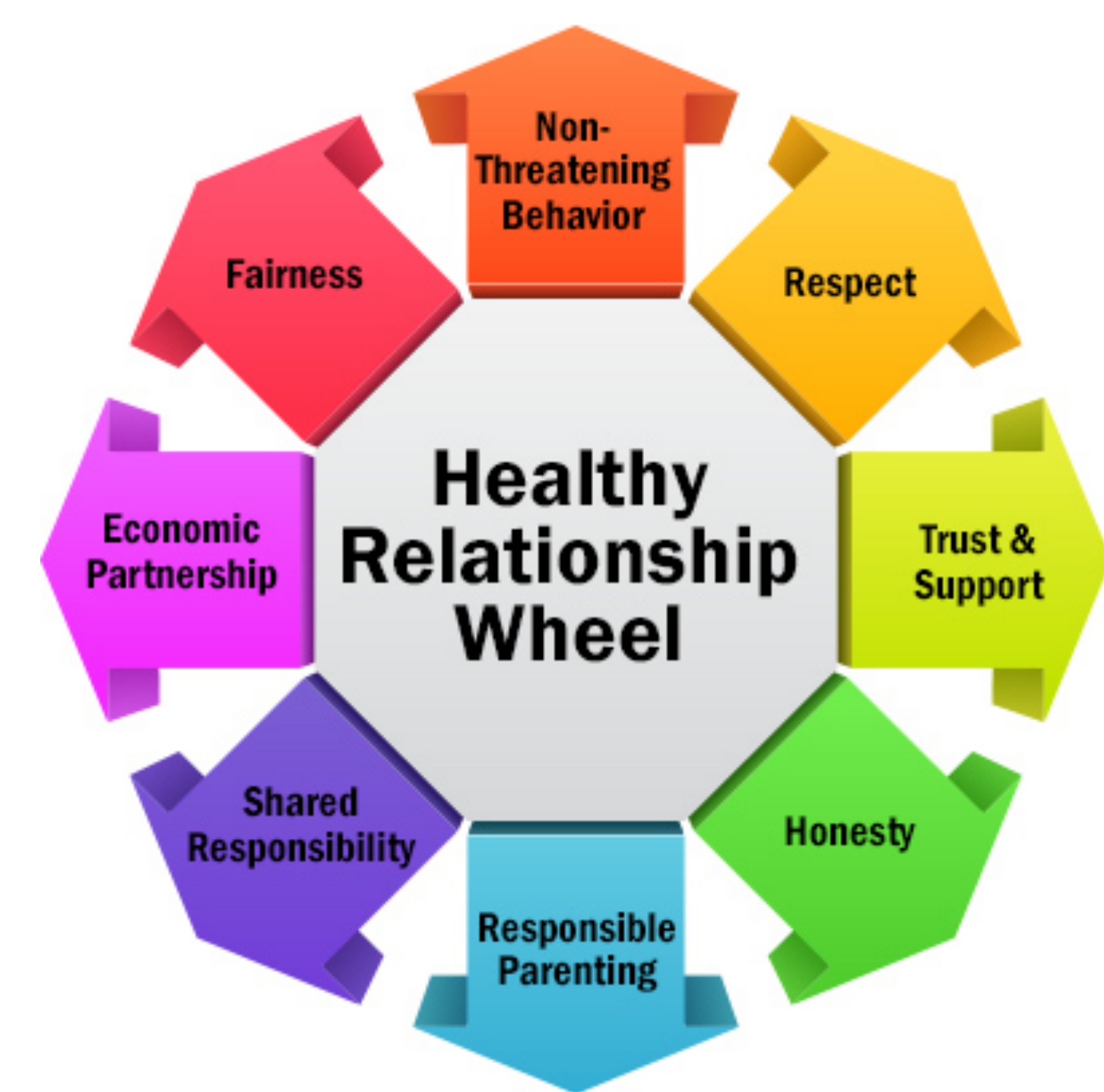
*Let's save
lives by
teaching
healthy
relationship
skills*

METHODOLOGY

While there are many programs that teach about teen dating violence, I am proposing a more diverse program. Programs such as Shifting Boundaries or BRIGHT focus on detecting and leaving a violent relationship while I propose starting at a more basic level as to avoid an abusive relationship before it starts. In the BRIGHT study, teachers were taught by psychologists about the curriculum, the importance, and how to teach students about healthy relationships. While the intention was well thought out, the study found that teachers struggled to connect with the students for many reasons. While most of the teachers involved believed the importance of teaching this curriculum, they stated that they didn't have time to fit in their regular curriculum on top of the BRIGHT program, therefore none of the teachers completed the entire BRIGHT curriculum. Furthermore, many teachers reported feeling uncomfortable with the material and therefore struggled to connect or keep student attention. While the curriculum itself seems strong, I would have it taught by a professional in the field of Psychology. This will increase the connection between teacher and student as the psychology professional will be more familiar and comfortable discussing difficult topics. The Shifting Boundaries program is similar to the BRIGHT program as it was also not taught by professionals in the field of psychology. What I liked about the Shifting Boundaries curriculum was that it also starts in 6th grade and it begins by discussing boundaries. While both of these programs have strong features, one pinnacle aspect I see missing in both is the development of one's own sense of self, which without, I don't see how someone could be successful in maintaining healthy relationships.

RESULTS

Findings in the BRIGHT program showed that students exposed to the curriculum either once or twice did not change their attitudes toward dating violence. Only 66% of the objectives were taught, teachers reported not having enough time to complete the standardized curriculum in addition to the new curriculum. There were two teachers in the BRIGHT study that didn't hold class at all and showed little to no commitment to the program. (7) In the SHIFTING BOUNDARIES program, the curriculum focused more on surveillance and familiarity of dating violence as well as safe places and finding a safe way out of a violent relationship. Findings of this program showed that while students gained knowledge as to the safe and unsafe areas of the school, there was no significant findings that this program was a success. (8) My proposal focuses more on avoiding and detecting an unhealthy or violent relationship before it starts, and will be taught by professionals in the field of psychology rather than placing the responsibility on teachers.



RESOURCES

- <http://iacsinc.org/staff-to-student-ratios.html>
- Daniel S, Goldston D. Interventions for suicidal youth: A review of the literature and developmental considerations. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*. 2009;39:252-268
- <https://www.ny.gov/teen-dating-violence-awareness-and-prevention/what-does-healthy-relationship-look>
- <https://study.com/academy/lesson/sense-of-self-in-psychology-definition-development-quiz.html>
- <https://vawnet.org/school-dating-violence-epidemic>
- Breiding, M.J., Chen J., & Black, M.C. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2158244014551716>
- <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=226>

1 IN 3 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
EXPERIENCE EITHER PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE,
OR BOTH, BY SOMEONE THEY ARE DATING.

See more statistics: breakthecycle.org
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YOUNG WOMEN 18-24
EXPERIENCE THE HIGHEST RATES OF INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE.

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