PROGRAMA GENER@T: SOCIAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE PREVENTION OF DATING VIOLENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

AINOA MATEOS, PERE AMORÓS, CRESCENCIA PASTOR, DANIELA COJOCARU

PROGRAMA GENER@T:
Social Educational Programme
for the Prevention of Dating Violence
among Adolescents

Ainoa MATEOS[1], Pere AMORÓS[2], Crescencia PASTOR[3], Daniela COJOCARU[4]

Abstract

The social educational program presented in this article, GENER@T, has been designed and developed as a response to the needs found in the diagnostic multi-method study descriptive which was carried out between 2008 and 2011. 701 adolescents from 5 State secondary schools in different parts of Spain took part in the study. The aim of the diagnosis was to detect social educational needs about gender based violence in adolescents of between 12 and 14. The program presented is innovative in the prevention of gender based violence in two ways: firstly it aims to anticipate the first dating relationships, aiming the intervention at the pre-adolescent stage and secondly the 24 sessions which make up the program means it can be applied transversally as an "optative subject" in a formal educational field or as a workshop in a non- formal educational field. The program "GENER@-T" consists of three parts: the first part is a presentation of its characteristics, the second part is a theoretic guide which records a summary of the content needed to carry out the sessions and the third part is a description of the activities, their objectives, content, techniques and resources needed.

[1] University of Barcelona, Department of Methods of Investigation and Diagnosis in Education. Faculty of Pedagogy. P. de la Valld'Hebron 171, 08035 Barcelona, SPAIN. *Email: amateos@ub.edu*

[2] University of Barcelona, Department of Methods of Investigation and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Pedagogy. P. de la Valld'Hebron 171, 08035 Barcelona, SPAIN; Email: *pamoros@ub.edu*

[3] University of Barcelona, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Methods of Investigation and Diagnosis in Education. P. de la Valld'Hebron 171, 08035 Barcelona, SPAIN, E-mail: *cpastor@ub.edu*

[4] Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Iasi, Bd. Carol I no. 11, Iasi, ROMANIA; Email: *dananacu@gmail.com*

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Introduction

Gender based violence is a phenomenon with many causes affecting women all over the world, independent of their origin, culture, ethnic background or age.

As Lorente says (2001, 51) "*Aggression towards women is unmotivated disproportionate, excessive, extended and with the intention of teaching a lesson*" and this makes it different from other kinds of violence. The aim of this form of violence is not to injure the other person, but to legitimize a power, historically given to men which sets patterns of inequality, based on submission between both sexes and strait-jacketing them in social roles which are sexist, unequal and exclusive.

Violence against women has always existed, however study in this field is relatively recent , especially among the younger generation, (González, Muñoz, Peña, Gómez, & Fernández, 2007; González, 2008; González & Santana, 2001b; Lavoie, Hébert, Vézina, & Dufort, 2001; Mateos, 2012; Muñoz, González, & Graña, 2003; Vézina & Hébert, 2007). Gender based violence does not crop up spontaneously in a marriage or partnership, it frequently occurs during dating (González & Santana, 2001a). In the last few years study has focused its attention on the first romantic relationships as it is from here that patterns and prototypes of love can mark later relationships in adult life. To find out the origin of this type of violence and the way to prevent it, it is important to know the risk factors which lead to and maintain violence in the first dating relationships (Bagner, Storch, & Preston, 2007; Clifford, 1996; Manseau, Fernet, Hébert, Collin-Vezina, & Blais, 2008; O'Keefe, 2005; Vézina & Hébert, 2007)

Different studies about risk and protection factors in dating violence have focused especially on risk (González, 2008; Vézina & Hébert, 2007). It is worth pointing out the ambiguity here, these risk factors could be presented as protection factors depending, among other things, on the context, individual characteristics of the subject, support network etc. Some of these risk factors –which could turn into protective factors in the opposite way are: background of aggressive behaviour; background of child abuse or been witness to abuse in the family; greater power or different status; isolation and lack of resources; controlling relationships marked by jealousy; lack of sense of identity; mental disorders and alcoholism and/or drug abuse (Riggs, Caulfield, & Street, 2000).

A distortional idea about romantic love and the socialization of unequal gender roles are some of the issues mentioned in studies about factors which increase the risk of suffering gender based violence between partners (Barrón, Martinez-Inigo,

de Paul, & Yela, 1999; Bosch et al., 2007; Cavanagh, 2007; de Roda, Martínez-Iñigo, de Paúl, & Yela, 1999; Ferrer, Bosch, Ramis, Espinosa, & Navarro, 2006; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992; Lavoie et al., 2001; Yela, 2003). The learning of violence in relationships, either by example or because its use in previous relationships has been an effective strategy to reach its objectives, contributes to an increase in violence towards women (Lorente, 2001; Lorente, 2010). For adolescents to recognize a situation of gender based violence, as well as knowing the risks which increase its probability, it is necessary to be aware of and identify the first signs of a violent situation (González & Santana, 2001b).

Young people have an optimistic idea of risk (Gidycz, McNamara, & Edwards, 2006), they do not at first feel vulnerable towards ill-treatment from their partner. This feeling of *"it won't happen to me"* prevents them from recognizing the first signs of violence in their relationship. González and Santana (2001b) point out some of the signs for alarm: trying to formalize the relationship too soon, being excessively "romantic", over jealous, blaming others for problems, sexist attitudes, cruelty shown towards others and towards the partner, humiliation, commonly insulting the other, coercion strategies to initiate sex, etc.

This lack of a sense of risk, together with romantic myths which justify partner violence make it difficult for young people to let go of these violent relationships (Bosch et al., 2007; de Roda et al., 1999; Fundación Mujeres & UNED, 2004). There are many factors which influence the beginning of gender based violence in adolescent couples. Some of these predictive variables point at different ways from which prevention could be possible (González & Santana, 2001b). The risk factors and the protective factors mark the way to plan social-educational programs to prevent gender based partner violence. As O'Keefe (2005) says, primary prevention programs should include in their educational proposals different types of violence, signs for alert, ways of intimidation, implicit power and control as well as forming habits such as communication and conflict resolving to build healthy relationships.

Different national and international studies show adolescence, and therefore secondary education, as one of the most significant evolutionary stages in preventing gender based violence. The period of adolescence is ideal to work with preventing violence; adolescence represents a transition period towards adult roles, romantic relationships gain importance, and new experiences and risks are presented in love-sex relationships (Cipriani-Crauste & Fize, 2007; Ferraz, 2008; Pérez, Pinto, & Prieto, s.a.).

In this area, and from a scientific framework (Díaz-Aguado, 2003; Ferraz, 2008; González et al., 2010; Lorente, 2010) provide some recommendations for preventing gender based violence: to start the prevention of violence scheme before the age of 13, to anticipate the first dating relationships; to create a mood of conciliation; a continuity of social-educational programs and interventions;

training of teachers; encouraging the adolescents participation; giving importance to the risk ; including the prevention of sexism in the school curriculum; offering alternative models (masculinity, femininity, not violence); optimizing and creating materials.; implementing and improving the Tutorial Action Plan (PAT) and Coexistence Plan; community and institutional involvement. Coordinated plans; emphasis on potentials not on risks; encouraging changing attitudes, and behaviour which favours sex equality and partnerships which are free from violence; providing the means of recognizing different types of violence; breaking myths and stereotypes about violence and romantic love; promoting strategies to handle conflict; favouring equal partnerships free of violence; visualizing new roles of masculinity and femininity; offering alternatives to violence; education and empowerment of women, etc.

Our diagnostic multi-method descriptive study was taken from this theoretical and empirical context, (Mateos, 2012), and explains the beginnings of gender based violence in adolescent couples and offers guidelines for its prevention, in order to detect the social-educational needs in adolescents of between 12 and 14 regarding to gender based violence. A prevention program, GENER@t (Mateos, 2013)which will be presented in this article, was designed and developed from the results found in our study together with those from national and international scientific research.

Methodological approach

As seen in the theoretic discussion, the complexity of the phenomenon of gender based violence, especially among teenagers, means that research must continue to look into the causes of its initiation and the social-educational needs to prevent it. Our diagnostic investigation started from this basis with adolescents of between 12 and 14, to find out the needs they have regarding gender based violence and its prevention.

The study follows a multi-method design with the aim of providing a comprehensive description. It is composed of two studies: a) a study by questionnaire, with the technique of attitude scales to collect extensive descriptive information to compliment the qualitative methods; b) a qualitative study to compliment the questionnaire. The following techniques were used to collect information: situation analysis, discussion groups with adolescents, informal interviews with teaching staff and the field diary. We were working towards the complementarity of both the qualitative and quantitative methods, aiming to overcome the dichotomy established historically in the debate over methodology. By combining the methods we can provide valid, reliable and thorough information (Hernández, Pozo, & Alonso, 2004).

The choice of using either a quantitative or qualitative method in the study depends on the information which you want to obtain at each stage of the diagnosis. The use of different sources, methods and techniques of data collection allows for the triangulation of data and triangulation of methods (Martínez, 2007).

Participants

A total of 701 adolescents, from 5 State secondary schools in different parts of Catalonia (Spain) took part in the study: Barcelona, Granollers, Sabadell, Rubí and Hospitalet del Llobregat. It should also be mentioned that the teaching staff of these adolescents also took part in an informal way.

The adolescents who participated in the study were chosen from a non-probabilistic sample. We went to educational centres which gave us permission and which fulfilled the following requirements: to speak to adolescents in first and second course of secondary school (ESO); where in the State secondary school (IES) there was a person interested in participating in the study; centres interested and committed to the study; commitment to apply the methodology to the different groups of first and second course of secondary education ; geographic dispersion of the centres; a selection of centres taking into account their characteristics and avoiding bias (social-economical, levels of   immigration etc.).

The aim was to always guarantee that the characteristics of the participants reflect those of the population in general.

The descriptive characteristics of the 701 adolescents who participated in the study are: the distribution by centre is not equal, there are predominantly more participants from the educational centre in Sabadell; there is an equitable distribution between sexes (64% boys and 49,36 girls); the average age is about 13; the distribution between academic course is balanced (53,07% 1st course of secondary; 47,93% 2nd course of secondary); the dominating religious group is Christian (63,36%) followed by agnostic(27,15%); the students are predominantly of local origin(72,4%) and also their parents (71,21%); the majority come from a nuclear family–father, mother and child/children (63,04%), followed by the extensive family (15,47%) and single-parent families(10,17%).

Means

The methods used to collect the information were the following: (1) Attitude scales regarding gender based violence; (2) Documental analysis of pleadings-situation of physical abuse and psychological abuse; (3) Discussion groups: 10 discussion groups of 8 people in each; (4) Informal interviews with teaching staff (by telephone, by email, face to face etc.); (5) Researcher's field diary.

By using these techniques of gathering information we could collect data related to gender based violence from a cognitive dimension, (what the adolescents know about gender based violence), the dimension of emotional attitude (which beliefs, attitudes and myths about gender based violence are revealed in the adolescent population studied) and the behavioural dimension (how the adolescents react when faced with gender based violence and the evaluation of this change in behaviour).

Procedures and analysis

A total of 701 attitude scales were carried out of the Likert type, with 20 items, which evaluate the level of agreement towards gender based violence. 701 analysis situations (physical and psychological) and 10 discussion groups (80 participants) were also done to complement the quantitative scale. Informal interviews with teaching staff were also carried out to add to this information, to collect data which could contribute to the interpretation of the results and improve the study process. Finally, the researcher's diary collected reflections, anecdotes and other issues found in the study.

The data from the attitude scales were analyzed using the statistics program SPSS v.15. The situations for analysis were studied in a qualitative way, the first 100 situations by means of the professional analysis of qualitative data software Atlas ti v.5., to reach a process of data saturation. The statistics program SPSS v.15 was used to analyse the 701 situations (physical and psychological abuse). The framework to quantify this qualitative data was produced from the analysis of the first situations, by grouping answers, categorizing the qualitative in quantitative. It was sufficiently flexible to include non-predictable answers.

The discussion groups (10 groups) were recorded with the participant's permission and the confidential agreement. They were transcribed literally and then analysed by means of the professional software Atlas ti v.5.

The content analysis, both the analysis of situations (n=100) as well as the discussion groups (nâ10), was carried out using a method of codes which distinguished the following dimensions: concept, perception, beliefs, proposals to deal with the subject and the interest it evoked.

Results

The qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the study, in triangulation with the scientific literature on gender based violence in adolescence has made it necessary to define the needs detected in the study, to prioritize them and convert them into objectives for GENER@T program (Mateos, 2013).

Table I. *The transformation of the needs detected into objectives of the progam (Mateos, 2013:22)*

DIMENSION	NEEDS DETECTED	GENERAL OBJECTIVES	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
COGNITIVE	1) Difficulty to identify the different forms of partner abuse, especially psychological. 2) Partner violence is defined in terms of physical relations. 3) The seriousness of the violence depends on the level of injury caused and the intention of the act. 4) Boys identified fewer examples of ill treatment related to the relationship and freedom than girls. 5) Jealousy was identified with feelings of protection and love. 6) The association of abuse to being sexual and rape, without considering other types of abuse. 7) Lack of knowledge of existing resources in their immediate context to help victims of physical abuse. 8) Justification of some forms of abuse due to cultural reasons.	1) To identify situations of gender based violence, especially in partnerships.	1) To know the basic articles of Human Rights, the Spanish Constitution and the Organic Law 1/2004 od Protection Measures against gender based violence. 2) To recognize the different forms of gender based violence. 3) To know the levels of incidence of gender based violence between partners. 4) To find out the existing local resources in support for women and victims of gender based violence. 5) Think about the inequalities between the sexes.
ATTITUDE	1) Myths about romantic love. 2) Beliefs, myths and stereotypes about gender based violence. 3) Misconceptions about the seriousness of psychological abuse. 4) Stereotype beliefs about traditional roles of men and women. 5) Explicit ideas of sexism between adolescent girls and boys. 6) Boys have more sexist and violent attitudes than girls.	2) Integrate attitudes of zero tolerance towards gender based violence.	1) Discuss myths and stereotypes in traditional gender roles, gender based violence and romantic love. 2) Build together values free from violence and male hierarchy. 3) Integrate attitudes, values and models as alternatives to aggression and violence.
BEHAVIOURAL	1) Boys have a higher score than girls in the attitude scales, showing a need to make them aware of zero tolerance towards violence 2) Boys do not empathize as much as girls with the figure of victim in the situations analyzed 3) Boys and girls saw the need to work on the theme as they saw the possibility of being in a situation of abuse, especially the girls.	3) Adapt behaviour in partnership relationships.	1) Develop alternative ways of resolving conflicts thus preventing gender based. 2) Form relationships of equality. 3) Learn ways of changing behaviour to become more assertive in relationships.

Needs detected in the study

The main needs found regarding gender based violence in adolescents of between 12 and 14 were made into general and specific objectives of the program (*Table I*).

Design and implementation of the program GENER@T

The progress of the design and implementation of the program (Mateos, 2013), including the activities, content and resources has been a spiral process. Each aspect of the program responds to planning and reflection on the possible effects of the social-educational proposals. The program rose from the reflection and dialogue about the proposal of a program and the fundamental theory about gender based violence and adolescents. To predict the possible effects the program may have and its viability in the context of education it was checked by experienced teaching staff of different Secondary schools and also that of the University of Barcelona. These experts suggested improvements to the definitive program proposal.

Contents of the program. Once the needs of the program had been changed into goals (general and specific), the themes and the theoretic justification of the content were decided. The process of developing the activities, strategies, resources was carried out and then checked by experts and the final program could be designed. The contents of the program, in the same way as the investigation diagnosis, were organized in three dimensions: a) *cognitive*: Human Rights, the Spanish Constitution and the Organic Law 1/2004 of Protection Measures against gender based violence; the level of gender based violence; the factors of risk and protection in partner violence ; the current resources of support to women and victims of gender based violence; gender and culture–socialization of gender, patriarchy and sexism -; sexual equality versus gender inequality in different areas–family, work, social-; b) *attitudinal*/*emotional:* myths, love and violence –stereotypes of gender and violence, the ideal of romantic love and myths about violence-; gender based violence and adolescence; emotional expression–love, passion and violence-; caring behavior as an alternative model to bad treatment b)*behavioural;* resolving conflicts; self-esteem; self-affirmation of individual rights and social and communicative skills.

Structure of the program. The program is aimed at the prevention of gender based violence in adolescent couples, especially between the ages of twelve and fourteen, in order to anticipate first dating relationships. It is especially designed to be applied in formal education, although its characteristics could be applied in informal educational contexts. The program consists of three different parts: a) firstly, the characteristics of the program are explained, its background, its aims, content and the didactic strategies it proposes; b) secondly, a guide is produced

for the teaching or educational staff, which summarizes the theory of the content necessary for its implementation; c) thirdly, the sessions are explained with the activities which are suggested (objectives, content, techniques and resources needed). The program consists of a total of 24 one hour sessions. The teaching staffs have a theoretic guide of the content of the program in order to carry out the session. Each session follows the following structure: introduction; objectives; content; activities (expected timing, strategies and resources needed, introduction to the activity, development of the activity and its conclusions) evaluation and bringing the activity to a close. The program is intended as a way of helping and providing the teaching staff with a first approach to its contents, and from them it can be amplified and intensified according to the characteristics of the group. The program marks the necessary steps to organize the sessions: before, during and after, as well as methods and procedures to carry out the evaluation. Even though the program provides a theoretic guide it is considered necessary that the teaching staff who carry it through have some instruction in gender issues.

The program is novel because of its complimentary focus of factors of risk and factors of protection and also due to its structure and the use of multimedia resources both during its development and for its evaluation. It offers tools and strategies to design a plan of prevention of gender based violence from a holistic point of view, including cognitive, attitudinal-emotional and behavioral dimensions.

Strategies and program techniques. The set of techniques and strategies suggested in the program is based on group work: the learning portfolio, research work, preparation of a thematic web (blog), exercises with pencil and paper (individual work), group work (small and big), theoretic explanation to teaching staff and pupils, analysis of videos, case analysis (situations, songs, etc.), artistic expression (collage, wall poster, etc.), animated stories, guided discussion, brainstorming and role plays. The techniques adopted by the "GENER@-T" program allow us to work on the cognitive, attitudinal-emotional and behavioural issued in a systematic and structured way.

Evaluation strategies. In order to evaluate if the program improves the situation and attains its goals the following evaluation strategies of process and results are to be used: students field diary, learning portfolio, preparation of the web and multimedia test (pre-test and post-test).

Conclusions

The prevention program presented in this article aims to prevent gender based violence in first dating relationships among adolescents. To do this, the program introduces various innovations in its social-educational plan:

1) The 24 1-hour sessions imply *a prolonged implementation*. Scientific research in prevention points out a lack of programs of longer duration. They stress the importance of doing prevention programs for longer periods as they are more effective (González et al., 2010).

2) It concentrates on the pre-adolescent years, from 12 to 14, following the recommendations from a scientific framework, which urge the promotion of prevention plans before first dating(González & Santana, 2001b; Lorente, 2010) and especially , during adolescence, as this is when the transition to adult roles begins, romantic relationships become more important, and these new experiences include risks related to health, affection, sex (Cipriani-Crauste & Fize, 2007; Ferraz, 2008; Pérez et al., s.a.).

3) *It is introduced as an "optional subject"*, which means that for the first time in a formal educational context the theme is treated in a similar way to other educational subjects. Traditionally this theme was only discussed in the Tutorial plan (PAT) or touched on in other subjects such as Citizenship or Ethics.

4) Its structure, content and methodology make it *applicable in different social-educational fields (*Secondary schools, Residential care centres, recreation centres etc.) and participants. It can also be adapted to older age groups by varying the level of the theoretical material and the discussion material.

5) *Structure of the program.* By structuring the program in three groups (characteristics of the program; content guide; session organization) the teaching staff know the background to the program, its focus and the theoretical elements necessary to implement it. The sessions are set out thoroughly and with timing guides making them easy for the teacher to carry out.

6) *Production and use of audiovisual material* to develop and evaluate the program: a) animated stories which show a situation of physical abuse, another of a psychological nature and another in a sexual context*(adobe flash player);* the students create a blog as a final project; *and, an evaluative pre*-test and post-test (*adobe flash player*) to compare their understanding before and after the program regarding cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural issues.

7) *Combining various didactic strategies* during the program to avoid repetition in consecutive sessions: role plays, working in small and big groups, animated stories, analysis of songs and videos, brainstorming, pen and paper exercises, creating a blog, research work, learning portfolio, etc. The program is mainly based on strategies of group intervention as they have been proven to be effective in many other programs (Amorós et al., 2005; Amorós et al., 2010; Amorós et al., 2011).

8) *The use of technology and the internet as a self-learning tool.* During the program the students searched for information, both in printed form and electronic (Internet) to approach the subject in a more individual way, respecting the learning pace of each participant. The last part of the presentation of content by the teaching staff calls for the information found by the students.

9) *Resilient approach.* The protection factors which contribute to creating violence-free relationships are worked on. Although the sessions and the content show the risk factors which increase the possibilities of suffering or generating partner violence, the focus is more on factors which combat these risks: self-esteem, individual basic rights, recognizing different types of violence, resources of attention for women and victims of gender based violence in their immediate environment etc.

10) *Training Seminar for teaching staff.* During the needs analysis the teaching staff demonstrated a lack of knowledge in the field of gender based violence. They also appreciated the opportunity of the training offered in the application of the program. A training seminar for staff was therefore considered necessary in the design and development of the program. This would include theory about gender based violence as well as the characteristics, the methods and the evaluation of the program itself. These factors are important to guarantee the viability of the program and the evaluation of its success.

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