

# Young people and violence against women

David Gadd, Claire Fox and Becky Hale  
report on the REaDAPt project

*The European Parliament's resolution of 29 November 2009 called for member states to 'step up measures to prevent gender-based violence among young people by providing targeted education campaigns'. This is a logical response to the problem of violence against women, since virtually every national study of domestic violence reveals that it is younger groups of women who are at greatest risk of victimisation.*

Indeed, some studies suggest the peak ages for victimisation – and thus offending – of this kind may be aged 16 or below (Walby and Allen, 2004; Barter et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2012). Intervening before victimisation levels escalate has therefore enormous potential.

## The REaDAPt project

In the REaDAPt – Relationship Education and Domestic Abuse Prevention tuition – project, we have been looking at preventative education in sites in England, France, and Spain. We have also been working in Malta to establish new provision there. Here we outline what the REaDAPt project reveals about the challenges involved in developing a preventative approach to the elimination of violence against women.

## Prevention programmes

The REaDAPt project used a quasi-experimental design to measure attitudinal change among children exposed to three programmes:

1. *Relationships without Fear*, a programme delivered in primary and secondary schools by a charity called *Arch* based in North Staffordshire, England.

One-hour sessions are delivered over six weeks.

2. *La Máscara del Amor (The Masks of Love)*, a programme run by the General Directorate for Prevention of Gender Violence and Juvenile Reform in Murcia, Spain. The programme consists of six one-hour sessions and is delivered to young people aged 14–16 years.
3. *Filles et Garçons, en route pour l'Égalité (Girls And Boys, Let's Go for Equality)*, a programme that is delivered by specialists who work in schools and vocational training centres in Muret, France where young people aged 13–25 attend. The programme normally comprises of a single session lasting a minimum of 90 minutes.

In all three sites secondary school students completed the Attitudes towards Domestic Violence (ADV) questionnaire before and after

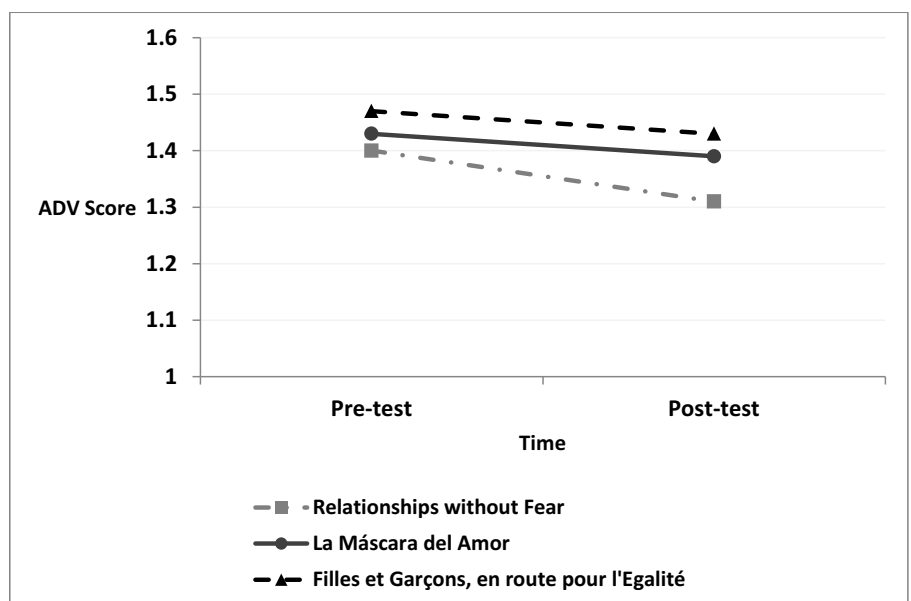
they had received the intervention. There are six situations outlined in the ADV, and for each one the respondent is asked first about the acceptability of a man hitting a woman, and second about the acceptability of a woman hitting a man. In total 1047 secondary school students completed both the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. The statistical significance of the attitude change, from pre-test to post-test, for each intervention site was assessed using a related t-test. Seven focus groups were also conducted with a total of 51 young people across the three intervention sites to explore their opinions about the programmes they had completed.

## What worked

Our analyses revealed that the six session interventions – *Relationships without Fear* and *La Máscara del Amor* – were effective at reducing the social acceptability of domestic violence. *Filles et Garçons, en route pour l'Égalité* appeared only to have a statistically significant impact on children's attitudes when delivered over the course of two or more sessions.

These were important findings for those who were undertaking this intervention work, since it assured them that preventative education – whether delivered by teachers briefed in the issues or by outside

Pre-test and post-test scores for each programme



## Percentages of young people who thought it was acceptable for someone to hit their partner in some situations

	English site	Spanish site	French site
All	36.9	32.9	60.0
Girls	20.8	29.9	58.0
Boys	50.3	34.9	61.5

agencies – could reduce young people's acceptance of violence in relationships.

However, in making this discovery we also came to realise how complex the issue of establishing effective interventions in this area really is. A consistent discovery across all of our research sites was that boys generally commence such interventions with attitudes more accepting of domestic violence than girls. But the role and nature of gender varied from locality to locality. In the English site (Stoke-on-Trent) the differences in attitudes between boys and girls were pronounced. But in the French site (Muret) the majority of boys and girls identified at least one circumstance when it was okay for a man to hit a woman. Conversely, in the Spanish site (Murcia) young people who thought this way were in the minority.

Such findings are unlikely to be reflective of genuine national differences, but they reveal how important it is to take stock of one's audience when undertaking classroom based education. Interventions that are designed for a UK audience where boys and girls think quite differently, may, for example, not work as well in other locations where girls and boys have very similar views on the acceptability of violence.

This point that was reiterated to us in focus groups where some participants complained, that the programmes were either 'sexist' or stated the obvious.

Girl 1: ... the male gender was getting the blame for abuse...

Boy 3: It was sexist.

Girl 3: ... Like the girls ... some of them got offended when they ... said that we weren't as strong as men...

(Relationships Without Fear participants)

Teachers who 'had to be right' or the 'boss' were roundly criticised by REaDAPt participants. On the other hand, giving pupils free rein to express ideas about violence can also be risky, as in most classrooms some are already living with violence at home or have direct experiences of abusive (ex) partners, some of whom may even be present. Listening to other pupils' sexism can be hard for some to take, while simply talking to some about domestic violence can leave some feeling unsupported and more worried about entering relationships.

*She was saying like [the husband] don't show their true feelings until after they were married. So you wouldn't know, would you?*

(Relationships Without Fear, Girl)

*I have no information on where I can ask for help if me or a friend of mine are involved and the violence is not very severe.*

(La Máscara del Amor, Girl)

In short, providing effective preventative education is demanding work and involves a careful balance between supporting learning, correcting misperceptions, protecting vulnerable pupils, airing prejudices, aiding discovery and providing pragmatic advice.

### The bigger challenge

Empowering educators to undertake this work in responsive ways requires that we help them build the skills

and confidence needed to talk to young people about violence, sexuality and intimacy. Pioneering teachers may also need basic research skills or support so they can assess for themselves whether what they have tried is working and develop their practice accordingly. In the REaDAPt Project we have tried to meet this challenge by providing free online resources that teachers can access: an educator video, a 180-page manual of worksheets and exercises to use with pupils, and a simple guide to research evaluation. Teachers, however, rarely have free rein over what they teach and how they do it. While relationship

education is legally mandated in Spain, in most other European countries regulation of the national curriculum limits

what can be taught. This, as we were to discover when we took our project to Malta can be a barrier to building the capacity needed at a national level to initiate or maintain relationship education programmes. It also underlines the importance of ensuring that EU initiatives to tackle violence against women are taken up not only by justice departments but also by those charged with governing education, training teachers and setting targets for schools. ■

**David Gadd** is Professor of Criminology at Manchester University School of Law, **Claire Fox** is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Keele University and **Becky Hale** was the Research Associate for the REaDAPt Project

For more information on the REaDAPt Project visit: [www.readapt.eu](http://www.readapt.eu)

### References

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