



# RESULTS FROM THE COMMUNITY ACTION AND MATTERING INITIATIVE:

Can Changing Norms Using Green Dot  
Community Help Reduce Sexual  
Violence Among Adolescents?

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CENTER ON VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN AND  
CHILDREN

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**Results from the Community Action and Mattering Initiative:  
Can Changing Norms Using Green Dot Community Help Reduce Sexual Violence  
Among Adolescents?**

Victoria L. Banyard, Rutgers University

Katie M. Edwards, University of Nebraska Lincoln

Andrew Rizzo, University of New Hampshire

Emily F. Rothman, Boston University School of Public Health

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Sexual violence and intimate partner violence (SV/IPV) are serious public health problems in the United States that impact adolescents at especially high rates in the form of dating violence. Nearly 1 in 11 teenage girls and 1 in 15 teenage boys<sup>1</sup> reported experiencing physical dating violence victimization during the past year. Dating violence (a form of SV/IPV) can lead to many negative long-term effects for youth, and can impede their development and future goals. Therefore, it is imperative that we identify effective strategies to prevent it.

Organizations like crisis centers and schools are trying different ways to prevent sexual and intimate partner violence in communities, and dating violence among teens. Researchers are partnering with them to see what works. In this study, researchers from several universities joined members of a New England State Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Together, researchers and practitioners examined a program called *Green Dot Community*, which brings adults, including community leaders, together to try to prevent sexual and intimate partner violence. The hope was that through local trainings and events, people (including young people) would see their community working together to prevent these forms of violence.

*Sexual violence (SV)* is defined as any sexual activity, including contact or intercourse, which takes place without freely given content (including because the victim is incapacitated).

*Intimate partner violence (IPV)* includes any physical, psychological, sexual, and/or stalking violence by a current or former partner.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html>



The Green Dot Community program teaches adults and youth skills to safely intervene to prevent SV/IPV and also to make people in a community more intolerant of SV/IPV, also known as positive social norms. When community members come together to build these skills and change social norms, it may also help improve people's sense that they can work together with neighbors and community leaders to solve problems like SV/IPV.

Green Dot Community mostly worked with adults, but in this study, we wanted to find out if the program could impact high school students. There are a few ways in which Green Dot Community may impact youth. First, adults trained in the Green Dot strategy could convey prevention messages and skills to youth. Also, some youth were invited to directly participate in prevention activities. We compared high school students in one town that received Green Dot Community programming to high school students in two other towns that did not use Green Dot. We did surveys in all the schools before and after the Green Dot Community events took place to see if there were differences in students' attitudes about their towns and about sexual and intimate partner violence.

## **Hypothesis**

We expected that students in the Green Dot Community town would have more of a strong sense of collective spirit and community connection. We also thought they would have more helpful attitudes around preventing sexual and intimate partner violence as compared to those in the other two towns. We also thought that the Green Dot Community students would be more likely to offer help in risky situations where violence was occurring (or about to occur).

## **Results**

More than a third of the students in the Green Dot Community town heard about the program, even though most of the events and activities were geared toward adults.

When the program was over, students in the Green Dot Community town showed increases in collective spirit and positive helping attitudes regarding sexual and intimate partner violence. They felt that people in their town were working together to solve problems, that people in their town should help prevent sexual and intimate partner violence, and that local people actually *were* working to prevent sexual violence. They had more positive views over time about their town than the students in the other two towns. Green Dot Community town students were more likely to talk about sexual or intimate partner violence with family, friends, or people at school. However, they did not show any change as far as helping in risky situations. This could be because the youth themselves did not receive enough direct training to take action when they saw SV/IPV, since most of the trainings were for adults.

## **Implications**

The changes in attitudes among Green Dot Community students are important, since research shows that increased collective spirit and positive helping attitudes are linked with lower rates of sexual and intimate partner violence.

Why didn't the Green Dot Community students show any increase in their helping behaviors? Perhaps because the program did not include any skill-building training specifically for young people. We know that skill-building is crucial to changing behavior, especially if it comes to intervening in a potentially risky situation. (In other studies, Green Dot programs created specifically for high schools have been shown to help reduce violence among students.)

An important innovation in the Green Dot Community approach is that it is delivered in the community to an adult audience, as opposed to most other violence prevention programs, which are school-based and youth-focused. Identifying prevention approaches that can promote protective social norms where we live, work, and play has the potential to strengthen existing youth-focused prevention efforts. Although additional research is needed, our findings suggest that Green Dot Community represents a novel community-building approach that can promote protective factors for sexual and intimate partner violence among youth.