Introduction: Overview of the Problem

Teen dating violence has only recently been recognized as a community and public health problem. In recent years, an Idaho high school student and six friends cut classes and went to one of their houses to drink alcohol. When the fourteen year old girl passed out, she was raped by two classmates while the others took photos with their cell phones. Another high school student was killed by her boyfriend by blows to the head with a hammer and by dumping a flammable liquid on her body and setting her on fire. Her badly burned body was found near a trash dumpster. And in a rural area of the state, a high school student committed suicide after texting his girlfriend who had threatened to break up with him.

For one in five teens, verbal, psychological, sexual, and/or physical abuse is a very real part of dating relationships. According to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, approximately ten percent of adolescents nationwide reported being the victim of physical violence at the hands of a romantic partner during the previous year. The rate of psychological victimization is even higher: between two and three in ten reported being verbally or psychologically abused in the previous year, according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Nationwide, the rates of reported victimization versus perpetration were similar for boys and girls. However, when it comes to severe teen dating violence — including sexual and physical assault — girls were disproportionately the victims.

Idaho is no exception to the increase in teen dating violence. The 2007 Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey found fourteen percent of Idaho students were hit, slapped, or physically hurt by their partners during the past year, while eleven percent were forced to have unwanted sex. One in ten Idaho students reported having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property and twenty-four percent of students carried a weapon during the previous year.

The Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project

In November 2006, the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence established the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project, an education and prevention strategy to eliminate the prevalence and cultural acceptance of teen dating violence in Idaho. The project is a collaboration of domestic violence and sexual assault victim service providers, social and community service providers, educational institutions, health care providers, and community youth organizations. The two primary populations that benefit from the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project are teens and adult influencers - parents, family members, teachers, community youth leaders, and coaches whose activities intersect with the lives of teens.

Because teen dating violence has recently been recognized as a significant public health problem, a key partner in Idaho’s prevention effort is St. Luke’s Regional Medical Center, one of Idaho’s largest hospitals. Through the St. Luke’s Women’s & Children’s Education Center, Director Sherry Iverson, R.N., has been able to secure the active participation of nurses and
pediatricians in Idaho’s awareness and prevention program, including encouraging nursing staff to serve as trainers on the issue of teen dating violence in their respective communities.

Lessons Learned:

What works to help youth avoid abuse relationships and learn healthy ways of coping with peer pressure?

Through the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project, we are continually working to develop and implement a comprehensive model that provides a balance between promoting areas of strength and addressing teen dating violence. Facilitating connections between teens and their parents, schools, and communities is critical in a comprehensive model. Idaho teens have responded more favorable to the curriculum when we utilized a skills based approach to increase their capacity to develop healthy relationships and increase their resilience to peer pressure. Research has also found that gender specific messages are important.

Teen involvement provides an important contribution to this model of building positive youth development and targeting dating violence behaviors. From the beginning, the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project recognized the importance of engaging teens in the solution. A Teen Advisory Council was developed and is comprised of twenty high school students from around the state. The Teen Advisory Council has been tremendously successful in raising awareness in the communities of Council members through a range of activities, including: school assemblies, community forums, Mayor Proclamations, and poster and t-shirt contests. Teen Advisory Council members have also presented on the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project nationally at the Yale University Jr. Statesman Conference; Idaho Junior Miss Pageant; Idaho Drug Free Youth Summit; Family, Career and Community Leaders of America; National Society of High School Scholars; the Mayor’s Advisory Council; Girl's State; National League of Cities; and an eight-state Soroptimist Conference in Colorado.

In 2007, the ten regional Teen Dating Violence Summits were held with an average of 200 participants attending each summit. In March 2007, the statewide Idaho Summit on Teen Dating Violence was held in Boise, with 460 participants attending and featured nationally renowned speaker Dr. Jill Murray, author of But I Love Him. In 2008, six additional community forums were held in Orofino, Kuna, Hailey, Ketchum, Meridian, and Rexburg. In April 2008, teen and campus sexual assault was addressed and discussed at the Idaho Summit on Sexual Assault, which was attended by over 650 participants.

Between October 2006 and October 2008, the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project conducted 140 community presentations for 2,752 parents or organizations working with teens. In preparation for the trainings, the Project has conducted seven “Train the Trainer" events, training 280 teachers, counselors, nurses, victim service providers, law enforcement officials, and attorneys on the four curriculums created for the Project – Healthy Friendships, Healthy Relationships, Teen Dating Violence for Teens, and Teen Dating Violence for Adults. Also, between October 2006 and October 2008, 460 community educational presentations for 15,601 teens were conducted for school health classes, assemblies, and youth groups.

Additionally, the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project has received media coverage through state and local newspapers, radio talk shows, and Idaho’s television

In 2007, with input from the Teen Advisory Council, the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness Project Executive Committee developed the *No Means Know* awareness campaign. As a part of the campaign, a website – www.nomeansknow.com – was developed by the Teen Advisory Council. The *No Means Know* campaign included a small, tri-fold informational brochure on teen dating violence printed in both English and Spanish, a series of five posters highlighting facts on teen dating violence, silicone bracelets with the *No Means Know* website on them, and themed key chains and water bottles.

In January 2008, toolkits were distributed to Idaho secondary schools and youth groups for National Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Week (February 4-8, 2008). The toolkits included a new series of five posters featuring the theme “I Deserve”, tri-fold pocket brochures, parent handbooks on dating safety and teen dating violence, lanyard key chains, stickers featuring the theme “I Deserve”, radio PSAs, and sample newspaper articles.

Over the first two years of the Idaho Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Project, we have learned that the solution is not easy; developing and implementing a comprehensive approach is difficult. But by strengthening the skills for developing healthy relationships among adolescents and fostering awareness of the prevalence of teen dating violence between teens and their parents, schools, and communities, we believe we can reduce the cycle of violence and incidence of intimate partner violence later in life.

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National victimization prevalence estimates from a study of adolescents aged 12 to 17 years showed 0.6 percent for boys and 2.7 percent for girls. These estimates are lower than those from other studies because adolescents who had never been in a relationship were included in the sample (Wolitzky-Taylor, K.B., Ruggiero, K.L., Danielson, C.K., Resnick, H.S., Hanson, R.F., Smith, D.W., Saunders, B.E., & Kilpatrick, D.G., “Prevalence and Correlates of Dating Violence in a National Sample of Adolescents,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 47 (2008): 755-762). Other studies have also found sex-based differences in rates of sexual victimization and perpetration in adolescent relationships (e.g., O’Keefe, M., “Adolescents’ Exposure to Community and School Violence: Prevalence and Behavioral Correlates,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 20 (1997): 368-376; and Molidor, C., Tolman, R.M., & Koeber, J., “Gender and Contextual Factors in Adolescent Dating Violence,” *The Prevention Researcher* 7 (2000): 1-4). Although most research tends to indicate that more severe forms of physical violence are disproportionately experienced by girls, this is not a universal finding (O’Leary, K.D. & Smith Slep, K.M.).


The regional summits were held in Boise, Idaho Falls, Rexburg, Emmett, Pocatello, Orofino, Kooskia, Coeur d’Alene, Sandpoint, and Ketchum.