

Abstract

Sheatre's *Far From the Heart*, developed in collaboration with a group of teens under professional direction, is a Forum Theatre presentation with an innovative approach that challenges youth to speak and act out their thoughts and attitudes surrounding dating violence. The purpose of this research was to get a broad sense of the literature surrounding adolescent prevention programs for dating violence, statistics surrounding sexual assault and dating violence particularly pertaining to youth, and the use of Forum Theatre as an effective educational tool for changes in attitude and/or behavior. The report explored key demographic considerations and statistics, dating violence prevention programs, Forum Theatre as an educational tool, methodology, survey analysis, and best practices. The research highlighted the demonstrable need for further dating violence prevention programs across Canada. The statistics established that youth are a high-risk population for becoming victims of sexual assault and/or dating violence. Within the literature, there was also a very high correlation to youth and the use of alcohol in association to dating violence. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of why violence continues to be perpetuated, more widespread education surrounding substance use and/or abuse, colonial history, patriarchy, white privilege, hetero-sexualism, ability/disability and racism need to be incorporated into violence prevention programs in schools.

Far From the Heart toured to 23 Saskatchewan communities in the fall of 2011, and presented 37 interactive presentations to over 3300 students. Teachers received an orientation which prepared them to lead their students in pre-show activities. The activities included a questionnaire which assessed their knowledge of sexual assault and dating violence (including what is sexual assault, what percentage of the population is affected by dating violence and sexual assault) and their ideas of appropriate behaviour in a relationship. Immediately after the Forum Theatre presentation, students participated in post-

show discussions with trained community facilitators who work in health and social services. The questionnaire was also given after they participated in the interactive play and discussion. These provided data for this research. Overall, both the females and the males surveyed showed an increase in knowledge between the PRE and POST surveys. The female mean increased from 8.28 in the PRE to 8.83 in the POST, implicating an average of 8 questions correct out of the 11 with an increase of .55 from PRE to POST. The male mean increased from 7.75 in the PRE to 8.39 in the POST, implicating an average of 8 questions correct out of 11 with an increase of .64. This data indicates that Far From the Heart works to successfully increase students' knowledge and shift attitudes.

The research reveals that prevention programs do positively shift attitudes surrounding dating violence, with the more effective prevention programs incorporating a skills-building component. Forum Theatre utilizes a skills-building component by providing the opportunity for participants to perform their strategies onstage which facilitates a unique opportunity to engage youth to enact and discuss difficult subject matter such as dating violence, date rape or sexual assault. Forum Theatre also allows participants to explore the action component to prevention; thus, an opportunity to learn from mistakes in a safe space. Overall, there is room for further growth, across Canada, in the use of Forum Theatre in prevention programming.