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Abstract

Teen dating violence has become a damaging issue in Salinas, California, which forces the community to find immediate solutions to prevent the devastating aftermath of this problem on adolescents. This paper provides ideas for solving this issue by designing the "That's Not Cool" social campaign that was created to maintain healthy relationships between teens. Coordinated with the STRYVE program of the County of Monterey Health Department, the plan was implemented in the Salinas City High School District, where the population is predominantly Hispanic or Latino. As a result of studies, poverty, cultural beliefs, and poor education have been identified as factors contributing to teen dating violence. The effects of teen dating violence include increased violence, intergenerational trauma, and physical injuries or deaths, according to further research. The project used social media campaigns as well as outreach missions to increase knowledge, build awareness, and curb youth violence. The results were more awareness among teenagers about teen dating violence and 150 additional followers on the social media platform. Evaluation methods consisted of pre-post surveys as well as analysis of social media insights. The recommendations for the agency are to continue educational campaigns, resource allocation to prevention programs, and constant community engagement. Overall, dealing with teen dating violence needs a multifaceted approach, including education, awareness, and community involvement.

Keywords: Teen dating violence, healthy relationships, social media campaigns, early intervention programs, and community awareness.

Agency & Communities Served

The County of Monterey Health Department (CMHD) STRYVE program (striving to reduce youth violence everywhere). “STRYVE’s vision is safe and healthy youth who can achieve their full potential as connected and contributing members of thriving, violence-free families, schools, and communities” (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2012, p. 4). At the County of Monterey Health Department, the main programs and services offered by STRYVE include CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design), TNC (That’s Not Cool), and Safe Dates (County of Monterey Health Department, 2023). CPTED entails designing, building, maintaining, and using spaces that promote cohesive and positive social interactions. The TNC program relies on social media platforms to reduce teen dating violence by increasing awareness of healthy relationships online. Safe Dates programs teach teens new behaviors, such as how to help their friends, anger management, communication, conflict resolution strategies, and warning signs of dating abuse.

The community served is Salinas City High School District, on California’s central coast. From a 2021 census, approximately 163,004 people were living within the district’s boundaries. About 13,951 of them were youth between the ages of 10-14 years old (United States Census Bureau, 2021). In terms of race and ethnicity, 79.8% of residents in the district identified as Hispanic or Latino, 12.2% identified as non-Latino white, and 8.1% identified as non-Hispanic of other races.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

Teen dating violence is a pressing concern in Salinas, California, requiring critical intervention measures. The challenge encompasses sexual, emotional, and physical abuse in

adolescents' dating relationships thus having lasting impacts (Hamby & Turner, 2013). It becomes challenging for teenagers to overcome dating violence without external help. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), 21% of high school females and 10% of males experience teen dating violence. The fact that this issue is prevalent in the region with few intervention mechanisms in place creates an alarm. Boyce, Deardorff, & Minnis contend, "Youth in Salinas are disproportionately affected by pervasive poverty, exposure to community violence, adolescent pregnancy, and social determinants that adversely affect health and well-being" (2020, Methods10). The issue of dating-related teen violence is a significant concern in Salinas, California. Between 2019 and 2021, 61% of all intimate partner violence was teen dating violence in Salinas. This problem has been on the rise, and the project's mission is to help the Salinas community by educating teens about teen dating violence and thus reduce violence. In addition, the most recent statistics indicate that in 2016 alone, teen dating violence affected 300 victims in Salinas (Beltrán, 2016). If this was the case a few years ago, it is only highly likely that the figures may have spiked.

Such social characteristics cause youth teen violence to be normalized to the extent that youth find reporting to be abnormal or insecure behavior. Considering the physical and emotional scars it leaves, teen dating violence remains a challenge in Salinas. In this instance, victims face academic performance and social development challenges, eventually interfering with their social engagement. Conditions such as anxiety and depression are consistent among victims such that their overall well-being is compromised. The problem, therefore, becomes a societal issue and is not confined to individuals. Its prevalence demonstrates a lack of support systems, education, and awareness, leaving teens vulnerable to abusive relationships. In this instance, it would be better if the community assumed a collective responsibility to ensure the

safety of the young population. Countering teen dating violence in Salinas calls for the efficient allocation of resources for prevention of three programs in society. It also calls for developing relevant support, increasing educational initiatives in schools, and providing unlimited access to support services for victims. Teen dating violence is an urgent issue to address in order to create a safer and healthier environment for teens.

Figure 1: Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Socioeconomic	Teen dating violence is a pressing concern in Salinas, California	Increased teen dating violence
Cultural and societal norms		Intergenerational trauma
Insufficient education		Physical injuries or death

Contributing Factors

Socioeconomic

Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in the prevalence of teen dating violence in Salinas. Economic stability is one of the critical socioeconomic factors exacerbating the risk of teen dating violence, considering abusive behaviors manifested due to financial stress (Boyce et al., 2020). It is a tendency that is especially pronounced among marginalized communities in Salinas. Furthermore, low-income neighborhoods' lack of affordable mental health services and support systems hinders victims from seeking help (Emelianchik-Key & Colvin, 2019). Teens may be less likely to report abuse or seek assistance due to the fear of social stigma or a perceived lack of resources. According to the *Social Science & Medicine*, teenagers self-reported psychological and minor physical victimization in up to six heterosexual romantic or sexual relationships (Spriggs et al., 2009). “The socioeconomic indicators reported by adolescents and parents were analyzed using a principal component analysis. In weighted multilevel random

effects models, between-school variability in dating violence victimization was proportionately small but substantive: 10% for male victimization and 5% for female victimization.”

Cultural and societal norms

Cultural and societal norms also contribute to teen dating violence in Salinas, perpetuating harmful behaviors. Salinas has cultural expectations surrounding traditional gender roles and relationships. A study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* found that “[T]raditional gender role attitudes...were associated with increased risk for dating violence perpetration (Reyes et al., 2015). Such norms create a power imbalance within teen relationships, with one partner in the relationship feeling entitled to exert control over the other. Peer pressure is another significant factor influenced by cultural and societal norms perpetuating teen dating violence (Exner-Cortens, 2014). In Salinas, teenagers often experience pressure to conform to certain relationship dynamics, which may include tolerating controlling or abusive behaviors to fit in. In this instance, victims are discouraged from speaking out or seeking help for fear of social isolation. Cultural and societal norms can shape attitudes and beliefs about relationships, gender roles, and power dynamics, which can contribute to the perpetration of teen dating violence. For example, norms that view domestic violence as a normal part of a healthy relationship or that place the blame on the victim can perpetuate a culture of acceptance and enablement of teen dating violence. On the other hand, norms that promote healthy relationships, non-violent conflict resolution, and gender equality can help prevent teen dating violence. It's important to note that cultural and societal norms are not the only factor that contributes to teen dating violence, and not all individuals who grow up in the same culture or society will engage in violent behavior. However, cultural and societal norms can play a role in shaping

attitudes and behaviors around teen dating violence, and addressing these norms can be an important part of prevention efforts.

Lack of education

Lack of education about consent and healthy relationships is another contributing factor to teen dating violence in Salinas. Teenagers are less informed about what constitutes a healthy relationship and may not recognize the signs of abuse (Emelianchik-Key & Colvin, 2019). The absence of education perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and power imbalances. Such deficiency perpetuates controlling behaviors and manipulation within relationships. Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, including their understanding of healthy relationships. When adolescents lack access to quality education, they may have limited knowledge about the negative consequences of dating violence, inadequate communication skills, and an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors. For example, Lack of empathy and perspective-taking: Education fosters empathy and the ability to understand different perspectives. Without exposure to diverse viewpoints, adolescents may struggle to empathize with their partners or recognize the harm caused by their actions. This can result in a lack of remorse and a tendency to justify violent behavior. Poor impulse control and decision-making: Education helps develop cognitive and emotional skills, including impulse control and decision-making. Adolescents with limited educational opportunities may have a harder time regulating their emotions and making rational choices, which can contribute to impulsive and aggressive behaviors in relationships.

Consequences

Increased teen dating violence

Teens who are exposed to violence continue to experience violence into adulthood therefore teen dating violence increases violence in teenage years into adulthood. According to Youth.gov (n.d.), a U.S. government website that supports youth programs, the rates of physical dating violence for youth have been found to range from 9 percent to 57 percent. This very high incidence rate goes to show how much teen dating violence has increased.

Intergenerational trauma

Intergenerational trauma is one consequence of teen dating violence in Salinas. Teens struggle with self-esteem and other related mental health issues, such as post-traumatic disorders impacting their overall well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Here are some possible ways in which intergenerational trauma can influence teen dating violence. Cycle of violence: Intergenerational trauma can contribute to a cycle of violence in families or communities. If individuals have experienced trauma and abuse in their own upbringing, they may be more likely to repeat those patterns of behavior in their own relationships, including teen dating violence. Emotional and psychological effects: Intergenerational trauma can have profound emotional and psychological effects on individuals. Survivors of trauma may struggle with anxiety, depression, anger, or other mental health issues, which can manifest in their relationships, including teen dating violence. Lack of healthy relationship models: Intergenerational trauma can also affect how individuals understand and navigate relationships. If individuals have grown up witnessing or experiencing abusive relationships, they may have difficulty recognizing healthy patterns or forming non-violent relationships themselves. Trauma response and coping mechanisms: Trauma can also shape how individuals respond to stress and adversity, including in their romantic relationships. For example, someone who has experienced

intergenerational trauma may be more likely to use manipulation, control, or violence to cope with their emotions or protect themselves in a dating relationship.

Physical injuries or death

Physical injuries or death is another critical consequence of teen dating violence. Boyce, Deardorff & Minnis (2020) contend that such violence can lead to physical harm ranging from bruises to more severe injuries. Teen dating violence is not limited to emotional or psychological abuse; it frequently escalates to physical violence, posing serious risks to the health and safety of young individuals in Salinas. If action is not taken immediately, these figures may rise. Also, it does not help that Salinas has been dubbed California's youth murder capital given the severity of violent crimes involving young people in the small city (World Population Review, 2023). Indeed, some of these heinous crimes may stem from teen dating violence, adding to the already glaring reputation.

Project Description and Implementation Process

Project Description

This capstone project involved the development of the That's Not Cool social media campaign to gain more followers with each outreach mission. I did five outreach missions in the school year with the goal of gaining 100 or more followers by May 2024 to raise awareness about various aspects of teen dating violence and promote healthy teen relationships among teenagers in Salinas, California. In the social media campaign "That's Not Cool Salinas" the content reflects verbal, physical, and emotional abuse scenarios during teen relationships. Furthermore, there was also content about healthy relationship sources where teens can learn about red flags and green flags when dating. The content also included videos about Talk About

It Tuesdays where teens see miniseries videos of how to set boundaries in a relationship or how to talk to your partner about verbal respect.

Project Justification & Benefits

This project was necessary because it will create awareness of teen dating violence and, therefore, encourage healthy adolescent relationships among teenagers in Salinas. The community in Salinas will benefit significantly from the project because it is partially the community's role to mold its adolescents into compassionate, responsible adults. Even more, the community will benefit from lower teenage dating violence-related cases. This will mean happy families, healthy adolescents, and a peaceful community. The changed adolescents will also set the right example for the little children entering adolescence. As such, the project should have a ripple effect in the coming years.

The project will also benefit the agency by broadening its platform and outreach and attracting more volunteers, sponsors, and donors. This will especially be the case if the project achieves more than was projected. It will also help the agency increase awareness throughout Salinas instead of just a few areas.

Ultimately, there was an urgent need to create awareness regarding adolescent dating violence in the area. There was also a serious need to call for healthy teen relationships among Salinas' teens. Thankfully, with the evaluation approach, it was possible to foster a safer environment and a more informed adolescent population who will be empowered to make the right choices.

Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan

When the project was complete, adolescents in Salinas, California, was expected to have developed a heightened understanding of teen dating violence and the need to only enter healthy

relationships. Initial and specific expected outcomes included five outreach missions and 100 additional That's Not Cool Salinas social media followers. Long-term outcomes include adolescents in this region will experience less violence or entering relationships characterized by violence because of improved awareness.

My analysis involved a thorough review of healthy relationships pre-post survey responses and the Instagram insights to identify trends and assess the outreach mission's effectiveness. Furthermore, the timeline for assessment activities outlined all pre and post-surveys as well as the outreach mission dates.

Implementation Process

The implementation process launched on October 31, 2023. The initial step was to seek input from TNC staff within the County of Monterey Health Department. From this initial meeting, the TNC team and I discovered it is essential to visit and speak with health teachers. This is because health teachers implement school-based sexuality and healthy relationship curriculums with adolescents and have a solid understanding of their thinking. The steps in implementing the social media campaign "That's Not Cool Salinas" consist of creating content for student feedback regarding the theme, text, and imagery of the post and/or video. After I receive feedback the content is updated and approved by the TNC team to finalize and upload content to the social media campaign platform. For the implementation of outreach events (which the county calls outreach missions), the TNC team and I focused on holidays or awareness months we could use to create events that coincide with teen dating violence. Using the information from the research, I started evaluating the outreach missions explicitly tailored to the needs of teenagers within Salinas. The missions had to be thorough, inclusive, and adolescent-friendly. Lastly, those involved in the implementation process included, the high

school teachers, students in That's Not Cool club, and the TNC staff. The high school health teachers (Ms. Cleaves-Alisal High School, Ms. Jefferson-Everett Alvarez High School, and Ms. Domingcil-Mount Toro) gave authorization and dates available for outreach events. The students who participated in That's Not Cool Salinas club meetings provided content feedback. The TNC staff team (Julia Muruato, Vivian Avila, Yolanda Cervantes, Bianca Arizmendi, and Betsaida Arreola) reviewed my outlines for the outreach activities. The Postpone Teen Pregnancy program staff (Emiko Torres and Ruby Godoy) assisted with outreach events. My mentor (Michelle House) supported all my activities and approved the projects. See Appendix A for a detailed Implementation Plan table.

Project Results

The implementation of the That's Not Cool Salinas campaign that cut across all social media platforms in Salinas, California, aimed to improve the knowledge of teenagers about relationships and also produce healthy relationships. The final result of this project was to reach at least 100 new followers on social media platforms by the end of March 2024 and to leverage the upsurge of awareness for teen dating violence among adolescents in Salinas.

To evaluate the efficiency of the project, we gave the surveys to adolescents before and after it to measure their knowledge and awareness of teen dating violence and healthy relationships. Moreover, we undertook Instagram Analytics to monitor the enlargement of the follower list and the engagement with the campaign content as well.

The findings obtained through this project were encouraging. By the end of March 2024, our mission of gaining 100 new friends on social media has been accomplished by exceeding our target number to reach 150 new people within our community. It was seen that pre- and post-surveys were from the perspective of adolescents, which also indicated a significant rise in

their awareness of dating violence or abuse and its negative consequences on healthy relationship dynamics. Our intervention is most significant among the subjects in which we recorded 30% higher responses when they were asked about red flag signs in relationships and when to seek help from professionals. As a result, the Instagram insights showed that there was an almost disproportionately high level of engagement with the campaign's content as an average total of 500 likes was achieved from each post and multiple comments were left appreciating the information shared. This clearly states that our campaign managed to reach the right group of recipients.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Concerning the results of “The That's Not Cool Salinas” social media campaign, it can be said that it met its goal to inform the community about teen dating problems and to encourage young people to develop healthy relationships. Social media platforms were used in the project to communicate to young people important information and resources that helped them to learn the skills of interacting in relationships safely and appropriately.

In addition to running the “That's Not Cool Salinas” social media campaign, it is suggested that the organization should develop the necessary educational programs within schools and in the community. These workshops must be designed for teenagers to have a grasp of the necessary skills, facts as well as knowledge to deal with and explore relationships in the safest way possible, including communication, conflict resolution, and consent. Interacting with the schools will make it possible to incorporate these programs in current health education lessons which will guarantee access for everyone and long-term program success. Also, it can be added that the proper audience should be given the top priority, along with the culturally sensitive methods that will consider the particular issues and the norms of Salinas town. Providing minors

with the means and tools to create connections and maintain healthy patterns is one of the most effective ways of long-term prevention, to ensure the welfare of minor residents in Salinas.

To maintain the pace set, the organization should stay committed to similar community outreach campaigns. This can be achieved through broadening the reach of the campaign and collaboration with partners in other schools of Monterey County and other community organizations and stakeholders for greater influence. Furthermore, evaluation and testing of the campaign as effective is needed in finding out areas for improvement and coming up with strategies to satisfy the needs of the teens in Salinas and other locations as well. Educating and raising awareness comes as the top priority of this agency to influence change among teens and to let them achieve healthier and safer relationships that eventually will non-offend teen dating violence.

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Appendix A

Figure 2: Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/ Deadlines	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables
Attend capstone brainstorming meeting	By October 20, 2023,	Michelle House, Thalia, Julia Muruato, Vivian Avila	Prevention room (CMHD)	Capstone ideas
Capstone confirmation meeting	December 5, 2023	Michelle House Thalia	Michelle's Office Ideas (CMHD)	Capstone approved
Meet with health teachers	By October 24, 2023	Thalia, Ms. Cleaves, Ms. Jefferson	Alisal High School, Everett Alvarez High School	Which students are involved in TNC club meetings?
TNC Club Meeting	Every Tuesday	Ms. Cleaves Ms. Jefferson Students TNC staff and Thalia	Alisal High School, Everett Alvarez High School	Feedback for next social media content
Planning Outreach Missions (Events)	By October 17, 2023 and January 9, 2024	TNC staff and Thalia	CMHD	Setting Dates
Outreach Missions (Events)	October 31, 2023, December 5, 2023, January 17, 2024, January 30, 2024, February 14, 2023	Emiko Torres, Ruby Godoy, Bianca Arizmendi,	Alisal High School, Everett Alvarez High School	Students educated
Analyze Data	February 27, 2024	Thalia	CMHD Data	Report
Write Evaluation	March 26, 2024	Michelle House, Thalia	CMHD	Report
Present Evaluation Data	Mar 28, 2024	Thalia	CMHD	Presentation

Appendix B

Figure 1: Project Results

