Women Educating Each Other Women in Safe & Equal Relationships

LIVERPOOL
WOMEN'S
HEALTH CENTRE

Liverpool Women's Health Centre
Young Women's Healthy Relationships Project

Evaluation Report (No. 1)

Written by

Dr. Margot Rawsthorne (University of Sydney) &
Sonia Hoffmann (Liverpool Women's Health Centre)

September, 2007

Liverpool Women's Health Centre
Cnr Bathurst & Campbell Streets
Liverpool NSW 2170

Centre funded by Sydney South West Area Health Service & project by Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme grant

Introduction

In 2000 following the results of a quality assurance review Liverpool Women's Health Centre developed a range of strategies to actively engage with young women. One of the Centre's strategies was to work more in the area of prevention of relationship abuse with young women. Research consistently demonstrates that domestic and sexual violence is unfortunately a highly prevalent and costly social problem; that the overwhelming majority of victims of this violence are women and the perpetrators are male and that it is young women who are most at risk. The Centre successfully applied to the Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme for the funding of a peer education program targeting young women in relation to healthy relationships and violence. The proposal was based on other successful peer education models, such as the Bilingual Community Educators Program run through Area Health Services. The project received 3 year funding and the project officer commenced work in November, 2004.

An interactive five session workshop program was developed in consultation with young women, schools, youth workers and other key workers (for details see Appendix). The program was named WEEO WISER by local young women on the advisory committee, which stands for Women Educating Each Other, Women in Safe and Equal Relationships. Workshops were facilitated by a pair peer of educators who have undergone thorough training & assessment in preparation to run the program. The peer educators were supervised and supported by experienced workers in the field. The program aims to equip young women with knowledge, skills and attitudes to reject violent, abusive relationships and to expect healthy, safe, equal relationships. It is a prevention and early intervention initiative which sets out to get information and skills to young women at the critical time when many are forming intimate relationships. This is also a time at which research indicates young women are highly at risk of experiencing violence in their relationships[1]. The workshop program was open to all girls in Year 9 in high schools in the Liverpool LGA: it was not a therapeutic group targeting young women who are experiencing violence in relationships or at risk. Ten to fifteen young women from Year 9 participated in each workshop program.

This report forms one part of the evaluation framework developed in conjunction with Dr. Margot Rawsthorne from the University of Sydney.

Methodology

The evaluation framework includes:

- Pre and post program questionnaires with the young women participants
- Feedback from schools where the workshop programs were held
- Focus groups with key stakeholders and peer educators
- Review of project reports & promotional activities
- Website hits and feedback[2]

This documents reports on the findings of three elements of the evaluation of the WEEO WISER Peer Education program: pre and post self administered questionnaires; a focus group with Peer Educators; and, a focus group with Key Stakeholders.

---

[1] DETYA (2001) *Young people and domestic violence: National research on young people' attitudes and experiences of domestic violence,* Commonwealth of Australia.

[2] Other data (such as the peer educators post-program write-ups; feedback from the pilots, the peer educators training and from the project committees) is also being collected. If further resources become available this other data may be useful for further evaluation.

Data on the impact of participation in the program was collected via pre and post questionnaires. The questionnaires are distributed and collected by the peer educators in workshop 1 for the pre-program and & workshop 5 for the post-program survey. A range of statistical tests were used to examine whether changes pre and post program were statistically significant. Plain English explanations of the results of these tests will be noted in cases where significance has been shown.

Focus groups

A series of pre-prepared questions (attached) were asked of each focus group. Four young women participated in the Peer Educators focus group and eight women participated in the Stakeholders focus group. Information from the focus groups was collected via butchers paper and audio taped. Key themes or lessons were then drawn out.

Pre and post self-administered questionnaire results

Pre and post self-administered questionnaires were collected from all young women who participated in the program. A number of the questions used were adapted from the Young People's Survey on Violence. The questionnaires aimed not to evaluate the program content but to gauge changes in knowledge, attitudes and to some extent skills.

Paired data (both pre and post) was collected for 87 young women (out of a total of 148). 49 women completed only the pre questionnaire and 12 only the post questionnaire. In some cases young women commenced the course but were unable to continue due to school commitments. Attendance fluctuations are likely to have affected the other young women. The pre-questionnaire data provides a snapshot of a larger group's views about relationships and violence. Throughout this report the total number of women being discussed will be indicated by n=.

Findings

Schools

Seven local high schools participated in the program. Liverpool Girls High and Ashcroft High were very active in the program. Both these schools have worked closely with Liverpool Women's Health Centre for a number of years.

Table 1: Participants by School

	Frequency	Percent
Liverpool girls	31	20.9
Ashcroft high	30	20.3
John Edmonson	24	16.2
Holsworthy	17	11.5
Hoxton Park	11	7.4
Lurnea	16	10.8
James Busby	19	12.8
Total	148	100.0

Participants' age

The program is offered to Year 9 students, with the vast majority of students being aged 15 years or less.

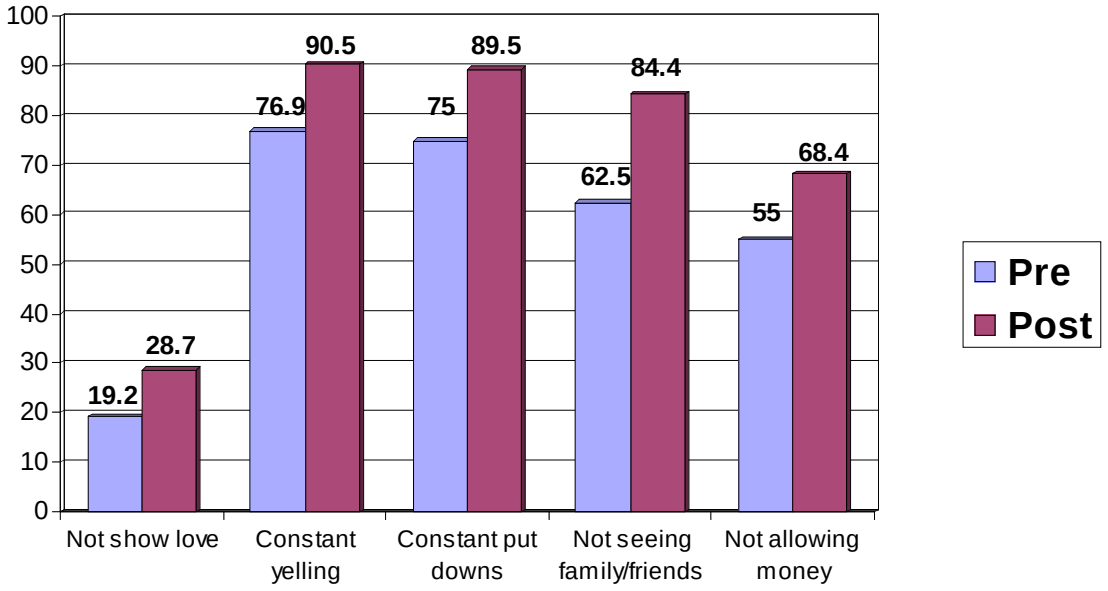
Table 2: Participants' age

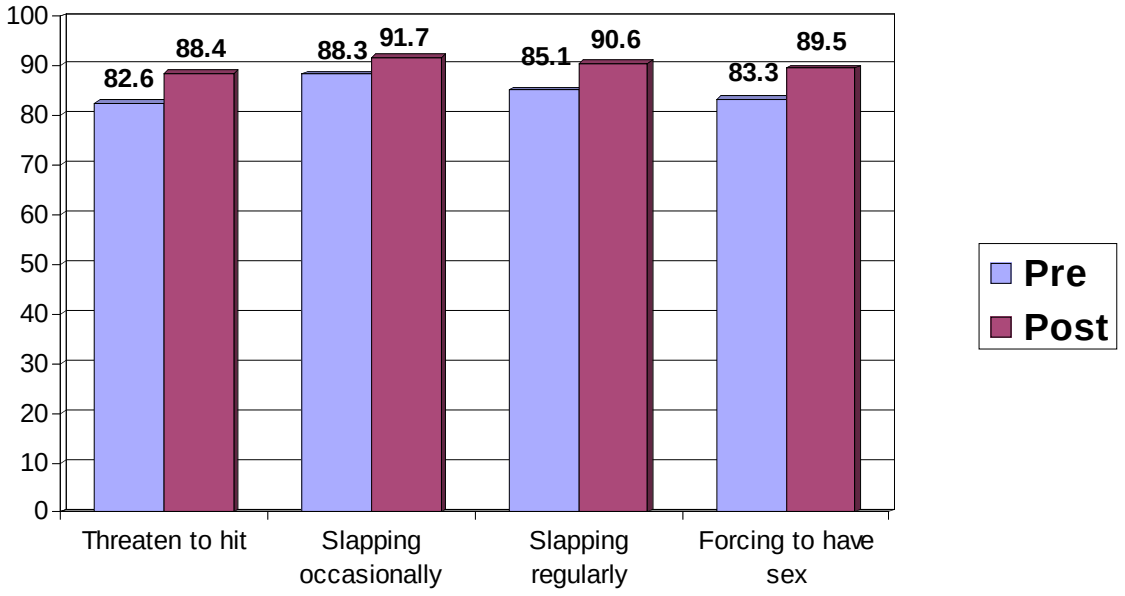
Age		Frequency	Percent
	14	50	33.8
	15	77	52.0
	16	6	4.1
	Total	133	89.9
Missing	0	15	10.1
Total		148	100.0

Awareness and attitude towards violence

The pre and post questionnaire sought program participants perspectives on a range of behaviours. Participants were asked firstly to indicate whether they believed something was violent or not and then secondly how serious that violence was. The two pronged nature of this question caused some problems for participants, with a high number of young women not completing the question in its entirety.

Graphs 1 & 2: Percentage of young women identifying incident as 'violence/abuse' pre and post program





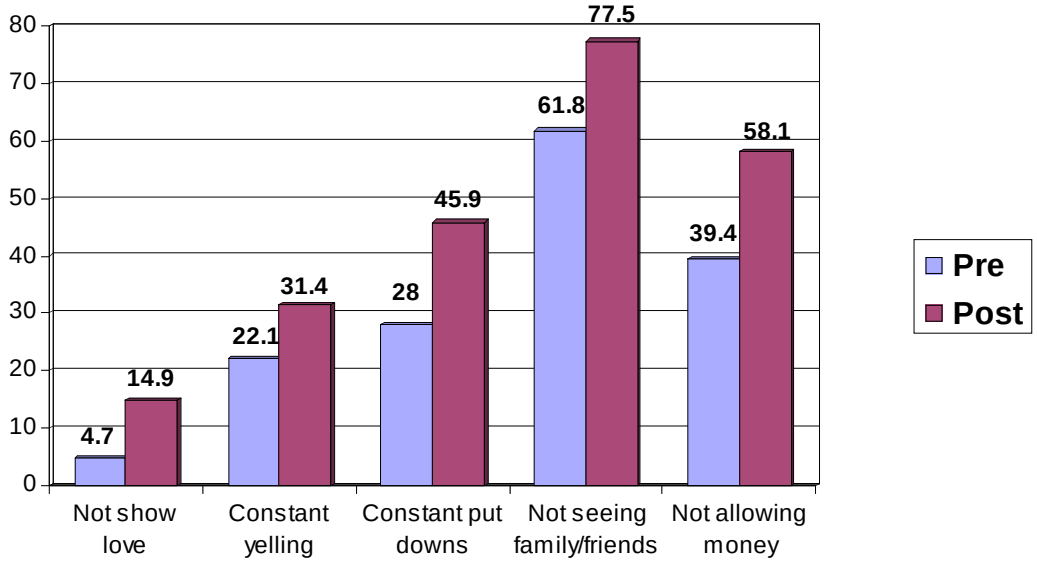
Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

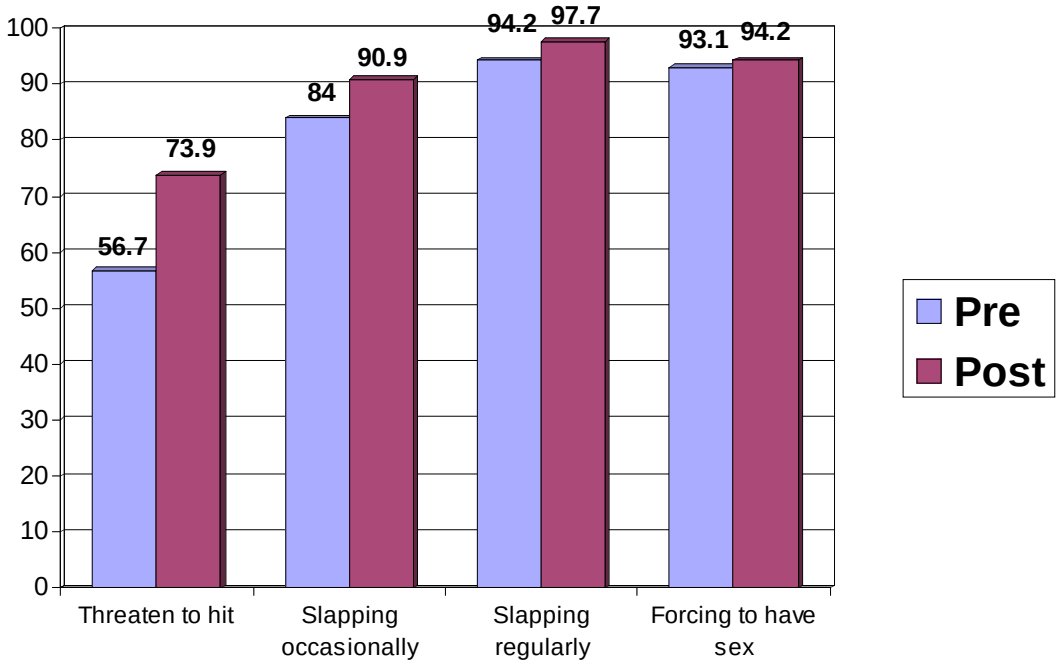
Graphs 1 and 2 reveal considerable shifts in young women's awareness of non-physical forms of violence, through intimidation, isolation and controlling behaviours. The strong awareness of physical and sexual violence is a welcome finding for feminist efforts at awareness raising.

Questionnaires for which we have both pre and post data (n=87) were examined using a statistical procedure (McNemar non-parametric related samples test) to test whether the changes

evident were likely to be chance. The following differences between pre and post responses were found to be unlikely arising from chance: not seeing family (p<.001); constant put downs (p<.012); constant yelling (p<.013); and forcing to have sex (p<.039). That is, there was a statistically significant increase in participants' awareness of these forms of violence and abuse and this change is unlikely to have occurred by chance. It is likely the changes occurred due to completion of the program.

Graphs 3 and 4: Percentage of young women identifying incident as 'very serious' pre and post program



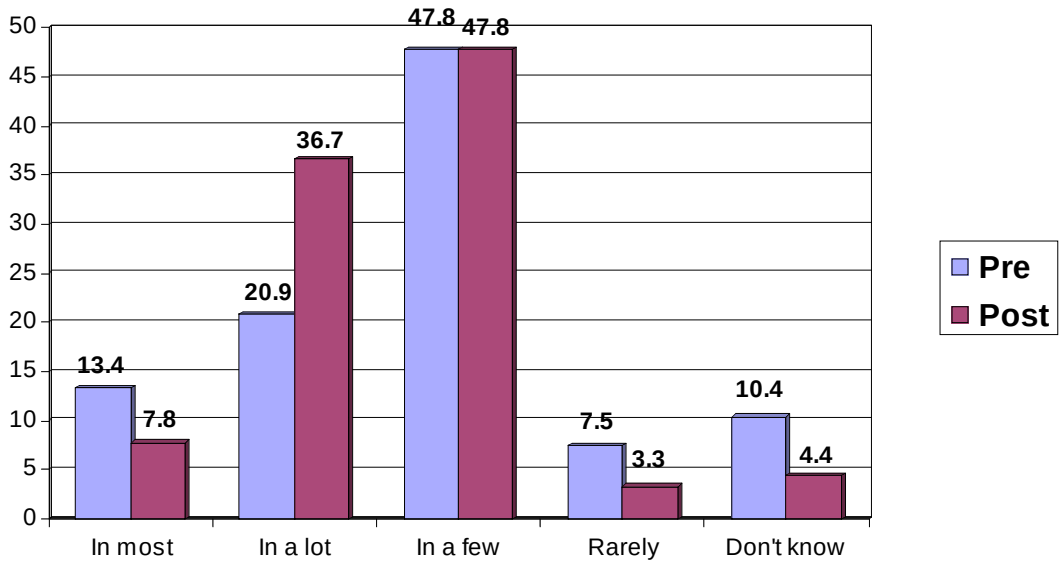


Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses. The surveys asked young women to rate seriousness on a scale from 'very serious', 'quite serious' and 'not that serious'.

Graphs 3 and 4 confirm the early findings in relation to non-physical forms of violence. The largest changes in young women's attitudes are evident in relation to intimidation, isolation and controlling behaviours. There was strong recognition of the seriousness of physical violence and sexual assault, once again a pleasing result from a prevention perspective.

Questionnaires for which we have both pre and post data (n=87) were examined using a statistical procedure (as this data was interval data a paired sample t-test was used) to test whether the changes evident were likely to be chance. The differences in levels of seriousness between pre and post responses were unlikely to occur by chance in the following incidents: constant yelling ($p<.041$); put downs ($p<.015$); stop seeing family ($p<.020$); and not allowing partner to have money ($p<.002$).

Graph 5: How common do you think violence is in relationships between people your age or a couple of years older than you?



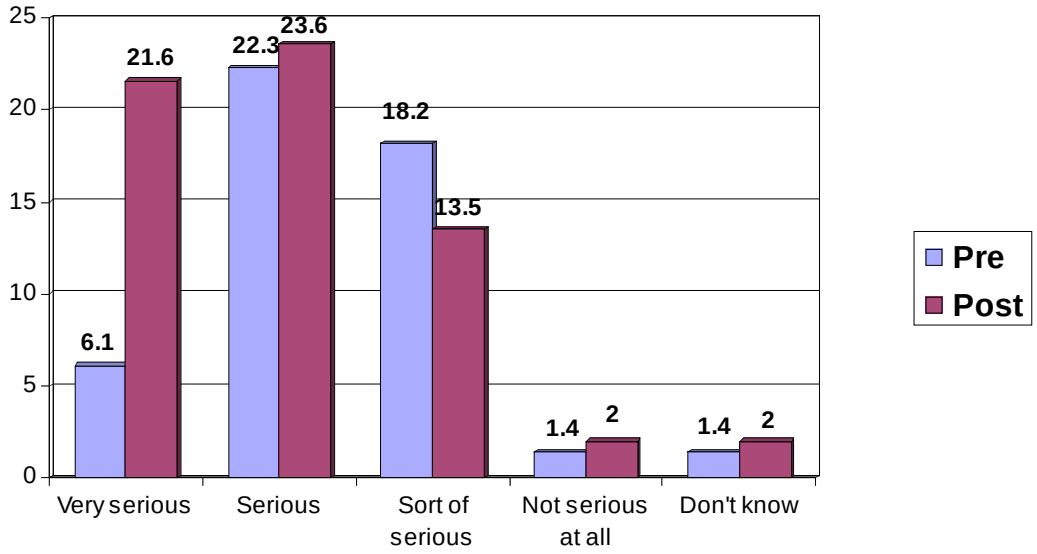
Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

The questionnaire sought participant's perspectives on the extent of violence in young people's relationships. Very few participants believed it 'rarely' occurred prior to undertaking the program. About half of participants acknowledged violence 'in a few' relationships. The number of young women who were unsure ('don't know') decreased after the completion of the program, as did the number who thought violence occurred 'in most' relationships. There was a substantial increase in the number who felt violence occurred 'in a lot' of relationships.

Graphs 6 and 7 below illustrate the participants' perspectives on the impact of violence on young people in the short and long term. There were a large number of participants who did not complete these questions pre-program due to a problem with questionnaire layout. Graph 6 shows more than 300% increase in those who viewed the impact as 'very serious' prior to and after the program.

How serious do you think the impact of violence in relationships is between people your age or a couple of years older than you, in the short and long term?

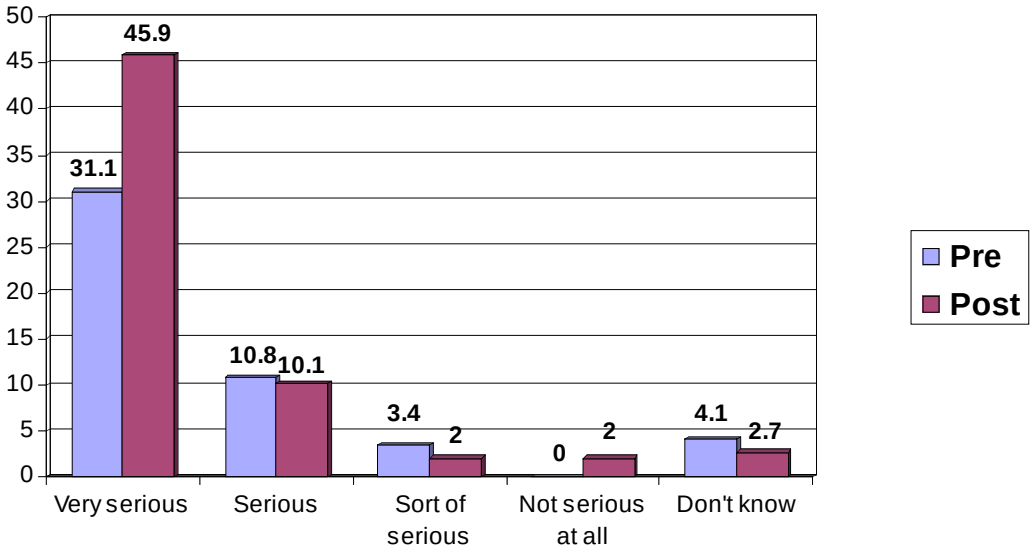
Graph 6: Short term consequences



Note: Pre-test missing=75 (50.7%)

Graph 6 below also reveals an increased awareness of the seriousness of the long term impact of violence following completion of the program. This increased awareness of both the short and long term impacts of violence may lead young women to be less tolerant of violence in the future. By acknowledging the seriousness of violence we can be hopeful these young women might act more quickly to leave violent relationships in the future.

Graph 6: Long term consequences

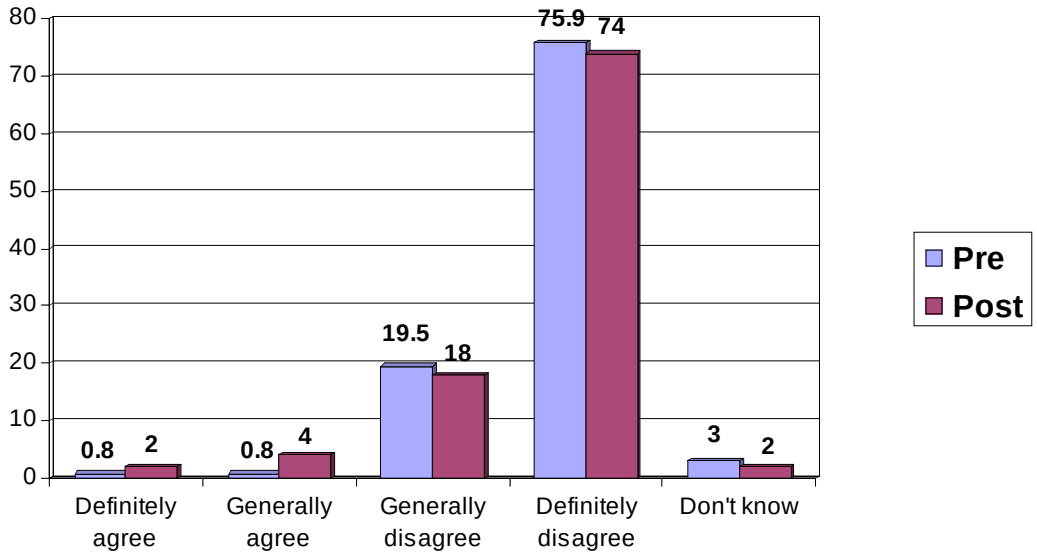


Note: Pre-test missing=75 (50.7%)

Myths concerning violence

The questionnaire asked participants to indicate a level of agreement to a series of common violence-supporting statements. These statements have been used previously in a number of large scale studies of attitudes towards violence, including the Young People's Survey on Violence. Participants were given the option to 'strongly agree', 'generally agree', 'generally disagree', 'definitely disagree' and 'don't know'.

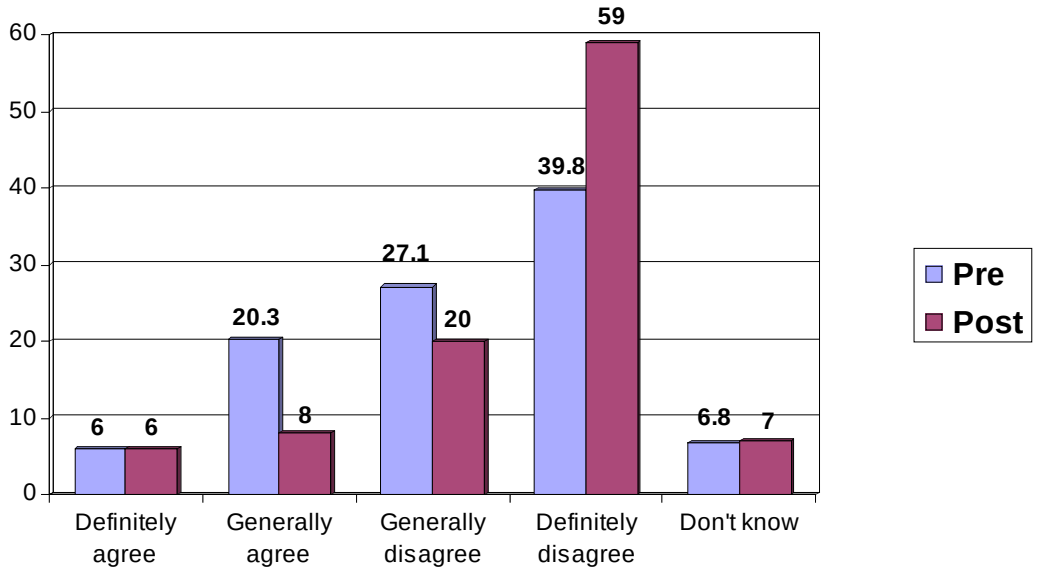
Graph 7: "It's alright for a guy to threaten his partner as long as he doesn't hit her"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

Graph 7 reveals that approximately three-quarters of participants 'definitely disagreed' with this statement both prior to and after the program. Of interest are the small shifts to greater agreement evident post program, suggesting possibly a hierarchy of abuse with threatening behaviour seen as a 'lesser evil' then some other forms of violence.

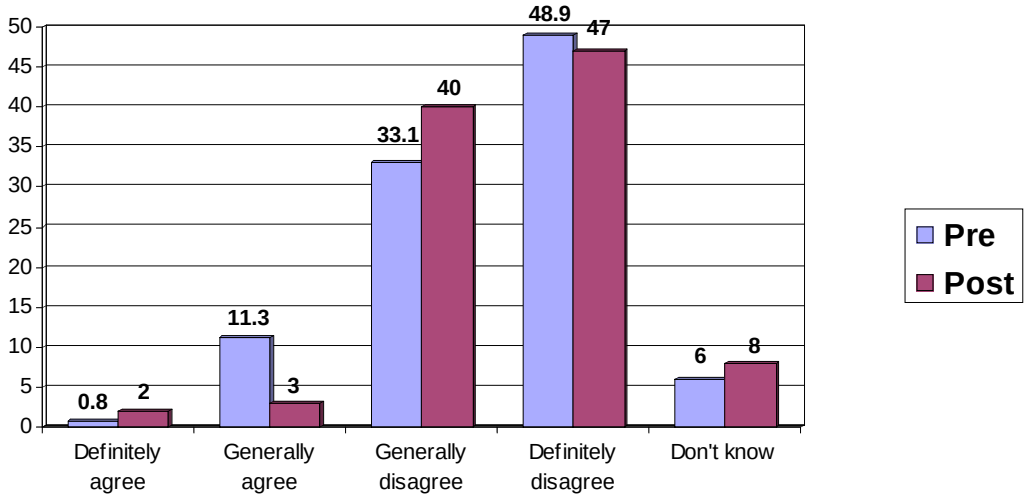
Graph 8: "Abuse within a relationship is a private matter that should be handled between the partners or within the family"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

Graph 8 reveals significant shifts in young women's belief in the private nature of relationship violence. Nearly eight out of ten young women express some level of disagreement to this statement after completing the program.

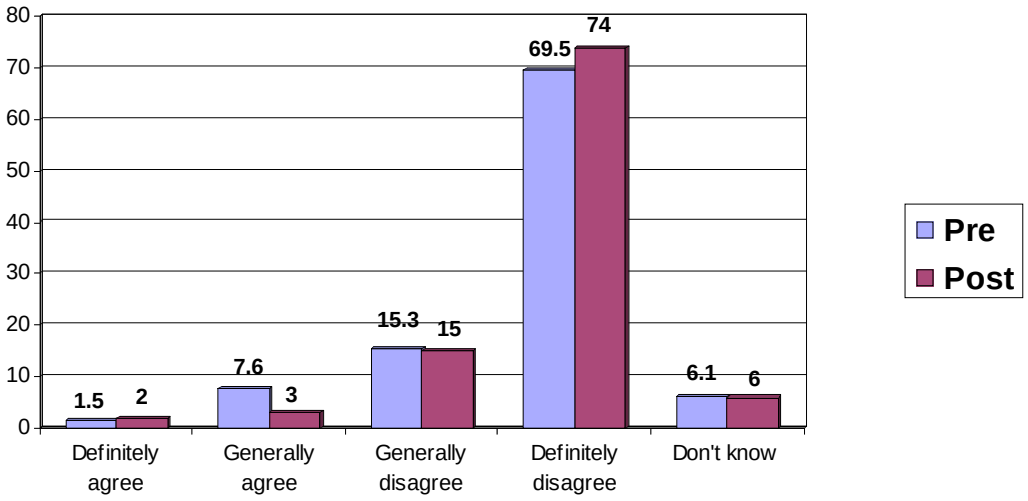
Graph 9: "If he's earning the family money, it's alright for a guy to decide what his partner can and can't spend it on"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

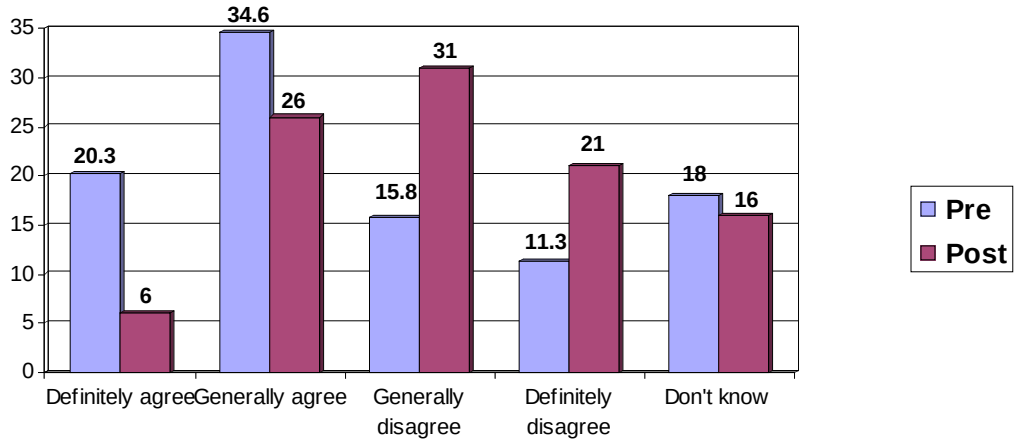
Once again Graph 9 reveals a shift from agreement to disagreement among young women following the program. The extent of disagreement however is not as strong as with other violence-supporting statements, suggesting greater ambivalence among young women.

Graph 10: "It's alright for a guy to restrict the contact between his partner and her friends and family if he thinks they have a bad influence on her"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).
There was strong disagreement among the young women to the notion that men can determine women's behaviour and this increased following the program.

Graph 11: "If a guy is jealous it shows how much he loves his partner"

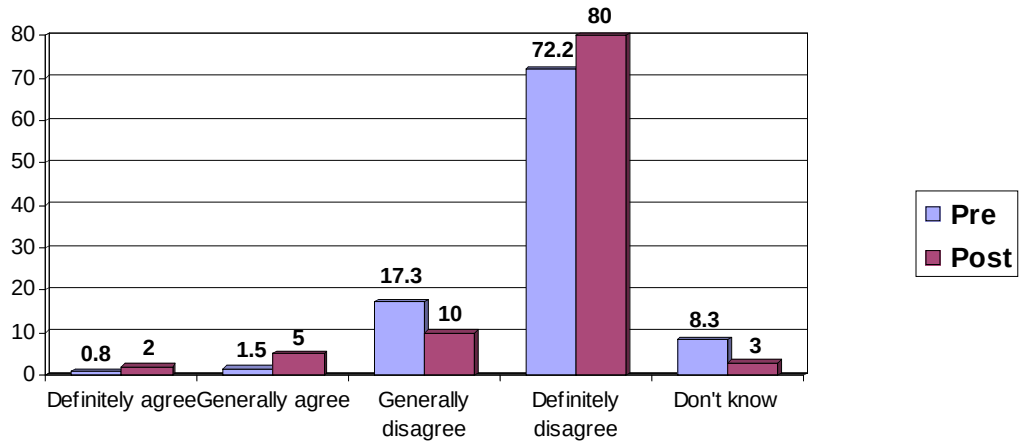


Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

The greatest level of agreement to all violence-supporting statements is evident in Graph 11. Whilst disagreement increased following the program, nearly one-third of young women believed jealousy illustrated 'love'. This is an important finding reflecting previous research on the difficult terrain of meaning young people negotiate in terms of relationships and sexuality (Rawsthorne 2001). This belief may entwine understandings and experiences of love with violence, resulting in acceptance and difficulties in ending violent relationships.

Questionnaires for which we have both pre and post data (n=87) were examined using a statistical procedure (as this data was interval data a paired sample t-test was used) to test whether the changes evident were likely to be chance. The differences in agreement to this question were statistically significant ($p<.001$) and unlikely to occur by chance.

Graph 12: "It's okay for a guy to make a girl have sex with him if she flirted with him or led him on"

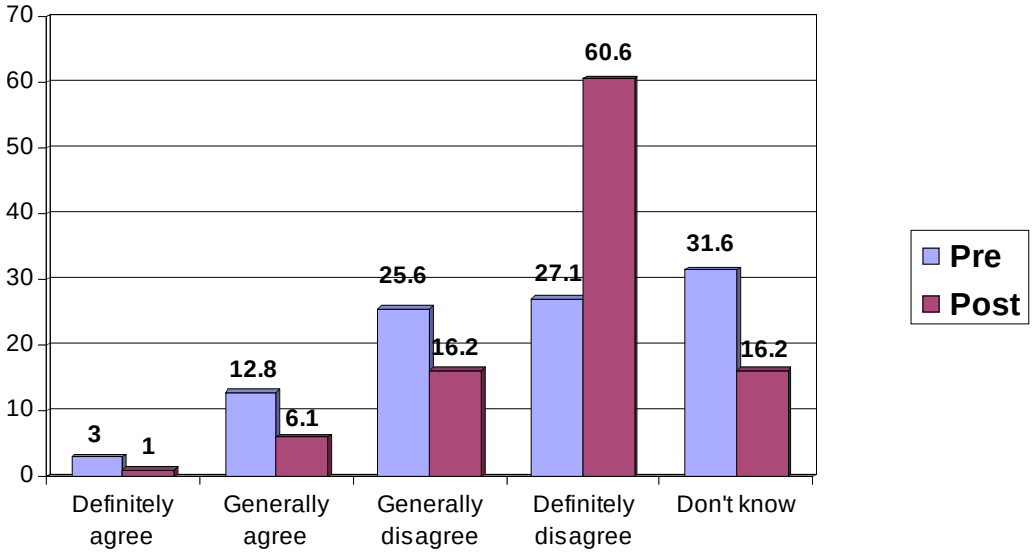


Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

Nine out of ten young women rejected the notion that a woman's behaviour permits men to force women to have sex. This is a very pleasing finding and raises the hope that graduates from the program act to support their peers who may experience violence rather than blame them or hold them responsible.

Questionnaires for which we have both pre and post data (n=87) were examined using a statistical procedure (as this data was interval data a paired sample t-test was used) to test whether the changes evident were likely to be chance. The differences in agreement to this question were statistically significant (p<.045) and unlikely to occur by chance.

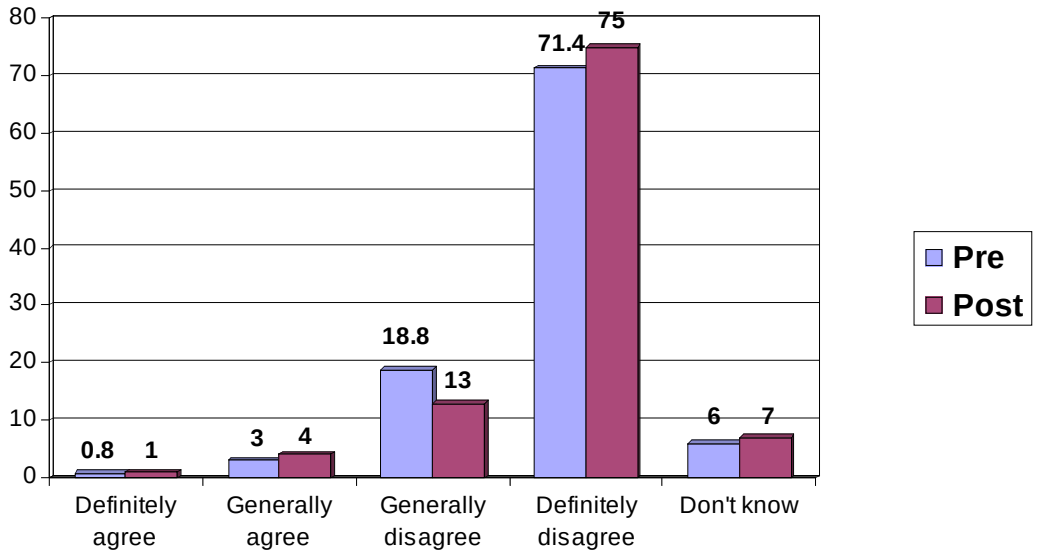
Graph 13: "Most physical violence occurs in a relationship because a partner provoked it"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

The notion of provocation has currency in popular culture and the legal system. Not surprisingly, there was a degree of uncertainty about this statement among young women prior to and following the program (although this decreased). The proportion of young women who 'definitely disagreed' with this statement doubled upon completion of the program (60.6% compared to 27.1%).

Graph 14: "It's ok for a guy to put pressure on a girl to have sex but not to physically force her"



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

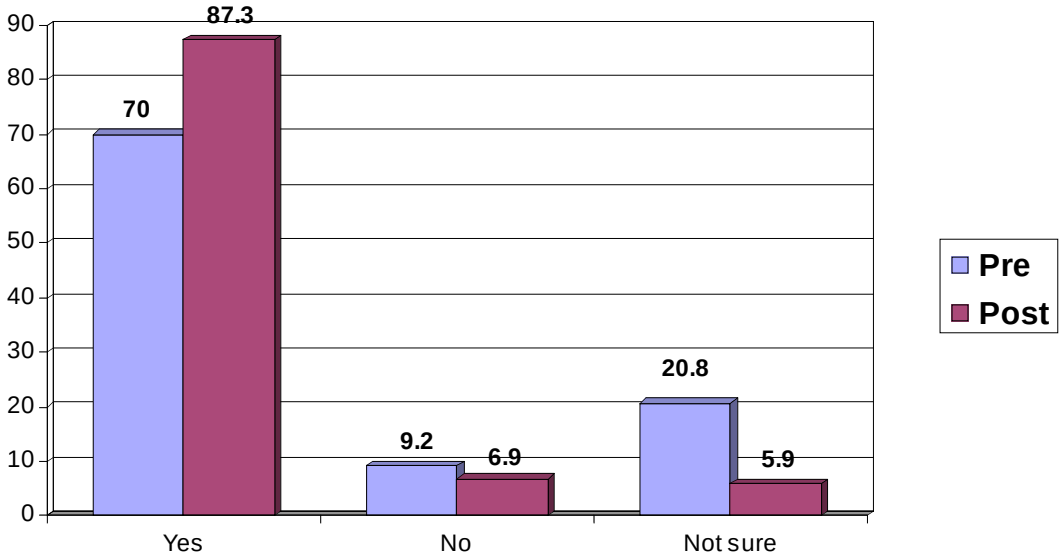
Graph 14 suggests that the anti-violence messages of the past three decades are influencing these young women's attitudes. Almost nine out of ten young women disagreed with this statement prior to participating in the course (with slight shifts following the course).

Case study

A case study revealing increasing non-physical violence in an adolescent relationship was used to explore participant's skills and behaviours. Behavioural change is very difficult to establish without observational data, however, the question does provide some insight into intended behaviour and the skills young women possess to respond to violent relationships.

Scenario:
"Ashanti and Joey have been going out for a couple of months. At first they had a lot of fun together but lately he has been getting really jealous of other guys and wants to know where Ashanti is all the time. He tells her what she can and can't wear and has been threatening her if she doesn't do what he says. Would you describe this relationship as violent?"

Graph 15: Participants' identification of scenario as violent



Notes: n=148. Percentages are of valid responses (ie. Those women who responded).

Graph 15 indicates that the majority of young women identified the scenario as violent, with a significant increase in the proportion following the course. Of particular note is the drop in the number of young women 'not sure' from one-fifth to one-twentieth.

The questionnaires then asked young women to 'imagine that you are Ashanti, what would you do?' This question provides insight into not only potential behaviour but also some indication of the types of skills they feel they possess, such as communication skills, problem solving skills and negotiation skills.

Table 3: Imagine that you are Ashanti, what would you do?
(more than one answer possible)

Action	Pre (%)	Post (%)
Try not to make him angry so he won't carry through on the threats	28.4	17.6
Ignore it	12.8	12.2
Forgive him because you think he didn't mean it	4.7	3.4
Tell him that violence is not on	55.4	41.9
Leave him	52.0	52.7
Talk to a friend	56.8	47.3
Talk to a parent or family member you trust	53.4	44.6
Talk to the school counselor or a worker at a support service	29.7	34.5

Over half of participants indicated they would 'leave him' both pre and post program. There also appears to be a shift away from friends and family members towards talking to a professional such as a school counselor or a worker at a support service. Following the program the young women seem less inclined to 'talk about it' with the perpetrator or down play its importance.

Peer Educators Focus Group findings

The Peer Educators identified a range of benefits from participating in the program, including:

- Gaining new knowledge, confidence and leadership skills
- Learning new opinions
- Working in group environment
- Feeling empowered
- Forming a relationship with co-facilitator
- Gaining insight into young women's lives
- Seeing the change in young women
- Learning to work with different learning styles/capacities
- Learning group work skills
- Paid work, although money was a bonus rather than a motivator
- Greater confidence in everyday life

Focus group members reported that participation as a peer educator affected their own relationships with family and friends. They found they were in a position to provide advice to friends more confidently. They also saw their participation in the program has having long term benefits in terms of their future careers and studies. There were also some unforeseen outcomes from being Peer Educators including: greater awareness of their own abilities; greater understanding that knowledge is power; becoming passionately committed to women's safety; greater sensitivity to inappropriate jokes and humour; and, the distress experienced by some young women.

Peer education was seen by focus group members as a very effective strategy for working with young women. It meant that young women were not afraid, more relaxed and hence engaged. They observed that the less teachers were involved the more young women were involved and willing to ask questions. Over a 5 week period they felt they became quite close to the young

women and sometimes took on a ‘big sister role’. This could involve asking questions about sex and other subjects young women felt teachers may not want to answer.

LWHC provided good support, although there was question whether a support person was necessary for those Peer Educators who were more experienced. The support and suggestions (rather than criticism) of the support person were very helpful. They all noted that all the staff at the centre are willing to help, interested in how the program was going and enthusiastic about the program.

The most useful support for the Peer Educators was the training and support person feedback. A number of suggestions were made about how the program content could be improved, particularly the reliance on complex language. They noted that many of the young women struggled with this language and the program needed to be simplified. They suggested the use of examples from families and friends for those who had not had a relationship. The folder was viewed as too large and cumbersome. They suggested that handouts be in a separate, easy to access file. Some participants also found teacher involvement not very helpful and at times intimidating.

The focus group commented positively on the project’s engagement of young women. They felt the mix of cultures and perspectives among the Peer Educators were very valuable as this reflects the local area. The Peer Educators were also very positive which was important.

Lessons for other non-government agencies wishing to undertake a peer education program included:

- Just do it!
- Could be unpaid but couldn’t loose the training
- Look at diversity of the community and ensure the program responds to this
- Allocate time to talk about issues
- Know your audience
- Ensure you train sufficient peer educators – need a big group so you can work with a range of people as well as sharing the load and cope with people dropping off
- Don’t make it too much like school
- Make sure you know your peer educators well
- Make sure you get support from other agencies
- If possible, start earlier than Year 9 and repeat the program through later years

Stakeholder Focus Group findings

The focus group identified the following key stakeholders in the project:

- Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme
- Local non-government agencies
- Young women
- Schools, particularly Liverpool Girls HS and Ashcroft HS
- Department of Education and Training
- Police
- Domestic violence services
- University of Sydney
- Health, particularly Accident & Emergency, mental health and alcohol and other drugs
- FLYHT
- Government, as funders and policy makers

- Youth organizations, particularly LYAACC and Live ‘n Learn
- Future generations

Participants in the stakeholders focus group commented on the effectiveness of the community development approach adopted by the program. The approach enabled young women, peer educators and stakeholder involvement in decision making about all elements of the program. Stakeholders played a range of roles, including:

- Training of educators
- Support workers for educators
- Involvement in development of program
- Assisting in engagement of young women
- Providing knowledge of relevant systems
- Logistical work

Involvement of specific people within schools was critical to the success of the project. This assisted in understanding timetabling issues, embedding the program within current curriculum and policy, getting the program through relevant school committees, gaining parental permission, motivating and pushing the program, talking to the ‘right person’ in the school for pick up. The Principals’ Breakfast was seen as a key strategy, particularly the attendance of the regional director. The long term engagement with local schools by Liverpool Women’s Health Centre as well as their reputation was also highlighted as important.

Stakeholders brought many things to the program, including

- Expertise, skills and knowledge
- Resources
- Commitment

The active engagement by the project of stakeholders established credibility for the program. Some of the engagement strategies included:

- Participation in peer education training
- Using staff of stakeholder services
- Ongoing consultation
- Group as well as individual meetings
- Feedback and liaison via regular phone contacts

It was noted that ongoing consultation has been a mark of the program, even in the pre-submission phase. This has generated a great deal of enthusiasm and joint ownership of the program among stakeholders. Consultation was undertaken consistently throughout the various phases of the project, including importantly with young women.

Of particular importance in engaging schools was the time allocated to consultation and participation in the steering committee. This meant school staff could be involved in content development, ensure the program slotted into the curriculum and ensure that the program met the needs of DET. The time for development meant the program was able to ‘chip away’ at resistance within schools to outside programs. Trust between the WEEO WISER project and the schools have been an outcome of the time allocated for the development phase. The program also effectively engaged DET both at a local and regional level.

LWHC was seen as an effective auspice for the overall project. The organization made a significant in-kind contribution to the project, including: knowledge and expertise (particularly in relation to the Bilingual Community Educators program); additional staff; resources and technology; management committee involvement; administrative support; financial management;

and lobbying. The project would have been enhanced by additional resources. Financial pressures were created by the decision to employ 2 peer educators to co-facilitate on each program. The service also underestimated the success of the program as reflected in demand for programs from schools.

The stakeholder focus group identified a number of things that may have improved the program, including:

- Additional funding enabling the employment of an additional worker, in recognition of the skills set required and the need to talk about issues
- Engagement of different bureaucracies, particularly Health, Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women and Premiers
- Having website 'live' earlier

The key lessons to pass on from the program included the importance of:

- Communicating with schools early and continually
- Sufficient funding (both personnel and incidentals such as stationary)
- Tapping into key personnel
- Involving young women: responding to their input, encouraging and supporting ownership
- Active engagement of auspice – the success of this program was due to agency wide commitment and the project not being viewed as a 'tack on' project
- Time for consultation, research and building relationships
- Good evaluation frameworks (built into submission)
- Building on previous knowledge, including the use of evidence/research in development
- Supporting peer educators

The focus group thought that parents of young women, particularly their mothers, could have been involved in the project. An unexpected outcome from the program has been the role young women have played in providing information for families and peers.

Conclusion

This document reports on three aspects of the evaluation framework: the pre and post questionnaires; the focus group with peer educators; and, the focus group with stakeholders. All three strongly support the success of Liverpool Women's Health Centre in the development and implementation of the peer education program. Significant changes to the knowledge and attitudes of young women who completed the program are evident in the pre and post questionnaires.

Core findings include:

- Considerable shifts in young women's awareness of non-physical forms of violence, through intimidation, isolation and controlling behaviours, along with a strong recognition of the seriousness of physical violence and sexual assault.
- Increased recognition of the extent of violence in young people's relationships, with a substantial increase in the number of participants who felt violence occurred 'in a lot' of relationships.
- Increased awareness of the seriousness of the short and long term impact of violence following completion of the program. This increased awareness of both the short and long term impacts of violence may lead young women to be less tolerant of violence in the future. By

acknowledging the seriousness of violence we can be hopeful these young women might act more quickly to leave violent relationships in the future.

- Significant shifts in young women's belief in the private nature of relationship violence.

One area identified for further preventative work with young women is discouraging the perceived connection between jealousy, control and love.

The focus groups with peer educators and stakeholders suggest that the program provides a good example of 'best practice' in implementing preventative education with young women concerning healthy relationships.

Appendix

Workshop Program Objectives

Workshop 1: Introduction: creating a safe space to talk about violence and abuse issues and healthy relationships
Objectives: – Introduce the program structure and purpose, and the peer educators – Introduce the key messages of the program – Create a safe learning environment – Introduce discussion about relationships, their impact and place in the lives of young women – Collect data on young women's current knowledge, behaviour and attitudes about relationships violence and healthy relationships – Begin to challenge cultural assumptions about women, men & relationships (includes assumptions within *all* cultural communities).

Workshop 2: Gender, roles & power
Objectives: – Examine gender roles and describe the difference in the socially constructed expectations of young women and young men – Develop a gender-based perspective that participants can use to understand the common dynamics of abusive relationships, explored in later workshops. For example that power and control are key processes and that it is usually men who are perpetrators and women who are victims. – Challenge stereotypes about gender and relationships, such as that women need to be submissive to men. – Identify and list the features of a healthy – Begin to identify the features of unhealthy relationships, including the warning signs of abusive relationships

Workshop 3: Abuse & respect: what is it, power, control & the law. Looking at healthy, equal relationships.
Objectives: – Define relationship violence and the different forms of abuse & violence – Identify the control and manipulation as forms of relationship violence – Continue to identify & name the warning signs of abusive relationships – Use a gender-bases perspective to understand abusive relationships – Identify abuse as unacceptable in all situations – Describe the basics of the legal framework for responding to violence in relationships (including DV, child protection, sexual violence) – List the features of unhealthy relationships – Describe the "cycle of violence" as a common pattern that violent relationships often follow and the likelihood of violence escalating over time

Workshop 4: The impact of abuse & creating healthy relationships
Objectives: – Describe the impact (short-term and long-term) of unhealthy (violent/abusive) relationships – Place the responsibility for violence with the perpetrator – Identify & name the external & internal warning signs of abusive relationships – Explore strategies for creating healthy relationships – Identify the signs of feeling good in relationships – Begin to demonstrate a sense of their self-worth in relation to intimate relationships

Workshop 5: Action: what you can do for yourself & others & available supports
Objectives: – Describe what good support is and what makes support helpful (“good” support) – Identify that some forms of intervention in a relationship where there is violence & abuse what are not helpful (“bad” support) – Identify a range of sources of support. This includes identify personal sources of support & name support services that can assist young women in abusive relationships – Identify at a basic level how the service system, including the legal system, can be used to support women experiencing abuse. – Begin to demonstrate the knowledge and skills to provide non-judgmental support to other women – Begin to demonstrate a willingness to intervene in abusive relationships of others, if this can be done in way that doesn’t compromise her own safety. – Begin to recognise & describe the barriers that can keep women in unhealthy relationships/ prevent women from leaving – Collect data on young women’s knowledge, behaviour and attitudes about relationships violence and healthy relationships at the end of the workshop program