

## Summary

### Introduction

A substantial number of adolescents encounter a form of dating violence in their romantic relationships. To prevent the onset of dating violence the Trimbos-institute, in association with Movisie, Riagg Zwolle and Parnassia, has developed the Stay in Love+ prevention program. The program encompasses four scholar courses and activities outside the school such as an information evening for parents and the distribution of information through business cards, flyers, posters and a website. The program aims to alter the negative attitude towards dating violence, increase knowledge about dating violence and stimulate social skills to solve interpersonal problems in a romantic relationship. By this means, it is expected that future dating violence among adolescents can be reduced.

In January 2008 the Trimbos Institute has sought cooperation with counsellors in Utrecht, Eindhoven and Zwolle to implement Stay in Love+ as a pilot in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade of high schools in these regions. In this report three main research questions are answered:

- 1) Is Stay in Love+ carried out as was meant by the designers of the program?
- 2) Does participation in the Stay in Love+ program alter attitudes, knowledge and social skills of students with respect to dating violence?
- 3) Are the effects found depending on the program integrity and student characteristics (gender, age, ability to show empathy and level of moral reasoning)?

### Methods

The way in which the program is carried out (program integrity) influences the possible effectiveness of the program. In the current study, program integrity is investigated by observing part of the lessons and providing teachers and pupils with questionnaires about the lessons. To investigate the effectiveness of Stay in Love+, questionnaires were used to measure attitude, knowledge and social skills. At four measurement occasions, adolescents were asked to fill out these questionnaires using a laptop. The moment the adolescent received the Stay In Love+ lessons differed between classes. Classes were assigned to three intervention cohorts that differed in terms of the number of pre- and post- measurements. Classes that participated in condition 1 received the lessons between the first and second measurement occasion, classes that participated in condition 2 received the lessons between the second and third measurement occasion and classes in condition 3 received the lessons between the third and fourth measurement occasion. The three intervention cohorts were aligned on the intervention, resulting in a combined model with six virtual assessments. During the first measurement occasion adolescents were also asked about their age, gender, ethnicity and received questions to judge their ability to show empathy and level of moral judgment.

### Results and conclusion

With respect to program integrity (research question 1) it is concluded that on average only half of the Stay in Love+ user guide is carried out. More specifically it is concluded that 1) the program does reach its target group, i.e. high school (VMBO) students aged 12-15 and that the majority of the teachers is trained. 2) The way in which the user guide was carried out with respect to the number,

content, frequency and duration of lessons was qualified as mediocre and only a few classes have completed the group assignments meant to process the content of the lessons. 3) The schools are not able to sufficiently engage parents and the information concerning dating violence and romantic relationship, distributed outside the school setting, does not reach a sufficient number of students.

To answer research question 1, factors that may influence program integrity were also examined. It is concluded that the training of teachers was a useful basis to be able to carry out the Stay in Love+ program. However, planning of the lessons was often insufficient resulting in lessons being cancelled. Concerning the feasibility of the program, teachers state that the program is time consuming with respect to both preparation and execution resulting in the inability to discuss all prescribed teaching material. Transfer of the content of lessons, i.e. the ability to structure lessons and teaching skills, was qualified as fairly good. Although observations of lessons also showed that the ability of teachers to create a safe atmosphere during the lessons was fairly good, students stated that the atmosphere was not safe enough to share experiences and opinions about romantic relationships.

Concerning the effects of Stay in Love+ (research question 2) it can be concluded that the program has a small, positive but short-term effect on attitude, knowledge and social skills of students regarding dating violence. The largest effect is found on attitude student's show towards dating violence. Two months after the program had ended the effects of Stay in Love+ are declining. At this point in time attitude, knowledge and social skills students show towards dating violence decline quicker in students that participated in Stay in Love+ compared to the situation in which they would not have participated in the program.

Regarding research question 3 it was examined to what extent student characteristics and program integrity influenced the effects of Stay in Love+. The direct, positive effects of Stay in Love+ on attitude, knowledge and social skills of students regarding dating violence, is mainly seen in girls and students that show higher levels of empathy. Individual characteristics do not influence the effects Stay in Love+ has on attitude, knowledge and social skills two months after the program has ended. Program integrity does not influence the direct effects, but does influence short-term effects of Stay in Love+ two months after the program has ended. The positive effects in attitude and knowledge decline less in students from classes in which teachers complied better with the user guide when carrying out the program.

## **Final conclusion**

In sum it can be concluded that Stay in Love+ has a small, positive but short-term effect on attitude, knowledge and social skills of students regarding dating violence. The facts that program integrity is qualified as mediocre and that students state that the atmosphere during lessons is unsafe may have caused the effects to be small and short-termed. In addition, higher levels of program integrity were related to lower decline of the positive effects of attitude and knowledge two months after Stay in Love+ had ended. Future research should examine whether the initial effects of Stay in Love+ on attitude, knowledge and social skills may lead to a reduction in dating violence.