



Executive Summary: Our Snapshot of this Research

Prepared by the R4Respect team

What is R4Respect?

R4Respect is a violence prevention program in which young people challenge harmful and violence supportive attitudes among young people to promote respectful relationships. The program has four main pillars of action: youth-led peer-to-peer respectful relationships education sessions, social media strategy, community events, and law reform and advocacy for young people. R4Respect was established to counter men's violence against women. This aim has broadened to encompass gender-based violence in the interpersonal context, rather than collective and institutional violence. The focus is on efforts to prevent and reduce forms of violence and abuse between individuals, peers or small numbers of people, such as domestic or intimate partner violence, on-line abuse, rape and sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

The R4Respect model draws inspiration from international movements that promote young people as agents of positive change on major health and well-being issues (United Nations Children's Fund, UNCF, 2012; United Nations Development Program, UNDP, 2018). The aim of R4Respect is to challenge attitudes and behaviours that foster gender inequality and disrespect for those who do not fit the white, male and dominant identity. This form of masculinity —based on characteristics such as violence, physical strength, suppression of emotion, devaluation of women and domination—is described as a toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018; PettyJohn., Muzzey., Maas., & McCauley, 2018). The work of R4Respect is based on a gender-based framework— consistent with the Federal Government's National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2012-2022); (the National Plan). The gender-based framework recognises that men are the primary perpetrators of violence and that male violence will persist while toxic masculinity and gender inequality persist. The R4Respect 'program logic' is underpinned by a theoretical framework that addresses: (1) the links between gender, power and violence and (2) guides young people as active agents of social change.

The Research Process

This research project included an action research methodology allowing us to act, reflect, learn from the feedback of young people, teachers and others, then adapt our program. With the researchers and our partner organisation, Ruby Gaea in Darwin, we formed a Youth Research Group (YRG). The first phase of the research involved our peer educators developing and delivering 4 hours of respectful relationships education content to young people aged 14-25 years of age. The research methods included pre-and post-test surveys with young people (YP), and interviews with stakeholders.

Our research questions

1. Do peer educators in the R4Respect program have a positive impact on the awareness and attitudes young people have of what constitutes respect in relationships?
2. What features of the R4Respect program have a positive impact, and how can the program be improved to enhance positive impact?



The Results

We know from the research that youth participants, teachers and community workers were very positive about R4Respect's peer-to-peer education. We are excited to know that we are having a positive impact on the immediate attitudes young people have in relationships and what crosses the line into harm —84% of the participants said that young people leading the learning helped them better understand what is okay and what crosses the line into harm. It is disturbing, however, that too many young men view themselves as superior to women as indicated by the finding that 41% of male students were unsure or in agreement that men should take control in relationships.

Encouragement from stakeholders to embed peer-to-peer respectful relationships education (RRE)

The teachers and community workers said that programs like R4Respect can be most effective when they are delivered over a longer term, and for schools they need to be planned as part of the school RRE curricula and strategy.

On the peer-to-peer education model

- 92% of YP strongly agreed or agreed that it is helpful to have young people leading the learning on respectful relationships —only 1% disagreed and 6% were unsure.
- 91% of the YP strongly agreed (54%) or agreed (37%) that the peer educators knew what they were talking about.
- 84% of the YP strongly agreed (56%) or agreed (28%) that young people leading the learning helped them better understand what is okay and what crosses the line into harm.
- 86% strongly agreed (55%) or agreed (31%) to the statement: *Things I learnt in the program would help me act with greater respect in the future.*

Teachers and others were very positive about the relatability of the peer educators, the gender mix and cultural diversity in R4Respect. They also offered constructive ideas to improve our program. One stakeholder said: "It is obvious that the [peer educators] want to be there, they show enthusiasm and energy". Another reported that this enthusiasm helps the content to be more of a young person's issue, than teacher directed: "...they [peer educators] ooze that kind of enthusiasm that it's their kind of project, that it's important to them personally..."

On the influence of R4Respect on the attitudes of young people

In response to the statement—*I know that there is a clear line between what is ok behaviour and what is harmful behaviour* — it was encouraging to find: 92% of YP indicated agreement post-workshop compared to 82% pre-workshop, with only 8% post-workshop disagreeing or unsure.

In response to the statement—It's okay to put pressure on someone to have sex—the young people overwhelmingly stated their strong disagreement and disagreement pre-workshop (80% and 10% respectively) and at post-workshop this strong disagreement/ disagreement had increased to 86% and 6% respectively.

In response to the statement—It's ok to physically force someone to have sex— the young people overwhelming stated their disagreement and disagreement pre-workshop (82% and 5% respectively) and at post-workshop this strong disagreement/ disagreement had increased to 86% and 5% respectively.



The response to the four statements that explicitly explored views on gender equality were concerning.

Men should take control in relationships

Men should be the head of the household

Men are better at more things than women are, in general

These days guys realise that girls are their equals

Promising Impacts

The aim is to have 100% strong disagreement by young people to the statement that *It's ok to physically force someone to have sex* as this constitutes rape. At 91% this high level of disagreement can be taken to indicate a promising impact of R4Respect's messaging about seeking consent.

Female participants expressed a higher level of certainty in viewing themselves as “equals” to males and a higher level of disagreement to comments that men should take control in relationships or men are better at more things than women. Forty-one percent of male students were unsure or in agreement that men should take control compared to 17% of female students. Twenty percent of male participants agreed/strongly agreed that men are better at more things. No female participants agreed.

Both male (46%) and female (30%) of participants were unsure whether guys realise that girls are their equals.

On the influence of R4Respect on the actions of young people

Four statements asked young people to think about actions they take to protect themselves or others from harm, including one statement related to bystander action.

I solve disagreements peacefully

I can remove myself from a person or partner who could cause physical or emotional harm to me

Things I learnt in the program will help me to act with greater respect in future

I can approach or interrupt someone who is being unsafe or dangerous towards their friend or partner in person or online

On each of these statements young people showed a positive shift in their actions or perceived actions. On the statement *I solve disagreements peacefully*, there was a 12% increase post-workshop in YP indicating strong agreement to this statement. The responses to the statement— *I can remove myself from a person or partner who could cause physical or emotional harm to me*—were encouraging. 83% of YP at post-workshop indicated that they agreed/strongly agreed compared to 68% pre-workshop. In response to the statement —*Things I learnt in the program will help me to act with greater respect in future*— 86% of YP agreed or strongly agreed post-workshop. This is a promising sign that the YP will recall the information presented by the peer educators post workshop (that is, immediately after the four hours of educational delivery had occurred) and that it will be helpful in future. The responses to the statement—*I behave respectfully towards my girls/boyfriend/friends*—showed that female participants marked themselves lower on respectful behaviour towards friends/partners than the males. At the pre-workshop stage, 63% of males and 37% of females strongly agreed that they behave respectfully to partners/



friends, increasing to 66% and 59% respectively post-workshop (92% and 94% when strongly agree/agree combined). There was no significant change on the statement—*I can approach or interrupt someone who is being unsafe or dangerous towards their friend or partner in person or online*— with 74% of YP agree/strongly agree pre-workshop and 74% post-workshop. This indicates that taking action to “call out” disrespectful behaviour is challenging. Specialist bystander education programs are emerging that aim to improve the willingness, skills and confidence of young people to intervene when they witness harm or sexual violence. Research on these programs report clear and positive changes for participants (mostly young people) across behavioural, cognitive and attitudinal domains (Taket & Crisp, 2017, p. 14). R4Respect refers schools to bystander programs such as MATES, Griffith University and in future R4Respect aims to incorporate more training for peer educators and more program content on bystander behaviour.

What do these findings mean?

Young people demonstrated that the content and pedagogy used in the short workshop improved their knowledge and understanding of harmful behaviour and attitudes. However, there are clear indications that attitudes to gender equity and consent still need improvement.

The youth participants showed more awareness of what behaviours cross the line into harm and many said that they will act with greater respect in future. The research showed that there are too many young people who think that it's okay to put pressure on, or force someone to have sex. There are also too many young men who think that men are superior to women. Disrespect for women is a driver of violence in relationships. This means that much more work needs to be done to promote cultural change and gender equality.

From a pedagogical perspective, educators in the evaluation of R4Respect expressed some reservations with external programs such as R4Respect that are not embedded in the curriculum. They acknowledged that learning can be limited when the information and experience is not reinforced over-time and where learning outcomes are not evaluated. It was evident from the school and community stakeholders in the R4Respect evaluation (Struthers, Parmenter & Tilbury, 2019) that R4Respect engages students effectively and that it is best used to complement and reinforce other respectful relationships educational activities within a whole of school, curriculum-based response to respectful relationships education.

Implications for practice, policy and research

Implications for practice

Promote gender-based frameworks for RRE that align with developments under the National Plan:

In Australia there is well-developed evidence-based guidance and educational resources (including curriculum) that promote the application of gender-based frameworks to RRE. R4R use for example, Respectful Relationships Department of Education and Training (2018) Respectful Relationships Education toolkit (Our Watch, ND). Gender-based frameworks— informed by feminist theory that expose the links between gender, power and violence —are recommended as most effective in promoting understanding of, and challenging violence supportive attitudes, actions and cultural norms (Flood, Fergus & Heenan, 2009; Ollis, & Dyson, 2018; Our Watch, 2015; Taket, & Crisp, 2018).

To promote the “youth voice” in RRE —peer education is one strategy to consider:

This research has shown that the peer-to-peer model can have a positive impact on young people in RRE. To strengthen the “youth-voice” in RRE and to make greater use of the positive influence of peers, programs like R4Respect are worthy of further development and wider application to meet the prevention objectives of the National Plan, alongside other evidenced based approaches.



Building capacity in peer-to-peer RRE models:

To complement existing RRE programs in schools and other settings, it will be helpful for R4Respect and other organisations to identify opportunities to build more peer-to-peer programs. The knowledge transfer activity arising from this ANROWS funded research —the development of an R4Respect manual—will be a useful resource to assist in the wider “roll-out” or replication of the RRE peer model in R4Respect.

Attracting and retaining young men:

Efforts to attract and train suitable young men need to be ongoing. This is an ongoing challenge for programs like R4Respect.

Collaboration with schools and community organisations:

Programs like R4Respect have a role to play in broader whole of school, systematised approaches to RRE that are emerging as ‘best practice’ in Australia. Stakeholders in this research were supportive of building ongoing collaboration with R4Respect, so that the visits to schools and community organisations could be embedded in a wider school/community strategy. This would help to overcome the planning challenges of engaging external groups on a one-off-basis.

Managing the well-being of young people and participants in R4Respect:

RRE activities like R4Respect can prompt disclosures and distress among young people as participants in the education or as peer educators. Use of agreed protocols in responding to the well-being of young people is a priority.

Resources and training:

There is an extensive range of RRE toolkits, whole of school strategy guides, RRE programs and evaluation guides to assist organisations in establishing RRE programs. There are limited resources available to guide the development of peer-to-peer RRE education models. As an outcome of this research, ANROWS are supporting R4Respect to produce their educational materials and processes into a guide for others to use.

Responding to diversity:

It is important for R4Respect and any other emerging peer education RRE programs to improve their capacity to be responsive to and inclusive of young people from a wide range of identities and backgrounds, including young people with disabilities. There are also significant differences in needs and experience of children and young people living in regional and remote areas of Australia, which should be investigated and applied to the existing model of R4Respect.

Implications for policy development

- The need for RRE peer-educator programs to maintain alignment with the gender-based framework of the National Plan and Change the Story (Our Watch, ANROWS, VicHealth, 2015).
- To achieve “youth voice”, youth participation in RRE and VAW prevention, innovation like youth peer-to-peer education is worthy of support by governments.
- Governments to consider supporting the widespread implementation of respectful relationships education and resourcing for schools and community organisations to increase their ability to embed RRE in their schools/ organisations.



Implications for research

Peer education programs in RRE need to be evidence-based. There needs to be more robust research tools that measure: (i) the impact of peer-to-peer delivery in RRE with youth participants and (ii) their views on the challenges and benefits of peer educators in delivering RRE.

Next steps for young people as agents of change

It is our aim that other schools, community and youth organisations will create more opportunities for young people to be involved in the design and delivery of RRE peer-to-peer models. The next steps require building much more capacity in the program —more peer educators, more training and more secure funding. We are up for the challenge.