

Fourth 'R' trims youth violence

A Western-led program proposing a new school curriculum to teach healthy relationship skills -- the fourth R -- is 50-per-cent more effective than traditional programs at lowering incidences of physical dating violence among Canadian adolescents, according to interim results released last week.

The results are based on information collected in 2004-2005 from 1,800 Grade 9 students in the Thames Valley District School

Board (TVDSB) in London, and compared students who learned extensively about violence prevention, sexual behaviour and substance use versus those who took part in traditional health classes.

"These results are encouraging and show the effectiveness of teaching modern-day health and interpersonal skills just like you would any other subject," says David Wolfe, of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Centre for Prevention Science.

As principal investigator of the research team, which includes Western's Peter Jaffe and Ray Hughes and Claire Crooks of the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, Wolfe says the program includes a 21-session classroom curriculum, skill building exercises and school-wide activities to promote positive relationships and prevent violence and abuse.

The program also impacted

student awareness about drug and alcohol use, showing 82 per cent of students in the Fourth R program reported learning new information compared to 63 per cent of students in traditional classes. Other findings included 72 per cent of Fourth R students reporting strong conflict management skills versus less than half (48 per cent) of students in traditional classes.

For more information please visit www.the-fourthr.ca