

1 IN 3 YOUTH EXPERIENCE DATING VIOLENCE: STUDY

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to continue into adulthood," said Harford.

Operating from the idea that "hurt people, hurt people," and armed with a grant from Public Safety Canada, Radius is piloting a program targeted at the perpetrator.

"The vast majority of young people that we work with have experienced trauma themselves."

Radius' Youth Dating Violence (YDV) Intensive Intervention Program is focused on individuals — in Halton, and across the province — between the ages of 12-24 who are using violence within a dating relationship.

"We were determined to engage in work with those who use violence in their relationships, as that is where the targeted change needs to occur," said Bente Skau,



Graham Paine/Metroland
Radius treats children and families affected by violence.

Radius' clinical director.

A 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children study, the first national study in Canada to look at adolescent dating violence (victimization and perpetration), showed that this behaviour "impacts a substantial minority of Canadian youth and is a serious health problem."

One in three youth who had dated reported adolescent dating violence, whether it was psychological, physical or cyber abuse, ac-

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- Bente Skau, Radius' clinical director

ording to the study. Statistics showed that the majority of victims experienced psychological abuse.

This can include manipulation, name calling, controlling behaviours, threatening, isolation from friends, and gaslighting, said Harford. "Many people who experience psychological abuse find themselves questioning if they are even being abused, because the perpetrator tends to be skilled in manipulating the victim into believing they deserved to be treated that way, or convincing them that the abuse never hap-

pened (gaslighting)."

What makes the YDV program "unique worldwide" is the combination of a comprehensive trauma assessment, as well as weekly therapy with a designated clinician until treatment goals are reached, said Harford.

Existing services tend to be manualized, group-based treatment, and although this can be very beneficial to some clients, research has not always supported the efficacy of this type of program, said Harford.

"We understand that it is

incredibly difficult to ask someone to take responsibility for their actions, when likely no one has even been accountable to them for the harm they have experienced. By using a trauma-informed approach, we process the harm they experienced in order to help them learn to take accountability for the harm they have caused," said Harford.

Referrals to the program can come from schools, probation officers, community organizations, or youth themselves.

In-person sessions are available for those who live close to the Oakville or Etobicoke Radius offices, with the virtual option opening the free program up to clients across the province.

Radius staff will determine the program's success through clients' completion of before and after psycho-

metric questionnaires, as well as with post-treatment follow-ups (with clients' consent), and checks with the Canadian Police Information Centre to find out if any additional charges have been accrued, said Harford.

More and more research is coming out related to teen dating violence, said Skau.

"What is clear is that there is not a direct causal pathway to engaging in violence. There are a myriad of risk factors.... It is our hope to contribute to the body of research by examining how or when young people are able to desist from using violence in their intimate relationships," added Skau.

Radius' current Public Safety Canada grant will expire in June 2024.

"We are searching for future/permanent funding, as the work of ending YDV will be far from complete by the end of the grant," said Skau.

To learn more about the YDV program, visit radius-cys.ca.

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