INTRODUCTION

Relationship abuse (physically or emotionally abusing a dating partner) and sexual assault (forcing someone to do something sexual) happen all too often among high school students and have many negative effects on students’ well-being (e.g., depression) and education (e.g., poor grades). We need programs that prevent these forms of aggression. The University of New Hampshire’s Prevention Innovations Research Center’s Bringing in the Bystander® High School Curriculum (BITB-HSC) is a seven-session, in-person educational program that encourages participants to safely take positive action when there is risk of sexual assault and relationship abuse, to support a victim, and to support healthy norms about relationships. In addition to increasing positive bystander action among students, the BITB-HSC also focuses on increasing knowledge, changing attitudes to be less supportive of abuse, and reducing the likelihood that students will use aggression in their own relationships.

METHOD

Over 4,000 students across twenty-five schools in upper New England participated in a project to evaluate the effectiveness of the BITB-HSC. Some students only completed surveys, and some students completed surveys and participated in the BITB-HSC. This allowed us to compare students who did and did not get the program to see if the BITB-HSC led to changes in ways that students think and act. In this report, we focus on the short-term effects (i.e., 2 months) of the BITB-HSC. In a later report, we will focus on the one-year findings.

FINDINGS

Compared to students who did not participate in the BITB-HSC, students who did participate in the BITB-HSC reported increases in:

1. Knowledge about relationship abuse and sexual assault.
2. Critical thinking skills about how relationships are portrayed in the media.
4. Personal responsibility to take action to prevent relationship abuse and sexual assault.
5. Taking positive bystander action in some situations to prevent relationship abuse and sexual assault.

Students who participated in BITB-HSC reported decreases in:

1. Myths about rape (e.g., boys and men cannot be raped, victims lie about rape).
2. Perpetrating aggression against others; students who did BITB-HSC did not perpetrate sexual assault, relationship abuse, stalking, and sexual harassment as much as students who just did the surveys.

It made a difference how much of the program students attended. The positive findings were strongest for students who went to the most sessions.

Overall, the findings of BITB-HSC are very promising, especially the finding that the BITB-HSC reduced all forms of violence perpetration among students. In a future report, we will present the impacts of the BITB-HSC at the one-year follow-up. We hope that the BITB-HSC can be one of many helpful prevention strategies that schools use to promote healthy relationships among their students.