



WHAT WORKS: OVERVIEWS OF REVIEWS

# Reducing relationship and sexual violence:

Findings from reviews about the effectiveness of respectful relationships and bystander programs in school and tertiary education settings

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ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

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# Reducing relationship and sexual violence:

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## **Acknowledgement of lived experiences of violence**

ANROWS acknowledges the lives and experiences of the women and children affected by domestic, family and sexual violence who are represented in this report. We recognise the individual stories of courage, hope and resilience that form the basis of ANROWS research.

Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Recommended support services include 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) and Lifeline (13 11 14).

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# Executive summary

## Background

Respectful relationships education and bystander interventions in school and tertiary settings seek to promote health and equal relationships and reduce sexual violence and dating violence experienced and perpetrated by young people, in and out of relationships, by equipping them with attitudes, knowledge and skills to confront violence. The aim of this review is to provide an overview of the evidence from systematic reviews in relation to the effectiveness of respectful relationships and bystander intervention programs in school and tertiary education settings.

## Methods

Using a systematic approach, an overview of reviews was conducted to allow for evidence from a large body of research literature to be synthesised, compared and contrasted in a systematic way. Review papers that included studies from high-income countries were identified by systematically searching multiple sources from the period January 2010 to October 2020. A total of 17 review studies were identified for inclusion, of which eight focused on respectful relationships programs, seven on bystander programs, and two on a combination of both programs. Reviews not focused on educational settings were excluded.

## Results

Promising results were reported for both respectful relationships and bystander programs, in particular in relation to the programs' effectiveness at changing attitudes and increasing knowledge. Out of the 17 reviews, eight reported that respectful relationships education and bystander programs were effective at improving attitudes towards sexual and dating violence; five reviews reported an increase in knowledge about sexual and dating violence; four reported an increase in intent, willingness or confidence to intervene; and five reported an increase in bystander action. Findings in relation to the programs' effectiveness at reducing violence were more mixed. While four reviews reported a reduction in intimate partner violence (IPV), one review reported no impact and one concluded that there is insufficient evidence.

In relation to sexual violence (SV), while one review reported a decrease, three found no impact, one reported mixed results and one concluded there was insufficient evidence. Key factors associated with increased effectiveness included longer program duration, program content focused on behavioural changes, and a focus on enhancing protective factors across all areas of a child's life.

## Directions for future research

While the evidence supports the effectiveness of education interventions in improving attitudes, knowledge and bystander action, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of respectful relationships and bystander programs in reducing IPV and SV perpetration and victimisation. In particular, there is a need for more high-quality studies that adopt a comparative design.

## Implications for policy and practice

There is a call for programs that focus on equipping young people with skills to intervene and modify their behaviours. Rather than focusing on what not to do (e.g. don't blame the victim, don't presume consent) there is a need for programs to teach young people how to intervene and to seek, refuse and ascertain consent, and how to support those who have been victimised. Programs should be adapted to suit the specific needs of their participants, with consideration given to gender, age, context, cultural background, and the overall preparedness of organisations to shift attitudes towards violence against women (VAW) among staff and students. Consideration should also be given to implementing programs earlier, before participants have potentially experienced IPV or SV and when their attitudes are more flexible and open to influence, as well as delivering longer programs, where resources permit. To facilitate wide-spread change, implementing respectful relationships and bystander programs across primary and secondary schools, as well tertiary educational settings, is recommended.

# Introduction

Respectful relationships education and bystander interventions provided in primary and secondary school and tertiary education settings typically aim to promote healthy and equal relationships. These programs aim to reduce SV and relationship violence experienced and perpetrated by young people, in and out of relationships, by equipping them with the knowledge to recognise violence, and the skills to confront the issue.<sup>1-3</sup> Respectful relationships programs focus on improving an individual's ability to engage in respectful and healthy relationships with others, whereas bystander interventions equip participants with the skills to recognise and intervene in instances of sexual or relationship violence. Some of these programs include a gender equality lens, exploring rape myths and gender stereotypes that inform violence against women. Rape myths are attitudes held by individuals that reflect and sustain harmful beliefs, attitudes and norms regarding rape, including how, to whom, and why rape occurs.<sup>4-6</sup> While respectful relationships and bystander interventions vary in their focus – particularly in the extent to which they focus on individual and community levels of responsibility, are targeted for particular age groups, and whether they are targeted just towards men and boys or provided in mixed-sex groups – the programs commonly seek to achieve similar outcomes.

A key focus of both program types is to facilitate a change in attitudes towards violence against women (VAW), with a particular focus on “the rape myth”, as well as gender roles and relationship norms more broadly.<sup>7</sup> Both program types also seek to impact behaviour, that is, to reduce the perpetration of violence and increase positive bystander behaviours.<sup>1</sup> Bystander programs, in particular, seek to empower individuals to intervene when they witness violence, to assist victims to move out of risky situations, to practice and demonstrate personal safety, and to speak up against gender stereotypes and rape myths.<sup>8</sup> Programs are usually delivered face-to-face by trained professionals, although online methods are sometimes used.<sup>2,7,9</sup>

The aim of this review was to provide an overview of the evidence from systematic reviews in relation to the effectiveness of respectful relationships and bystander intervention programs in primary and secondary school and tertiary education settings. Only reviews of interventions that specifically aimed to prevent or reduce relationship or sexual

violence in a dating or relationship context were included. Reviews of interventions that address interpersonal violence in educational settings more broadly (e.g. with a focus on bullying) or programs in the field of social and emotional learning focused on developing positive relationships more broadly were excluded.

This review provides an overview of the effectiveness evidence, focusing on findings and recommendations that are relevant to policy and practice design decision-makers. The review is structured as follows:

1. overview of the methods used
2. results reporting the effectiveness findings as well as factors associated with effectiveness for each outcome
3. evidence gaps and directions for future research
4. implications for policy and practice.

# Methods

Using a systematic approach, an overview of reviews was conducted to allow for evidence from a large body of research literature to be synthesised, compared and contrasted in a systematic way, and presented in a single document.<sup>10</sup> This current overview of reviews was conducted within the context of a larger ANROWS-led "What Works" study that is mapping the available evidence for interventions that seek to reduce the prevalence and impact of violence against women more broadly.

## Screening process and study selection

Reviews were identified for inclusion by systematically searching multiple sources, including the database Scopus and a systematic search of websites of key organisations in the violence against women field, from the period January 2010 to October 2020. The details are outlined in Appendix B. Studies were assessed for inclusion using the criteria outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Inclusion criteria

Topic	Inclusion criteria
Review aim	To review, summarise, or synthesise effectiveness evidence
Interventions/setting	Respectful relationships and/or bystander intervention programs in school and/or tertiary education settings that seek to reduce relationship and sexual violence. Reviews not focused on educational settings were excluded, as were reviews of interventions that address interpersonal violence in educational settings more broadly (e.g. with a focus on bullying) or programs in the field of social and emotional learning focused on developing positive relationships more broadly
Study design	All review studies, providing a systematic approach was used
Quality	While no formal quality assessment was conducted, only reviews that clearly described the methods used were included
Years	Studies published between 1 January 2010 and 31 October 2020
Countries	Reviews that included high-income countries (as determined by the review authors). Reviews limited to only low- or middle-income countries were excluded
Publication type	Reviews published as peer-reviewed journal articles as well as research (grey literature) reports were included. Publications not available or accessible in full text were excluded
Language	Only studies published in the English language were included

Studies were first screened for inclusion by title and/or abstract. Reasons for excluding studies were documented. Relevant studies were uploaded into a designated EndNote library for full-text screening. During the early phase of the study, all reviews were discussed with the team until clarity around inclusion and exclusion was established, and the research team demonstrated confidence and consistency in decision-making. All review studies identified for inclusion were cross-checked by a second reviewer.

## Data charting and synthesis

Data from included studies were systematically extracted using a purposely designed data extraction template. To allow for easy extraction and analysis, the data extraction form was administered using Survey Monkey (which can be exported into Word or Excel).

Data analysis was conducted using Excel and Word files. Findings were analysed per outcome and intervention type. Review study results at the intervention type level, in relation to specific outcomes, were only described as effective (“works”) if findings were statistically significant; the review included high-evidence studies, specifically randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and non-RCTs with appropriate forms of control; and review authors expressed confidence in the quality of included primary studies. Positive findings that were based on lower evidence studies such as non-RCTs without appropriate forms of control, pre–post studies and qualitative studies were described as “positive”. Findings are described as “mixed” when the results from included studies conflict. The term “no impact” is used when the intervention is not associated with a statistically significant change, and the term “harmful” is limited to results that demonstrate a statistically significant negative impact.

# Results

We identified 17 review studies for inclusion, of which eight focused on respectful relationships programs, seven on bystander programs, and two on a combination of both. Interventions targeted both young boys and men, as well as young people more broadly. Seven reviews focused on interventions targeting young people in tertiary education settings;<sup>3, 4, 11, 12 5, 13, 14</sup> five evaluated interventions targeting middle- and high-school students;<sup>2, 6, 7, 15, 16</sup> three focused on interventions targeting students in high school and university settings;<sup>1, 17, 18</sup> one review evaluated interventions delivered in middle- and high-school and tertiary educational settings;<sup>19</sup> and one review evaluated programs for early childhood (pre-school) to high-school students.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the reviews included studies that evaluated interventions across a range of age groups and education settings (often combining primary school and high school, or high school and universities), and provided little to no detail of the intervention itself. There was very little exploration of the impact of student age or education setting, or specific program design elements on effectiveness.

There was little discussion or exploration of the differing program curriculums (such as a gendered approach, healthy approach, consent training approach) and their varying strategies and aims, or modes of delivery (such as digital programs and youth-led programs). Representation of programs that integrate an LGBTQ+ and intersex component or an approach that recognises intersectionality is absent from these reviews, which limits their findings to heteronormative, cisgendered and predominately white experiences of relationship and sexual violence.

Of the 17 reviews, five included a meta-analysis<sup>1, 4, 7, 11, 12, 17</sup>, while 14 were limited to a narrative synthesis of the findings (due to the heterogeneity of the data found).<sup>2, 3, 5, 6, 13-20</sup> A detailed overview of the included review studies and their design is reported in Appendix A (Table A1).

Reviews reported on the effectiveness of interventions for the following key outcomes:

- attitudes towards sexual and dating violence
- knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence
- intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening in peer-perpetrated gender-based violence
- rates of bystander intervention behaviours
- IPV perpetration and victimisation
- SV perpetration and victimisation.

A description of the outcomes and how these were measured is provided in Appendix B (Table B2). The effectiveness findings per outcome are reported in Table 2, and reported narratively below. Factors associated with effectiveness are reported in Table 3.

Table 2: Outcome effectiveness

	Target population	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	Knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence	Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening	Rates of bystander intervention behaviours	IPV perpetration and victimisation	Sexual violence perpetration and victimisation
<b>Respectful relationships education</b>							
De Koker et al., 2014 <sup>2</sup>	Middle- to high-school students	NS	NS	NS	NS	Works	NS
De La Rue et al., 2014 <sup>7</sup> *	Middle- to high-school students	Works - results maintained at follow-up	Works - post-intervention only (not at follow-up)	NS	NS	No impact	NS
Fagan & Catalano, 2013 <sup>20</sup>	Pre-school to high-school students	NS	NS	NS	NS	Works	NS
Fellmeth et al., 2015 <sup>1</sup> *	High-school and tertiary students	NS	Works - results maintained at follow-up	NS	NS	Insufficient evidence	NS
Fellmeth et al., 2013 <sup>17</sup> *	High-school and tertiary students	Works	Works	NS	NS	Insufficient evidence	NS
Graham et al., 2019 <sup>3</sup>	Tertiary students	NS	NS	NS	NS	Positive	Mixed results

	Target population	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	Knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence	Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening	Rates of bystander intervention behaviours	IPV perpetration and victimisation	Sexual violence perpetration and victimisation
Leen et al., 2013 <sup>15</sup>	Middle- and high-school students	NS	NS	NS	NS	Positive - maintained at follow-up	NS
Stanley et al., 2015 <sup>16</sup>	Middle- and high-school students	NS	Positive - post-intervention only (not at follow-up)	NS	NS	No impact	NS
<b>Bystander interventions</b>							
Jouriles et al., 2018 <sup>11</sup> *	University students	Works	NS	NS	Works	NS	NS
Katz & Moore, 2013 <sup>4</sup> *	University students	Works	NS	Works	Works	NS	No impact
Kettrey & Marx, 2019 <sup>13</sup>	University students	NS	NS	Mixed results	Works	NS	No impact
Kettrey & Marx, 2019 <sup>14</sup>	University students	NS	NS	Works	Works	NS	NS

	Target population	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	Knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence	Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening	Rates of bystander intervention behaviours	IPV perpetration and victimisation	Sexual violence perpetration and victimisation
Kettrey et al., 2019 <sup>12</sup> *	University students	Works - maintained at follow-up	NS	NS	NS	NS	No impact
Mujal et al., 2019 <sup>19</sup>	Middle- and high-school and tertiary students	Works	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Storer et al., 2015 <sup>18</sup>	High-school and tertiary students	NS		Positive	Positive - not maintained at follow-up	NS	NS
<b>Combined respectful relationships and bystander programs</b>							
Garrity, 2011 <sup>5</sup>	University students (men)	Positive - maintained at follow-up	Positive	NS	NS	NS	Works
Ricardo et al., 2011 <sup>6</sup>	Middle- and high-school students	Works	Positive	Positive	NS	NS	Insufficient evidence

NS = not studied; Primary school = aged 4 to 12; Middle school = aged 12 to 15; High school = aged 12 to 18; Tertiary = university college and TAFEs.

\* Meta-analysis.

## Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence

The most commonly measured outcome among reviews was attitudes towards sexual and dating violence (including “rape myths”). Seven reviews reported against this outcome: two that focused on respectful relationships,<sup>7, 17</sup> three that focused on bystander interventions<sup>4, 11, 12, 19</sup> and two that focused on a combination of both.<sup>5, 6</sup> The majority of these reviews reported effectiveness findings for this outcome, regardless of intervention type.

In relation to *respectful relationships programs*, key findings include:

- A meta-analysis (of 13 studies) that evaluated the efficacy of interventions that sought to reduce or prevent teen dating violence or SV in intimate relationships in school settings found that at post-test, students were statistically less accepting of violence in relationships and of rape myths.<sup>7</sup> Statistically significant improvement was maintained at one-month follow-up for acceptance of violence, though there was a slight decrease compared to the post-test results. Rape myth acceptance was not studied at follow-up.<sup>7</sup>
- Another meta-analysis (of 22 studies, and a pool of 5,256 participants) reported slightly (but non-significantly) improved attitudes towards relationship violence (i.e. less accepting) in participants who received a respectful relationships intervention.<sup>17</sup>

In relation to *bystander interventions*, key findings include:

- One meta-analysis (of 12 studies) found strong evidence of program effectiveness on rape myth acceptance in adolescents and university students, with improvements maintained at six-month follow-up (based on 12 included studies).<sup>12</sup> They also found a positive post-test impact on pre-test date rape attitudes, with insufficient data to calculate impact at six-month follow-up (based on four included studies).<sup>12</sup>
- Similarly, a meta-analysis (of 24 studies) of bystander programs that address SV in universities found that students who voluntarily participated in bystander programs had significantly more prosocial attitudes and beliefs about SV compared to students who had not participated (although effect size was small).<sup>11</sup>

- Another meta-analysis (of 12 studies, with 2,926 students) found that bystander education programs for preventing sexual assault in universities had a small but significant effect on lower rape-supportive attitudes.<sup>4</sup>
- A further review concluded that bystander programs (particularly the programs Bringing in the Bystander, Take Care and Men’s Program) are generally effective in improving attitudes, regardless of setting. This training created positive changes in attitudes by increasing awareness of a problem and the responsibility to provide solutions.<sup>19</sup>

Similar findings were reported by reviews that *included both respectful relationships and bystander interventions*. Key findings include:

- A review that examined sexual assault prevention programs for college men found that an educational intervention directed at college-aged men can produce beneficial changes in attitudes and beliefs of rape and sexual assault.<sup>5</sup> Participants demonstrated a decline in the acceptance of rape myths immediately post-intervention, and the results were sustained at a seven-month follow-up.<sup>5</sup>
- Another review scoped the evidence in relation to the effectiveness of respectful relationships education and bystander interventions in community and school settings in increasing gender-equitable attitudes to prevent boys’ and young men’s use of SV.<sup>6</sup> Of the 47 studies identified, 19 measured rape myth acceptance, nine of which were considered of moderate to high design quality. Of these nine, five found the intervention effective at reducing adherence to common rape myths, including at five-month follow-up. All five studies involved relatively short-term interventions of one to six sessions; three worked with boys and/or young men in single-sex groups, and two worked with boys and/or young men in mixed-sex groups.<sup>6</sup>

## Knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence

Five reviews reported effectiveness of the intervention for participant knowledge of sexual assault and intimate partner relationship and dating violence following a respectful relationships intervention.<sup>1,5,7,16,17</sup> While all reviews reported an improvement in knowledge, two reviews stressed that due to the heterogeneity of how studies measured changes in knowledge as variation in the interventions evaluated, caution should be given to the interpretation of results.<sup>1,17</sup>

Key findings in relation to participant knowledge included:

- A meta-analysis (of 13 studies) that evaluated the efficacy of school-based respectful relationships interventions found a statistically significant increase in knowledge of teen dating violence compared to the comparison group at post-test.<sup>4</sup> Students' retention of this knowledge, however, varied at follow-up; one review found a statistically significant increase in knowledge was sustained at follow-up.<sup>7</sup>
  - Similarly, another review found an increase in knowledge in the short term, but the retention of this knowledge in the longer term was less evident.<sup>16</sup>
- A review that assessed the efficacy of *respectful relationships interventions* designed to prevent relationship and dating violence in adolescents and young adults found evidence of an increase in knowledge about VAW at post-intervention.<sup>1</sup>
- A review that examined the effectiveness of *respectful relationships and bystander interventions* for male university students found that knowledge not only improved post-intervention, but that some subjects reported a newfound understanding of their position and the privileges they hold in society as men.<sup>5</sup>
- A meta-analysis (of 13 studies) that assessed the efficacy of *respectful relationships interventions* designed to prevent relationship and dating violence in adolescents and young adults found that the interventions had a beneficial effect on knowledge of relationship violence (although this relationship was not found by the only included study that was assessed as having a low risk of selection bias).<sup>17</sup>

## Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening

Five reviews focusing on *bystander interventions* in schools and tertiary institutions assessed the impact of programs on participants' intent, willingness, confidence and self-efficacy toward intervening, reporting positive results.<sup>4,6,12,14,18</sup>

Key findings include:

- A review that summarised the impact of bystander interventions on participants' behaviours and attitudes found that these programs show promise in increasing young adults' self-reported willingness and confidence in intervening, at least in the short term.<sup>18</sup>
- A meta-analysis (of 23 studies) found that bystander programs have a desirable effect on bystander efficacy, intentions and intervention.<sup>14</sup>
- A meta-analysis (of 12 pre-post studies) found that bystander programs had a moderate effect on bystander-related attitudes.<sup>4</sup>
- A review that examined the effects of bystander programs over time on attitudes towards bystander intervention, bystander efficacy, and the ability to identify situations appropriate for intervention reported mixed results.<sup>12</sup> While bystander efficacy improved immediately at post-test, and was sustained at one- and four- month follow-up, participants' ability to identify situations as appropriate for intervention reduced over time (had a smaller effect size at follow-up waves of testing). Additionally, the effects on attitudes towards intervention were not present immediately post-intervention, but were delayed until one- and four-month follow-up. The researchers hypothesised that while the program equips participants with the skills to intervene, it may take some time and reflection for the program to have a meaningful impact on their attitudes.

## Rate of bystander intervention behaviours

An increase in self-reported bystander intervention rates was measured by five reviews of bystander programs, all of which reported positive results.<sup>4,11-14,18</sup> The reviews supported the

effectiveness of the programs in increasing rates of bystander intervention, however the impact was found to be small.

Key findings include:

- Two reviews that evaluated the effectiveness of bystander programs on college campuses found that, compared to a comparison group, there were positive effects on bystander actions and helping, but noted these were small in magnitude.<sup>4,11</sup>
- A further review found that while there was some evidence that participation results in bystander intervention, evidence that training resulted in bystander action was weak, especially over longer follow-up periods.<sup>18</sup>
- A meta-analysis (of 15 studies, published across 19 articles) that examined the effects of bystander programs found a desirable effect on bystander efficacy, intentions and intervention.<sup>14</sup>

## Behaviour change: IPV perpetration and victimisation

Eight reviews of respectful relationships education examined effects on IPV perpetration and victimisation, reporting mixed evidence.<sup>1-3,7,15-17,20</sup> While two reviews conducted by the same researchers (one narrative analysis and one meta-analysis) found no evidence to support that respectful relationships programs reduced violence or increased help-seeking and protective behaviours among participants,<sup>1,17</sup> evidence from other reviews presented more positive results.

Key findings include:

- One review found that half of the identified RCTs produced statistically significant reduction in perpetration and victimisation, highlighting the respectful relationships programs Safe Dates, Fourth R and Shifting Boundaries as most effective.<sup>2</sup> They did also note, however, that the RCTs that measured more than one type of IPV produced more positive results.<sup>2</sup>
- Another review found that the respectful relationships program Coaching Boys into Men, developed for male high-school athletes, had an effect on overall domestic and family violence perpetration (i.e. not reported

individually for physical, psychological or sexual DFV) at 12-month follow-up.<sup>3</sup>

- A review that compared the effectiveness of various respectful relationships programs found that several programs had positive effects on perpetration immediately post-test, but that the duration of this effect varied.<sup>15</sup> While some programs reported significant positive effects on perpetration for up to five years post-program, others found that positive effects dissipated after six months.<sup>15</sup>
- A further review that examined the process of change for preventing domestic abuse for children and young people with school-based respectful relationships programs found an increase in help-seeking in some studies.<sup>16</sup>
- A review that evaluated the efficacy of school-based respectful relationships programs found no change in levels of dating violence perpetration in three studies, and this null finding remained at follow-up.<sup>7</sup> For the five studies that measured dating violence victimisation, however, there were small but significant effects at post-test, where intervention students showed lower levels of victimisation. However, at follow-up this effect size decreased to null.<sup>7</sup>

## Sexual violence perpetration (including proclivity to rape) and victimisation

Seven reviews measured SV perpetration and victimisation outcomes. One reviewed respectful relationships programs,<sup>3</sup> three reviewed bystander interventions,<sup>4,12,13</sup> and two reviews included both program types.<sup>5,6</sup> While one review of both respectful relationships and bystander programs for college men found that programs reduced the likelihood of rape,<sup>5</sup> all other reviews found no impact or insufficient evidence.

In relation to *bystander interventions*, three reviews found no impact on SV perpetration and victimisation. Key findings include:

- A review that examined the effectiveness of in-person bystander education for campus sexual assault prevention found small effects on rape proclivity, but observed no effect of the program on the incidence of sexual assault among recipients of the program.<sup>4</sup>

- Another review that examined the effects of bystander programs found no evidence of the effectiveness of these programs on self-reported perpetration of sexual assault.<sup>13</sup>
- These were supported by another review (of 27 studies) that examined the effects of bystander programs on the perpetration of sexual assault, which found no effect on sexual assault perpetration.<sup>12</sup>

In relation to respectful relationships education for boys and men, one review found insufficient evidence that male-focused programs prevent SV, but did highlight that the prevention program called RealConsent decreased SV perpetration among a universal population (i.e. college men broadly).<sup>3</sup> In addition, while one study included in the review of The Men's Program observed program effects among participants who joined a fraternity, another study of the same program found no effect. This review also found that a higher percentage of high-risk group participants of one particular program (The Video Program) reported being less likely to perpetrate SV after watching the video than their high-risk group counterparts.

Similar findings were reported by a review (of 65 studies) that included both *respectful relationships and bystander interventions*. This found little evidence of the effectiveness of interventions in actually decreasing boys' and young men's perpetration of violent behaviours in the long term.<sup>6</sup> Only eight of the strong or moderate studies in the review attempted to measure perpetration of SV, three of which were focused on younger teens. Out of these eight studies, only one demonstrated a statistically significant impact on behaviour.

Factors associated with effectiveness are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Factors associated with effectiveness

Factor	Outcome*	Results
Program duration	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	A meta-analysis of 24 studies found that bystander programs that ran for longer periods of time had greater effects on attitudes and beliefs. The longer the program, the larger the effect on attitudes/beliefs (university settings) <sup>11</sup>
	Behaviour change: IPV perpetration and victimisation	One review of 17 studies found evidence that interventions with a short duration (lasting a few months) were just as successful as programs implemented in the long term (pre-school through to high-school settings). <sup>20</sup>  Another review of 6 studies found that more effective respectful relationships programs have a longer program duration (middle- and high-school settings) <sup>2</sup>
Program content	Behaviour change: IPV perpetration and victimisation	A review of 6 studies that compared the effectiveness of respectful relationships programs found that programs that focused on behavioural changes achieved a greater effect on follow-up than those focused on increasing knowledge and relationship skills. <sup>15</sup> This was contradicted by another review of 6 studies that concluded that more successful respectful relationships programs focus on relationship skills (middle- and high-school settings). <sup>2</sup>  Another review of 17 studies found that programs that were designed to enhance protective factors across all areas of a child's life were the most successful in reducing violence behaviours (pre-school through to high-school settings) <sup>20</sup>
Mode of delivery	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	A meta-analysis of 24 studies found that programs delivered in person (by a facilitator) and those delivered via video/online/posters both resulted in positive improvements (university settings) <sup>11</sup>
	Behaviour change: IPV perpetration and victimisation	One review of 6 studies attributed the success of some respectful relationships programs to the role played by teachers, parents and community members in program delivery (middle- and high-school settings) <sup>2</sup>
Theoretical frameworks	Rate of bystander intervention behaviours	One meta-analysis of 26 studies that compared the effects of gendered versus gender-neutral bystander programs for adolescents and university students found no evidence that the effect of bystander programs was moderated by these two different approaches (university settings) <sup>13</sup>
Mixed- or single-sex delivery	Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence	A review of 65 studies found that mixed-gender programs in high schools were most effective in improving attitudes towards violence against women. <sup>6</sup>  A meta-analysis of 24 studies found that the effect of the program did not differ whether delivered to mixed- or single-sex participants (university settings) <sup>11</sup>
	Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening	Another meta-analysis of 12 studies found that studies of bystander programs with a larger percentage of male participants produced stronger effects on intent to help (university settings) <sup>4</sup>
	Rate of bystander intervention behaviours	A meta-analysis of 14 studies found that both single- and mixed-gender programs were effective in improving bystander intervention among high-school and tertiary education students <sup>13</sup>

Factor	Outcome*	Results
Timing of program implementation	Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening	A meta-analysis of 23 studies found that the effects of bystander programs on bystander intentions are stronger in the early college years than in the later college years (university settings) <sup>14</sup>
	Rate of bystander intervention behaviours	A meta-analysis of 23 studies found that the effect of bystander programs on bystander intentions were stronger in the early college years than in the later college years, however, this difference was not significant (university settings) <sup>14</sup>

\* Definitions of the outcomes are included in Appendix A (Table A2).

# Evidence gaps and directions for future research

This review indicates that, while results are promising in terms of improving participants' attitudes and knowledge of VAW, as well as bystander efficacy and rates of intervention, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of respectful relationships and bystander programs in reducing IPV and SV perpetration.

There is a need for more quantitative studies that adopt a comparative design/control group<sup>4,7,11,19</sup> and with larger and more culturally diverse sample sizes, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.<sup>1,2,5,21</sup> The use of a control decreases the risk of bias associated with pre-post comparisons, and provides more rigorous estimates of the effectiveness of these programs.<sup>4,7</sup> Caution is needed when designing cluster or quasi-cluster randomised methods. While randomising by schools or classes can decrease the risk of cross-contamination, they may not be practical to implement and there is a high likelihood that the effects of the interventions studied will be over- or underestimated due to challenges in screening out other whole-of-school or -institution influences or campaigns.<sup>1,21</sup>

Research that identifies the factors associated with effectiveness is also required, to better understand the impact of program orientation or conceptual framework (e.g. gender transformative, consent training, healthy relationships), setting (e.g. high school versus university), or pedagogical method (e.g. dialogic, collaborative, participatory versus didactic).<sup>7,11,18,19,22</sup>

Some specific recommendations include:

- **Sample:** Reach diverse populations, not just the men who volunteer for studies.<sup>5</sup> Studies that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse groups are needed, with the details of demographic breakdown of participants, including by cultural background, reported. It is important to understand whether programs work across cultures or whether culturally appropriate programs are needed.
- **Outcomes:** More research is needed to assess the effect bystander programs have on incidence of rape or sexual assault,<sup>4,19</sup> as well as the degree to which bystander helping leads to fewer incidents of sexual assault.<sup>4,18,19</sup> The majority of studies included in reviews relied on program

participants' self-report of sexual assault perpetration, likely resulting in underreporting.<sup>5,6,11,23</sup> Alternative methods of tracking changes in behaviour are required, including longer follow-up periods post-intervention.<sup>1,6</sup>

- **Longitudinal studies:** There is a need for longitudinal research to measure longer term impacts and assess whether positive impacts are maintained.
- **Measures:** Where possible, established validated scales should be used rather than developing new scales, unless time is committed for proper measurement validation.<sup>21</sup> Researchers should consider using existing reliable and validated scales such as the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (or the revised CTS).<sup>21</sup>
- **Reporting:** To support the interpretation of study findings, and allow for studies to be included in meta-analyses, care needs to be taken in reporting to include power calculation, methods of sequence generation and allocation concealment,<sup>1,2,6,21</sup> long-term (more than one year) impact,<sup>6</sup> and whether skews have impacted on the outcomes reported.<sup>18</sup> All study findings should be reported, including non-significant results.<sup>7</sup> In addition, more detail should be provided about the nature of the intervention, so as to allow for program elements associated with effectiveness to be established. Studies should articulate the theoretical underpinnings and mechanisms of behaviour change behind the programs studied.<sup>18,22</sup>

# Implications for policy and practice

## **Develop programs that equip students with skills in addition to knowledge**

While further research is required into what program approach is the most effective, current research calls for programs that focus on positive solutions and equipping students with skills to intervene and modify their behaviours.<sup>4</sup> This includes by teaching students how to intervene, obtain consent, and support people who have been victimised as opposed to only focusing on prohibitions on behaviour (such as don't blame the victim and don't presume consent).<sup>4,7</sup> Considering the social context in which bystander behaviour will most likely occur for the students participating in these programs will improve the likelihood of these skills being adopted.<sup>18,19</sup>

## **Ensure the appropriateness of the chosen program for the setting and cohort**

Schools and universities should consider if the program is appropriate for their particular needs and resources and their student population across all cultures and philosophical orientations, and if they are at a point of “organisational maturity” to benefit from the program.<sup>16,20,18</sup> For example, mixed-gender programs are not only about modelling good behaviour but are also a practical way to manage mixed cohorts in schools. However, this can also depend on the social context of the school or university in question.<sup>6</sup> This should be monitored on an ongoing basis through the routine collection of implementation data.<sup>20</sup> One strategy to ensure appropriateness is to involve those who will deliver and receive the program in its development.<sup>16</sup>

## **Consider the intervention timing and length**

The research calls for programs to be implemented earlier, before participants have potentially experienced IPV or sexual assault and when their attitudes are more flexible and open to influence.<sup>4,7,16</sup> Furthermore, while the evidence suggests that longer programs are more effective, this needs to be considered in light of the resources available.<sup>6</sup>

## **Mandate programs in all educational settings**

Implementing respectful relationships and bystander programs across schools and universities, rather than relying on individual institutions to adopt them, would help to facilitate change, particularly if young people socialise across institutions.<sup>6,19</sup> However, for this to be successful, resources need to be made available to support the implementation of evidence-based approaches.<sup>7,16</sup>

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## APPENDIX A:

# Supplementary evidence

## Review design

A detailed overview of the included review studies and their design is reported below. Three reviews had strict inclusion criteria limited to primary studies that were randomised or non-randomised controlled trials (RCTs),<sup>1,2,17</sup> while 14 reviews also included studies without control or comparison groups (e.g. pre–post design, uncontrolled observational studies, interview studies).<sup>3-7, 11-16, 18-20</sup>

**Table A1:** Overview of included reviews (n=17)

Review	Review aim	Population	Search period	N	Study design of included studies	Overall study results
<b>Respectful relationships programs</b>						
De Koker et al., 2014 <sup>2</sup>	To evaluate the effects of interventions to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration and victimisation among male and female adolescents (narrative analysis)	Middle- to high-school students	Database inception - February 2013	8 (of 6 interventions)	Cluster RCTs (n=6)	Results demonstrate a decrease in the perpetration of adolescent IPV
De La Rue et al., 2014 <sup>7</sup>	To evaluate and synthesise the efficacy of school-based interventions that sought to reduce or prevent teen dating violence or sexual violence (SV) in intimate relationships (meta-analysis)	Middle- to high-school students	1960 - July 2013	23	RCTs (n=10); non-RCT with pre-test equivalence measures (n=11); quasi-experimental design (n=2)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in increasing knowledge of, and improving attitudes towards, relationship violence. Results support the effectiveness of programs in decreasing the perpetration of dating and sexual violence
Fagan & Catalano, 2013 <sup>20</sup>	To provide a comprehensive view of “what works” by identifying effective violence prevention interventions that have been evaluated using high-quality research designs and which have targeted youth from birth through late adolescence (narrative analysis)	Pre-school to high-school students	Not stated	17	RCTs (n=14); quasi-experimental design (n=3)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in decreasing perpetration of relationship and sexual violence

Review	Review aim	Population	Search period	N	Study design of included studies	Overall study results
Fellmeth et al., 2015 <sup>1</sup>	To assess the efficacy of educational and skills-based interventions designed to prevent relationship and dating violence in adolescents and young adults (meta-analysis)	High-school and tertiary students	2005 - 2012	38	RCTs (n=18); cluster RCTs (n= 18); quasi-experimental design (n=2)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in increasing knowledge of relationship violence, but insufficient evidence was found for a decrease in the perpetration of dating and intimate partner violence
Fellmeth et al., 2013 <sup>17</sup>	To assess the efficacy of educational and skills-based interventions designed to prevent relationship and dating violence in adolescents and young adults (meta-analysis)	High-school and tertiary students	From database inception - 2012	38	RCTs (n=18); cluster RCTs (n= 18); quasi-RCTs (n=2)	Results support an increase in knowledge of and a slight improvement in attitudes towards relationship violence. No evidence found to support a reduction in violent behaviours
Graham et al., 2019 <sup>3</sup>	To evaluate prevention programs for sexual, dating and intimate partner violence for boys and men (narrative analysis)	Tertiary students	Jan 1997 to Aug 2017	10	Pre-post test (n=10)	Results support the effectiveness of some interventions in decreasing the perpetration of dating and intimate partner violence
Leen et al., 2013 <sup>15</sup>	To address the limitations in the current literature on adolescent dating violence by comparing the effectiveness of established intervention programs (narrative analysis)	Middle- and high-school students	2000 - 2011	9	Pre-post test (n=8); interviews (n=1)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in decreasing the perpetration of adolescent dating violence
Stanley et al., 2015 <sup>16</sup>	To consider what works for whom in what circumstances and to explain the process of change for preventing domestic abuse for children and young people with school-based interventions (narrative analysis)	Middle- and high-school students	1990 - February 2014	34 (of 22 programs)	RCTs (n=13); non-RCTs (n=15); case control and cohort studies (n=12); interviews (n=6)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in increasing knowledge of relationship violence. Results supported an increase in help-seeking for some studies, however there was little evidence to support a decrease in perpetration of domestic abuse

Review	Review aim	Population	Search period	N	Study design of included studies	Overall study results
Jouriles et al., 2018 <sup>11</sup>	To evaluate the effectiveness of bystander programs that address SV on college campuses (meta-analysis)	University students	Database inception - August 2017	24	Non-RCTs (n=24)	Results support the effectiveness of the program in improving attitudes towards VAW, and an increase in rates of bystander intervention
Katz & Moore, 2013 <sup>4</sup>	To examine the effectiveness of in-person bystander education for campus sexual assault prevention (meta-analysis)	University students	Not stated	12	Controlled outcome evaluations (n=12)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in improving attitudes towards VAW, increasing rates of bystander intervention and a lower rape proclivity. There was insufficient evidence to support a decrease in perpetration of sexual assault
Kettrey & Marx, 2019 <sup>13</sup>	To examine the effects of bystander programs on 1) bystander intervention and 2) self-reported perpetration of sexual assault; to compare gendered versus gender-neutral bystander programs (narrative analysis)	University students	Database inception - June 2017	26	RCTs (n= 21); non-RCTs (n=5)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in increasing bystander intervention, but there was insufficient evidence to support a reduction in the perpetration of SV
Kettrey & Marx, 2019 <sup>14</sup>	To determine whether the effects of bystander programs vary between students who participated in the program in early college years compared to later college years (narrative analysis)	University students	Database inception - June 2017	23	RCTS (n=19); non-RCTS (n=4)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in improving attitudes towards and increasing rates of bystander intervention
Kettrey et al., 2019 <sup>12</sup>	To examine the effects of bystander programs on knowledge and attitudes concerning sexual assault and bystander intervention, when witnessing sexual assault or its warning signs, and the perpetration of sexual assault (meta-analysis)	University students	Database inception - June 2017	27	RCTs (n=21); non-RCTS n=6	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in increasing rates of bystander intervention and an improvement in attitudes towards VAW. Results did not support a decrease in the perpetration of sexual assault

Review	Review aim	Population	Search period	N	Study design of included studies	Overall study results
Mujal et al., 2019 <sup>19</sup>	To assess the effectiveness of bystander programs (narrative analysis)	Middle- and high-school and tertiary students	2007 - 2017	44	RCTs (n=17); one-group designs (n=16); quasi-experimental with comparison (n=7); quasi-experimental with no comparison (n=4)	Results support the effectiveness of the programs in improving attitudes towards SV
Storer et al., 2015 <sup>18</sup>	To summarise the impact of bystander interventions on participants' behaviours and attitudes (narrative analysis)	High-school and tertiary students	Not stated	15 studies (of 9 programs)	Longitudinal studies (n=3); cross-sectional study designs (n=12)	Short-term positive results were found for a change in attitudes towards bystander intervention, but evidence supporting this translating into an actual uptake of bystander behaviors was mixed and preliminary
Garrity, 2011 <sup>5</sup>	To examine the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention programs for male college students in achieving sustained changes in behaviour (narrative analysis)	University students (men)	2000 - 2007	7	Pre-post test (n=7)	Results support the effectiveness of an improvement of attitudes towards VAW and a reduced likelihood of sexual assault
Ricardo et al., 2011 <sup>6</sup>	To 1) investigate the effectiveness of interventions for preventing boys' and young men's use of SV, including increasing gender-equitable attitudes, bystander intentions, and other attitudes and behaviours; and 2) explore the potential for intervening directly with boys and young men in community and school settings to address risk factors for SV within diverse sociocultural settings (narrative analysis)	Middle- and high-school students	Not stated	65	RCTs (n=4); cluster RCTs (n=13); quasi-experimental studies with comparison group (n=48)	Results support the effectiveness of an improvement in attitudes towards VAW and participant intent and efficacy in intervening. There was insufficient evidence to support a decrease in perpetration of SV

## Outcomes studied

Reviews reported on the effectiveness of interventions for the following key outcomes:

- attitudes towards sexual and dating violence
- knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence
- intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening
- rates of bystander intervention behaviours
- IPV perpetration and victimisation
- SV perpetration and victimisation.

A description of the outcomes is provided in Table A2.

**Table A2:** Outcomes described

Outcome	Definition	Measure used
<b>Attitudes towards sexual and dating violence</b>	<p>Acceptance of sexual and dating violence, gender-based violence, interpersonal violence, empathy for rape or sexual assault survivors, gender roles and women’s rights. Some reviews also measure changes in attitudes towards masculine gender roles and norms, as well as male hyper-sexuality and male sexual entitlement.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>A core facet of this outcome is “rape supportive attitudes”, described as the participants’ acceptance of “rape myths”. Rape myths are defined as the attitudes and beliefs about gender-role stereotyping and acceptance of violence in dating relationships, along with the notion that sexual relationships are often exploitative.<sup>4-6</sup> A change in attitudes is intended to support the prevention of dating violence and a decrease in perpetration and victimisation<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>The most commonly used instruments for measuring this outcome were the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and its variations, followed by other tools including the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, Conflict Tactics Scale, Gender Equitable Men Scale, Rape Empathy Scale, Rape Attitudes Survey, Relationship Expectations Scale and the General Attitudes Towards Rape Scale<sup>6, 17</sup></p>

Outcome	Definition	Measure used
<b>Knowledge of the definitions and types of sexual assault and dating violence</b>	Participants' ability to identify what behaviours constitute a sexual assault or relationship and dating violence. It involves recognising safe and unhealthy behaviours in relationships as well as the advantages, disadvantages and consequences of adopting particular behaviours when in a relationship <sup>5,7</sup>	The most common tool used to measure this outcome was a quiz tailored to the program learning content. Knowledge was measured using true/false questions, and also questions testing students' ability to recognising dating violence behaviours. <sup>5,7</sup> Other studies measured knowledge qualitatively through participants' responses about what they learned and how they have applied their learnings to their everyday lives. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy toward intervening</b>	<p>Willingness and perceived competence of participants to intervene in instances of dating violence and sexual assault.<sup>4,7,14</sup> This includes being able to notice violence or its warning signs, identifying a situation as appropriate for intervention, taking responsibility for intervening, and knowing strategies to intervene.<sup>12</sup> It also involves attitudes towards the appropriateness of intervening, and the community norms about violence that underpin them.<sup>11</sup></p> <p>Intent/willingness/confidence/self-efficacy in intervening is theorised as informing bystander behaviour<sup>11</sup></p>	Some common tools measured participants' ability to notice violence and its warning signs, including the Bystander Behaviours Scale and the Bystander Willingness to Help Scale <sup>18</sup>
<b>Rates of bystander intervention behaviours</b>	Frequency of engagement in bystander behaviours, such as intervening when there is a risk of sexual assault, or when assault is occurring, as well as providing support to people who have been victimised who disclose experiencing sexual assault	Participant-reported change in how often they have intervened when witnessing sexual or dating violence or its signs <sup>4,8,11,12,14</sup>
<b>IPV perpetration and victimisation</b>	The self-reported frequency of engagement in behaviours including verbal aggression, relational aggression or coercive control, physical aggression or violence and sexual aggression, and violence or coercion <sup>4,6,7,17</sup>	Reports of the number of episodes of dating violence. Most commonly measured in terms of frequency and/or severity. For example, in some studies Likert scales were used to rate the severity of an instance of violence <sup>2,17</sup>
<b>SV perpetration and victimisation</b>	Decrease in SV perpetration and victimisation, <sup>6</sup> including self-reported sexual coercion, and sexual aggression perpetration. <sup>3,12</sup> As both are indications of violence, and only some reviews measured victimisation, these two measures have been thematically organised into one outcome	Most commonly measured in terms of frequency and/or severity. Likert scales were typically used to rate the severity of an instance of violence <sup>2,17</sup>

## APPENDIX B:

# Methods continued

This review was conducted within the context of a larger “What Works” study; as such, the search method was designed to identify a broad range of reviews relevant to the effectiveness of interventions to respond to and reduce violence against women.

## Search strategy and data sources

Reviews for inclusion were identified by searching multiple sources as outlined in Table B1 below.

**Table B1:** Search strategy and data sources

Data source	Description of data source	Period searched	N=records screened
Systematic search of Scopus	Scopus was identified as a suitable database as it covers all key journals that publish violence against women literature (as per a list of 50 journals created by the Office for Policy Studies on Violence Against Women at the University of Kentucky). The search terms are included below	1 January 2010 – 20 May 2020	2,883
Non-systematic Google search and non-systematic database searches	A number of non-systematic Google searches (incl. Google Scholar) were conducted	From January 2010	Not recorded
Systematic search of websites of key organisations in the violence against women field	A systematic search of relevant websites was conducted to identify relevant grey literature	From January 2010	68 websites
A systematic search of the ANROWS Library	The ANROWS Library is an online collection of research records from the family violence and violence against women sector, designed for practitioners and service designers who may not have access to research databases	Searched from January 2010 – October 2020	3,663
A systematic search of ANROWS publications	A systematic search of ANROWS publications was conducted	Searched from January 2010 – October 2020	149

## Search terms

The following search string was used in Scopus, limited to title, abstract and keywords only.

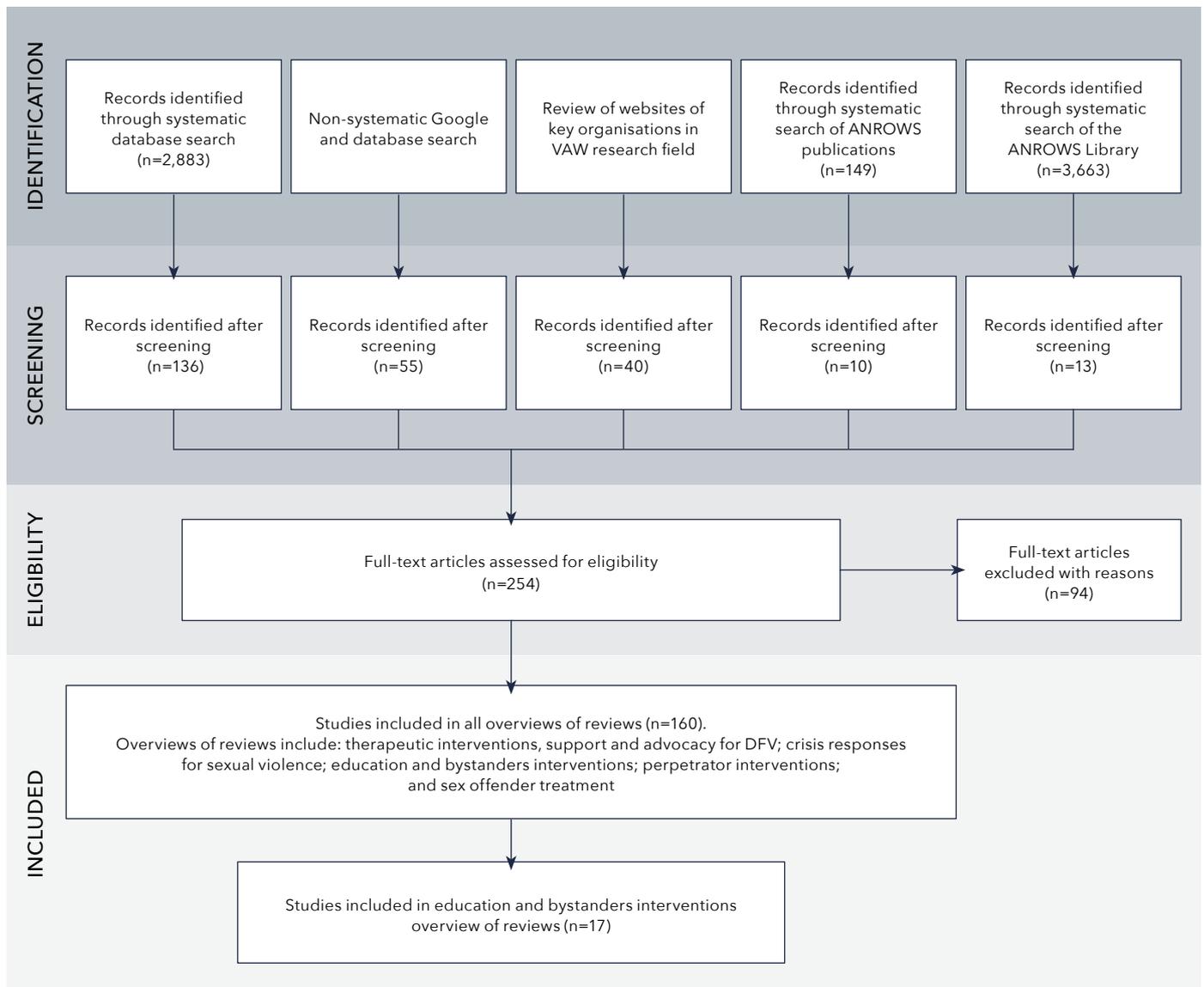
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("violence against" OR vaw\* OR "domestic violence" OR gbv OR "gender violence" OR "gender-based violence" OR femicide OR feminicide OR "partner violence" OR "abuse of" OR "wife abuse" OR "abuse of wives" OR "wife battering" OR "battering of wives" OR "battering of" OR "spouse abuse" OR "family violence" OR "murdering of" OR "homicides of" OR rape OR "sexual violence" OR "sexual abuse" OR "sexual assault" OR "sexual harassment" OR "coerced sex" OR "unwanted sex" OR "unwanted fondling" OR "unwanted touching" OR "intimate partner abuse" OR "intimate partner psychological abuse" OR "intimate partner social abuse" OR "intimate partner verbal abuse" OR "intimate partner control" OR "intimate partner coercion" OR stalking OR "spiritual abuse" OR "technology facilitated abuse" OR "financial abuse" OR "education abuse" OR "health abuse" OR FGM\* OR FGC OR "female genital mutilation" OR "sexual exploitation" OR "forced prostitution" OR "sexual slavery" OR "relationship debt" OR "cyberstalking" OR "account take over\*" OR "image-based abuse" OR "fake social media" OR "online tracking" OR "online abuse")

AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (woman OR women OR female) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (review OR meta-analysis OR synthesis)

## Study identification

As per the PRISMA chart included in Figure B1 below, this process identified 254 reviews, of which 17 regarded respectful relationships and bystander programs.

Figure B1: Overview of reviews PRISMA flow diagram



ANROWS

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AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
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*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

