The Fourth "R" – preventing youth violence - program not only effective but saves taxpayers millions - School of Public Policy report

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CALGARY- Teen violence in dating and violent delinquency/crime are widespread social issues in Canada. They have significant repercussions and huge costs to society in numerous areas including health care, social services, the workforce and the justice system. Can an effective violence prevention program that is part of a school's curriculum be beneficial not only for teens, but save taxpayers millions? Yes it can.

Today, The School of Public Policy and authors Claire Crooks, Jennifer Zwicker, Lana Wells, Ray Hughes, Amanda Langlois and J. C. Herb Emery released a report that examines an effective violence prevention program called the Fourth R, which was developed in Ontario, and has been implemented in schools throughout Canada and the U.S. The Fourth R program is a violence prevention program that was developed in Ontario and has been implemented in schools throughout Canada and the U.S. Covering relationship dynamics common to dating violence as well as substance abuse, peer violence and unsafe sex, the program can be adapted to different cultures and to same-sex relationships. The program, which gets its name from the traditional 3Rs — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic — offers schools the opportunity to provide effective programming for teens to reduce the likelihood of them using relationship for violence as they move into adulthood.

According to Western University professor and lead-author Claire Crooks, "An effective violence prevention program that is part of a school's curriculum is beneficial not only for teaching teenagers what is appropriate behaviour in a relationship, but also for helping them break the cycle of violence which may have begun at home with their own maltreatment as children. The federal government has estimated that the societal costs of relationship violence amount to more than **$7 billion**. These costs can continue to be incurred through the legal and health-care systems as the ripple effects of violence play out over the years, even after a relationship has ended. Research shows that if prevention programs such as the Fourth R can deter just one 14-year-old high-risk juvenile from a life of crime, up to **$5 million** can be saved in costs to society."

The program's costs vary depending on the school's location. This paper shows that the program's costs per student are small compared to the savings to society in violence avoidance. In a large Ontario school board, costs were down to $5 per student. In the Northwest Territories, smaller class sizes and bigger geographic distances make implementing the program more expensive, but still only cost $15-33 per student. The authors calculated savings based on costs avoided related to dating and peer violence at $2,101 per student. In an era of fiscal restraint and demand for more financial accountability, the Fourth R has proven to be a pro-active success in terms of saving both public money and young lives from the deleterious effects of violence.

The report can be found online at www.policyschool.ca/publications/

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