Views of School Counselors on Dating Violence

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Dating violence is a common problem with severe effects in the short and long term. It is known that dating violence occurs mostly among young people aged between of 16-24. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the views, awareness, and experiences about dating violence of school counselors who work at the high schools in the central district of Amasya, Turkey. The research design is qualitative descriptive research. The study group consists of 14 school counselors. As one of the data collection methods of qualitative research, interviews were held throughout the study. In the collection of data, "Personal Information Form (PIM)" and "Interview Form (IF)" were employed. The IF consists of 7 open-ended questions about the concept of dating violence. For data analysis, content analysis was used. Almost half of the school counselors have not heard of the concept of dating violence before, they do not know the concept and do not work on dating violence or healthy romantic relationships. Participants think that studies related to dating violence and healthy romantic relationships should be done and these studies will have positive effects on an individual level and on social contexts. However, they think that if they do these studies with teachers and administrators, or with parents, they will get negative reactions. Similar studies can be done in different regions, different provinces, with different people, and larger samples. Studies can also be conducted to examine the opinions and experiences of students, teachers, and parents on this issue and to raise their awareness. Especially in high schools, preventive studies aimed at avoiding dating violence and studies to protect students who are exposed to dating violence can be conducted.

Introduction

Violence has probably always been a phenomenon among the experiences of humanity and almost the whole world is affected by violence in various ways. As apartner violence, which is discussed as a sub-category of interpersonal violence, is an important public health problem (Krug, et al: s. 113). One type of partner violence is dating violence

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and dating violence is discussed as an important public health problem. Dating violence refers to the type of violence that occurs between two people in a romantic relationship and as in other types of violence, it is discussed in three categories according to the nature of violence as physical, psychological/emotional, and sexual violence (CDC, 2014).

Dating violence is a widespread problem with severe short and long-term effects; however, many young people do not report this situation since they shy away from their families or friends (CDC,2014). Among adults who have been victims of physical violence, rape/harassment, or stalking by their partners, it is known that 22% of women and 15% of men have been exposed to some type of violence for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17 (Black et al, 2011). Dating violence is known to occur mostly among young people between the ages of 16 and 24 (Mıhçıokur & Akın, 2015; Sünetçi et al, 2016). In other words, the developmental periods in which dating violence is most common are adolescence and young adulthood. It is a known fact that violence in romantic is relationships experienced in university years, which are the years, especially romantic relationships are very frequent, and the foundations of marriage are laid, preparing a basis for domestic violence cases that may occur in the future (Karatay et al, 2018). In this respect, it is important to inform adolescents about how romantic relationships should be to prevent both family violence and dating violence. When the related literature is examined, it is seen that programs with proven effectiveness to prevent dating violence are mostly aimed at high school students (Foshee et al, 1998; Rizzo et al, 2018; Taylor et al, 2013; Taylor et al, 2017).

In this sense, it is thought that conducting awareness studies on the characteristics of healthy dating relationships in the high school period which corresponds to ages between 14 and 18, and on dating violence may be a preventive and protective element for dating violence and family violence cases that may occur at later ages. A large number of both national (Subaşı & Akın, 2003; Mıhçıokur & Akın, 2015) and international (Alleyne-Green et al, 2012; Foshee et al, 2001; Makepeace, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1987; Price et al, 1999) studies in the literature have shown that the state of both using violence and being exposed to violence is very common among young people.

The main goal of studies conducted on mental health is to prevent any negativity before it occurs. Studies carried out by Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Programs applied in high schools in Turkey are conducted with three functions as preventive, healing, and life-enriching (Nazlı, 2020; p. 7). In this context, it is thought that finding out the views of psychological counselors working in high schools on the concept of dating violence and their experiences about dating violence of high school students is important in terms of showing the current situation about dating violence and finding out the state of studies conducted on dating violence in high schools in Turkey. It is also known that mental health professionals play an important role in preventing violence (Dolunay-Cug et al, 2017). In this direction, it is thought that school counsellors as mental health professionals will play an important role in terms of preventing dating violence among high school students. In this context, the present study aims to explore and describe the views, awareness, and experiences of school counsellors working in high schools in the central district of Amasya province on the phenomenon of dating violence.

Method

Study Model

This study had qualitative descriptive research, which is based on qualitative data. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe the thoughts or views of the individuals about one event or phenomenon (Willis, et al, 2016).

Study Group

The study group consists of school counselors working in high schools in the central district of Amasya province. The convenience sampling method was used to form the study group. Convenience sampling is the sampling method that includes individuals who are easy to reach, available, and volunteering to participate in the study (Erkuş, 2013).

It was determined based on the website of the Provincial Directorate of National Education that there were 20 high schools in Amasya province central district; however, since 2 of these high schools were in villages of the central district, psychological counselors working in these high schools were not included in the study. In addition, since the psychological counselor working in 2 high schools was on leave at the time of the study, he was not included in the study. Therefore, the study was carried out in 16 high schools of the central district in Amasya province. In schools with more than one psychological counselor, only one was included in the study. In addition, since two of the psychological counselors were working in two high schools at the same time, the study was conducted with 14 school counselors.

Demographic information of the study group is given in Table 1:

Table 1. Demographic information of the study group

		f	%	Min	Max	Mean
Gender	**Female**	5	35,71			
	Male	9	64,29			
Age		14	100	30	57	42,21
Department graduated from	**PCG**	10	71,43			
	Psychology	1	7,14			
	Other	3	21,43			
Level of education	**Undergraduate**	12	85,71			
	Postgraduate	2	14,29			
Professional seniority (Years)		14	100	6	34	18,71
Type of high school	**Anatolian High School**	4	28,57			
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School	4	28,57			
	Anatolian İmam Hatip High School	3	21,44			
	Fine Arts High School	1	7,14			
	Social Sciences High School	1	7,14			
	Science High School	1	7,14			

When Table 1 is examined, it can be seen that 5 (35,71%) of the 14 school counselors that form the study group are female, while 9 (64,29%) are male. Their ages ranged between 30 and 57 and their mean age is 42,21. While 10 (71,43%) of the participants are PCG graduates, 1 (7,14%) is a psychology department graduate and 3 (21,43%) are graduates of other

departments. 12 (85,71%) of the participants are undergraduates, while 2 (14,29%) are postgraduates. Professional seniority ranges between 6 and 34 years and means professional seniority is 18,71 years. 4 (29,57%) of the participants are working in Anatolian High Schools, while 4 (28,57%) are working in Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, 3 (21,44%) are working in Anatolian Religious Vocational High School, 1 (7,14%) is working in Fine Arts High School, 1 (7,14%) is working in Social Sciences High School and 1 (7,14%) is working in Science High School.

Data Collection Tools

Interview, which is a data collection method for qualitative studies, was used to collect data in this study. The interview is a mutual and interactive communication process based on the style of asking and answering questions, which is predetermined and done for a purpose (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Within the scope of this study, the "Personal Information Form" was used to obtain demographic data of the participants, and the "Interview Form" was used to conduct the interviews. The personal Information Form was prepared by the researchers for this study and included questions regarding the participants' gender, age, department graduated from, level of education, professional seniority, and type of high school they worked in. The Interview form was also prepared by the researchers, and it included close-ended and open-ended questions. During the process of preparing the interview form, national and international literature conducted on dating violence was reviewed by the researchers.

7 open-ended questions in the Interview Form are as follows:

- Have you heard of the "Dating violence" concept before? What do you think dating violence is?
- Based on your observations, do you think there is dating violence among students in the school you are working at? Do you have such observations?
- Do you have students who consult you or ask for your help because they are exposed to dating violence?
- Do you work on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships in your school? If yes, what kind of work do you do?
- Do you think informative and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence? What are your views on the issue?
- What kind of difficulties do you encounter/think you will encounter while working on dating violence at school?
- In your opinion, what kind of effects can studies on dating violence have at individual level and in social contexts?

Data Collection

After the study group and data collection tools were formed, official permission was taken from the Amasya Provincial Directorate of National Education to interview school counselors working in high schools of central districts and therefore to conduct the study. Interviews with school counselors were carried out face to face by the first researcher. All of the interviews were carried out in the guidance service of the high schools the participants worked in and they were voice recorded with the knowledge and permission of the participants. Following the completion of the interviews, voice recordings were transcribed and then deleted, as the participants were informed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Content analysis, which is one of the data analysis methods for qualitative studies, was used in the analysis of the data obtained within the scope of this study. Content analysis is a method that investigates social reality through making inferences about the unspecified features of the content from the specified contents of social reality (Gökçe, 2006). The main purpose of content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that will explain the relevant data based on the data obtained (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, 227). Additionally, frequency analysis is used for data analysis.

The concept used to ensure the reliability of qualitative studies is verifiability. In this respect, the researchers used the reliability formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and used to test verifiability in qualitative studies (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: p. 233) by comparing the codes and themes obtained from content analysis conducted separately by the researchers. This formula is as follows:

Percentage of agreement = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100

For this study, based on the codes of two researchers, first, the codes with the agreement were marked as + and those with disagreement were marked as –. After this, the percentage of agreement was calculated according to the reliability formula. As a result of the calculation, the percentage of agreement was found as 76,67% for this study. >70% percentage of agreement is considered as an indicator that the study conducted is reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: p. 233).

Results

Within the context of the present study which was conducted to analyze the views of school counselors working in high schools on dating violence, the participants were asked closed-ended and open-ended questions. The results obtained with these close-ended and open-ended questions and the content analysis conducted were explained below based on the questions in the interview form.

Question 1:   Have you heard of the "Dating violence" concept before? What do you think is dating violence?

The participants were first asked if they heard of the "dating violence" concept before and what dating violence is. The results relating to participants' definition of dating violence and whether they heard of the concept of dating violence before are presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Results regarding whether participants heard of the concept of dating violence before and the participants' definitions

			F	**%**
Hearing of the concept of dating violence		Yes	8	57,14
		No	6	42,86
		Total	14	100
Definition of dating violence	**1st Theme (dating relationship)**	Yes	14	100
		No	0	0
		Total	14	100
	2nd Theme (types of violence)	Yes	5	35,71
		No	9	64,29
		Total	14	100

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that while 8 (57,14%) of the participants stated that they heard of the dating violence concept before, 6 (42,86%) stated that they did not hear of this concept before. Regardless of whether they heard of the dating violence concept before, all of the participants were asked to define the dating violence concept. There are two themes in the definition of dating violence concept in literature: "dating relationship" and "types of violence". While the theme of dating relationship refers to the occurrence of violent behavior between individuals in a dating relationship; types of violence refer to the fact that the violent behavior that takes place has types such as verbal, physical, and sexual, as in other violence types. It was found that all of the school counselors in the study (14 participants, 100%) included the theme of dating relationships in the dating violence definitions they made; while 5 (35,71%) included the theme of types of violence and 9 (64,29%) did not.

Question 2:   Based on your observations, do you think there is dating violence among students in the school you are working at? Do you have such observations?

The participants were asked whether they observed dating violence among students in the school they were working, and the results found were presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Results regarding whether dating violence was observed among students

		F	%
The state of whether dating violence is observed among students	**Yes**	6	42,86
	No	8	57,14
	Total	14	100

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen that while 6 (42,86%) of the students stated that dating violence was observed among students in schools they were working, 8 (57,14%) stated that dating violence was not observed among students in schools they were working.

Question 3: Do you have students who refer to you or ask for your help because they are exposed to dating violence?

The school counselors in the study were asked about whether they had students who referred to them and asked for help because they were exposed to dating violence and the results obtained were presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Results regarding whether there were students who asked for help because they were exposed to dating violence

		F	%
The state of having students who asked for help for being exposed to dating violence	**Yes**	5	35,71
	No	9	64,29
	Total	14	100

When Table 4 is examined, it appears that while 5 (35,71%) of the participants stated that they had students who referred to them and asked for help because they were exposed to dating violence, 9 (64,29%) stated that they did not have students who referred to them and asked for help because they were exposed to dating violence.

Question 4: Do you work on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships in your school? If yes, what kind of work do you do?

The school counselors in the study were asked whether they worked on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships in the school they worked, and the results found were presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Results regarding working on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships

		F	%
The state of working on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships	**Yes**	3	21,43
	No	11	78,57
	Total	14	100

When Table 5 is examined, it is understood that 3 (21,43%) participants stated they worked on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships in the schools where they worked, while 11 (%78,57) stated that they did not work on these issues.

When the three participants who stated that they worked on healthy romantic/close relationships were asked about what kind of work they carried out, they stated that they carried out works on personal boundaries (f=2) and healthy relationships with the opposite sex (f=2).

Questions 5: Do you think informative and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence? What are your views on the issue?

The participants were asked whether informative and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence and the results obtained were presented in Table 6:

Table 6: Results regarding whether informative and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence

		F	%
The state of thinking whether informative and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence	**Yes**	10	71,43
	No	4	28,57
	Total	14	100

When Table 6 is examined, it is clear that while 10 (71,43%) of the students stated that information and awareness-raising activities should be carried out for students on romantic/close relationships and dating violence, 4 (28,57%) stated that this was not necessary.

Question 6: What kind of difficulties do you encounter/think you will encounter while working on dating violence at school?

The participants were asked what kind of difficulties they encountered, and they thought they would encounter while working on dating violence at school and the results obtained were presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Results regarding the difficulties participants encountered and they thought they would encounter while working on dating violence at school

	Themes	f	%
Difficulties participants encountered and they thought they would encounter while working on dating violence at school	**Reactions to promote dating relationship**	4	28,57
	Students' not opening-up	4	28,57
	I would not experience difficulties	5	35,71
	Others	1	7,15

When Table 7 is examined, four common themes were found regarding the answers given when they were asked about difficulties they encountered and what they thought they would encounter while working on dating violence at school. These themes were reactions to promote dating relationship (f=4, 28,57%), students' not opening up f=4, 28,57%), experiencing difficulties (f=5, %35,71) and others (f=1, 7,15%).

Direct quotes on the theme of reactions to promote dating relationships are as follows:

"First of all, I would get reactions from both teachers and parents. I would get reactions as if I was encouraging students to flirt; in other words, as if I was heartening them. And I wouldn't like to get such a reaction (4)"

"Misunderstanding. Encouragement. Giving wrong explanations to the parent or the community. The student can explain wrongly. The parent can misunderstand. It can be understood as encouraging or guiding students to this side. It can create such a problem. (1)"

Direct quotations on the theme of students' not opening up are as follows:

"I suppose you may have a little trouble making students inform this when something like this happens and express this when such violence occurs because we are responsible for students who are 14 to 17 and 18 years old due to working in high schools. Sometimes families do not know about these relationships and because of this when others learn about the exposure to violence, it may cause students to experience the feeling of shame and problems may be experienced in informing this to the guidance service or authorities. (2)"

"I'm thinking for my school type. Maybe male students can show resistance about opening up. Of course, the respect felt for the teacher and the healthy trust-based relationship between the student and the teacher will affect this. However, I think that there may be resistance in general. I think this is because men generally live their private lives within themselves and have difficulties in opening these up; they may have problems or difficulties. (5)"

Direct quotations on the theme of "I would not experience difficulties" are as follows:

"I mean, I think that I would not experience any difficulties. If I did such an activity, I would prepare general presentations in classes with a language they would understand. I would not have individual talks; I would talk with those I need to. If there are serious incidents that have passed a certain point, I would talk with the family. I think I would experience difficulties because of the increase in workload. I believe that my colleagues would help me. I don't think that I would experience problems. (8)"

"I don't think that we would experience too many difficulties because the student profile is apparent. When such situations occur, parents want to meet us when the child is affected. (6)"

Question 7:   In your opinion, what kind of effects can studies on dating violence have at individual level and in social contexts?

The participants were asked what kind of effects studies on dating violence can have in individual and social contexts and the results obtained were presented in Table 8:

Table 8: Results regarding what kind of effects studies on dating violence can have in individual and social contexts

	Themes	f	%
Individual and social effects of studies related to dating violence	**Knowing oneself**	3	17,65
	Ensuring personal safety	3	17,65
	Healthy family relationships	5	29,41
	Awareness/sensitivity	2	11,76
	Reducing violence against women/domestic violence	4	23,53

When Table 8 is examined, one can see that there are five common themes regarding the views of participants relating to the effects of studies on dating violence. These themes are knowing oneself (f=3, 17,65%), ensuring personal safety (f=3, 17,65%), healthy family relationships (f=5, 29,41%), awareness/sensitivity (f=2, 11,76%) and reducing violence against women/domestic violence (f=4, 23,53%).

Direct quotations on the theme of "knowing oneself" are as follows:

"It can prevent self-esteem destruction. It will enable the individual to trust society and others, to be at peace with oneself, to build healthier relationships, and to know oneself. (14)"

"I believe the results of studies will be positive both individually and socially. They will also help a woman to know herself (12)"

Direct quotations on the theme of "ensuring personal safety" are as follows:

"I believe that awareness of personal boundaries will not be negative. It will certainly have positive results. (12)"

Individually, children or couples can develop empathy, or they can protect themselves. I think that it can have effects such as gaining knowledge about where to apply and gaining awareness about what to do. Maybe this individual development in turn can become socially meaningful. (3)"

Direct quotations on the theme of "healthy family relationships" are as follows:

"Regardless of what, this is also a kind of relationship, but it is a core relationship. Maybe it can result in marriage in the future. Or in this case, the violence this child experiences can become traumatic and affect the child's own family life. (7)"

"As I said previously, if children learn at young ages what kind of a relationship they should have with the opposite sex and if they learn how the things they do make the other person feel and if they learn this is violence and causes pressure on the other party and restricts their freedom and makes them sad, I think they will be healthier parents and spouses. This way, there will be healthy families, and this will have such a benefit. (4)"

Direct quotations on the theme of "awareness" are as follows:

"At least, it will give them awareness. Such a need arose because there is a new concept. (11)"

"I heard of the dating violence term for the first time. I am happy that I heard of it. At least it has a name now because such a thing existed before. (13)"

Direct quotations on the theme of "reducing violence against women/domestic violence" are as follows:

"I think studies should be conducted on this in schools because we hear on the news, and we experience situations related to violence and domestic violence. At least, I find it right to organize activities in this context to prevent this and create awareness but I do not apply them. (10)"

"It will also help reduce violence (8)"

Discussion and Interpretation

This study has aimed of describing and exploring to the views, awareness and experiences of the school counsellors about dating violence. When the analyses made within the scope of this study are examined, firstly almost half of the school counselors who participated in this study stated that they did not hear of the dating violence term before. Regardless of whether they heard of the term before, all of the participants were asked to make the definition of dating violence and it was found that all of the participants used the expression "dating relationship", which is one of the two elements in the definitions in the literature, while very few participants included the second element "types of violence" in their definitions. The reason for this finding may be related that the term dating violence includes its meaning. Besides, when the national literature is examined, seemingly studies on dating violence were initiated in 2000s (Özcebe et al, 2002; Sezer, 2008; Pehlivan, 2008; Hatipoğlu, 2010; Toplu-Demirtaş et al, 2013; Dolunay-Cug et al, 2017). Since it is a relatively new concept, it can be regarded as an expected result that most of the participants did not hear of the concept of dating violence before. However, studies on dating violence have increased in recent years (Ayyıldız & Taylan, 2018; Türk & Tekin, 2018; Yıldırım & Terzioğlu, 2018; Akış et al, 2019; Erbaş et al, 2019). When studies on international literature are examined, it can be seen that a large number of studies have recently been conducted on both the concept of dating violence (Morelli et al, 2016; Reyes et al, 2016; De La Rue et al, 2017; Wincentak et al, 2017; Espelage et al, 2018; Marganski & Melander, 2018; Bernard et al, 2019; Willis & Bianchi, 2019) and on dating violence with high school sample (Gage et al, 2016; Espelage et al, 2018; Griner et al, 2018; Thompson, 2019). It is interesting that despite the increase in studies on dating violence in both national and international literature, the concept was not heard by most of the school counselors in the study.

Most of the school counselors stated that they did not observe dating violence among students studying in the schools they worked in and they did not have students who referred to them for help about dating violence. However, it is stated in the literature that dating violence occurs mostly among young people between the ages of 16 and 24 (Mıhçıokur & Akın, 2015; Sünetçi et al, 2016). According to Büyükşahin Çevik and Atıcı (2008), almost half of the high school students have romantic relationships. This result can be evaluated in a meaningful way when it is discussed with the difficulties the participants may encounter if they worked on dating violence. The participants stated that they thought students would not open up due to cultural, social, familial, and individual reasons if they worked on dating violence. Based on

this finding, it can be said that in the schools the participants worked in, romantic relationships and dating violence did not occur openly and this prevented students from asking for help. This finding coincides with the findings of the United States Centre of Disease Control and Protection (CDC) violence protection report (CDC, 2014).

Most of the school counselors stated that they did not work on dating violence or healthy romantic/close relationships in the schools they worked. This result can be evaluated in a meaningful way when it is discussed with the difficulties the participants may encounter if they work on dating violence. The school counselors in the study stated that parents, teachers, and administrators would say that they were encouraging these relationships if they worked on dating violence or healthy romantic relationships and as a result of this, it can be said that the participants did not work on these issues to prevent these reactions they may receive. However, most of the studies for preventing dating violence in literature have been conducted in schools on high school students (Avery-Leaf et al, 1997; Rozen & Bezold, 1996; Rizzo et al, 2018; Taylor et al, 2013). In this context, considering the importance of school-based studies in preventing dating violence and the prevalence of dating violence among adolescents, school counselors should carry out studies to prevent dating violence in schools.

Most of the participants stated that it was necessary to work on these issues in high schools. Participants also stated that works on dating violence would be effective in helping individuals to know themselves and to ensure personal safety, in developing healthy family relationships, raising awareness/sensitivity, and reducing violence against women/domestic violence. This finding shows that school counselors are aware of the importance of studies to prevent dating violence. Although they are aware of the importance of prevention studies, there may be some cultural and social reasons why they do not work on the prevention of dating violence. According to Büyükşahin Çevik and Atıcı (2008), more than half of high school students' families interfere in friendship relationships. The second issue that their families interfere in is romantic relationships. Within the scope of this study, school counselors stated that if they work to prevent dating violence or healthy romantic relationships, they may receive a reaction from families and school administrators that they encourage dating violence. In this context, it can be thought that the reason why school counselors do not carry out studies to prevent dating violence despite knowing the importance of it may be related to the possible reactions. In addition, this finding can be explained by the concept of "social control". Social control is defined as a mechanism that regulates relationships in social life and helps to ensure social order. In traditional and patriarchal Turkish society, the reason for the reaction to the studies on romantic relationships for high school students may be concerns about the deterioration of the social order.

Conclusion

In a conclusion, it was found that almost half of the school counselors did not hear of the dating violence concept before, they did not know about the concept, and they did not work on healthy romantic relationships. The participants thought that studies should be conducted on dating violence and healthy romantic relationships and that these studies will have positive individual and social positive effects. However, they think that they will get negative reactions from parents, teachers, and administrators if they work on these issues.

Recommendations

This study has some limitations. First of all, the data are limited to data obtained from 14 school counselors working in high schools of the central district of Amasya province.

Similar studies can be conducted with different regions, different cities, different individuals, and larger samples. Within the context of this study, dating violence in high schools has been examined through the eyes of school counselors. Studies can be conducted to examine the views and experiences of students, teachers, and parents and to increase their awareness. The present study is a qualitative study on dating violence in high schools and no studies were found in national literature on dating violence in high schools. Studies can be conducted to prevent dating violence, especially in high schools, and to protect students exposed to dating violence.

Note

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