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Systematic Review

Youth Engagement in Sexual Violence Prevention Programs and Research: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: Youth in the US experience high rates of sexual violence. Historically, adults design and deliver preventive initiatives, with youth limited to participants and recipients. The use of community-based participatory research and other participatory approaches can expand the reach and impact of adolescent sexual violence prevention initiatives by positioning youth as leaders and co-researchers. This systematic review explores both adolescent violence prevention programs and research projects that take a participatory, youth-engaged, or youth-led approach. This review aims to understand what activities youth are involved in and how they are equipped for their roles. Following PRISMA guidelines, the review located eight eligible articles that involved high school youth or younger as more than data, focused on adolescent sexual or dating violence prevention, and whose programs or studies were conducted in the United States. I reviewed each article for programmatic and study specifics, with special attention to which stages youth participated in and how capacity-building was incorporated. The results revealed that youth can participate in a variety of activities, though they are involved in certain stages more than others, and that capacity-building ranged in breadth and frequency. I call researchers to detail youth activities and training, and explain clearly their participatory approach and decisions.

Keywords: adolescents; participatory research; capacity-building; youth-led

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1. Introduction

This systematic review explores and summarizes youth activities and capacity building in sexual violence prevention research and interventions in partnership with adult leaders.

Despite continued efforts to understand the impact of sexual violence victimization on young people's development and intervene by way of targeted preventive interventions, adolescent sexual violence and teen dating violence are pervasive and persistent [1–3]. Hundreds of millions of dollars in funding are dedicated to prevention programs and research each year [4], though the reach of this work has yet to significantly decrease incidence. Adolescent sexual violence experts suggest a way forward is the utilization of participatory methods and youth-engaged models in the development of prevention initiatives [5]. Community-based participatory research and similar approaches are based on a set of principles that consider community knowledge on social problems and local assets to be paramount in creating sustainable change [6–8]. The integration of participatory and youth-engaged methods with the priorities of violence prevention is still under-utilized, and these in the context of adolescent sexual violence are even more rare.

Though they are not insurmountable, the challenges with involving youth under the age of 18 in research and program development are daunting for researchers and practitioners alike [7,9–11]. Children and teens are considered vulnerable populations by institutional review boards, requiring additional justification for their involvement and compensation, explanation of how their data and autonomy will be protected, and the involvement and approval of parents or legal guardians [12]. For this reason, much of the literature on sexual violence prevention is focused on college students or emerging

adults [13]. Exploring prevention programs as well as research projects that involve high school youth or younger as leaders, experts, or partners would extend what is known about the activities and capacity-building younger adolescents undertake.

Community-based participatory approaches provide a rich foundation for the engagement of youth. While participatory methods are diverse and can go by a variety of names, the intentions are consistent; participatory methods: (1) center historically marginalized communities and people and their lived experiences, (2) share decision-making power and benefits of the work, and (3) incorporate capacity-building and co-learning [6,8,14]. It is these three principles that define participatory methods for this systematic review. Youth participatory action research (YPAR), a methodology for youth engagement and oriented toward action [15], and youth-led models (predominantly used/referred to in programs/interventions) will be grouped under the community-based participatory research (CBPR) umbrella; "participatory approaches" and "methodologies" will be used interchangeably.

A focus on research projects or prevention programs conducted in the United States allows for contextual consistency. As compared to other nations—specifically Australia and the United Kingdom—many communities in the US are influenced by the church, which shapes how school or institution leaders conceptualize adolescent sexual and reproductive health, design education policy, and consequently, approach sexual violence prevention [16–19]. More specifically, the reliance on abstinence-only education and its emphasis on sex avoidance disallow active conversations and education on affirmative consent, which is the foundation of sexual violence prevention education broadly [20–22]. Further, religiously conservative groups tend to believe sexual health education and risk prevention efforts are the responsibility of a child's legal guardians and should not be discussed in school or in other settings outside the home [19]. It is for these reasons that this review focuses on research projects and prevention programs conducted in the US.

Next, I provide an overview the literature on sexual violence incidence among youth and adolescents in the US, the history and use of youth engagement in sexual violence prevention, and the possibilities of participatory methods in prevention efforts conducted with young people rather than only for young people.

2. Background

2.1. Sexual Violence Incidence in Adolescence

Nationally representative surveys estimate that between 40 and 50% of adolescents will experience a form of sexual violence before they turn 18 [1–3]. Adolescents aged 12–17 are the largest group of sexual assault victims, with young adults aged 18–24 the next largest group [23]. Defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as any sexual act perpetrated against someone without their freely given consent, sexual violence encompasses rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. Additionally, some scholars have conceptualized gender-based microaggressions as a 'gateway mechanism' to high-severity offenses, like sexual assault [24]. Teen dating violence affects between 10 and 35% of youth, which can include emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual violence [25,26].

Victimization in adolescence drastically influences a young person's developing self, mind, and body. Adolescent sexual violence is associated with numerous chronic health conditions including hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer [26,27]. Survivors are more likely to struggle with substance use disorder and display high levels of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders [28,29]. Academic performance and engagement are also affected [30]. The literature indicate that 50% of adolescent or child survivors experience revictimization as adults [31]. With perpetration most often occurring at the hands of a relative or dating partner, sexual violence influences if and how adolescent survivors form trusting, intimate relationships later in adulthood [1,32].

Sexual violence intersects with other oppressive systems, including racism, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, and classism; consequently, statistical estimates of victimization

are higher for gender and sexually diverse youth, youth of color, and those with disabilities [26,33,34]. Racist, cisheteronormative, and ableist systems create barriers for survivors seeking recourse, as one's collection of social identities shape their access to health care and social services [35] and impact their experiences with law enforcement and the criminal justice system [36]. The persistence and consequences of adolescent sexual violence demand innovative and effective prevention strategies.

2.2. Youth Engagement in Sexual Violence Prevention

Because of their high risk for victimization and perpetration, young people are most often the targets of primary violence prevention initiatives. Effective violence prevention education acknowledges disparate risks faced by different groups, the powerful influence of group norms and beliefs, and the individual's role in creating safer communities as active bystanders [37–39]. Conversations about consent, boundaries, and effective communication are helpful tools for interpersonal relationships of all kinds [40]. Whether delivered in community settings or in schools, youth can participate in a variety of activities to learn new skills, counter stereotypes and myths, and practice proactive bystander behavior [5,41]. Community-engaged prevention efforts have shown to be effective, as they better respond to the unique, context-dependent environments and attitudes that enable violence to persist [42].

Prevention efforts where young people are involved in program development, implementation, and evaluation are increasing. Growing evidence indicates that youth-engaged and youth-led models improve intended impacts on students' knowledge, sexual violence attitudes, and behavior [5,43]. Being that young people's behavior is highly influenced by that of their peers [44,45], violence prevention education designed or delivered by peers is well-received and accepted by youth, as they report the content is more responsive to their unique experiences [46]. Further, young people genuinely want opportunities to lead and contribute to social change [47,48], and many want to share their ideas related to sexual health and sexual violence [49]. Some scholars go so far as to argue that youth engagement in the development of sexual health and violence prevention programs is a human right [50,51]. Youth participation in prevention research and interventions alike may address the limitations of both to effectively reduce violence among adolescents. These impacts evidence a larger need to merge the aims and tenets of community-based participatory methods, effective violence prevention tactics, and youth engagement.

2.3. Participatory Approaches and Prevention Science

Participatory methodologies actualize the ways research can be done by, with, in, and across communities [52]. Hall [53] claims participatory research "sees no contradiction between goals of collective empowerment and the deepening of social knowledge" (p. 16). A participatory framework invites in and prioritizes communities who have been and still are disenfranchised from opportunities to participate in scientific research and benefit from its outcomes [52]. Participatory models reject the researcher/researched binary to transform who holds decision-making power, disowning the "extraction industry" of traditional scholarship [52] (p. 73). Across all types of participatory models is a shared control over the research process [6,7,54].

Prevention science's efforts to promote health equity and reduce disparities draws attention to the unequal distribution of power between researchers, practitioners, and the community members they aim to serve [55]. Participatory models, which focus on historically and contemporarily marginalized groups, similarly acknowledge that social problems cannot be disentangled from hierarchies of power as they exist within culture, place, and society [52]. Researchers who do participatory work "are united by their dissatisfaction with the social order [and] their commitment to change social inequities in partnership with poor and marginal peoples" [54] (p. 35). Participatory approaches and prevention science share a commitment to shifting the conditions that prevent harm to those that promote health, though the prevention field's limited use of participatory methods

reveals a stark disconnect. For this reason, violence prevention scholars call for a more interdisciplinary prevention agenda that brings together different voices and mobilizes community expertise for greater and lasting impacts [56].

Participatory research integrates systems and behavioral change—the goals of the prevention science field—through the involvement and participation of the target population, who, together with researchers and practitioners, collectively define the problem and co-create solutions. Effective prevention and participatory efforts identify the existing strengths of people, families, and communities, and work to reinforce them [5,57,58]. Capacity-building is a foundational component of a participatory approach [59], just as skill-building and empowerment is central to prevention initiatives [55,56]. These similarities encourage a deeper look at prevention settings where participatory or community-engaged designs are used, with a specific focus on the involvement of young people.

3. Current Study

While youth are most often the target of primary prevention initiatives, efforts to elevate them as researchers are still rare, and the degree to which they participate in the different phases of the research is highly varied (see review by [60,61]). To date, participatory projects with youth oriented toward prevention predominantly focus on community violence like bullying or crime [15,62]; therefore, a review of participatory methods used specifically in adolescent sexual violence prevention—in both research projects and prevention programs—is warranted.

Several systematic reviews of CBPR and YPAR exist [15,60,62], though an explorative review of youth-engaged participatory projects specific to adolescent sexual violence prevention has not been conducted. Identifying the scope of youth participation across the stages of a research project as well as prevention programs may assist practitioners, researchers, and prevention leaders in outlining where young people and their expertise can be brought into the fold. Capacity-building is an important element of participatory approaches with community members; this review paid particular attention to how youth were prepared to engage in various research or program stages. Collectively, the findings may implicate areas for increased youth involvement and capacity-building in sexual violence prevention and research. This review aimed to answer the following research question: For youth involved in participatory projects (which may be research or interventions) related to sexual or dating violence in the United States, what are the activities they undertake and (how) are they equipped for those activities?

In this review, I focus on high school and middle school students, described below as "youth" and "young people". Due to the collective concern of adolescent sexual violence and teen dating violence, prevention efforts of both of these will be reviewed if they utilize participatory methods. Finally, with the emphasis on youth, participatory approaches that involve young people, whether they are described as CBPR, YPAR, youth-led models, or use a specific data collection/analysis tool like Photovoice, will be collectively referred to as "participatory methods".

4. Methods

Following the PRISMA guidelines, my search and analysis process was guided by replicable protocols.

4.1. Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria focused on four key elements: (1) study characteristics (empirical studies, conducted in the United States, published in English, peer-reviewed, project or program addresses adolescent sexual or dating violence prevention); (2) population (youth involved in project or program must be in middle school or high school); (3) youth engagement style (youth are involved as more than just data—could be described as analysts, researchers, interns, etc.); and (4) participatory methods (records must use participatory methods, defined broadly as the engagement of community members

who will be directly impacted by the project or study in the implementation of said project or study, as not all studies classify their work as CBPR or YPAR).

4.2. Search and Sampling Strategy

Selected for their relevance to sexual violence, adolescence, and participatory methods, seven databases were searched: SocINDEX, APA PsycArticles, APA PsychInfo, Education Res Complete, ERIC, LGBTQ+, and Women's Studies International. This review included articles published prior to March 2023. To identify records of interest, I entered search terms using the Boolean operators AND/OR and used asterisks to truncate the search terms. Search terms included terms associated with the study population (separated by OR): youth, adolesc*, young people AND search terms associated with the prevention focus (separated by OR): sexual violence, interpersonal violence, dating violence, partner violence AND terms associated with the study methods (separated by OR): community-based, participatory.

4.3. Study Selection

The systematic search process included three phases led solely by the author, a doctoral student, and was overseen by a faculty advisor. The author established the eligibility criteria and searched, screened, and reviewed the studies. The PRISMA flow diagram is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

	Records identified through database searching (N = 257)	
	Records remaining after duplicates were removed (n = 253)	
	Records remaining after screened by title and abstract (n = 70)	Records excluded (n = 183)
	Records remaining after screened by full text (n = 3)	Records excluded with reasons (n = 67) 1. Project/program is not sexual/dating violence prevention (n = 11) 2. Methods use CBPR but not with youth (n = 25) 3. Methods do not use CBPR (n = 25) 4. Not peer-reviewed (n = 1) 5. Setting is outside US (n = 4)
Records identified through reference lists (n = 5)	Final sample (n = 8)	

4.4. Data Items and Extraction

A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to document the methodological details of the selected articles. Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation model [63] was used to identify the style of youth participation utilized in each study. Styles can either be 'participation' or 'non-participation' [63] (p. 8). Within participation styles, degrees range from 'assigned but informed' to 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults', which differentiate who initiates the project as well as how/if decisions are shared between adults and youth [63] (p. 8).

Participatory approach. There is a range of possible participatory methods that are used in collaboration with young people (e.g., CBPR, YPAR, Photovoice, asset mapping). In my review, I captured which method or style was utilized in the outlined program, with three primary styles described: (1) CBPR, (2) YPAR, and (3) youth-led, which indicated youth were positioned in the study or program as facilitators, researchers, evaluators, or

another leadership role where they shared decision-making power with adults (*approach*; Table 2).

Table 2. Study summary table.

#	Article	Population	*N*	Approach	Project Type	Data/Methods	Youth Activities	Trained?
1	Banyard et al., 2022 [64]	Middle/early high school	9 youth participants	YPAR	Part of longitudinal prevention program	Photovoice	Plan photo assignments, weekly meetings, take/document photos, dialogue about photos, develop/organize community exhibit, shared data analysis, engagement in dissemination decisions	Not described
2	Beatriz et al., 2018 [65]	Middle school as participants, high school as Peer Leaders	Not listed	YPAR	Prevention program and evaluation	Survey, observations, focus groups, interviews	Developed protocols/instruments, qual and quant data collection, data analysis, preparation of dissemination activities, co-authorship	Yes
3	Cheatham-Rojas et al., 2008 [66]	High school (Cambodian girls)	40 over whole project	YPAR CBPR	Community-based program	Survey, action research	Developed survey measures, implemented survey/data collection, organize community forum, dialogue with school/community stakeholders	Yes
4	Kervin et al., 2010 [67]	(Alternative) high school	48 pre, 29 post over 4 years	Youth-led	For-credit service-learning course	Survey, observations, written self-reports, focus groups	Presentations to peers and school community, skits for class activities, conferences, planning decisions	Yes, service-learning course
5	McLeod et al., 2015 [68]	9th graders ("at risk")	5 Peer Facilitators	Youth-led	School-based intervention	Survey	Facilitated curriculum, informed curriculum development/formative assessment	Yes
6	Ravi et al., 2018 [69]	High school (Burmese/Thai refugee youth)	6 Peer Leaders	CBPR	Prevention program and evaluation	Interviews	Input on peer leader model, recruitment, reviewing/adapting curriculum for target pop, facilitation/assistance during implementation	Yes
7	Stokar et al., 2017 [70]	High school (Black/African-American)	155 youth over 8 semesters	YPAR	Prevention program and evaluation	Ethnographic observations, interviews, survey, field notes, focus groups, youth-led evaluation	Co-creation of materials/skits/presentations, formative evaluation, member checking of findings, facilitation of curriculum	Yes
8	Water-man et al.,2021 [71]	High school	~500 total participants ~120 at events	Youth-led	Part of longitudinal prevention program and evaluation	Attendance tracking, survey, interviews	Interns delivered and created content, facilitated activities, created media campaigns, organized events, recruitment of peers, community presentations	Yes

Prevention focus. With the focus of the review on (1) adolescent sexual or (2) dating violence, I noted which of these was the prevention focus of the program or project (*topic area*; Table 3). For programs that had more of an adolescent sexual health focus, I looked to see if they described incidence of sexual or dating violence in their background or rationale for the program; if violence prevention intentions explicitly were described, the article was eligible, and the following items were reviewed. Sexual health-oriented programs without a violence prevention focus (e.g., program aimed at reducing HIV incidence among teens) were not included in the review even if they used participatory methods.

Table 3. Study or program characteristics.

Age Group	***n***
Middle school	2
High school	8
Topic area	***n***
Teen dating violence	5
Sexual violence	4
Design	***n***
Qualitative	2
Quantitative	2
Mixed methods	4
Data type	***n***
Interviews	3
Focus groups	3
Surveys	6
Photos or media	1
Observations or field notes	3
Self-reports	1
Participatory approach used	***n***
YPAR	4
CBPR	2
Youth-led	3
Compensation model	***n***
Paid via stipend	4
Received credit	2
Not described	2

Note. A percentage is not included when the totals add up to more than 100% to indicate that studies could select or be identified as representing more than one characteristic.

Project/program characteristics. The type of project or program was recorded for each study (*project type*; Table 2); for instance, whether it was a one-time funded project or part of a larger prevention effort. If the project was tailored or designed for a specific population (as compared to a general adolescent audience), this was noted in Table 2 as *population* and in Table 3 as *age group* which coded each study as involving high school, middle school, or both.

Study characteristics. Study design was coded as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods (*design*; Table 3). I documented the specific types of data that were collected for the project (*data/methods*; Table 2) as well as calculated percentages across the major types, which is listed in Table 3 as data types. Sample sizes were documented in Table 2.

Youth activities. I documented any and all tasks, activities, or responsibilities youth were assigned or participated in for each article (*youth activities*; Table 2). To categorize these activities, I integrated the phases of CBPR outlined by Israel and colleagues [72] and the phases of program development, implementation, and evaluation as outlined by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension's Framework for Program Development [73]. The resulting five phases allowed me to describe the stages where youth were involved, regardless if the project was a research study or an intervention:

(Phase 1) Identifying priorities, topic, or research questions;

(Phase 2) Developing and designing protocols, instruments, or curricula;

(Phase 3) Implementing and facilitating the intervention or data collection;
(Phase 4) Analyzing results;
(Phase 5) Directing dissemination, developing deliverables, or sharing findings.

Additionally, I documented how youth partners were trained or otherwise equipped for their roles; if capacity-building was not mentioned or described, this was documented as well (*trained?*; Table 2). If youth were paid a stipend or compensated in a different way, I recorded this as *compensation model* (Table 3).

Outcomes for youth. While a systematic review of youth outcomes has been conducted across a variety of youth-engaged participatory projects [62], none of the articles in that review had an adolescent sexual or dating violence focus (p. 873). With this in mind, I documented any outcomes—developmental, emotional, or otherwise—described in each study, regardless of how these outcomes were measured or data were collected.

5. Limitations

Several limitations related to the study design warrant caution in interpreting this study's findings. The decision to focus on programs or projects conducted in the US was justified due to the specificity of the cultural and political context, and was needed to narrow the scope of this review; however, there are many high-quality examples of participatory projects on the topic of adolescent sexual violence and health conducted in other countries (see [47,74]. Further, this search was limited to peer-reviewed articles; undoubtedly, there have been many impactful dissertations that report on participatory and youth-engaged efforts. Other limitations relate to the coding process. While the phenomena I aimed to explore when coding for youth activities and capacity-building are multifaceted, the terms used in the search may have missed eligible studies that used different terminology or were not cited in the articles I located and reviewed.

6. Results

After conducting electronic searches using the databases and search terms described, at total of 257 studies were returned. An initial review of titles revealed four duplicates, which were removed. Phase 1 entailed a preliminary screening by title and abstracts to determine whether they were eligible. Of the 253 remaining articles, 70 passed to Phase 2, which involved a full-text review. I reviewed the full text of the 70 articles, with a focus on the prevention focus and methods used to assess eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. A total of 67 articles were screened out because the studies were conducted outside the United States, because their prevention focus was not adolescent sexual or dating violence, because they did not utilize participatory methods, or because they did not utilize participatory methods with youth (youth were only a source of data). Phase 3 entailed a scan of the three eligible studies' reference ancestors and descendants, which returned five more eligible studies, for a total of eight articles (N = 8) for inclusion. Due to the size of the sample and scope of this review, the author alone conducted the data extraction.

All studies included in this review were published after 2008, indicating that programs on adolescent sexual violence using participatory methodologies are still emerging. Most of the articles utilized the terminology YPAR or CBPR (n = 5, 62.5%), but the other three described their programs using other terms like youth-led or community-engaged. The most common setting for program delivery was the community, such as within a local organization or center (n = 5, 62.5%), with the others taking place in schools (n = 3, 37.5%).

The target population was predominantly high school (n = 8, 100%), with two programs also targeting middle school students. Several studies mentioned a demographic focus when identifying youth for participation in their program or project. Two studies (25%) involved "disadvantaged" teens or youth considered "at-risk". In half of the studies (50%), youth leaders and participants were from a specific racial, ethnic, or nationality group. The topic area for prevention was split between teen dating violence and adolescent sexual violence, with five studies (62.5%) targeting teen dating violence and four targeting sexual violence (50%), with two studies targeting both (25%). In half of the studies

(n = 4), youth leaders were compensated via a financial stipend. In two projects, youth leaders received credit for their time and labor (25%). In two of the studies, it was not mentioned whether youth were compensated in some form or another (25%).

Selected articles described a variety of project types that involved youth as more than data. One article (12.5%) described a study where youth met for a specific purpose to answer a set of research questions. Two articles outlined a program evaluation (25%), four detailed the specifics of a prevention intervention (50%), and one article outlined a service-learning course that utilized participatory action activities and intentions (12.5%). A mixed methods design was used in half of the studies, with the other four split between primarily qualitative and primarily quantitative methods. Surveys were predominantly used to collect data (n = 6; 75%), though interviews, focus groups, field notes, and other methods were also used as collection tools. Table 3 provides a visual breakdown of these methodological differences across studies.

What activities do youth participate in? Using my integrated (and non-mutually exclusive) phase list [72,73], I documented where youth were involved in each of the eight projects; the breakdown of studies and their engagement of youth in each of these phases is provided in Table 4. Youth most often participated in Phases 2 and 3 (n = 8, 100%); in Phase 2, youth developed survey measures and interview questions and created curricular content. For Phase 3, youth recruited participants, conducted data collection via focus groups, surveys, and interviews, and facilitated peer education via presentations or skits. Youth were least likely to be involved in Phase 1; in only one study (12.5%) did youth identify the priority or focus of the intervention or project. In the others (87.5%), adult researchers or program directors selected the prevention focus and goals prior to youth involvement. Three studies (37.5%) involved youth in Phase 4, where youth participated in or directed data analysis or member checking of results. Youth were involved in Phase 5 in five of the projects (62.5%) where they organized events, created media campaigns, organized community exhibits, prepared articles or reports, and dialogued with important stakeholders. In three of the studies, young people were engaged in four of the five phases (37.5%), with the others involving youth participants in only three phases (62.5%).

Table 4. Youth involvement in research or intervention stages.

		Study #							
Research or Intervention Stages	***n***	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Phase 1: Identifying priorities, topic, or RQs	1			■					
Phase 2: Developing/designing protocols, instruments, or curricula	8	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Phase 3: Implementing/facilitating the intervention or data collection	8	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Phase 4: Analyzing results	3	■	■				■		
Phase 5: Directing dissemination, deliverables, or sharing findings	5	■	■	■	■				■

Note. Study numbers are listed next to their citation in the Table 2.

Using Hart's Ladder of Participation, the studies in this review qualified as utilizing three of the five 'participation' levels [63] (p. 8). Three of the studies (37.5%) utilized an 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children' approach to youth engagement. In these studies, adult researchers or program leaders selected the topic of interest, assigned and trained youth, and oversaw young people as they executed their roles in research or programmatic activities. Youth in these projects held active roles as co-researchers doing data collection and organizing events to disseminate findings [63] (p. 12). Two of these three studies shared some decisions with youth; for instance, youth provided input on a curriculum and facilitated it to peers, but did not make decisions about the evaluation component or participate in dissemination.

In four studies (50%), the project was characterized as "consulted and informed", where young people understood the intentions of the project and provided input on materials, but the program or curriculum was directed by adults with youth assigned limited roles. In these projects, youth were most often peer facilitators, but were

supervised by adult leaders or older peers who had more active roles and decision-making power [63] (p. 12). Finally, only one study (12.5%) was characterized as the 'child-initiated and directed' level of youth participation. In this project, young people directed and were leaders at each stage of the intervention—development, implementation, and dissemination [63] (p. 14). Adults served as mediators and provided guidance, but did not make primary decisions related to the process. No studies utilized the highest tier of Hart's ladder, "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" where youth invite adults to participate in projects they devise and conduct.

How are youth equipped for their roles in the prevention projects? A majority of studies (n = 7, 87.5%) described a capacity-building component to their youth-engaged project, study, or intervention. One did not mention a training/education element. Across studies, the breadth of training they received varied greatly; where some youth leaders received one singular training over a few hours, others participated in training over many weeks. The collected prevention projects and interventions detailed a variety of capacity-building strategies that aimed to build leaders' knowledge on the topic and learn new skills related to research processes or programmatic activities.

Information about the prevention topic was the predominant focus of education youth leaders received. They learned about definitions, rates, warning signs/red flags, healthy relationships, and how to help others. Some youth learned more critical theoretical foundations through conversations about power, gender norms, and the contributions of prominent feminist and antiracist scholars. Youth who were engaged in research projects learned about the history of research, how research is used to study social problems, the difference between participation and exploitation, and community-based participatory methods.

Youth engaged in preventive interventions and whose roles included facilitating curricula to peers or younger students participated in training on how to deliver workshops, answer tough questions from the audience, mediate discussion, and collect evaluative data. Youth developed skills for leadership and mentorship as well as bystander intervention.

Youth involved in research projects developed a different set of skills. Youth were trained on research ethics and, in one study, youth leaders completed the National Institutes of Health Human Subjects training. Others were trained in how to discuss and collect informed consent from potential study participants. Youth who conducted interviews were trained in how to ask good questions and build trust with informants. Youth were trained to develop grassroots organizing skills and use their own experience and knowledge to come up with action plans. Youth were trained in data collection strategies (i.e., interviews or surveys) as well as data analysis (i.e., thematic analysis). Some youth were prepared to present their findings to school administrators and local policy makers at community forums or conferences. Others were encouraged to consider how their identities shape their positionality.

7. Discussion and Implications

Considering the significance of adolescent sexual violence and growing popularity of community-engaged methods, it may be surprising to the reader that only eight eligible studies were located for this review. Because schools and nonprofit organizations often take on the labor of instituting prevention programs, and being that this happens often without the assistance or oversight of a researcher or evaluator, it is very likely that there have been impactful youth-engaged programs that were just not published. Publishing requires additional time, funds, and capacity that organizations may not have. Further, in community settings, publishing the methods and outcomes of youth programs may not be a priority or be seen as valuable in comparison to the many other obligations and tasks organizations undertake. While the size of this review does not allow broad generalizations, many notable findings and implications were drawn from those eight studies which hold relevance for the field and practice; they are discussed below.

A participatory approach offers an actionable framework for youth-engaged research and programs and yet, this systematic review indicates that there is great variability in the implementation of its tenets in practice. Intentions of the studies described here were based on an understanding that youth will benefit more from programs and interventions when they are involved as leaders in those programs and interventions [5,64]. Indeed, increased program acceptability and effectiveness are two common reasons why scholars and practitioners adopt community-engaged methods [5,7,8].

Program and research leaders utilized a wide range of activities and capacity-building efforts in their participatory projects with youth. Youth leadership across the review, while still limited, supports young people's development of self-efficacy, self-esteem, critical thinking, and feelings of empowerment—outcomes described in many of the studies [66,69,71,75]. Youth input and co-creation of program materials and evaluative measures (1) produce curricula that are tailored to the specific cultural contexts of the target population and (2) return higher quality data [65,67]; these extend the potential of programs to reduce violence incidence among adolescents.

Youth were predominantly relegated to roles within specific stages, suggesting that certain activities within research and program implementation may be perceived to be more feasible for youth engagement. For example, in only three of the eight studies did youth participate in data analysis, indicating the scope of ethical training and competencies needed may be greater than what is possible under the time, funding, and capacity constraints of the project [76]. This finding is consistent with that of other systematic reviews of CBPR or YPAR with youth that found data analysis is typically the sole responsibility of adult leaders or researchers [60,62]. One challenge faced in many studies was attrition of youth participants and leaders over the course of the study or program; this can disrupt the continuity of team members needed for collaborative analysis [67].

While five studies engaged youth in the dissemination of findings, this phase of research or program evaluation is one of the more creative and hands-on phases where young people's social media, technology, and artistic skills can be incorporated. Indeed, there are myriad dissemination products that can be tangible and informative for various audiences and developed with community members [77] (p. 294). Whether participants develop a research brief, present at a conference, or organize a community forum, dialogue about what was done, what was learned, and what should happen next are critical steps in the pursuit of community and structural change. The sharing about participatory projects with youth with audiences beyond the academy can counter adultist attitudes and misconceptions about young people's capacity and contributions [66,75,78]. Scholars or program directors must consider how the dissemination stage can highlight young people's talents and be tailored for youth audiences; this practice would ensure that young people and their allies can benefit from the findings and outcomes of prevention initiatives—a key goal of participatory approaches [6,7,14].

The most notable finding in relation to youth activities was that only one study allowed youth to identify the topic of focus [66]. While adult leaders came into the project with a reproductive justice orientation due to their affiliation with a city-wide initiative, the first stage of the CBPR effort was to encourage the girls to draw on their own experiences to identify an issue that affected their health, education, and well-being [66] (p. 127). Hart [63] confirms that child-directed efforts are rare not because of young people's lack of interest, but because of an "absence of caring adults attuned to the particular interests of young people" and adults who know how to "give life to the potential in young people" (p. 14). The success of Cheatham-Rojas and Shen's CBPR study reveals the impact of honoring young people's autonomy in issue selection for youth and for larger efforts for social justice [66]. Unfortunately, the results of this systematic review indicate that the barriers Hart [63] speaks to persist in participatory efforts in the realm of sexual violence prevention. Scholars and practitioners who are committed to youth empowerment must make room at the table for youth expertise and

provide a microphone; genuine participatory approaches counter marginality through sharing (or passing on) control to community members and partners.

The focus on engaging youth who are deemed "at risk" or are from historically marginalized communities is not new to participatory approaches; in fact, the origins of these methods are based in collective action strategies in response to social, economic, and health inequities [52,79]. Studies in this review involved American Indian/Alaska Native youth [71,75], Black/African American youth [70], youth in an alternative high school [67], Burmese/Thailand refugee youth [69], and Cambodian girls [66]. Two studies described their youth participants or target population as "disadvantaged" [70] or "at risk" [68]. While all youth have something to gain from participation in research projects or prevention interventions, historically minoritized youth are often more motivated to contribute to social change efforts than their socially privileged peers [80,81]. A future study could compare the motivations of youth from different cultural backgrounds and the impacts they experience from their participation.

Another observation made in this review is the lack of detail in describing how many youth leaders were involved, how youth were trained, using which methods, by whom, and if that training or capacity-building was effective at equipping youth for their responsibilities. Zeldin [59] encourages scholars and program directors to incorporate formative evaluation questions at each stage of a youth-engaged project, to collect important data about how youth are experiencing their roles and to offer tailored and specific support along the way. Additionally, the range of time spent on capacity-building varied significantly; while the methods incorporated hands-on practice and lectures on various topics, the breadth of training that can be conducted in one 3-hour session is unquestionably less than in biweekly sessions over a 16-week semester. Adult leaders and researchers must consider (1) young people's motivations for participating, (2) their incoming knowledge and skills relevant to the project, and (3) the time, funding, food, and support needed to adequately equip them to execute their tasks [59,74]. Clear explanations and descriptions allow emerging researchers and practitioners to learn from a project's successes and missteps and adapt what worked for their own community-engaged efforts.

Further, few studies described the setting or location where the capacity-building and study activities took place. The environment is an important condition for collaboration with youth as the setting is associated with accessibility and feelings of safety, which implicate the scope of their engagement and its impact on intended outcomes [81,82]. Continued research is needed to explore what kinds of methods and settings for youth training are effective, as well as the length and frequency of those trainings for preparing youth for participation in community-based programs or academic research. A comparative analysis between community settings versus school settings for participatory projects might reveal the unique contextual factors that support (or impede) youth engagement [42].

All studies incorporated teaching on the topic of teen dating violence or adolescent sexual violence, and increased knowledge and skills related to violence prevention were noted as outcomes in several [67,69–71]. While many youth-engaged participatory research projects do encourage youth to critically analyze and dialogue about the social ills that affect them (e.g., police brutality, discriminatory school discipline), that critical analysis and dialogue—though it may still positively impact youth [83]—unfortunately does not alone protect youth from experiencing those harms. In the case of adolescent sexual violence, however, the education youth receive about affirmative consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention *is* primary prevention. Whether youth are impacted positively by their participation or leadership, their exposure to this content in a supportive, targeted way may protect them from future victimization and perpetration [46]. Further study is needed to understand how participation as leaders in prevention may improve young people's violence prevention skills and reduce experiences with sexual violence. Broadly, researchers should explore the longitudinal impacts of participation in participatory research and programs on young people's academic outcomes and professional trajectories; it is possible

this early engagement may boost their commitment to civic engagement and pursuing careers dedicated to social justice as adults.

Through my analysis, there are strategies all researchers and practitioners can adopt in conducting and reporting their participatory prevention efforts with young people. First, offer opportunities for youth to reflect on the pressing issues they are facing and to identify the questions they have about those issues. This process may reveal experiences and concerns that exist beyond adult awareness and would lead to research projects and programs that respond directly to those concerns. Second, in addition to writing up reports and articles for publication, collaborate with youth partners to develop tangible guides for others to learn from. Not only would this effort encourage teams to articulate their decision-making processes, but it would make their important work accessible to audiences outside the academy (for a great example see [84] and step-by-step manual). Community-based research, broadly, values the translation of both process and findings so many can benefit. Finally, legitimize youth-engaged research and program implementation as meeting young people's *human right* to inclusion and participation; measuring and describing individual-, organizational-, and systems-level impacts of participatory methods may begin to tell new stories about what young people know, offer, and can do within supportive partnerships.

8. Conclusions

This focused systematic review on youth activities and capacity-building in participatory research and programs related to adolescent sexual violence prevention contributes to the knowledgebase in a few significant ways. Youth-engaged sexual violence prevention efforts—whether they be in the form of programs or research—can involve youth in a variety of stages and activities. With intentional capacity-building, young people can leave the project empowered with a new set of skills, expanded knowledge, and increased sense of confidence. Young people's ideas and perspectives are valuable in the development and implementation of prevention initiatives, and their participation in these efforts can acknowledge the active roles they already play in their schools and neighborhoods. Further study is needed to explore the logistics of effective capacity-building and expand the responsibilities youth can undertake. Despite the challenges adult leaders may face, youth participation and leadership in research and community-based projects advance the potential of prevention and support positive youth development.

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