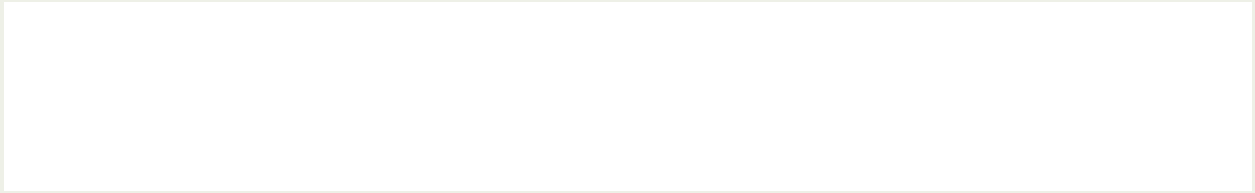




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College of Arts and Sciences
Case Western Reserve University

Teen Dating Violence and Girls



of violence such as slapping, kicking, punching
and verbal abuse such as yelling or threatening to

Despite similar levels of victimization for males and females, risk factors are somewhat different across the genders. For example, teen girls who are struggling in school or who have multiple partners may be at higher risk of victimization. Poor grades are associated with a higher likelihood of being a victim of psychological violence from a dating partner. In one study, female students with mostly A grades had one third the risk of experiencing psychological violence as a student with mostly Ds or Fs. For girls, the total number of relationships was also linked to the likelihood of experiencing any kind of dating violence, with teens involved in the most relationships having the highest rates of dating violence. Higher levels of commitment and longer relationships have also been associated with higher rates of dating violence victimization. Risk factors for adolescent boys include having a much older partner, a same-gender partner, and previous violent victimization.

Teens who have had personal experiences with relationship violence are at higher risk for dating violence in the future and later in adulthood. Victims of dating violence have a greater likelihood of experiencing future dating violence than are those who have never been victimized and importantly, research has shown that physical, verbal and sexual violence often occur in tandem, with victims of one type of violence at higher risk for other forms of violence as well. Childhood maltreatment, poor attachment and exposure to other forms of trauma has been strongly linked to adult relationship abuse and may also be associated with teen dating violence, although the importance of the peer group during adolescence may be a more important factor than child-parent relationships. Maltreatment or witnessing violence may lead to children developing behaviors such as increased vigilance that, while necessary for survival in a hostile environment, later influence a teen's ability to form healthy relationships. These effects may be felt in a number of ways, including hostility, fear, mistrust, aggression, poor self-efficacy,

poor problem-solving and a greater propensity to engage in risky behaviors. These factors, combined with a distorted view of relationships, may be associated with dating violence.

In addition to personal experience with relationship violence, peer group influence is a major risk factor for dating violence. In a longitudinal study of adolescent dating violence, researchers found that having friends who were in violent relationships consistently predicted a teen's likelihood of experiencing dating violence first-hand, as a victim or an aggressor. While parental violence or risky behavior impacts the well-being of adolescents, research shows that peer engagement in risk behavior is more likely to be influential during adolescence, perhaps because of its crucial role in teen identity development.[†] Negative peer attitudes about male-female relationships can be a powerful force in adolescence, both reinforcing beliefs supporting aggression as a viable and acceptable tactic with dating partners and convincing girls to be more tolerant and accepting of such hostile behavior. These findings illustrate the crucial role of the peer group for teens and further support prevention interventions targeting all adolescents, not just perpetrators or victims of violence.

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Dating violence can have both long and short-term effects on the health and well-being of teens, beyond the more immediate physical and emotional injury caused to the victim. In an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, researchers found that adolescent girls who were victims of dating violence showed longitudinal increases in health risk behaviors including depressed mood, antisocial behavior, suicidal behavior and illicit drug use. Adolescent boys who had been victims of dating violence, on the other hand, showed an increase in depressed mood only.

Addressing Teen Dating Violence: Implications for Policy and Practice

Dating violence among adolescents has clear policy and public health implications, both on a local and national scale. The high prevalence of dating violence combined with the negative implications of such abuse for health and well-being suggests that intervention is both vitally necessary and has the potential to improve the lives of both teens and adults. Both legislation and violence prevention programs have attempted to address the issue of teen dating violence and its associated harms.

Locally, two pieces of legislation have recently been enacted to combat dating violence among adolescents. In 2010, Ohio enacted "Tina's Law", which requires Ohio public schools to have policies and programs to address dating violence in grades 7-12. The law is named for a teen in Middleton, Ohio, who was shot and killed by her boyfriend in 1992. "Tina's Law" provides a clear definition of dating violence as "a pattern of behavior where a person uses or threatens physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control the person's dating partner" and dating partner as "any person, regardless of gender, involved in an intimate relationship with another person primarily characterized by the expectation of affectionate involvement, whether casual, serious or long-term." A second Ohio bill, HB 10, was also passed in March 2010. It allows a person under the age of 18 to file for civil protective orders on their own behalf against former dating partners. This law is important because it recognizes that adolescents experience dating violence and must have the right to seek protection. In the past, juveniles were unable to file for protection on their behalf or against other juveniles. This law represents a major step in combating dating violence and sets Ohio apart from other states, because although national legislation exists for some specific behaviors such as sexual abuse, stalking and physical violence, most states have age requirements that

prohibit minors from filing protective articles. In addition, some laws are limited to marriage or common-law partnerships, which do not apply in the vast majority of teen dating violence cases.

In addition to legislation and services designed to protect teens from dating violence once it occurs, some researchers and practitioners are developing prevention and early intervention programming based on a public health model of risk and protective factors, to help prevent dating violence in adolescence. Because adolescent girls and boys report both victimization and perpetration of dating violence, researchers have called for universal approaches to raising awareness and preventing teen dating violence that target both genders. School-based approaches that teach teens about developing healthy relationships and avoiding dating violence have been shown to be effective.[†] In addition, community-based programs that prevent teen dating violence, even by a small amount, have the potential to significantly reduce health care costs. Programs should use developmentally appropriate assessments and services should be cognizant of gender, in addition to race and cultural differences, whether employing a universal or targeted service strategy.

An innovative school-based prevention program that involves teens, parents, teachers and the broader community, seeks to address the underlying factors that predispose some teens to dating violence. This targeted program is known as the Fourth R approach, where "relationships" are considered to be such a central part of education that they are added to the old adage of "reading, writing and arithmetic." It draws on the research that demonstrates different risk factors for adolescent boys and girls to provide specific programming to both genders. In addition, the classroom setting avoids the tendency to stigmatize some students by involving whole classes in the intervention. This program addresses the topics of dating violence and also violence/bullying, unsafe sexual behavior,

and substance use, as these behaviors often occur within the context of relationships. Programs such as the Fourth R seek to empower teens to build healthy relationships and to avoid dating violence with its associated health risks and potential to develop into a cycle of unhealthy relationships into adulthood.

Further research is needed to better understand how teen dating violence is qualitatively different from childhood peer group aggression and adult intimate partner violence in order to better address the problem. Areas for potential research include: dating violence comorbidity with other risk factors (i.e. substance abuse, eating disorders, early maturation, trauma); dating violence experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth; developmental trajectories; developing more reliable measurement and assessment techniques; and evaluating effectiveness of interventions and violence prevention strategies. Ultimately, this research should inform more effective prevention and treatment practices and policies.

Teen dating violence is increasingly becoming an issue of local, national and international concern. Alarming cases in the media help to draw attention to the issue of teen dating violence but far more cases go under the public radar. Advocacy campaigns, such as National Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Week (the first week in February), seek to educate and inform teens, parents and educators about the issue of adolescent dating violence. These advocacy efforts, in combination with legislation and effective interventions, may help to reduce violence in adolescent relationships. However, with rates of teen dating violence remaining high and evidence mounting for associated detrimental effects to health and well-being, teen dating violence remains a crucial issue for child and adolescent research, policy and practice.

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