

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Young people, 12 to 19 years old, experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault,ⁱ and youth, 18 to 19 years old, experience the highest rates of stalking.ⁱⁱ Approximately 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which intimate partner violence occurred at least once in the past year.ⁱⁱⁱ There are a large number of young people in this country whose lives are affected – sometimes shaped – by violence. Teen dating violence and other forms of exposure to violence are a huge problem in this country. The research below indicates a strong connection between dating violence, exposure to other forms of violence, and unhealthy behaviors.

Dating Violence and Unhealthy Behaviors

- Teen victims of physical dating violence are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in unhealthy diet behaviors (taking diet pills or laxatives and vomiting to lose weight), engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide.^{iv}
- In a representative sample of high school students, physical dating violence victimization in the past 12 months was associated with initiation of sexual intercourse before age 11, sexual intercourse with four or more partners, and alcohol or drug use before sexual intercourse.^v
- Having been a victim of dating violence was associated with multi-person sex including gang rape among female patients, 14 to 20 years old, seeking care at adolescent community- and school-based clinics.^{vi}
- Teens who experienced physical dating violence in the past 12 months were more likely to initiate alcohol use before age 11, currently drink, smoke daily, use marijuana and inhalants, use vomiting or laxatives for weight loss, and have feelings of sadness or hopelessness.^{vii}
- Not using condoms during sex was associated with a history of dating violence for African American and Caucasian teens.^{viii,ix}
- In a longitudinal study with a nationally representative sample of middle school and high school students, physical and psychological dating violence victimization during adolescence increased the risk of heavy episodic drinking, depression, suicide ideation, smoking and becoming a victim of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) during young adulthood for females and increased the risk of antisocial behaviors, suicide ideation, marijuana use, and physical IPV victimization during young adulthood for males.^x
- The one in five female public high school students in a Massachusetts study who reported ever experiencing *physical or sexual violence* from a dating partner were four to six times more likely than their non-abused peers to have been pregnant and eight to nine times more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.^{xi}
- Compared with nonabused girls, those who experienced *both physical and sexual dating violence* were three times more likely to have been tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV, and more than twice as likely to report a STD diagnosis.^{xii}
- A cross-sectional survey of students in 7th, 9th, 11th and 12th grade in a high risk community found that preteen alcohol use before students were 13-years-old was significantly associated with both being a *victim* of physical dating violence and *perpetrating* violence in the past year.^{xiii}
- A history of dating violence among female patients (ages 15-21 years old) seen at a pediatric emergency room was associated with having ridden in a car with a partner who was doing drugs or alcohol, physical fighting with peers, and a history of sexually transmitted diseases.^{xiv}



- In a meta-analysis of 28 studies looking at the association between youth alcohol use and dating violence, there was a significantly increased risk of perpetrating dating violence among youth who drank more frequently or in high quantities, youth who engaged in heavy episodic (binge) drinking, and youth with problem alcohol use.^{xv}
- In a longitudinal study, youth who disclosed physical dating violence in the past 12 months were more likely to have mental health and substance dependence disorders six months later.^{xvi}
- In a national sample of high school students who participated in the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, teens who reported physical dating violence by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months were nearly twice as likely to consider and attempt suicide.^{xvii}
- In a large survey with male and female students attending high school in Boston, Massachusetts, physical dating violence perpetration in the past month was associated with carrying a knife and being a gang member or involvement with the justice system.^{xviii}
- According to analyses of data from the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey for San Francisco and Los Angeles, high school girls who were victims of physical dating violence in the past 12 months were more than twice as likely not to attend school due to feeling unsafe at school – or on the way to or from school – on one or more occasions in the past 30 days compared to nonabused girls (20 percent versus 8 percent).^{xix}

The Risks Associated with Exposure to Violence

- Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health found that teens and young adults in 7th to 12th grade who were exposed to violent crime (seeing someone shot or stabbed) were 32 percent more likely to be victims of physical dating abuse.^{xx}
- A survey of boys and girls in the 6th, 9th and 12th grades who reported childhood exposure to violence (i.e. physical abuse by a household adult, sexual abuse by family member, sex abuse by non-family member, and witnessing physical abuse by a family member on another family member) found that this violence was associated with an increased risk of perpetrating dating violence like threats of harm, physically or sexually hurting someone they are going out with.^{xxi}
- Early involvement (at ages 10 to 15) with antisocial peers was linked to dating violence perpetration for Hispanic and African American males and females. Antisocial peers were defined as friends who had taken part in delinquent activities like stealing, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, and carrying a weapon.^{xxii}
- Perpetrating physical dating violence one or more times in the past month was associated with either having been a victim of peer violence or witnessing a physical assault/homicide in the past year among male and female high school students.^{xxiii}
- In a longitudinal study with high school students (grades 9th-11th), adolescents who were part of peer groups characterized by high levels of aggression at the beginning of the school year were more likely to experience dating violence (both perpetration and victimization) six months later.^{xxiv}
- In a cohort study that followed 8th through 12th graders over a two-year period, the strength of the association between heavy alcohol use and perpetrating physical dating violence increased for both boys and girls as the levels of family violence and friend involvement in perpetrating dating violence increased.^{xxv}
- Boys who perpetrated teen dating violence were three times more likely to be involved in neighborhood violence and three times more likely to have perceptions of violent activities in their neighborhoods.^{xxvi}



What Works to Mitigate the Harmful Impacts of Witnessing Violence

- Teen dating violence is a significant public health problem that should be addressed through early detection, prevention, and intervention.^{xxvii}
- Researchers recommend integrating information on healthy relationships in health and sex education programs.^{xxviii}
- A preliminary evaluation of a dating violence prevention program for youth who have experienced or witnessed violence indicated significant increases in healthy relationship skills from baseline to program completion.^{xxix}
- Findings from a series of focus groups with African American adolescents and young adults (ages 13-24), indicated that youth preferred seeking help for dating violence from older siblings, parents, and friends as opposed to formal resources.^{xxx}

Parents Matter!

- Greater parental warmth and parental knowledge about what their teens were doing reduces the odds of sexual risk behaviors including alcohol and drug use during sex and pregnancy.^{xxxi}
- In a large, multisite study of ethnically diverse middle schools across the United States, 6th grade girls who perceived their parents as supporting nonaggressive solutions to problems were less likely to perpetrate physical dating violence. Parental monitoring reduced the likelihood of 6th grade boys perpetrating physical dating aggression.^{xxxii}
- Greater parental warmth and parental knowledge about what their teenagers were doing reduced the odds of onset of sexual intercourse, alcohol and drug use during sex, and pregnancy in a large study with nearly 8000 middle school and high school students.^{xxxiii}
- Parental support consistently buffers negative consequences associated with physical dating violence and sexual coercion including suicidal thoughts, using alcohol or drugs, depression and lower than average grades in school.^{xxxiv}
- In a large, longitudinal study that followed children from kindergarten through 18 years of age, the quality of the parent-child relationship during early adolescence was a significant predictor of adolescent dating violence victimization and perpetration. These findings indicate that relationship characteristics such as how well a parent gets along with youth are protective for dating violence.^{xxxv}
- According to data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, low parental warmth reported by 7th to 12th grade students was predictive of physical and sexual dating violence perpetration and victimization during young adulthood among both males and females.^{xxxvi}
- In a prospective study that followed students from elementary school through high school, bonding with parents, measured during grades 4th through 6th grade, was protective against physical dating violence victimization during high school.^{xxxvii}
- In a survey with 1300 teens (9 to 17 years old), youth who described their relationship with their parents as close/respectful and whose parents imposed rules/monitoring were less likely to have attitudes that supported controlling dating relationships.^{xxxviii}
- In a longitudinal study with adolescent Latino and African American girls, mothers' high level of monitoring during adolescence was associated with a decreased likelihood of their daughters becoming victims of physical and sexual dating violence for families living in high crime neighborhoods.^{xxxix}



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