



background

Dating Violence during adolescence

Dangerous Relationships

Dating can turn violent for many adolescents

For significant numbers of American adolescents, dating is marred by violence.

Research suggests that Intimate Partner Violence, generically known as dating violence, is perhaps more common during adolescent relationships than many Americans believe. And both young men and young women admit to perpetrating violence during a relationship as well as being the victim of a violent act.

Young people report that relationships turn violent for reasons ranging from fits of anger and jealousy to self-defense.

Whatever the reason, the consequences of dating violence can be grave. Victims risk physical harm, with women being more likely to suffer injuries. Injuries sustained as a result of dating violence account for an estimated 250,000 emergency room visits each year.¹

Dating violence is particularly troubling during adolescence. As many as 42% of early and middle adolescents, who range in age from 10-17 years old, may experience violence during a dating relationship, according to some studies.

In addition to the risk of injury, dating violence among adolescents may also influence relationship patterns that carry over into adulthood.

What is known about dating violence is reported in a relatively thin body of research. And improvements in the methodology and scope of studies is needed for a fuller understanding of this important topic. Available studies, however, shed some light on the characteristics of dating violence and the adolescents who experience it.

Common Characteristics

Various studies report that anywhere from 11% to 42% of adolescents aged 10-17 years old experience dating violence at some point in their young lives. Estimates are higher for later adolescents – young people whose ages range from 18 years to their mid-20s. Studies report that between 21% and 55% of later adolescents experience dating during a dating relationship.

Although determining the true rate of dating violence among adolescents is difficult given the wide differences reported in available studies, several general characteristics of violence within dating relationships seem clear:

- A significant number of adolescents

Related reports

Reasons for Conflict

Intimidation and self-defense are among the most common reasons for dating violence that occurs among adolescents. But family history and personal factors may also play important roles.

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experience violence within a dating relationship.

- Both young men and young women are involved in inflicting and receiving physical violence within dating relationships.
- Young women report being recipients of more sexual violence than men.
- And young women are more likely to report they had inflicted violence or been the victim of dating violence.

Injuries

The reported injury rates among adolescents who experience dating violence are high. And when dating violence occurs, young women are more likely to be the ones injured.

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Among early and middle adolescents, for example, one study found that 70% of the girls and 52% of the boys who had experienced dating violence sustained injury. Of those injured, 9% of females and 8% of males went to a hospital emergency room for treatment.²

In one study of dating violence among late adolescents, women were significantly more likely to report mild injuries, such as small cuts and bruises; moderate injuries, such as cuts that required stitches; and severe injuries, including fractured limbs and permanent disability.³

Mutual Violence

The roles of perpetrator and victim of dating violence are not as clearly defined as people might expect. Young men are not always the perpetrators and young women are not always the victim. In fact, research suggests that, in many cases, both partners inflict violence as well as receive it.

Such situations are especially troubling because mutually-violent relationships heighten the risk of injury. The mean amounts of violence received and injuries sustained in these types of relationships are reported to be greater than in relationships involving one-sided violence.⁴

Between 42% and 72% of early and middle adolescents who experience dating violence report having been both the perpetrator and the victim.

Very few studies examine mutual violence in dating relationships among late adolescents. However, one study of undergraduates reported that nearly 60% of men and women said they had been involved in a mutually-violent relationship at some time in their life.⁵

Gender Differences

The perception that girls are typically the victim of physical violence in a dating relationship rather than the one who inflicts it is called into question in several studies of high school students who had experienced dating violence.

One such study found that 29% of females and 4% of males reported being perpetrators of dating violence and that 26% of the males and 8% of the females reported being victims.⁶

Narrower gender differences were reported in one of the most methodologically-sound studies of adolescent dating. It found that 21% of male 12th grade students and 26% of

females reported being the perpetrators.⁷

Although many studies find that more girls report inflicting physical violence than boys, firm conclusions are difficult to draw. Reported rates vary and some studies have failed to find significant differences in gender.

Reported rates may support findings among adults that suggest women, in general, remember and report more violent incidents than men.

But significantly more adolescent girls report being the victim of *sexual* violence that occurs within a dating relationship.

One study found that among high school students, 16% of girls and 4% of boys reported having experienced sexual dating violence.⁸

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Co-Directors: Christina J. Groark, PhD.; Robert B. McCall, PhD. **Associate Director:** Carl N. Johnson, PhD.

background Editor: Robert B. McCall, PhD.; **Writer:** Jeffery Fraser (412) 731-6641, e-mail: Fraser53@msn.com

Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh, University Center for Social and Urban Research, 121 University Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15260; (412) 624-7425; fax: (412) 624-1187

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