



Formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund

The Connection between Dating Violence and Unhealthy Behaviors

Young people age 12 to 19 experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault,¹ and people age 18 and 19 experience the highest rates of stalking.² 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year.³ There are a large number of young people in this country whose lives are affected – sometimes shaped – by violence.

Teen dating violence is a huge problem in this country. The research below indicates a strong connection between dating 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.⁴
- 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.⁵
- Compared with nonabused girls, those who experienced *both physical and sexual dating violence* are three times more likely to have been tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV, and more than twice as likely to report an STD diagnosis.⁶
- A cross-sectional survey of students in 7th, 9th and 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.⁷
- A cross-sectional survey using data from the national 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of U.S. high school students found that girls who considered suicide were one and a half times more likely to report being victims of physical dating violence. Girls who were dating violence victims were also more likely to have sad/hopeless feelings and consider suicide.⁸
- 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).⁹

The Risks Associated with Witnessing 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.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- 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.¹²

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.¹³
- The middle school years offer key moments to educate young people and their parents about healthy relationships and teen dating violence prevention. Programs need to meet youth where they spend time, such as in schools, and engage a range of community partners. Effective violence prevention programs also engage youth as advocates and peer leaders. These programs can have lasting benefits.
- Researchers recommend integrating information on healthy relationships in health and sex education programs.¹⁴

¹ Truman, Jennifer and Rand, Michael. 2010. *Criminal Victimization, 2009*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv09.pdf>.

² Baum, Katrina, Catalano, Shannan, Rand, Michael and Rose, Kristina. 2009. *Stalking Victimization in the United States*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/svus.pdf>.

³ McDonald, R, Jouriles, E, Ramisetty-Mikler, S, et al. 2006. Estimating the Number of American Children Living in Partner-Violent Families. *Journal of Family Psychology* 20(1): 137-142.

⁴ Silverman, J, Raj A, et al. 2001. Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality. *JAMA*. 286:572-579. Available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/5/572>.

⁵ Silverman, J, Raj A, et al. 2001. Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality. *JAMA*. 286:572-579. Available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/5/572>.

⁶ Decker M, Silverman J, Raj A. 2005. Dating Violence and Sexually Transmitted Disease/HIV Testing and Diagnosis Among Adolescent Females. *Pediatrics*. 116: 272-276.

⁷ Swahn MH, Bossarte RM & Sullivent EE. 2008. Age of Alcohol Use Initiation, Suicidal Behavior, and Peer and Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration among High-Risk, Seventh-grade Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 121:297-305.

⁸ Howard, Donna; Wang, Min Qi; Yan, Fang. 2009. Psychosocial Factors Associated with Reports of Physical Dating Violence among U.S. Adolescent Females. *Adolescence*. 2007, Summer;42(166):311-24. Available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_166_42/ai_n21052946/?tag=content;coll.

⁹ Davis, Antoinette, MPH. 2008. Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency Focus. Available at <http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/Dating%20Violence%20Among%20Teens.pdf>.

¹⁰ Spriggs, Aubrey; Halpern, Carolyn; Martin, Sandra. 2009. Continuity of Adolescent and Early Adult Partner Violence Victimization: Association with Witnessing Violent Crime in Adolescence. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*. 2009 September; 63(9): 741-748. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2727565/>.

¹¹ Duke NN, Pettingell SL, McMorris BJ & Borowsky IW. 2010. Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Association with Multiple Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences. *Pediatrics*. 125: e77-e786.

¹² Schnurr MP & Lohman BJ. 2008. How Much Does School Matter? An Examination of Adolescent Dating Violence Perpetration. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 37:266-283

¹³ Wolitzky-Taylor, Kate; Ruggiero, Kenneth; et all. 2008. Prevalence and Correlates of Dating Violence in a National Sample of Adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry*. 47:7, 755-762.

¹⁴ Decker M, Silverman J, Raj A. 2005. Dating Violence and Sexually Transmitted Disease/HIV Testing and Diagnosis Among Adolescent Females. *Pediatrics*. 116: 272-276.