



**Advocates
For Youth**

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The Facts

Dating Violence Among Adolescents

More than 20 percent of all adolescents report having experienced either psychological or physical violence from an intimate partner – and underreporting remains a concern.¹ Dating violence includes psychological or emotional violence, such as controlling behaviors or jealousy; physical violence, such as hitting or punching; and sexual violence such as nonconsensual sexual activity and rape. Female or male teenagers may be the victims and/or perpetrators of dating violence. While both females and males may suffer dating violence, female teens in heterosexual relationships are more likely to be injured, more likely to be sexually assaulted, and more likely to suffer emotionally than are their heterosexual male peers.^{2,3} While little research exists on dating violence among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth, research on same-gender violence among GLBT adults shows violence patterns similar to those among heterosexual youth.⁴

Dating violence and abuse can lead to negative sexual health outcomes: the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy are higher for young people who have a history of abuse. Those who have experienced dating violence are also more likely to suffer from mental illness and suicidal thoughts and to be involved in binge drinking, smoking, and/or fighting.

Programs to prevent dating violence can positively change attitudes if they are appropriately implemented and reach all youth, including those most in need. Health care professionals should routinely screen young people for dating violence.

Dating Violence Includes Psychological, Physical and Sexual Abuse

- In a national survey, 21 percent of male adolescents and 22 percent of female adolescents reported physical or psychological abuse by an intimate partner.¹ In another national study, 32 percent of adolescents reported experiencing either psychological or physical violence, with the figures being almost identical for both males and females.² Both of these studies, along with information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), suggest that rates of dating violence are similar across genders.^{1,2,3}
- In a study conducted at a North Carolina university, 66.7 percent of the respondents reported sexual or physical violence with a partner while in high school.⁵
- According to the CDC, one in 11 adolescents reports physical violence and one in 5 adolescents reports emotional abuse.⁶
- Psychological violence includes uneven power dynamics, control, jealousy and threats regarding the relationship. In one study, 21 percent of teens said that they had been in a relationship with someone who wanted to keep them from seeing friends and family.⁷ The same study found that 64 percent of those surveyed had a partner who acted jealous and demanded to know their whereabouts at all times.⁷
- According to data from the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS), one in eight females and one in 16 males reported being physically forced to have sexual intercourse in their lifetime; nine percent of all adolescents report having been raped.⁸
- In a study on rape victimization, 22 percent of the women and 3.5 percent of the men surveyed between the ages of 18-29 said that they had been raped during their lifetime. Of these people, more than half of the women and almost three-quarters of the men had been raped before they turned 18 years old.⁹
- According to another national study, 29 percent of the young women surveyed who had ever been in a relationship said they had been pressured to have sex or to engage in sexual activity they did not want.⁷
- In a study of urban youth, 30 percent of the young women reported unwanted sexual experiences in the past twelve months; 13 percent of those incidents were rape or attempted rape.¹⁰

- Dating violence can lead to a number of problems. One study found that females in violent relationships suffered from posttraumatic stress and dissociation, and males suffered from anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress.¹¹ Analysis of the 2001 YRBS found that fighting, binge drinking, smoking, suicidal thoughts and multiple sex partners were linked with a higher prevalence of forced sexual intercourse.¹²
- Young people who have experienced dating violence have been found to carry abusive patterns into future relationships.^{5,6}

Dating Violence in Same Sex Relationships

Most research conducted on adolescent dating violence has focused on opposite-sex partners. However, two studies on same-sex partner abuse have found that abuse happens at the same rates of opposite sex partner violence.

- In a national sample of 117 adolescents, who were selected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health because they reported exclusively same-sex intimate relationships, 14.6 percent of males and 26 percent of females reported psychological violence, and 24 percent of males and 28 percent of females reported physical violence.⁴
- Another study that included 184 self-identified GLBT youth measured five types of violence: controlling behaviors, threats to physical safety, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Of the males, 43.6 percent had experienced at least one type of abuse from a same-sex partner, and 39.8 percent of the females reported experiencing at least one type of abuse from a same-sex partner. Controlling behaviors were the most common type of abuse, followed by emotional abuse.¹³
- Those in same-sex relationships typically experience the same types of violence as those in opposite-sex relationships, but same-sex partners may have the additional threat and fear of being outed by their partner.¹³

Correlation Between Dating Violence and Sexual Risk

Young women who are in an abusive relationship may be at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, or of becoming pregnant, because the power dynamics within the relationship do not allow them to negotiate condom use. They may fear heightened violence or forced sexual intercourse if they address issues of safer sex. Depression and feelings of sadness or hopelessness in an abusive relationship can also cause risky sexual behavior - the depression may lower the victim's inclination to use protection during intercourse or make them become less concerned about the potential consequences of unprotected sex.¹²

- An analysis of the 2001 YRBS data showed that young women who have experienced dating violence were found to be less likely to use condoms consistently and to be more likely to fear the perceived consequences of negotiating condom use than other young women.¹⁴
- Analysis of the 2001 YRBS data also showed that rates of recent condom use were significantly lower among young women who had experienced dating violence in the previous year.¹⁴
- In the same study, young women who reported being hurt in the previous year from dating violence were also approximately twice as likely as other young women to report having been pregnant.¹⁴
- In a study using the data collected from the 1997 and 1999 Massachusetts YRBS, young women who had experienced dating violence were more likely than other young women to have had their first sexual experience before age 15, and did not consistently use condoms.¹⁵
- In a study of 1,641 sexually active young women, those who reported physical and sexual violence were more likely to have been diagnosed with an STI or HIV than those who experienced no dating violence.¹⁶ Another study with 409 participants found that the young women who reported a history of abuse, were about twice as likely to report having had an STI than other young women.¹⁷
- In a national study, researchers found a correlation between history of physical abuse and pregnancy, and between verbal abuse and not using a condom at most recent sexual intercourse.¹⁸

Many Young People Remain Silent About Dating Violence

- One study found that a young person is more likely to report abuse if they have been on five or fewer dates with the perpetrator. The longer the young person has been in the relationship, the less likely it is that he or she will report the abuse.¹⁹
- Young people may remain in the abusive relationship for many reasons, including: fear of their partner, self-blame, loyalty or love for their partner, social or religious stigma, lack of understanding, the belief that dating violence is a private matter, embarrassment or denial.^{12,20}
- Young people under the age of 21 may not want to report the abuse if illegal alcohol consumption was involved.¹⁹

Prevention Programs Can Be Successful

- Prevention programs should include education about the different forms of dating violence, understanding dynamics of power and control, early warning signs, and aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships.²¹
- Programs should include skills building around effective communication and conflict resolution.²¹
- Prevention programs should address the problem of negative reproductive outcomes associated with abuse, such as STI, HIV and pregnancy, to avoid permanent consequences.¹⁸
- Dating violence prevention programs should reach out to the often overlooked GLBT community.
- Programs should not only teach young people how to avoid an abusive relationship, but to also teach them how to help a friend who might be in one.⁴

Health Care Professionals Should Screen for Abuse

- Health care professionals should not assume that patients will disclose abuse, even when asked directly.¹⁹
- Health care professionals who provide sexual and reproductive health care services should routinely screen adolescents for dating violence, and should be knowledgeable about referrals and assistance in the area.^{14,18}
- Medical professionals and health clinics should make information about dating violence hotlines and assistance for assault patients available to all visitors.¹⁶

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