U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
National Institute of Justice

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

FIVE THINGS ABOUT

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Addressing teen dating violence, which includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, is a priority for healthy youth development. Teen dating violence is highly prevalent, with as many as 69% of youth reporting victimization.[1] Teens who experience dating violence — particularly when their victimizations go untreated — may be at increased risk for a range of negative outcomes, including involvement in further intimate partner violence as adults.

What has long-term funding of research taught us about how to understand and respond to teen dating violence? Here's what we've learned so far:

1. Teen dating relationships that involve violence often involve *mutual* violence.

When it comes to dating violence, it was once thought that there are victims of abuse and there are those who abuse. We now understand that the picture is less clear. Through the first comprehensive national household survey of teen relationships, the NIJ-sponsored National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence, we have a more nuanced understanding of teen dating violence perpetration and victimization.[2]

Specifically, teen dating violence victimization and perpetration are often bidirectional; relationships that are characterized by violence typically involve mutual violence rather than one person being solely the victim and the other being solely the perpetrator.[3] In fact, nearly 84% of victims also report perpetrating abuse,[4] and teen relationships with mutual violence are more likely to include only physical acts of violence, whereas relationships in which one person is the primary victim often also include coercion and control tactics.[5] Given the high degree of overlap, interventions should not be designed for monolithic groups of "victims" or "perpetrators," but should instead consider contexts and implications for mutual violence.

2. Teen dating violence does not tend to occur in single, isolated instances, but rather in the context of a broader pattern of abusive behaviors over time.

Youth who are exposed to one type of violence are at greater risk of experiencing other types of violence.[6] Most victims of teen dating violence experience at least one other type of victimization, and on average victims experience over a dozen other victimizations.[7]

Prior exposure to abuse and violence in the family, among peers, and in the community has been linked to involvement in teen dating violence.[8] For example, youth who are involved in bullying are at greater risk for teen dating violence,[9] and different forms of family violence and conflict (e.g., witnessing violence between parents) are also associated with teen dating violence.[10] Teen dating violence is highly associated with some forms of child maltreatment (e.g., physical abuse by a caregiver), sexual victimization, and polyvictimization (experiencing a number of different types of victimizations).[11]

Looking for help?

See "Resources for Victims of Teen Dating Violence" from Youth.gov at https://youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence/resources.

April 2023 NCJ 306271

NIJ | NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE
ADVANCING JUSTICE THROUGH SCIENCE

3. A range of risk factors is associated with becoming involved in teen dating violence.

Nearly 26% of women and 15% of men say they experienced dating violence before the age of 18.[12] Identifying risk factors is key to finding prevention and intervention points. Studies have identified a wide range of risk factors across multiple levels of the social-ecological model, including the individual level (e.g., beliefs, behaviors), the relationship level (e.g., peers, family), the community level (e.g., schools, neighborhoods), and the broader society level (e.g., cultural norms, policies).[13] Most research has focused on the individual level, including substance use disorders and mental health or psychological issues, and the relationship level, including childhood neglect and abuse, exposure to family violence, and bullying.[14]

Although there is less research on protective factors, positive and supportive family and peer relationships appear to significantly protect against teen dating violence.[15]

4. Teen dating violence is associated with both short- and long-term negative outcomes, including negative mental and physical health, substance use disorders, and victimization or perpetration.

Negative outcomes across four broad domains are associated with teen dating violence:[16]

- Mental and psychological health, such as suicidal ideation and attempts at suicide, and psychiatric conditions and symptoms. Girls who experience certain types of teen dating violence may be more likely to experience internalizing outcomes (e.g., depression) than boys.[17]
- Physical health, such as unhealthy body mass index and risky sexual behaviors.[18]
- Use and abuse of a range of substances, including nicotine, alcohol, various illicit substances, and prescription drugs.[19] These patterns vary across gender and specific types of substances. For example, physical victimization may be associated with increased cigarette and marijuana use, especially for girls.[20]
- Victimization/perpetration, including different forms of violence (e.g., intimate partner violence, peer aggression).[21] Research suggests there are gender differences in the experience and response to dating violence and subsequent outcomes.[22] For example, trauma symptoms may mediate the association between physical dating violence victimization and later revictimization in adulthood for females, but not for males.[23]

5. Programs to reduce teen dating violence perpetration and victimization have demonstrated effectiveness.

Teens are unlikely to seek help after they experience dating violence, and boys in particular are less likely to seek help than girls.[24] Given all the findings and implications of research on teen dating violence, researchers have been examining effective strategies for prevention and intervention. Multiple evaluations of a range of programs designed to prevent or reduce dating and sexual violence for youth and young adults indicate that some models work well in improving teens' knowledge of and attitudes about abuse and violence in intimate/dating relationships, as well as reducing dating violence perpetration. See the practice profile for Programs To Reduce Dating and Sexual Violence for Youth and Young Adults at https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedpractices/63.

A couple of programs are highlighted below.

The Safe Dates program is a school-based prevention program for middle and high school students that is designed to stop or prevent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Among other goals, the program attempts to change norms on dating violence and gender roles and improve conflict resolution skills for dating relationships. The program was found to reduce psychological, physical, and sexual abuse perpetration and physical abuse victimization at the four-year follow-up. See the program profile for Safe Dates at https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedprograms/142.

The Shifting Boundaries (Classroom Curriculum and Schoolwide Intervention) program for middle school students is designed to reduce peer and dating violence and sexual harassment by highlighting consequences of these behaviors and increasing faculty surveillance of unsafe areas. The program was found to reduce sexual victimization and violence victimization and perpetration. See the program profile for Shifting Boundaries at https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedprograms/226.

Find more research

See a list of publications from NIJ-funded research on teen dating violence at https://nij.ojp.gov/tdv-pubs.

---

[1]Bruce G. Taylor and Elizabeth A. Mumford, "A National Descriptive Portrait of Adolescent Relationship Abuse: Results From the National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31 no. 6 (2016): 963-988, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514564070.

[2]Bruce G. Taylor, Elizabeth A. Mumford, and Weiwei Liu, "National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV)," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2011-WG-BX-0020, October 2016, NCJ 250292, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/250292.pdf.

[3]Taylor, Mumford, and Liu, "National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV)"; and N. Dickon Reppucci et al., "A Review of Findings From Project D.A.T.E.: Risky Relationships and Teen Dating Violence Among At-Risk Adolescents," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2009-IJ-CX-0004, July 2013, NCJ 243170, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/243170.pdf.

[4]Taylor, Mumford, and Liu, "National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV)."

[5]Janine M. Zweig et al., "Can Johnson's Typology of Adult Partner Violence Apply to Teen Dating Violence?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76 no. 4 (2014): 808-825, https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12121.

[6]David Finkelhor et al., "Polyvictimization: Children's Exposure to Multiple Types of Violence, Crime, and Abuse," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Washington, DC: U.S Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, October 2011, NCJ 235504, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/235504.pdf.

[7]Sherry Hamby, David Finkelhor, and Heather Turner, "Teen Dating Violence: Co-Occurrence With Other Victimizations in the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV)," *Psychology of Violence* 2 no. 2 (2012): 111-124, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027191.

[8]Priscilla Offenhauer and Alice Buchalter, "Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2010-IJR-8832, July 2011, NCJ 235368, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/235368.pdf.

[9]Vangie A. Foshee et al., "Bullying as a Longitudinal Predictor of Adolescent Dating Violence," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 55 no. 3 (2014): 439-444, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.03.004.

[10]Offenhauer and Buchalter, "Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography"; and Dorothy L. Espelage, Jun S. Hong, and Alberto Valido, "Associations Among Family Violence, Bullying, Sexual Harassment, and Teen Dating Violence," in *Adolescent Dating Violence: Theory, Research, and Prevention,* ed. David A. Wolfe and Jeff R. Temple (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2018), 85-102, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-811797-2.00004-9.

[11]Hamby, Finkelhor, and Turner, "Teen Dating Violence: Co-Occurrence With Other Victimizations."

[12]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Preventing Teen Dating Violence," Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv/TDV-factsheet_508.pdf.

[13]Offenhauer and Buchalter, "Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography"; and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention," https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html, accessed December 20, 2022.

[14]Caroline Claussen, Emily Matejko, and Deinera Exner-Cortens, "Exploring Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Dating Violence Across the Social-Ecological Model: A Systematic Scoping Review of Reviews," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 13 (2022): 1-21, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.933433.

[15]Claussen, Matejko, and Exner-Cortens, "Exploring Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Dating Violence."

[16]Yunsoo Park, Carrie Mulford, and Dara Blachman-Demner, "The Acute and Chronic Impact of Adolescent Dating Violence: A Public Health Perspective," in *Adolescent Dating Violence: Theory, Research, and Prevention,* ed. David A. Wolfe and Jeff R. Temple (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2018), 53-83, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-811797-2.00003-7.

[17]Diann M. Ackard, Marla E. Eisenberg, and Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, "Long-Term Impact of Adolescent Dating Violence on the Behavioral and Psychological Health of Male and Female Youth," *Journal of Pediatrics* 151 no. 5 (2007): 476-481, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2007.04.034; Elyse Olshen et al., "Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Suicide Attempts Among Urban Teenagers," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 161 no. 6 (2007): 539-545, https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.161.6.539; Deinera Exner-Cortens, John Eckenrode, and Emily Rothman, "Longitudinal Associations Between Teen Dating Violence Victimization and Adverse Health Outcomes," *Pediatrics* 131 no. 1 (2013): 71-78, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-1029; and Danice K. Eaton et al., "Associations of Dating Violence Victimization With Lifetime Participation, Co-Occurrence, and Early Initiation of Risk Behaviors Among U.S. High School Students," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22 no. 5 (2007): 585-602, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260506298831.

[18]Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman, "Longitudinal Associations Between Teen Dating Violence Victimization and Adverse Health Outcomes"; and Eaton et al., "Associations of Dating Violence Victimization With Lifetime Participation, Co-Occurrence, and Early Initiation of Risk Behaviors Among U.S. High School Students."

[19]Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman, "Longitudinal Associations Between Teen Dating Violence Victimization and Adverse Health Outcomes"; and Eaton et al., "Associations of Dating Violence Victimization With Lifetime Participation, Co-Occurrence, and Early Initiation of Risk Behaviors Among U.S. High School Students."

[20]Vangie Ann Foshee et al., "A Longitudinal Examination of Psychological, Behavioral, Academic, and Relationship Consequences of Dating Abuse Victimization Among a Primarily Rural Sample of Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53 no. 6 (2013): 723- 729, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.06.016; and Denise L. Haynie et al., "Dating Violence Perpetration and Victimization Among U.S. Adolescents: Prevalence, Patterns, and Associations With Health Complaints and Substance Use," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53 no. 2 (2013): 194-201, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.02.008.

[21]Offenhauer and Buchalter, "Teen Dating Violence: A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography"; and Claussen, Matejko, and Exner-Cortens, "Exploring Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Dating Violence."

[22]Anu Manchikanti Gómez, "Testing the Cycle of Violence Hypothesis: Child Abuse and Adolescent Dating Violence as Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence in Young Adulthood," *Youth & Society* 43 no. 1 (2011): 171-192, https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x09358313; and Ernest N. Jouriles et al., "Teen Dating Violence Victimization, Trauma Symptoms, and Revictimization in Early Adulthood," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 61 no. 1 (2017): 115-119, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.01.020.

[23]Jouriles et al., "Teen Dating Violence Victimization, Trauma Symptoms, and Revictimization in Early Adulthood."

[24]Pamela Lachman et al., "Patterns of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Victims of Teen Dating Violence and Abuse: Variations Among Boys and Girls," *Journal of School Health* 89 no. 10 (2019): 791-799, https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12816.

Photo credits: Camila Cordeiro/Unsplash, Antonio Guillem/Shutterstock, Leah Kelley/Pexels, Motortion/iStock, and Paolo Cordoni/iStock