

Dating Violence: Prevalence, Consequences, Risk Factors, and Prevention

Prevalence

- Nationwide, 9.4% of students in grades 9–12 in 2011 reported being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the previous 12 months.¹
- Eight percent of students in grades 9–12 report having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse at least once in their lifetime (11.8% of females and 4.5% of males).²
- Among sexually active adolescent girls in grades 9–12, more than 31% report having experienced physical or sexual violence from dating partners.³
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in grades 9–12 report being substantially more likely than their heterosexual classmates to have experienced dating violence and to have been forced to have sexual intercourse.⁴

Consequences

- Violence in adolescent dating relationships can have long-term negative consequences. A national study of adolescents ages 12–18 found that five years after experiencing dating violence females reported increased heavy episodic drinking, symptoms of depression, suicidal thoughts, smoking, and intimate partner violence. Males reported increased antisocial behaviors, suicidal thoughts, marijuana use, and intimate partner violence.⁵
- Potential consequences for both female and male victims of dating violence include depression, anxiety, academic problems, posttraumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, association with delinquent peers, future victimization, and even thoughts of self-harm or suicide.^{6,7}

Risk Factors

- Research suggests that early exposure to parental interpersonal violence and child maltreatment are related to teen dating violence.⁸
- Early teen alcohol use directly predicts dating violence victimization among girls. Among boys, victimization and perpetration of dating violence are correlated with a range of externalizing behaviors, such as physical aggression, defiance, and verbal bullying.⁹
- Having a friend who uses violence against a date predicts the initiation of dating violence perpetration by both boys and girls.¹⁰

- Dating violence is associated with risky styles of alcohol use, including drinking more frequently, drinking to cope, drinking to release inhibitions, believing that alcohol provides a time-out from behavioral expectations, and expecting alcohol use to stimulate aggression.¹¹

Prevention

- Primary prevention efforts that increase child–parent bonding and improve children’s social skills may help them avoid externalizing and internalizing behaviors, reduce their alcohol consumption, and ultimately protect them from dating violence.¹²
- Research suggests that prevention strategies aimed at directly reducing dating violence among early adolescents need to be tailored based on gender and ethnicity. For example, interventions with boys need to focus on externalizing behaviors,¹³ while those with girls need to address factors such as alcohol use,¹⁴ depression, poor self-esteem, and aggression against peers.¹⁵
- The *Expect Respect* dating violence prevention program addresses multiple aspects of the ecology of schools, and there is evidence that its gender-separate support groups for at-risk girls and boys significantly reduce emotional and physical victimization and perpetration.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Youth risk behavior surveillance, United States, 2011. *MMWR*, 61(4), 1-162. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Decker, M., Silverman, J., & Raj, A. (2005). Dating violence and sexually transmitted disease/HIV testing and diagnosis among adolescent females. *Pediatrics*, 116, 272–276.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12 — Youth risk behavior surveillance, selected sites, United States, 2001-2009. *MMWR*, 60(7), 1-133. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6007a1.htm>

⁵ Exner-Cortens, D., Echkenrode, J., & Rothman, E. (2012). Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 131, 71-78.

⁶ Ayers, J., & Davies, S. (2011). Adolescent dating and intimate relationship violence: Issues and implications for school psychologists. *School Psychology Forum*, 5(1), 1–12.

⁷ Teten, A. L., Ball, B., Valle, L. A., Noonan, R., & Rosenbluth, B. (2009). Considerations for the definition, measurement, consequences, and prevention of dating violence among adolescent girls. *Journal of Women's Health*, 18, 923–927.

⁸ Maas, C. D., Fleming, C. B., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Catalano, R. F. (2010). Childhood predictors of teen dating violence victimization. *Violence and Victims*, 25, 131–149.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Foshee, V. A., Reyes, H. L. M., & Ennett, S. T. (2010). Examination of sex and race differences in longitudinal predictors of the initiation of adolescent dating violence perpetration. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 19, 492–516.

¹¹ Rothman, E., F., Stuart, G. L., Greenbaum, P. E., Heeren, T., Bowen, D. J. Vinci, R., ... Bernstein, J. (2011). Drinking style and dating violence in a sample of urban, alcohol-using youth. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol & Drugs*, 72, 555-566.

¹² Maas, C. D., Fleming, C. B., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Catalano, R. F. (2010). Childhood predictors of teen dating violence victimization. *Violence and Victims*, 25, 131–149.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Foshee, V. A., Reyes, H. L. M., & Ennett, S. T. (2010). Examination of sex and race differences in longitudinal predictors of the initiation of adolescent dating violence perpetration. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 19, 492–516.

¹⁶ Ball, B., Kerig, P. K., & Rosenbluth, B. (2009). “Like a family but better because you can actually trust each other”: The Expect Respect dating violence prevention program for at-risk youth. *Health Promotion Practice*, 10, 45S–58S.

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