

Teen dating violence sets stage for future abusive relationships

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Teens who are abused by a romantic partner may suffer long-lasting

repercussions, and this is especially true for girls, a new analysis finds.

Investigators who reviewed 38 studies concluded that teenage dating [violence](#) was linked to a higher risk for additional relationship violence in the [teen years](#) and even into adulthood.

These unhealthy relationships were also associated with higher long-term risk for [substance abuse](#) (drugs and alcohol) and mental health struggles.

"Teen dating violence has been defined as a variety of harmful partner-directed behaviors—including physical, sexual, psychological, cyber violence—that occur within adolescent romantic relationships," said study lead author [Antonio Piolanti](#).

Research has shown that dating violence is "very common" in the teen years, said Piolanti, a post-doctoral assistant at the Universität Klagenfurt's Institute of Psychology, in Austria.

Among U.S. [high school students](#) who reported dating in the previous year, a 2019 survey found about 1 in 12 experienced physical dating violence. About 1 in 12 experienced sexual dating violence.

But "psychological teen dating violence has been estimated to be the most common form of dating violence among adolescents," Piolanti noted, affecting somewhere between 17% to 88% of adolescents.

This can take the form of very controlling behavior or [emotional abuse](#). Sexual violence can include forcing a partner to engage in unwanted sexual activities, while cyber violence might include aggressive online behaviors.

When these behaviors do occur, it's important that victims not feel ashamed to report that abuse, said [Emilio Ulloa](#), an associate professor

of psychology at San Diego State University.

For the new study, Piolanti and his colleagues looked over studies that collectively focused on the various forms of violent behavior that can occur within a youthful romance. Most of the studies were conducted in the United States. Participants were 13 to 18 years old. More than half the studies tracked participants for more than five years.

Both victims and perpetrators of teen violence were found to have higher odds for post-relationship problems, though risk was greatest among victims. The authors did not seek to quantify that risk, however.

Teens who had experienced relationship violence were found to face a higher risk for more [relationship](#) violence going forward, with one-third of the studies finding greater odds among kids who continued to date while still [teens](#).

Teens exposed to intimate violence were also more likely to end up struggling with mental health issues. And they were more likely to engage in risky behaviors involving excessive use of alcohol and/or marijuana, the investigators found.

The findings applied to boys and girls, although girls were identified as more vulnerable than boys.

Ulloa said the study results are not unexpected.

"A robust literature links trauma of all types to mental health issues," said Ulloa, who was not involved in the research.

"Substance use, which can turn into substance abuse, is how many cope with the pain of that trauma. Teen dating violence—be it physical, sexual or psychological—is an important source of trauma in the lives of young

people," he explained. Ulloa said they are particularly vulnerable due to the importance that romantic relationships play in their psycho-social development.

Both Ulloa and Piolanti noted that [prevention programs](#) can be effective in reducing teen dating violence.

Programs that help youth identify the markers of healthy versus unhealthy relationships are "always good," Ulloa said. When such violence does occur, "interventions designed to help teens deal with the trauma of this abuse can have an effect," he added.

"The more effective interventions are those that help reduce the stigma of victimization in the [school environment](#), which can encourage teens to recognize that they've experienced abuse, and encourage them to seek out support/services," Ulloa said.

Also, "counseling services are very effective at mitigating this risk, but we shouldn't underestimate the effect that peer and family support can have as well," he added.

The findings were published May 2 in *Pediatrics*.

More information: There's more on teen dating violence at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Antonio Piolanti et al, Long-term Adverse Outcomes Associated With Teen Dating Violence: A Systematic Review, *Pediatrics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2022-059654](#)

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