

Teen Dating Violence

Since 1999, the biennial *California Student Survey* (CSS) has assessed teen dating violence (TDV) among secondary school students, as measured by reports of having been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend at least once in the twelve months prior to the survey. Teen dating violence is an emerging concern as research shows that it causes not only physical and emotional injury — because the perpetrator is known and trusted by the victim — but also is associated with a wide range of serious risk behaviors and problems. This fact sheet presents data from the 2003 CSS on the scope and nature of dating violence among California high school students and its relationship to alcohol and drug (AOD) use, school violence, and academic achievement.

Scope and Nature of Dating Violence

At least one incident of dating violence was reported by 5% of 9th graders and 8% of 11th, about the same as in 2001. We refer to these students as “dating victims.” Roughly 60% of students in both grades reported that they had a boy or girlfriend. Among just this dating subgroup, the TDV rates were 9% in 9th grade and 13% in 11th.

Results for the total-sample are consistent with those reported nationally on the same question by 11th graders on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. California results are slightly lower for 9th graders. These results possibly underestimate actual frequencies in view of the sensitivity of the question, but there is currently little information available with which to assess the accuracy of self-reports of dating violence.

Gender Differences. Research indicates that male and female adolescents report similar frequencies of dating violence prevalence (Bergman, 1992; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). The 2003 CSS revealed little difference by gender among 9th graders, but slightly higher rates among females in the 11th grade (14% vs. 11%).

Racial/Ethnic Differences. Teen dating violence has been found to occur in every demographic group studied (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer & Hannan, 2003). In the CSS, it was reported by similar percentages of whites and Hispanics in 11th grade (around 7%), but Hispanics were higher in 9th grade, suggesting the need for earlier prevention efforts with this group. Rates for blacks were also similar, but they were higher among Asians and youth of mixed ethnicity in grade 11 (12% and 9%). However, the results for these three groups are tentative due to the small sample sizes (each about 10% of weighted sample).

Table 4.1. Prevalence of Dating Violence

	9 th Grade		11 th Grade	
	2001 (%)	2003 (%)	2001 (%)	2003 (%)
Total Sample	5.4	5.2	6.6	8.2
Female	—	5.1	—	9.3
Male	—	5.1	—	7.0
Whites	—	4.7	—	7.0
Hispanics	—	7.6	—	7.7
Students with boy/girlfriend	8.5	8.8	10.4	12.8
Female	—	9.1	—	14.1
Male	—	8.6	—	11.3

Relationship to Substance Use

Substance use has been implicated in increased likelihood in experiencing relationship aggression, including unwanted sex (Burky et al., 1988; Jackson, Cram, & Seymour 2000; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel 1997). Table 4.2 shows that CSS students varied markedly in TDV depending on their level of substance use. Based on patterns of use in the past six months, High-Risk Drug Users (HRU) in the 9th grade were almost five times more likely to report dating violence than AOD abstainers, and three times more likely than Conventional Drug Users (those who used but did not meet high-risk criteria). Youth who were classified as Excessive Alcohol Users (EAU) reported TDV rates moderately lower than HRU students, but closer to the former than to Conventional Drug Users. (Rates were about 4 percentage points higher in all categories among the subgroup of students who reported having a boy/girlfriend.)

For 11th graders, the percentages in each substance-use category were similar, but group differences were slightly smaller than for 9th graders. Ninth-grade substance abusers may be especially vulnerable to TDV. In both grades, those reporting dating violence were three times more likely to be classified as HRU and 1.7 times more likely to be EAU than the total school sample.

Table 4.2. Dating Violence by Substance Use Category

	Grade	
	9 th (%)	11 th (%)
High-Risk Drug User*	19.2	18.0
Conventional Drug Users*	6.5	9.0
Abstainers*	4.3	5.1
Excessive Alcohol User	14.5	14.2

* Past six months

Violence and Victimization at School

Table 4.3 reveals that dating victims consistently reported higher rates of both victimization and violence at school in the past 12 months than did the total sample of all respondents. In particular, rates for dating victims in 9th grade were generally at least twice as high and often three times as high. The largest differences were for threatened with a weapon (38% vs. 12%), gender-related harassment (24% vs. 7.5%) or sexual orientation (22.5% vs. 7%), as well as fear of being beaten up (44% vs. 20%). Indeed, on most questions dating victims reported higher rates in 9th grade than in 11th. Although these are very small groups, the consistency in the results would again indicate that dating violence prevention should begin prior to 9th grade.

The group differences were even greater when dating victims were compared with dating students who had not experienced relationship violence, and even greater still when compared to students who *did not* have a boy/girlfriend (not shown in table). For example, 13.5% of non-dating 11th graders had been in a physical fight at school, compared to 20.5% of all 11th graders.

For measures of victimization, there was less consistency in the results, but 11th graders without boy/girlfriends were much less likely to report having had mean rumors or lies

spread about them (28% vs. 35%) or having experienced sexual jokes, comments, or gestures (35% vs. 45%).

Table 4.3. School Violence, by Total Sample (All) and Dating Violence Victims (TDV)

	Grade 9		Grade 11	
	All (%)	TDV (%)	All (%)	TDV (%)
Occurred at School, Past 12 Months				
Pushed, shoved, slapped, hit	30.6	67.6	22.4	36.1
Threatened/injured by weapon	12.0	38.0	10.0	18.4
Afraid of being beaten up	18.9	43.7	13.7	23.7
Had mean rumors or lies spread	34.1	59.8	35.2	64.4
Made fun of because of looks	33.5	58.9	32.8	46.9
Had property stolen or damaged	23.0	50.6	23.2	28.9
Harassed — race/ethnicity	12.7	32.8	12.5	22.5
Harassed — religion	7.2	19.2	8.3	13.9
Harassed — gender	7.5	23.9	6.4	9.4
Harassed — gay/lesbian	6.7	22.5	6.7	11.9
Harassed — disability	5.9	18.6	6.3	6.7
Harassed — other reason	19.4	42.9	18.6	32.7
Been in a physical fight	26.0	67.1	20.5	26.6
Damaged school property	20.2	52.8	17.8	35.6
Seen a gun, knife	30.8	61.1	32.7	46.9
Carried gun	5.0	21.2	5.2	8.3
Carried other weapon	10.2	30.1	11.8	24.0

Relationship Violence and School Achievement

Low academic achievement has been a significant predictor of dating violence in several studies (Bergman, 1992; Gorman-Smith et al., 2001). Consistent with this, CSS dating victims were 1.6-1.8 times as likely as the total sample to report receiving mostly D/Fs and somewhat less likely to receive grades of mostly A/Bs.

Table 4.4. Academic Grades Generally Received, Total Sample (All) and Teen Dating Victims

	Grade 9		Grade 11	
	All (%)	TDV (%)	All (%)	TDV (%)
Mostly A/Bs or better	47.8	42.5	41.4	38.5
Mostly D/Fs or lower	5.7	10.3	3.9	6.2

Conclusion

The percentage of California high school students who experience dating violence is consistent with national rates. While the numbers are relatively small, there is still a clear need to address the problem. It is a problem that equally affects males and females and all major racial/ethnic groups, although it seems to be a relatively greater problem among Hispanics in 9th grade. Significantly, it is associated with higher levels of substance abuse, violence, victimization, as well as lower school achievement. Dating victims present a strong, consistent pattern of exposure to, and participation in, a broad range of high-risk behaviors. Dating violence is typically not an isolated victimization event.

These findings replicate the more detailed investigation by Furlong et al. (2004) of the 2001 CSS data. They also are consistent with other previous research showing that TDV victims are a very high-risk group

with multiple needs (e.g., Cano et al., 1998; Gorman-Smith et al., 2001; Malik et al., 1997; O’Leary & Slep, 2003; Ozer et al., 2004; Pellegrini, 2001; Silverman et al. 2001).

No conclusions about causality can be drawn among these risk-behaviors based on cross-sectional, non-experimental data. However, the role played by substance use in this nexus of problems warrants further investigation. As shown in CSS Brief #1, substance use is itself associated with higher levels of school violence and victimization.

A better understanding of both dating victimization and violence perpetration — and how they relate to violence and victimization in general — is needed for the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies. Although gender differences in overall prevalence rates are small, research has found higher rates of dating violence perpetration by females, but

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that males generally report perpetrating more severe violence (Feiring et al. 2002; James, West, Deters, & Armijo, (2000); Malik et al., 1997).

These findings illustrate above all that violence prevention and intervention programs must address the problem of dating violence, and that programs targeting dating victims must be prepared to address multiple problems within this population. In view of the prevalence among 9th graders, these programs should target early high school or even middle school students

before dating starts (Cano et al., 1998; O'Leary & Slep, 2003). School violence and poor academic performance cannot be attacked in isolation. They must be approached as part of a set of interrelated problems that extend beyond the school.

Unfortunately, there is currently little evaluation data to guide schools in program selection or implementation (Jaffe et al 1992; LaVoie et al. 1995; Wekerle & Wolfe 1999).

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