The Dynamics and Consequences of Teen Dating Abuse & Violence

1. What is Teen Dating Abuse and Violence?

"Teen dating violence occurs between two young people in a close relationship and includes four types of behavior: physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression. TDV can be perpetuated in person or electronically, and it affects millions of U.S. teens each year."

-National Conference of State Legislatures

1 in 3

young people will be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship in their adolescence.[1]

1.5M

high school students across the US will be subjected to physical abuse by an **intimate partner in a year.**[2]

The Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) defines teens as young people between the ages of 14 and 24. Types of teen dating abuse and violence may include:

Emotional, psychological and/or verbal abuse

- Name calling or spreading rumors
- Intimidation, like yelling or throwing/slamming objects
- Constant monitoring and/or jealous behaviors, which can lead to isolation from friends and family
- Minimizing abuse and/or "gaslighting"

Sexual Abuse & Violence

- Coercing partner into sexual activity or contact
- Physically forcing partner into sexual activity or contact
- Releasing or threatening to release intimate photos or sexts
- Reproductive coercion: forcing pregnancy or abortion

Stalking

- Following
- Constant unwanted calling and texting
- Monitoring phone calls or computer use
- Using social media to track location

Physical Abuse & Violence

- Pinching
- Hitting
- Shoving
- Biting
- Scratching
- Strangling (choking)
- Kicking

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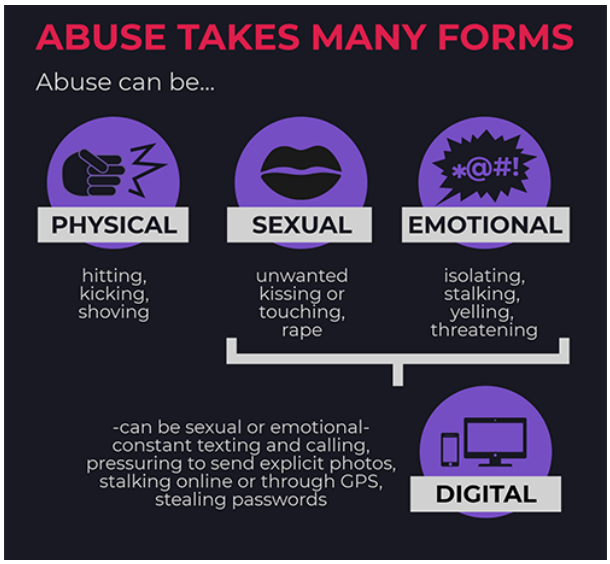
The Children's Safety Network created a fact and resource sheet[3] about Teen Dating Abuse. The graphics below were adapted from that sheet. They highlight the prevalence, types and important impacts of abuse on youth.



2. What is Intimate Partner Sexual Abuse?

Intimate partner sexual abuse is not defined by gender or sexuality, but by abusive behavior. Intimate partner sexual abuse can be perpetrated in all types of intimate relationships and is rarely an isolated incident. It is often perpetrated alongside other forms of abusive behavior, including physical and emotional abuse[4]. Below are included examples of intimate partner sexual abuse:

Insensitive, critical or degrading behavior relating to sex and sexuality

- Using sexually degrading names or criticizing victim's physical features/attractiveness/body image
- Making victim feel cheap or dirty for wanting sex
- Using sex to prove faithfulness
- Withholding affection or accusing partner of being sexually abusive for denying sex; blaming victim for not being satisfied
- Stalking to ensure fidelity
- Accusing partner of infidelity
- Punishing partner for attracting sexual attention – whether actual or imagined
- Checking partner's underwear for signs of sex
- Bragging about having other sexual partners

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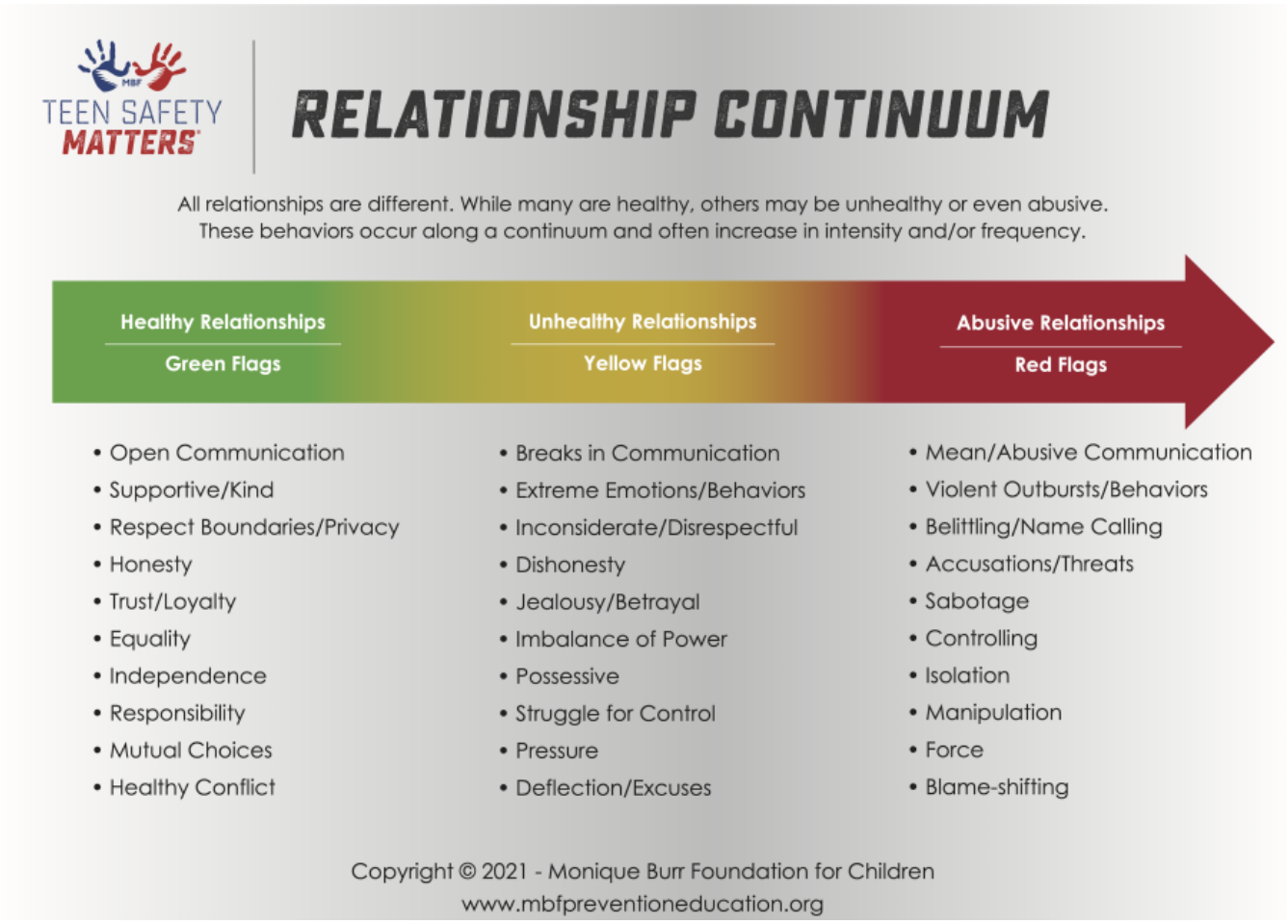
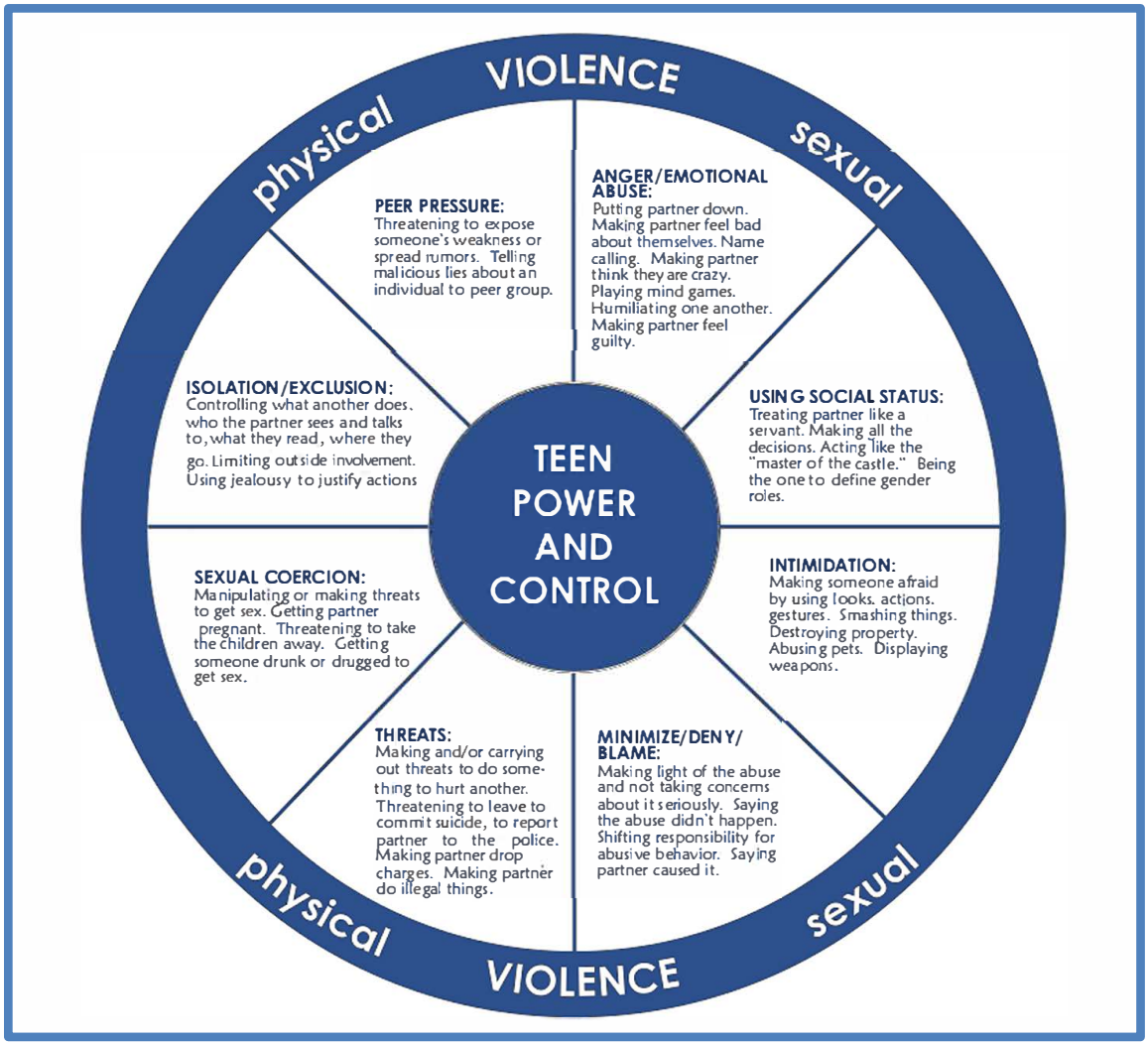
Trying/Making Victim Perform Sex Acts Against Their Will, When Not Fully Conscious or When Afraid	Hurting the Victim in Relation to Sex
• Coercing victims into acting out pornography • Reproductive Coercion • Coercing abortion • "Apologizing" after a battering incident by coercing sex • Coercing prostitution/trafficking	• Battering before, during or immediately after sex • Hurting victim physically during sex • Assaulting victim's breasts and/or genitals • Bondage • Forced physically painful and sadistic sex
Physical Harms	**Extorting Sex**
• Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) • Unintended pregnancy • Bruising, broken bones, burns, internal injuries • Long-lasting physical consequences because of repeated assaults, including internal injuries and chronic pain	• Refusing to pay child support without sex when there is a child in common

The Monique Burr foundation for children created a relationship continuum[5] to equip teens with the tools to recognize the signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.



3. Teen Power and Control Wheel

The Teen Power and Control wheel presents **the behaviors to which TDAV victims are most universally subjected** by their partner.



Origin

This diagram[6] was adapted from the original "Power and Control Wheel," created by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs: Home of the Duluth Model (DAIP). DAIP created the Power and Control wheel as a way to "make the pattern, intent and impact of violence visible."[7] DAIP "wanted a way to describe battering for victims, offenders, practitioners in the criminal justice system and the general public." It is adapted here for teens.

Technological Abuse

- Controlling a partner's content and followers on social media and demanding access to accounts.
- Convincing a partner to "sext" or share intimate photographs that they don't want to.
- Harassment by phone, text, or social media.
- Tagging (notifying user that another user mentioned them in a post or comment) partner in threatening or hurtful posts.

For more information on this adaptation and other examples of Power and Control Wheels, visit http://www.ncdsv.org/publications_wheel.html.

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4. Teen cf. Adult Dating Abuse & Violence

Although the perpetrators of TDAV are young people, TDAV is as dangerous as adult intimate partner violence.

Teens lack relationship experience and because of their developing brain, are less in control of their emotions. Navigating the boundaries and the rules of their families complicates their ability to label relationships and set boundaries with partners. For example, their family could tell them they aren't allowed to date, forcing them to lie about when and where they see their partner. The restrictions set by parents may lead teens to hide their relationship.

Definition of "Dating"

50% of sexually active teens have had at least one sexual partner they were not dating.[8]

In some instances, if the relationship is mostly physical, teens may think of and describe their intimate partnership as "just a hook-up."

Secrecy

The reliance on and presence of parents may force a teen into hiding their relationship from parents and other adults. This is prevalent in LGBTQIA2S+ relationships. The secrecy of the relationship forces the secrecy of the abuse. This makes it much harder for a teen to recognize and understand abusive behaviors for what they are.

Relationship Experience

25% to **46%** of female adolescents involved in aggressive intimate relationships interpreted the violence as an act of love.[9]

Many teens have limited relationship experience and believe that TDAV is only perpetrated in long-term, romantically and physically intimate relationships. If their relationship does not fit that model, they may view their relationships as not "serious enough" to look for signs of abusive behavior in their partners. This makes it difficult for teens to recognize that their partner is abusing them.

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5. The Risks and Outcomes of Teen Dating Abuse & Violence

As mentioned previously, TDAV is rarely a one-time incident, but rather "a pattern of abusive behaviors over time that causes fear and/or harm."[10] The impacts on victims are serious and can lead to severe long term physical and psychological harm. The urgency and gravity of these consequences make clear how important it is for courts to act in TDAV cases. Some of these consequences may include:

- **INESCAPABLE DIGITAL ABUSE:** Teens heavy reliance on social media makes it difficult for them to fully escape from and cut all ties to an abuser.
- **STALKING:** Technology also makes it easier for perpetrators of TDAV to stalk their victims, a prevalent habit in TDAV cases. This presents a real danger to the victim— in 20% of adolescent stalking cases, a weapon is used.[11]
- **POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**: Stress caused by the abuse can lead to this, limiting a victim's overall lifetime earnings.[12] To learn more about the effects of TDV and stress on the teenage brain, see *The Teenage Brain: New Knowledge from Neuroscience* Information Sheet.
- **MALADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISMS:** Victims of TDAV are more likely to have eating disorders and suicidal thoughts, to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol, and to engage in risky behaviors, such as unsafe sex and drug dealing.[13]
- **PATTERN OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR:** TDAV perpetrators will often continue their pattern of violent behavior later in life, and are more likely to become perpetrators of domestic violence and intimate partner sexual abuse.[14]
- **NORMALIZING ABUSE:** TDAV victims may view this abusive behavior as normative and become involved in violent relationships in later life.

6. Screening For Behaviors That May Indicate TDAV:

Screening for signs of abuse in cases involving adolescents – even those cases that may not seem to encompass TDAV – is crucial. There are many barriers to keep in mind when doing so:

Reluctance to Disclose:

Adolescent victims of TDAV may be reluctant to admit that their partner abused them due to a number of factors, and may seem apathetic or unwilling to cooperate with court personnel.

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Fear of Punishment:

Adolescents may be unwilling to admit to either perpetrating or being victimized by certain acts of violence if they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time because they do not want to be punished for underage or illegal use of these substances.[15]

Reading Beyond the Words:

It is important to read and interpret adolescents' body language during proceedings. For example, if a victim unwilling to admit being abused appears anxious or fearful of the abuser, some form of TDAV may be taking place. Also, TDAV victims may be heavily traumatized, and their behaviors might seem unusual, such as speaking with a flat affect and/or being unable to remember details or even the chronology of events. Traumatic memories are recorded and recalled differently than ordinary memories, but they are not inaccurate.[16]

Significant Age Differentials:

In some TDAV cases, the perpetrator is much older than the victim (e.g., perpetrator is in their mid-20s and victim is 15). If a teen is brought into court on a charge like truancy, drug use or selling drugs to others, or even attacking another student, seek to determine whether there was coercion by an older partner to commit these crimes.

A significant age difference between a teen and a controlling, jealous abuser is also a risk factor for potential lethality.[17]

7. Coercive Control

I emotionally abused her by telling her one thing and doing the opposite. I controlled her dress, behavior, and who she could be friends with. I used my gang to intimidate her by pointing out victims and threatening to do the same to her." – Ruiz, 17

Barrie Levy "In Love and In Danger" (2006)

Coercive control **is a pattern of coercive or controlling behaviors that intimidate, degrade, isolate, and control the victim**—aimed at making the victim subordinate to the abuser; it is often psychological and emotional abuse, but can also be physical, financial or sexual.
Many victims often say that **the violence wasn't the worst part.**

"Well over 90% of abusive assaults are non-injurious, relatively minor, and fall far below the radar of an injury-based model. Nevertheless because of their frequency in a typical abuse situation, low-level assaults have a devastating effect. A related problem with the prevailing model is that is fails to recognize that the **level of fear and entrapment women present is the cumulative result of all that has come before rather than of the proximate event.** When victims or their children present with high levels of fear in response to a seemingly trivial assault, they are thought to be exaggerating, or, in family court, to be manipulating or "alienating" their children from a father figure."

Dr. Evan Stark, "Coercive Control," National Domestic Violence *Fatality Review Initiative: Fatality Review Bulletin,* 2010, retrieved from https://angelzfury.wordpress.com/2010/09/02/coercive-control-national-domestic-violence-fatality-review-initiative-fatality-review-bulletin-spring-2010/

Examples of Coercive Control

Origin: Forensic social worker, Dr. Evan Stark, coined the term "coercive control" in his 2010 book *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life.* Other sources[18] contribute to show that coercive control has a variety of forms:

Pressure/ Forcing Partner Into:

- Answering texts within a few minutes
- Answering calls at all times
- Granting location tracking to partner at all times
- Cutting off their family & friends
- Restricting daily activities
- Dressing, walking, talking and taking pictures in specific ways and not in others
- Giving access to all social media accounts
- Adhering to behaviors associated with stereotypical gender roles

Control and Verbal Violence:

- Gaslighting
- Name- calling and other forms of bullying behaviours
- Controlling access to money
- Controlling aspects of health and body

"The combination of these big and little indignities best explains why [victims] suffer and respond as they do in abusive relationships, including why so many [victims] become entrapped… why they are prone to develop a range of psychosocial problems and exhibit behaviors or commit a range of acts that are contrary to their nature or to a basic common sense or decency. The risk that battered [victims] will kill or be killed is a direct function of entrapment by coercive control."

-Dr. Evan Stark, "Coercive Control"

8. Reproductive Coercion

12%

of teen girls reported being subjected to reproductive coercion in a Northern California study in 2012-2013. [19]

"We have to treat pregnancy itself as a warning sign. I always tell other counselors that I'm training, 'When you see a pregnant teenage girl, always, always assess for an abusive relationship, because 99 percent of the time, that will be the case.'"

Dr. Jill A. Murray, quoted in Harris, He Thought a Baby Would Keep Me in His Life Forever': When Partner Abuse Isn't a Bruise But a Pregnant Belly (2009)

26%

of teen girls who were sexually active and in abusive relationships **reported birth control sabotage or pregnancy coercion.**[20]

"My sister was 14 years old when she became involved with this abusive guy, and when she was 15 his mother wanted grandkids so he coerced her into getting pregnant."[21]

A 2007 study found that some young men explicitly stated that they would pressure a partner to have condomless sex as a way to assert power in the relationship. Other research found that some young men believe a partner requesting the use of condoms is a sign of cheating.[22]

Despite the cultural trope that women "trap" men in a relationship by getting pregnant, social science research shows the opposite. In abusive heterosexual relationships, there are high rates of men using reproductive coercion, exerting one of the most intimate and lasting forms of control over a victim. This form of abuse is especially pernicious because of its secretive nature.

Teens often learn information about sex through peer sharing rather than comprehensive sex education, making them more susceptible to **misinformation about sex**.

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Types of Reproductive Coercion:

Similar to Intimate Partner Sexual Abuse, reproductive coercion is not defined by sexuality or gender and does not solely occur within heterosexual, cisgender relationships. Partners can use physical, economic and emotional abuse to pressure a partner into insemination or finding a woman to carry a child. Additionally, the female reproductive system is not reserved to cisgender women, trans men and non-binary people can also become pregnant, especially if their partner restricts access to their hormone doses. These facts are important to keep in mind when thinking of barriers to recognition of abuse and disclosure. It is also important to note that reproductive coercion is perpetrated in teen dating relationships at rates similar to adults relationships.

Reproductive coercion takes many forms. In attempting to coerce the partner into sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy or abortion, one can use[23]:

Birth Control Sabotage

- Pressuring partner through emotional abuse to not use birth control
- Manipulating contraception by: forcibly removing contraception such as contraceptive rings, contraceptive patches or condoms; hiding, throwing away, or destroying birth control, poking holes in condoms
- Stealthing: Male partner removes or purposely damages condom during sex without partner's clear consent
- Refusing to pull out during sex when previously agreed upon
- Refusing to use condoms,
- Physically or economically preventing partner from obtaining birth control
- Manipulating or restricting access to hormones

Emotional Abuse:

Coercing partner into a certain pregnancy outcome by:

- Convincing partner no one will want them if they choose a certain pregnancy outcome
- Calling partner names, degrading them, or using profanity directed at them
- Threatening to harm self or others
- Threatening to hurt or kill partner, or force a miscarriage
- Threatening to reveal something private about partner, including their hidden sexuality or gender identity
- Using religious or cultural beliefs
- Making partner feel guilty for continuing pregnancy or choosing to have an abortion
- Threatening to leave partner
- Making the pregnancy about fidelity and attachment in relationship

Economic Abuse

Refusing to help pay for:

- Birth control or an abortion
- Costs of raising children if partner chooses a certain pregnancy outcome
- Prenatal care and basic health needs

Forcing pregnancies and births, one after another within a short time frame, to force partner into inability to work or leave the home without difficulty or risk

Destroying partner's credit, sabotaging assets, or amassing debt.

Physical Abuse

Threats: Beating, kicking, hitting, strangling, raping, destroying property or possessions or using any form of physical violence to force partner into beginning or continuing a pregnancy or having an abortion.

Consequences: The physical abuse may result in miscarriage, early delivery or into having a child requiring special assistance.

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Neglected Reproductive Coercion:

Transgender Victims: Transgender people may identify with the gender binary of woman/ man, or as non-binary, genderfluid, gender nonconforming and may need access to a variety of reproductive health services. They also may be subjected to sexual coercion in ways that might not be congruent with assumptions about their gender identity or sexual orientation. Research has demonstrated that transgender people are subjected to sexual violence at a greater rate than cisgender people and most often in the context of an intimate relationship[24]. If you are unfamiliar with the medical health needs of transgender people, there are various resources available to help you, such as the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Toolkit Around Sexual and Reproductive Coercion.[25]

Male Victims: Cisgender men (of all sexual orientations) may be at risk for reproductive coercion, including experiencing pressure to not use condoms during sexual encounters. The risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is greater when people feel they are unable to negotiate safe condom usage in their relationships[26].

Consequences of Reproductive Coercion

- **Higher rates of unintended pregnancy:** Adolescent girls in physically abusive relationships were 3.5 times more likely to become pregnant than non-abused girls[27], and as many as two-thirds of adolescents who become pregnant were sexually or physically abused at some time in their lives.[28]

- **Higher rates of sexually transmitted disease:** Women subjected to abuse are 3 times more likely to get an STI than women not in abusive relationships.[29] This is caused by abusers' putting them at a higher risk through things such as birth control sabotage.

9. Sex Trafficking and the Juvenile/ Criminal Justice System

Teen dating abuse and violence can also lead to young people being forced into sex trafficking. Sex traffickers often enter teens' lives as boyfriends who promise to love and care for them and offer shelter, protection and romance. These "boyfriends" coerce and force their victims to engage in sex with others, which often brings their victims into contact with the justice system on prostitution charges, drug charges and more.

Cooperation: When trafficking survivors of any age come into contact with the justice system, it may be hard to see them as victims. Initially they may be uncooperative and confrontational.

> "Human trafficking victims rarely are cooperative with law enforcement during their first confrontation. They have been trained to be evasive and to lie about their age and what they are dong with the trafficker. Failure to follow the code set forth by the trafficker results in physical and sexual abuse….[T]he courts have a critical role in establishing trauma-informed response for all victims. This role includes connecting community resources to each victim to ensure they feel safe throughout the court process."
>
> Judge Virginia Kendall and Christi Wade, "The judicial System Can Mitigate Re-Traumatizing Sex and Labor Trafficking Survivors," The Judges' Journal, Vol. 60 No. 2, Spring 2021.

Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide: The Role of Courts, OFF. FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME TRAINING & TECH. ASSISTANCE CTR. (U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) and Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)), https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/6-the-role-of-courts

Youth at Risk: LGBTQIA2S+ and Black youth are disproportionately affected by violence, poverty and stigmatization **making them more susceptible to the coercive influences of human trafficking.**

- A report by the Department of Justice revealed that in a review of all suspected human trafficking incidents across the country, "Black females represent 40% of those victimized by sex trafficking."[30]

Judge Pamila J. Brown, "Disparate Impact Considerations in Human Trafficking Cases, "The Judges' Journal, Volume 60, Number 2, Spring 2021

- A report by the Atlanta Youth Count found that 71 percent of transgender and gender non-conforming youth had experienced trafficking during their lifetimes, 65 percent of whom had become victims while homeless.[31]

For a comprehensive approach to this issue see *Working with Juvenile Victims of Sex Trafficking* developed by Judge Mark J. Kappelhof, 4th District, Hennepin County, Minneapolis for the Minnesota Judicial Branch website. The web course covers the problem and its challenges, the victims, the law, and what judges can do in their own courtrooms and to create solutions:
https://mjbstream.courts.state.mn.us/Courses/DN_BESU_vids/Published_Sex_Trafficking/story_html5.html "

10. Lethality

Despite the small amount of data and research available, the limited existing information makes clear that lethality is as much a potential danger for adolescents as it is for adults.

"I was sure I'd never hit a girl because my dad beat my mom. But I felt I had to have control, and I did. I had a hard time trusting girls. I used to hit [my girlfriend], punch her, slap her. I told her she was no good and called her a slut. I choked her and threatened to kill her. – Paul, 18"

Barrie Levy, "In Love and In Danger" (2006)

17 years old
is the average age of female teens killed by an intimate partner and the perpetrator is on average 4 years older - Adhia et al; "Intimate Partner Homicide of Adolescents," *JAMA Publications*, April 2019

90%
of adolescent lethality case victims are female – Adhia et al; "Intimate Partner Homicide of Adolescents," *JAMA Publications*, April 2019

A 2019 analysis of the National Violent Death Recording System showed that Compared to **19-24** year old victims, **11-18** **year old victims were more likely to be killed by a former intimate partner, and less likely to be killed at the victim's residence**.

These unique characteristics of adolescent lethality cases explain the increased risk for youth in break ups and altercations compared to adults in similar situations.

Causes

The most common categories of homicide related to teen dating abuse and violence were:

- breakups
- refusing to start a relationship with the perpetrator
- jealousy
- pregnancy
- reckless firearm behavior

Suicidality

Teen dating abuse and violence is a major risk factor for suicidal ideation and is **associated with an increase in teen suicide,** which is the second leading cause of death among teenagers.[32]

Importance of action by judges

Most intimate partner homicides of adolescents are perpetrated with firearms (61% of cases), demonstrating the importance of accessing orders of protection for adolescents subjected to TDAV[33]. Teen Dating Abuse and Violence is no less dangerous or lethal than in adult relationships. It is important for judges to take these youths and their relationships seriously.

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