

THE DYNAMICS AND CONSEQUENCES OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

The Seriousness of Teen Dating Violence

Violence in teen dating relationships is as prevalent, harmful, and dangerous as it is in adult domestic violence cases.

- 1 in 5 teenage girls in a relationship has reported being sexually or physically abused¹
- TDV causes depression,² eating disorders,³ and poor school performance⁴ in its victims
- TDV is the leading cause of death for African American girls ages 15-19⁵
- Intimate partner femicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescent girls of other races⁶

What is Teen Dating Violence?

“Teen Dating Violence” (TDV) is the term used to describe the broad range of abusive behaviors perpetrated in relationships between teenagers aged 11-19. Like the perpetrators of adult Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), TDV perpetrators exert power and control over their victims. TDV is just as lethal as IPV, and TDV perpetrators use the same abusive behaviors to harm their victims. However, TDV differs from IPV or Domestic Violence in that adolescent perpetrators may also use different mechanisms than adults to control their victims, particularly social media.

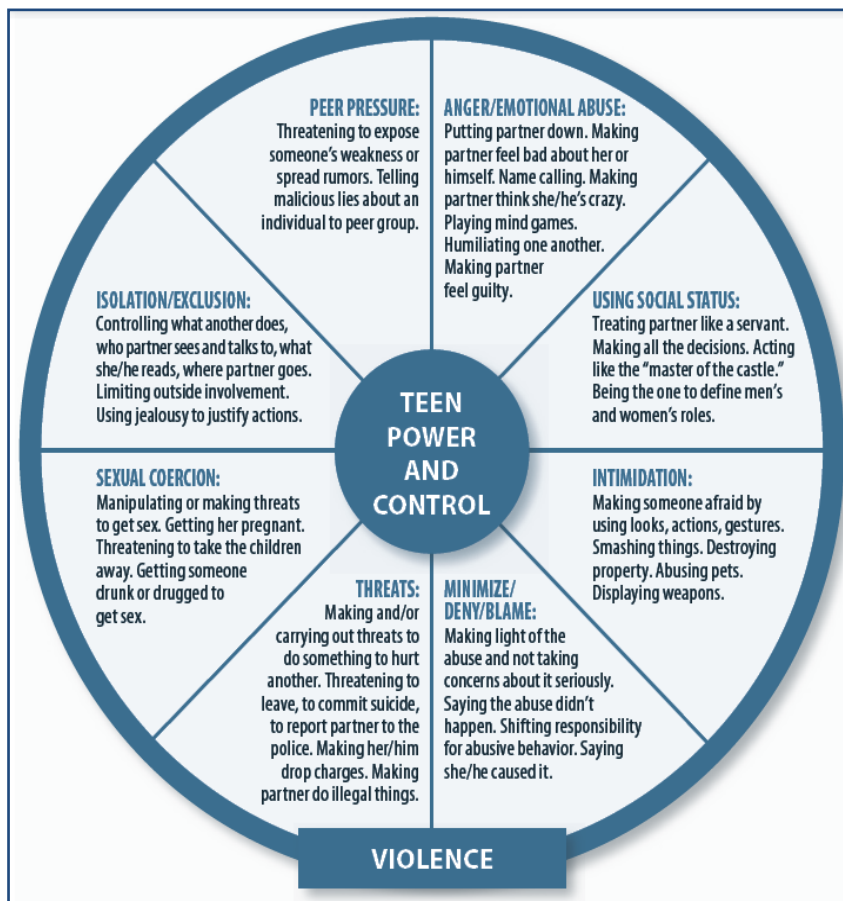
For example, technological communications and electronic evidence (such as digital photographs, emails, text messages, and communications on various social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram) play a large role in many cases of TDV and abuse is often carried out via electronic methods. More than 1 in 3 teenagers has sent or posted sexually suggestive emails or text messages, often coerced by an intimate partner.⁷ For more information on the effects of technology on TDV, see the *Use of Social Media in Teen Dating Violence* Information Sheet.

It is also important to note that the very definition of “dating” differs for adolescents. In some instances, if the relationship is mostly physical, teens may think of and describe their intimate partnership as “just a hook-up.” Also, some teens may be “dating” or “hooking up” with multiple partners, and given the casual nature of their relationships, the victims may be willing to overlook their partners’ abusive behaviors.

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Many teens believe that TDV is only perpetrated in long-term, romantically and physically intimate relationships; if their relationship does not fit that model they may not view their relationships as “serious enough” to look for signs of abusive behavior in their partners. It is also important to note that teens may have difficulty recognizing that they are being abused, as “25% to 46% of female adolescents involved in aggressive intimate relationships interpreted the violence as an act of love.”⁸

Many adolescent perpetrators use sexual and/or physical abuse as a means of coercion.⁹ However, adolescent perpetrators are also likely to use non-physical abuse, such as threats, peer pressure, stalking, economic manipulation, and/or verbal harassment. TDV can take many forms, ranging from “punching, slapping, pushing, and grabbing to rape and murder— from threats of violence, verbal attacks, and other forms of intimidation to extreme jealousy, possessiveness, and controlling behavior.”¹⁰



The Power and Control Wheel for Teenage Relationships

This diagram is a tool that explains the many different types of behavior that an adolescent perpetrator might use to abuse a partner. The “Teen Power and Control Wheel” was adapted by the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence 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.”¹¹ DAIP “wanted a way to describe battering for victims, offenders, practitioners in the criminal justice system and the general public.”

The behaviors presented on the original wheel are those that “were most universally experienced by battered women.” The Teen Power and Control Wheel, therefore, presents the behaviors that are most universally experienced by teens being subjected to TDV.

The Teen Power and Control Wheel depicted here can be found at:

<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Teen%20P&C%20wheel%20NO%20SHADING.pdf>.

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

The Risks and Outcomes of Teen Dating Violence

TDV is “typically not [a] one-time incident, but a pattern of abusive behaviors over time that causes fear and/or harm.”¹² TDV victims may be at risk for severe physical and psychological harm for prolonged periods of time. Courts need to intervene in TDV cases for the following reasons:

- TDV victims may be able to temporarily leave their abuser, but, due to adolescents’ reliance on technological interactions, find it difficult to completely cut all ties to the perpetrator. Technology also makes it easier for perpetrators to stalk their victims, and stalking is prevalent in TDV cases.
- Stalking presents a real danger to the victim—in 20% of adolescent stalking cases, a weapon is used.¹³
- TDV can cause abused partners to have poor academic performance due to stress caused by the abuse, therefore limiting their overall lifetime earnings.¹⁴ To learn more about the effects of TDV and stress on the teenage brain, see *The Teenage Brain: New Knowledge from Neuroscience* Information Sheet (stress detailed on page 4).
- Teenage girls subjected to TDV 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.¹⁵
- TDV 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.¹⁶
- TDV victims may accept this abusive behavior as normative and become involved in violent relationships in later life.

Interacting with Adolescents – Tips from Break the Cycle¹⁷

- Be aware of cultural differences between the court’s personnel and the teens, such as age, race, class, and sexual orientation.
- Try to simplify complicated legal concepts and explain each aspect of the court proceedings
- Offer adolescents the opportunity to speak during court proceedings; they may feel as if they are not supposed to
- If adolescents appear surly or combative, do not react in kind; remaining calm will foster mutual understanding in the courtroom

Screening for Behaviors That May Indicate TDV

Although the perpetrators of TDV are young people, TDV is as dangerous as adult intimate partner violence. Screening for signs of abuse in cases involving adolescents – even those cases that may not seem to encompass TDV – is crucial.

Although both girls and boys can be victims of TDV, girls are more likely to be sexually assaulted, injured, and emotionally damaged. In heterosexual relationships, males are more likely to perpetrate violence and abusive behaviors than their female partners. With respect to teens' same-sex relationships, "two studies on same-sex partner abuse have found that abuse happens at the same rates of [sic] opposite sex partner violence."¹⁸ See the *LGBTQ Issues in Teen Dating Violence* Information Sheet for more information about same-sex TDV.

Some tips that may help screen for TDV in your own court:

- Adolescents who have been victims of TDV might be reluctant to admit that they have been abused due to a number of factors, and may seem apathetic or unwilling to cooperate with court personnel.
- 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.¹⁹
- It is important to read and interpret adolescents' body language during proceedings. For example, if a victim unwilling to admit abuse appears anxious or fearful of the abuser, some form of TDV may be taking place. Also, TDV victims may be heavily traumatized, and their behaviors might seem unusual – e.g., 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.²⁰
- In some TDV 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.²¹

Sexual Abuse and Assault in Teen Dating Relationships

As with intimate partner sexual abuse in adult relationships, sexual abuse in teen dating relationships has been all but ignored until very recently. It was not until 2013 that the Centers for Disease Control added questions about intimate partner sexual abuse (IPSA) to its national Youth Risk Behavior Survey.²²

Like adult intimate partner sexual abuse (IPSA), IPSA in teen dating relationships takes many forms, ranging from verbal abuse relating to sex, to rape and trafficking.

“It may consist of sexually derogatory verbal abuse, pressure to have sex for fear of disappointing or angering a partner, threats (implicit or explicit), or attempted or completed rape. It can include deceiving a teen into thinking a romantic relationship exists, only to force her into sex trafficking; threatening to ‘out’ a gay or bisexual teen in order to force a sexual act; or sabotaging a partner’s contraception to gain control.”²³

Most young women who reported coerced sexual penetration to researchers reported that they were 15 or younger when they were victimized for the first time.²⁴ Among young women age 15 to 20 years who reported being sexually active and subjected to TDV, 26% reported that their partners were actively trying to get them pregnant by manipulating condom use and sabotaging birth control use.²⁵

Many older teens are in college, and college students who are age 20 or older were teens until very recently, making data on intimate partner violence from a 2015 study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) informative. The study found that “approximately 75 percent of the student population” had been in any “partnered relationship” since enrolling in college, and classified a partner relationship as a “casual relationship or hook-up,” a “steady or serious relationship,” and/or “marriage, civil union, domestic partnership or cohabitation.”²⁶ Using those definitions of an intimate partnership and definitions of violence such as “controlled or tried to control you,” “threatened to physically harm you, someone you love, or themselves,” and “used any kind of physical force against you,” the AAUW survey found that

“9.8% percent of the student population who had been in a partnered relationship reported experiencing IPV. This was reported most often by those identifying as TGQN [transgender, genderqueer, non-conforming, questioning, and as something [sic] not listed on the survey²⁷] (22.8% undergraduates; 17.8% graduate/professional), followed by female undergraduates (12.8%).”²⁸

The AAUW survey underscores the fact that IPV is not just perpetrated by adults. Until the recent shift in attention toward TDV, society has acted as if offenders turn 21 and suddenly begin abusing their wives/girlfriends/partners when, in fact, this abusive behavior begins much earlier in life, learned from family, friends, and cultural norms.

Relationships in which there is abuse are even more complicated for teens than for adults because teens may not recognize abuse in their intimate relationships.²⁹ Studies show that due to ongoing teen development of personal identity, they are at higher risk for “traumatic bonding,” or the feeling of attachment to a perpetrator of abuse.³⁰ It may be difficult to see the underlying abuse behind deviant behavior, because “young women feel strong and not vulnerable,”³¹ and may not show traditional signs of fear.

Teen Dating Violence Victims as Victims of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking in the teen dating context is a serious form of intimate partner violence in which a batterer forces his victim into prostitution as part of his abuse.³² Just because a girl is romantically involved with her trafficker does not mean there is no force and abuse involved.³³

Girls who have been subjected to sexual abuse are particularly likely targets of traffickers, so there are often many layers and instances of trauma.³⁴ Girls who grow up without the stability or safety of a familial support network, due to abuse or involvement in the child welfare system, are more vulnerable to manipulation by traffickers who promise to love and care about them. Sex traffickers often enter girls’ lives as boyfriends who offer shelter, protection, and romance.³⁵ Once a level of trust has been built, girls become extremely vulnerable to being coerced into a human trafficking relationship.³⁶

Prosecuting girls for prostitution when they are victims of trafficking demonstrates a misunderstanding of their situation. The phrases “girl prostitute” and “child prostitute” are oxymorons because children’s lack of ability to consent means there can be no purposeful exchange of sex for money.³⁷ Sex trafficking of minors should be considered child sexual abuse, not delinquent behavior by juveniles.³⁸

Human Trafficking Screening Tool for Use with Children and Teens

Human trafficking may be an issue in relationships where TDV is being perpetrated. To learn more about child trafficking and how to screen children and teens for signs of trafficking, the University of Loyola Chicago’s Center for the Human Rights of Children offers a handbook called ***Building Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking***. The handbook provides screening tools designed to help guide the process of identifying a potential child victim of trafficking.

It is accessible at <http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/chrc/pdfs/BCWRHandbook2011.pdf>.

Safe Harbor Laws and Post-Conviction Relief

Twenty states now have safe harbor laws that divert minors involved in prostitution away from the criminal justice system.³⁹ Of these, nine states use diversion models to get girls into the child welfare system instead of subjecting them to criminal sanctions.⁴⁰ These laws recognize that the best way to help young women who pose no threat to public safety is to enable them to help themselves and connect with support networks in their community. The other eleven states provide an affirmative defense to girls and women charged with prostitution, but do not protect them from prosecution when they are implicated in their abusers' criminal behavior.⁴¹ *Post-Conviction Relief for Human Trafficking Victims Convicted of Crimes Coerced by a Trafficker* is a comprehensive resource developed by the Human Trafficking and the State Courts Collaborative.⁴²

Coerced into Delinquency

In addition to trafficking, teen dating violence victims may find themselves in the juvenile justice system because an abusive dating partner coerced them into truancy, shoplifting, selling drugs or other criminal activity. Treating these abuse victims as delinquents can further isolate girls and perpetuate negative self-image and feelings of worthlessness.⁴³ Confining girls in juvenile detention facilities rather than diverting them to the child welfare system may expose them to even more victimization, and exacerbate the problems that brought them into the criminal justice system in the first place.⁴⁴ These facilities are often ill-equipped to address the trauma and treat the symptoms of abuse underlying girls' behavior.⁴⁵ The criminal justice system is not designed to heal, and emphasizes negative aspects of girls' character at a moment when support and positive encouragement is needed the most.⁴⁶

A Trauma-Informed Approach

Considering that 70% of girls involved in the juvenile justice system have been exposed to trauma of some kind, addressing that trauma will have a positive effect on the resulting "criminal" behavior.⁴⁷ Trauma-driven offenses should be viewed from the lens of public health, rather than as criminality.⁴⁸ Past trauma caused by abuse can manifest itself in girls' behavior in the courtroom. If girls seem disobedient or irritated, it is a traumatic response, rather than an expression of disrespect for the justice system.⁴⁹

An approach that takes past trauma into account acknowledges the difficulty teen girls have reporting their own victimization. Disclosure and reporting are huge problems in the teen population because teens are private, and especially subject to perceived social stigma that might damage their reputation. Abuse by a trafficker causes isolation, which makes it less likely for a girl to disclose her situation, which increases her risk exponentially.⁵⁰ Additionally,

teens may not even recognize abuse in their relationships, rendering them beyond the protection of even civil protection orders.⁵¹

Potential Lethality

TDV is the leading cause of death for African-American girls ages 15-19⁵² and the second leading cause of death for adolescent girls of other races.⁵³ But the deadly potential of TDV did not attract national attention until 2010, when Yeardeley Love, a University of Virginia senior, was beaten to death in her dorm room by her ex-boyfriend, George Huguley. In 2015, Yeardeley's mother spoke of the warning signs of potential lethality that were "never taken seriously because relationship violence was never on anyone's radar."⁵⁴ Huguley had attempted to strangle Yeardeley and told her "he wished he had killed her."⁵⁵

In her memory, Yeardeley's family established the One Love Foundation (<http://www.joinonelove.org/>) which "works with young people across the country to raise awareness about the warning signs of abuse and activate communities to work to change the statistics around relationship violence."⁵⁶ The One Love Foundation developed the "My Plan App," based on Professor Jacquelyn Campbell's Danger Assessment, which college students can use to "determine if a relationship is unsafe and create an action plan to leave safely." For more information about the One Love Foundation, see the *Resources on Teen Dating Violence for Judges, Courts, and Communities* Information Sheet.

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