Teen Dating Abuse & Violence: Facts, Myths, and Opportunities for Judicial Leadership

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Dynamics and Consequences of Teen Dating Violence

Facts and Myths
#1: Violence in teen dating relationships is as prevalent, harmful, and dangerous as it is in adult domestic violence relationships

A. Fact
B. Myth
Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017)

- 8% of dating youth subjected to physical abuse by dating partner
- 7.4% of youth subjected to forced sex
- Nearly 7% of dating youth were forced to do “sexual things” by their dating partner in the preceding 12 months
#2: Adolescent “dating” relationships look the same as adult “dating” relationships.

A. Fact

B. Myth
The Power and Control Wheel for Teenage Relationships

Adapted and developed from "Teen Power and Control Wheel" that was originally from: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802, 218.722.4134.
#3: TDAV victims can easily leave their abuser.

A. Fact

B. Myth
Coercive Control

“...many men adapted coercive control as their abuse strategy of choice when gains in women’s rights and resources made violence alone increasingly ineffective as a means to sustain [their] privilege...The adoption of this model is important because the current violence-centered and incident-based approach caused the domestic violence revolution to stall.”

Traumatic Bonding

• The development of strong emotional bonding between two people when one person is at times abusive and at other times loving

• “I started to break up with him. But he would come to me crying ‘I love you. I’ll never hurt you again.’ When I’d see him cry, I’d remember the softness and gentleness he could show. It would give me hope that we could work it out. I’d leave him and go back. When [his crying] didn’t work, he started threatening to hurt me and my friends and my mom. It even got to the point where he threatened to commit suicide.” Salina, 13

#4: Physical violence perpetrated by teen dating partners is often accompanied by sexual abuse.

A. Fact
B. Myth
Reproductive Coercion

- Coercing sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections
- Coercing pregnancy
- Restricting access to gynecological medical services and/or birth control
- Attacking partner when she becomes pregnant
- Coercing abortion
- Sabotaging birth control/“stealthing”
#5: The consequences of TDV can lead to victims’ involvement in the juvenile/criminal justice system.

A. Fact

B. Myth
Recommendations

Francine Sherman & Annie Balck, “Gender Injustice: System Level Juvenile Justice Reforms for Girls”


- Training for judges, attorney, court personnel
- Awareness of court process
- Representation
- Diversion
- Brief, targeted, strengths-based probation
The Teen Brain: New Knowledge from Neuroscience

Facts and Myths
#6: From a neurobiological perspective, by the teenage years the brain is fully developed.

A. Fact
B. Myth
“[T]he teen brain is only about 80 percent of the way to maturity. That 20 percent gap, where the wiring is thinnest, is crucial and goes a long way toward explaining why teenagers behave in such puzzling ways – their mood swings, irritability, impulsiveness and explosiveness; their inability to focus, to follow through, and to connect with adults; their temptations to use drugs and alcohol and to engage in other risky behavior. When we think of ourselves as civilized, intelligent adults, we really have the frontal and prefrontal parts of the cortex to thank.”

- Dr. Frances Jensen, *A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (2015) at 37.
#7: The flexibility and excitability of the teen brain means that stressors can create problems far more serious than they would be for an adult brain.

A. Fact
B. Myth
VIDEO

• Dr. Francis Jensen, *The Workings of the Adolescent Brain*, 3:14

• [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8sO4tqfUEs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8sO4tqfUEs)
#8: Exposure to trauma in childhood has less of an impact on overall health outcomes than trauma in adulthood.

A. Fact
B. Myth
VIDEO

- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, *How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime*, 16:12
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXXTLf7oouU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXXTLf7oouU)
- A TED/MED talk explaining ACES, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, how it maps the neuroscience and the implications for every aspect of physical and mental health across the lifespan.
ACES and impact of childhood trauma

- Toxic stress
- The “alarm state”
- Fear conditioning
Harms of Prolonged “Bad Stress” For Teen Dating Violence Victims

- Greater susceptibility to PTSD than adults
- Liable to self-medicate with alcohol, drugs, and self-harm such as cutting
- Addictions take tenacious hold because the teenage brain has so many synapses eager to absorb everything in the environment
- Adolescent-origin addictions are harder to eradicate
#9: Just as the teenage brain is more susceptible to “bad stress”, it is also more able to absorb new learning.

A. Fact
B. Myth
Resilience

• Resilience is learned behavior.
• Because the teen brain so rapidly absorbs new learning, teens are better able than many adults to learn how to respond to stress effectively.
• Courts can help teen dating violence victims and perpetrators take control of their lives.
Technology-Facilitated TDV and the Evidence it Produces
The Reality of Communication

- Access to smartphones
  - 95% of teens in 2018

- Internet use
  - 45% “almost constantly”

- Social media use
Cyber-facilitated TDV
How prevalent is this abuse?

- 1 in 4 dating teens is abused or harassed online/via text by partner.
- Victims of digital abuse are 2x as likely to be abused physically, 2.5x as likely to be abused psychologically, and 5x as likely to be sexually coerced.
- 1 in 5 TDV victims is subjected to digital abuse at school/during school hours.

Urban Institute, 2013
Cyber-facilitated TDV
What does it look like?

• Excessive texting/messaging
• Threatening texts/messages
• Location sharing/demanding to know whereabouts
• Writing embarrassing/harassing/threatening material on social media
• Coercing sexually explicit images
• Threatening dissemination of sexually explicit images and/or humiliating information
• Tampering with victim’s social media accounts
Exercise

• I would not, could not, in the rain. Not in the dark. Not on a train, not in a car, not in a tree. I do not like them, Sam, you see. Not in a house. Not in a box. Not with a mouse. Not with a fox. I will not eat them here or there. I do not like them anywhere!

Dr. Seuss, *Green Eggs and Ham*
• Where are you?
• What are you doing?
• You better answer me.
• Are you with another guy?
• You’re a slut.
• I’m coming to your house.
• All your friends are going to know what a hoe you are.
• I bet your mom would like to know about you.
• Answer me.
• I need you.
• I love you and I need to know you’re thinking about me.
• Remember what happened last time you didn’t answer me?
Considerations for Crafting an Order of Protection

- Tailored to reflect teens’ inability to change social environments
- Consider shared spaces
- Specificity, e.g., avoid “refrain from communicating” in favor of “refrain from communicating by...”
Orders of Protection and Students

- Challenges to issuing or compliance?
- Solutions?
Orders of Protection and Students

- Use narrow language so schools have a directive
- Direct parties/attorneys to discuss compliance options with school; to convey order to school
- Communicate directly with schools
- Minimize burden on victims
Orders of Protection – Minor Petitioners

- Can minors petition without a parent/guardian?
- How can courtrooms be more accessible for young petitioners?
Accountability
A Moment of Opportunity

What we know about the teenage brain tells us it is the optimal time for successful intervention
What Can Effective Intervention Achieve?

• “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. Now I am working on my issues in counseling. I have learned to talk to [my girlfriend] and use a time-out when I am angry. I now can look at what she is going through.” – Paul, 18

• “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. Now I think about negative consequences for assault, like jail. I also think about how it affects her.” – Ruiz, 17

Barrie Levy “In Love and In Danger” (2006)
Effective Intervention

- Explore past trauma
- Teach empathy
- Address alternative outlets for triggers
- Encourage acknowledgement of conduct and harm
- Explore the dynamics of healthy relationship behaviors and consensual sex
Alternatives to Explore

• Restorative Justice

• Youth Courts

• Are alternative justice models equipped to deal with teen intimate partner violence?
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