



National Crime Prevention Council

Research and Evaluation Department

Research Brief – May 1, 2008

Abusive Behaviors in Teen Dating Relationships

Summary: This study looked at the co-occurrence of boys' and girls' self-reported use of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in teen dating relationships. The researchers also asked the participants to report on risk factors associated with dating violence.

Sample: The sample for this study consisted of 633 students, 309 girls and 324 boys, in grades 7, 9, and 11 from four schools in a small Canadian province.

Key Findings:

- The use of at least one of the forms of dating violence was reported by 43 percent of boys and 51 percent of girls.
- The authors found that 19 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls reported using two or more of the forms of dating violence.
- Students at each grade level reported using all three forms of dating violence, showing that age was not necessarily a determining factor.
- Significantly more girls than boys reported using more than one form of dating violence with a partner.
- Girls were more likely to engage in psychological abuse, either alone or in combination with another type of dating violence.
- Boys and girls both are more accepting of girls using physical violence than boys.
- The respondents who were more accepting of dating violence also ranked highly on the predictive risk factors associated with dating violence: fear of family violence*, perception of their peers as abusive, and experience with dating violence.

*The authors of the source study cited below define fear of family violence as “having experienced violence from a parent, having witnessed violence between parents, or living in a family in which there was potential for violence even if violence had not actually occurred” (p. 489)

Recommendations for Future Work:

- More research needs to be done to help determine why boys and girls use different types of dating violence.
- Future research should look at whether girls' experience with psychological abuse can predict the use of this behavior in future relationships.
- Adolescent couples should be followed over time and information collected from both partners in the relationship for comparison.

Implications for Crime Prevention Practitioners:

- By understanding that dating violence behavior is starting at such young ages, School Resource Officers (SRO) in particular can pay more attention to the behaviors of younger teens to help prevent this behavior from occurring and escalating.

Source: Sears, Heather A., E. Sandra Byers, and E. Lisa Price. “The co-occurrence of adolescent boys' and girls' use of psychologically, physically, and sexually abusive behaviours in their dating relationships.” *Journal of Adolescence* 30 (2007): 487-504.