

Child and adolescent psychiatrists could improve their screening for dating violence

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Even though dating violence is common amongst teens, less than a quarter of U.S. child and adolescent psychiatrists report consistently screening for it, a new study finds.

“We found that although most child and adolescent psychiatrists screen for other risk behaviors such as suicide and drug use, only 21 percent screened for dating violence,” says lead author Larry K. Brown, MD, with the Bradley Hasbro Children’s Research Center and The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

This is important, the authors say, because dating violence is common among teens and over one half of child and adolescent psychiatrists reported identifying it in the past year. One quarter of female adolescents are reported to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a dating partner.

The study appears in the current issue (2007; 22; 456) of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Dating violence includes verbal and physical violence and forced sex, but studies suggest that spontaneous disclosure of details about romantic relationships are infrequent, so clinicians need to take the lead in initiating this discussion.

“Screening for teen dating violence is everyone's job,” says Brown; “Teens may not volunteer about an abusive relationship for a variety of

reasons, one of them being that they may not even recognize behavior in a partner as aggressive or abusive, and may even view it as a demonstration of love.”

Similar to suicidal behavior, it is impossible for clinicians to use strategies that reduce suicidal behavior unless one identifies it and the frequent co-occurring disorders (such as depression), explains Brown.

“Screening is the first step in identification, diagnosis and proper treatment; it will lead to a reduction in further dating violence and proper treatment for reactions to dating violence that has already happened,” says Brown.

Victims of dating violence can be helped by encouraging them to seek support from families and giving them strategies to avoid violence in the future. In some circumstances, victims and families need to use legal remedies such as restraining orders and assault charges to provide safety, Brown explains. Likewise, identification of perpetrators of dating violence leads to appropriate treatment and support for safety.

The authors also found that screening for dating violence is associated with consistent screening for other risks. “So screening is something that can be taught and encouraged, and as a result, can further address the growing problem of teen dating violence,” says Brown.

Source: Lifespan

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