

Relationship violence appears common among college students

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Violence between partners, friends and acquaintances appears prevalent both during and before college, according to results of a survey of students at three urban college campuses published in the July issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

The transition from living at home to attending college may increase adolescents' vulnerability to relationship violence, according to background information in the article. Factors associated with this risk include less parental monitoring and support, isolation in an unknown environment and a strong desire for peer acceptance that can change behaviors toward others.

Christine M. Forke, M.S.N., C.R.N.P., of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and colleagues anonymously surveyed 910 undergraduates age 17 to 22 (57.1 percent female) in 67 randomly chosen college classes. The students answered demographic questions about sex, age, race and length of time in school and reported whether and when they had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence in a relationship.

The researchers found that:

- 407 (44.7 percent) of participants experienced relationship violence either before or during college, including 383 (42.1 percent) who were victims of such violence and 156 (17.1 percent) of participants who reported perpetrating violence
- Rates of both perpetrating and being a victim of relationship violence

were higher before college than during college

- 53 percent of women and 27.2 percent of men reported victimization
- More than half (130 of 227 reports) of the violence experienced during college was related to a partner rather than a friend or acquaintance
- Emotional violence was most common before college (21.1 percent), while sexual and emotional violence were equally common during college (12 percent and 11.8 percent)
- Men were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence, while women were more likely to perpetrate physical violence

"In conclusion, all forms of relationship violence are prevalent among male and female college students; almost half of the students had experienced relationship violence at some point in their lives, more than one-third had experienced violence before college and one-quarter had experienced violence during college," the authors write.

Emotional violence was the most common type of violence at all ages.

"While emotional abuse frequently is not a focus of violence prevention, it can cause poor outcomes and may predispose victims to other forms of violence. Therefore, educational efforts focusing on healthy relationships should begin during childhood," they conclude.

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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