

Know a teen hurt by a date? Someone else has been hurting them too, research finds

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Teen victims of dating violence are overwhelmingly more likely to have been victims of other forms of violence, such as sexual violence and child abuse, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center.

Researchers were surprised to discover that every teen victim of [dating violence](#) surveyed as part of a national sample of 1,680 youth ages 12 to 17 reported that this wasn't the first time that they had been victimized. Although teen dating violence is often thought of as a stand-alone phenomenon, the new research shows that teen dating violence is more typically part of a pattern of multiple victimizations.

"We were genuinely surprised how interconnected teen dating violence turned out to be with other forms of victimization. We thought there would be overlap but had no idea that all dating violence [victims](#) are dealing with other forms of violence and abuse as well," said UNH Crimes against Children Research Center research associate Sherry Hamby, lead author of the study and research associate professor at Sewanee, the University of the South.

The new research is published online in the article "Teen Dating Violence: Co-Occurrence With Other Victimizations in the [National Survey](#) of Children's Exposure to Violence" by the [American Psychological Association](#) in a special issue of the journal *Psychology of Violence*. February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.

[Sexual violence](#) and [child abuse](#) were the most common other victimizations among teen dating violence victims. A distressingly high percentage — 60 percent — also had experienced at least one type of sexual victimization, with the most common types being verbally sexually harassed (30 percent), flashed by a peer (25 percent), and sexually assaulted (20 percent).

The researchers also found that most of the time, the other victimizations were not at the hands of violent dating partners. More than half of teen dating violence victims had a history of some form of child abuse, with more than 40 percent of victims physically abused by a caregiver, and nearly 70 percent having witnessed violence in their families.

Cyberbullying also was linked to teen dating violence. Youth who had been cyberbullied were three to four times more likely to be teen dating violence victims than other youth.

"We know that some youth are just generally more at risk for everything than other youth," Hamby said. "If they live in a violent family or violent neighborhood, they may not be able to avoid violence or know how to. If they've been hurt in the past, it may lower their self-esteem or impair their ability to protect themselves. In particular, we need to help kids from violent families, kids who have been bullied or kids who have been sexually abused from getting involved or staying in an assaultive relationship."

More information: The study was conducted in 2008 and involved interviews a nationally representative sample of 1,680 youth ages 12 to 17. In addition to Hamby, the researchers include David Finkelhor, director of the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center and professor of sociology, and Heather Turner, professor of sociology at UNH.

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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