

# One in three victims of teen dating violence has had more than one abuser

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(Medical Xpress)—More than one-third of young adults who reported being victims of dating violence as teenagers had two or more abusive partners, a new study suggests.

The study involved 271 college students who recalled [dating violence](#) - including physical, sexual and [psychological abuse](#) - from ages 13 to 19.

Overall, nearly two-thirds of both men and women reported some type of abuse during their teenage years, which falls in line with other studies.

But it was surprising how many teen victims had two or more abusive partners, said Amy Bonomi, lead author of the study and associate professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University.

"For about one in three teens who were abused, it wasn't just one bad boyfriend or girlfriend. It may have been at least the start of a trend," Bonomi said.

The same patterns were not seen in similar population-based studies of adults, who tend to report abuse by a single partner, she said.

Well more than half of all teen victims reported multiple occurrences of abuse, with roughly 15 percent reporting 20 or more instances of some types of abuse.

"For most teens, dating violence is rarely reported as an isolated incident," said Bonomi, who is also an affiliate with the [Group Health Research Institute](#) in Seattle.

The study appears online in the journal [BMC Public Health](#).

Among both [males and females](#), psychological abuse - such as yelling, swearing, insults, controlling behavior, put-downs and name-calling - was the most common type of abuse.

One argument that violence researchers often hear is that behaviors like name-calling and insults aren't serious enough to be called abuse. But that's not true, Bonomi said.

"Studies in adults have shown that psychological abuse alone can be damaging to health," she said. She is currently studying whether the same is true for [adolescents](#).

For this study, 271 students aged 21 and under at Ohio State completed a web-based survey about their dating history between ages 13 and 19.

The researchers used a method similar to what is called the timeline follow-back interview, which has been extensively used by researchers to study at-risk behavior such as substance abuse and risky sexual practices. However, this is the first time this type of interview technique has been used to study teen dating violence.

The technique involves asking participants to remember their most recent dating partner and asks questions about that relationship, and then works backward to the previous two relationships. This technique uses memory prompts, such as asking participants to remember the year they were in high school to facilitate recall of the age when a relationship began and ended.

The result showing that more than one-third of teen victims had more than one abusive partner was unexpected, Bonomi said.

"Our studies of adults showed that most women and men had only one abusive partner, so it was startling to find the number of teens who had two or more," she said.

For example, about 43 percent of women said two or more partners had pressured them into sex during their [teenage years](#). About 60 percent of men said they had two or more partners who had sent unwanted calls or text messages.

Psychological abuse was the most common type of abuse reported in the study. The category of "yelling, swearing and insults" was the most frequently reported type of psychological abuse, noted by 43 percent of female victims and 44 percent of males.

Nearly 25 percent of females experienced sexual pressure due to a partner's persistent begging, compared to 11 percent of males. Fewer than 5 percent of women said they were hit or physically harmed, compared to 13 percent of men.

Some types of dating violence tended to occur at earlier ages than others, the study found. For females reporting dating violence, controlling behavior tended to occur early, with 44 percent reporting it between the ages of 13 and 15. For males, 13 to 15 was the most common age range for the first occurrence of put-downs and name-calling (60 percent).

Pressure to have sex was more likely to start at later ages, from 16 to 17 for women.

Bonomi said it was significant that college students were reporting this level of [abuse](#) as teens.

"There's a common belief in our society that dating violence only affects low-income and disadvantaged teens. But these results show that even relatively privileged kids, who are on their way to college, can be victims."

The results also call for better education in our elementary schools.

"Many of these kids are getting in relationships early, by the age of 13," Bonomi said. "We need to help them learn about healthy relationships and how to set sexual boundaries. It shouldn't just be one class session - it needs to be a routine discussion in school."

Provided by Ohio State University

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