

One-third of dating teens report violence in their relationships

January 21 2013, by April Reese Sorrow

(Medical Xpress)—Nearly a third of those dating in middle and high school report abusive relationships, according to a new study from the University of Georgia. The dating violence, which the researchers first measured in sixth grade, is a cycle that increases over time.

UGA professor Pamela Orpinas led the recent study, available in an early online edition of [Journal of Youth and Adolescence](#), revealing that middle and [high school students](#) involved in physically violent [romantic relationships](#) consistently report violence across time and that they are likely to be both victims and offenders.

"This study shows that the kids who are involved in dating violence are consistently involved in dating violence, and this problem starts early," said Orpinas, professor and head of the department of [health promotion](#) and behavior in the UGA College of Public Health and a member of the Institute for Behavioral Research. "About 90 percent of those kids in violent relationships are both victims and perpetrators-so it goes together. For two-thirds of the kids, dating aggression is just not an issue, but among those that report violent relationships, this problem is very stable over time."

Orpinas and members of the youth violence prevention work group at UGA followed a cohort of adolescents from northeast Georgia from sixth to 12th grade. Participants were surveyed each year for seven years. Each spring, students reported whether they had dated. If they did date, participants specified any acts of violence in the relationship, as

well as their [acceptability](#) of these behaviors.

"This is usually shocking for people not in the field, but in middle and [high school](#), the girls consistently report more perpetration of violence and the boys report more victimization," Orpinas said. "Girls are more likely to report hitting, slapping and pushing their boyfriends than the boys. It is important to clarify, however, that the girls are more likely than boys to be the victims of [sexual violence](#) and to be injured."

Among the sixth-graders who reported dating, 14 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls reported committing at least one act of physical violence. That same year, nearly 38 percent of boys and 22 percent of girls reported being victims of dating violence.

In 12th grade, 14 percent of boys and 32 percent of girls reported perpetrating dating violence while 32 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls reported being victims.

"What we find is that the trajectories that adolescents follow are very consistent over time," she said.

A fourth of boys and girls were in the high or increasing trajectory of physical dating violence, and the probability of being on this track was already high in sixth grade. For both boys and girls, 27 percent of the dating population was highly likely to be both victimized and commit violent acts against their boyfriend or girlfriend; 62 percent of the [boys](#) and 65 percent of the girls were in a category that indicated they were less likely to be victims or aggressors.

"We found more acceptance of dating violence among those who were in the category of high victimization and high perpetration," she said. "If we use this measure as a predictor for later violence, we see that even though the support for dating violence goes down, the probability goes

up so there are other factors influencing the behavior."

Not surprisingly, students in the high dating aggression group also reported a worse relationship with their partner. However, overall rating of care from the partner was high, suggesting that these relationships do offer some support in spite of the violence.

"Parents, teachers and school health officials should understand and identify the early signs of [dating violence](#), as they may indicate the start of a long-lasting trajectory," Orpinas said. "And, we need to educate adolescents about positive relationships.

"Bad dating experiences, particularly those related to physical violence, are associated with a plethora of negative experiences such as anxiety, depressed mood, suicidal thoughts, alcohol and drug use, lower educational achievement and poor relationships with parents."

More information: An abstract of the article is available at link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10964-012-9881-5

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