

Study focuses on dating violence in Texas public schools

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Texas was the first state in the nation to mandate school policies on dating violence, but it still has some work to do in protecting victims and addressing consequences for the crime, according to a study by the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University.

"We conclude that school districts' implementation of the dating violence policy as it currently stands is in need of additional attention," concluded Dr. Leana A. Bouffard, Director of the Crime [Victims'](#) Institute. "Though most of the districts have a definition and set of consequences, the wide range of disciplinary techniques may unintentionally benefit the offending student and may send a message that this type of behavior is uncommon or unimportant."

Dating abuse is a problem that affects every community across the country. Every year, nearly 1.5 million [high school students](#) nationwide experience [physical violence](#) from a dating partner, and one in three girls in the U.S. are victims of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. One in ten high school students have been purposely hit, slapped or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend, and one-quarter of high school girls have been victims of physical or sexual abuse or date rape, according to Teen Dating [Violence Prevention](#) and Awareness Month Web site.

In response to the 2003 death of 15-year-old Ortralla Mosley at the hands of her boyfriend in an Austin [high school](#), the Texas Legislature passed a law in 2007 requiring school districts to adopt and implement a

dating violence policy. The report found that while 90 percent of select district had adopted policies, there were few safety provisions provided for victims and the consequences for committing the crime at school were too general and wide-ranging.

In a report entitled "Texas School Districts' Implementation of Teen Dating Violence Legislation," Dr. Bouffard, Dr. Kathleen Fox of Arizona State University and SHSU Graduate Student Robin Jackson surveyed the 72 largest school districts within the 20 Education Service Center across Texas. Here are some of the major findings of the research.

- Based on the sample, 90 percent of public school districts in Texas have adopted the basic components of the state's dating violence policy.
- Many districts have a wide ranging set of consequences for dating violence on school property or at school events, ranging from reprimand to expulsion. Many districts treat the crime as general mistreatment or misconduct.
- None of the districts offered safety provisions for victims, such as allowing requests for transfer from a class or campus, and one-third of the districts do not clearly indicate that students can get counseling services for the issue.
- School district information on teen dating violence was generally either nonexistent or difficult to find.

The report suggests that districts develop a distinct set of consequences for dating violence that reduces the discretion of [school](#) officials and incorporate into the policy safety provisions specifically for dating violence victims that address the physical and verbal elements of the crime. Districts also should implement programs to raise awareness about the issue, such as the Safe Dates program that has been credited

with reducing violence rates over time. The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) also provides a variety of resources and a model policy to address teen [dating violence](#) (<http://www.tcfv.org/resources/teen-dating-violence-policy>).

More information: The full copy of the report can be found at www.crimevictimsinstitute.org. The full study of the issue is expected to be published in an upcoming issue of *Criminal Justice Policy Review*.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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