

Peers and mental health can influence dating violence

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A new emergency department study from the University of Michigan Injury Center looks deeper at risk and protective factors among teenagers who report dating violence and alcohol use.

Patients ages 14 to 20 that came to the U-M emergency department seeking care were asked to complete a survey on alcohol use, peers, mental health and dating [violence](#).

From those survey results, 842 male and female patients reported alcohol misuse, of which nearly 1 in 4 reported past-year [dating violence](#), defined as being either a victim or perpetrator of physical acts such as throwing something, slapping, pulling hair, pushing, shoving, kicking, hitting or punching.

"We wanted to understand why dating violence occurs among young adults, so we analyzed individual and [social factors](#) that might contribute," says lead author Vijay Singh, M.D., M.P.H., M.S., an U-M Injury Center researcher and clinical lecturer in the Departments of Emergency Medicine and Family Medicine.

The study, funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, analyzed individual factors such as:

- alcohol use
- age of onset of drinking
- marijuana use

- other illicit or non-medical prescription drug use
- depression
- suicidal ideation
- number of emergency department visits
- attending a drug treatment program and
- psychiatric service use.

Social factors examined included:

- grades in school
- positive peer influences
- negative peer influences
- parental support
- religious service participation
- community activities and
- school clubs.

The study found positive peer influences are associated with reduced dating violence. This finding may reflect the importance of peers during adolescence and emerging adulthood.

"We believe these findings are important not only for health care providers, but also parents and peers of our youth," says Singh. "We all have encountered [young adults](#) with alcohol and [mental health problems](#), and it's important to find out if dating violence might be contributing to these health issues."

The results appear in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* and are consistent with other studies associating alcohol use with dating violence. It is unclear if the mental health problems analyzed were a result of or trigger for dating violence.

Findings from the study suggest the [emergency department](#) is an

important location in identifying if youth have dating violence. Additionally, dating violence interventions should harness the power of positive peer influences among youth, and assess if [alcohol](#) use, depression, and suicidal ideation are factors that escalate or are coping mechanisms for dating violence.

More information: Vijay Singh et al. Physical dating violence among adolescents and young adults with alcohol misuse, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.05.003)

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