

Involvement in traditional dating abuse increases chances of cyberdating abuse in teens

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New findings from The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston revealed that teens who are involved in dating abuse—as either the perpetrator or the victim—are more likely to also be involved in cyberdating abuse. Further, teens who commit cyberdating violence against their partners are more likely to later be victimized by it and cyberviolence victims are more likely to later perpetrate this act. The findings are currently available online at the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

"While researchers have explored teens' use of technology to perpetrate dating violence, little is known about how traditional in-person and cyberabuse are linked, and this is the first study to examine their relationship over time," said lead researcher Jeff Temple, who is an associate professor in UTMB's department of obstetrics and gynecology.

Teens are more likely than any other age group to use technology to communicate, with virtually constant access to their peers. Although there are benefits to teens having such close connections with their peers, prior research suggests that this lack of privacy may contribute to unhealthy relationship behaviors. The popularity of text messaging, social media and Internet use among teens may create opportunities for cyberdating [abuse](#), including monitoring, controlling, harassing or otherwise abusing a dating partner via technology.

Researchers collected information from 1,042 [high school students](#) as a part of an ongoing six-year study of teen health in several public schools in Texas. Researchers analyzed whether being involved in any form of dating abuse as either the perpetrator or the victim predicted involvement in cyber-dating abuse over the following year.

The study found that teens involved in cyberdating abuse both commit and fall victim to it. In other words, teens victimized by cyberdating abuse are also likely to commit cyberdating abuse over the next year and those who perpetrate cyberdating abuse tend to be victimized by the same behaviors.

Also, teens who were the victim of either cyber or traditional dating abuse were likely to be victimized by cyberdating abuse within the following year. Similarly, teens who commit traditional dating abuse are likely to commit cyberdating abuse in the future.

"These findings highlight the connections between traditional and cyberdating abuse perpetration and victimization among teens and further suggest that the line separating teens online and offline relationships is becoming increasingly blurred," Temple said. "It's important for parents, teachers and healthcare providers to be aware that victims of cyberdating abuse may be experiencing other forms of dating abuse as well. Speaking with [teens](#) about their online behaviors could provide some insight into their other relationship behaviors."

Temple said that prevention efforts should focus on helping adolescents understand healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors as they relate to face-to-face and technological interactions.

More information: *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10909-013-0380-3/fulltext.html

Provided by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

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