

Orange county teen dating violence is twice the national average

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Orange County teens are facing varied and more frequent types of dating violence than any generation before them. Chapman University researchers have partnered with Orange County domestic violence agency Laura's House to determine how prevalent this issue is amongst teens to aid prevention efforts.

National studies historically have researched the rate of [physical violence](#), not taking into account other forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, emotional and sexual. Nationally, one in three teens report being harmed in a dating [relationship](#). The latest study, focused exclusively on Orange County, shows that 69 percent of local teens have experienced at least one type of abuse in their dating relationships.

"Prevalence data on teen dating violence are very difficult to find," said Michelle Miller-Day, Ph.D., Chapman University [communication studies](#) professor and an author of this study. "A look at these percentages suggests there is a significant lack of information at the state and county levels concerning facts beyond the prevalence of physical violence. We examined other factors in our study, including different forms of abuse, age at first experience of dating violence, psychological acceptance of this behavior and gender specific data."

"The primary population of who Laura's House serves is in Orange County," said Laura's House Executive Director and CEO Margaret Bayston. "To truly understand the gravity of dating violence in the

county, we need local data so we can better tailor our youth education program. We are proud of the work that we have done with Chapman University as a first look in grasping a deeper understanding of this local, widespread issue."

Key findings of the study include:

- Teen dating violence begins on average at 15.5 years old, or tenth grade.
- Two out of 10 respondents experienced abusive behaviors in more than one dating relationship in high [school](#); these occurred in an average of three different dating relationships.
- Five out of 10 reported having experienced abuse in only one high school dating relationship.
- Nearly 35 percent reported being pushed, shoved or slapped by their dating partner.
- Almost 30 percent reported having a partner threaten to hurt them, with nine percent of those reporting it was a frequent or routine occurrence.
- One in four have experienced some form of sexual abuse in their teen dating relationships.
- More than 30 percent have been put down, insulted, called bad names, or humiliated/belittled by their partner on a frequent basis.

Of those who experienced hurtful behaviors in their relationship, only eight percent broke up immediately, while more than 50 percent stayed with their abusive partner for up to six months longer.

Notably, research reveals that neither teens nor adults know how to recognize dating violence when it does not specifically take the form of physical abuse, or involve visible injuries. Types of abuse studied in this report included cyber abuse, stalking behaviors, sexual abuse, and

parental abuse, in addition to physical violence and emotional abuse. Other pertinent study variables such as, self-esteem, reasons why young people stayed in a hurtful relationship, and the effectiveness of healthy relationships education programs were also included.

As a prevention movement to end domestic violence, which often starts with dating violence, Laura's House pioneered H.E.A.R.T. (Healthy Emotions and Attitudes in Relationships Today), a program that offers interactive workshops on building healthy relationships for youths at public and private schools throughout Orange County. The program recently expanded to middle schools and universities. In 2017, Laura's House presented its H.E.A.R.T. workshop at more than 45 Orange County high schools and middle schools through over 320 workshops, as well as in detention facilities, churches, colleges, and community organizations, reaching more than 12,500 teens.

"We often hear parents and educators say, 'This type of violence doesn't happen in our community,'" said Laura's House Prevention & Education Manager Jennifer Ponce. "The fact is, this is happening here, but no one is talking about it. Teen dating violence is starting earlier than we have seen in the past. The trend has changed, especially in the last five years, and girls are now dating as young as 11. We have made the proactive decision to expand our prevention education programs into local [middle schools](#) to help both male and female students identify signs of abuse and create a safety plan."

Ponce says that unhealthy relationship patterns can transfer from generation to generation. If young children grow up witnessing [abuse](#) of any type, this makes it difficult for them to recognize it years later because they perceive it as a normal behavior. Prevention and education efforts are made to stop and recognize the cycle of [violence](#).

The report is titled "Teen Dating Violence in Orange County, CA."

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The researchers surveyed 270 participants between the ages of 18 and 21 by utilizing an online questionnaire that asked them about hurtful behaviors in high school dating relationships. To be eligible for the study, participants had to have attended [high school](#) in Orange County for at least one year. After completing the study, participants were provided information and resources for help if they were currently in an abusive relationship.

Provided by Chapman University

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