

Nearly half of US youth have been stalked/harassed by partners

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A new, first-of-its-kind Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) study finds that 48% of 12-18-year-olds who have been in a relationship have been stalked or harassed by a partner, and 42% have stalked or harassed a partner.

Published in the journal *Youth & Society*, the analysis is part of the first nationally-representative study of non-physical youth dating abuse.

"These victimization and [perpetration](#) numbers are unacceptably high," says study lead author Dr. Emily Rothman, professor of community health sciences at BUSPH. "Unfortunately, they are in line with estimates of similar problems like dating and sexual violence victimization, so they are both shocking and unsurprising at the same time."

Previous research shows that harassing and stalking behaviors, including destroying belongings or going through [social media accounts](#), can lead to [physical violence](#), Rothman says.

But perhaps especially in the time of COVID, non-physical dating abuse needs to be recognized as

real and harmful in its own right, she says.

"Adolescents have already been fully aware of how harmful online forms of abuse can be—that it's valid to be interested in that and to try to address it," Rothman says. "COVID has in some ways made parents, teachers, and other adults more willing to see, right now, that what we do online matters and is fully part of our real lives."

Rothman and colleagues from NORC at the University of Chicago used data from the ongoing Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV) study to look at responses from 148 boys and 172 girls who were currently in relationships or had been in relationships in the past year. The survey asked teens if a partner had ever followed or spied on them, damaged something that belonged to them, or gone through their online accounts. The survey also asked the teens if they had ever done any of these things to a partner.

They found that rates of perpetration and victimization were similar for boys and girls: 46.5% of boys and 50.6% of girls reported stalking or harassing a partner, and 44.6% of boys and 51.1% of girls reported a partner doing these things to them.

The researchers analyzed and controlled for a range of other factors to better understand why particular teens may be at higher risk of perpetration, victimization, or both.

Among boys, having worse relationships with parents and living in neighborhoods with higher rates of violent crime were both associated with higher risk of perpetration. Among girls, being in relationships at younger age, living in neighborhoods with higher rates of violent crime, using marijuana, and using alcohol were associated with higher risk of victimization and perpetration. By race/ethnicity, the researchers found that Latino

boys and Black [girls](#) faced higher risk of both victimization and perpetration.

Further research will need to untangle these associations, but Rothman says the findings show that dating abuse is shaped by forces larger than the individual.

"We know from intervention research that the way to prevent stalking and harassment, or sexual and dating violence, is partly about addressing how [young people](#) think about relationships, gender norms, and improving their social-emotional skills, but these are also influenced by the context in which they are operating," she says.

"So, addressing racism, poverty, homophobia, misogyny, and disability-related discrimination is part of the solution, too."

More information: Emily F. Rothman et al, Prevalence of and Risk Markers for Dating Abuse–Related Stalking and Harassment Victimization and Perpetration in a Nationally Representative Sample of U.S. Adolescents, *Youth & Society* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0044118X20921631](#)

Provided by Boston University School of Medicine

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