

Stalking, harassment of partners common among teens

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(HealthDay)—Nearly half of U.S. teens have been stalked or harassed by

a partner or done the deed themselves, a new study finds.

"These victimization and perpetration numbers are unacceptably high," said study author Emily Rothman, a professor of community health sciences at Boston University's School of Public Health.

"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," Rothman said in a university news release.

The study included 148 boys and 172 girls, aged 12 to 18, who were in relationships or had been in relationships in the past year. The teens were asked if a partner had ever followed or spied on them, damaged something of theirs, or gone through their online accounts. The teens were also asked if they'd ever done any of these things to a partner.

The researchers found that 46.5% of boys and nearly 51% of girls said they'd stalked or harassed a partner, and about 45% of boys and 51% of girls reported a partner doing these things to them.

Among boys, having worse relationships with parents and living in neighborhoods with higher rates of violent crime were associated with a higher chance of stalking or harassing a partner, the findings showed.

Among girls, being in relationships at a younger age, living in neighborhoods with higher rates of violent crime, using marijuana and using alcohol were associated with a greater likelihood of victimization and perpetration.

Hispanic boys and Black [girls](#) had higher rates of both victimization and perpetration, according to the study published online recently in the journal *Youth & Society*.

Previous research shows that harassing and stalking behaviors can lead to [physical violence](#).

But non-physical dating abuse needs to be recognized as real and harmful in its own right, especially during the coronavirus pandemic, Rothman added.

"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," she said. "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."

The findings show that dating abuse is shaped by forces larger than the individual, Rothman noted.

"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 said.

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

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics offers advice for teens on [healthy relationships](#).

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