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UNDERSTANDING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Learn about the National Domestic Violence Hotline
www.thehotline.org

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is the only 24/7 center in the nation that has access to service providers and shelters across the U.S. Today. We serve teens through our loveisrespect platform. loveisrespect engages with young people on our website with interactive polls and quizzes and on social media. Any opportunity to influence positive self-image, self-care and healthy relationships on these platforms is crucial.

BACKGROUND

Dating violence and sexual assault disproportionately affect teens and young adults. Hundreds of thousands of young people are experiencing dating abuse, sexual assault, and stalking every year. Among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 22% of women and 15% of men first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age (*National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Division of Violence Prevention*). Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year. According to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Systems (YRBSS) conducted

by the Centers for Disease Control, 8% of high school students surveyed had experienced physical violence by someone they were dating and nearly 10% of students had experienced sexual violence, including non-consensual sex.

The effect of teen dating violence on physical health, mental health, and educational outcomes is significant. Youth victims of dating violence are more likely to experience depression and anxiety symptoms, engage in unhealthy behaviors like using tobacco, drugs and alcohol, exhibit antisocial behaviors, and think about suicide. Additionally, research suggests that teen dating violence patterns change rapidly over a short time period as adolescents grow older, thus dating violence services for young people need to be accessible, available, adaptable and safe.

It is also evident that many service providers and institutions (such as law enforcement, prosecutors and judges) that interact with teens have limited knowledge of complex abuse dynamics in all intimate-partner relationships, as well as limited knowledge in collaborating on ongoing safety strategies with and for teen victims. Other identified gaps are present in rural programs. Rural programs report that transportation, parental consent, and the lack of teen-specific services often prevent youth from engaging services.

Furthermore, local programs (not only those located in rural communities) are highly interested in developing and implementing peer advocacy models. There is a large number of diverse youth dating abuse victims, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) individuals, immigrants, those with limited English proficiency, and those who may be religiously affiliated who indicate they have not disclosed abuse to anyone.

Youth also report concerns that the abuse will be disclosed to their parents and/or Child Protective Services, or that their partners will be notified, thus subjecting them to more abuse. These are important gaps which could benefit from additional resource development and technical assistance.

It is important to note the language used by teens when talking about their romantic or intimate relationships may be unfamiliar to adults, including parents and service providers. When assessing for dating abuse, it is important to meet young people at where they are clarifying any terms used to describe being in a romantic partnership, or having sexual contact, and stating a number of examples of various tactics of abuse.

A study published in 2010, for example, recommends pediatricians and school health providers must inquire about behaviors, not identity, to determine teens' risk for contracting a sexually transmitted infection; similarly, when assessing for abuse, as a best practice, behaviors ought to be the main subject of inquiry. In the current social climate abuse amongst teenagers often manifests itself primarily as coercive control and through digital or electronic mechanisms.

These forms of abuse are often challenging to identify because they are extremely normalized in society and at the same time, inherently more private. Also of note is research showing consensually non-monogamous partnerships, including open relationships, comprise a



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proportion of romantic and sexual relationships comparable in size to the LGBT community, therefore service providers must reserve judgment and use reflective listening when assisting teens to mirror youths' representation of their own relationships.

ACCESS BARRIERS

There are real differences between teen and adult victims of intimate partner violence that contribute to or compound barriers teens face when experiencing dating abuse. Of primary concern are aspects of life over which adults have much more control, for example, teens may have little input over their schedules, which schools they attend, how to get to and from school, activities in which to participate, where they work, or where they worship. Additionally, many teen and adult victims alike experience abuse which intersects with discrimination and institutional biases based on race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, and language barriers among others, that make abuse harder to overcome and create additional challenges to receiving desperately needed services.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Current services provided by domestic violence organizations or outreach programs have been identified as difficult to access or utilize by teens who are not sure where to go for support. Barriers cited include organizational operating hours, legal and confidentiality issues, access points, and lack of teen-specific services. Because young people have grown up with technology, many are more comfortable communicating in writing than via phone. Providers aiming to serve young people would be well-served to offer chat services in addition to traditional phone-based hotlines.

As identified in the background section, rural programs report that transportation, parental consent, and the lack of teen-specific services often prevent youth from engaging in services. Another issue is lack of access to technology (such as on reservations and remote areas in Alaska) which prevents teens from accessing chat lines or hotlines. A longitudinal study published in 2018 of 589 adolescents from a rural, southern county suggests that informal help-seeking intentions are an important link between perceived social support and professional help-seeking intentions. The study's findings highlight the importance of informal help-seeking and informal help-giving in fostering professional help-seeking for adolescent victims and perpetrators of dating violence.

Some early intervention programs, such as those for Battering Intervention & Prevention (BIPP), are only made available to teens in the juvenile justice system. Or, if they are available in the community, they are fee-based and many youth, parents and guardians may not be able to pay required fees. Additionally, not all providers offer services after-school or after traditional work hours or on weekends. We know that if teens are not able to get help via early intervention or prevention programs, the abuse can become normalized and patterns are likely to continue into adulthood. 69.5% of women and 53.6% of men who have been physically or sexually abused or stalked by a dating partner, first experience abuse between the ages of 11-24.



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PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT AND CONSENT

Lack of parental/guardian consent to access services (e.g. counseling, medical, and legal support) may often result in teens not seeking or obtaining critical services to prevent, stop, or become educated about abusive and/or healthy relationships. Additionally, the lack of services for parents/guardians concerned about their teen's relationships/friendships/behaviors is troubling. 81% of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue. Without proper information and resources parents/guardians may not feel equipped to assist their teens to get them the necessary help to prevent violence or intervene in abusive relationships.



LACK OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a barrier for some teens as they may live in rural locations where transit systems do not operate or operate on very limited bases, and many young people do not have driver licenses or vehicles of their own. Additionally, even if parents are willing to transport their teens to local agencies, if services are only provided during "regular working hours" many parents are not able to leave or skip work to help their children access services.



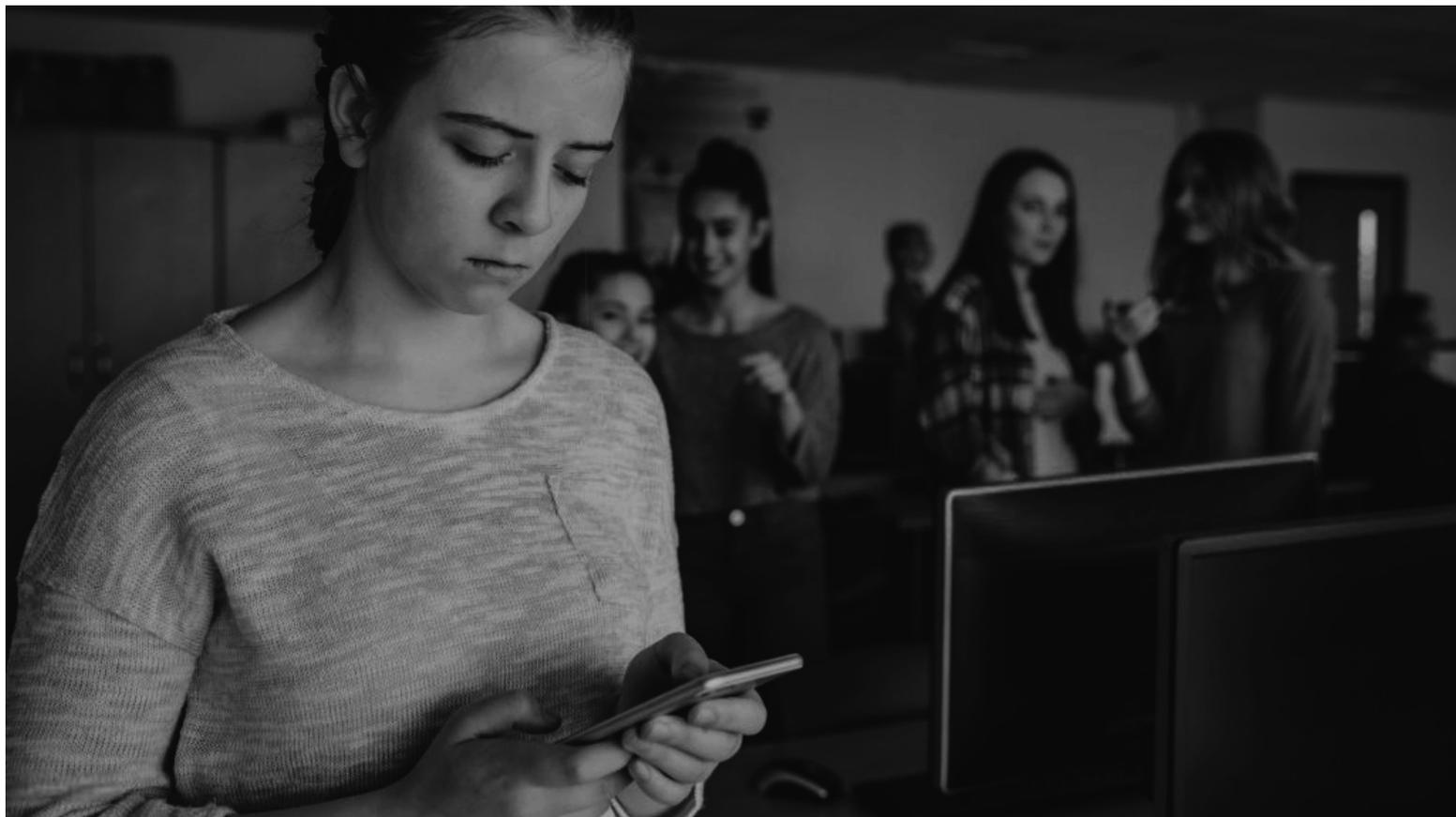
PROTECTIONS FOR TEENS

Legal: There are far fewer legal protections and resources designed to protect teens as well as fewer services available through domestic violence programs. Parental/guardian consent is required to obtain an order of protection in many places across the United States.

Shelter: Domestic Violence shelters in many states may not be able to provide emergency housing to teens under the age of 18 if the teen is not emancipated. If a teen feels their safety is compromised and wants to go into shelter, they may need to seek a group home that may or may not be able to house them. This may lead to teens remaining in abusive relationships because they feel they have no safe refuge. Commonly, even if a teen attempts to enter shelter with a parent that is being abused, there may be age restrictions in place, particularly if the teen is male, gender non-conforming, or transgender.



TRAINING /RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF DV COALITIONS AND LOCAL PROGRAMS



There are many different options available to address the barriers teens face when attempting to access services due to dating abuse. We will start by looking at a list of priorities to address the referenced barriers:

- Implementation of Peer Advocacy Models/Peer led programs. Youth advocates can make a difference in empowering peers to be active participants in the decisions made regarding their relationships. Support of youth leaders and engaging more youth to guide the creation and implementation of youth services, curricula, social media content, etc., are often helpful;
- Strengthening and expansion of school-based violence prevention and intervention programming. Information provision, education, resources, and services for teens,

parents, and school staff to address dating abuse and teach healthy relationship characteristics are critically important. The provision of information, education, and indicators of sex trafficking and sexting coercion available for youth, parents and educators, are especially helpful. Making free programs available at school resource centers, such as healthy relationship and consent classes, conflict resolution, and individual and family counseling, help promote safety. Making services available on-site at schools or in school resource centers could address transportation issues many teens face as well as costs associated with these services. Comprehensive information/education/resources regarding the intersectionality of multiple cultural, racial, sexual orientation, gender identity, and language barriers, etc., would be especially informative to address multiple barriers within the context of dating violence;

- Service providers offering hotel vouchers to survivors whenever shelter space is not available, and sheltering teens seeking refuge from an abusive intimate partner to the extent allowed under state law would help teen victims get and stay safe;
- Advocacy organizations lobbying elected officials to adopt legislation that allows teens to seek shelter for dating abuse/ domestic violence, and obtain an order of protection, both without parental/guardian consent, would be helpful for teens seeking legal remedies to dating abuse;
- Training law enforcement officers, judges, other court personnel, and prosecutors to more effectively identify and respond to dating violence would improve systems' responses and improve community and youth trust;
- Strengthening and expanding support for parents of teens, including provision of information and communication education, conflict resolution, the signs of abusive behavior, and healthy relationship education would help both parents and teens navigate the challenges presented in violent relationships. Also, educating parents on available youth services such as chat lines (i.e. loveisrespect.org) and youth service providers, such as Break the Cycle, are especially critical to educate about available resources for teens in

abusive relationships;

- Leveraging the use of technology to provide advocacy services, safety planning for youth dating violence survivors, and to provide support to parents/guardians, other family members, and friends, would improve safety and family communications. The promotion of social media as safe places for youth to reach out for support, help, and information are also critical. Expanding the use of online technology at schools, before and after school hours, in an effort to allow youth with limited access to technology to access vital services would also increase safety and knowledge of available options;
- Coordination of community partners such as government and non-government agencies, faith-based organizations, immigrant-serving programs, LGBTQ programs, Native services, people with disabilities' communities, programs serving teen parents, and experts on strategic planning is vital to ensure dating violence and intersections of other issues are prioritized and addressed; and,
- Clarification of child abuse/neglect mandatory reporting guidelines regarding abuse or sexual assault between minors is also essential to safely support minors in their quest for healthy relationships and to protect their legal rights.



BELOW ARE SOME OF THE VARIOUS RESOURCE CENTERS WHICH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO HELPING TEEN SURVIVORS ADDRESS BARRIERS

1. Resources and Institutional knowledge - National Clearinghouse of Defense of Battered Women and Battered Women's Justice Project
2. "ThatsNotCool" website
3. Adolescent health data model programs research and RCT intervention model
4. Therapeutic Outcomes Tool (TOT) and consensus guidelines for health providers working with teens
5. Patient/Provider Education Tools – Human Rights Campaign
6. DV/Children inclusion tools - Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
7. Participatory Action Research with Latino/a/x Youth, including on how immigration issues impact youth – Casa De Esperanza
8. Judicial Education in Adolescent Relationship Abuse Curriculum – National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
9. Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Resources - Asian Pacific Institute on Gender –Based Violence
10. Webinars reviewing challenges & impact in health settings & barriers to services – Futures Without Violence (FWV)
11. Sexting Report – FWV
12. Teen dating violence special collection – VAWnet , a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
13. Loveisrespect.org – National Domestic Violence Hotline
14. Training on forced marriage – Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence