

# Longitudinal Patterns of Electronic Teen Dating Violence Among Middle School Students

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?


Teen dating violence (TDV) is a prevalent public health problem that a substantial number of youth experience. Currently, adolescents not only experience TDV physically, psychologically and sexually, but also face TDV electronically. Electronic TDV may be associated with a number of undesirable outcomes, such as suicide, depressive symptoms, and anxiety. However, little study has been done to explore electronic TDV among middle-school adolescents. The purpose of this study was 1) to identify the prevalence of electronic TDV perpetration and victimization among middle school students and whether the prevalence differs by gender and 2) to examine developmental changes in electronic TDV over time, and whether the change varies by gender.

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

- Electronic teen dating violence (TDV) is a form of electronic aggression where an individual monitors, controls, harasses, or abuses their dating partner through technological means
- This study found that middle school students both experience and use high levels of electronic TDV
- Across 7th and 8th grade, approximately 1 in 3 students reported electronic TDV perpetration, and 1 in 2 reported electronic TDV victimization
- This finding highlights the need for addressing electronic TDV in prevention programming.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Data were collected from 795 students from four middle schools in the United States. These students all had some dating experience. The research survey was conducted four times at 6-month intervals. The students were in the fall of their 7th grade year during the first survey. The second survey was conducted in the spring of 7th grade, the third survey in the fall of 8th grade, and the fourth and final survey in the spring of 8th grade. The survey asked questions about participants' demographics (race/ethnicity), their dating status, and experience of electronic TDV. The electronic TDV question asked "how many times in the last 6 months have you done these things to a boyfriend or girlfriend [perpetration]/has a boyfriend or girlfriend done these things to you [victimization] using a cell phone, email, IM [instant messaging], text messaging, web chat, a blog, or a networking site like MySpace or Facebook?" Participants then responded to 8 items using this prompt (e.g., showed private or embarrassing pictures of you to others).



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## **WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?**

The results illustrated that middle school students reported a high prevalence of electronic TDV. Across all four surveys, 32% of youth reported electronic TDV perpetration and 51% reported electronic TDV victimization. There was no significant gender difference in students' reports of electronic TDV perpetration and victimization overall, but boys were more likely than girls to report electronic victimization in the fall of 7th grade. Furthermore, perpetration and victimization rates decreased significantly from the beginning of seventh grade to the end of eighth grade. However, when this result was explored by sex, the researchers found that only boys' victimization and perpetration decreased significantly; comparatively, girls showed almost no change in victimization or perpetration from 7th to 8th grade.

## **HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?**

This research indicates that a large portion of middle-school adolescents may have experienced and/or used electronic TDV. As such, this research can be used by practitioners to support the need for early preventive efforts (e.g., before 7th grade) for all genders. Such programs should include content aimed to assist the adolescent in distinguishing electronic TDV, decreasing the acceptance of electronic TDV, and providing support if they experience electronic TDV.

For researchers, there is a need for future study to investigate causes, intentions and consequences of electronic TDV.

## **ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS:**

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## **KEYWORDS**

Teen dating violence, cyberbullying, electronic aggression, middle school, adolescents

## **FULL REFERENCE**

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