

Ten-year trends in physical dating violence victimization among adolescent boys and girls in British Columbia, Canada

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?


Physical Dating Violence (PDV) victimization is a serious problem among adolescents worldwide. PDV victimization occurs when an individual experiences physical harm from a current or former dating partner. Adolescents who have been victims of dating violence report higher levels of depression, substance use, suicidal ideations and attempts, antisocial behaviour, risky sexual behaviour, and PDV victimization in adulthood. The goal of the present study was to examine trends in the frequency of PDV, as well as potential differences by sex, over a span of 10 years in British Columbia, Canada. Specifically, the authors wanted to know what the prevalence rate of self-reported PDV victimization was among British Columbia school students at each survey administration (2003, 2008, and 2013). Second, they wanted to know if rates of PDV victimization decreased, increased, or remained the same over the 10-year period. Finally, they wanted to know if there were any sex differences between prevalence rates at each time point, and if these differences decreased, increased, or remained the same over the 10-year period.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Data were collected from the British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS), which is a province-wide survey with 140 items assessing risk behaviours and health outcomes among youth. The current study analyzed existing data from the 2003, 2008, and 2013 survey administrations, as PDV victimization was not measured earlier than 2003. Between 2003 and 2013 there were a total of 89,735 respondents. Participants were excluded if they did not report being in a dating relationship in the previous 12-month period and if their school did not participate in all 3 years of the survey. Individuals who did not identify as heterosexual were also excluded because the authors felt that sexual minority youth may have different victimization experiences. The final number of participants in the current study was 35,900 youth (18,441 boys and 17,459 girls), and the average age was approximately 15 across all three surveys. Public health nurses and nursing students administered surveys to youth in their school classrooms and responses were anonymous. Parental consent was received where required. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete and was filled out using paper and pencil. PDV victimization was measured by asking "During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend or girlfriend ever hit, slap or physically hurt you on purpose?" Response options were "no", "yes", and "not in a relationship."

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Despite declines in overall PDV victimization from 2003-2013, there were still important differences in rates between boys and girls
- Rates of PDV victimization remained higher for boys than girls, and the sex gap in victimization did not decrease over the 10 years measured
- The results demonstrate that it is important for programming and health policies aimed at reducing PDV victimization to consider sex differences.
- They also support the need to promote healthy social norms regarding the non-acceptability and non-normalization of dating violence in order to create healthy romantic relationships in adolescence.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

In 2013, Grade 7 to 12 youth were less likely to report PDV victimization (5.0%), as compared with 2003 (5.9%) and 2008 (6.7%). This decline was fairly small, however, which suggests that PDV victimization continues to be an important problem among adolescents in BC. The authors discuss that the decrease in PDV victimization might reflect that dating violence is less acceptable and therefore happening less often, or could be due to PDV prevention programs that have been developed over the past decade.

Compared with girls, boys had higher rates of PDV victimization in 2003 (girls: 4.6%; boys: 7.2%), 2008 (girls: 5.3%; boys: 8.0%), and 2013 (girls: 4.2%; boys: 5.8%). Interestingly, these results differ from police-reported data, which show that females are consistently at a higher risk to experience PDV victimization than males. This is likely because police reports indicate more severe experiences of violence, whereas the current study only asked about less serious forms of PDV victimization (e.g. slapping). When more serious forms of PDV victimization are asked about (e.g., injured with an object or weapon), higher rates are more commonly observed for girls.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Results of the current study clearly show the relevance and importance of PDV victimization for both adolescent boys and girls. Both mental health and behaviour problems are associated with PDV victimization for both groups, demonstrating the importance for implementing prevention and intervention strategies as well as public health policies surrounding PDV victimization. Despite the fact that rates of PDV victimization for girls over the 10 year period remained relatively stable and the rates of PDV victimization for boys decreased after 2008, the gap in PDV victimization between both sexes did not significantly narrow. These results suggest that province wide interventions focused on reducing PDV victimization may be having a positive effect for boys, but have not been as effective for lowering the rates for girls. This may mean that gender specific targeted interventions may be needed to further reduce the prevalence of PDV victimization among adolescent girls.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS:

Catherine S. Shaffer, MA, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Jones Adjei, PhD, Red Deer College, Alberta, Canada

Jodi L. Viljoen, PhD, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Kevin S. Douglas, LLB, PhD, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada; Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden

Elizabeth M. Saewyc, PhD, RN, FSAHM, FCAHS, FAAN, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada; McCreary Centre Society, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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