



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE :
ADDRESSING YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE

Highlights from Current Research What We Know About Online Teen Dating Violence and Strategies for Prevention

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What is Teen Dating Violence?

- Teen dating violence (TDV) is a form of intimate partner violence that happens between people in a close relationship, and may include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression, and stalking. It can take place either in person or electronically (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Some researchers also indicate that cyberdating violence can occur also with an ex-partner (Fernet et al., 2019).
- Teen dating violence is a deliberate act of violence (whether physical, sexual or emotional) by one partner in a dating relationship (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2020).

Teen Technology Use

- Nearly 100% of youth aged 15 to 30 years old use the internet on a daily basis or own their own smartphone, and these figures are generally the same across all provinces and household income groups (Statistics Canada, 2019).
- 93% of youth aged 15-30 years old use social networking sites (Statistics Canada, 2019).
- In the United States, the proportion of young people between the ages of 13 and 17 years who have a smartphone has reached 89% (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020)

Online Teen Dating Violence

- Online dating violence is abusive behaviour committed by romantic partners or an ex-partner using technology (e.g., social networking sites, texting, e-mail) (Zweig, Dank, Lachman, et al., 2013; Fernet et al, 2019).
- Online dating violence can also be called cyber dating abuse, digital dating abuse, cyber intimate partner violence.
- It may include using technology to threaten or harass a partner or using a partner's social networking page without their permission.
- Online teen dating violence can be sexual in nature or non-sexual (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013). It is usually combined with other forms of violence (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013).
- In a qualitative study examining the role of electronic communication between dating partners, there were six ways in which partners use technology for violent, abusive, or controlling behaviour, including: arguing, monitoring the location of a partner or controlling their whereabouts, emotional aggression, seeking help during a violent episode, distancing a partner's contact by not answering calls or texts, and finally, reestablishing contact after a violent episode (participants were young adults who had experienced dating violence in adolescence (Draucker & Martsof, 2010).

- According to the Violence Against Women learning network, there are six general types of cyber violence against women and girls (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015):
1. **Hacking** is using technology to illegally or without permission, gain access to another's accounts to obtain personal information, change or modify information, or slander and degrade the victim.
 2. **Impersonation** is the use of technology to assume the identity of the victim or someone else to access personal information, embarrass or humiliate the victim, contact the victim, or create fake identity documents.
 3. **Surveillance/Tracking** involves the use of technology to stalk and monitor a victim's activities and behaviours.
 4. **Harassment/Spamming** involves the use of technology to incessantly contact, annoy, and/or threaten the youth being victimized.
 5. **Recruitment** is the use of technology to entice potential victims into violent situations.
 6. **Malicious distribution** is the use of technology to manipulate and circulate insulting and illegal materials related to the victim.

Potential Impacts of Online Dating Violence

- Online dating violence can differ from offline dating violence in a number of ways. Online, the perpetrator can remain anonymous and the abuse can be done from anywhere, requiring less time and effort. Technology is more widely available to perpetrators, and information put online can spread and exist indefinitely (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015).
- Some forms of online dating violence have the potential to reach a very large audience, in particular through social media (Smith et al., 2018; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013). The offender also has the ability to reach and harm the victim anytime (Smith et al., 2018; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013).
- Online dating violence can happen rapidly, occur publicly, be very embarrassing, and has the possibility to occur constantly or at any time, even after the relationship ends (Peskin et al., 2017; Zweig et al., 2014).
- Re-victimization may be more likely for cyber abuse victims than victims of other types of dating violence because of the lasting nature and distribution of online messages (Peskin et al., 2017; Stonard et al., 2017).
- Online dating violence is associated with low self-esteem and psychological distress in teenagers (Smith et al., 2018). Furthermore, distress appears to be greater for females compared to males (Deans & Bhogal, 2019)
- In a study examining the rate of online dating abuse among adolescents with a relation to reproductive and sexual health behaviours, it was found that, among female participants, higher rates of experiencing online dating abuse were correlated with increased likelihood of contraceptive non-use **and** reproductive coercion (Dick et al., 2014).

Prevalence of Online Teen Dating Violence

- In a study with over 5,000 middle and high school student participants examining the role of technology in teen dating violence and abusive experiences, the researchers found that in the past year, 26% of youth in a relationship reported experiencing some form of cyber dating abuse victimization (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013).
- Approximately 12% to 56% of adolescents have experienced cyber dating violence (Stonard et al., 2014; Zweig et al., 2013). Around 10% to 20% have engaged in cyber dating violence (Peskin et al., 2017). Non-sexual cyber dating violence is twice as common as sexual cyber dating violence (Zweig et al., 2013)
- Girls were twice as likely as boys to report being a victim of sexual cyber dating abuse. (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013).
- Girls also reported greater levels of non-sexual cyber dating abuse perpetration than males. (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013)
- More than 12% of youth in a relationship said they had been the perpetrator of cyber dating abuse in the past year (Zweig, Dank, Lachman, et al., 2013).
- Boys were significantly more likely to report perpetrating sexual cyber dating abuse. (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013)
- Significantly higher rates of cyber dating violence (victimization and perpetration) was reported among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, et al., 2013).
- In a study of over 800 middle schoolers, close to 15% of participants reported perpetrating cyber dating abuse at least once during their lifetime, with the most widespread method being using a partner's social networking account without permission and making a partner afraid of not responding to the other partner's calls and messages (Peskin et al., 2017).
- Of 190 Canadian student participants, 35.6% reported having been victimized through at least one online violent behaviour in a romantic relationship in the past 12 months, with no significant gender difference found in the prevalence of victimization (Smith et al., 2018).
- 33% of youth reported having committed at least one act of online violence against their romantic partner (Smith et al., 2018).
- The majority (82.5%) of those who report having perpetrated cyber violence also report being victims (Smith et al., 2018).
- Norms for violence for boys against girls, having a current boyfriend/girlfriend, and participation in offline bullying perpetration were significantly correlated with perpetrating cyber dating abuse (Peskin et al., 2017).

Preventing Online Teen Dating Violence

- Online teen dating violence is related to other forms of relational aggression, so efforts should focus on root causes of unhealthy relationships (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020).
- Individual and systemic interventions should be put in place for today's youth to help them navigate the difficulties brought on by the use of smartphones and social media, protect themselves from harm, and use social media in a way that protects their mental health, with a foundation of policy initiatives which target factors that nurture youth resilience (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).
- According to the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015), it is essential to focus on prevention, especially among youth, in order to create strategies to address violence. Such strategies could include education programs targeting youth in the community, as well as facilitating positive forms of expressive outlets such as music, arts, and sports.
- Preventative measures include sensitization, which involves changing societal norms and attitudes regarding violence by bringing visibility and public consciousness to the issues of online violence (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015). It is important that online abuse is understood, and that proper seriousness is given to the issue. Strategies may include training and learning programs in schools, and community development/mobilization for zero tolerance for violence (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015)
- Additionally, inquiring about online dating violence when assessing youth's sexual health behaviours may identify youth in particular need for adolescent relationship abuse intervention. Targeted interventions within school health settings are key (Dick et al., 2014).

Organizations can address online teen dating violence by:

Helping youth identify online dating violence, through incorporating the topic into dating violence programs that address healthy versus unhealthy relationships.

1. Providing youth with education on 'digital literacy' and safe internet use.
2. Providing youth with education on the importance of reporting online dating violence and seeking help, as well as on available and accessible resources in their community

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