



Adolescents' Help-seeking Behavior and Intentions Following Adolescent Dating Violence: A Systematic Review

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This article reviews research on adolescents' help-seeking behaviours and intentions after experiencing dating violence. Help-seeking refers to any action carried out by an adolescent who perceives that they need support. This review focused on intentions to seek help and actual help-seeking behaviours. The authors summarized findings on factors associated with help-seeking, the sources adolescents turn to for help, and the barriers and facilitators for help-seeking.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Overall, adolescents were most likely to report using informal sources of support for dating violence experiences, compared to formal sources of support. Friends were the most commonly cited informal source, and teachers were the most commonly cited formal source.
- Girls were more likely than boys to intend to seek help and to actually seek help after experiencing dating violence.
- Practitioners and researchers should find ways to address the identified barriers to help-seeking, which include concerns about confidentiality and feelings of shame.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The study authors identified 19 research studies (published in English, up to early 2017) that examined adolescents' help-seeking behaviours and intentions in relation to dating violence. The authors used standardized checklists to appraise the quality of the research studies and summarized their findings.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The research review suggests that adolescents are more likely to go to informal sources of support (e.g., friends) rather than formal sources of support, in relation to dating violence. School staff were the most commonly identified source of formal support. Girls were more likely than boys to seek help for dating violence, consistent with research on adolescent help-seeking for other concerns. Barriers to help-seeking included concerns about confidentiality, retaliation by partners, embarrassment, and shame.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Given that youth are most likely to turn to their friends for support, dating violence intervention programs should include education on ways peers can help one another. School staff and other adults who work with youth should consider ways to address the barriers to seeking more formal support. For example, adults should find ways to clearly communicate that they will provide confidential, empathetic support. School staff should be provided with adequate training in order to provide such support. Programs and public health campaigns should also find ways to normalize and promote help-seeking among boys, who are less likely than girls to seek help for dating violence.

Researchers and research consumers should know that the literature on this subject (up to 2017) has limitations. The majority of studies included in this review use American samples and cross-sectional designs which make it hard to generalize results and to draw conclusions about causality. Samples from other populations and longitudinal studies would add to our understanding of adolescent help-seeking behaviours.

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