

# Social Support, Exposure to Parental Intimate Partner Violence, and Relationship Abuse Among Marginalized Youth

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Youth who have been exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) between parents are more likely to experience violence in their own dating relationships. In this study, the researchers explored whether social support might protect youth with parental IPV exposure from experiencing dating violence. Specifically, they explored this question among “marginalized youth,” who are typically not represented in school-based studies. This included youth who were incarcerated, in residential homes, independent living programs, or in a shelter.

## **WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?**

- There is a link between young people’s exposure to parental intimate partner violence and their experiences of violence in dating relationships.
- Social support – having caring, dependable people in one’s life – might play a protective role for youth with exposure to parental intimate partner violence.
- Future work can build upon this finding to understand how to harness social supports to promote young people’s healthy dating relationships.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

About 250 participants were recruited from community agencies that serve marginalized youth in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. The sample included youth (ages 14 to 19) experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, and incarcerated youth. Participants completed survey questions about their exposure to parental intimate partner violence (IPV; youth who have witnessed violence between their parents), social support, and experiences of dating violence. The questions about social support asked youth whether they have someone in their life who cares about them, who makes them feel better, and on whom they can depend.



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

44% of participants reported that they had been exposed to parental IPV in their lifetime. 17% reported experiencing physical or sexual dating violence in the past year.

Youth with parental IPV exposure were more likely to report lower social support. Among youth with low levels of social support, there was a significant association between parental IPV exposure and dating violence. For these youth, parental IPV exposure was associated with increased risk of experiencing dating violence. There was no significant association among youth with higher levels of social support.

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

This research was based on data collected at one point in time, so it is correlational (we cannot say, based on the data from this study, that parental IPV exposure causes youth to have lower social support or more experiences of dating violence). However, this study provides a starting point for further research into how social support may help youth with parental IPV exposure engage in healthy relationships in adolescence. For example, future work can examine how different kinds of social supports (e.g., mentors, friends) can be harnessed to protect IPV-exposed youth from experiencing dating violence. This study also highlights the importance of engaging marginalized youth in dating violence research.

## **ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS**

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## **KEYWORDS**

teen dating violence; intimate partner violence; adolescence; social support

## **FULL REFERENCE**

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