

Risk Markers for Physical Teen Dating Violence Victimization in the United States: A Meta-Analysis

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Physical dating violence can include any physical form of aggression (such as pushing, slapping, shoving, and kicking) within the context of a dating or sexual relationship. Youth who experience physical adolescent dating violence are at risk of experiencing depressed mood, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and other negative outcomes.

In this study, the researchers used an ecological model to examine different kinds of risk factors for experiencing physical dating violence. The ecological model guides researchers to look at different aspects of young people and their environments that can affect their lives. For this study, the researchers identified characteristics unique to the individual, as well as factors in their relationships and in their communities, that increased risk for experiencing physical dating violence. This study is a meta-analysis, which means that the authors synthesized findings from many past research studies.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers identified English-language studies that examined risk factors for physical dating violence among American youth between the ages of 13 and 19 years. Altogether, they identified 50 such studies. The researchers synthesized the findings from these studies to identify risk markers for physical dating violence.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

- Factors related to individual characteristics, relationships, and the environment increased young people's risk for experiencing physical dating violence.
- In this meta-analysis of 50 studies, the strongest individual risk markers were substance use, risky behaviours, having carried a weapon, suicide attempts, and disordered eating.
- Involvement in other forms of dating violence (such as sexual or emotional dating violence), whether as a perpetrator or a victim, were strong risk markers for experiencing physical dating violence.
- Community-level factors (neighbourhood disorganization [including community violence] and socioeconomic status) were significant risk markers, though not as strong as risk markers at the individual and relationship levels.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The 50 studies examined 18 risk markers that were related to youth's individual traits. Of these, the strongest risk markers of experiencing physical dating violence were substance use, risky sexual behaviors, having carried a weapon, suicide attempts, and disordered eating. The strongest relationship-related risk markers were related to other forms of teen dating violence (i.e., perpetrating physical dating violence, and experiencing sexual or emotional dating violence). The authors also identified two community-related risk markers, neighborhood disorganization (defined in this study as high levels of community violence and disadvantage, and low levels of social control and cohesion) and low socioeconomic status, that had a small effect on predicting physical dating violence. There were no gender differences in the strength of different risk markers.

Of all the factors identified in this study, the relationship-related risk markers were the strongest predictors of physical dating violence. These findings support previous research findings that within violent dating relationships, there are often multiple forms of aggression, and an overlap between perpetrating and being victimized by violence.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This work can be used by service providers and researchers to conceptualize the different levels of risk markers for physical teen dating violence, and identify potential areas for intervention. Some of these risk markers may be more noticeable than dating violence (which youth may not disclose unprompted) and thus may provide an opportunity for adults to explore what else the youth may be experiencing. For example, an adult may notice substance misuse, which may prompt them to also assess for experiences of dating violence. Adults who work with youth, such as healthcare providers, should also know that youth who report or show signs of experiencing physical dating violence (e.g., bruising) may also be experiencing other forms of dating violence, and thus assess for these other experiences in a sensitive manner.

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