Dating Violence

Dating violence may be defined as the perpetration or threat of an act of violence by at least one member of an unmarried couple on the other member within the context of dating or courtship.\(^1\) This violence encompasses any form of sexual assault, physical violence, and verbal or emotional abuse.

Scope of the Problem

Violent behavior that takes place in a context of dating or courtship is not a rare event. Estimates vary because studies and surveys use different methods and definitions of the problem.

- A review of dating violence research found that prevalence rates of nonsexual, courtship violence range from 9% to 65%, depending on whether threats and emotional or verbal aggression were included in the definition.\(^1\)

- Data from a study of 8th and 9th grade male and female students indicated that 25% had been victims of nonsexual dating violence and 8% had been victims of sexual dating violence.\(^2\)

- Summarizing many studies, the average prevalence rate for nonsexual dating violence is 22% among male and female high school students and 32% among
college students. Females are somewhat more likely than males to report being victims of violence.¹

- In a national study of college students, 27.5% of the women surveyed said that they had suffered rape or attempted rape at least once since age 14. Only 5% of those experiences were reported to the police.³ The term "hidden rape" has emerged because this survey and many other studies found that sexual assaults are seldom reported to the police.³,⁴,⁵,⁶,⁷

- Over half of a representative sample of more than 1,000 female students at a large urban university had experienced some form of unwanted sex. Twelve percent of these acts were perpetrated by casual dates and 43% by steady dating partners.⁸

- Studies of college students⁹,¹⁰ and high school students¹¹ suggest that both males and females inflict and receive dating violence in equal proportion, but the motivation for violence by women is more often for defensive purposes.¹⁰,¹² Other studies have found that women and girls were victims of dating violence twice as often as men and boys,¹²,¹³ and that females suffer significantly more injuries than males.¹²,¹³

- A recent National Crime Victimization survey found that women were 6 times more likely than men to experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner.¹⁴ Intimate partners include current or former spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, dating partners, regardless of whether they are cohabiting or not.

- Nearly half of the 500,000 rapes and sexual assaults reported to the police by women of all ages were committed by friends or acquaintances.¹⁴ From 80% to 95% of the rapes that occur on college campuses are committed by someone known to the victim.⁸,¹⁵

**Risk Factors**

**Characteristics of Victims**

- Young women aged 12-18 who are victims of violence are more likely than older women to report that their offenders were acquaintances, friends, or intimate partners.¹⁴

- The likelihood of becoming a victim of dating violence is associated with having female peers who have been sexually victimized,¹⁶ lower church attendance,¹⁷
greater number of past dating partners, acceptance of dating violence, and personally having experienced a previous sexual assault.

**Characteristics of Perpetrators**

- Studies have found the following to be associated with sexual assault perpetration: the male having sexually aggressive peers; heavy alcohol or drug use; and the man's acceptance of dating violence, the male's assumption of key roles in dating such as initiating the date, being the driver, and paying dating expenses; miscommunication about sex; previous sexual intimacy with the victim; interpersonal violence, traditional sex roles, adversarial attitudes about relationships, and rape myths.

- Men who have a family history of observing or experiencing abuse are more likely to inflict abuse, violence, and sexual aggression.

- As the consumption of alcohol by either the victim or perpetrator increases, the rate of serious injuries associated with dating violence also increases.

**References**