

Contributing Factors to Teen Dating Violence

The following are some of the contributing factors that could have an impact on youth in teen dating violence situations. Examples of cultural, social and developmental factors have been included; however, these examples do not encompass an individual's entire experience, neither should this information limit your understanding of a youth's experience or lifestyle. When examining whether or not a young person is involved in a teen dating violence situation, the philosophy of youth development emphasizes the importance of considering a young person in their context: how they live, where they live, and with whom they live. The following information is not intended to be stereotypical - it is based on research across various information sources and can be used as a resource. These factors might influence your client's experience.

Cultural Factors

African-American

- Domestic situations are seen as a family matter and should not be reported.
- Many African-Americans handle conflicts by expressing anger; therefore, females may react to a boyfriend's assault with verbal and physical aggression. Because of this behavior, adults might often view her as less of a victim
- African-Americans admit to refusing counseling because they feel that mental health professionals do not give them practical and realistic advice on dealing with the abuser.
- African-American girls receive conflicting messages from society; factors such as racism, sexism and classism become major barriers to their attempts to develop a strong sense of self and avoid abusive relationships

Latino/a

- Teenage dating is often forbidden and in many cases, a chaperone may be required.
- Latina females are taught to be very submissive and subservient; take care of home; be faithful to their partners; and not focus on careers. This type of "role" in a relationship will most often keep a young girl from reporting any abuse against her. She may possibly even view the abuse as being her fault.
- Latino males usually control the household. They are taught to work; be very macho; and pampered by their spouses. It is also acceptable in Latino culture for males to have more than one dating partner at a time.
- A Latino male who is an abuser may feel that abuse against his partner is evidence of maintaining his "machismo" or macho behavior. It can be seen as a way to prove who is "in charge."

Asian/Pacific Islander American

- Teenage dating is often forbidden. Thus, when Western and non-Western cultural norms clash and dating violence occurs, it is extremely hard for these teens to disclose what is happening to them for fear of how their parents will respond.
- Immigrants from war-torn countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia often minimize their abusive relationships. They compare the dating violence to the more severe and frightening violence they may have experienced in their home country.
- The young Asian/Pacific Islander woman can be considered as one who balances the family's respectability; is sexually submissive to her male partner; and isolated to cultural differences between American norms and Asian/Pacific Islander norms. Domestic violence is invisible in this community and a teenage girl who finds herself in an abusive relationship may feel she must stay due to lack of support.

Disabled Persons

- In many cases, there are limited services provided for disabled persons, therefore a disabled teen may feel helpless due to their lack of accessibility to resources.
- Physically challenged people in teen dating violence situations may feel powerless to defend themselves.
- Any behavior that intentionally harasses, teases, or takes advantage of a person with a disability is abusive.
- Disabled teens often experience alienation or harassment from their peers.

Gays/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgendered Persons

- Youth may not define the relationship they have with another teen of the same gender as a dating relationship. Therefore, the term "dating violence" may sound irrelevant to them, in which they may not recognize it as describing their situation.
- Invisibility is an issue for gay and lesbian teens because they face issues of disapproval and isolation based on their sexual identity.
- Gay/Lesbian teens often lack positive role models for healthy relationships due to their isolation.
- Gay/Lesbian teens in abusive relationships reinforce what may already be low self-esteem or shame. Because of this they may not trust anyone with the knowledge of their abuse for fear of coming out or not being accepted for their lifestyle choice.
- Homophobia among adults, teachers, youth workers, parents, and other caring adults makes it difficult for gay/lesbian teens to report abuse.

Gender Role Influences

- Females learn at an early age that males should be in control: i.e. men should be providers for the household, breadwinners in the family, disciplinarians of children, etc. In teen relationships, many young women look to their boyfriends to abide by gender roles by paying for dates, driving the car, giving their girlfriends money, etc.
- Females are encouraged to accept the role of being nurturing, passive, submissive, and dependent upon males. They are also seen as the person responsible for maintaining the relationship, as well as being the caretakers.
- Males are socialized to exercise power and control over others.
- If a male exhibits signs of weakness, he is labeled as a wimp, sissy, fag, acting like a “girl”, etc.

Developmental Considerations

- Isolation, low self-esteem, and unhealthy coping mechanisms may make one vulnerable to teen dating violence. This type of young person is less likely to report instances of abuse against them.
- The obsession with body image and a very narrow definition of attractiveness affects whether a teen will enter into an abusive relationship. A young woman who may have been told or feels that she is less attractive may enter into a relationship with an abusive male for fear that she is not worthy of a healthier person.
- Young people may not have developed the proper coping skills to handle a partner who is offensive or humiliating. Thus, teens often confuse love with other factors in violent dating relationships such as jealousy, various forms of manipulation, control, etc.
- Previous sexual victimization at an earlier age and association with other victims or perpetrators may increase one’s susceptibility to TDV.
- Consumption of drugs and alcohol by either the victim or the perpetrator increases the likelihood that dating violence will occur in the relationship.
- Teens often experience peer pressure to be in a relationship and in many cases fear loneliness or social disapproval from if they are not dating

Familial Issues

- Individuals who come from homes where violence occurs between family members view violence as a normal part of relationships. Several studies report that the chances of being physically abusive to a partner increase if the individual was abused or witnessed abuse between his or her parents.

- Families do not often take teen dating seriously. Most often, teens refuse to confide in their parents if they feel that the family does not approve of the relationship. Additionally, if young people live in violent home environments, the family is less likely to take teen dating violence seriously; there may also be pressure for the teen couple to stay together, particularly if they have a child.
- Many parents do not raise their children to practice self-respect, respect for others, and clear communication in dating situations.

Societal Factors

- Society glorifies and presents images of violence through various forms of media that may influence how teens perceive gender roles: i.e.: lyrics of music popular among young people tend to present distorted views of male-female relationships that put men in positions of power over women.
- Society accepts violence.
- There is a lack of response by bystanders who witness violent situations and do not report, intervene or discourage the violence.
- Youth have few resources and have much less mobility (not free to move out of the area or change schools to avoid an abusive relationship).
- The legal system is not easily accessible or readily available for most youth; therefore, youth do not seek police assistance in violent dating situations.

Systems Barriers

- Teenage victims of violence do not often know their legal right; therefore, they are reluctant to report any form of violence against them.
- Language barriers in society prevent one from reporting abuse due to miscommunication, an inability to properly convey the experience, not being able to read or understand the English language, and fear of immigration issues if applicable.
- The majority of young people fear or mistrust the police, and will often use the police as a last resort for safety. Additionally, law enforcement professionals are not well-trained to address teen dating violence.

Source: *Illinois Center for Violence Prevention – Mari Sanchez*