

A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF LITERATURE RELATED TO VIOLENCE IN
TEEN DATING RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the available research associated with violence in teen dating relationships. Violence in teen dating relationships is becoming quite widespread in our society. Parents and professionals need to be aware of this behavior because they are in daily contact with teens.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine the intricacies associated with violent teen dating relationships. This study was focused on the following areas: the warning signs and types of abuse; the effects of violent dating relationships on the victim, their family, and friends; and successful methods in helping a teen break free of an abusive dating relationship.

Upon conclusion of the literature review, recommendations were made to assist professionals and parents as to how they can be prepared to help teens involved in a violent dating relationship.

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Chapter I: Introduction

When Shelly met Jeff, she was co-captain of her high school softball team and Junior class Vice-President. She excelled academically and was scheduled to take her ACT and PSAT placement tests. She hoped to attend the state university after graduating from high school. Jeff was a new student and the first guy Shelly had ever dated. He was totally romantic. They wanted to spend all of their time together. He took her out to nice dinners, showered her with gifts, and he wrote her poems and love letters. Her family really liked him. Her friends seemed to respect her now that she had a steady boyfriend.

After dating several weeks, Shelly and Jeff's relationship abruptly changed. Shelly began going to school in baggy clothes without make-up on or her hair fixed nicely. She started missing softball practice and decided to drop out of her favorite sport. Her grades were slipping. She missed her ACT and PSAT testing appointments. She had unexplained bruises on her body and seemed extremely nervous and jumpy. She wasn't spending any free time with her friends. When she wasn't with Jeff, he would be constantly calling her on the cell phone he gave her. Shelly's family became extremely concerned for her well-being and tried to talk to her about the changes they had recently witnessed, but she dismissed their concerns as overreactions based on their dislike of Jeff.

Shelly's relationship with her family became so strained that she moved out of her family's house and in with Jeff. Shelly's family didn't hear from her for weeks at a time. Eventually Shelly was admitted to the emergency room when the relationship with Jeff became more volatile and she suffered a severe beating at his hands.

Situations such as Shelly's are common occurrences in today's society. "Fueled in part by the Columbine High School massacre, which focused attention on violence in

schools, dating violence has become a big issue in the United States” (Rayner, 2002, p. 11). Until recently, very little was known about the phenomenon of teen dating violence. Research has been hampered by the broad definition of adolescent dating which can be interpreted from “hanging out” with a group of peers to a monogamous sexual relationship. According to Schewe (n.d.), rates of dating aggression vary according to how this variable is defined and what age group is studied.

National research suggests that one in five high school girls is physically or sexually abused by a dating partner and nearly one in three girls experience some type of abuse in their dating relationships. According to Charron (2005), a recent survey revealed 57% of American teens know friends who have experienced physical, sexual, or verbal abuse in dating relationships. One in three of women killed in the United States are murdered by their boyfriend or husband. Bush (2002) indicated that The National Center for Health Statistics cited homicide as the leading cause of death for African-American girls ages 15 to 19 (it is the second leading cause of death for other races).

Not only should this type of violence be taken seriously because it has the potential of escalating to a point of serious physical harm or even murder, but also because the effects have a serious impact on our economy and society. Victims of teen dating violence have higher incidences of unwanted pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, and eating disorders. According to Nifong (1996), the impact of teen dating violence looms large for society. In addition to concerns about a victim’s mental and physical well-being and the cost of rehabilitating or incarcerating abusers, a community loses a valuable future teacher, accountant, or lawyer if the victim drops out

of school. If an abused teen is pregnant, she is more likely to expose her child to violence, extending the chain of abuse.

Dating violence does not discriminate. This type of violence is found in all cultures and ethnic groups. It takes place across all socio-economic levels. Dating violence transpires in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. The level of wealth or poverty, education, color, ethnicity, or sexual preference is irrelevant; all victims share the same patterns of abusive relationships. Both sexes have been perpetrators of abuse and both have been victimized. Our society is more tolerant of aggressive behavior in boys towards girls, which makes it far more common for boys to be violent. In a survey funded by Liz Claiborne, Inc. (March 2006), research shows deep and troubling evidence that significant numbers of today's teens are not only victims of dating abuse, but are accepting it as normal. The World Health Organization has identified violence as one of the "deadly rites of passage" for teens as they travel from childhood to adulthood (Greydanus, n.d.).

Violence against women has been an acceptable practice in Western culture since the Middle Ages. English common law permitted a man to beat his wife, as long as the switch he used was no thicker than his thumb. The expression "rule of thumb" originated from this law. Nineteenth-century feminists believed that male tyranny would totally disappear when women gained the right to vote, own property, and have equal protection under the law. Little did they know that domestic violence would be the leading cause of death and injury to women between the ages of fifteen and forty-four. Until the late 1970's, domestic abuse, while against the law, was rarely prosecuted (Riddle Gaddis, 2000). The original Violence Against Women Act of 1994 did not fund services for

teens, nor did the renewed 2000 legislation. The 2005 version of the act, VAWA II, does include \$15 million annually for new initiatives targeting teens (Rath, 2005).

Examining the developmental phases of adolescence has helped clarify how a teen could become involved in an abusive relationship. During the adolescent years, teens are making the transition from childhood to adulthood and striving to define their individual identity. They are embarking on a journey to figure out their interests, strengths, future, values, attitudes, and sexuality. They are distinguishing themselves from adults and during this process, for better or worse, the relationships with their friends become more important than their relationship with their family. Teen's relationships with their parents change and often become strained during this stage. While the teens are gaining more independence and freedom, parental interference is viewed as a threat.

Even though only one state – Massachusetts – mandates teen-dating violence education, many new curriculums are becoming available to educators addressing the prevention of this type of behavior. Many private foundations are funding programs aimed at stopping teen dating violence because until recently there has been a complete lack of governmental funding for services aimed at helping teens in violent dating relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the complexities associated with violent teen dating relationships. This includes identifying the warning signs and types of abuse, the effects a violent dating relationship has on the victim, their family, friends, and society, and successful methods in helping a teen end an abusive relationship. This is

achieved by conducting a literature review, an analysis, and a critique of the findings related to violent teen dating relationships. The results of this study will be used to formulate recommendations for helping professionals.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions.

1. What are the warning signs and types of abuse?
2. What effects does a violent dating relationship have on the victim, their family, and friends?
3. What methods are successful in helping a teen break free of an abusive relationship?

Definition of Terms

For clarification, the following terms are defined.

Emotional Abuse – “The attacking of someone’s self-worth and self-esteem” (Johnson, 2005, p. 4).

Physical Abuse – “Any act that is intended to cause or results in bodily harm to another person” (Johnson, 2005, p. 4).

Sexual Abuse – “mistreatment by sexual acts, demands, or insults” (Levy, 1997, p. 35).

Stockholm syndrome – A condition experienced by people who have been held as hostages for some time in which they begin to identify with and feel sympathetic toward their captors.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that those who are involved in a violent teen dating relationship do not always report this behavior, which skews statistical information. Ironically, the signs of potential abuse are also behaviors that young women find most flattering and believe these behaviors are a normal aspect of dating. While studies show that teen dating violence is a severe problem, the issue has not been tracked steadily. Most statistics have been gathered from heterosexual couples.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the research and literature associated with violence in teen dating relationships. The focus of this chapter is on violence in teen dating relationships as it relates to the warning signs and types of abuse; the effect a violent dating relationship has on the victim, their family, and friends; and methods that have helped teens escape violent relationships.

Concise History of Violence Against Women

Violence against women dates back centuries. According to Riddle Gaddis (2000), violence against women has been upheld by both civil and religious authorities. Anthropologists have discovered Egyptian papyrus documents from as early as 2000 B.C. that describe sexual violence against women. X-rays of female mummies show six to eight times more skull fractures and breaks than do X-rays of male mummies. During medieval times, women lost the ground that had been gained through the spiritual teachings of Jesus. Eve's transgression was used as a justification for keeping all women in a subordinate social position.

As noted by Crompton and Kessner (2003),

When John Adams was attending the Continental Congress in 1776, his wife, Abigail, wrote to her husband, whom she addressed as "Dearest Friend", a letter that would become famous. "In the new code of laws, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more favorable than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of husbands." But John Adams and other well-meaning men were no more able to free the women than they were the slaves. When the founders of our country signed the Declaration of Independence, their

own wives were still, in every legal sense, their property. Upon marriage, a woman forfeited the few rights that she had, and her husband owned her just as he owned his horse. (p. 14)

Laws have changed since colonial times, but marriage has continued to trigger territorial notions, a sense of immediate ownership and entitlement. The arrival of the women's movement in the late-nineteenth century stimulated the awareness that spousal abuse was a criminal and immoral act (Crompton & Kessner, 2003). The first wave of the women's movement, however, focused more on a woman's right to vote than on her right to live her life peacefully and free from violence.

American culture continued to reinforce the notion of male authority: men were supposed to be dominating and controlling. Even in non-marital relationships, men within western culture were socialized to regard their partners as their property. A man's home was his castle, and he was master of his wife – or his “woman.” It was only recently that the criminal justice system stopped supporting that notion (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Experts have come up with many theories over the decades as to why women stay in abusive relationships. During the 1920's when women finally won the right to vote, the subject of battered wives came to the forefront. It was common to question why an abused woman didn't just leave the violent relationship. Experts at that time believed that women just didn't know better because of their inferior intelligence. Society believed that wives were kept “barefoot and pregnant” and that the wife must be doing something to make the husband so upset and volatile.

By the 1950's, experts had formulated a different theory explaining why women stayed with violent men. Psychologists theorized that women stayed with violent men

because they were masochistic and enjoyed being beaten. In addition, the “makeup sex” afterward would be great and all forgiving.

The early 1970’s brought the second wave of the feminist movement. During this time, women identified domestic violence for what it was: a significant social and health problem in America and a crime they had to fight with education and lobbying (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

In their book titled, *Saving Beauty from the Beast*, Crompton and Kessner (2003) noted the following:

The decade of the 1980’s brought about cultural backlash against feminism and our culture was consumed with the ideal of the sensitive male, who was in touch with his feminine side, and the strong, independent woman who was dressed for success. These ideals were replaced by the ultra-macho guy and the super-sexy girly-girl in her tiny skirts and stiletto heels. These retro images have been revived and dressed up in new, ever-tighter clothing and are gaining wider and wider acceptance, with many teen girls and boys eager to try them on. (p. 15)

The passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) by Congress in 1994 brought about strict legal consequences against the person responsible for acts of domestic violence. Many states gradually began enforcing these sanctions under this act. Unfortunately the original VAWA did not include any funding of services for teens. Funds for domestic violence services were nearly doubled by the renewed 2000 legislation to \$3.3 billion over five years. Once again funding of services for teens was nonexistent in this revised legislation. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted research in 2002 and reported that the original VAWA funding of \$1.6 billion

resulted in a savings of \$14.8 billion in avoided social costs. The most recent version of the VAWA act passed in 2005, garnered strong bipartisan support in the Senate and House. The passing of this latest version allotted \$3.9 billion over five years. The rationale of this new legislation's funding focused on civic and law enforcement services related to teen violence. Funding for these services was long overdue. The 2005 version of the VAWA included \$15 million yearly for new programs focusing on services available for teens (Rath, 2005).

Our culture is deeply divided over the topic of sexuality. Parents try to raise their daughters to value and view themselves as a whole person. Their attempt seems futile because the media reduces females to just bodies. Adolescents are taught by movies and television that sophisticated people are free and spontaneous. At the same time, they are constantly bombarded with warnings that casual sex can kill. Our society is trapped by double standards and impossible expectations (Pipher, 1994).

Unfortunately today's culture stresses super macho aggressive role models for young men, and weak, submissive ones for young women. In our post feminist society, many of us, strong women ourselves, are often astonished to discover that once our accomplished daughters reach their teens, they can find self-esteem only through the eyes of a boyfriend empowered to destroy it and they never know it is happening until it is too late. "Not only are boys learning that they must be in control, but girls are learning that boys are supposed to be in control. So girls are looking for controlling boys" (Rosenbluth, cited in Crompton & Kessner, 2003, p. 16).

Teens are exposed to distorted and extreme gender role models in today's society. Males are stereotypically portrayed as entirely dominant, while women are portrayed as

unusually passive. The teens' lack of relationship related experience leaves them very susceptible to these extreme gender role models portrayed by the media. Thus, young women and men are afraid of being labeled as something other than these two stereotypically defined gender roles. They fear the prospect of being labeled "different" and as a result of this fear behave in highly exaggerated ways to prove their heterosexuality. The fear of being labeled a homosexual is one example of why they behave in this manner. They haven't reached a level of confidence, maturity, and independence that allows them the flexibility and freedom to be themselves. Experts believe that the level of dating violence among teens is on the rise because we are living in a much more aggressive society. Displaying physical and mental toughness is a boy's way of demanding respect from his girlfriend and his peers. Our impulsive, fast-paced, glitzy society leaves little time for taking care of ourselves and each other (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Many believe that we as a society are forcing our children to grow up prematurely. The result is that they are ill-prepared for the obstacles that accompany adulthood. Experts in the field believe that pressing our children into adulthood prematurely is a dangerous mistake. By forcing our children to grow up too soon, the fragile boundaries of young girls are in jeopardy of being broken (Riddle Gaddis, 2000).

Pipher (1994) indicated that even puberty is influenced by culture. Statistics show that girls are beginning their menstruation cycles much earlier now than during colonial times, and even earlier than in the 1950's. This earlier onset of puberty can actually slow down many aspects of a girl's development. Early development coupled with our more difficult culture increases the stress on adolescents. At the same time girls are facing

events prematurely, our culture is encouraging them to distance themselves from their parents and move towards a growing dependence upon their friends for guidance and advice. Thus it is no surprise why teens suffer and make so many mistakes.

Murray (2000) believed that girls do not choose abusive relationships by accident; nor do they become the targets of abusive boyfriends without rationale. Examining a girl's family life may provide a candid look at indicators in which the arrival of an abusive boyfriend could have been predicted. Parents are the most important role models in the teen's life. Teens incorporate the parent's values and beliefs into their own lives. They learn from their parent what represents acceptable behavior, both in childhood and adulthood. Children absorb more from observing their parents' actions than from listening to what their parents say. Thus it is imperative that parents display those behaviors that are consistent, not only with their belief system, but also what they wish for their teen to emulate.

As noted by Pipher (1994),

There is an enormous gap between the surface structure of behaviors and the deep structure of meaning. Surface structure is what is visible to the naked eye – awkwardness, energy, anger, moodiness, and restlessness. Deep structure is the internal work – the struggle to find a self, the attempt to integrate the past and the present and to find a place in the larger culture. Surface behaviors convey little of the struggle within and in fact are often designed to obscure that struggle. This deep structure – surface structure split is one reason why girls experience so much failure in relationships. Communication is confused and confusing. Relationships

between friends are so coded that misunderstandings abound. Parents who attend to the surface structure often miss the point. (p. 53-54)

What are the warning signs and types of abuse?

One of the biggest signs that a girl will become the recipient of abuse is a history of abuse in her family. When a girl watches her mother being abused verbally, emotionally, or physically by a man, the only conclusions she can reach are that this is how male/female relationships work. She erroneously assumes that this is the way that all women are treated in intimate relationships and that this is what she can also expect in her relationships. This distorted view of these behaviors is a contributing factor in the cyclical nature of violence. Thus if a girl is raised in a verbally, emotionally, or physically abusive household, she mistakenly believes that this is acceptable behavior (Murray, 2000).

Emotional/Verbal

The first level of violence in an abusive dating relationship is emotional/verbal abuse. This type of abuse can be devastating. Healing takes a long time and sometimes may never happen. Emotional/verbal abuse targets the teen's positive self-esteem and is extremely detrimental because a person who they deeply care for is degrading their self-worth and self-esteem. At the core of an abusive relationship is the need for one person to have complete power and control over the other. The use of power and control begins with what often does not seem like abuse, but morphs into more and more abusive behaviors (Crompton & Kessner, 2003). Young women prone to being abused often share a common bond of very low self-esteem. They have bought into media messages that women exist to please men. They may have been denied affection, praise, and affirmation

through childhood which can make them extremely vulnerable to these ideas. If a girl doesn't have a nurturing home life, she may be looking for it somewhere else – anywhere else, even from an abusive boyfriend. Teens with low self-esteem feel powerless to stand up for themselves in a harmful relationship (Riddle Gaddis, 2000).

Our society has dictated that the female is responsible for the emotional well-being of a relationship. She takes it very seriously when her boyfriend tells her there is something wrong with their relationship and it is all her fault. It is very confusing for the teen to be told she is worthless by the same person who professes such great love for her. As she begins to devote her life totally to her boyfriend, she also begins to isolate herself from others, especially those, typically adults, who might provide another perspective on the healthiness of her dating relationship. A teenage woman does not find many reasons to talk to adults about problems she encounters while dating due in large to the penchant she has for holding herself totally accountable for her boyfriend's behavior. Because she views herself as responsible for his behavior, she often reacts by trying to "manage" the situation herself (Sanders, 2004).

Emotional abuse marks the beginning of an abusive relationship. Crompton and Kessner (2003) noted, verbal cruelty frequently exists alone, but it is always a component in sexual and physical violence. Experts agree that even if a girl has not experienced the other forms of battering, she will be deeply damaged by emotional abuse. It destroys a girl's independence and makes her feel worthless, thus making her feel totally dependent on her abuser and a belief that no one else will ever want her. In addition, Murray (2000) indicated that some common forms of emotional/verbal abuse are: name calling, sarcasm, intimidating looks, monopolizing her time, isolation, making her feel insecure, blaming,

saying I love you too soon, manipulation, making threats, interrogating, humiliating her in public, breaking treasured items, making her believe she is crazy, and to doubt herself.

Levy and Occhiuzzo Giggans (1995) found that many high school and college victims believe that jealousy is the major cause of dating violence. Emotional abuse is fueled by the abuser's jealousy and possessiveness. The abuser's jealousy, possessiveness, and suspicions lead to outlandish accusations and intense interrogations. Ultra possessiveness feels like love to a girl who is inexperienced. The abuser is an expert of manipulation under the guise of love (Crompton & Kessner, 2003). The victim is subjected to verbal harassment about everything she does or says – all in the name of love. This type of abuse makes it extremely frightening for the victim who is constantly guarding her behavior so as not to set the abuser off on a tirade. The victim is isolated from her parents and family because the abuser considers them enemies. Talking to her parents or family would be considered a disloyal act by the victim. If a girl refuses from the beginning to be isolated, her abusive boyfriend may try another approach, integrating himself into all aspects of her life, as well as her friends' and family's lives. A parent shouldn't get between the daughter and her boyfriend because that's just what the abuser wants the parent to do. The manipulator prefers to put himself between the parent and the child. Some abusers delight in taking down a girl who has good self-esteem. It is mind control. They are experts at knowing how to tear down one's self-esteem (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Sexual Abuse

Murray (2000) revealed statistics illustrating that 60 % of high school seniors have had sex before graduation. The United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy

rates among developed nations. The second level of violence is sexual abuse and is defined as forced or coerced sexual acts. Sexual violence in an ongoing dating relationship usually takes the form of repeated sexual coercion and sexually aggressive acts. Using psychological pressure, the abuser coerces the victim to have sex against his/her will (Riddle Gaddis, 2000). Sexual coercion doesn't necessarily refer to intercourse or penetration. Dutton (cited in Crompton & Kessner, 2003, p. 32) noted that the same four names are used over and over: bitch, cunt, whore, slut. "All are sexual and all are related to her imagined lasciviousness."

Sexual abuse covers the spectrum from unwanted touching and kissing to rape. Date rape accounts for 67 % of sexual assaults among teens. More than one third of college freshman girls have indicated being date raped at least once. Riddle Gaddis (2000) noted that sexuality and violence have become increasingly bound up with each other in American society. Teenage girls experience one of the highest rates of violence by an intimate partner compared to other age groups.

Because teen girls are sexually inexperienced, this type of abuse leads to a lot of confusion on the female's part about what has happened to her. She doesn't realize that her boyfriend is using sexual violence with the intention of humiliating, degrading, and controlling her.

Riddle Gaddis (2000) noted the following:

Teens have a hard enough time coping with emerging sexuality. They are maturing physically much faster than they are emotionally and socially. When they see sex distorted into manipulation and violence, most teens do not have the maturity to filter out the wrong ideas and false values. Abusive relationships are

by definition highly emotional. Both the abuser and the abused react from instinct-instincts formed under the influence of questionable and even harmful sources. (p. 43-44)

Many girls believe that because they are in a relationship, they must participate in whatever sexual acts their boyfriend prefers. They are under the delusion that because a boy has spent money on them, they owe him sexual favors. Many teens don't look at this type of sexual assault as real rape because it wasn't committed by a stranger. Teens need to be educated that they have the right to say no during any phase of the sexual act. Many times the boyfriend will use the excuse that once he is aroused, he just can't stop himself. This of course isn't true, it is just another way he can manipulate her. Teen girls who have experienced sexual abuse may have been forced to have sex with others, made to watch her boyfriend have sex with someone else, participated in bizarre sexual acts, or coerced into having unprotected sex. Needless to say, this sexual servitude is extremely risky because the victim is then exposed to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The victim feels guilt and shame, especially if she continues to date this boyfriend after sexual abuse has occurred.

One of the most potent emotions girls feel in an abusive relationship is shame. The victim of a violent dating relationship behaves similar to a rape victim. They take all of the shame and humiliation upon themselves. One powerful difference though is that unlike a rape victim, they blame themselves for what has happened, not the abuser. "Insults about a girl's appearance are often a boy's way of securing a more favorable power balance within the relationship. Some guys believe that the insults guarantee 'sexual exclusivity.' Abusers make an all-out attempt to annihilate the young woman's

self-esteem, to enslave her psychologically” (Dutton, cited in Crompton & Kessner, 2003, p. 38).

In a survey of 499 female teenage minors, Sanders (2004) found the results suggest that the difference between what young teenage women think they will tolerate and the degree to which they actually will tolerate sexually abusive behavior, is striking. The research has shown that teenagers think that intercourse is the only way to “have sex.” They do not consider sexual behaviors such as anal penetration, mutual masturbation, or oral sex as “having sex.” Thus, when Sanders administered her survey, there was obviously some ambiguous terms in the questions which were then open to individual interpretation. The results of Sander’s research showed that teenage women are very confused about what constitutes abuse, especially sexual abuse – should be especially disturbing for parents, teachers, and counselors. Young women lack frames of reference, life experience and role models that will help them distinguish between healthy, exploitative, marginally abusive, or very abusive sexual behaviors. (p. 101-103)

Physical Abuse

The third level of violence is physical abuse. Physical violence is usually the last phase in an abusive relationship. This means that in a physically violent relationship, emotional and sexual abuse have been present for quite some time.

Of all the girls whom I have counseled or interviewed throughout the past fifteen years, not one had reported physical violence occurring at the beginning of her relationship. By the time the battering took place, her boyfriend had already

established a pattern of verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse. (Crompton, cited in Crompton & Kessner, 2003, p. 41)

Because these dating relationships don't begin with physical violence, the importance of understanding the warning signs of emotional and sexual abuse could provide the opportunity of helping a son or daughter before his or her relationship reaches this level (Murray, 2000).

Using physical violence in a dating relationship is premeditated; the abuser has thought about it beforehand. Johnson (2005) noted that "often abusers claim that the abuse was an accident. Accidents do occur, but abuse toward one's significant other is always a planned choice. It never occurs by chance" (p. 3). The batterer makes a conscious decision to use physical violence. Once abusers have acted on their violent urges, it becomes easier and easier to be violent. With the emergence of this pattern of behavior, each violent episode is worse than the previous one.

According to Crompton and Kessner (2003),

Violence often begins "innocently" with simple "play wrestling." Then the "horseplay" segues into slapping, punching, pulling hair, and arm twisting. At that point, the girl will ask him to stop, but he won't; she may hit him back, but he hits harder. Other physical ways the abusers often show how much they "love" their girlfriends are slapping, pushing, grabbing, shoving, tripping, biting, punching, kicking, holding her down so she can't leave, slamming her into a locker, or throwing her across a room. (p. 43)

"In recent years, girls have been doing as much hitting as boys. Cultural norms these days say its okay for girls to hit boys, but this is the wrong kind of equality for

women. Because of the difference in male and female muscle power and strength, the injury rate is seven times higher when the boy hits back” (Strauss, cited in Crompton & Kessner, 2003, p. 44-45). When a relationship has reached this level, the abuser has completely objectified the victim. The victim is viewed as an object and not as a human being.

Many experts in the field believe that cohabitation is detrimental for a couple involved in a violent dating relationship. It can increase the incidences of violence because of the fact that the victim and abuser are now living together and spending much more time together in close proximity. Experts believe that by living together, violent incidences may also increase because of a deeper and more intimate knowledge of the partner. Cohabitation also leads to the likelihood of complications due to sexual jealousy. Marriage then triggers a more domineering reaction, a now-she-belongs-to-me feeling that exacerbates violence (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Warning Signs

There are a number of warning signs that can alert parents to the possibility their teen is in a potentially abusive relationship. Recognizing the signs of abuse can help parents remove their child from an abusive relationship before serious or lethal injury occurs.

In their book titled, *What Parents Need to Know About Dating Violence*, Levy and Occhuizzo Giggans (1995) noted the following warning signs of abuse:

- Your daughter comes home with injuries she can’t explain. Often the teen’s explanation doesn’t match the injury.

- You see signs that she is afraid of her boyfriend. She is jumpy, nervous, or afraid to displease or disagree with her boyfriend.
- She flinches when he lifts his hand to do something. In an outburst of anger, he hits a wall or breaks something.
- Her boyfriend checks up on her. There is evidence she is being watched, followed, or checked up on. The most common sign is constant phone calls which are often tension-filled and contain repeated explanations and apologies from your daughter.
- He usually lashes out at her, calling her names, or talking mean to her or about her.
- Your daughter seems to be giving up things that were important to her, such as school, friends, time with family, activities, and interests.
- She apologizes for him and his behavior to you and others. She blames herself for his mistreatment and defends him, justifying why he treated her badly.
- He is verbally abusive or physically violent toward other people or things.
- Your daughter's appearance or behavior has changed. She no longer dresses well or takes care of her appearance. She is suddenly having a hard time getting up in the morning. Neglected appearance is a major warning sign of sexual abuse or rape. Sometimes behavioral change is caused by substance abuse. (p. 17-22)

Abusers seem to have a dual personality. They would be the last person someone would suspect of abuse because outwardly they are charming, pleasant, and engaging.

They may be very hard workers and good students, and at times loving and gentle. These traits are important and unnerving because they display very deceptive characteristics of the abuser. An abuser uses his charm and charisma as a ploy to enter a girl's life and to keep her parents from being suspicious (Murray, 2000). At the beginning of their relationship he is charming, flattering, attentive, caring, and loving. Unfortunately, the relationship deteriorates when he realizes he is free to act in whatever manner serves him best.

According to Riddle Gaddis (2000),

An abuser's behavior will be filled with inconsistencies. He will naturally try to make himself look good to friends and relatives. His need for power and his uncontrollable temper, however, will eventually give him away. Some of the characteristics of a potential abuser are:

- He has a negative attitude toward women.
- He seems bossy: he makes decisions without consulting others.
- He exhibits mood swings.
- He is excessively jealous and possessive.
- He may prevent his girlfriend from seeing her family and friends.
- He may have witnessed his father abusing his mother.
- He lacks the ability to trust his girlfriend and cannot appropriately express anger without becoming violent.
- He blames the victim for his violent behavior.
- He denies he has abused his girlfriend, despite bruises and other evidence.

(p. 58-59)

Escalating Violence

According to Sanders (2004),

Once a woman has recognized these behaviors and acknowledged that her partner is abusing her, she then needs to assess whether she is in a potentially lethal situation. The South Suburban Family Shelter, Inc. has developed a scale where abusive behaviors are listed in the order of severity. In increasing order of severity, these behaviors include the following:

1. Throwing things, punching the wall;
2. Pushing, shoving, grabbing, throwing things at the victim;
3. Slapping with an open hand;
4. Kicking, biting;
5. Hitting with closed fists;
6. Attempting to strangle;
7. Beating (pinned to wall/floor, repeated kicks, punches);
8. Threatening with a weapon; and
9. Assaulting with a weapon. (p. 33-34)

To this list Therapist Barbara Hart, an expert in the field, added 11 other behaviors that suggest that the violence between intimate partners may be escalating to lethal proportions. In particular, she proposed that teens be especially wary when their partners do the following:

10. Make threats of homicide or suicide;
11. Describe fantasies of homicide or suicide;
12. Become acutely depressed;

13. Possess weapons;
14. Report that they “can’t live without them”;
15. Tell their partners that they have lost hope for a positive future without them;
16. Become enraged when they believe their victims are leaving;
17. Consume alcohol or use drugs when despairing or enraged;
18. Abuse or mutilate pets;
19. Have access to their partner’s person or family members; and
20. Take hostages. (Hart, cited in Sanders, 2004, p. 33-34)

What effects does a violent dating relationship have on the victim, their family, and friends?

Victim

Johnson (2005) noted that victims of abuse often lose the most valuable aspect of their life. The result of an abusive dating relationship is that the victim loses ownership over his/her own life and body. The teen should be focusing his/her energy on the good things in their life. Instead a victim focuses all of his/her energy on enduring the day-to-day battles with their abusive partner. These battles become part of their daily routine schedule. The reaction of the victims can span the gamut from becoming submissive to becoming aggressive. Both of these reactions are survival mechanisms by the victim to cope with the abusive relationship.

If the epidemic of teen dating violence is not addressed, this will carry over into the abuser’s and victim’s adulthood. If teens cannot access help now for issues of dating

violence, they will find it extremely difficult or impossible, as adults, to change this pattern of abuse that has been occurring for years or decades.

Adolescence is a very blurry line between adulthood and childhood. The uniqueness of adolescence is characterized by a richness and diversity unequaled by any other stage of a person's life. It is impossible to ensnare the complexity and intensity of adolescent girls. Adolescents are travelers on a life journey, which seems to take them far from home, with no land to claim as their own. They are neither children nor are they adults. At times adolescents act like they are twenty-five years old and the next minute they are acting like a toddler. They don't really fit in anywhere. They do not view themselves as children and they certainly can't relate to adults at this stage of their development. This awkwardness leads them to yearn for a place to fit in (Pipher, 1994).

An adolescent is striving to have a different life than her mother's. She may never ask for help from her parents because she doesn't want to disappoint or worry them. The teen's relationship exists in a vacuum. They don't want their parents to know anything about their private life. The teens feel that fate has brought them together. According to Charron (2005), a group of teens were asked who they would turn to with the problem of dating violence and 73 % said they would ask a friend for help versus a parent.

Experts believe that a girl's vulnerability to abuse has much to do with the way she copes with outside pressures (Bush, 2002). The fear of being excluded and criticized by their peers puts enormous pressure on teens to conform. There is very little flexibility for individualism in this stage of development. Their primary concern is how they appear to their peers. This is one contributing factor to why some girls are desperate for a boyfriend in high school. There is tremendous pressure on a girl to attract a boyfriend and

keep him at all costs. If a high school girl does not have a boyfriend, she is perceived as having something wrong with her. If this girl just hangs out with girlfriends, rumors start circulating that she is a lesbian. If her friends all have boyfriends and she doesn't, she feels extremely out of place. She would rather have an abusive boyfriend than none at all.

Teens are not only pressured by peers, but society in general. Every day they are bombarded with serious issues such as AIDS, pregnancy, violence, racism, gangs, drugs, alcohol, sex, school, and work requiring good decision-making skills. They are under extreme pressure to do well academically and have a distinct plan for their future. There are expectations for teens to participate in extra-curricular activities, extensively prepare for college admission testing and requirements, and make decisions regarding what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. This leaves the teen with very little time to develop a sense of her identity. As a result of her lack of identity, she attaches herself to a boy who is cocky, charming, and confident. Of course the boy is in the same state of uncertainty about his identity; he only appears to know what he is doing. She stays in the abusive relationship with the hopes she will find herself. This scenario is even more serious if the girl isn't considering higher education or if she is not sure what she wants to do with her life. This makes her even more susceptible to an abusive relationship. Without a distinct career or plans to attend an institution of higher education, she is apt to define her identity as someone's girlfriend (Murray, 2000).

Teens are inexperienced at relationships and this inexperience leads to struggles with the intricacy of feelings, decisions, and conflicts that all relationships have. This inexperience also makes the teen vulnerable to abusive relationships. They have a tendency to romanticize love and they often misinterpret jealousy, possessiveness, and

abuse as signs of love. They have not learned through experience that love is behavior and that a person's actions speak louder than their words of "I love you." Additionally, they may not fully understand what behaviors are and are not okay.

Levy and Occhiuzzo Giggans (1995) stated that most battering relationships are not exclusively violent. The abusive relationship has tender moments as well. These extremes make the dynamics of a battering relationship especially complex. Sporadic kindness and abuse keep the victim trapped in this cycle of violence. Rayner (2002) declared that when the serious and controlling abusive behavior surfaces, girls stay in the relationship because they are holding on to the memory of how wonderful that relationship made them feel in the beginning.

Some teens believe a stable relationship is boring. Addictive love is often an element of an abusive relationship. Addictive love implies an urge far past longing. The victim and her abuser believe that their continued existence depends upon the survival of the relationship. The young woman narrows the center of her life to concentrate on pleasing him. This addiction causes her to either ignore or make excuses for his abuse.

According to Bush (2002),

One public-health survey on dating violence found that girls involved in abusive relationships are significantly more likely to engage in substance abuse, including binge drinking, cocaine use and heavy smoking, as well as risky sexual behavior such as having multiple sex partners. High school girls who were victims of dating violence were also eight to nine times more likely to have attempted suicide and four to six times more likely to have been pregnant than peers who weren't abused. (p. 195)

Abuse is a learned behavior that begins in childhood. Children learn what they live. Boys who were abused or saw their mothers being abused are more likely to be abusive. He doesn't learn to treat women with respect and the mistreatment he experienced or witnessed is perceived as normal behavior. He has also seen his abusive parent blame others for his/her problems and then resort to violence to maintain control. Tension is released by exploding and losing his temper, with no regard for who gets hurt. Unfortunately, they have not learned positive and constructive ways to handle their feelings and problems.

When a relationship becomes more serious and progresses to the "going steady" stage, the majority of dating violence occurs. In several studies, young men were more violent as they began to view themselves as one half of a couple. Some abusers become more violent when they think the relationship is going to end, or after their girlfriend or boyfriend does break up with them (Levy, 1997).

Many high school and college victims say that jealousy is the major cause of dating violence. Jealousy is based on insecurity, but teens often mistake it as a sign of love. The victim is flattered by this perceived proof of the other person's love. Abusers are jealous because they are insecure and afraid they won't be loved. The relationship starts out as romantic, but becomes a prison of isolation and control. The abuser becomes more jealous and violent over time, not less. The abusers discover that their jealousy gives them the excuse to control the person they love by keeping them intimidated, frightened, and dependent upon them.

The abusers threats of suicide are a very common type of control exerted on the victim. This form of blackmail is a very effective weapon against a girl who has strong

rescue needs. This suicide threat plays on the victim's belief that if she stays with the abuser long enough, she can save him. This delusional thought process keeps the victim trapped in the abusive relationship.

Crompton and Kessner (2003) noted:

One of the reasons a teen may have a difficult time ending an abusive relationship is that once she is out of the relationship, she is out of the group that the couple was a part of. All of his friends, who were the victims also, pull away from her after the relationship ends. Girls, facing a void without him, without the friends and interests he made her give up, lose their sense of self. She finds herself snubbed by even those "friends" who told her to leave him. (p. 68)

Victims often suffer from a type of traumatic bonding disorder similar to Stockholm syndrome. This syndrome is a result of relationship hostages bonding with their abuser (captor). Emotionally, the victim is a prisoner of the abusive relationship. The physical and sociological isolation doesn't allow the victim the objectivity to see a way to get out of her situation. She has mixed emotions towards her abuser because he has shown her some kindness and love in their relationship. The battered teen may feel sorry for her abuser and make every effort to protect him from her parents and law enforcement. If the victim becomes involved in some kind of illegal activity with her abuser, she is drawn even further into the Stockholm syndrome, strengthening her attachment to her abuser.

According to Riddle Gaddis (2000), psychologists believe that repeated assaults can cause severe psychological distress and dysfunction to the victim. They believe this repeated abuse leads to cognitive changes in how the battered victim views herself and

the world. These tumultuous relationships can also contribute to the onset of dissociate disorders.

Family

Having a daughter involved in an abusive relationship is like being on an emotional rollercoaster for every member of the family. Many parents say they feel they are constantly on guard around their daughter as if they are walking on eggshells. Many wives withhold information from their husbands because they fear their husband will retaliate against the abuser. This is also true of the victim's brother who may retaliate on his sister's behalf. Sometimes the victim will confide in a sibling and then swear them to secrecy. When the sister is then subsequently hurt, the sibling, privy to the victim's secrets, feels guilty for not keeping their parents abreast of the situation. The parents in turn may feel anger towards the confidante for keeping them out of the loop. Parents may find themselves in the role of a mediator whose task it is to try and keep peace between family members.

Marital relationships between parents of abuse victims may become extremely strained under these circumstances with so much time and attention focused on the daughter's traumatic situation. Parents may clash over the handling of their daughter's situation and this conflict may drive a wedge between the couple. There may be a lot of conflict over how each parent handles their daughter's situation and the abuse incidences.

If a daughter is in an abusive relationship, she swings back and forth between her abuser and her family. When the relationship is going well and there is no abuse, she feels closer to the abuser and angry with her family and more secretive. That is until the abuse returns, and when it does return, she feels hurt and angry and seeks support from

her family. However, once they make up, she returns to the abuser, prolonging this repetitive pattern.

Raising a teen is difficult enough with the normal moodiness, drama, and emotions of adolescence. Having a daughter abused by her boyfriend is a nightmare for not only parents, but siblings and extended family members as well. Everyone involved has their own way of dealing with this disturbing and emotional situation. The stress and strain of figuring out what to do, and of dealing with the victim's unwillingness to cooperate or her resentment of her parent's meddling can be exhausting. The victim becomes very adept at lying. She becomes extremely competent in deceiving her parents. She doesn't want to admit that her parents accurately assessed what type of person her boyfriend truly is.

Siblings of abuse victims experience an array of emotions. The family's normal routine may be repeatedly disrupted by the abused daughter's crises. This can result in less attention being given to the other children in the family. The siblings may or may not know or understand what their sister's problems are. Regardless of their level of awareness, siblings are affected by their family's predicament.

Some siblings act extraordinarily good because they do not want to cause the same trouble their sister has. Yet other siblings may do whatever they can to get their own share of their parent's attention, as if they are in some form of competition with their sister. Still other siblings may go on with their daily lives as if nothing unusual is happening. These siblings give the impression they are coping with their family's situation, but they are actually covering up their feelings (Levy & Occhuizzo Giggans, 1995).

Siblings can have an especially difficult time in this situation. They struggle with the fact that they know what is going on, but are torn whether to tell someone that their sister is in danger. They worry about their sister's well-being, but have been sworn to secrecy about her violent relationship. If the sibling is committed to keeping his/her sister's secret from their parents, experts hope the sibling will persuade the victim to seek counseling. This allows the sibling to keep the secret without breaking his/her sister's trust. It also allows the victim to have a safe harbor because in some instances the victim feels that she is in more danger from her parents than her boyfriend. In such instances as this, the counselor will only divulge information regarding the victim's situation if they feel the girl is in immediate danger. Many times siblings of abuse victims are themselves wary of entering into a serious relationship. This is a direct result of the turmoil they have experienced from their sibling's violent dating relationship (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Friends

Crompton and Kessner (2003) noted that the data from various surveys show a range from 40 to 55 % of girls ages fourteen to seventeen reported knowing a peer who has been struck or beaten by a boyfriend. No matter what the exact percentage is, young people are deeply affected when their friends are involved in a violent relationship.

There is no better triumph for many girls than to date a popular boy – one who is viewed as “perfect” in everyone's eyes. They define themselves in terms of who they are dating. Her identity is completely tied to his. She is willing to walk away from her friends, activities, and interests to devote her undivided attention to this new boyfriend and relationship. The teen mistakenly believes that her love will nurture him back to his true sweet self (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Teens are bombarded with enormously distorted views of male and female roles portrayed in music videos, movies, television, and magazines. Boys assume that using violence to maintain their power is totally acceptable. They develop extremely rigid and stereotypical ideas of male and female roles. They believe males should dominate females and that women are supposed to please men. Naturally they feel they can control her by being "the boss," which draws admiration by his peers. Even if it is hurtful, the girl feels pressured to do what her boyfriend wants. She learns to be dependent on her boyfriend and puts him and his needs first. Their relationship becomes the most important aspect of her life. Her personal needs and interests are neglected and abandoned in lieu of his.

Being the friend of an abuse victim can be very precarious for a number of reasons. It is very traumatizing for a teen that possesses the awareness of the dynamics of dating violence and the knowledge of how to avoid being a target to have a friend who does not possess these skills. Having a friend who is a victim of abuse is disturbing enough, being the friend of a perpetrator of abuse is even worse. The victim's friends may be well aware of her boyfriend's jealousy and bad temper. Often friends of the victim do not think the abuser's threats will be carried out. It is extremely traumatizing to her friends to witness his violence towards her. The friend may be tempted to confront the abusive boyfriend about his treatment of the victim. This could put the friend in a dangerous situation for his/her own safety. A friend trying to mediate an abusive relationship is not recommended. The friend's attempt to intervene on behalf of the victim has a greater likelihood of making the problem worse. The friend is also jeopardizing the victim's trust.

Needless to say, the friend is involved in a very delicate and tumultuous situation. If the friend decides to intervene in the violent relationship, the situation could potentially become dangerous for the friend, and even more volatile for the victim. It is crucial that the friend does not instigate the wrong kind of intervention. The friend runs the risk of retaliation from the abuser. If the friend decides not to intervene, that is a traumatic decision as well because the next time their friend is victimized, he/she will experience the realization and guilt that he/she could have done something to prevent the crime.

The friend may have tried everything he/she can think of to help the victim without successful results. If the victim continues to remain in the abusive relationship, their friend has to come to the realization that he/she can't rescue someone who is not ready to be helped. While the friend can still lend his/her moral support to the victim through the ups and downs of the abusive relationship, he/she cannot neglect his/her own life.

Society

Nifong (1996) drew attention to the fact that the impact of teen dating violence appears enormous for society. There are concerns regarding the victim's mental and physical well-being and the costs imposed on the health care community. There will be a huge cost for rehabilitating and incarcerating the abusers. As a result of violent teen dating relationships, a community may lose a valuable future leader and productive member of society when the victim drops out of school. If the victim becomes pregnant, she is apt to expose her child to violence, perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

Abusive relationships impact society in various ways. If abuse is not acknowledged by society as a serious problem, then it not only is allowed to occur, but

becomes an accepted standard of behavior. Thus, if violence in relationships is condoned, then eventually any type of violence towards others becomes commonplace and tolerated. This scenario leads to a more barbaric society as a whole.

Children learn more through observation than by any other method of teaching. Children who are witnesses to abuse are much more likely to grow up to believe that this type of behavior is acceptable, perpetuating the cycle of violence. This continuation of the cyclical nature of violence through future generations makes it clear that abuse has an influence on the adults of tomorrow. The impact on society will last decades into the future (Johnson, 2005).

Riddle Gaddis (2000) noted:

The peer pressure and levels of vulnerability that characterize a teenager's stage of development make teen battering unique. Far fewer options are available for teenage girls who are seeking help. They have fewer opportunities for economic independence, and most domestic violence shelters are unable to accommodate teenage girls, mainly because of the legal liabilities that are involved when sheltering minors. (p. 45-46)

What methods are successful in helping a teen break free of an abusive relationship?

Even though violence is widespread among teens, there are very limited services that are specifically aimed at adolescents. The vast majority of sources for assistance are either child abuse services geared toward young children or domestic violence resources targeted at adult victims. Teens do not have ready access to shelter, money or transportation. Confusion about the law and teen's rights adds another level of difficulty for young people in need of assistance. Often teens will not reach out for assistance

because they are ignorant of their rights. Teens have fears regarding the lack of confidentiality, ordered child abuse reporting, and parental consent laws. A yearning for confidentiality and confusion about the law are two of the most significant obstacles to young victims of teen dating violence seeking the help they need. (Relationships 101, n.d.)

Studies regularly show that the majority of teens in abusive relationships have not discussed the violence in their lives with any adult. Therefore it is essential that all parents with teens familiarize themselves with the obstacles to communication and promote discussion on the topic.

Statistics gathered by the National Coalition against Domestic Violence show that a victim's chances of being murdered by her abusive partner increase by 75 % when she leaves him. When working with teens, it is imperative they are told that violent relationships can be deadly. There should be candid discussions regarding all the peril they are exposing themselves to by staying in a violent relationship. They are not only putting their lives in danger of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, but also making themselves vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies. Unfortunately girls will go back to their abusive boyfriends many times before they are ready to end the relationship once and for all. It is imperative that parents express their concerns to their daughter and assure her that they are on her side. The reaction from the daughter can vary from her welcoming the opportunity to unload herself of this terrible burden, to her denying there is a problem at all and assuring her parents that everything is fine. She may resent this perceived interference on the parent's part and feel the motivation is to break up her relationship. Persistence on the parent's part is vital. If the teen is not willing to

discuss her situation with her parents, then outside help must be sought from others who have the knowledge and experience to empower your daughter to leave her abusive boyfriend.

Riddle Gaddis (2000) recommended that if parents suspect that their daughter is in a violent dating relationship or is being abused, they should initially be sure of the facts. The parents' first reaction to learning that their daughter is in an abusive relationship is often to lock the door and throw away the key. They want to keep her protected from the danger outside of their home. They need to educate themselves and study the three types of abuse and the warning signs. If a teen is becoming involved in a potentially abusive relationship, there are distinctive signs and behaviors parents need to familiarize themselves with. Recognition of these signs and behaviors is the first step that parents can take toward removing their daughter from a potentially dangerous relationship before serious injury occurs.

Parents should find out everything they can about their daughter's boyfriend and his home life. If the parents have reason to believe that their daughter's boyfriend is indeed abusive, they might want to contact his parents and see if they are willing to discuss their son's relationship. If the boy's parents are willing to meet and talk with the girl's parents, it is suggested that a third party be present. The girl's parents should make it clear to the boy's parents that they have concerns about how the boy is treating their daughter and reiterate that they will take action to protect their daughter. If the boyfriend has already displayed abusive behavior, then the girl's parents need to be more direct to the boy and his parents that they will take legal action to end the violent treatment of their

daughter. Often the parents of the abusive boy have been hoping that the girlfriend will be their son's salvation from his violent behavior.

If the victim dismisses the abusers threats, friends should be aware of safety plans for the victim and report what is happening to their own parents. The friend and his/her parents can decide how to best inform the victim's parents. The assumption should never be made that the victim's parents are already aware of what is happening to their daughter. Friends may hesitate at the idea of betraying a friends trust – but saving her life is the real issue.

Levy (1997) suggested that friends should try to get the victim to recognize the abuse in their relationship and know the warning signs. They should ask the victim questions about what is happening in his/her dating relationship. Experts suggest that the victim's friends should try and help the victim realize that this behavior is not normal. They should also encourage the victim's strength and bravery. The victim should be encouraged to do things socially with his/her friends so he/she can have some enjoyment apart from the abusive relationship. The victim's friends should try to be non-judgmental. It is suggested that the friend tell the victim how worried they are about his/her safety and self-respect. The victim's friends should help her with her safety plan and keep the focus on her knowledge of the abuser's patterns of behavior to foresee a violent outburst. They should also help the victim familiarize herself with the resources that are available to her and how to keep safe during times of explosive behavior by the abuser.

A safety plan is a way that parents and victims can prepare in advance for the possibility of future violence. It is imperative for the victim to realize that she does not have control over the abuser's violence. She doesn't have any control over his actions,

but she does have control over how she responds to his abusive behavior and what methods she can implement to insure her safety. In fact, she should have multiple safety plans in place for the various scenarios that could occur. For instance, she should have one safety plan for what she will do during an abusive episode and another plan for those times she is home alone or in another isolated area. It is strongly recommended that once a safety plan is in place, the teen and her family practice those procedures so the responses become automatic.

An effective safety plan should be appropriate for each particular situation. Brainstorming with immediate and extended family members is recommended. Others outside of the family, who might play key roles in helping the victim stay safe, should also be included in these discussions. Experts advise that as many people as possible know that this relationship is abusive and has ended. This knowledge will help them be more alert as to what is happening to the teen when her parents or other family members are not around and contact the parents or authorities if necessary. If the teen balks at the thought of a safety plan, then the parents, family, and friends must do it for her. Abuse is often a dark secret kept by the victim and her family. By bringing this information to the forefront, the power this secret holds over these people is greatly lessened.

It is suggested that the school counselor be involved in the safety plan of action. The counselor may know of dating-violence support groups the teen could join and other resources available to abused teens. These support groups could offer the teen comfort in the fact that she is among others who have experienced the same situations as her. Research shows that members of support groups are less likely to return to their former behavior or circumstances.

Nifong (1996) pointed out:

Massachusetts has a unique program in which the state provides grants to school districts willing to develop a teen dating violence prevention effort. The effort calls for schools to include the police department, battered women's shelters, and parents in their planning. In two years, the grant has funded the training of teachers and police officers and the adoption of teen-dating curricula in the schools. (p. 3)

Chapter III: Discussion, Analysis, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter represents a summary of the information obtained in the literature review. A critical analysis is included regarding the warning signs and types of abuse, the effects a violent dating relationship has on the victim, family, friends, and society, and successful techniques to end an abusive relationship. Lastly, the chapter offers recommendations to those in the helping profession who work with those involved and affected by violent dating relationships.

Summary

Violence against women dates back centuries. Anthropologists have discovered Egyptian papyrus documents from as early as 2000 B.C. that describe sexual violence against women. X-rays of female mummies revealed that women suffered many more injuries than the males. Throughout the centuries, women were regarded as just another piece of property that the man owned.

Until recently, very little was known about the phenomenon of teen dating violence. Research has been hampered by the broad definition of adolescent dating which can be interpreted from “hanging out” with a group of peers to a monogamous sexual relationship. Dating violence has received more attention since the tragedy at Columbine in 1999, which focused attention on violence in schools.

National research suggests that one in five high school girls are physically or sexually abused by a dating partner and nearly one in three girls experience some type of abuse in their dating relationships. According to Charron (2005), a recent survey revealed

that 57 % of American teens know friends who have experienced physical, sexual, or verbal abuse in dating relationships.

This type of behavior has been around for centuries, why is it cultivating so much attention now? The tragedy at Columbine opened the public's eyes to the horrible and disturbing fact that teen violence is a very real problem in our society. This type of violence should be taken very seriously because it has the potential of escalating to a point of serious physical harm or even murder.

Experts believe that the level of dating violence among teens is on the rise because we are living in a much more aggressive society. Displaying physical and mental toughness is a boy's way of demanding respect from his girlfriend and his peers. (Riddle Gaddis, 2000, p. 46)

Submissive female role models and super macho male role models bombard teens in all aspects of their daily lives.

Critical Analysis

There are several research questions that this study addresses. The following is a critical analysis of the original research questions.

1. What are the warning signs and types of abuse?

The various resources that were referenced indicate that there are universal warning signs of the types of abuse. Violence usually surfaces over a period of time, but the warning signals are there from the beginning of the relationship.

Emotional

The first level of violence in an abusive dating relationship is emotional/verbal abuse. Emotional/verbal abuse targets the teen's positive self-esteem and is extremely

detrimental because a person who they deeply care for is degrading their self-worth and self-esteem. This type of abuse marks the beginning of an abusive relationship. Even if the victim does not experience sexual or physical abuse, the emotional abuse is deeply damaging. This type of abuse destroys the victim's self worth and independence.

Sexual

The second level of violence in an abusive dating relationship is sexual abuse. This type of abuse is defined as forced or coerced sexual acts. Sexual abuse covers a wide range of behavior from unwanted touching and kissing to rape. The abuser uses sexual violence against the victim to humiliate, degrade, and control her. Many victims believe they owe their boyfriends sexual favors. This type of abuse exposes the victim to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

Physical

The third level of violence in a violent dating relationship is physical abuse. By the time a violent relationship has reached this level, an established pattern of verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse is in place. The use of physical violence in a dating relationship never occurs by chance; it is always premeditated. Violence may begin "innocently" as play wrestling but can quickly escalate into much more aggressive behaviors such as slapping, punching, pulling hair, biting, and kicking. Once an abuser reaches this level of violence in a relationship, each violent episode is more intense than the one prior. At this level the victim has become completely objectified by the abuser.

Warning Signs

There are several warning signs that can alert parents that their teen may be involved in a potentially violent relationship. It is imperative that parents familiarize

themselves with these warning signs so they can intervene in a violent dating relationship before serious or deadly injury occurs to their child.

In their book titled, *What Parents Need to Know About Dating Violence*,

Levy and Occhuizzo Giggans (1995) noted the following warning signs of abuse:

- Your daughter comes home with injuries she can't explain. Often the teen's explanation doesn't match the injury.
- You see signs that she is afraid of her boyfriend. She is jumpy, nervous, or afraid to displease or disagree with her boyfriend.
- She flinches when he lifts his hand to do something. In an outburst of anger, he hits a wall or breaks something.
- Her boyfriend checks up on her. There is evidence she is being watched, followed, or checked up on. The most common sign is constant phone calls which are often tension-filled and contain repeated explanations and apologies from your daughter.
- He usually lashes out at her, calling her names, or talking mean to her or about her.
- Your daughter seems to be giving up things that were important to her, such as school, friends, and time with family, activities, and interests.
- She apologizes for him and his behavior to you and others. She blames herself for his mistreatment and defends him, justifying why he treated her badly.
- He is verbally abusive or physically violent toward other people or things.

- Your daughter's appearance or behavior has changed. She no longer dresses well or takes care of her appearance. She is suddenly having a hard time getting up in the morning. Neglected appearance is a major warning sign of sexual abuse or rape. Sometimes behavioral change is caused by substance abuse. (p. 17-22)

2. What effects does a violent dating relationship have on the victim, their family and friends?

Victim

The result of an abusive dating relationship is that the victim loses ownership over his/her own body (Johnson, 2005). The victim of an abusive dating relationship may react in a wide range of ways. Their reactions can span the gamut from submissiveness to becoming aggressive. Whatever end of the spectrum the victim's reaction falls into, this is their survival mechanism of coping with the abusive relationship.

The awkwardness and turmoil of adolescence leaves a teen with a sense that they do not belong anywhere. There is very little flexibility for individualism at this stage of development. Their main concern is how they are perceived by their peers. There is a tremendous amount of pressure on a girl to attract a boyfriend and keep him at all costs. She is made to feel that there is something wrong with her if she does not have a boyfriend. The bottom line is – it is better to have an abusive boyfriend than none at all.

The teen's inexperience at relationships leads to struggles with the complexities of feelings, decisions, and conflicts that are characteristic of all relationships. This inexperience leads them to misinterpret inappropriate behaviors as signs of love. Levy and Occhuizzo Giggans (1995) noted that the dynamics of a battering relationship are

especially complex due to the fact that it is not only violent. The violence is intermingled with tender moments. These moments of kindness are what keep a victim trapped in a violent relationship.

According to Riddle Gaddis (2000), psychologists believe that repeated assaults can cause severe psychological distress and dysfunction to the victim. They believe this repeated abuse leads to cognitive changes in how the battered victim views herself and the world. These tumultuous relationships can also contribute to the onset of dissociate disorders.

Family

Having a daughter involved in an abusive relationship is an emotional rollercoaster for every member of the family. Parents say they are constantly on guard around their daughter. Marital relationships between parents of abuse victims may become very strained under these circumstances with so much time and attention focused on the daughter's tumultuous situation. Parents may disagree on the best way to deal with their daughter's situation. This conflict can drive a wedge between the couple.

Siblings of abuse victims experience an array of emotions. They may or may not understand exactly what is happening, but regardless of their level of awareness they can still be deeply affected. The normal family routine and dynamics are interrupted and less of the parent's attention may be given to the other children in the family.

Siblings who are confidants of the victim are put in a vicarious position. They bear the burden of knowing about the abuse their sibling is experiencing and struggle with how to act on this knowledge. These siblings are torn between breaking their sister's trust, worrying about their sibling's safety, and keeping vital information from their

parents. Many times siblings of abuse victims are themselves wary of entering into a serious relationship. This is a direct result of the turmoil they have experienced from their sibling's violent dating relationship (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Friends

Young people are deeply affected when their friends are involved in an abusive relationship. The victim is willing to walk away from her friends, activities, and interests to devote her undivided attention to this new boyfriend and relationship. Her identity is now completely tied to his. The result is she forsakes her friends and life because their relationship becomes the most important facet of her life (Crompton & Kessner, 2003).

Being the friend of an abuse victim is very traumatizing. The victim's friend has the awareness of the characteristics of dating violence and the knowledge and strength to avoid being a target of abuse. It is extremely frustrating to possess these skills, yet have a friend who does not and who ends up being a victim. It is even worse being the friend of a perpetrator of violence.

The friend of the victim is traumatized by witnessing the abusive treatment his/her friend is experiencing. They may feel compelled to intervene on his/her friend's behalf. This could jeopardize his/her own safety and possibly cause the abuse toward his/her friend to escalate. Deciding not to intervene is a traumatic decision for the friend as well. The next time their friend is victimized; he/she will experience the awareness and guilt that he/she could have done something to prevent this crime. The friend has to come to the understanding that he/she can't rescue someone who is not ready and willing to be helped.

Society

The high percentage of violent dating relationships will have a profound effect on society in several ways. The health care system will be required to provide services for the victim's mental and physical well-being. This could also include providing services to the victims for unwanted pregnancies, drug addiction, and sexually transmitted diseases. The rehabilitation and incarceration of the abusers will have a huge effect on the legal and judicial systems.

The continuation of these types of violent relationships will spill over in their adult years impacting the adults of tomorrow. The cycle of violence will continue and could potentially result in an overall more violent society.

3. What methods are successful in helping a teen break free of an abusive relationship?

Even though the occurrences of teen dating violence are widespread, the services available to teens are very limited. The vast majority of services are either child abuse services geared toward young children or domestic violence resources targeted at adult victims.

It is imperative that parents take a proactive approach if their teen is involved in a violent dating relationship. Discussions regarding violent dating relationships should be very candid so that the teen realizes the potential danger and vulnerabilities they are exposing themselves to. If the teen is not willing to discuss her situation with her parents, then outside help must be sought from others who have the knowledge and experience to empower your daughter to leave her abusive boyfriend.

A safety plan is a way that parents and victims can prepare in advance for the possibility of future violence. It is imperative for the victim to realize that she does not have control over the abuser's violence. She doesn't have any control over his actions, but she does have control over how she responds to his abusive behavior and what methods she can implement to insure her safety. In fact, she should have multiple safety plans in place for the various scenarios that could occur.

An effective safety plan should be appropriate for each particular situation. Brainstorming with immediate and extended family members is recommended. Others outside of the family, who might play key roles in helping the victim stay safe, should also be included in these discussions. Experts advise that as many people as possible know that this relationship is abusive and has ended.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that those who are involved in a violent teen dating relationship do not always report this behavior, which skews statistical information. Ironically, the signs of potential abuse are also behaviors that young women find most flattering and believe these behaviors are a normal aspect of dating. The fact that teens' perceptions of some behaviors as not abusive can distort results of data collected. While studies show that teen dating violence is a severe problem, the issue has not been tracked steadily. Most statistics have been gathered from heterosexual couples with disregard to violent relationship of same sex partnerships.

Recommendations

In order to assist helping professionals in working with victims of violent teen dating relationships, the following recommendations are made as a result of the literature review and critique.

1. It is recommended that helpers be understanding and knowledgeable about the warning signs of abuse.
2. It is recommended that helpers be understanding and knowledgeable about the types of abuse.
3. It is recommended that early intervention be employed with teens involved in a violent dating relationship.
4. It is recommended that parents communicate with their children regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in dating relationships.
5. It is recommended that the parents, teen, family members, friends, and school officials create safety plans for the victim for various scenarios.
6. It is recommended that more schools offer curriculum on the prevention of violent dating behaviors.
7. It is recommended that federal, state, and local governments offer more services to victims of teen dating violence.

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