



Domestic And Sexual Abuse Services

Empowering Victims, Supporting Survivors for Over 20 Years

Community Education Newsletter

January 2010

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month



Teen Dating Violence

For many people, the stereotypical victim of domestic violence is the a thirty-something women with three kids running to the shelter in the middle of the night. However, according to Department of Justice statistics, young women ages 16 to 24 experience the highest rates of relationship violence. Recent statistics have shown that teen dating violence can start as early as 11 years old.

Teen dating violence can look very much like adult domestic violence. Teens can experience the same physical, sexual and emotional abuse as their adult counterparts. However, teens face unique obstacles to addressing the violence such as dependence on parents, attending school and their age if under 18 years old. Because of these barriers, teen dating violence is often underre-

ported.

Teen dating violence can also hinder proper development because of the stress and confusion of an abusive relationship. The abuse can affect the victim's grades and planning for the future. Research shows that dating violence is associated with lower grade point averages, substance abuse, depression and eating disorders.

School can pose issues when a victim tries to leave the abuser. If there are no options for attending a different school, the victim may have to face the abuser on a daily basis. For the school to be able to help in any way, the victim would have to tell someone about the abuse. Many victims, teen or adult, do not disclose the abuse to others.

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Teen Dating Violence and Technology

Technology is a major part of many teen's lives. Many teens have cell phones and have access to the internet readily available. An abuser can harass and stalk the victim with text messaging, constant calling, emailing, instant messaging and social networking sites (MySpace and Facebook).

According to a 2007 survey of teens by Teenage Research Unlimited, over half of teens surveyed believe cell phones and computers make abuse more likely to occur in teen dating relationships.

During this same survey, it was revealed that one in three teens have been texted 10, 20, or 30 times an hour by their boy/girlfriend finding out where they were,

who they were with and what they were doing. One in four teens surveyed said they were harassed, put down or called names over through cell phones and texting. Seventeen percent of teens reported their partner made them afraid not to respond to a cell phone call, email, IM or text message because of what he/she might do.

Technology is also used to carry out sexual abuse. When sexual acts are performed over text message, it is referred to as "sexting." Often times, teens will share intimate texts and nude pictures of their partners with friends. One in four teens reported having been asked over cell phone or internet to engage in sexual activities when they did not want to.

Teen Dating Violence and Legal Issues

Teen Dating Violence by the Numbers

62% of tweens (age 11-14) who have been in a relationship say they know friends who have been verbally abused (called stupid, worthless, ugly, etc...) by a boyfriend/girlfriend.

1 in 3 teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked or physically hurt by their partner.

1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse.

More than 1 in 4 teenage girls in a relationship (26%) report enduring repeated verbal abuse.

If trapped in an abusive relationship, 73% of teens said they would turn to a friend for help; but only 33% who have been in or known about an abusive relationship said they have told anyone about it.

Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide have experienced physical dating violence.

Young women ages 16-24 experience the highest rates of relationship violence.

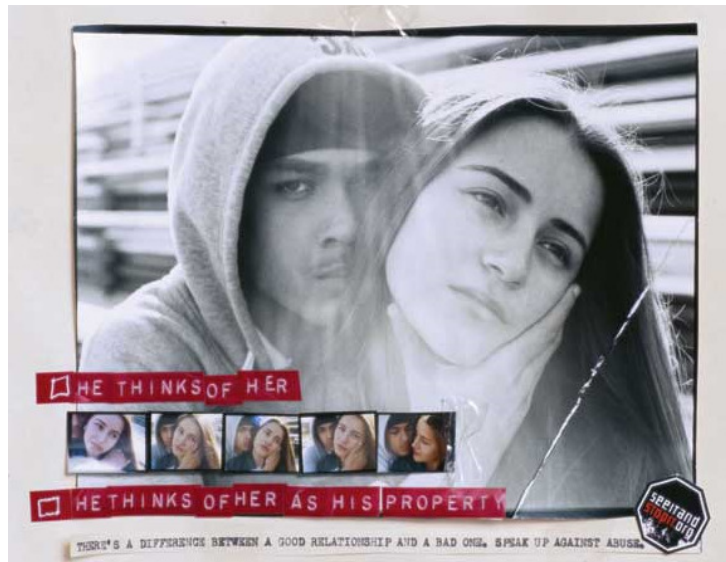
Among rural teens, 15.8% report ever being hit, pushed, or threatened by a dating partner. For females, the odds of this violence occurring are 3.5 times that of males.

Statistics from www.loveisnotabuse.org

Many states do not cover teen dating violence under their domestic violence laws. In 2009, Break the Cycle, a national teen dating violence organization, graded each state's accessibility of protection orders to legal minors. Michigan received a C, because even though it includes dating relationships under the definition of domestic violence, a legal minor must have their parent or guardian file the petition for them. Since many teens do not disclose the abuse to their parents, this creates an un-

necessary barrier for victims.

Many teens cannot access counseling or domestic violence services because of their age. Many agencies need parental consent to work with legal minors. This may be waived if the victim is emancipated from their parents. However, there are different guidelines for sexual abuse. If a victim of sexual abuse is over the age 12, then many agencies are able to offer services without parental consent.



Out of Touch Parents

In June 2009, a survey was conducted of both teens and parents on teen dating violence. Parents surveyed seem to be out of touch with what is occurring in their teen's relationships.

Nearly two-thirds of parents whose children have been in a dating relationship say violence has not been a problem for their teen. However, 54% of teens surveyed reported some form of abuse.

Over three-quarters of the parents talked with their children about family finances, the economy, and grades. However, only 31% of parents talked with their children about dating

abuse.

Teens were asked who they told about the abuse if they told anybody. 80% confided in friends, while only 32% talked to a parent. Furthermore, when teens did talk to a parent, more teens are talking with their mother instead of their father, even though the fathers surveyed seemed to be more aware of what is occurring in their teen's relationship.

This survey also revealed that teens who have witnessed abuse between their parents report 50% higher incidence of abuse themselves than teens who have not witnessed.

Mallory Dowd, Sexual Assault Program Coordinator for DASAS

According to a 2002 report, physical aggression occurs in 1 in 3 teen dating relationships. Furthermore, one study revealed that one in three high school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship. In addition to these alarming statistics, adolescent and teen girls are highly likely to experience sexual assault within dating relationships. In fact, date rape (also known as acquaintance rape) accounts for almost 70% of the sexual assaults reported by adolescent and college age women; 38% of those women are between 14 and 17 years old. Our children and students in Southwest Michigan are not immune to what national leaders and policy makers now refer to as a *public health crisis*.

What can community members do about sexual violence in teen dating relationships? A 2004 study revealed that 81% of parents either believe that teen dating violence is not an issue or admit that they don't know if it is an issue. One of the first things our sexual assault advocates do when working with teen survivors of sexual abuse/assault is to assess and support the relationship between the survivor and their primary caregiver. When speaking with concerned parents and community members, we emphasize the importance of open, honest communication about sex and sexual violence with adolescents and teens. Especially given the fact that nearly half of all adolescent rape victims have been sexually assaulted more than once, sexual violence is not a problem that simply "goes away." Adding to this problem, research has shown that over 80% of sexual assaults against minors go unreported.

Many schools employ risk reduction education that focuses on teaching potential victims of sexual assault—typically girls only—ways to defend themselves and to say "no" to sex; at the same time, many schools provide absolutely no primary prevention education, which typically focuses on preventing potential *abusers* from perpetrating sexual assault. Primary prevention against sexual assault ranges from co-ed curricula involving communication about sexual values and desires, to male-only education such as the Men Can Stop Rape campaign, which focuses on using positive images of masculinity to instill responsibility in young men for ending sexual violence. While no program is a perfect match for any single community, we as leaders and members of this community can address sexual assault in teen dating relationships by identifying the needs of our young people. Southwest Michigan is facing epidemics of increasing teen pregnancy rates, high alcohol and drug usage, and unemployment; sexual assault amongst our teens and adolescents is equally damaging and often leads to long-term effects on individuals, families, and communities.

Much research has focused on the impact of sexual assault/abuse on adolescents and teens. Girls are especially at risk for sexual assault by dating partners and may experience traumatic and profound loss of self-esteem, and engage in disempowering and self-defeating behaviors that may lead to ongoing cycles of addiction and violence. They are also more

likely to consider or attempt suicide, develop an eating disorder, take more risks sexually, and become delinquent from home and/or school. The messages we send to our children and teens about equality and respect in relationships are more important than ever. The following are some things adults can do to combat and prevent sexual assault amongst adolescents and teens:

- Encourage teens to talk about sex! If you have children, incorporate your family's values regarding sex into *consistent* dialogue about healthy sexuality (which, of course, does not include coerced or unwanted sexual behaviors). If you interact regularly with families, encourage parents and teens to talk openly about sex and sexual violence. Remind them that talking regularly with teens about sex can actually make them *less likely* to have it!
- Don't place the responsibility to prevent sexual violence in the hands of potential victims. Talk to girls *and* boys about sexual violence, recognizing that some boys are sexually assaulted by their female partners, too, and that sexual assault occurs just as frequently in lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered (LGBT) relationships as it does in heterosexual relationships. Prevention of sexual assault *must* begin with potential *perpetrators*, as they are the ones who make the choice to assault their partners or not.
- Read books about sexual assault in dating relationships. Our staff can make recommendations!
- Safety plan with teens, especially if you are concerned that they are going to be exposed to drugs and alcohol, which factor into the *majority* of sexual assaults amongst young people. Many teens believe that it is normal and expected to have sex while under the influence of drugs and alcohol – extinguish this myth and encourage them to avoid situations and parties where they may feel pressured to have sex. Encourage them to call a safe adult if they find themselves in an unsafe environment.
- Give teens resources! There are plenty of websites, books, and magazines written just for teens about healthy sexuality and dating relationships. If you encounter a teen who has been sexually assaulted, contact our hotline immediately – 1-800-828-2023 – so that a professional advocate can support them and assist them in accessing the information and help that they need.
- Remember – it takes an entire community to prevent sexual violence. The first step to eradicating this problem amongst our youth is coming together and talking about it. April is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month and a Take Back the Night Rally in support of survivors will be taking place in your community. There are many ways for you to get involved. We hope you can make room in your lives for at least one of them.

Healthy Relationships Curriculum Offered by DASAS

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services currently provides a curriculum for middle and high school students in Cass and St. Joseph Counties, on a limited, request-only basis. This curriculum, entitled "Healthy Relationships," has been approved by the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and covers topics ranging from dating/domestic violence and warning signs of abusive or controlling partners, to CSC laws and legal/illegal sexual behaviors. The program emphasizes developing healthy relationships amongst youth, encouraging students to report and reach out to safe adults when they experience or witness violence at school and at home, and providing useful, engaging information about the *realities* of dating violence and sexual assault. The curriculum typically runs for 3-4 hour-long sessions. For information about the "Healthy Relationships" program or to request the curriculum in your school, please contact Mallory Dowd, Sexual Assault Program Coordinator, at 269-273-6154, ext. 106.

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services

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Resources on Teen Dating Violence:

Websites:

www.loveisrespect.org
www.breakthecycle.org
www.loveisnotabuse.com
www.safeyouth.org
www.stayteen.org
www.athinline.org
www.thesafeplace.org
www.respect2all.com

Toll-free Helplines:

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:
1-866-331-9474

National Domestic Violence
Hotline:
1-800-799-7233

Rape, Abuse, Incest, National
Network:
1-800-656-4673

No one deserves to be abused.

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- Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1996.
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About Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services

DASAS Mission:

Domestic And Sexual Abuse Services will lead efforts to end domestic violence and sexual assault in southwest Michigan. DASAS will assist domestic violence and sexual assault survivors in clarifying their options, accessing community services that support personal choice, and will provide a safe place for survivors and their children.

DASAS Philosophy:

Domestic And Sexual Abuse Services shall promote the empowerment of survivors by providing information, resources, and advocacy. DASAS will treat survivors with dignity and respect, and will value their right to self-determination. DASAS is committed to improving community systems' response to domestic violence and sexual assault by focusing on enhanced protection, empowerment, and support for survivors and their children and on increased accountability for abusers. DASAS will lead prevention efforts by providing accurate information on domestic violence and sexual assault issues to the community and to youth through school based initiatives.

Programs:

From community education and prevention programs to supportive counseling services and assisting survivors in crisis situations. DASAS provides comprehensive services to those impacted by sexual assault and domestic violence.

- 24-hour Toll-free Help Line 1-800-828-2023
- Advocacy/Supportive counseling
- Sexual Assault Program
- Domestic Violence Program
- Weekly Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence support groups
- Assistance in obtaining a personal protection order
- Legal advocacy and accompaniment to court proceedings
- Information and referral to other services in the community, including obtaining clothing, emergency medical services, financial assistance, transportation and child care
- Assistance developing parenting skills
- Safe Shelter- Available 24/7