



ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN DATING AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SELECTED RISK INDICATORS

INTRODUCTION

Dating violence and sexual violence can be physical, psychological, or emotional and can take place in person or digitally. Unhealthy behaviors can start early and the abuses of power and control are often normalized and tolerated in peer to peer relationships. Anyone can be a victim, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and or disability. In addition, both dating violence and sexual violence encompass behaviors that can escalate in frequency and intensity over time, leading to possible lethality. Dating violence and sexual violence exist because of a continuum of attitudes, beliefs, and actions that society uses to excuse and justify violence. Improving recognition of these forms of violence among Oklahoma's youth, fostering a better understanding of the complex dynamics of dating and sexual violence coupled with evidenced based or evidenced informed curriculum, and promoting positive social norms that protect against violence can lessen immediate and long-term harms to Oklahoma teens.

Dating violence and sexual violence among teens pose significant health concerns in the United States. Nationally, it is estimated that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old.¹ In a breakdown by age and gender, 29.9% of girls ages 11-17 years and 12.3% of girls age 10 or younger had their first completed rape victimization. For boys, more than one-quarter 27.8% were first raped when they were 10 years of age or younger. In addition, more than one-third of women who were raped as minors were also raped as adults, compared to 14.2% of women without an early rape history. And, because too few men report rape victimization in adulthood, there is not enough information to examine rape victimization as a minor and subsequent rape victimization in adulthood. Overall, 22.4% of women and 15.0% of men first experience some form of dating violence between 11 and 17 years of age.²

Dating violence and sexual violence are issues that have serious short-term and long-term effects on an individual's health and well-being across the nation.^{3,4} Many teens do not report victimization because they fear retaliation from the perpetrator, judgement by their peers and or family, and being victim-blamed for what happened to them.⁵ Those who are directly affected by dating and sexual violence struggle with their

health throughout their lifetime. Youth who are victims are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, engage in unhealthy behaviors, exhibit antisocial behaviors, and think about suicide.^{6,7,8} Furthermore, youth who are victimized are at a higher risk for re-victimization during their college years, which can range from sexual assault to rape. The majority of sexual assault victims are under the age of 30 years old.⁹ In Oklahoma, approximately one-quarter of the population is under the age of 18 years of age.¹⁰

METHODS

For the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 1,649 questionnaires were completed in 45 out of 50 public high schools for a school participation rate of 90.0%, a student participation rate of 82.1%, and an overall response rate of 74%. The 2017 survey included 89 questions, covering six categories of health-risk behaviors, an assessment of obesity prevalence, and other health-related topics. Health-risk behaviors included behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and physical inactivity.

The statewide, randomized YRBS is conducted biennially on odd-numbered years. The 2017 sample was selected using a two-stage sampling design. Schools were first selected for participation based on probability proportional to enrollment. Classes were then selected from each school using systematic equal probability sampling with a random start. The sample was weighted to be representative of Oklahoma public high school students in grades 9 through 12 based on the demographic distribution of the enrolled student population provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. A detailed explanation of YRBS methodology has been well documented elsewhere.¹¹

Dating and Sexual Violence Indicators

Four questions were used to create the violence indicators: 1. Have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?; 2. During the past 12 months, how many times did anyone force you to do sexual things that you did not want to? (Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.); 3. During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with force you to do sexual things that you did not want to? (Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.); 4. During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose? (Count such things as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon.)

If a student answered yes to question one then Ever Been Forced to Have Sex was coded as “yes.” If a student answered one or more times to question two then Recently Experienced Sexual Violence was coded as “yes.” If a student indicated one or more times to question three then Recently Experienced Physical Dating Violence was coded as “yes.” If a student answered one or more times to question four then Recently Experienced Sexual Dating Violence was coded as “yes.” If a student indicated that they were not dating anyone during the past 12 months then Recently Experienced Physical Dating Violence (474 records) and Recently Experienced Sexual Dating Violence (475 records) were coded as missing.

Selected Risk Indicators

Nine selected risk indicators were included in the analysis – bullied at school, bullied electronically, current alcohol use, current binge drinking, current marijuana use, sex with four or more people, currently sexually active, used alcohol at last sex, and suicide risk. Bullied at school was defined as having been bullied on school property during the 12 months before the survey. Bullied electronically was defined as having been bullied electronically during the 12 months before the survey. Current alcohol use was defined as having one or more alcoholic drinks during the 30 days before the survey. Current binge drinking was defined as having five or more (four for females) alcoholic drinks within a two-hour period during the 30 days before the survey. Current marijuana use was defined as using marijuana during the 30 days before the survey. Sex with four or more people was defined as having had sexual intercourse with four or more people in your lifetime. Currently sexually active was defined as having sexual intercourse with one or more persons during the three months before the survey. Used alcohol was defined as having used alcohol or other drugs at last sexual intercourse.

Five questions were used to create the variable “suicide risk.” If a student reported during the previous 12 months that they ever felt so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row that he/she stopped doing some usual activities, seriously considered attempting suicide, made a plan about how he/she would attempt suicide, attempted suicide, or was treated for an injury from attempted suicide then suicide risk was coded as “yes.”

Analyses

SAS 9.4 was used to perform the analyses.¹² SAS *PROC SURVEYFREQ* was used to generate descriptive statistics and to perform bivariate analyses. Variables were examined using percentages and 95% confidence intervals (CI). The chi-square test was used to test for differences in proportions. Variables were considered statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 1. Prevalence of Dating and Sexual Violence by Select Demographic Characteristics: Oklahoma YRBS 2017

Characteristics	Ever Been Forced to Have Sex		Recently Experienced Sexual Violence		Recently Experienced Physical Dating Violence		Recently Experienced Sexual Dating Violence	
	%	p value	%	p value	%	p value	%	p value
Gender								
Female	15.7		19.2		11.1		12.6	
Male	2.9	<.0001	5.5	<.0001	4.3	<.0001	2.4	<.0001
Grade Level								
9th	6.4		11.8		5.3		6.5	
10th	8.7		13.1		8.6		8.4	
11th	11.1		10.6		7.1		7.4	
12th	10.8	0.3131	12.8	0.8685	9.5	0.4745	7.5	0.9559
Race/Ethnicity								
NH White	8.8		12		7.1		8.8	
NH Black	8.1		10.7		10.2		6.8	
NH Native American	11.1		13.4		5.8		3.7	
NH Multiple	10.6		10.4		6.6		5.1	
Hispanic	8.5	0.9142	9.9	0.8949	13.1	0.4081	7.7	0.4929
Total	9.1		12.1		7.7		7.4	

Data for Asian/Pacific Islanders are not shown due to small numbers and statistical imprecision

NH= Non-Hispanic

RESULTS

One in eleven students (9.1%) had ever been forced to have sex, 12.1% had recently experienced sexual violence, 7.7% had recently experienced physical dating violence, and 7.4% had recently experienced sexual dating violence (Table 1.) Females were significantly more likely than males to have experienced dating and sexual violence. No differences were observed by grade or race/ethnicity.

One in five (18.5%) students who reported being bullied at school have ever been forced to have sex compared to 6.5% of students who had not been bullied at school (Table 2). Similar differences were observed for being bullied electronically ($p<.0001$), current alcohol use, current binge drinking, current marijuana use, having had lifetime sex with four or more people, being currently sexually active, and suicide risk. Having used alcohol at last sex was not statistically significant ($p=0.7605$). Similarly, students who experienced the selected risk indicators were more likely to report recently experiencing sexual violence than those who did not experience the selected risk

Table 2. Bivariate Associations between Sexual Violence and Selected Risk Indicators: Oklahoma YRBS 2017

		Ever Been Forced to Have Sex			Recently Experienced Sexual Violence		
		Yes	No	p value	Yes	No	p value
Bullied at school	Yes	18.5	81.5		28.2	71.8	
	No	6.5	93.5	<.0001	7.8	92.2	<.0001
Bullied electronically	Yes	26.4	73.6		33.5	66.5	
	No	5.8	94.2	<.0001	8.2	91.8	<.0001
Current alcohol use	Yes	13.6	86.4		20.4	79.6	
	No	6.1	93.9	0.0011	6.1	93.9	<.0001
Current binge drinking	Yes	13.5	86.5		21.6	78.4	
	No	7.2	92.8	0.031	8.8	91.2	<.0001
Current marijuana use	Yes	16.7	83.3		22.3	77.7	
	No	7.7	92.3	0.0017	9.9	90.1	<.0001
Sex with 4 or more people	Yes	21.2	78.8		18.5	81.5	
	No	7.0	93.0	<.0001	106	89.4	0.0022
Currently sexually active	Yes	17.5	82.5		23.2	76.8	
	No	5.2	94.8	<.0001	7.5	92.5	<.0001
Used alcohol at last sex	Yes	18.7	81.3		36.5	63.5	
	No	17.3	82.7	0.7605	20.3	79.7	0.0013
Suicide risk	Yes	16.6	83.4		22.6	77.4	
	No	4.4	95.6	<.0001	5.8	94.2	<.0001

indicators; however, having used alcohol at last sex was significantly associated with recently experiencing sexual violence (0.0013).

One in seven (14.4%) students who were bullied at school had recently experienced physical dating violence and 20.8% had recently experienced sexual dating violence compared to 5.7% and 3.7% of those who had not been bullied at school, respectively (Table 3). Similar differences were observed for being bullied electronically, current alcohol use, current binge drinking, current marijuana use, having had lifetime sex with four or more people, being currently sexually active, and suicide risk. Having used alcohol at last sex was not statistically significant for recently experiencing physical data violence ($p=0.0572$) but was statistically significant for recently experiencing sexual violence ($p=0.0247$).

Table 3. Bivariate Associations between Dating Violence and Selected Risk Indicators: Oklahoma YRBS 2017

		Recently Experienced Physical Dating Violence			Recently Experienced Sexual Dating Violence		
		Yes	No	p value	Yes	No	p value
Bullied at school	Yes	14.4	85.6		20.8	79.2	
	No	5.7	94.3	0.0013	3.7	96.3	<.0001
Bullied electronically	Yes	21.4	78.6		21.8	78.2	
	No	4.3	95.7	<.0001	4.3	95.7	<.0001
Current alcohol use	Yes	12.3	87.7		13.8	86.2	
	No	4.2	95.8	0.0063	2.9	97.1	<.0001
Current binge drinking	Yes	15.5	84.5		13.6	86.4	
	No	5.2	94.8	0.0014	4.8	95.2	0.0035
Current marijuana use	Yes	13.5	86.5		14.7	85.3	
	No	6.0	94.0	0.0071	5.8	94.2	0.0002
Sex with 4 or more people	Yes	16.4	83.6		13.4	86.6	
	No	5.5	94.5	<.0001	6.3	93.7	0.0365
Currently sexually active	Yes	12.8	87.2		13.6	86.4	
	No	4.2	95.8	<.0001	4.4	95.6	<.0001
Used alcohol at last sex	Yes	17.8	82.2		26.1	73.9	
	No	11.8	88.2	0.0572	11.5	88.5	0.0247
Suicide risk	Yes	13.9	86.1		14.4	85.6	
	No	3.3	96.7	<.0001	2.8	97.2	<.0001

Limitations

The YRBS is a cross-sectional study; therefore, the measured associations reflect one point in time and do not imply a causal relationship. These data were representative of public school students in grades 9 through 12 in Oklahoma. Adolescents who attended private institutions, were home-schooled, or did not attend any school were not represented in this study. There is potential underreporting of risk behaviors by students participating in the YRBS. Despite efforts to conduct the YRBS in such a manner as to preserve confidentiality, some students may not report events if they feel their answers will in some way identify them. Furthermore, students read and interpret the

questions and form their answers without any external assistance; therefore, students may have different interpretations of the YRBS questions and response options.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate a need for continued education, awareness, and collaborative, multifaceted approaches in addressing these issues. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are imperative. As teens grow into adults, they are developing their beliefs, attitudes, and value system. It is a formative time to provide a skill set for healthy communication, respecting boundaries, and being empowered to have bodily autonomy. When coupled with positive and comprehensive sex education, sexual violence prevention is possible.¹³ Effective strategies require utilization of curricula that is evidenced-based or evidenced-informed. These curricula suggest several methods to teach skills that can lead to reductions in dating and sexual violence perpetration and victimization or their risk factors. These include social-emotional learning approaches, which focus on developing empathy, communication, and problem-solving skills. A second approach involves teaching healthy, safe dating and intimate relationship skills to adolescents. This approach focuses on identifying caring, respectful relationships and reinforcing communication skill sets. A third approach promotes healthy sexuality, which is comprehensive and highlights sexual respect and consent. A fourth approach addresses empowerment-based training for women to reduce risk for victimization. This focuses on overcoming emotional barriers in acknowledging danger, recognizing harmful societal norms, and strengthening self-efficacy through support and leadership opportunities.¹⁴

Conclusions

YRBS data are an important tool to be utilized for the implementation and evaluation of dating violence and sexual violence prevention in Oklahoma. Despite the data only encompassing three questions on sexual violence and one on physical violence, it does highlight the need to address these issues Oklahoma. These data can help inform effective approaches to addressing prevention as well as where efforts should be directed in promoting the health of Oklahoma's youth. This approach focuses on strengthening the ability of women to assess risk for violence in relationships and in situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote social norms that protect against violence – Ex: Bystander approaches and mobilizing men and boys as allies.
- Teach skills to prevent sexual violence – Ex: Social-emotional learning, teaching healthy, safe dating and intimate relationship skills, promoting healthy sexuality and empowerment-based training for women to reduce risk for victimization.

- Provide opportunities to empower and support girls and women – Ex: Strengthening economic supports for women and families and strengthening leadership and opportunities for adolescent girls.
- Create protective environments – Ex: Improving safety and monitoring in school, establishing and consistently applying workplace policies and addressing community-level risks through environmental approaches.
- Support Victims/Survivors to lessen harms – Ex: Victim-centered services, treatment for victims of SV and treatment for at-risk children and families to prevent problem behavior, including sex-offending.¹⁴

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RESOURCES

- **National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline**
Phone: 1-866-331-9474 (24 hours)
TTY: 1-866-331-8453 (24 hours)
<http://www.loveisrespect.org>
- **Oklahoma Safeline**
1-800-522-7233 (24 hours)
- **Expect Respect**
<http://www.safespace.org/expectrespect>
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
Understanding Teen Dating Violence Factsheet
<http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/TeenDatingViolence2012-a.pdf>
- **Sexual Violence**
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html>
- **Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence: Program Activities Guide**
<http://www.breakthecycle.org/>
- **Love is Respect**
<http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/safedates.page>

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