



# RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

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Canadian adolescents' experiences of dating violence: Associations with social power imbalances



## What you need to know

Dating violence is an issue effecting adolescents. Since negative repercussions (i.e., poor psychological health) result from adolescent dating violence (ADV), it is important to understand patterns of ADV with the intention of informing prevention efforts.

## What is the research about?

A substantial minority of adolescents' experience and/or use some form of physical, psychological and/or sexual dating violence in their romantic relationships. ADV is associated with many negative health outcomes (i.e., physical and psychological), therefore investigating the patterns associated with ADV can be used to better inform prevention programming. This study has two aims. First, to investigate the ways in which adolescents may experience and/or use dating violence. Second, to explore whether factors tied to power imbalances (i.e., bullying, risk of social marginalization) are associated with patterns of ADV victimization and perpetration.

## What did the researchers do?

The researchers used data from the 2017/2018 Health-Behavior in School-Aged children dataset (HBSC). For this study, the sample was restricted to youth in grades 9 and 10 who had consistently reported having a dating experiences for all adolescent dating violence (ADV) items during the survey. This produced a sample size of n=3636.

To measure if the youth had engaged in ADV perpetration, the youth were asked three questions that explored psychological (i.e., had they tried to control or emotionally hurt someone they were dating), physical (i.e., if the youth had physically hurt on purpose who they were dating) and cyber dating violence (i.e., If they had ever used social media to hurt, embarrass, or monitor someone they were dating). The same three questions were rephrased to assess for victimization.



All the youth were given a definition of bullying then asked eight questions to assess various types of bullying perpetration they had engaged in within the past few months. This included how often they partook in various types of bullying (i.e., verbal, social exclusion, retentional, weight related, sexual and cyberbullying). The same eight items were used to assess for victimization.

Finally, the following six variables were used to assess the adolescents' risk of social marginalization: gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, family structure, food insecurity, and socioeconomic status.

A latent class analysis was conducted to investigate patterns of violence amongst youth and a multinomial logistic regression analysis to examine any associations between bullying and the risk of social marginalization variables with the likelihood of ADV.

## What did the researchers find?

For ADV perpetration, the results showed that 9.2% reported using psychological violence, 7.7% engaged in cyber aggression and 7.1% used physical aggression towards the person they had been in a romantic relationship with.

For youth who disclosed being victims of ADV, 27.3% reported experiencing psychological violence, 17.1% cyber aggression and 11.5% physical aggression.

In this sample, 19.3% reported bullying other students while at school at least 2-3 times a month. Cyber bullying (i.e., using social media to hurt or embarrass someone they were dating) was perpetrated by 8.6% and experienced by 18.3% of youth.

Most youth (65.7%) were classed in the uninvolved category and were given a low probability of experiencing or using ADV. Next, 28.9% were classified as experiencing psychological and cyber victimization and placed at a high probability of experiencing psychological ADV and a moderate risk of being a victim of cyber aggression. Finally, 5.4% were classified in the mutual violence class and were considered to have a high probability of experiencing and using both forms of ADV.

Using the uninvolved group and the comparison group, bullying perpetration and victimization was found to increase the chances of being classified in the psychological and cyber victimization class. Similarly, the analysis on social marginalization showed that older youth, cisgender girls, youth with food insecurity and lower social economic status also placed youth at a greater chance of being classed in the psychological and cyber victimization class. Also, bullying perpetration and victimization, age (being older), being a recent immigrant and food insecurity showed to increase the odds of being classified in the mutual violence class.

When comparing the mutual violence class to the psychological and cyber victimization class, it was found that bullying perpetration and/or victimization by physical or weight bullying increased the youths chances of being in the mutual violence group. Similarly, being a racialized youth, a cisgendered boy or a recent immigrant also increased the odds.

## How can you use this research?

Bullying was most strongly associated with the mutual violence class, suggesting a transformation of power from peer to romantic contexts. Social marginalization variables were associated with ADV patterns in different ways, highlighting the need to use a critical and anti-oppressive lens in ADV research and prevention initiatives. Therefore, this study can be used to inform ADV prevention programming. Specifically, the findings suggest that youth involved with bullying should be an important target for ADV prevention programming. Additionally, ADV prevention needs to consider addressing social inequities, in addition to the well-established focus on individual-level attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.



## About this summary:

This summary was prepared by Keri Rempel, a research assistant for the HOPE Lab at the University of Calgary. The HOPELab collaborates with a number of community and research partners with the goal of building healthy relationships as a foundation for child and adolescent well-being.

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