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SCHOOL HEALTH
RESEARCH NETWORK

Dating and Relationship Violence: victimization and perpetration among young people in Wales

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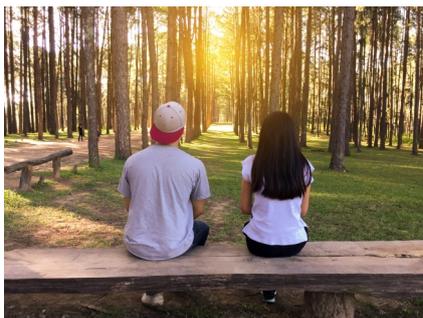
Adolescent dating and relationship violence (DRV), like domestic violence, includes emotional, physical and sexual abuse. However, because the term domestic violence in the UK only refers to those aged 16 years or older, this type of abuse is often assumed not to occur among those under 16. Subsequently, little is known about how prevalent DRV is among children and young people in Wales.

What we already know...

Although research in this area is limited, adolescent DRV has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, such as poor mental health, substance use, teenage pregnancy and eating disorders.

The relationship between DRV and socio-demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity and deprivation, is unclear.

USA-based research suggests that DRV perpetration and victimization are linked in 16 year olds, meaning that perpetrators of DRV may also be victims.



What we did...

- We used data from all students aged 11 to 16 who took part in the 2017 Student Health and Wellbeing Survey in Wales to examine prevalence rates and patterning of DRV.
- Only the 74,908 students who had ever dated or been in a relationship with someone of either sex were asked whether they had experienced or perpetrated emotional and physical DRV.
- Emotional DRV was defined as hurtful comments, while physical violence included any of the following: being pushed, shoved, slapped, punched, kicked or beaten up.
- We analysed DRV victimization and perpetration separately, as well as overlapping victimization and perpetration.
- We analysed patterning of DRV using survey data on social characteristics, including gender, family affluence, ethnicity, age and living arrangements.

In a nutshell

- **More girls than boys experienced emotional DRV victimization, but more boys reported physical victimization than girls.**
- **A slightly higher proportion of girls than boys reported physical and emotional DRV perpetration.**
- **Compared to students living with both parents, adolescents from single or step parent homes and those in care were slightly more likely to report some form of DRV victimization and/or perpetration.**
- **We found no association between family socioeconomic status and DRV.**



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What we found...

Emotional DRV

- More girls (28%) than boys (20%) who had ever dated had experienced emotional dating violence.
- Girls (18%) were also more likely to perpetrate emotional dating violence than boys (16%).
- Around 13% of boys and 17% of girls both experienced *and* perpetrated emotional DRV.

Physical DRV

- Roughly the same proportion of girls (8%) and boys (7%) who had ever dated had perpetrated physical dating violence.
- Unlike emotional victimization, more boys (17%) than girls (12%) had experienced physical dating violence.
- Approximately 6% of boys and girls had both experienced *and* perpetrated physical DRV.

Patterning of DRV

- DRV showed patterning by age, ethnicity and living arrangements, as well as by gender. For example, boys from all types of household, other than living with both parents, were more likely to report physical DRV.
- There was no patterning, however, by family affluence, meaning that students from more affluent homes were just as likely to report DRV as those from less affluent homes.
- Age and gender also interacted, so as students got older, the likelihood of experiencing and perpetrating DRV increased at a faster rate for girls than for boys.



Issues to consider

This was the first nationally representative study in the UK to look at DRV among young people aged 11-16 and to disaggregate emotional and physical DRV.

All of our data was collected at one time point (a cross-sectional survey) so we cannot determine when and which type of DRV occurred first.

We do not know whether students who perpetrated dating violence did so in self-defence.

The prevalence of DRV was lower than other studies have found. This could be due to the young age of our sample, as few young students reported dating experiences and thus DRV. Stigma associated with being a victim or a perpetrator of DRV may also have led to under-reporting.

What does this mean for my school?

- **The prevalence of DRV among young people in Wales highlights it as a public health problem that is relevant to secondary schools.**
- **The age-related increase in all types of DRV in both girls and boys, highlights the need for early, universal interventions.**
- **Mutual conflict within relationships, where young people are both perpetrators and victims of violence, suggests a need for interventions that focus on development of healthy relationships.**

Read the research paper in full. Download for free here:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz084>

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