

A Report On Violent Teen Relationships

by {ga=l Crawford}

Wednesday, September 03, 2003 12:00 AM

Children who witness violence between their parents are at the greatest risk for becoming victims of violence themselves in teenage and young adult romantic relationships, according to [a 20-year study](#) published in the August issue of the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology.

Witnessing violence between parents also increases the chances of a child being a perpetrator of violence in future relationships, and of having serious behavior problems (conduct disorders). And children who have been excessively punished are also significantly at risk for becoming perpetrators of violence against their partners.

According to Dr. Miriam K. Ehrensaft, who authored the study with other researchers at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and New York State Psychiatric Institute, it is not surprising that witnessing violence shows up as an indicator on both the victim and perpetrator sides. "Being a perpetrator and being a victim are highly related phenomena," said Ehrensaft.

The link between excessive punishment and a tendency toward partner violence later on is a new finding for these researchers. "We knew that punishment was related to kids' aggression in general, and a host of bad outcomes later on," said Ehrensaft, "but we didn't know the relationship with partner violence."

Another significant finding is the route that child abuse takes to show up in partner abuse statistics. "What we figured out from this study is that child abuse works through conduct disorder," explained Ehrensaft. "If a child is abused, they are more likely to develop conduct

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disorder, and that then puts them in line to be a violent partner."

In New York City, approximately 10 percent of domestic violence victims treated at New York City public hospitals are under the age of 20, according to Department of Health [statistics](#) released by the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence.

The City's domestic violence hotline received 10,574 calls from teens in 2002, which was up 54 percent from 2001. As of July of this year, they already received 7080 calls, suggesting another spike for 2003.

This spike does not necessarily mean that there is more partner violence among teens in New York City than before. It may just be that more of them know where to call. According to the city's domestic violence commissioner Yolanda Jimenez, "Teen hotline calls increased after the City's 1997, 1998 and 2000 public education campaigns directed towards teens, which suggests that the campaign was successful in reaching our target audience."

Violent behavior by a partner is highly resistant to treatment, the new study reports, but author Ehrensaft recommends prevention programs for children prior to adolescence, before the use of violence and coercion as a means of resolving conflicts become totally ingrained in the child. These programs would target children exposed to various types of damaging environments.

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"Most existing dating violence programs aim to change attitudes about violence from men to women," said Ehrensaft. "These are generally successful in changing attitudes but not in reducing actual levels of violence between young dating partners. Also, few programs have followed teens over time to test whether the programs had long term effects."

There are several existing programs provided for adolescents in New York City (see accompanying box) and the trend is to target younger and younger children.

" The Mayor's [Office to Combat Domestic Violence](#) believes that violence prevention programs should begin as early as possible and progress through high school so that abuse does not become an acceptable norm," commented Commissioner Jimenez. "Early violence prevention can break the cycle of violence that leads to teen dating violence and adult domestic violence."

Domestic violence research is still a young field, according to Ehrensaft. "A lot of interventions have gone on using clinical experience and common sense, but only recently are we bringing science into the picture. And we really need that science to go forward and help people, just like with any medical disorder that needs to be backed by science."

Ehrensaft's next research project will likely build on this work, using science to find out what exactly is the process that puts kids with conduct disorder at risk for partner violence "We figured out that child abuse links up to conduct disorder. But we still need to do more research to find out what that process is so we can help those kids--and prevent bad relationships."

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NYC VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

[Adopt-A-School Relationship Abuse Prevention Program](#) ("RAPP") (In pdf format)

In 20 city high schools to promote healthy relationships intervene in the cycle of teen relationship abuse, and work to prevent destructive patterns of relationship abuse from extending into adult relationships.

[New York City Department of Youth and Community Development](#) (DYCD)

Funds organizations and programs to provide Violence Intervention and Prevention programs targeting youth who are at risk of becoming involved in violence or who have already exhibited violent behavior.

DYCD Youthline 1-800-246-4646

TTY 1-800-246-4699

Youthline is a toll-free 24-hour a day seven days a week confidential and anonymous crisis intervention and resource line for youth, their families and concerned service providers. Youthline has a paid staff of highly trained high school and college students.

The New York City schools have implemented violence prevention programs over the years in various elementary and middle schools. These programs include:

â€˜ Second Step developed by Committee for Children based in Seattle, WA

â€˜ Resolving Conflict Creatively developed by Educators for Social Responsibility Metro with the New York City Department of Education

â€˜ Safe Harbor developed by Safe Horizon

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â€˜ Speak Your Peace developed by Center Against Domestic Violence (currently in the intermediate School for International Studies)

â€˜ Students Advocating Against Violence Initiative (SAAVI)

â€˜ Project Charlie

[Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center](#)

312 East 94th Street
New York, NY 10128
212-423-3000

[STEPS to End Family Violence](#)

1968 Second Avenue
New York NY 10029
212-410-4200

INCLUDES a group for teenage boys who have abused a girlfriend or mother.

[Safe Horizon Youth Division](#)

189 Montague Street, 6th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-624-2111 ext. 22

Center Against Domestic Violence
25 Chapel Street, 9th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-254-9143

[Children's Aid Society Family Wellness Program](#)

212-503-6837
Offers services for victims, perpetrators and children.

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[The Door](#)

555 Broome Street
New York, NY 10013
212-941-9090

Serves domestic violence victims ages 12-21
Services in English, Spanish, Chinese

[FACES](#)

Maimonides Theater Network for Teens
Maimonides Medical Center
902 48th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11219
718 283 7861

This prevention program has been around for almost 20 years.

Yankee Rep Fork in the Road Players

157 East 3rd Street #D
New York, NY 10009
917 441 4171

Jbigelson@abcny.org

This is a theater group that performs a play on dating violence in high schools and teen centers.

The NiteStar Program

St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center
St. Luke's Division
1111 Amsterdam Avenue, Scrymser 1
New York, NY 10025
212-523-3599

[Hetrick-Martin Institute](#)

2 Astor Place, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-674-2400
Services for same sex relationships

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Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

120 West 57th Street

New York, NY 10019

212 582-9100

718-237-1337

Family Violence Hotline

[NYU Child Study Center](#)

Excellent program that works with parents of children who are at risk for developing behavior problem.

ART Programs

Additionally, there are organizations that do art with children affected by domestic violence who are in DV or homeless shelters:

- Art Start Simon Fulford is the executive director 212-966-7807 ext. 1
- Oyster Arts Caleb Jensen is the executive director 212 475-8900
- Free Arts for Abused Children Corinne Arles is the Program Director 212 974-9092

(Our thanks to Christina Alex, Research Coordinator at the [Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence](#) who provided most of this program information.)

Lynda Crawford wrote the social services topic page for Gotham Gazette, and has written for City Limits, New York Woman, The New York Observer, and The New York Daily News.

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