

# Dating violence prevention in schools

## Research finds school environments affect dating violence

### Informing policymakers through research

**The issue.** Teen dating violence is as much a societal problem as domestic violence, with rates of each ranging from 10 to 36.5 percent of couples. Furthermore, boys and girls are equally as likely to use violence toward their dating partner; however, girls are more often seriously injured than boys. Finally, minority teens are at greater risk of being involved in violent relationships compared to white teens.

With key federal initiatives promoting healthy marriages, we first must understand how to promote healthy dating relationships during the teen years and deter negative couple behaviors such as violence, especially in young minority teens' dating relationships. Indeed, a host of teen problem behaviors and their families' characteristics, including family violence, increase the risk of violence between dating teens. A question that has not been addressed, however, is how the school environment may increase teen dating violence among minorities. Exploring this question can better inform violence prevention efforts in schools.

**According to our research.** Some aspects of the school environment do, indeed, increase the chances of minority teens being violent in their dating relationships, especially for teens that grow up in homes with parental violence. Specifically, African-American boys are more likely to be violent in their dating relationships if they sense a lack of safety at school. Second, Hispanic boys are more likely to be violent in their dating relationships if they have low grades. Finally, for African-American girls and Hispanic boys, having same-sex friends who are delinquent increases their chances of being violent in their dating relationships, even if they do not experience violence at home.

**We recommend.** Because dating behaviors that begin during the early teen years most often carry through to marital relationships,

preventing violence in dating relationships in middle and high school must be considered. Our work demonstrates the need for comprehensive violence prevention in middle and high schools, including components that aim to prevent dating violence.

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Programs should take steps to increase school safety, academic achievement, and non-delinquent friendships. Positive changes in these behaviors will not only decrease dating violence, they will also improve teens' health and academic performance. These improvements will ultimately increase their chances of having healthy marital relationships in the future.

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**For more information, visit:**  
[www.hs.iastate.edu/makeadifference](http://www.hs.iastate.edu/makeadifference)

This policy brief is based on published research: Schnurr, M. P., & Lohman, B. J. (2008). How much does school matter? An examination of adolescent dating violence perpetration. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 266-283.

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