

Girls less likely to be violent when seeking others' approval

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Many teen girls who push, slap or punch their dates know the situation could become more violent, but they think most consequences are unlikely, a new study shows.

Researchers at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University used the theory of planned behavior, which predicts a person's intentions and actions.

"We know that girls' use of force often occurs in the context of violence against them, either as self-defense or sometimes [retaliation](#)," said Richard Tolman, U-M professor of social work, who wrote the study with lead author Poco Kernsmith, an associate professor of [social work](#) at WSU. "The impact of dating violence is more severe for [girls](#) who are victimized than for boys."

Previous research indicates many girls say they initiate the use of force, and "we wanted to understand more about the predictors for girls' actions," he said.

Surveys were administered to 224 male and female students from a southeastern Michigan high school. The study focused only on female students, analyzing the responses from 102 girls who had been or were currently dating.

Fifty-nine percent of the girls said they pushed, slapped, grabbed or committed other nonsevere violence and 28 percent said they punched,

kicked, choked or committed other severe force against a partner. Forty-nine percent of the girls reported no use of violence.

Of the girls who had used physical force, 40 percent said it was done to protect themselves at least some of the time. The study also found that 53 percent of girls said their dating partner was violent first, and 22 percent said both partners initiated violence. Of those who reported using physical force in their relationships, 32 percent reported that they had never been victims, themselves, of dating violence.

Most students (81 percent) reported that they would be unlikely to perpetrate violence in the future, although those who had previously used severe violence were more likely to repeat these actions.

Based on seven items measured on a scale ranging from "strongly approve" to "strongly disapprove," girls believed the highest disapproval for their violent acts would come from the police and religious leaders. However, the girls placed greater importance of approval from their mothers and boyfriend/girlfriend, the study showed.

A scale measuring the attitudes toward violent behavior looked at the perceived consequences of this action against one's partner, such as going to jail or losing self respect. The researchers said girls felt moderately confident in their ability to control violent behavior, but were least confident of their ability to avoid using force if they had been using alcohol or drugs.

The researchers also said that perceived social acceptability appears to be a deterrent against future violence since respondents believe that others who were significant to them disapprove of [violence](#). About 77 percent indicated they thought others would disapprove of violent behavior.

"Supporting an environment that is intolerant of any form of [violent behavior](#) is an important component of [dating violence](#) prevention," Kernsmith said. "Reaching youth before they begin dating to provide skill-building around healthy, respectful relationships can help shape future behavior."

More information: The findings appear in Violence against Women - [vaw.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... /06/1077801211404312](http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/early/.../06/1077801211404312)

Provided by University of Michigan

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