

Teen dating violence is down, but boys still report more violence than girls

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UBC nursing professor Elizabeth Saewyc. Credit: University of British Columbia

When it comes to teen dating violence, boys are more likely to report being the victim of violence—being hit, slapped, or pushed—than girls. That's the surprising finding of new research from the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

Overall, fewer teens are experiencing physical abuse from their dating partners, with five per cent of teens reporting dating violence in 2013, down from six per cent in 2003.

However, the researchers found 5.8 per cent of boys and 4.2 per cent of [girls](#) said they had experienced dating violence in the past year.

First author Catherine Shaffer, a Ph.D. student from SFU who was involved in the study, says more research is needed to understand why boys are reporting more dating violence.

"It could be that it's still socially acceptable for girls to hit or slap boys in dating relationships," she said. "This has been found in studies of

adolescents in other countries as well."

She added that the overall decline in dating violence, while small, is encouraging.

"Young people who experience dating violence are more likely to act out and take unnecessary risks, and they're also more likely to experience depression or think about or attempt suicide," Shaffer said. "That's why it's good to see that decline in dating violence over a 10-year span. It suggests that healthy [relationship](#) programs are making an impact among youth."

The study is the first in Canada to look at dating violence trends among adolescents over time, and the first in North America to compare trends for boys and girls. Researchers analyzed data from three B.C. Adolescent Health Surveys involving 35,900 youth in grade 7 to 12 who were in dating relationships.

Elizabeth Saewyc, senior study author and UBC nursing professor, said the findings highlight the need for more support programs for both boys and girls in dating relationships.

"A lot of our interventions assume that the girl is always the victim, but these findings tell us that it isn't always so," said Saewyc. "And [relationship violence](#), be it physical, sexual or other forms, and regardless who the perpetrator is, is never OK. Health-care providers, parents and caregivers, schools and others can protect teens from dating [violence](#) by helping them define what healthy relationships looks like, even before their first date."

More information: Catherine S. Shaffer et al, Ten-Year Trends in Physical Dating Violence Victimization Among Adolescent Boys and Girls in British Columbia, Canada, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0886260518788367](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518788367)

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