

## **Sexual violence study finds NY teens victimized at rate higher than national average**

June 27 2008

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The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, in collaboration with Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health's Center for Youth Violence Prevention, announced the results of a three-year, comprehensive research project on sexual and dating violence among New York City high school students, and the health impact of that violence on those victimized by it. A copy of the full study, "Partners and Peers: Sexual and Dating Violence Among NYC Youth," will be released in July.

The New York City Department of Education granted researchers permission to enroll New York City high school students anonymously with their parents' consent and their own permission given the agreement of school principals and district superintendents. Students from four schools, reflecting a range of those in New York's cultural groups, were asked to participate. Over 1,300 high school students ranging in age from 13-21 were included in these analyses. The majority of participants were 15 or 16 years old.

Findings in the study include:

- One in six participants (16.2%) report having experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives;
- The percentage of New York teens reporting having experienced

sexual violence at some point in their lives is higher than the national average (nationally, between 7% and 10.2% of 12-17-year-olds report having experienced some form of sexual assault.);

-- 89% of those who have experienced sexual violence knew the person who perpetrated the victimization;

-- 28% of those who reported having perpetrated sexual violence against their dating partner also reported having carried a weapon in the past month;

-- 60% of youth who were physically violent with their dating partners also reported having engaged in other physical fights in the last year;

-- Among those who experienced physical dating violence, more than one quarter (27.4%) reported having been pushed or shoved by a dating partner, and 17% reported having been slapped or hit;

-- Almost 10% of students who reported having a dating partner in the last year said that their partner touched them sexually when they didn't want to be touched and 6.7% said they were forced to have sex against their will;

-- Less than half (41.3%) of the students who self-identified as having experienced physical or sexual dating violence told someone about those experiences;

-- New York City high school students are most likely to tell their friends about sexual or dating violence. 71.8% told friends first. Only 12.8% first told a parent about the violence; 11.5% first told another adult;

-- Only 24.4% of youth experiencing sexual or physical dating violence

sought help from a health professional, teacher or guidance counselor;

-- Both victimization and perpetration of physical and sexual dating violence was linked with adverse health outcomes for these youth. Victims of sexual dating violence reported more frequent pain and illness symptoms that results in high physical discomfort (31%) and higher emotional discomfort (28%) than teens who have not experienced sexual dating violence (20% and 18% respectively), and

-- Likewise, victims of physical dating violence also reported poorer health status (28%) and lower self-esteem (25%) than youth who have not experienced physical dating violence (21% and 18% respectively).

Leslie Davidson, MD, professor of clinical Epidemiology at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and a lead researcher on the study, said "We know the long term adverse consequences on physical and emotional ill health from partner violence among youth. It is essential that New York City address this problem with a multi-faceted strategy."

"These data highlight the need for early identification, treatment as well as prevention," said Vaughn Rickert, PhD, professor of clinical Population and Family Health at the Mailman School of Public Health. "Unfortunately, funding for relationship violence among youth is not a priority. Funds need to be made available at the city, state, and federal levels in order to promote sound intervention and prevention strategies for youth."

"New York City's young people are subject to sexual and dating violence at rates far higher than national average, according to this study," said Harriet Lessel, executive director of the New City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. "These are alarming statistics any way you look at them, and we are hopeful that these findings will highlight an issue that has

been kept in the shadows for far too long, and encourage more young people to seek help when they are victimized. We are grateful to the New York City Council for funding this landmark study and to the New York City Department of Education for its courage in allowing such a research project to take place in city schools; the cooperation we received from the four school principals, the teachers, the parents and from the students was unprecedented."

Source: Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

Citation: Sexual violence study finds NY teens victimized at rate higher than national average (2008, June 27) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-06-sexual-violence-ny-teens-victimized.html>

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