

# Victims likely to talk when dating violence is witnessed

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Victims of teen dating violence are more likely to talk about the violence if a friend witnesses the incident, according to a new study.

Researchers from the University of Michigan and three other institutions conducted the study to understand what leads abused teens to seek help. The findings appear in the July issue of *Violence Against Women*, a scholarly journal that focuses on gender-based violence against women in all forms and across cultural and national boundaries.

"There are a number of possible reasons that teens are likely to talk about the violence if someone sees it," said Daniel Saunders, U-M professor of social work. "The witness to the violence might start the conversation out of concern or the victim might want to talk about their fear or embarrassment. Another possible reason is that the victim might feel comfortable discussing what has already been disclosed."

Fifty-seven victims of dating violence at an urban high school were asked questions about the worst episode of violence they experienced. Two-thirds of these episodes were observed by someone else.

"We tend to think of violence between intimates as being behind closed doors" said Beverly Black, the study's lead author and a professor at the University of Texas–Arlington School of Social Work. "We were surprised that in most cases someone witnessed the violence."

Most of those victimized said they talked with someone about the worst violence. Those who talked with someone always chose a friend. Only a small number talked with an adult as well.

The authors recommend that more information be available for teens on how best to respond to victimized friends. Current programs give specific do's and don't's for teens after an episode has ended. However, teens may need additional information on ways to respond immediately, the researchers said.

Another factor related to teen victims' willingness to talk about the violence was their view of the violence. If they viewed the perpetrator as angry or jealous, as opposed to controlling or protective, they were more likely to talk about the violence. The authors speculate that victims may be more frightened by angry and jealous forms of violence than by controlling forms. Alternatively, angry and jealous forms may be viewed as more "normal" or justified and thus less embarrassing to talk about.

The type and severity of violence and emotional hurt were not related to talking about the violence.

Black and Saunders collaborated with Richard Tolman from the University of Michigan, Arlene Weisz from Wayne State University, and Michelle Callahan of 360 Strategies in New York City.

Provided by University of Michigan

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