

Male college students also victims of violence at girlfriends' hands

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Thinking about a typical victim of college dating violence, you're probably imagining her, not him.

Researchers often think the same way, according to a Kansas State University expert on intimate partner violence. Sandra Stith, a professor of family studies and human services, said most research has looked at men as offenders and women as victims.

"In the research on college students in particular, we're finding both men and women can be perpetrators," she said. "In our growing-up years, we teach boys not hit their sister, but we don't teach girls not to hit their brother."

She and a K-State research team are looking at the impact that being a victim of violence has on male versus female college students in heterosexual relationships.

"Most research shows female victims having higher levels of depression, anxiety and school problems than nonvictims," Stith said. "Our research indicates that both male and female college students are being victims of violence, and we want to see how it affects both."

In 2008, Stith and her former student at Virginia Tech, Colleen Baker, published research in the *Journal of [Aggression](#), Maltreatment and Trauma* that found the biggest predictor of whether male and female college students would use violence against a partner was whether the

partner was violent toward them.

"It's a dramatically more important factor than anything else," Stith said. "If your girlfriend hits you, that dramatically increases the likelihood that you're going to hit her, and vice versa."

In general, Stith said there are lower levels of violence among college couples than among married or cohabiting couples, and the violence is more likely to involve shoving and pushing by both men and women.

"Previous research indicates that as young people grow up, the violence may become less frequent or severe or it may be eliminated," Stith said. "Sometimes it's about immaturity."

Although alcohol is often a factor in violence among older couples who are married or in long-term relationships, Stith said drinking -- particularly binge drinking -- plays a big part in college student violence. Other factors include a lack of anger management skills and having grown up with parents who are violent with one another.

"When students get angry with their boyfriend or girlfriend, violence sometimes seems to be the normal thing to do," she said.

Stith said when researching alcohol problems, she found that college students often had different standards for themselves when it came to what constitutes a drinking problem. Whereas they see themselves as just partying and participating in normal college life, they would say an older, professional adult behaving the same way has a problem with alcohol.

"I think they might be normalizing their aggressive behaviors, too," she said. "They may think that when they're drinking and get angry and she slaps him and he grabs her, that it's not domestic violence. They may

think that domestic violence is what happens in married people's lives."

Stith said one of her basic philosophies is that society needs to work toward ending all violence, not just male violence.

"We need to address female violence, too," she said. "We need to say that when you're in a relationship with someone you care about, you don't hit and you don't kick."

Provided by Kansas State University

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