

research snapshot

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Dating Aggression Is a Global Problem Among Teens

What is this research about?

In recent years, dating aggression has been identified as a serious problem among teenagers. Between 30% and 50% of teenagers report having experienced some form of physical aggression while dating. The most common forms include slapping, pushing, and making threats. But more severe acts of violence can occur as well. Girls are just as likely as boys to report committing acts of aggression, although it is important to note that research does not tell us about girls' and boys' intentions and so it is premature to conclude that boys and girls are similarly aggressive.

Much of the research on dating aggression comes from studies of teens in North America, especially the United States and Canada. Some studies, however, suggest that aggressive dating behaviour might be a global problem. But it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about how this phenomenon might differ from country to country. And it is unclear if the risk factors that lead to dating aggression are common across national borders.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers set out to compare dating aggression among teenagers in Canada and Italy. They also looked at some of the risk factors that lead to aggression. Using questionnaires, they interviewed over 1200 teenagers – 664 from Canada and 578

What you need to know:

Dating aggression is a global problem among teenagers. International efforts need to focus on prevention.

from Italy. The teenagers were 16 years old, in high school, and mostly from middleclass, two-parent households.

What did the researchers find?

Researchers found that dating aggression among adolescents is a global problem and not unique to teenagers in North America. The rates of aggression among teens in Canada and Italy are similar. Both girls and boys reported acts of aggression. However, there appear to be some cultural differences in the risk factors that lead to aggression. In both countries, relationships with a lot of conflict are a risk for aggression. But power imbalances – in which one member of the relationship is seen to be more in control than the other – lead to more instances of physical aggression in Italy than they do in Canada. Italian culture has a more conservative view of gender roles, which clearly has an impact on romantic relationships.

How can you use this research?

This research will be of interest to decision-makers and researchers who want to understand and prevent adolescent dating aggression. International prevention programs need to be developed to help reduce the occurrence of dating aggression. Governments need to support healthy relationships for youth in all countries.

By studying teenagers across national borders, researchers will improve our understanding of the common risk factors that lead to dating aggression. Power dynamics may be a key area for future study since girls in Canada and Italy experience less power and control than boys. Given that imbalances of power lead to more aggression in Italy, more research on power dynamics is crucial. Further, power imbalances may also be a problem in Canada. They may just emerge later on among teens. It is also possible that teens who are prone to aggression are more likely to date one another. Further research is needed, especially on teens from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

About the Researchers

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