



# International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Prevalence of teen dating victimization among a representative sample of high school students in Quebec

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Received 16 February 2017; accepted 6 June 2017

### KEYWORDS

Dating violence;  
Adolescence;  
Post-traumatic stress  
symptoms;  
Prevalence;  
Descriptive survey  
study.

**Abstract** *Background/Objective:* The present study aimed to (1) examine prevalence rates and frequency of dating violence victimization among a representative sample of Quebec high school adolescents and (2) explore possible gender differences in these rates as well as in perceived impact of victimization. *Method:* A sample of 8,194 students completed questionnaires evaluating dating victimization in the past 12 months as well as perceived impacts. *Results:* Results show that psychological violence is the most frequent form of dating victimization reported. Girls are more likely to report experiences of psychological, physical, threatening behaviors as well as sexual dating victimization than boys. Analyses on different indicators of the impact of victimization (i.e. feelings of fear, distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms) reveal that teenage girls are more vulnerable to sustaining more pervasive impacts than boys. *Conclusions:* The findings underscore dating violence as a prevalent public health problem. A significant number of teens report dating victimization with girls more likely than boys to perceive negative impacts associated with the coercive behaviors experienced.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2017.06.001>

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Please cite this article in press as: Hébert, M., et al. Prevalence of teen dating victimization among a representative sample of high school students in Quebec. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2017.06.001>

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Violencia De Pareja;  
adolescentes;  
síntomas de estrés  
postraumático;  
prevalencia;  
Estudio descriptivo.

**Prevalencia de victimización entre adolescentes en una muestra representativa de estudiantes de Secundaria de Quebec**

**Resumen** *Antecedentes/Objetivo:* El presente estudio tuvo como objetivos: a) examinar las tasas de prevalencia y la frecuencia de la victimización de la violencia en parejas en una muestra representativa de adolescentes de Secundaria de Quebec y b) explorar diferencias por sexo en esas tasas, así como en el impacto percibido de la victimización. *Método:* Una muestra de 8.194 estudiantes respondió cuestionarios que evalúan la victimización en las relaciones de pareja adolescente en los últimos 12 meses, además del impacto percibido. *Resultados:* La violencia psicológica es la forma más frecuente de victimización en parejas adolescentes. Las chicas fueron más proclives a reportar violencia psicológica, física y comportamientos amenazantes, así como victimización sexual que los chicos. Los diversos indicadores del impacto de la violencia en las relaciones de pareja adolescente (miedo, sentimientos de angustia y síntomas de estrés postraumático) revelan que las mujeres son más vulnerables a sufrir impactos más generalizados que los varones. *Conclusiones:* La violencia en las relaciones de parejas adolescentes es un problema de salud pública. Un número significativo de adolescentes informó haber sido víctima en sus relaciones de pareja, con las mujeres con más probabilidades que los varones de percibir impactos negativos asociados.

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Adolescence is a crucial stage of development associated with a number of challenges related to intimacy and the emergence of early romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 2014; Van de Bongardt, Yu, Deković, & Meeus, 2015). Healthy romantic relationships during adolescence are linked to positive outcomes including higher self-esteem, sense of social competence and skill building for long-term partnership (Fisher, 2016). However, a considerable proportion of teenagers are likely to sustain victimization in the context of their first romantic relationships and experience significant distress. A recent meta-analytic review of 101 studies of teen dating violence (TDV) prevalence revealed rates of physical violence ranging from 1% to 61% and those for sexual violence between less than 1% and 54% with an overall meta-analytic combination rate of 20% for physical TDV and 9% for sexual TDV (Wincentak, Connolly, & Card, 2017). Psychological violence was not considered in the meta-analysis, yet findings from an international review on North-American and European studies reported rates of psychological TDV varying from 17% to 88% (Leen et al., 2013). This wide variability observed among all forms of dating victimization can be attributed to a host of different factors, mainly operational, methodological and sampling discrepancies. Despite these differences, researchers are in accordance that a significant proportion of youths have experienced psychological and physical violence as well as sexual coercion in their first dating relationships.

Although previous studies have provided prevalence rates of TDV, several limitations remain in the current body of research. More specifically, few studies have investigated prevalence estimates of different forms of TDV concurrently, outcomes specifically related to victimization experiences as well as gender differences in representative samples. When assessing TDV victimization experiences, more insidious forms, such as threatening behaviors, are

rarely considered separately. However, the presence of threats can be more telling of the nature of abusive behavior in adolescent relationships and are equally important to consider since they often precede more severe acts of violence (Wolfe et al., 2001). Moreover, most surveys failed to assess sexual TDV or often focalized on forced sex using ambiguous terms, omitted sexual assault that didn't include completed sexual intercourse and neglected alcohol/drug induced sexual coercion (Hamby, 2009).

A number of findings are still at issue, namely the question of gender disparity in the prevalence of victimization as well as in severity of associated outcomes. For instance, no significant gender difference in victimization rates were highlighted in a recent household survey of 1,804 youth ages 12-18 with 19.6% of boys and 15.3% of girls reporting physical TDV in the U.S. (Taylor & Mumford, 2016). Similarly, prevalence of sexual victimization was found to be similar for girls (17.8%) and boys (18.2%). Psychological violence was the form of TDV most frequently reported, with similar disclosure rates among boys (65.7%) and girls (65.3%) (Taylor & Mumford, 2016).

These results are in sharp contrast with the most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey in which 9,900 students in dating relationships completed the survey (Vagi, Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015). With the inclusion of sexual TDV for the first time in the CDC national survey, prevalence of distinct forms of TDV in the past 12 months was analyzed. All prevalence rates were found to be higher in teenage girls than for boys, namely physical only TDV (6.6 vs. 4.1%), sexual only TDV (8.0% vs. 2.9%), both physical and sexual TDV (6.4% vs. 3.3%) and either physical or sexual TDV (20.9% vs. 10.4%).

A population-based study conducted in the province of Quebec assessed TDV over the last 12 months among high

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