Adolescent Help-Seeking for Dating Violence: Prevalence, Sociodemographic Correlates, and Sources of Help


Surveys have reported prevalence rates of adolescent physical and/or sexual dating violence ranging up to 25%. Prior research on help-seeking patterns has typically focused on female victims at domestic violence shelters and/or on victims in adult relationships. Research was needed to explore help-seeking patterns of adolescents from the general population who were in violent dating relationships.

This paper reported (1) the prevalence of help-seeking by adolescent dating violence victims and perpetrators, (2) sociodemographic correlates of adolescent help-seeking for dating violence, (3) the sources from whom adolescents seek help for dating violence, and (4) correlates of the helping sources that adolescents choose. No previous studies have assessed actual help-seeking by adolescents for dating violence.

Data are from the 225 victims and 140 perpetrators of dating violence identified from a study of adolescent dating violence conducted in the public school system of a primarily rural North Carolina county. We used logistic regression to examine bivariate and multivariate relationships between study variables and help-seeking or sources of help.

In this study, most adolescents did not seek help for dating violence. Female perpetrators and young perpetrators were least likely to seek help. Most adolescents who sought help turned to friends and family. Male victims and perpetrators who sought help were more likely than female victims and perpetrators to choose professional sources. Little is currently known about the relationships among gender, age, and help-seeking for adolescent dating violence in other areas of the country.

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