

# Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Perpetration Among Youth in Hawai'i

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of the current study was to examine the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among teens in Hawai'i.

**Methods:** Youth from two O'ahu high schools (N = 623) were asked to complete a quantitative survey about their experiences, as victims and perpetrators, of IPV.

**Results:** The most frequently reported type of violence was monitoring/controlling behaviors. Girls reported higher rates of victimization and perpetration than boys for most violence types.

**Conclusions:** Future research should examine the contexts in which teen IPV occurs. It will also be important to engage community-based organizations in prevention efforts. Therefore, a train-the-trainer curriculum for IPV prevention and intervention is proposed.

Reducing violence within intimate relationships has been a research focus for many years, though most studies have been on preventing violence in adult relationships. Attention has shifted to the need to address violence in adolescent dating relationships as these experiences likely are precursors to later relationship violence and have been associated with poor school and health outcomes for teens.<sup>1-5</sup> In particular, adolescent intimate partner violence (IPV) has been linked with drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and attempting suicide.<sup>2</sup>

Recent studies have shown that adolescent IPV is prevalent in the United States, with rates ranging from 10-65% depending on the definitions of violence and the research methods used.<sup>5-8</sup> Using a conservative definition where only severe forms of physical and sexual aggression were included, results from one probability sample showed that one in five adolescent high school girls have experienced dating violence.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, using a broader definition that includes acts of verbal and psychological abuse, studies showed that almost half of adolescents reported experiences as a victim, perpetrator, or both.<sup>10-12</sup>

Data are limited regarding the prevalence of IPV among Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Asian American youth, with the exception of a few studies that have shed light on these populations. According to Hawai'i-based research conducted in 2003, 58% of the sample, which included Filipino American, Japanese American, Native Hawaiian, and Samoan adolescents, reported experiencing emotional dating violence, including verbal abuse and controlling behaviors.<sup>13</sup> Ramisetty-Mikler, Goebert, Nishimura, and Caetano found in a sample of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and European American adolescents that almost 8% reported physical dating violence, with no sex differences in the rates.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, according to the Hawai'i Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS), which is completed by youth in grades 9-12, 14% of girls and 17% of boys reported experiencing physical violence by their partners in the previous 12 months.<sup>15</sup> An important caveat with the last two studies on physical dating violence is that they are based on data from the YRBS, which includes a single question on IPV victimization; participants are asked: "During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend or girlfriend ever hit, slap, or physically hurt you on purpose?"

Therefore, to fill the gap in our understanding of IPV victimization and perpetration of emotional, physical, and sexual violence among Hawai'i adolescents, this study presents data collected in 2007 from a high school-based sample. Also, given the increased attention on teens' use of social electronic media (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, YouTube), as well as one national online survey showing that dating abuse via technology is a problem,<sup>16-18</sup> the current study will present data on the rates of adolescent IPV victimization and perpetration involving the use of social electronic media.

## Methods

The authors sought to collect information that would be useful to prevention educators in Hawai'i. Therefore, first, a qualitative study was conducted using focus group interviews to gather youth perceptions of IPV among teens. Then, a quantitative survey was developed to measure baseline prevalence rates of adolescent IPV, with the goal of building an empirical model to inform prevention activities. The survey was administered at two schools, and occurred about six months after the focus groups (which were also conducted at these schools) during the same academic school year. This paper presents youth self-reported prevalence rates of IPV victimization and perpetration on the quantitative survey. (For methodological details and results published from the focus groups, refer to Baker & Helm, 2010).<sup>19</sup>

## Participant Demographics

A total of 881 youths participated in the survey. To examine the prevalence of IPV, it was necessary to determine whether teens had been in a dating relationship in the past year. Therefore, participants were asked whether they had a boyfriend, girlfriend, ever "gone out" (defined as on a date or hung out romantically) or had a romantic relationship with someone in the past year. If yes, participants were asked to complete questions relating to IPV. A little over 70% of the total sample (n=623; 76% for girls and 66% for boys) answered "yes" to this question. Sample demographics and subsequent prevalence rates are based only on youth who had "dated" in the past year. Participants' ethnocultural groups included Native Hawaiian (n=160, 26.8%), Samoan or other Pacific Islander (n=41, 6.9%), Filipino (n=266, 44.6%), Asian (not Filipino, n=59, 9.9%), and other (n=71, 11.4%). [Ethnicity was operationally defined by asking students how they would describe their ethnic background. Participants were categorized as follows: Hawaiians = some Hawaiian ancestry because the large majority of Hawaiians are of mixed ancestry (US Bureau of Census, 2000). Therefore Native Hawaiian is typically defined as someone with any Hawaiian heritage. In this study, Hawaiian youth could be mixed with other ancestries such as Filipino, Samoan, Japanese, and White, for example. Samoan has at least some Samoan ancestry but no Hawaiian and Filipino heritage. Filipino has at least some Filipino ancestry but no Hawaiian and Samoan heritage.] Of those reporting a dating relationship, n=393 (63.8%) were girls, and n=223 (36.2%) were boys. [This discrepancy between male and female respondents was

the same for the sample as a whole; approximately two-thirds of the total sample was female.] Just over 25.5% of the sample were 9th graders, 31.5% were 10th graders, 27% were 11th graders, and 16% were 12th graders.

### **Survey Protocol**

The survey was administered to students as a paper-pencil, self-report questionnaire. Student responses were anonymous; no identifying information could be linked to the student's responses. The methods for the quantitative study were reviewed and approved by the University of Hawai'i Committee on Human Studies.

The IPV data reported here were collected as part of a larger epidemiological study on youth violence and risk and protective factors. The survey was based on a prior survey developed by the Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center, and was updated using data from focus group interviews with teens, community partners, work groups, and recent empirical evidence gathered from national experts. The survey topics were divided into 12 sections, including demographics, ethnic identity, violence/fighting, dating violence, substance use, suicidality, depression, and school attitudes, to name a few. In particular, IPV victimization and perpetration were measured by items representing four types of violence: (1) emotional, 2) physical, 3) sexual, and 4) monitoring and controlling behaviors, including using social electronic media. Items representing the first three types were taken from a previous study on adolescent IPV.<sup>20</sup> Items related to monitoring and controlling behaviors were developed from teen responses during prior focus group interviews.<sup>19</sup> Respondents were asked whether they had experienced or perpetrated these behaviors "never," "once," "2-3 times," or "4 or more times" in the past year. Reliability for the IPV scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with results indicating excellent reliability at 0.89.

Emotional IPV consisted of 6 items, including: "my partner turned some of my friends against me;" and "my partner insulted me with put-downs." Physical IPV consisted of 3 items: "my partner slapped me or pulled my hair;" "my partner threw something at me;" and "my partner pushed, shoved, or shook me." Sexual violence was comprised of two questions: "my partner touched me sexually when I didn't want to be touched" and "my partner forced me to have sex when I didn't want to." Monitoring and controlling consisted of 3 items, including: "my partner went through my cell phone to check my calls or text messages;" "my partner kept track of whom I was with and where I was" and "my partner went through a personal website (like MySpace or Friendster page) to check up on who I was communicating with." Participants were asked to answer questions twice: once to assess victimization and secondly to assess perpetration.

### **Data Analysis**

Violence items were recoded as dichotomous variables, into either 0 (no victimization or perpetration) or 1 (any victimization or perpetration). Any answer of 1, 2-3, or 4+ times was coded as 1, indicating exposure to IPV. Recoding allowed for analyses on sex differences, as several items were positively skewed in that few students reported some types of violence more than once (e.g., sexual violence). Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine significant sex differences on the individual victimization and perpetration items as well as on the subscales representing the four types of violence.

## **Results**

Data on prevalence rates and sex differences related to the IPV victimization and perpetration questions, and the subscales representing the four types of IPV, are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

### **Emotional Violence**

With respect to girls' and boys' victimization, the most prevalent forms of emotional violence were the same, and involved dating partners who did something to make them jealous or insulted them with put-downs. These two forms also were perpetrated most often by girls and boys against their dating partners. Analyses indicated that girls self-reported significantly higher rates of victimization and perpetration compared to boys.

### **Physical Violence**

Girls and boys in dating relationships reported various forms of physical violence, though to a lesser degree than emotional violence. The most prevalent forms of victimization experienced by both girls and boys were partners who threw something at them, or slapped or pulled their hair. These same acts were identified as most commonly perpetrated by girls and boys. Sex differences were significant and showed that boys reported higher rates of victimization, while girls reported higher rates of perpetration.

### **Sexual Violence**

Though not as prevalent as emotional and physical violence, girls and boys in dating relationships reported sexual violence. For both victimization and perpetration, the most prevalent form reported by girls and boys was having a partner who touched them sexually when they did not want to be touched. There were significant sex differences, with girls more often victims and boys more often perpetrators of sexual violence.

### **Monitoring and Controlling Behaviors**

Girls and boys in dating relationships reported high rates of monitoring and controlling behaviors. For victimization, the most prevalent forms reported by girls and boys were partners who went through a personal website to check up on what they were doing and partners who kept track of who they were with and where they were. These same behaviors were the most often perpetrated as well. Significant sex differences were evident in monitoring and controlling behaviors. For both victimization and perpetration, girls self-reported significantly higher rates.

## **Discussion**

Results show that IPV among Hawai'i teens is prevalent. The most frequently reported type of violence was monitoring and controlling behaviors. Next, almost 60% of teens reported experiencing emotional violence. Although physical and sexual violence were reported less often; these rates were not inconsequential at 29% and 21%, respectively. Rates of perpetration were similar to victimization for each type of violence, with the exception of sexual violence where teens reported lower rates of perpetration compared to victimization.

In addition to examining overall prevalence rates, sex differences were analyzed. Results showed that girls were more often victims of emotional, sexual, and monitoring and controlling IPV by their

Table 1. Percentages of IPV Victimization and Perpetration			
Violence Items	Total N = 623	Sex	
		Boys N = 223	Girls N = 393
<b>Victimization (My partner...)</b>			
<b>Emotional</b>			
Did something just to make me jealous.	47.0	41.4	50.1 *
Insulted me with put-downs.	26.9	25.0	28.0
Has threatened to commit suicide to get me to stay with him/her.	17.1	7.9	22.1 ***
Turned some of my friends against me.	16.7	15.2	17.5
Destroyed or threatened to destroy something I valued.	12.9	12.4	13.1
Threatened me or deliberately tried to frighten me.	11.4	6.0	14.4 **
<b>Physical</b>			
Threw something at me.	18.0	23.4 **	14.9
Pushed, shoved, or shook me.	16.1	18.1	14.9
Slapped me or pulled my hair.	15.3	21.4**	11.9
<b>Sexual</b>			
Touched me sexually when I didn't want to be touched.	17.6	9.6	22.1 ***
Forced me to have sex when I didn't want to.	9.1	3.7	12.1 ***
<b>Monitoring</b>			
Kept track of whom I was with and where I was.	49.6	41.9	53.9 **
Went through my cell phone to check calls or text messages.	47.5	40.7	51.3 *
Went through a personal website (like a MySpace or Friendster page) to check up on who I was communicating with.	39.5	35.7	41.6
<b>Perpetration (I...)</b>			
<b>Emotional</b>			
Did something just to make my partner jealous.	41.9	25.1	51.3***
Insulted my partner with put-downs.	25.1	17.8	29.1**
Turned friends against my partner.	10.6	6.0	13.2**
Threatened or deliberately tried to frighten my partner.	8.1	5.7	9.4
Destroyed or threatened to destroy something my partner valued.	6.8	3.3	8.8**
<b>Physical</b>			
Threw something at my partner.	16.9	7.9	21.9***
Slapped my partner or pulled his/her hair.	16.6	5.6	22.7***
Pushed, shoved, or shook my partner.	16.0	10.3	19.2**
<b>Sexual</b>			
Touched my partner sexually when she/he didn't want to be touched.	5.1	7.9*	3.6
Forced my partner to have sex when he/she didn't want to.†	1.0	1.4	0.8
<b>Monitoring</b>			
Went through a personal website (like a MySpace or Friendster page) to check up on who my partner was communicating with.	44.8	34.4	50.5***
Kept track of who my partner was with and where he/she was.	44.2	31.6	51.2***
Went through my partner's cell phone to check calls or text messages.	41.8	30.7	47.9***

\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < 0.05$ , using chi-square analyses. \*\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < 0.01$ , using chi-square analyses. \*\*\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < .001$ , using chi-square analyses. † Chi-square analyses not conducted because of low expected cell counts.

dating partners. By contrast, boys reported being victims of physical violence more often than girls. Regarding perpetration, with the exception of sexual violence (where rates for boys were higher) girls had higher rates than boys. These findings are consistent with previous research where girls report higher rates of perpetration.<sup>21,22</sup>

There are many reasons for the discrepancy in rates between boys

and girls. Underreporting is likely, especially with some types of violence (e.g., sexual violence). It may be that boys who are victims of sexual violence do not report; similarly, boys who perpetrate sexual violence may also underreport this behavior. Also, adolescent IPV does not simply occur in heterosexual relationships. It may be that some of the teens in this sample were in same-sex relationships, thus

Table 2. IPV Victimization and Perpetration by Sex						
	Total (N = 623)		Sex			
			Boys (N = 223)		Girls (N = 393)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Victimization</b>						
Emotional	368	59.7	117	52.5	251	63.9**
Physical	177	28.7	79	35.4 **	98	24.9
Sexual	124	20.6	25	11.6	99	25.7***
Monitoring	400	66.3	129	60.3	271	69.7 *
<b>Perpetration</b>						
Emotional	322	53.6	78	36.6	244	62.9 ***
Physical	169	28.0	36	16.7	133	34.3 ***
Sexual	33	5.5	18	8.4 *	15	3.9
Monitoring	370	61.4	102	47.4	268	69.1 ***

\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < 0.05$ , using chi-square analyses.

\*\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < 0.01$ , using chi-square analyses.

\*\*\* Significantly higher than its sex counterpart,  $p < .001$ , using chi-square analyses.

affecting the prevalence rates for boys and girls. Clearly, additional research is needed to better understand these discrepancies.

Another caveat is that the measure used in the current study did not assess the context of these behaviors. This issue has become one of the most prominent in teen IPV research.<sup>23</sup> Although etiological research that seeks to explain why teen IPV occurs is just getting started, it is clear that explanations posited for understanding adult female IPV perpetration are insufficient. Previous research suggests that self-defense is one reason for adult female perpetration; however, this explanation may not be as salient for teen IPV. Recent studies have shown that girls report anger as the primary factor for using violence.<sup>23,24</sup> Research also suggests that females use violence to respond to violence that males perpetrate against them, not in self-defense but rather as a reaction, or in some limited cases as retaliation.<sup>25</sup> Additional work is needed to understand the complexity of teen relationships, and that moves beyond measuring acts of violence. In particular, quantitative measures that assess context, including teens' reasons for perpetrating IPV, are needed. Qualitative research also will be important and possibly a precursor to surveillance research, to examine more thoroughly the many facets of girls' social ecology. The context in which teen IPV occurs is laced with other risk factors such as substance abuse, peer/family/school pressures, and societal gender role expectations of girls (e.g., to be in a relationship, even if it is unhealthy), all of which may help explain girls' higher rates of perpetration.

### Limitations

Data are based on responses from students at two public high schools on O'ahu. The extent to which prevalence rates are reflective of adolescents across the state (including those in private schools or not in school) is not known. Additional research is needed with adolescents in multiple settings on all islands in order to capture a more representative picture of adolescent IPV in Hawai'i. In addition, the data are self-reported. Therefore, it is possible that these prevalence rates are an underestimate, especially for the perpetration of physical and sexual violence. For example, students may not have wanted to admit to perpetrating acts of violence against their

partners, even on an anonymous survey. That said, the prevalence of IPV endorsed by teens was quite high, with rates for some types higher than in samples from the continental US.

### Implications for Practice/Intervention

Given high rates of adolescent IPV, as shown in the current study, it will be important for schools, community-based organizations (CBOs), and health clinics, among others, to address this problem through prevention education curricula or specific intervention programming. In particular, highlighting the prevalence of IPV as well as teen's use of social electronic media to perpetrate IPV will be important to include. Recently, several studies have shown how often teens use social media and for what purpose.<sup>17-19</sup> The current study's findings support this literature, and suggest that our conception of IPV may need to be expanded to consider monitoring and controlling behaviors as a new "type" of IPV, perhaps as a subgroup of emotional IPV or as its own group. Therefore, raising awareness about the dangers that come with social media use is a necessary next step, not only for teens but for parents, many of whom may not be as technologically savvy as their teenage sons and daughters. However, challenges exist as many organizations are overloaded in terms of limited staffing, staff inexperience in addressing this issue, and the limited time allotted to IPV prevention in the face of other competing demands.

To address these challenges, an increased number of staff trained to implement IPV prevention in their current day-to-day activities is required. Furthermore, there is evidence that IPV is correlated with other types of issues for teens, such as substance abuse.<sup>15</sup> As such, organizations that are implementing substance abuse interventions also can include information on the relationship between IPV and drug use. In this way, teens are exposed to information that is more fitting with their overall experiences. It also may help to ensure that organizations with limited time to address multiple teen issues can do so more efficiently. Integrating IPV prevention with existing education/services could potentially improve the effects of drug prevention programs. For example, it is difficult to tell teens to stop using drugs or alcohol when their dating partners may be pressuring them into it. In this case, the decision for teens may not be clear; if they stop drinking or using drugs it may cost them their relationship. With the integration of these two issues (IPV and substance abuse) health clinics and CBOs may appeal more effectively to adolescents' reality and context.

To address this practice/intervention gap, the University of Hawai'i (UH) is developing a "train-the-trainer" teen IPV curriculum that can be implemented in a variety of settings. The curriculum includes modules on raising awareness of adolescent IPV, risk and protective factors associated with adolescent IPV, ideas for integrating IPV prevention into existing programs, and an introduction to evaluating IPV prevention activities. To disseminate this curriculum, UH is partnering with the Hawai'i Youth Services Network and will begin offering trainings beginning Spring 2011.

### Conclusion

Data from Hawai'i show that IPV among teens is prevalent, with monitoring and controlling behaviors the most insidious. To inform prevention and intervention activities, it is necessary to gather additional qualitative information related to the context in which IPV



occurs, and how this context may be different for boys and girls. Health and other service providers can be helpful in this endeavor. Finally, given the recent budget cuts in Hawai'i, it will be important to devise strategies that address adolescent IPV efficiently. Therefore, equipping program staff with information on IPV and how to integrate this information into existing activities may increase the likelihood that IPV is addressed, and thus reduced among teens in Hawai'i.

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