

Teens and domestic violence

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October is recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness month, and although domestic violence is mostly associated with adults, an expert at Baylor College of Medicine says teens too often experience this type of abuse.

"In general when we think about [domestic violence](#) among teens we really think more about intimate [partner](#) violence," said Ruth Buzi, associate professor and director of social services at the Baylor Teen Health Clinic.

Intimate partner violence can be subdivided into four different categories:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Threat of physical or sexual violence
- Psychological and [emotional abuse](#)

Physical and sexual violence are normally identified as the worst forms of intimate partner violence; however, psychological and emotional abuse are very significant among teens, Buzi said.

"All forms of intimate partner violence are damaging to teens. If you think about where they are developmentally, it is important to support them because those forms of relationships can be so discouraging and effect teens in many negative, long-lasting ways," she said.

According to Buzi, one in 10 teens experience rape through intimate partner violence, one in six experience sexual abuse other than rape, one in four experience severe physical violence and one in two experience psychological aggression.

Among teens, domestic violence that affects reproductive health is common and is done to maintain control and power over the relationship, she said.

"What we see is coercion around reproductive healthcare," Buzi said. "Partners are more likely to jeopardize use of contraceptives because if a girl becomes pregnant, she is likely to stay in the relationship. This jealousy and need to control the partner can affect the choices of the girls, especially girls who are engaged in a relationship where violence is present and are afraid to insist on condom use."

Domestic violence among teens is more likely to occur when drugs and alcohol are present, and it is commonly associated with family and [community violence](#). Teens who observe [family violence](#), either male or female, may assume it is okay to act that way. They learn to accept that this is what it takes to be in a relationship, and intimate partner [violence](#) becomes normal.

Buzi says signs of [intimate partner violence](#) as either a perpetrator or victim can result in these types of behavioral and physical changes:

- Pattern changes
- Less interest in school
- Losing friends due to partner control
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bruises

Any type of behavior change that occurs when a teen is in a [relationship](#) may suggest that there is some type of abuse occurring. Parents who begin to notice these changes are advised to check in with their [teen](#), acknowledge the behavioral changes and seek additional help.

"It is important to educate teens that they do not deserve to be treated in an abusive way. They should know that they deserve to be respected, treated with fairness and allowed to be happy and pursue life goals. Abusive relationships are unhealthy, and anyone has the right to live their life free of abuse," Buzi said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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