

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10th at 9:00AM EST

Teen Dating Abuse 2009 Key Topline Findings

Liz Claiborne Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund commissioned research to quantify levels of Teen Dating Abuse, better understand Parental Engagement on the issue, and determine if the Economy had an impact.

Key Findings: American teens from across the country are experiencing alarmingly high levels of abuse in their dating relationships, and the economy appears to have made it worse. Nearly half of all teens whose families have experienced economic problems in the past year report having witnessed their parents abusing each other. These teens report a higher incidence of abuse in their own dating relationships.

Parents are disturbingly out of touch with the level of teen dating violence and abuse among their teens. The large majority of abused teens are not informing parents and, even when they do, most stay in abusive relationships.

Methodology in Brief

TRU was commissioned to conduct quantitative research among teens who have been in a relationship (ages 13-18) and parents of teens (ages 11-18) about young dating relationships and the presence/absence of abusive behaviors. TRU independently sampled the two groups and fielded a customized 15-minute survey online to both groups from April 10 to May 5, 2009. TRU recommended online as the data-collection method for this research not only because of its high penetration (93%) among this population, but also because of the sensitive nature of the content of this survey, allowing young people to answer candidly (i.e., no adult interviewer) within the context of their preferred communications method. A total of 1,233 teens and 500 parents completed the survey, resulting in a margin of error (at the 95% confidence level) of ± 2.8 percentage points for teens in total, and ± 4.4 percentage points for parents.



I. Incidences of Teen Dating Abuse are unexpectedly high. Nearly 1 in 3 report actual sexual abuse, physical abuse, or threats of physical abuse. Nearly 1 in 4 have been victimized through technology, and nearly 1 in 2 teens in relationships report being controlled, threatened, and pressured to do things they did not want to do.

| | |
|-----|---|
| 47% | Have personally been victimized by controlling behaviors from a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 29% | Have been the victim of sexual abuse, physical abuse, or threats of physical abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 24% | Have been victimized by the use of technology from a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 11% | Have been the victim of verbal abuse from a boyfriend or girlfriend |

- > Further, extremely high numbers of teens know **someone their age** who has experienced abuse in their dating relationships.

| | |
|-----|---|
| 80% | Know someone who has been a victim of controlling behaviors from a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 60% | Know someone who has been the victim of sexual abuse, physical abuse, or threats of physical abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 51% | Know someone who has been victimized via the use of technology from a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 35% | Know someone who has been the victim of verbal abuse from a boyfriend or girlfriend |

*See key on last page for specific acts included in abusive behavior categories above



II. There appears to be a link between the economy, higher levels of violence and abuse between parents, and teens' own experience with dating violence and abuse.

- > Nearly three-fourths (**74%**) of all teens surveyed report their families have experienced economic problems in the past year.
- > Nearly half of these teens (**44%**) report witnessing some form of violent or abusive behavior between their parents. These behaviors include repeated verbal abuse (35%), severe controlling behavior (27%), or physical abuse and threats (18%).
- > Notably, **67%** of these same teens experienced some form of dating violence and abuse themselves (vs. 45% of teens who have not witnessed domestic violence between their parents).
- > Teens who have witnessed domestic violence and abuse between their parents experience abuse at a **50%** higher rate than those who have not witnessed abuse.



III. Despite the high numbers of teens experiencing abuse, parents are dangerously out of touch with the level of dating violence and abuse taking place in their children’s lives.

> Nearly two-thirds of parents (**63%**) whose children have been in a dating relationship say dating violence and abuse have not been a problem for their teens, but the data shows otherwise.

» Parents are unaware of specific types of abuse that their teens are experiencing.

| | % of relationship teens who say they’ve been a victim | % of parents who are unaware of abuse in teen’s relationship |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Controlling behaviors | 47% | 67% |
| Tech abuse | 24% | 82% |
| Verbal abuse | 19% | 88% |
| Sexual abuse | 17% | 90% |
| Physical abuse | 12% | 90% |

Parents feel confident they can spot the signs of abuse, but they are mistaken:

> Though **82%** of parents feel confident that they could recognize the signs if their child was experiencing dating abuse, a majority of parents (**58%**) could not correctly identify all the warning signs of abuse.

> While nearly **two-thirds** of parents claim to be comfortable talking to their teen about the most serious aspects of dating abuse and **75%** of parents say they have had a conversation with their teen about what it means to be in a healthy relationship, the research shows these conversations between parents and teens have not been effective.



IV. The majority of teens in abusive relationships have not confided in their parents. When these teens do confide in their parents, significant numbers do not heed parents' advice.

Of those who have been in an abusive dating relationship, fewer than one-third (32%) have confided in a parent about their abusive relationship.

- > But when they do have conversations, significant numbers of teens do not take their parents' advice. Alarminglly, **78%** of teens who have experienced *dating abuse* report **staying in relationships** despite their parents' advice.

When encouraged by their parent to break up with their boyfriend/girlfriend due to abusive behavior, teens...

| | Abused Teens |
|--|---------------------|
| ... decided to give their boyfriend/girlfriend one more chance | 63% |
| ... listened to parents advice, but decided not to break up | 62% |
| ... ignored their advice because they profess love for their boyfriend or girlfriend | 31% |
| ... lied to parents, telling them they broke up, simply to get them "off their back," but continued the relationship | 28% |
| ...have done at least one of the above | 78% |



V. Overall, despite its prevalence, dating abuse remains hidden and is not being talked about by teens and parents.

- > **74%** of sons and **66%** of daughters say they have *not* had a conversation about dating abuse with a parent in the past year.
- > Only **28%** of teens say they have had a conversation about dating abuse with **Mom**, and fewer than half as many (**13%**), say they have had a dating abuse conversation with **Dad**.
 - » The frequency of parent-teen conversations about the topic of abuse pales in comparison to that of other tough issues. While fewer than 1 in 3 (**31%**) teens have talked to parents about dating abuse in the past year, more than **6 out of 10** teens have had a conversation with a parent in the past year about...
 - Drugs (**71%**)
 - Alcohol (**71%**)
 - Sex (**64%**)

Among teens whose families have experienced economic problems in the past year, conversations about dating abuse are drowned out by talks about money.

- > **71%** of teens whose families have been affected by the economy in the past year have **NOT** had a conversation with a parent about dating abuse.
- > In comparison, more than **8 out of 10** of these teens say **they HAVE had** a conversation with a parent about:
 - » Money (**92%**)
 - » The economy in general (**86%**)
 - » Family finances (**82%**)



VI. Teens are not talking to their parents or other authority figures about abuse.

- > **80%** of teens who've been in an abusive relationship have turned to a friend for help.
- » Fewer than **1 in 3** have...

| | Abused Teens |
|--|--------------|
| ... talked to a parent | 32% |
| ... gone to a website or online resources for help | 21% |
| ... talked to a school counselor or social worker | 15% |
| ...called an abuse help line | 5% |



VII. Conversations on dating abuse are difficult and unproductive because both teens and their parents are extremely uncomfortable talking to each other about the most serious aspects of dating abuse.

- > **Teens** are uncomfortable talking to their parents, especially **Dad**, about abuse issues.

| Comfort level talking to parents if boyfriend/girlfriend did the following: | Uncomfortable talking to MOM | | | Uncomfortable talking to DAD | | |
|---|------------------------------|------|------------|------------------------------|------|------------|
| | TOTAL | SONS | DAUGHTERS | TOTAL | SONS | DAUGHTERS |
| Pressured you in to having sex or oral sex | 71% | 67% | 74% | 75% | 61% | 86% |
| Shared or threatened to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos of you | 62% | 55% | 68% | 70% | 57% | 81% |
| Hit, slapped, punched, choked, or kicked you | 50% | 46% | 53% | 60% | 50% | 68% |

- > **At least a quarter** of all parents are uncomfortable talking about the most serious aspects of dating abuse with their teens.
- > **Dads** are particularly uncomfortable talking to their **daughters**.
- > **In combination with the high level of discomfort expressed by teens, parents' discomfort virtually ensures these conversations won't happen.**

| Comfort level talking to teen if his/her boyfriend/girlfriend did the following: | Uncomfortable talking to SON | Uncomfortable talking to DAUGHTER | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| | Both Parents | Both Parents | DAD |
| Pressured him/her into having sex or oral sex | 27% | 33% | 38% |
| Shared or threatened to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos of him/her | 24% | 29% | 35% |
| Hit, slapped, punched, choked, or kicked him/her | 24% | 28% | 36% |



VIII. Dads appear to be much more in touch with the reality of teen dating abuse than Moms; however, Dads and teens aren't talking.

- > **46%** of Dads (compared to **29%** of Moms) are aware of the dating abuse taking place in their teen's relationship.
 - » However, only **13%** of teens say they have had a dating abuse conversation with Dad.
- > Not surprisingly, dating abuse is an especially uncomfortable topic of discussion between Dads and Daughters.

| Comfort level talking to parent/teen if boyfriend/girlfriend did the following: | Uncomfortable talking to DAD | | | Uncomfortable talking to DAUGHTER | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| | TOTAL | MALES | FEMALES | TOTAL | DAD | MOM |
| Pressured into having sex or oral sex | 75% | 61% | 86% | 33% | 38% | 28% |
| Shared or threatened to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos | 70% | 57% | 81% | 29% | 35% | 24% |
| Hit, slapped, punched, choked, or kicked | 60% | 50% | 68% | 28% | 36% | 21% |

- > **Nearly half of Dads** (43%) are unaware of any resources to help them have a conversation with their teen about dating abuse.

IX. Majority of teens who have been taught about teen dating violence and abuse say it has helped them.

- > Only **25%** of teens say they've taken a course on relationships and dating at school, **but**
 - » Fully three-fourths of those teens who have taken such a course at school (**75%**) say they learned about the signs of an abusive relationship in this course and now feel confident that they would be able to judge whether a relationship is abusive.
 - » **2 out of 3 (65%)** found this class helpful in learning about appropriate dating and relationship behavior .



- X. Most parents claim their child's school does not provide education on dating abuse, and most are at a loss for where to get help.
- > Although **84%** of parents say schools *should* provide dating and relationship education, only **30%** of parents say their child's school in fact **provides such education**.
 - > **37%** of parents are unaware of any resources to help them have a conversation with their teen about dating abuse.



*Abusive Behaviors Key: specific behaviors included in each category above

Controlling behaviors:

- » Want to know who you are with all the time
- » Want to know where you are at all the time
- » Pressure you to do things you didn't want to do
- » Try to tell you what to do a lot
- » Try to prevent you from spending time with your family or friends
- » Tell you how to dress all the time
- » Threaten to spread rumors if you didn't do what he/she wanted

Use of technology includes:

- » Call or text you to check up on you (find out where you are, what you're doing, who you're with) between midnight and 5:00am
- » Call your cell phone to check up on you (find out where you are, what you're doing, who you're with) 20 or more times per hour
- » Text you to check up on you (find out where you are, what you're doing, who you're with) more than 40 times per hour
- » Share or threaten to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos of you

Verbal abuse includes:

- » Repeatedly abuse you verbally so that you've been made to feel bad about yourself (like being told you are stupid, worthless, ugly, etc.)
- » Threaten you or make you think that he or she would get violent or hurt himself/herself if you were to break up
- » Threaten to hurt (hit, slap, choke, punch, kick) you when angry

Sexual abuse includes

- » Pressure you to perform oral sex
- » Pressure you into having sex

Physical abuse includes:

- » Hit, slap, push, punch, kick or choke you
- » Physically hurt you, like bruise from a punch
- » Make you fear for your safety

