February 2014

Teen Dating Violence: What We Still Don’t Know

National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month offers an opportunity to appreciate the progress made to address Teen Dating Violence (TDV). Yet, there is still a great deal of information about TDV that is not fully understood, particularly with regard to youth offenders. Prevalence rates of physical or sexual violence among teens are broadly estimated between 15 and 40%.* In many instances, teens who have perpetrated dating violence have also experienced it as victims. Additionally, other factors have implications for prevention and intervention, such as the way “dating” is defined, the context and motivations for the use of violence, and the developmental differences (cognitive and otherwise) that exist within the age range of those considered “teens.” These shifting variables permeate the research, suggesting the absence of a shared understanding of teen dating relationships and violence dynamics.

Some communities have developed tailored interventions for working with TDV offenders, both through and outside the justice system. The Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court provides a comprehensive response through dedicated court personnel, educational programming for offenders, and victim advocacy. The Santa Clara County Juvenile Domestic and Family Violence Court aims to increase competency and consistency in the court’s response to TDV through specialized training and agency collaboration. While promising, these approaches** are few and await further evaluation.

The juvenile justice system exists to provide a safety net for youth offenders, and keep them out of the adult criminal justice system. As the national emphasis around TDV focuses largely on prevention efforts, a framework for intervening with youth offenders remains incomplete. The absence of fully-developed juvenile justice policies in the area of TDV often results in an adult framework being superimposed onto teen offenders. This approach is likely to fail youth as it ignores the acknowledged, if poorly understood, differences between youth and adult perpetrators.

Some of the areas needing further development for addressing TDV include:

- **Assessments** of current intervention practices with offenders of TDV
- **Evaluations** of innovative intervention models used in working with TDV offenders
- Informed TDV and youth policy work that is better aligned with thoughtful juvenile justice philosophy
- Additional explorations of systemic barriers in implementing effective interventions
- Further research into the contextual and developmental dynamics of TDV, including targeted research in communities of color and LGBTQ relationships
- Establishing stronger partnerships among system practitioners to coordinate the justice response to TDV offenders

* Prevalence rates vary widely and can range from 15% to 40%

** Approaches vary across communities and are often limited in scope
Prevention efforts must be sustained to reduce the harm that TDV causes to individuals, families and communities. However, communities must also be prepared to respond thoughtfully and appropriately to youth who commit TDV in order to effectively protect victims and promote nonviolent behavior.

Footnotes


**Brooklyn's Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court and Santa Clara County Juvenile Domestic and Family Violence Court

Thanks to Break the Cycle for the use of the TDV Awareness Month image!

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**Teen Dating Violence Resources**

[Youth Dating Violence: Can a Court Help Break the Cycle?](http://example.com/tdv-resource1) (Hermann, CCI)

[Teen Dating Violence: A Closer Look at Adolescent Romantic Relationships](http://example.com/tdv-resource2) (Mulford & Giordano, NIJ)

[Accountability in Teenage Dating Violence: A Comparative Examination of Adult Domestic Violence and Juvenile Justice Systems Policies](http://example.com/tdv-resource3) (Zosky, U of IL)

[Break the Cycle](http://example.com/break-the-cycle)