

Surprising New Research Indicates that Significant Numbers of Children as Young as 11 are Engaging in Sexual Activity and that Dating Violence and Abuse are Part of Their Relationships

Findings are part of new national poll that identifies an unexpected prevalence of dating abuse behaviors among the youngest adolescents and uncovers evidence that sexual activity before age 14 is linked to high levels of dating abuse and violence among older teens
Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch, incoming President of the National Association of Attorneys General, urges attorneys general to join effort to establish curricula on teen dating abuse in schools nationwide

WASHINGTON, February 14, 2008 /PRNewswire/ – A new survey released today reports that a surprising number of young adolescents are experiencing significant levels of dating violence and abuse. One in five children between the ages of 11 and 14 (20%) say their friends are victims of dating violence and nearly half of all tweens in relationships say they know friends who are verbally abused. Alarming, 40% of the youngest tweens, those between the ages of 11 and 12, report that their friends are victims of verbal abuse in relationships and nearly 1 in 10 (9%) say their friends have had sex.

The survey on Tween and Teen dating relationships conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU) and commissioned by Liz Claiborne Inc. and the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline explores how relationships among young adolescents are fueling high levels of dating violence and abuse. The data reveals that early sexual experiences can be a precursor to dating violence and abuse among older teens. For example, among American teens who had sex by age 14, one out of three teens (34%) say they have been physically abused (hit, kicked or choked) by an angry partner compared to 20% of other teens. 69% of teens who had sex before 14 said they had experienced all aspects of dating abuse including verbal, emotional physical and mental abuse.

"We know that education for tweens and teens helps and is critically important if we are going to break the cycle of abuse and strengthen healthy relationships," says Sheryl Cates, Chief Executive Officer of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which operates loveisrespect.org, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline. "This new data provides important insight into when we need to begin to intervene and how to do it. We need to educate parents, teachers and tweens about a connection between early sexual experimentation and increased levels of teen dating violence and abuse."

In response to the concerns about teen dating violence and abuse across the United States, the incoming president of the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), Rhode Island Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch, said that he will introduce a resolution at NAAG's June meeting that will call for the inclusion of curricula on teen dating violence in schools in every state.

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The necessity and importance of this education campaign is clear. New survey results show that:

Dating relationships begin much earlier than expected.

- Nearly three in four tweens (72%) say boyfriend/girlfriend relationships usually begin at age 14 or younger.
- More than one in three 11-12 year olds (37%) say they have been in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship.

Surprising levels of abusive behavior reported in tween (11-14) dating relationships.

- 62% of tweens who have been in a relationship say they know friends who have been verbally abused (called stupid, worthless, ugly, etc) by a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Two in five (41%) of tweens who have been in a relationship know friends who have been called names, put down, or insulted via cellphone, IM, social networking sites (such as MySpace and Facebook), etc.
- One in five 13-14 year olds in relationships (20%) say they know friends and peers who have been struck in anger (kicked, hit, slapped, or punched) by a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Only half of all tweens (51%) claim to know the warning signs of a bad/hurtful relationship.

Significant numbers of teens (15-18) are experiencing emotional and mental abuse and violence in their dating relationships; this is even more prevalent among teens that have had sex by the age of 14.

- Nearly half of teen girls who have been in a relationship (48%) say they have been victims of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by their boyfriends.
- More than one in three teens report that their partners wanted to know where they were (36%) and who they were with (37%) all the time.
- Among teens who had sex by age 14, it's much higher (58% and 59%, respectively).
- 29% of teens say their boyfriends/girlfriends call them names and put them down, compared to 58% of teens who had sex by age 14.
- 22% of teens say they were pressured to do things they did not want to do, compared to 45% of teens who had sex by age 14.
- 24% of teens in a relationship said their boyfriends/girlfriends called them stupid, worthless, and ugly compared to 45% of teens who had sex by age 14.

"Currently in my practice I am seeing dozens of young girls who had early sexual experiences and I witnessed directly how it makes these young girls more vulnerable and how it can lead to situations where they will be abused," says Jill Murray, leading psychologist and author of *But He Never Hit Me The Devastating Cost of Non-Physical Abuse to Girls and Women*.

"Education for parents, teens, tweens and teachers is an answer to prevent this situation."

In addition, the survey found that parents think they know what is going on, but many don't have any idea. Results show that:

- More than three times as many tweens (20%) as parents (6%) admit that parents know little or nothing about the tweens' dating relationships.
- Twice as many tweens report having "hooked up" with a partner (17%) as parents reported of their own 11-14 year old child (8%).

"Over the past four years Liz Claiborne Inc. has conducted research into the many aspects of teen dating abuse. What makes this current study so disturbing is the clear and unexpected finding that dating abuse and violence begins at such a young age," says Jane Randel, Vice President, Corporate Communications, Liz Claiborne Inc. "We applaud the willingness of Attorney General Lynch to push for the introduction of education about dating abuse in schools across the country. This research shows just how urgently this information is needed."

National Association of Attorneys General Teen Dating Violence and Abuse Campaign

To reduce and prevent teen dating violence and abuse, the incoming president of the National Association of Attorneys General, Rhode Island Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch, will introduce a resolution at NAAG's June meeting in Providence, R.I. to ask that all Attorneys General work to ensure that schools in their states use a dating violence and abuse curriculum. The education campaign is inspired by the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, a law proposed by Attorney General Lynch that became effective in

Rhode Island in July 2007. The Lindsay Ann Burke Act, named in the honor of Lindsay Ann Burke, who was murdered after a 2-year struggle in an abusive relationship, requires all school districts in Rhode Island to teach about the signs of dating violence and abuse every year from grades 7 - 12. Attorney General Lynch and Lindsay's parents, Ann and Christopher Burke, along with Liz Claiborne Inc., made a presentation on this initiative at the National Association of Attorneys General's December 2007 meeting in Park City, Utah.

"We are committed to addressing this issue through education. Abuse and violence in intimate partner relationships not only cause great individual pain, but this destructive behavior breaks down families, communities and our larger society," says Attorney General Lynch. "A curriculum such as Liz Claiborne's Love is Not Abuse is an effective way to begin the process of education, prevent abuse and help to save lives."

Liz Claiborne Inc.'s Love Is Not Abuse curriculum aims to raise awareness about the problem of dating abuse, recommends resources that provide assistance, such as loveisrespect.org, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, and ultimately, help prevent dating abuse from occurring in the future. The curriculum was piloted around the country in October 2005 and was officially launched in April 2006. As of February 2008, this free curriculum has been distributed to approximately 3,500 schools and organizations across all 50 states.

Survey Methodology

Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU) was commissioned to conduct quantitative research among tweens (ages 11-14), parents of tweens, and teens (ages 15-18) who have been in a relationship about young dating relationships and the presence/absence of sexual activity and abusive behaviors. TRU independently sampled the three groups and fielded a customized 15-minute survey online to each group from January 2-18, 2008. A total of 2,192 interviews (1,043 tweens, 523 parents, and 626 teens) were completed and processed for analysis. The resulting margin of error (at the 95% confidence level) is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points for tweens in total, plus or minus 3.9 points for parents, and plus or minus 4.1 points for teens.

Liz Claiborne Inc.

Since 1991 Liz Claiborne Inc. has been working to end domestic violence. Through its Love Is Not Abuse Program, the company provides information and tools that men, women, children, teens and corporate executives can use to learn more about the issue and find out how they can help end this epidemic. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com>.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

The National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline is a resource that can be accessed by Internet or phone. The Helpline and loveisrespect.org offer real-time one- on-one support from trained advocates. The National Domestic Violence Hotline operates loveisrespect.org, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, from their call center in Austin, Texas. Loveisrespect.org provides resources for teens, parents, friends and family, advocates, government officials, law enforcement officials and the general public. All communication is confidential and anonymous. In the first year of existence, Loveisrespect has received 5,455 calls and 3,026 chats with the most common participant identifying themselves as a "victim/survivor". The Helpline is operated by the National Domestic Violence Hotline and was established through a gift from Liz Claiborne Inc.

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Related links:

- <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com>
- <http://www.Loveisrespect.org>