

Dating Violence Prevention

Above all thought, children are linked to adults by the simple fact that they are in process of turning into them.

(Phillip Larkin, (1922-1986, British Poet)

The Violence Against Women Network (VAWnet) and the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, are funded through a cooperative agreement with the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and **Prevention** [emphasis added] and is housed within the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence <http://www.vawnet.org/>.

VAWnet claims its primary goal is to support local, state and national **women prevention** [emphasis added] and intervention strategies. Similar to the vast majority of domestic violence organizations the dating violence focus of VAWnet is exclusively or primarily the victimization of our daughters and not our son's <http://www.vawnet.org/ARDocs/ARDocs.php>.

The VAWnet report, "Teen Dating Violence: A Review of Risk Factors and **Prevention** {emphasis added} Efforts," similar to the majority of domestic violence agencies, minimizes the offenses of our daughters and the victimization of our sons http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/Research/VAWnetDocs/AR_TeenDatingViolence.php.

The author of the above VAWnet report, Maura O'Keefe, acknowledges that the majority of dating violence studies consistently indicates that non-sexual violence in dating relationships is mutual. In fact, O'Keefe reports that many studies document girls or young women initiate more physical assaults than boys or young men. However, O'Keefe claims those studies are not valid because:

- (1) The studies do not address the "consequences" or "context" of the violence;
- (2) Girls are injured more than boys,
- (3) Girls fear for their safety more than boys,
- (4) Girls are emotionally hurt more than boys,

- (5) Girls and boys have different motivations and,
- (6) Girls most often act in self-defense.

Mutuality infers that girls and boys "equally initiate and use" dating violence. While it is important and necessary to address that the consequences of dating violence are feared and felt more by girls than boys, if the intent is to **prevent dating violence**, it is important to recognize that injury, fear, and emotional hurt are responses and consequences, *not causal factors*.

Murray A. Straus writes in, "Future Research on Gender Symmetry in Physical Assaults on Partners" the issues of injury, safety, and emotional hurt are all, "the results or the effect of an assault, not a context giving rise to an assault" <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/ipv-violence-by-women.htm>

Prevention

There is universal agreement that for **prevention** programs to be successful **prevention** programs must place the **cause** before the **consequence**. Placing **cause** before **consequence** can effectively minimize or **prevent** the negative consequence.

The National Youth Violence **Prevention** [emphasis added] Resource Center developed by the CDC and other Federal agencies claim that boys and girls use violence for *different reasons*. Boys, it is claimed, use violence because they are jealous, angry and want to control their girlfriends. While girls, they claim, are passive, docile and primarily act violently in dating relationships in self-defense. Advocates claim that surveys that examine the circumstances and context of dating relationships and not just the physical assaults will dispel any notation of gender parity or mutual aggression. <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/about/index.asp>.

Power and Control Issues

Liz Claiborne Inc's funded **Teen Relationship Abuse Survey (TRAS)** http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults_teens2006.htm, on page 3 notes, "[P]ower and control actions and attitudes are pervasive in teen relationships – many young people have dealt with a boyfriend or girlfriend who tried to control their whereabouts." The survey asks if the boys or girls had partners who want to know:

- Who were they with all the time, 32% of boys and 39% of girls responded yes.
- Where they were all the time, 31% of boys and 35% of girls responded yes.
- Tried to tell them what to do a lot, 33% of boys and 31% of girls responded yes.
- Asked them to only spend time with him/her, 24% of boys and 24% of girls responded yes.
- Tried to prevent them from spending time with family or friends, 22% of boys and 21% of girls responded yes.

The **TRAS** does include *context* and *circumstance* and it documents more similarities than differences. The TRAS on page 4 reports there are greater differences in "serious" as compared with "non-serious" relationships. However, the **TRAS** provides no definitional distinction between "serious and non-serious" relationship. That important distinction is left open for the respondents to define and assign to themselves.

On page 15 the **TRAS** explores relationships between boys and girls who have endured emotional abuse from their partner.

- 59% of boys and 64% of girls report that their partner made them feel bad or embarrassed about themselves.
- 28% of boys and 26% of girls report that their partner called them names or put them down.
- 8% of boys and 10% of girls report that their partner became physically or verbally abusive when drunk or high.

Self-Defense

In the VAWnet report O'Keefe, claims that girls **primarily** use physical assaults in **self-defense**. O'Keefe may, similar to many other advocates, *intuitively believe* violence by girls is committed in self-defensive (O'Keefe, 1997). However O'Keefe **provides no empirical evidence-based data that documents that the girls in her study used violence primarily in self-defense**.

On page 562, (O'Keefe, 1997), "... it is also **possible** that females **may** inflict more violence than males in self-defense or in retaliation for the sexual assault [emphasis added].

On page 563, (O'Keefe, 1997), "Whereas being a victim of dating violence was a stronger predictor for females compared with males **suggesting** [emphasis added] that females are more likely than males to hit in self-defense or retaliation."

O'Keefe in her VAWnet paper cites a study by (Foshee, 1996) but O'Keefe **does not** acknowledge in her VAWnet paper that the Foshee study documents **even when controlling for violence perpetrated in self-defense girls perpetrate more violence than boys**.

Most troubling is the fact that the O'Keefe, 1997 study documents that girls, for their own safety, need to realize that *their initiation* of dating violence and that *their use* of minor or severe physical assaults are *risk factors* that *place them in danger* of injury, fear, and emotional harm <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/ID27B.pdf>. Those important findings are, almost, if not impossible to decipher in the VAWnet report?

Equally disturbing is the fact that in the VAWnet report, O'Keefe claims that girls and boys have *different motivations* for their use of physical assaults. However, O'Keefe writes on page 14 of, "Victims of Dating Violence Among High School Students (O'Keefe & Treister, 1998):

*"Also, of interest is the finding of **no gender differences** [italics added] in the amount of **interpersonal control** [italics added] exhibited by males and females in dating relationships, suggesting that interpersonal control may not be gender-specific and that despite women's subordinate position in the larger social structure, **they are just as likely to act to control their dating partner** [italics added]."*

On page 9 of the VAWnet report it claims that:

"It is naïve to think a change in attitudes or behavior can occur unless a long term, integrated and multi-dimensional approach is launched at all system levels."

Researchers and advocates who continue to ignore or minimize the victimization of our sons and who minimize and excuse the offenses of our daughters need to understand that those propositions are not **preventative** efforts and they may naively be placing both our daughters and our sons in danger of victimization.

How To Get Boys and Young Men Involved

Most advocates agree that to end dating and domestic violence that boys and men need to become more involved. Many males, regardless of age, are not involved with the issue because boys and men are most often **presented as the problem**.

Family Nonviolence, Inc. (FNI) suggests that the best way to get boys and men involved in dating and domestic violence **prevention** programs is to document that their victimization can demonstrate to boys and men that they do have a positive self interest in the effort.

The CDC, *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Dating Abuse Fact Sheet* <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/DatingViolence.htm> reports that 1 in 5 high school girls have been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner. This 1 in 5 data is published on almost all dating and domestic violence websites. The CDC dating violence fact sheet *does not* publish that 8.9% of boys and 8.8% of girls report being a victim of physical dating abuse. Why does the CDC publish one and not the other?

The www.Familynonviolence.org (FNI) website invites you to read its extensively researched and cited report *Dating Violence: Our Daughters and our Sons* that documents the majority of dating and domestic violence organizations either ignore or minimize male victimization. The FNI report suggests that a first and positive step in getting boys and men involved in the issues of dating and domestic violence is to end **ignoring, minimizing and marginalizing** their victimization.

You may contact the author of the FNI report at rldavis@post.harvard.edu

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Facts and Fiction by Omission



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