

# Teen Dating Violence

## KEY ISSUE

### Challenges in Service Provision



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# KEY ISSUE

## Teen Dating Violence: Challenges in Service Provision

**A**ge-appropriate, culturally diverse and fully accessible services are needed in order to adequately address the diverse needs of teens involved in violent dating relationships. Teens may face multiple challenges and risks in their daily lives and services designed to meet their needs require individualized, comprehensive and, in some cases long-term, approaches. Teen victims, who may be struggling with unplanned pregnancy, parenting, homelessness, ableism, oppression based on gender identity, racism, poverty and drug addiction, can benefit from the same types of holistic services offered to adult survivors. To be effective, teen services may need to include access to jobs, housing, transportation, childcare and a wide range of other resources.

### AGE-BASED BARRIERS

Advocates often encounter age-based barriers in providing comprehensive services for teens. Confidentiality issues, for example, are more difficult to navigate when serving teen victims. Advocates for adult survivors of domestic or dating violence have learned the crucial role that confidentiality plays in trust building and the need for thorough exploration of victim options. State laws, however, create barriers for teens with regard to confidentiality by requiring parental notification and consent to services and mandating the reporting of abuse. Designed to protect minors, these laws often discourage or prevent young victims of dating violence from accessing the information and support they need. Teens may be reluctant to use community services when youth advocates clarify for them the ethical/legal reporting requirements that service providers must consider in dealing with youth, parents, child protection, law enforcement and/or the courts.

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Another age-related barrier is the availability of safe shelter for teen victims. To the extent that it is possible, adolescent survivors of dating violence and their advocates integrate safety planning into all aspects of counseling and support services. When a teen survivor's safety is seriously threatened, safe shelter needs to be an option. That option does not exist for the vast majority of teen victims. Most domestic violence shelters are unable to house teens, except in cases where they enter shelter with their mothers. Special state licensure is required to provide shelter services to minors – parental consent is often not sufficient for admission and for most programs the cost of meeting state requirements is prohibitive.

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In discussing provisions of safe shelter for teens, community members often raise the topic of teen emancipation. Generally speaking, emancipation is a legal process in which minors petition the court to be declared legal adults. It is frequently suggested that teen victims become emancipated in order to be eligible for adult support services, such as counseling and safe shelter. However, even if the emancipation process were simple, quick and feasible in crisis situations, it does not necessarily afford minors full adult legal rights. The extent to which emancipated minors are treated as legal adults varies from state to state, but usually means that the emancipated youth can enter into binding contracts, sue and be sued, establish a residence and consent to medical treatment on the same basis as an adult. Minors who marry or join the armed services generally qualify for emancipation, but not necessarily for the full range of rights afforded adults.

Additionally, laws governing the age at which minors may begin driving, voting and purchasing alcohol are not affected by emancipation and laws that set standards for service provision to teens are not necessarily relaxed. Because safe shelter is seldom an option, teens and their advocates understand that planning for safety at home, in school and throughout the community is imperative. An increasing number of communities are making information about dating violence and safety planning available in all teen venues – in schools, malls, medical offices, workplaces, youth centers, recreational facilities, juvenile detention centers and on the streets.

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## INDIVIDUALIZED SAFETY PLANNING

Any safety planning process must be specific to the needs, life experiences and capabilities of each victim and should involve more than strategizing around avoidance of physical assault and ending the violent relationship. In safety planning it is important to encourage young victims to explore the options and resources necessary for staying safe within the relationship as well as those necessary for ending the relationship. For many reasons breaking up may not be the most desirable – or safest – option. Ending the relationship may generate additional, and more lethal, risks. Violence may escalate when the abuser's control is interrupted. In addition, teens who live and/or parent with their batterers face economic, housing and childcare issues when leaving the relationship, creating life-generated risks similar to those faced by adults. Safety planning needs to be continuous, flexible and reflective of rapidly changing teen lives. Teen safety planning should include all elements that are considered in adult planning – reducing risks presented

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by the abuser, strategizing for staying safe in the relationship as well as leaving it, considering 'life generated risks,' such as poverty, housing, and childcare and developing both short and long-term time strategies (Davies, Lyon & Monti-Catania, 1998).

Finally, in order to assure comprehensive advocacy and promote effective safety measures for teen victims, agencies and organizations have begun to closely examine the economic context in which teen abuse occurs. While not all teens struggling against dating violence live in poverty, those who live with limited financial resources face challenges and barriers not experienced by more economically secure peers. Dating violence and economic hardship affect adolescents in a variety of ways – as children in poor families, as teens living out-of-home/homeless and as parenting teens. Information provided by national research and surveys has indicated that teens – particularly parenting teens – experience many challenges and barriers when interacting with current human service systems (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2001).

## DEVELOPING HOLISTIC APPROACHES

While it is imperative for communities to address the complex needs of teen victims, it is also important to explore effective responses to the criminal behavior and rehabilitation issues of young batterers. In some communities, teen batterer intervention services are now being designed to enhance the safety of young victims and guarantee meaningful consequences for teen perpetrators.

Increased awareness about the importance of teen batterer containment and the implementation of age appropriate, culturally relevant intervention strategies have resulted in the creation of innovative programs nationwide. These programs attempt to hold young batterers accountable for their violence and to rehabilitate them, incorporating methods and strategies

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as diverse as the individuals and their communities. Most programs have developed in relative isolation from one another, yet many have adopted ecological approaches to program design. According to Dean Peacock and Emily Rothman, the commonality of ecological approaches lies in *“the recognition that each participant serves as an important point of access to the family, community members, including peers, and institutions such as the faith community, schools, other community based agencies, the juvenile and family courts and to youth employment agencies. This access makes it possible to enlist family, community members and institutions in holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring victim safety”* (Peacock & Rothman, 2001).

Ecological models are being used with regularity in many communities of color. Youth providers and domestic violence intervention specialists have come together in Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, African-American and Tribal communities to develop models which involve perpetrators’ families and communities, include components connected to individual cultural heritage and hold participants to extensive and holistic accountability. Currently, many programs advocate the re-education of young men about their relationships and their use of violence with their partners, their families and their communities as an alternative or complement to incarceration.

Descriptions and contact information for innovative service programs addressing the diverse needs of teen victims and batterers can be found in the NRC DV Resource Lists within this packet.

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## References

*Add It Up: Teen Parents and Welfare . . . Undercounted, Oversanctioned, Underserved* (2002). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.impactresearch.org/publication/publication.html> >

Davies, J., Lyon, E. & Monti-Catania, D. (1998). *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peacock, D. & Rothman, E. (2001). Working with young men who batter: Current strategies and new directions. *Applied Research Paper*, National Electronic Network to End Violence Against Women. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.vawnet.org>>

## ENCLOSURES

The enclosed materials (reprinted with permission) provide research findings, examples of promising projects and referral materials that offer basic information on service challenges for teen dating violence:

Davies, J. (1997). *Safety planning*. Greater Hartford Legal Assistance (GHLA), Hartford, CT: GHLA

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Levin-Epstein, J. (1999). *Seeking Safe Haven: Two States' Approaches to the Minor Parent TANF Living Arrangement Rule*, Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://www.impactresearch.org/publication/publication.html>>

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Peacock, D. & Rothman, E. (2001). *Working with young men who batter: Current strategies and new directions*. Harrisburg, PA: Applied Research Forum, National Electronic Network to End Violence Against Women. Retrieved September 1, 2003 from <<http://vawnet.org>>

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on these and other teen-related issues is available through the following:

- Technical Assistance/Public Education Team of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
Telephone: 800-537-2238 and TTY: 800-553-2508

and other organizations comprising the Domestic Violence Resource Network (DVRN):

- Battered Women's Justice Project  
Telephone: 800-903-0111, Ext. 1 (Criminal Justice), Ext. 2 (Civil Justice), Ext. 3 (Defense);
- National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
Telephone: 888-792-2873 and TTY: 800-595-4889;
- Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody  
Telephone: 800-52-PEACE (527-3223);
- Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women  
Telephone: 877-733-7623