

Adolescent sexual violence: Prevalence, adolescent risks, and violence characteristics

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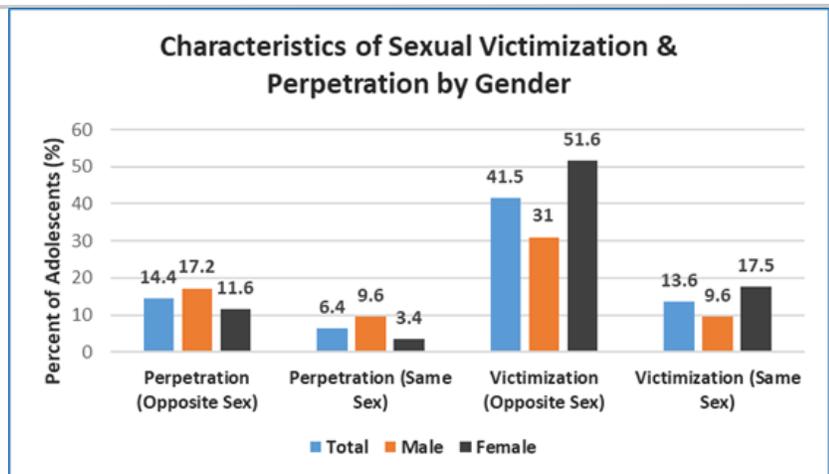
Publication Brief

Purpose In this longitudinal study, the authors investigated prevalence and correlates of adolescent peer-to-peer sexual violence victimization and perpetration, in a community-based sample in SE Michigan middle and high schools. Previous research focused on child maltreatment or dating partners, but this comprehensive study was designed to focus instead on the prevalence of male and female adolescent peer-to-peer sexual violence.

Background Sexual violence involves both contact and non-contact sexual experiences that are unwanted and where consent was not/could not be obtained. Little is known about the prevalence and trajectory of sexual violence in middle and high school teens. Adolescent peer-to-peer studies to date have mainly focused on male perpetration. Therefore, the need exists for research on prevalence and characteristics of adolescent male and female peer-to-peer sexual violence (both victimization and perpetration) over time.

Methods Cross-sectional survey data over a 4-year period (2009-2013) was used from a socioeconomically diverse sample of students in grades 7 through 12 from five schools. The study addressed multiple types of sexual acts (both physical and non-physical), and the assessment included analysis of potential mental health or alcohol/substance abuse problems.

Findings Sexual violence is prevalent in middle and high schools; during the study period 33.9% of males and 53.5% of female students reported sexual violence victimization and 22.8% of males and 12.6% of females reported sexual violence perpetration. Factors associated with peer-to-peer sexual violence included substance use, depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Conduct Disorder for both males and females.



Discussion This research illuminated the high prevalence of peer sexual violence, particularly non-contact sexual violence. Although opposite sex-peers were the primary perpetrators of sexual violence, same-sex peer violence was significant. This indicates a need for further study, particularly regarding contexts and climates that may foster, or not address, peer-to-peer sexual violence among adolescents. Many forms of prevention efforts could be informed by the study.

Citation Ngo QM, Veliz PT, Kusunoki Y, Stein SF, Boyd CJ. Adolescent sexual violence: Prevalence, adolescent risks, and violence characteristics. *Prev Med.* 2018 Nov;116:68-74.