

# TEEN BOYS REPORT MORE DATING VIOLENCE THAN GIRLS, PERPLEXING SCIENTISTS

Emma Betuel Aug. 30, 2018

<https://www.inverse.com/article/48537-teenage-boys-relationship-abused-surveys>

Over the past ten years, Canadian researchers have been collecting data on one dark corner of society: teen dating violence. What they describe in their new study in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* may seem surprising, given society's gender stereotypes. Boys, they show, are victims of personal dating violence, and in some cases are more often so than girls. No one, regardless of gender, should have to experience violence in a relationship, and these findings tell us a lot about the many awful ways abuse can manifest.

This [study](#), carried out by researchers at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, combined data from the [British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey](#) in 2003, 2008, and 2013 to investigate the long-term trends in teen relationship violence that might not be captured on a year-to-year basis. Of the 35,900 Canadian teens in "dating relationships" involved in the study, 5.8 percent of boys and 4.2 percent of girls had experienced physical dating violence within the past year.

Study author and UBC's School of Nursing director [Elizabeth Saewyc](#), Ph.D. tells Inverse that the study results can tell us a lot about what society expects of teenage boys and how those expectations might hamper their ability to recognize a bad situation when they see it. The findings, however, are specific to Canadian youth, and so they may potentially highlight differences between nations. The most recent [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) done by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, [shows](#) that 9.1 percent of girls experience physical dating violence compared with 6.5 percent of boys.

## DO BOYS REPORT RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE?

Saewyc notes that this trend might have remained hidden for so long because of a confluence of societal ideas about masculinity and some poorly written survey questions. It's hard to get boys to talk about things like dating violence — especially if they're on the receiving end.

"What I can tell you is the boys are not more likely to speak up about their romantic partners, especially girlfriends," she says. "Part of the reason we're getting the results that we do see is that we're asking the question in a concrete kind of way. We're not saying 'Hey, have you been a victim of dating violence?'"

Instead, she rephrased the question: "During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend or girlfriend ever hit, slap, or physically hurt you on purpose?" The responses to that question revealed 5.8

percent of the total number of boys surveyed who did not identify themselves as victims of physical dating violence but had experienced it nonetheless.

## WHAT DOES RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE?

Another hidden reason that teenagers don't tend to report partner violence is that they've never been properly taught to recognize it — especially if it's coming from a girlfriend.

“A possible reason it's still considered socially acceptable for girls — when they get really angry or upset — to lash out physically in ways that we've worked really hard as a society to tell boys and young men that they're not allowed to do so,” Saewyc notes.

If the roles were reversed, it would be pretty obvious that the behavior constitutes relationship abuse. But this isn't something we talk about with teenage boys, Saewyc says.

“Young men might not be recognizing it as dating violence, or abuse. But they're still reporting, yes, this has happened,” she adds. “I think they might not realize that what they're talking about is an unhealthy relationship.”

These concerns aside, Saewyc cautions that it's really hard to pin down why these trends occur because you can't ask follow-up questions. But she emphasizes that, as a society, it's important not to discriminate when it comes to relationship violence. Whether it comes from a boy or a girl, no one should have to experience it. Period.

“Still one in 20 youth that are dating experience violence,” she says. “Dating relationships during the teen years set the stage for relationships in life, so it's really important that we help young people define what healthy relationships look like.”