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Study Finds Connection between Teenage Violence and Domestic Violence

Researchers tracing the development of violent behavior have found a link between teenage violence and domestic violence.

Adolescents who engaged in violent behavior at a relatively steady rate through their teenage years and those whose violence began in their mid teens and increased over the years are significantly more likely to engage in domestic violence in their mid 20s than other young adults, according to a new University of Washington study.

“Most people think youth violence and domestic violence are separate problems, but this study shows that they are intertwined,” said Todd Herrenkohl, lead author of the study and a UW associate professor of social work.

The study also found no independent link between an individual’s use of alcohol or drugs and committing domestic violence. In addition it showed that nearly twice as many women as men said they perpetrated domestic violence in the past year including kicking, biting or punching their partner, threatening to hit or throw something at their partner, and pushing, grabbing or shoving their partner.

Data from the study came from the on-going Seattle Social Development Project which has been tracing youth development and the social and antisocial behavior of more than 800 participants. It began when they were in the fifth grade and continues to follow them into adulthood.

That project earlier showed four patterns of youth violence taken by teens between the ages of 13 and 18.

- Non-offenders, the largest group (60 percent), did not engage in violent behavior in adolescence.
- Desisters (15 percent) engaged in violence early on but stopped by age 16.
- Chronic offenders (16 percent) began violent behavior early and it persisted at a moderate level up to age 18.
- Late increasers (9 percent) became involved with violence in mid adolescence with the behavior increasing up to age 18.

The new study found that individuals from the last two groups were significantly more likely than non-offenders to have committed moderately severe forms of domestic violence when they were 24 years old. At that age, nearly 650 of the original students had a partner and about 19 percent of them, or 117 individuals, reported having committed domestic violence in the past year.

The finding that a perpetrator's use of alcohol is not significantly related to domestic violence was somewhat surprising since other studies have shown such an association. The reasons for this are unclear, according to Herrenkohl, who speculated such a relationship may have shown up if more severe forms of domestic violence, such as those requiring hospitalization had been measured.

The study also showed a number of personal characteristics, partner characteristics and neighborhood conditions that increased an individual's chances of being involved in domestic violence as a young adult. Being diagnosed with a major episode of depression or receiving welfare were significantly related to committing domestic violence, as were having a partner who used drugs heavily, sold drugs, had a history of violence toward others, had an arrest record or was unemployed.

Disorganized neighborhoods where attitudes toward drug sales and violence were favorable also increased a person's likelihood of committing domestic violence.

"Individuals who have a history of anti-social behavior may be more likely to find a partner with a similar history and re-create what they experienced as children. They may also be more likely to be in places in their communities where they interact with people with the same types of behavior," said Herrenkohl.

"The take-home message from this study is that it may be possible to prevent some forms of domestic violence by acting early to address youth violence. Our research suggests the earlier we begin prevention programs the better, because youth violence appears to be a precursor to other problems including domestic violence."

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Co-authors of the study were Rick Kosterman, a research scientist; W. Alex Mason, a research analyst; and J. David Hawkins, professor of social work. All are affiliated with the UW's Social Development Research Group. The paper appears in the current issue of the journal *Violence and Victims* and the research was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Mental Health.

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