

Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Suicide Attempts Among Urban Teenagers

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Objective: To evaluate the relationship between dating violence, sexual assault, and suicide attempts among urban adolescents.

Design: Secondary analysis of the 2005 New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Participants: Representative population-based sample of 8080 students, 14 years and older.

Main Exposure: Dating violence in the past year and lifetime history of sexual assault.

Outcome Measure: One or more suicide attempts in the past year.

Results: Respondents were 50.0% female and primarily black (36.0%) or Hispanic (40.1%). In the past year, 11.7% of the females and 7.2% of the males reported 1 or more suicide attempts. Lifetime history of sexual assault was reported by 9.6% of females and 5.4% of males. Dating violence in the past year was reported by 10.6% of females and 9.5% of males. In multivariate models, controlling for persistent sadness, sexual orientation, and significant risk behaviors, recent dating violence (odds ratio, 1.61; 95% confidence interval, 1.05-2.47) was associated with suicide attempts in adolescent girls, while lifetime history of sexual assault (odds ratio, 3.86; 95% confidence interval, 2.11-7.06) was associated with suicide attempts in adolescent boys.

Conclusions: In this population of urban youth, recent dating violence among females and lifetime history of sexual assault among males were significantly associated with suicide attempts. Clinicians and educators should be trained to routinely screen adolescents for violence victimization and should have a low threshold for referring these at-risk teenagers for mental health services.