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WHITE PAPER: Teen Dating Violence

The Cycle of My Life

By Pamela, age 16

It all starts out wonderful until he strikes
Constantly hearing I'm sorry
Until it doesn't matter anymore
Forgiving every time, forgetting never
Calling out for him to stop
Never stopping until it is almost too late
Never thinking about the consequences of his actions
Just making me think out every possible consequence of mine
Hearing I'm sorry all over again
Meeting him with open eyes
Awaiting the gifts I know will pour forward
Until it all stops-
And the cycle begins all over again¹

As Pamela's poem illustrates, teen dating violence is typically not a one-time incident, but rather an established pattern of cyclical abuse that occurs over and over again—and can be very difficult to stop once it has begun. Unfortunately, Pamela's experience is not unique. As many as one-third of teens in the United States experience some form of abuse in their romantic dating relationships, including verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse.² A similar survey found that nearly one-third of teens in the United States who have been in a relationship experience the most serious forms of dating violence and abuse including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and threats of physical harm.³ Additionally, nearly one-half of teens in relationships report being controlled, threatened, or pressured to do things they did not want to do.⁴ One such teen is Nicole, her story sadly representative of a typical abusive relationship:

¹ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 45. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

² Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 26. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008. The vast majority of information, statistics and resources pertaining to teen dating violence are U.S. and Canadian-based. The global study of teen dating violence is still in its nascent period of development and international data on this issue is, at this point, virtually non-existent. As a result, this paper relies on data derived from U.S. and Canadian-based resources.

³ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

*When I was 15, I went to summer school, and I met this guy. And we became a couple. Slowly, he became controlling and verbally abusive. And then finally, it led to him hitting me. It would be just like a flicking of the head... and then one time it was a hit in the face. And then he was choking me on the stairs. It made me feel very scared and alone and confused.*⁵

Most teens who experience dating violence feel scared, alone and confused. Although they may certainly feel scared and confused, they are—statistically speaking—far from alone. Fifty-seven percent of teens know someone who has been verbally, physically, or sexually abusive in a dating relationship.⁶ Moreover, females ages 16 to 24 are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than any other age group.⁷ However, a recent survey found that one-fourth of tweens (aged 11 to 14) say that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships usually begin at age 14 and younger, and more alarming, both parents and tweens report that sex is considered a typical part of tween dating relationships.⁸ Data now reveals that early sexual activity is an indicator for dating violence and abuse among teenagers.⁹ Therefore, teen dating violence may soon also become prevalent among female tweens.¹⁰ Finally, no teen is exempt: teen dating violence can affect any adolescent, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, culture or economic status.

Teen Dating Violence: What is It?

The patterns and signs of teen dating violence tend to mirror those exhibited in adult abusive relationships.¹¹ In both cases, there is often a pattern of repeated violence that escalates over time, a pattern of abusive behavior followed by apologies and promises to change, and an increased risk of violence when the abused partner decides to leave the relationship.¹² Also, abusive boys, like men, tend to isolate their partner from friends and family, equate possessiveness and jealousy with love, and use their social status to establish control over their partner.¹³

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence defines teen dating violence as:

a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent against a current or former dating partner. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behavior—either in a heterosexual or homosexual dating relationship—in order to gain power and maintain control over the dating partner.¹⁴

⁵ NBC News Transcripts, *Today Show*, “Jessica Aranoff of Break the Cycle Discusses Causes of and Solutions for Abuse in Teen Relationships” (2005). Retrieved from www.ncdsv.org/images/JessicaAranoffBreakCycle.pdf on January 30, 2008.

⁶ American Bar Association (ABA), *National Teen Dating Violence Initiative*, “Teen Dating Violence Facts” (2006), p. 3. Retrieved from www.abanet.org/unmet/teendating/facts.pdf on January 30, 2008.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and the National Teen Dating Violence Abuse Helpline, *Tween/Teen Dating Relationships Survey 2008*. (July 2008). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited.

<http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-203.pdf>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ LeAnna M. Gutierrez, “Teen Dating Violence: An Ignored Epidemic” (2002), p.1. Retrieved from www.2.edc.org/gdi/publications_SR/publications/CRicaPub/GutierrezEnglish.pdf on November 2, 2007.

¹² *Women’s Law*, “Information for Teens.” Retrieved from www.womenslaw.org/teens.htm on November 6, 2007.

¹³ LeAnna M. Gutierrez, “Teen Dating Violence: An Ignored Epidemic” (2002), p.1. Retrieved from www.2.edc.org/gdi/publications_SR/publications/CRicaPub/GutierrezEnglish.pdf on November 2, 2007.

¹⁴ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview* (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

The three main types of dating abuse—verbal or emotional, physical and sexual—are more fully explored below.

Verbal or Emotional Dating Abuse

What hurt me the most were his mean words. I wasn't used to the kind of names he called me... I cried a lot. I walked looking down. I'd ditch school a lot, and, although I made sure I passed, I was falling behind. I was miserable.¹⁵

Verbal or emotional abuse involves someone saying or doing something to their dating partner that causes the person to feel afraid and/or develop a reduced sense of self-esteem or self-worth. Verbal or emotional abuse involves one person trying to control their partner's feelings or behaviors. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Name-calling and put-downs
- Yelling and screaming
- Embarrassing the person in front of others
- Intimidation
- Spreading negative rumors about the person
- Preventing the person from seeing their friends or family
- Threatening violence or harm
- Telling the person what to do
- Making racial slurs about the person
- Making the person feel responsible for the abuse/violence

A high percentage of high school students surveyed—61 percent—reported having had a partner who made them feel bad or embarrassed about themselves.¹⁶

Physical Dating Abuse

...He had to make sure I wasn't doing anything. He'd find out from his friends if I was talking to someone, and we'd get in a big argument. ...He'd hit me, push me, sock me in the stomach and in the head. He was smart. He knew not to leave me with bruises that showed.¹⁷

Physical abuse involves any intentional unwanted contact with the other person's body. Physical abuse does not have to leave a mark. Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Scratching
- Kicking
- Pushing
- Choking
- Biting
- Slapping
- Shoving
- Pulling hair

¹⁵ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 29. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

¹⁶ Liz Claiborne, Inc. "New Survey of American Teens Reveals Shocking Levels of Teen Dating Abuse and Violence" (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/pressreleases.htm> on January 31, 2008.

¹⁷ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 29. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

- Punching
- Pinching

Forty-five percent of girls surveyed reported they had encountered some form of physical aggression during the course of dating.¹⁸ In another survey, girls reported they were victims of physical violence significantly more often while their male partners were making sexual advances. This suggests that a large percentage of girls are being physically abused when they refuse unwanted sexual advances.¹⁹

Sexual Dating Abuse

*It began gradually. He'd yell at her, accuse her of flirting with other guys and harp on the shortness of her cheerleading skirt. Then he started punching her, kicking her and pulling her hair. ...Sometimes, he'd force her to have sex.*²⁰

Sexual abuse involves any sexual behavior that is unwanted or interferes with the other person's right to say "no" to sexual advances. Example of sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Forcing someone to go further sexually than they want to
- Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
- Date rape
- Not letting someone use birth control
- Not letting someone use protection against sexually transmitted diseases

An alarming 76 percent of female high school students surveyed reported that they had experienced one or more incidents of unwanted sexual activity, including unwanted kissing, hugging, groping and/or sexual intercourse.²¹

Technology: A New Form of Abuse

*My boyfriend terrorized me in a number of ways, but one of the most effective was through email. Email became one of his primary methods of control. ...He wanted to know where I was every second of every day.*²²

As teenagers' use of technological devices—such as cell phones and computers—becomes more and more common, new research is proving that this technology is being used by adolescents to abuse and/or control partners in dating relationships. This research has provided the first clear evidence that technology has made teen dating violence more pervasive.²³

¹⁸ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, "Statistics" (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ NBC News Transcripts, *Today Show*, "Jessica Aranoff of Break the Cycle Discusses Causes of and Solutions for Abuse in Teen Relationships" (2005). Retrieved from www.ncdsv.org/images/JessicaAranoffBreakCycle.pdf on January 30, 2008.

²¹ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, "Statistics" (2004), p.3. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

²² Liz Claiborne, Inc., "Groundbreaking Research Provides Clear Evidence that Technology is Taking Teen Dating Abuse to New Levels" (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/pressreleases.htm> on January 30, 2008.

²³ TRU Research Topline, *Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study* (2007), p. 5. Retrieved from <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults.htm> on January 30, 2008.

In a survey of teens ages 13 to 18, results showed that alarming numbers of teens are being controlled, abused and threatened via cell phone and computer use, including the use of email, text messaging, instant messaging, phoning, and community networks such as web chats, social sites and blogs:²⁴

- Thirty percent of teens say they've been text messaged up to 30 times an hour by a partner trying to find out where they are, what they're doing or who they are with.
- Twenty-five percent of teens say they have been called names, harassed or put down by their partner via cell phone and text messaging.
- Twenty-two percent of teens have been asked to engage in sex via cell phone or the internet when they do not want to.
- Nineteen percent of teens say that their partner has used a cell phone or the internet to spread rumors about them.
- Eleven percent of teens report that a partner has shared private or embarrassing photos or videos of them.
- Ten percent of teens claim they have been threatened physically via email, instant message, text, or chat room.²⁵

New research has also found that an alarming number of tweens (aged 11 to 14) are also affected by technological teen dating violence. A survey funded by Liz Claiborne, Inc. and the National Teen Dating Violence Abuse Helpline found that two-fifths of tweens know friends who have been verbally abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend— called names, put down, or insulted – via cell phone, instant messenger, and social networking sites such as Facebook.²⁶ The use of these technological devices to control and abuse dating partners intensifies the relentlessness of abuse as abusers can have access to their dating partner twenty-four hours a day, even when they are not physically together.

A Three-Stage Cyclical Pattern of Abuse

Teen dating violence, like adult domestic violence, has a distinct pattern of abuse comprising three stages repeated over and over again: tension building, explosion and honeymoon. During the tension building stage the couple may argue a lot. Abusers may yell for no reason and make false accusations against their partners. The targets of abuse may feel like they can't do anything right. In general, the atmosphere between the couple is tense and the tension builds with each interaction.²⁷

During the explosion stage this culmination of tension is released in a burst of verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. Abusers may scream in a frightening, threatening or humiliating way. They may throw things at their partners, slap, kick or punch them. They may grab at their partners in a sexually aggressive manner and/or rape their partners.²⁸

After the release of the pent-up tensions, the honeymoon stage begins. During this stage, abusers apologize profusely and promise to never be abusive again. They may then purchase flowers or other gifts for the abused. Sometimes, abusers will shift the blame onto their partners and accuse them of causing the explosive and abusive behavior. At other times, abusers may blame the abuse on drugs or alcohol. Over

²⁴ Ibid., p. 5

²⁵ Ibid., p. 7-9.

²⁶ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and the National Teen Dating Violence Abuse Helpline, *Tween/Teen Dating Relationships Survey 2008*. (July 2008). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-203.pdf>.

²⁷ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 40. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

²⁸ Ibid.

time, the honeymoon period may get shorter and shorter between bouts of abusive explosions. In severely abusive relationships, the explosion stage becomes more and more violent and dangerous, and the honeymoon stage may disappear altogether.²⁹

Factors Influencing Teen Dating Violence

Inability to Recognize a Healthy versus an Unhealthy Relationship

Dating and intimate relationships are a normal part of growing up for many adolescents. Yet teenagers frequently form their first romantic relationship without a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy versus an unhealthy relationship. For example, when Dr. Elizabeth Miller, an expert on teen dating violence, administered a survey to a class of middle-schoolers, 100 percent of them responded that jealousy and possessiveness are part of true love.³⁰ Seventy-one percent of 200 Boston teens surveyed said that arguing is a normal part of a relationship.³¹ With little or no formal education regarding what constitutes a healthy versus an unhealthy relationship, teens tend to rely on what they have learned from their family, peers and the mass media. Rather than being helpful and clarifying, these informal modes of education can actually hinder the understanding and development of healthy dating relationships. As a result, teens are particularly vulnerable to becoming targets of dating abuse.³²

Family Influences

The gender socialization of boys and girls is rooted in childrearing practices. By the age of 2 or 3, children are already imitating the behaviors of their same-sex family members.³³ Young boys who grow up observing their fathers or other male family members being violent toward women, treating them as inferior, or as objects for their sexual pleasure—may grow up to believe these attitudes and behaviors are normal.³⁴ Likewise, studies show that girls who grow up witnessing their mothers or other female family members being abused or treated in an inferior manner, will grow up learning to accept violence from their future dating and intimate partners and will not necessarily consider the behavior abusive.³⁵

For example, a study conducted in June 2009 found that the international economic crash had a strong link to levels of teen dating violence among the families hardest hit in the United States. Almost one-half of teens who reported that their families suffered from financial problems said that they witnessed some form of violent or abusive behavior between their parents.³⁶ Sixty-seven percent of these same teens reported experiencing some form of dating violence and abuse in their own relationships – a rate of abuse 50 percent higher than for teens who did not witness abuse between their parents.³⁷

Peer Influence

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse*. Shannon Mehner, “Teens Often View Abusive Dating Behavior as Normal.” 2010. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/web/guest/home/journal_content/56/10123/110502/69257>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 4.

³³ Gary Barker, “Engaging Boys and Men to Empower Girls: Reflections from Practice and Evidence of Impact” (2006), p.3. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP3%20%20Barker.pdf on November 16, 2007.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, “Key Issues: Use of Violence by Girls and Boys” (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

³⁶ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

³⁷ Ibid.

As teenage boys are more concerned with what their male peers think and do than with what their female peers think or do, they tend to look to their male peers as models for shaping their own behaviors.³⁸ If adolescent boys have male peers who advise them to verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse their dating partners, they are likely to seriously consider this advice. Likewise, if they have peers who are abusive to their dating partners, they are more likely to be abusive in their own dating relationships.³⁹ Several studies have shown that male teens who hold sexist attitudes that support male domination over females are more likely to associate with other male peers who hold these same views.⁴⁰

Mass Media Influence

Although arguably not as influential as family or peers, the mass media also contributes to a teens' understanding of healthy versus unhealthy relationships. For example, the mass media readily characterizes subtle abusive relationship behaviors, such as possessiveness and jealousy, as romantic acts of love and devotion.⁴¹ In addition, youth are bombarded by mass media images depicting men solving their problems through violent means. Moreover, this aggressive, physical, and often misogynistic conduct is admired as heroic masculinity.⁴² As a result, it is not surprising that boys (and girls) would incorporate violence into their definition of manhood.⁴³

Teen Dating Violence in Same-Sex Relationships

Nearly 25 percent of teens in same-sex relationships report some type of dating abuse.⁴⁴ This statistic is comparable to the percentage of teens that experience dating abuse in opposite-sex relationships. As in opposite-sex relationships, dating violence in same-sex relationships is a systematic pattern of behavior in which one teen tries, through verbal, physical and/or sexual means, to control the thoughts, beliefs and/or conduct of their dating partner. Although teens in same-sex relationships share similar dating experiences with their peers in opposite-sex relationships, there are major important differences between the two groups.

In heterosexist and homophobic societies, many lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered teens live in the proverbial closet too afraid to disclose their sexual orientation. As a result, an abusive dating partner may use their boyfriend or girlfriend's sexual orientation as a tool of control. The abuser may threaten to tell family, friends or teachers about their partner's sexual orientation. The consequences of this information becoming public could very likely result in a loss of friends, not to mention intimidation, harassment or

³⁸ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, "Key Issues: Use of Violence by Girls and Boys" (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

³⁹ Department of Justice Canada, "Dating Violence: A Fact Sheet from the Department of Justice Canada" (2007), p.8. Retrieved from <http://justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/datingfs.html> on November 6, 2007.

⁴⁰ Dean Peacock and Emily Rothman, "Working with Young Men Who Batter" (2001), p. 1. Retrieved from http://new.vawnet.org/category/Main_Doc.php?docid=415 on November 13, 2007.

⁴¹ Rus Ervin Funk, "A Coordinated Collaborative Approach to Address and Combat Teen Dating Abuse," United Nations, INSTRAW (2001), p. 9. Retrieved from www.un-instraw.org/en/docs/mensroles/Funk.pdf on November 2, 2007.

⁴² New York Times. Jan Hoffman, "Teenage Girls Stand by their Man." (2010). <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/fashion/19brown.html>>.

⁴³ Robert Connell, "On Men and Violence" (2001), p. 2. Retrieved from http://toolkit.endabuse.org/Resources/MenandViolence/FVPPResource_viewccb4.html?searchterm=None on November 16, 2007.

⁴⁴ C.T. Halpren, et al, "Prevalence of Partner Violence in Same-Sex Romantic and Sexual Relationships in a National Sample of Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 35 (2004). Abstract retrieved from <http://www.pire.org/print.asp?detail=y&core=18443> on November 20, 2007.

physical violence from peers. In addition, these teens risk being thrown out of their houses, disowned or even institutionalized by their parents.⁴⁵

Given the possibility of these dire consequences, simply the threat of their sexual orientation being disclosed is enough to frighten teens into remaining in abusive relationships and deter them from seeking support or talking to a friend. Myths about gender-equality also serve as an additional barrier for teens in same-sex abusive dating relationships. The myth that issues of power and control don't exist in same-sex relationships because both partners are the same gender and therefore equal covers up the reality that teen dating violence not only occurs in same-sex relationships, but does so at roughly the same rate as in opposite-sex teen relationships.⁴⁶

Consequences of Teen Dating Violence

The consequences of teen dating violence create myriad health-related issues for teens. A sense of disempowerment and personal hopelessness that often results from being on the receiving end of an abusive relationship can lead to self-harming coping strategies, such as substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behaviors and suicide.⁴⁷ Statistical data reflecting these health issues are sobering:

- Girls who reported having been sexually or physically abused in a dating relationship were more than twice as likely as non-abused girls to report smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs.⁴⁸
- Girls who reported having been sexually or physically abused in a dating relationship were nearly three times as likely as non-abused girls to report binge eating and purging.⁴⁹
- Girls who were recent targets of dating violence were 61 percent more likely to attempt suicide.⁵⁰

In addition, girls who have been abused in a dating relationship are more likely to experience and/or engage in sexually risky behavior thus increasing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as unwanted pregnancy.⁵¹ Girls in abusive relationships are less likely to use condoms consistently and/or negotiate condom use for fear of being abused if they insist that their partner use a condom.⁵² This, of course, leads to the increased likelihood of unwanted pregnancy. Girls who experience teen dating violence are twice as likely as other girls to report having been pregnant.⁵³

Although there is not a conclusive correlation between teen dating violence and teen pregnancy, one study did show that 26 percent of pregnant teens reported having been physically abused by their boyfriends, while 50 percent of these girls stated that the abuse began or was intensified once the

⁴⁵ Gunner Gurwitch, "Teen Dating Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Girls" (2007), p.1. Retrieved from http://new.vawnet.org/category/index_pages.php?category_id=601 on January 31, 2008.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, "Key Issues: Health Concerns for Survivors" (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

⁴⁸ Family Violence Prevention Fund, "Facts on Teenagers and Intimate Partner Violence." Retrieved from www.endabuse.org on November 20, 2007.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Elyse Olshen, et al, "Suicide Attempts by Teens Linked with Assault," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* (2007). Abstract retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USKRA47436320070604> on November 7, 2007.

⁵¹ Jay G. Silverman, et al, "Dating Violence and Associated Sexual Risk and Pregnancy Among Adolescent Girls in the United States," *Pediatrics Vol. 114, No. 2* (2004), p. 220. Retrieved from www.pediatrics.org on November 6, 2007.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p.223.

pregnancy was disclosed.⁵⁴ Already in a vulnerable position as a pregnant teen suffering from peer disapproval, isolation and self-shame, pregnant teens are even more likely to stay in an abusive relationship for fear they will be completely alone if they leave. The stress of a teen pregnancy, coupled with feelings of confusion and shame, contribute to an atmosphere conducive to violence and control.⁵⁵

Sometimes the issue of control is taken to such extremes that abusers will actively try to impregnate their partners. Twenty-six percent of girls with a history of dating abuse reported that their partners actively tried to get them pregnant by manipulating condom use, sabotaging birth control use or making explicit statements about wanting them to become pregnant.⁵⁶

Needless to say, the health consequences of teen dating violence are not to be taken lightly. The effects of teen dating violence can result in detrimental consequences to a young woman's health that can last a lifetime, including: depression, substance abuse, anti-social behaviors, suicidal thoughts and/or actions, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorder, anxiety and low self-esteem.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the depression, anxiety and low self-esteem caused by teen dating violence creates its own set of harmful consequences, such as:

- dramatic changes in weight and/or appearance
- extreme mood swings
- fear of expressing one's own thoughts or feelings
- becoming quieter than usual and/or withdrawn
- dropping out of extra-curricular school activities
- falling grades
- excessive worry about how a partner will react
- unusual nervousness.

Seeking Help and Ending an Abusive Relationship

Nearly 80 percent of girls who have been physically abused in their intimate relationships continue to date their abusers.⁵⁸ Ending a relationship is a difficult and involved process, even in a healthy relationship. In a physically abusive relationship, it can sometimes seem unmanageable—for violence doesn't usually happen in a vacuum. It occurs after a history of verbal and emotional abuse that has chipped away at the victim's self-esteem, making it more difficult to summon the courage to tell someone about the abuse, let alone end the relationship.⁵⁹ The following passage from a girl who eventually did manage to leave her abusive relationship demonstrates how difficult it can be:

It was like a honeymoon when we started dating for the first couple of months. It just started off with this mental abuse. It was very verbal abuse. And then I remember the very first time that he actually physically hit me. The hard part for me was not the fact that he hit me, but the fact that

⁵⁴ LeAnna M. Gutierrez, "Teen Dating Violence: An Ignored Epidemic" (2002), p.2. Retrieved from www.2.edc.org/gdi/publications_SR/publications/CRicaPub/GutierrezEnglish.pdf on November 2, 2007.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Miller, "Teen Girls Report Abusive Boyfriends Try to Get Them Pregnant" (2007). Abstract retrieved from http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/newsroom/releases/archives/childrenshospital/2007/teen_pregnancy9-2007.html on November 2, 2007.

⁵⁷ Mary E. Muscari, "What Should I Tell Clients About Teen Dating Violence?" (2005), p.1. Retrieved from <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/502450> on November 6, 2007.

⁵⁸ Liz Claiborne, Inc., "Are Boys Getting the Wrong Message About What it Means to Be a Man" (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/pressreleases.htm> on November 17, 2007.

⁵⁹ Liz Claiborne, Inc., "Tough Talk: What Boys Need to Know About Relationship Abuse" (2004), p. 3. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/handbooks_toughtalk.htm on November 16, 2007.

*he made me feel like I was nothing. ...It was a giant secret. I didn't even tell any of my lesser friends or my best friend or my mother. I couldn't tell a soul... I felt that it was my fault and that everything was the result of me being not worthy.*⁶⁰

One survey found that 33 percent of teens who had been in an abusive relationship never told anyone about the abuse.⁶¹ When determining whether or not to seek help and/or end an abusive dating relationship, teens have unique obstacles they must face, including peer pressure and age-related factors.

The peer pressure to have a girlfriend or boyfriend can make it difficult for a teen to seek help, let alone end the abusive relationship—for sometimes a teen may feel it is better to have an abusive relationship than no relationship at all.⁶² When they do imagine disclosing their abusive relationship to their peers, teens often worry that their friends will take the side of the abuser. And even if their friends do side with them, teens may still worry about losing respect and social status among their peers.⁶³

The age-related obstacles teens face when determining whether or not to seek help and/or end an abusive dating relationship often involve a general distrust of adults in positions of authority. A survey found that 80 percent of teens who had been in an abusive relationship turned to a friend for help, not their parents or an authority figure.⁶⁴ They may have had experiences of not being believed by an adult or of having adults minimize or not take seriously their experiences. In addition, they may not want their parent(s) to know for fear of losing their freedom of choice and autonomy, and/or that their parent(s) will force them to end the relationship.⁶⁵ Parent-teen relationships go two-ways, however. Whether their teens are in an abusive dating situation or not, parents are not educating their children about the issue. Less than one-third of surveyed teens had talked to their parents about dating abuse in the past year, whereas more than six out of ten teens had a conversation with a parent in the past year about drugs, alcohol, and/or sex.⁶⁶ Furthermore, though 82 percent of parents feel confident that they could recognize if their teen was experiencing dating violence, more than half of these parents could not correctly identify the warning signs of abuse.⁶⁷

On top of these peer-based and age-related obstacles, the dynamics and patterns of relationship abuse itself function in ways that hinder an abused partner from seeking help. For instance, early in a new relationship, controlling behaviors and excessive jealousy may be interpreted as a sign of commitment and love. As the relationship progresses and the level of control and jealousy increases, rather than

⁶⁰ NBC News Transcripts, *Today Show*, “Jessica Aranoff of Break the Cycle Discusses Causes of and Solutions for Abuse in Teen Relationships” (2005). Retrieved from www.ncdsv.org/images/JessicaAranoffBreakCycle.pdf on January 30, 2008.

⁶¹ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007), p. 26. Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁶³ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview* (2004), p.2. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

⁶⁴ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

⁶⁵ LeAnna M. Gutierrez, “Teen Dating Violence: An Ignored Epidemic” (2002), p.2. Retrieved from www.2.edc.org/gdi/publications_SR/publications/CRicaPub/GutierrezEnglish.pdf on November 2, 2007.

⁶⁶ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

recognize the behaviors as unhealthy and abusive, the targets of abuse may simply readjust their baseline of what they consider normal or acceptable behavior within a relationship. As the baseline shifts, it can become harder and harder for the target of abuse to recognize the behaviors as abusive, let alone seek help or end the relationship.⁶⁸

Teen Reactions to Teen Dating Violence

In March 2009, an incident of celebrity teen dating violence became heavily publicized. The pop singer Chris Brown, 19, faced two felony charges for allegedly beating his girlfriend, the pop singer Rihanna, 21. Court documents revealed that Chris Brown punched, bit, and choked Rihanna after she read a text message he had received from another female.⁶⁹ Her injuries required hospital treatment and pictures of her bloodied and bruised face circulated TV, internet and newspapers. The highly publicized event gave teens around the world a chance to talk about teen dating violence. They vocalized their opinions on blogs and other social networking sites. Many of the teenage reactions, however, were disturbing.

A survey of 200 teenagers administered by the Boston Public Health Commission found that 46 percent of participants believed Rihanna was responsible for her abuse and 52 percent said that both Rihanna and Chris Brown bore responsibility.⁷⁰ A junior at Lake Forest High School in Chicago said that a common reaction to the incident among his peers, both male and female, was that Rihanna must have done something to provoke the violence.⁷¹ These reactions demonstrate what Harvard Professor Marcyliena Morgan believes are learned behaviors of a patriarchal culture that teaches us to sympathize with rather than blame and destroy boys.⁷² These reactions clearly demonstrate the need and importance of teen dating violence education.

School-Based Prevention Programs

Evidence suggests that patterns of teen dating violence and victimization that develop during early adolescence can already be difficult to reverse by late adolescence.⁷³ However, studies show that it is possible to change such attitudes and behaviors, especially if teen dating violence prevention and intervention programs are implemented in a social context, especially within school settings.⁷⁴ A study found that 75 percent of teens who took a school course on teen dating violence said it helped them learn about the signs of abusive relationships.⁷⁵ Consequently, schools have a critical role to play in addressing teen dating violence.⁷⁶ Though only Rhode Island and Virginia have adopted laws requiring teen dating

⁶⁸ Liz Claiborne, Inc., *Love is Not Abuse: A Teen Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum* (2007). Retrieved from http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum.htm on January 30, 2008.

⁶⁹ New York Times. Jan Hoffman, "Teenage Girls Stand by their Man." (2010). <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/fashion/19brown.html>>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Chicago Tribune. Bonnie Miller Rubin and Megan Twohey. "Many Teens Blame Rihanna, say dating violence normal." (2010). <<http://www.chicagotribune.com/features/chi-teen-domestic-violence-20-feb20,0,7647229.story>>.

⁷² New York Times. Jan Hoffman, "Teenage Girls Stand by their Man." (2010). <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/fashion/19brown.html>>.

⁷³ Ann Rosewater, *Promoting, Prevention. Targeting Teens: An Emerging Agenda to Reduce Domestic Violence* (2003), p. 11. Retrieved from www.endabuse.org/field/PromotingPrevention1003.pdf on November 2, 2007.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁵ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Alan Berkowitz, et al, "Young Men as Allies in Preventing Violence and Abuse," p. 1. Retrieved from <http://toolkit.endabuse.org/resources/YoungMen.html> on November 13, 2007.

violence instruction in public schools,⁷⁷ 25 percent of teens in the United States report having had a dating abuse course in school.⁷⁸

School-based teen dating violence prevention programs are vitally important in that they have the ability to address the issue directly with teens, and to offer and promote positive alternatives to violence, as well as to the gender-based beliefs that can lead to violence against women.⁷⁹ Impact studies of school-based dating violence prevention programs increasingly provide evidence that programs deliberately addressing underlying gender norms and notions of masculinity are particularly effective in creating positive changes in the gender-based attitudes and behaviors of boys and young men—thus potentially reducing the chances of abusive teen dating relationship from developing.⁸⁰

To redress the discriminatory and sexist masculine gender socialization that contributes to teen dating violence, there is growing international consensus that boys and men need to be directly involved in the processes of change.⁸¹ In bringing boys and men into the equation, advocates of this approach emphasize that it is not their intention to create an either/or argument of whether time and resources should be spend to engage males in redressing gender equalities, versus working directly with girls and women to empower them and make sure they have the support services they need.⁸² Advocates are adamant that both need to happen simultaneously; for efforts to change male attitudes and behaviors that condone, or engage in, violence against women and girls will not be fully successful without the active involvement of boys and men.

One successful school-based program that focuses on the role of boys and young men is the U.S. based *Mentors in Violence Prevention* program <www.jacksonkatz.com>. This program is designed to train male student-athletes and other student leaders to use their status to speak out against all forms of sexist abuse and violence. At the international level, the *White Ribbon Campaign* <<http://www.whiteribbon.ca>> works to raise awareness and educate young men and boys on the issue of violence against women. Both of these organizations provide readily available educational resource materials designed for use in high school violence prevention program.

As for organizations and programs that deal directly with teen dating violence, Canada has developed a national resource manual as part of its *School-Based Violence Prevention Programs*. The manual can be accessed at: <www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/violenceprevention/English/reviewprog/youthdprogs.htm>.

⁷⁷ Chicago Tribune. Bonnie Miller Rubin and Megan Twohey. “Many Teens Blame Rihanna, say dating violence normal.” (2010). <<http://www.chicagotribune.com/features/chi-teen-domestic-violence-20-feb20,0,7647229.story>>.

⁷⁸ Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund, *Troubled Economy Linked to High Levels of Teen Dating Violence & Abuse Survey 2009*. (June 2009). Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited. <http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=45693&folderId=72612&name=DLFE-202.pdf>.

⁷⁹ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV), *Teen Dating Violence Overview*, “Key Issue: Approaches to Prevention” (2004), p.1. Retrieved from <http://search.pcadv.net/phpdig/search.php> on November 6, 2007.

⁸⁰ Gary Barker, “Engaging Boys and Men to Empower Girls: Reflections from Practice and Evidence of Impact” (2006), p.8. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP3%20%20Barker.pdf on November 16, 2007.

⁸¹ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child Report* (2006), p. 29. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/EGM%20Report_FINAL.pdf on November 7, 2007.

⁸² Gary Barker, “Engaging Boys and Men to Empower Girls: Reflections from Practice and Evidence of Impact” (2006), p.2. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP3%20%20Barker.pdf on November 16, 2007.

In the United States, there are several websites devoted exclusively to teen dating violence, such as *Love is Not Abuse* <www.loveisnotabuse.com> and *Break the Cycle* <www.breakthecycle.org>, both of which offer an extensive and comprehensive curriculum guide for developing a school-based teen dating violence prevention program. In addition, the first national teen dating abuse helpline, *Love is Respect* <<http://loveisrespect.org>>, was established in 2006. Also in 2006, the U.S. Senate established the *National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week* which took place during the first week of February. However, in 2010 the U.S. Senate unanimously passed Resolution 373 which designates the entire month of February as Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month, <<http://www.teendvmonth.org/>>. In support of this month, the American Bar Association created a school-based curriculum called the *National Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative*, which can be found at <<http://www.abanet.org/publiced/teendating.shtml>>.

What Soroptimist Is Doing to Help Prevent Teen Dating Violence

Soroptimist International of the Americas is a volunteer organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. Soroptimists contribute time and financial support to community-based and international projects benefiting women and girls, including projects that address teen dating violence. Many of these projects are funded through the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls program.

Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls

Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls are given annually to Soroptimist clubs initiating or continuing innovative projects benefiting women and girls. Grants range from \$500 to \$10,000. Since 1997, more than \$2.5 million has been disbursed to Soroptimist club projects, and more than 200,000 women and their families have benefited from these projects. In 2007, the program was awarded the *Associations Make a Better World Award* from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).

Listed below are a few examples of grant-funded Soroptimist club projects addressing teen dating violence:

SI/Fremont, OH (Midwestern Region): <sifremont@soroptimist.net>

SI/Fremont, OH was awarded a \$5,000 Soroptimist Club Grant in support of its project *TRAP: Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention*. SI/Fremont, OH is using its grant to provide educational materials and forums for teens, parents, and community members on healthy dating relationships and teen dating violence. The club used its funds to purchase literature such as bookmarks, brochures, and posters, and for campaign and public relations expenses. Club members are organizing and promoting presentations for two high schools, running an educational workshop for parents and community members, and preparing and presenting a curriculum at a local pregnancy crisis center.

SI/Bloomington-Normal, IL (Midwestern Region): <sibloomington.normal@soroptimist.net>

SI/Bloomington-Normal, IL was awarded a \$2,500 Soroptimist Club Grant for its project *VIP: Invitation for Communication*. Club members created workshops for teen girls and their mothers on the topic of healthy teen relationships. SI/Bloomington-Normal used their grant to purchase workshop supplies and materials.

SI/Hofu, Japan (Japan Nishi Region): <sihofu@soroptimist.net>

SI/Hofu was awarded a \$5,000 Soroptimist Club Grant for its new campaign *Raising Awareness of Teen Dating Violence*. This initiative implemented a new teen dating violence public awareness campaign and continued to support a domestic violence shelter. Club members used the grant to create and distribute flyers and lecture materials at local high schools and for the operational costs of the shelter.

SI/Imabari, Japan (Japan Nishi Region): <siimabari@soroptimist.net>

SI/Imabari was awarded a \$1,000 Soroptimist Club Grant for its project *Are You Aware of Teen Dating Violence?* Club members created and distributed literature about teen dating violence to high school students as part of a larger awareness raising project that included a formal lecture presentation of the issue at local high schools. SI/Imabari used their grant to for brochure printing costs.

Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Bookmark

Soroptimist clubs working on teen dating violence projects can choose to distribute professionally designed bookmarks as part of their project. The bookmarks have been designed with teens in mind. On one side of the bookmark is a “Dating Quiz” to determine if a teen may be in an abusive relationship. If so, the bookmark provides resources for seeking help. The other side of the bookmark contains a list of “Dating Rights,” provided to help teens understand that they have a right to a happy, healthy dating relationship. The Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Bookmark is available as a writeable PDF on the Soroptimist website <http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_TDV.html> and is also available as a sales item in the [Soroptimist Store](#).

The Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award

The Violet Richardson Award is a recognition program for young women ages 14-17 engaged in volunteer action within their communities or schools. The award is given to young women whose volunteer activities make the community and world a better place. This award is not a scholarship and applicants need not be at the top of their class academically or be a star athlete. Rather they must simply be committed to improving the world around them. By honoring young women for their volunteer efforts, this award encourages them to be powerful female agents of change. As a result, the Violet Richardson Award helps ensure that these young women develop a healthy sense of self-esteem and a confident understanding that they are important and valuable members of society—worthy of only the happiest and healthiest of relationships.