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National Survey of Youth Access to Dating Abuse Services

The National Domestic Violence HOTLINE
1.800.799.SAFE (7233) • 1.800.787.3224 (TTY)

Break the Cycle
Empowering Youth to End Domestic Violence
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND
One in three youth experience some form of abuse in their dating relationships, yet many victim service agencies throughout the country do not meet their needs. There is little information about the provision and accessibility of services for youth nationally. For these survivors, intervention is vital; without appropriate services, youth can experience a wide range of negative impacts, including increased rates of drug abuse, eating disorders, high-risk sexual behaviors, and suicide⁷. Experiencing abuse early in life can have a lasting impact and contribute to increased possibility of re-victimization, and early intervention and support can promote healing and empowerment across the lifespan. This report examines the current state of dating abuse services for youth in the United States with the goal of identifying areas of need for technical assistance and the development of new programs.

METHODOLOGY
In the summer of 2012 the National Domestic Violence Hotline and Break the Cycle conducted a national survey of victim service providers. The survey was sent to over one thousand agencies and collected information on available dating abuse-related services for youth. This report looks at the 1,030 responding agencies from the United States, all of which vary in geography, size, scope of services, and amount and type of funding. Each agency offers some type of victim services, although for many this is not their primary or sole mission. Youth was defined between the ages of 12-24, and is further broken down into two categories as articulated in the findings.

There are some limitations in the data collection process which may impact the findings. Responses were self-reported by agency staff and therefore dependent on the reliability and expertise of the individual respondent. Additionally, organizations solicited who do not serve youth may have been less likely to respond to a survey regarding their youth-serving practices. Estimates of the percentage of youth clients and available services may therefore not be a representative sample and overestimated. Finally, every survey question was not included in this analysis, some questions were combined into categories to ensure relevant comparisons, and some ranges were approximated as noted in the results.

KEY FINDINGS

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS
• Approximately 27% of clients at responding agencies are youth ages 18-24, and 14% are youth ages 12-17. These numbers are approximated based on ranges reported by agencies.
• Approximately one in three agencies provides youth-specific prevention education, but another one in three is unable to serve youth ages 12-17.

TYPES OF SERVICES AVAILABLE
• Legal advocacy that explains and supports legal rights is the most available service for youth. The next most available services are protective or restraining order assistance and sexual assault services.
• Legal representation by an attorney, group counseling, and transitional housing are the least available services to youth, though accessibility varies by minor status.
• Individual counseling is more likely to be available than group counseling for youth, and its availability is less impacted by the client’s minor status.
• Male youth are most likely to have access to specific or specialized services, followed by LGBQ or parenting youth. Fewer agencies provide specific services for youth with disabilities or special needs, or deaf or hard of hearing youth.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES
• Over half of available services to youth ages 12-17 require parental consent. Shelter and transportation services are most likely to require parental consent for minors.
• After an individual turns 18 years old there is a significant jump in service availability. Access to transitional housing, shelter services, and support groups increases most significantly after the age of 18.
• Agencies are most likely to accept self-referrals, but rely on a breadth of service providers and agencies to reach youth in their communities.
• Over one in three agencies are not wheelchair accessible, and less than half provide Spanish language support of some type

DESIRE FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
• Over half of responding agencies would like technical assistance in their dating abuse work.
• One in ten responding agencies would like to begin offering services to youth.
CONCLUSIONS

The information collected through the survey illustrates important national trends in service provision to youth. Trends in availability and accessibility highlight gaps in service as well as strengths and unique needs of communities. There are many variables influencing the services delivered by each agency, but these broader conclusions can inform technical assistance priorities, help victim service agencies strategically expand, and suggest areas of further research about dating abuse services nationally.

IDENTIFY CAUSES FOR LACK OF YOUTH CLIENTS

Young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest per capita rates of dating abuse but do not make up the majority of clients at these agencies. A better understanding is needed of why youth make up fewer clients in order to better support survivors through existing services.

EXPAND PROGRAMMING TO SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Agencies offer varied specialized or specific services for marginalized populations of youth. These populations are often at a higher risk of dating abuse and may face limited access to many types of services, so it is important for victim service agencies to take steps to promote responsive services. Technical assistance is needed to support agencies to meet the needs of specific populations, particularly youth who are immigrants, deaf or hard of hearing, and have disabilities or special needs.

PROMOTE YOUTH-FRIENDLINESS

The most common way agencies are able to welcome new youth clients is through self-referrals. Reaching out to youth and being known and trusted in the community can therefore have powerful implications for youth help-seeking behaviors. Additionally, the breadth of referral sources agencies reported show a need for strong community collaboration. Technical assistance is needed to support agency youth-friendliness and help leverage these potential self-referrals.

EDUCATE ABOUT PARENTAL CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

There are significantly fewer services offered for youth ages 12-17 than youth ages 18-24, and over half of those services to youth ages 12-17 require parental consent. There was no distinction in the survey whether these policies are imposed by the state or agency, or why certain services required consent and others did not. Parental consent requirements are not always empowering for youth survivors and may be required by providers due to a lack of understanding of state law. Clarity around parental consent laws and minor access to services is important for agencies to feel empowered and comfortable serving minors in their state. Anecdotal evidence and the difference in services available for youth ages 12-17 suggest a technical assistance need for legal education on the topic.
RESULTS

PLEASE NOTE: Domestic violence is abbreviated as DV throughout the results.

AGE OF CLIENTS

Not including children of victims you serve what percent of your clients are teens ages 12-17 each year?

- 14% of clients

Not including children of victims you serve what percent of your clients are young adults ages 18-24 each year?

- 27% of clients

Approximately 27% of clients at responding agencies are youth ages 18-24, and 14% are youth ages 12-17. These numbers are approximated based on ranges reported by agencies.

CAPACITY TO SERVE YOUTH

Our agency offers primary prevention or education programs for teens or young adults.

- 34% of clients

Our agency is able to serve teen clients specifically not children of adult clients.

- 63% of clients

Approximately one in three agencies provides youth-specific prevention education, but another one in three is unable to serve youth ages 12-17.
Agencies are most likely to accept self-referrals by youth. Other valuable referral sources are family and other agencies.

Over half of available services to youth ages 12-17 require parental consent. Shelter and transportation services are most likely to require parental consent for youth ages 12-17.
There is a significant jump in access to services after age 18, particularly shelter and support groups. Legal advocacy and assistance that explains and supports legal rights is the most available service for youth; legal representation by an attorney, group counseling, and transitional housing are the least available services to youth, though accessibility varies by minor status.
Male youth are most likely to have access to specific or specialized services, followed by LGBQ or parenting youth. Fewer agencies provide specific services for youth with disabilities or special needs or deaf or hard of hearing youth.

Over one in three agencies are not wheelchair accessible, and less than half provide Spanish language support.
DESIRE FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Would you like training or guidance in developing services for teens or young adults particularly relating to dating violence? 56%

Would you like to begin offering services for teens or young adults? 10%

Over half of responding agencies would like technical assistance in their dating abuse work, and one in ten would like to begin offering services to youth.