

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: THE LIMITS OF THE LAW

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ABSTRACT

Family law scholars have long ignored the “book-ends” of domestic violence that occur at either end of the life cycle: teen dating violence (TDV) and elder abuse. This presentation focuses on the former phenomenon. Intimate partner violence is surprisingly common among teenagers. Research reveals that from 10-20% of high school youth who are in a dating relationship are victims of physical violence by their dating partners. TDV is a particularly appropriate area of study for family law scholars because it is society’s first indication of the intimate partner violence that takes such a heavy toll on family relationships and children’s well-being.

The law responds to TDV in two ways: (1) state laws that make protection orders available to teens in some circumstances, and (2) state laws that provide for teen dating violence prevention education in the schools. Empirical research sheds light on the effectiveness of these approaches and reveals multiple flaws in each legal remedy.

This presentation will explore the law’s response to TDV and its shortcomings. It will first shed light on the scope of the problem. Second, it will highlight the law’s response in the form of teen protection orders and the TDV prevention education movement. Next, it will identify the primary shortcomings in each of these legal approaches. Finally, it will propose suggestions for law reform.