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Teen sex often involves abuse

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Among teenagers who have had sex, one-quarter of those relationships included some form of abuse, with nearly one in 10 teens reporting physical abuse within their relationships, according to a study by Child Trends.

The study also found that one-fourth of teens who have had sex reported having sex with their first partner only once.

Richard Ross, founder of the abstinence program True Love Waits and professor of youth and student ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, drew a link to the entertainment business' inaccurate portrayal of sexual encounters.

"In order to titillate bored adults and hormonally raging teens into buying \$8 movie tickets, the movie industry usually portrays teen sex as a grand adventure without consequences," Ross said. "This study suggests otherwise. For any number of reasons, one-fourth finds their first sexual encounter with a partner so negative that they never repeat the mistake. Even more alarming, one-quarter find that what they thought would be magical is instead filled with shoving, insults, disrespect and even violence."

One-fourth of teenagers who have had sex reported that verbal abuse such as name-calling, insults, threats of violence and disrespectful treatment occurred within their first sexual relationship, the Child Trends study

noted. Nine percent reported physical abuse, and 7 percent reported both physical and verbal abuse.

In other findings, Child Trends reported that a majority of teens viewed their first sexual relationship as more than a casual fling, with 85 percent of teens defining their first sexual relationships as romantic involvements and 61 percent having begun sex within three months of the start of a romantic relationship.

Teen girls were more likely to have older partners, the study found. Among sexually active teens, half of girls reported their first sexual partner was at least two years older. Nearly one in five girls had a partner who was four or more years older.

Founded in 1979, Child Trends is a non-profit research organization based in Washington, D.C., and dedicated to improving the lives of children by providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs and policies that affect children.

The Child Trends study found that among teens who had sex, 59 percent discussed contraception with their partners before they had sex for the first time. Twenty-two percent reported never using contraception with their first sexual partner.

Concerning ethnicity, 17 percent of sexually active Hispanic teens experienced physical violence in their first sexual encounter, compared with 6 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 12 percent of non-Hispanic blacks. Also, Hispanic teens were less vigilant when it came to using contraception, the study found, with 36 percent reporting they did not use contraception during their first sexual relationships.

"Though this study is filled with troubling news, we must not miss the best news," Ross said. "The study reaffirms that now less than half of teenagers have had intercourse before 18. Rates of teenage sexual activity started

dropping about the time True Love Waits and the broader abstinence movement emerged. By God's grace, we hit the tipping point just last year. Now abstinent youth are in the majority. We need to celebrate that."

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