High School Girls and Violence 2015:
A Chartbook

Introduction

Young women and girls of color often do better than their same-race male counterparts on a number of indicators, including high school completion, college enrollment, and even unemployment (Hartmann et al. 2015). These advantages over their male counterparts are often taken to mean (or used to project) that women and girls of color are doing "ok" and do not need the same levels of support and investment as their male counterparts. This is especially the case with Black children and young adults.

Girls and young women of color face significant disadvantages compared with their same-race male counterparts across a range of indicators, however, including higher poverty rates and lower earnings. Further, girls and young women of color also often fare worse than their White female counterparts across a range of issues from suspensions and expulsions from their primary and secondary schools to college graduation rates (Hartmann et al. 2015). Collectively, these disparities undermine the social and economic well-being of women and girls of color.

This chartbook focuses on an area often ignored in discussions about the well-being of girls generally, and girls of color in particular—the alarming proportion of high school girls experiencing physical and sexual violence at the hands of schoolmates, friends, family members, and dating partners. This violence has long-term effects on girls' lives, including degraded physical and mental health, limited educational success, increased chances of becoming entangled in the criminal justice system, and reduced long-term economic security (Hartmann et al., 2015, Riger et al. 2000, Saar, et al. 2015, Wider Opportunities for Women 2013). This chartbook relies on data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) to provide a snapshot of the prevalence of violence in the lives of high school girls in the United States.

Did you know?

More than one-in-ten high school girls experienced
physical dating violence in 2015.

**Figure 1. Percentage of high school students who experienced physical
dating violence by sex and race/ethnicity, 2015**
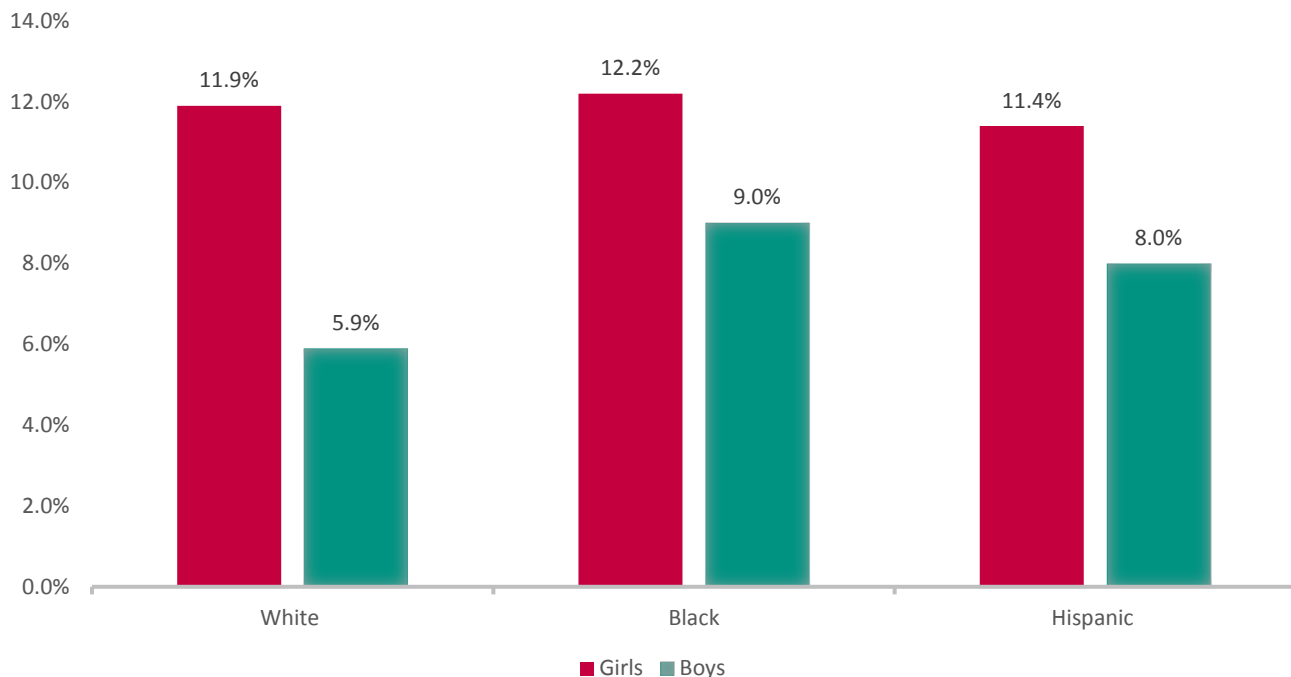
Source: IWPR compilation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016).
Notes: Percentages are of the 68 percent of students who reported dating someone in the twelve months before the survey. White and Black are non-Hispanic.

Physical dating violence is too common among the nation's high school students overall with higher rates for girls compared with boys—more than one in every ten female high school students has experienced physical dating violence.

Even as so many high school girls experience physical dating violence, many states do not recognize high school teens as domestic violence victims, nor do they have consistent legal protections for these teen victims (Anderson et al., 2016).

Did you know?

More than one in six high school girls—16.6 percent of White girls, 11.7 percent of Black girls, and 14.2 percent of Hispanic girls—experienced sexual dating violence in 2015.

Figure 2. Percentage of high school students who experienced sexual dating violence by sex and race, 2015
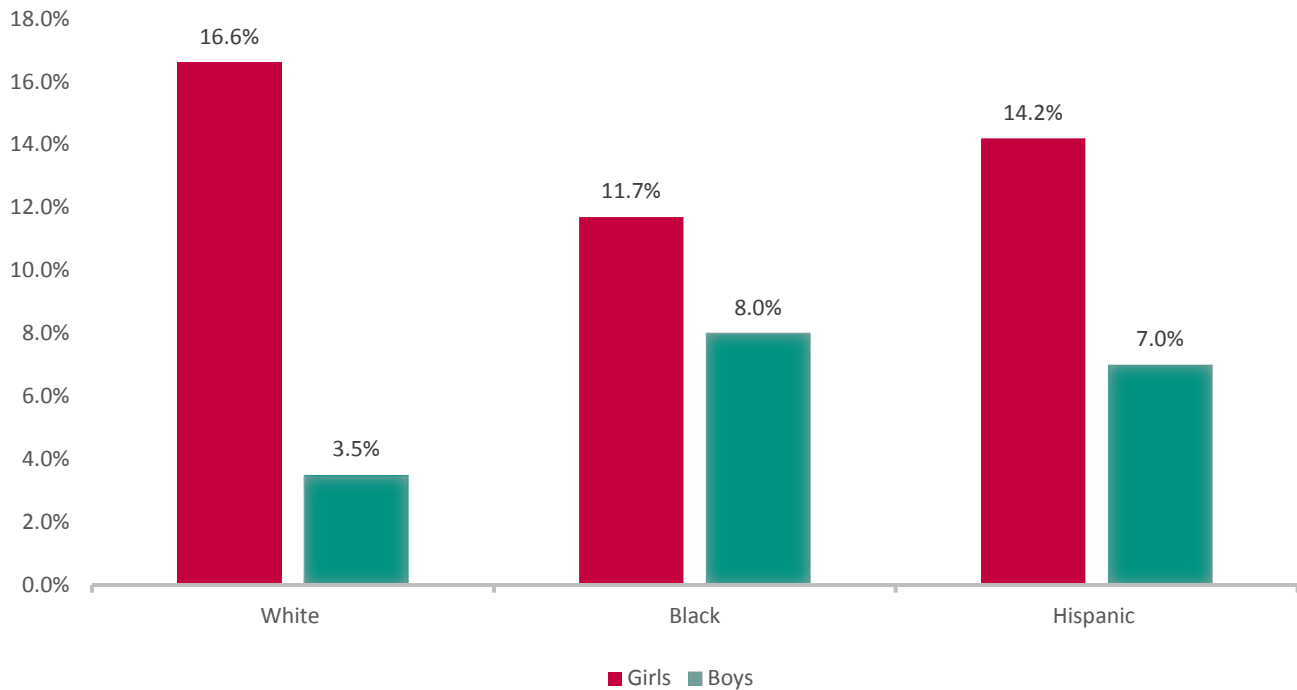
Source: IWPR compilation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016).
**Notes:** Percentages are of the 68 percent of students who reported dating someone in the twelve months before the survey. White and Black are non-Hispanic.

Girls are from 1.5 to more than 4.5 times more likely than their same-race male counterparts to experience sexual dating violence. The highest rates of sexual dating violence were among White and Hispanic high school girls, while the lowest rate was among Black high school girls. Despite Black girls having the lowest rate among girls, their rate is still more than three times that of White high school boys.

Did you know?

One in ten White, Black, and Hispanic high school girls have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to at some point during their lifetime.

Figure 3. Percentage of high school students who were ever physically forced to have sexual intercourse by sex and race/ethnicity, 2015
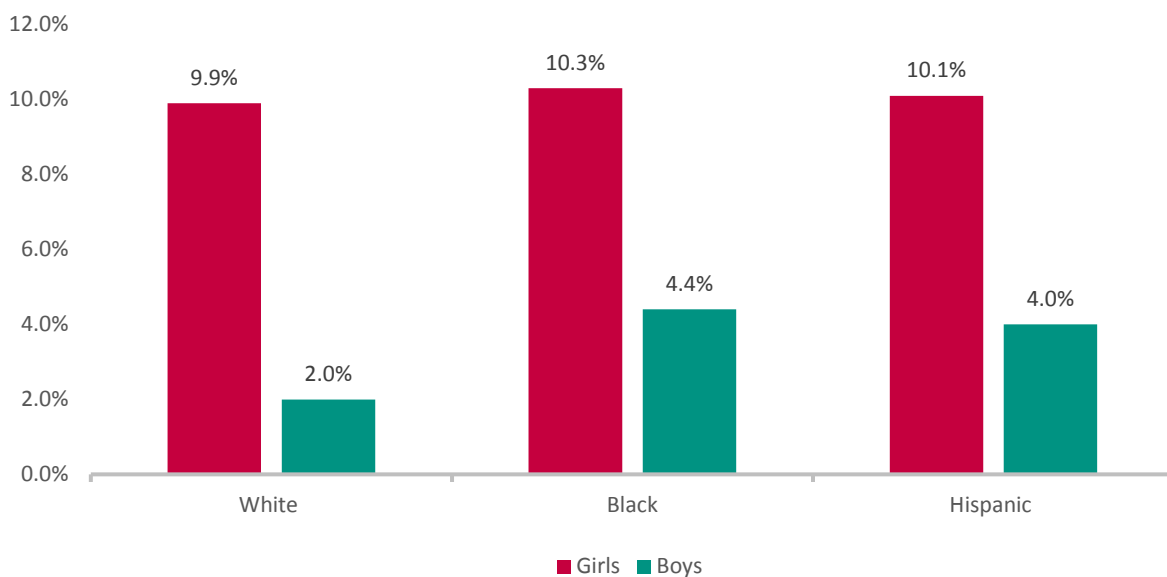
Source: IWPR compilation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016).
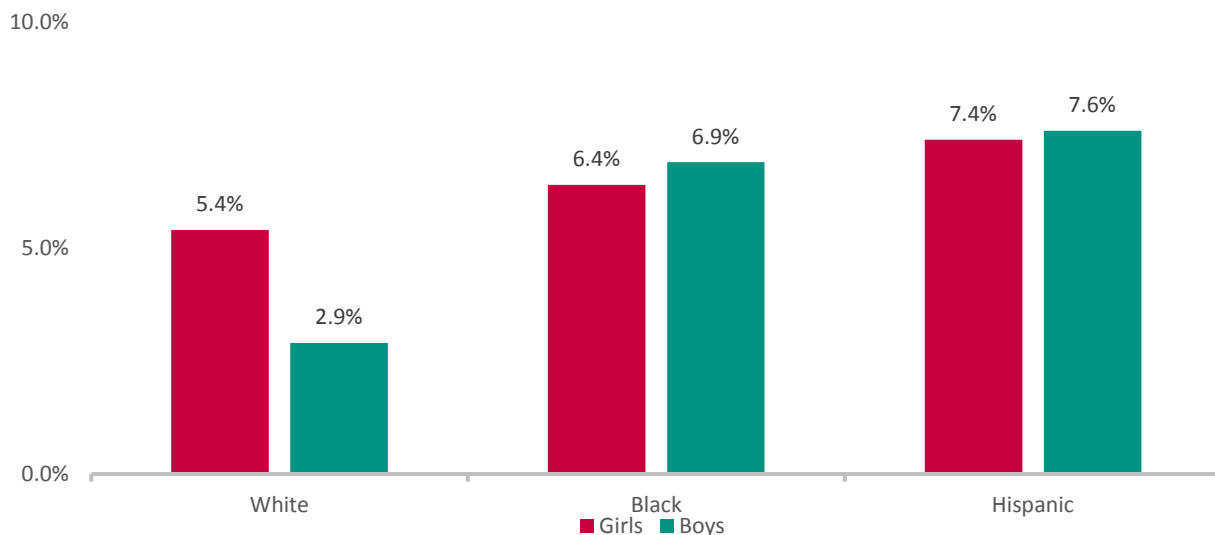**Notes:** White and Black are non-Hispanic.

Between 2001 and 2015, the prevalence of having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse decreased among high school students overall (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016). In 2015, about one in ten Hispanic, Black, and White girls reported that they had been physically forced to have sexual intercourse during their lifetimes. Hispanic, Black, and White boys were all less than half as likely to ever have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse compared with their same-race female counterparts. White boys had the lowest rate of being forced to have sexual intercourse, at 2.0 percent.

Did you know?

In 2015, six percent of all female high school students were absent from school on at least one day due to concerns for their safety, with higher rates for Black (6.4%) and Hispanic (7.4%) female students.

Figure 4. Percentage of high school students who did not attend school at least once in the previous month due to concern for safety at school or on the way to or from school, by sex and race/ethnicity, 2015

Source: IWPR compilation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016).
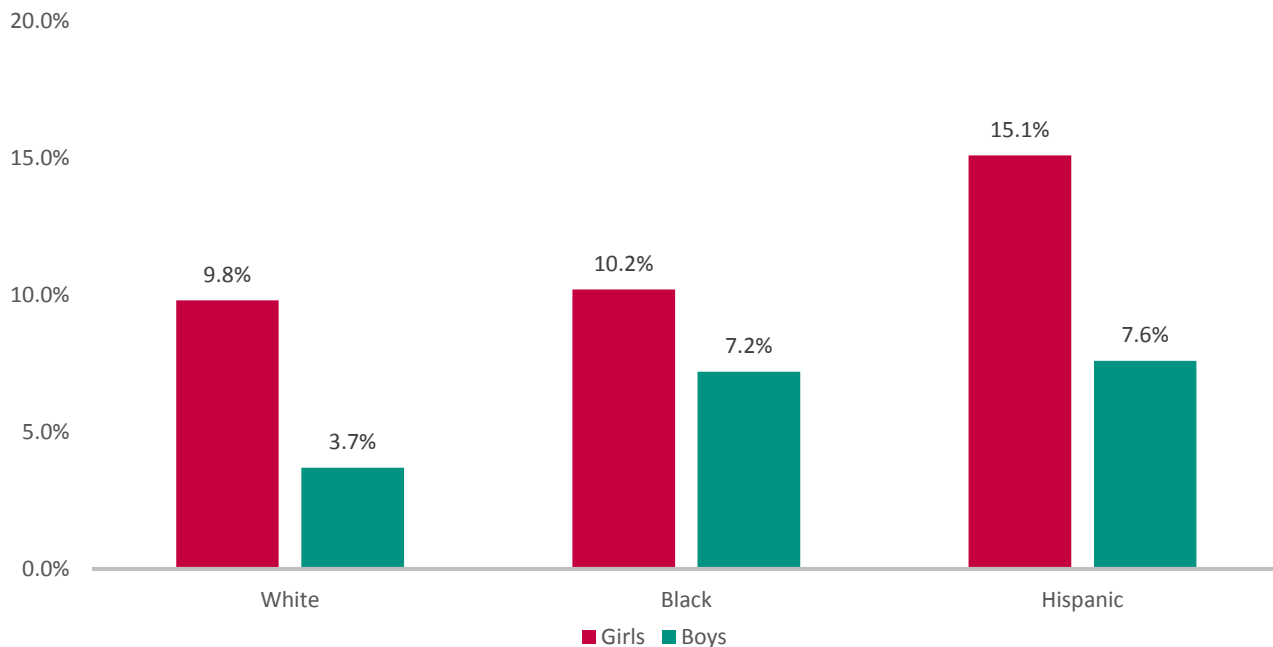**Notes:** White and Black are non-Hispanic.

Since 1993, there has been a steady increase in the share of high school students who have missed at least one day of school because they were concerned for their safety, with more than 1 in 20 White female students, 1 in 16 Black female students and 1 in 13 Hispanic female students missing school for this reason in 2015 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016).

White female students are almost twice as likely as White males to be absent from school due to concern for their safety while there is little difference between male and female students among Black and Hispanic students, although both Black and Hispanic boys are slightly more likely than their female counterparts to be absent from school because of fear for their safety.

Did you know?

More than ten percent of all female high school students in the United States reported that they attempted suicide one or more times during the last year—this rate was much higher among Hispanic girls where one in six attempted suicide.

Figure 5. Percentage of high school students who reported attempting suicide one or more times during the last year, 2015

Source: IWPR compilation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016).
Notes: White and Black are non-Hispanic.

Almost nine percent of all students—boys and girls—reported attempting suicide one or more times in 2015.[1] This rate was higher among female students (11.6 percent) than male students (5.5 percent) and higher among Hispanic girls than White or Black girls. There were also, however large differences across schools as rates of attempted suicide ranged from a low of 6.4 percent to more than 20 percent (20.7).

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[1] Rates of attempted suicide were lower in 2015 than in 1991 by 1.3 percentage points (8.6 percent and 7.3 percent respectively, for all high school students) and the decline is statistically significant (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016).

Policy Recommendations

The findings in this chart book reveal the extent of violence that high school girls live with in the United States. In order for girls to succeed in pursuing education and move on to live economically secure lives, policymakers, schools, and advocates must work to reduce violence against girls and support those girls who are survivors of violence. Interventions must not, however, rely on punitive systems that deepen racial divides. Schools and policymakers should avoid zero tolerance policies, which have had a disproportionately negative effect on students of color, fueling racial inequities in educational success and increasing their contact with the criminal justice system, without actually improving students' safety (Kang-Brown et al. 2013). Instead, the following recommendations are initial steps that stakeholders can take to make progress in comprehensively addressing violence against girls.

- **Advocates and policymakers** can improve educational institutions' responses to violence against girls by training educators about the prevalence, dynamics, and impacts of violence on girls' lives and best practices for building effective, victim-centered institutional responses.
- **Schools and community advocates** should establish programs to educate girls and boys about the harmfulness of emotional, physical, and sexual violence against girls and women, in the home, in school, in the community, and in the media.
- **Schools should**:
    - Provide students, faculty, and staff with regular, mandatory training on harassment and violence, healthy relationship skills, and bystander intervention. Training for students should include information about students' rights, staff responsibilities, and local resources for survivors.
    - Collect and publish disaggregated data on the prevalence and type of harassment and violence among students based on sex, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity and the environments in which they occur.
    - Fully comply with federal guidelines regarding survivor accommodations and safety outlined in Title IX, which requires schools receiving federal funds to minimize the impact of violence on survivors' ability to fully engage in academic life.
    - Make accommodations for students who need time to recover from violence or participate in criminal justice proceedings.
    - Take steps to protect survivors' safety, such as by issuing no contact directives when appropriate. Schools can also reduce the impact of violence on survivors' lives by helping them transfer to other schools and retake classes.
- **Communities** should consider comprehensive approaches to supporting girls' healthy emotional development and develop a network of support that gives girls of different economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds multiple reporting and support options when experiencing difficulties in mental health.
- **Federal and state policymakers should**:
    - Work to expand access to affordable health care to ensure that girls who have experienced violence have access to critical medical services, including mental health care and counseling, access to contraception, and drug and alcohol counseling.
    - Ensure that adequate funding is allocated to providing survivors with free sexual assault kits (as required by the Violence Against Women Act)
    - Consider expanding free services for survivors to include emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections and HIV.
    - Prioritize reducing barriers to minors' access to justice system remedies. Jurisdictions should eliminate bans on minors obtaining protection orders as well as eliminate requirements that minors be accompanied by a parent and/or other adult.

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