

THE MANY FACES OF ABUSE

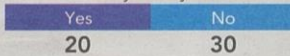
This month, IN polled students to find out what constituted dating abuse in their eyes. The 50 respondents, aged 12 to 19, were given several situations to consider. Try the same survey below, then see what your peers thought.

Of the following situations, which ones would you consider "dating abuse"? Choose all that apply:

Your partner repeatedly checks on your whereabouts throughout the day, and consistently does so on a day-to-day basis.	
Your partner makes you ask for his or her consent whenever you meet up with anyone else who is not him or her.	
Your partner consistently forbids you from meeting up with certain friends.	
Your partner consistently asks you to make video-calls to show your surroundings when you are meeting up with other people.	
Your partner pressures you into performing certain intimate actions or having sex even though you are not comfortable.	
Your partner expects you to always pay for dates or any expenses related to your dating activities.	
Your partner repeatedly and consistently says you are not good enough for him or her or says harsh words or calls you degrading names if you do not live up to his or her standards.	
Your partner consistently controls what clothes you wear, how you style your hair.	
During disagreements, your partner has a consistent habit of grabbing you by your shoulders and shaking you or slapping you.	
During disagreements, your partner sometimes grabs you by your shoulders and shakes you or slaps you.	
During a disagreement, on a one-off occasion, your partner grabs you by your shoulders and shakes you or slaps you.	

IS IT DATING ABUSE?

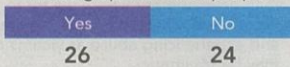
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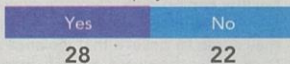
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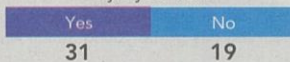
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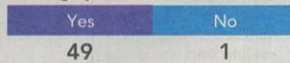
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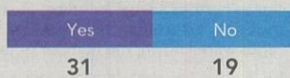
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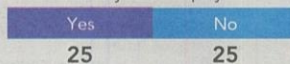
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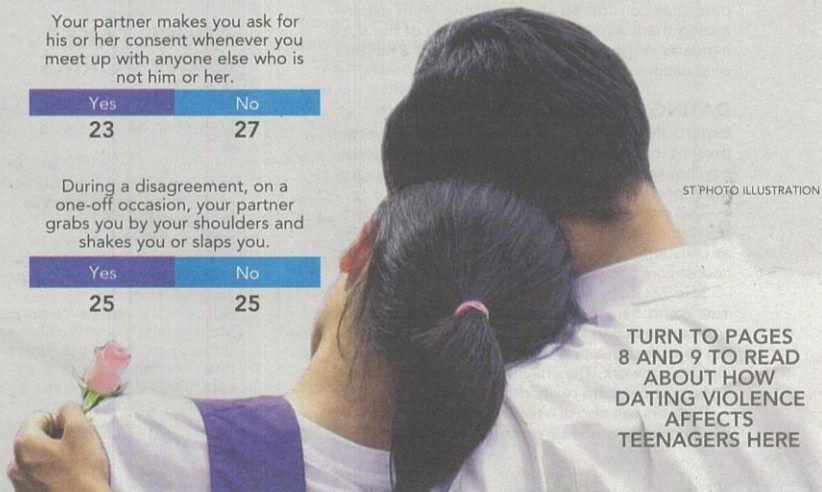
During a disagreement, on a one-off occasion, your partner grabs you by your shoulders and shakes you or slaps you.



During disagreements, your partner has a consistent habit of grabbing you by your shoulders and shaking you or slapping you.



Your partner repeatedly and consistently says you are not good enough for him or her or says harsh words or calls you degrading names if you do not live up to his or her standards.



ST PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

TURN TO PAGES 8 AND 9 TO READ ABOUT HOW DATING VIOLENCE AFFECTS TEENAGERS HERE

ARE YOU DATING THE ENEMY



Leading up to this Valentine's Day, ANG YIYING tackles the thorny issue of dating violence by asking experts how to identify toxic relationships and finds ways to deal with them.

In her previous relationship, Jade Tan, 17, used to receive a flurry of messages from her then boyfriend asking: "Where are you?", "Who are you with?", "Where are you meeting him at his convenience."

She recalled: "I study in Ngee Ann Poly and he was in TP (Tampere Polytechnic), which are on completely opposite sides of Singapore. But he still expected me to go all the way there."

Worst, he also made her feel bad for having better grades than he did. She eventually broke up with him, saying: "After a period of time, I got sick of it."

She is currently in a new, healthier relationship. Jade was among 50 teens who IN spoke to in a street poll to find out their views on dating and dating abuse.

While most of those IN spoke to said they had not experienced dating situations that made them feel uncomfortable, intimidated or distressed, some had observed such problems in their friends' relationships.

For example, they knew of fights where boyfriends scolded their girlfriends until they cried, or partners - girl or guy - who made the other party pay for everything.

Sometimes, one party was extremely controlling of the other.

However, when it came to recognising abusive situations for themselves, not everyone could do so.

They were given a list of 11 situations (see page 7) - all abusive in different ways - and asked which ones they considered abusive if they were experiencing them. While some identified all of the scenarios as abusive, others recognised just a handful of situations as being so.

DATING ABUSE VARIES

Experts IN interviewed said that dating abuse can present itself in different ways, such as emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, or physical (see right for descriptions).

The pervasiveness of technology and smartphones has also led to controlling behaviours, such as constantly tracking or monitoring partners, said counsellors and psychologists interviewed.

Said Ms Sally Goh, a senior counsellor at Fei Yue Youth Services: "Sometimes, there is project work and one partner is constantly texting and calling to make sure that their partner is actually doing project work. They have to give pictures or images to show 'I am really doing work'."

Partners can also use technology in coercive behaviour, such as when a partner demands for com-

promising photos, or threatens to release such photos online.

SAFETY IN AWARENESS

Some agencies, such as the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (Pave), have been raising awareness of the issue of dating abuse.

It launched its inaugural Dating Violence Awareness Week - usually timed to coincide with the Valentine's Day period - in 2009.

Pave said that dating violence made up 2 to 3 per cent of its total caseload each year. But a "sizeable number" of married couples it counsels had histories of violence dating back to their courtship phase.

Of the dating violence cases it handled, about one in six on the receiving end is a student.

The Sexual Assault Care Centre (SACC) at the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) provides free services to those who have experienced sexual assault.

Of those who sought help from SACC for intimate partner sexual violence, in which they were not married to their partners and for whom their ages were known, the number of teens aged 13 to

"In a survey of 279 students here by the International Dating Violence Research Consortium in 2004, one in five said that he or she had been physically assaulted by a dating partner in the past year.

19 seeking help rose from four cases in 2016 to 14 cases last year.

DEEP SCARS LEFT BEHIND

Dating abuse can cast long shadows.

Dr Jessie Chua, a senior clinical psychologist with the Resilient Clinic, noted that the adolescent years of 13 to 19 is "a formative phase during human development where we try to figure out who we are and where do we fit in within our society" and experiencing abuse as victims or perpetrators may be traumatic.

She said: "For example, some victims might come to believe that they are unworthy or not good enough. This may increase one's risk of developing low self-esteem or have a heightened sense of anxiety or stress response due to the lack of healthy coping skills."

"On the other hand, some of the perpetrators may come to believe that violence is the only way to get what they want, as such, leading some to integrate these characteristics into their developing self-identity, which will become very resistant to change as they continue to grow into young adulthood."

Ms Sue Anne Nummela, a principal psychologist at Adelphi Families and Youth Centre, observed this of the young adults who have sought

her help for emotional distress: "A majority of them are young adults, and although many of them experienced dating abuse during their teens, most did not seek help immediately until they develop depression, anxieties or post-traumatic stress disorder that overwhelmed their coping system."

But getting teens to seek help early include them first recognising that certain behaviours are abusive. And, beyond that, creating an environment conducive for them to speak up.

Said Ms Anisha Joseph, SACC's manager: "Many young people fear punishment or even violence if they talk about having been physically intimate or being in a relationship."

"We need to have open and non-judgmental platforms for young people to freely discuss intimacy, relationships and sexuality, to truly support those who may be in unhealthy or abusive relationships."

Additional reporting by Serene Luo, Zan Sam and Chloe Ng

HELP IS NOT FAR AWAY

If you think that you may be in an abusive relationship and need to talk about it, you can speak to a school counsellor or find help at:

■ Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (Pave)
Call: 6555-0390; weekdays, 9am to 6pm (9.30pm on Wed only)
E-mail: admin@pave.org.sg

■ Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware)
Women's Helpline: 1800-777-5555; weekdays, 3pm to 9.30pm
Sexual Assault Care Centre: 6779-0282; weekdays, 10am to midnight
(Aware's services are primarily for girls and women aged 16 and above)

■ ComCare
Call: 1800-222-0000; daily, 7am to midnight

If you believe your friend may be in an abusive relationship:

- ✓ Offer a listening ear.
- ✓ Provide information or resources.
- ✓ When giving support to those on the receiving end of the abuse, emphasise "It's not your fault".

"A joint survey by Pave and Nanyang Technological University undergraduates in 2008 showed that one-third of the 250 Singaporeans polled, between the ages of 16 and 30, said they knew someone who could be a victim of dating violence."

TRAPPED IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE OF ABUSE

This 17-year-old was anxious about enlisting for national service, and feared losing his 15-year-old girlfriend.

But it emerged during the counselling process that the pair's relationship was strained as he was a very controlling boyfriend who refused to let her meet up with new friends.

When she did so without his permission, he once blew his top and slapped her.

This was a case that Ms Lena Teo, deputy director of therapy and mental wellness services of Children-At-Risk Empowerment Association (Care Singapore), saw in 2016.

She recalled of her client: "He was worried he would go to NS, and she would have free play in looking for new boyfriends."

Digging deeper, it turned out that he himself used to be on the receiving end of dating abuse in his previous relationship - and was the one being controlled.

He was attending ITE while his then girlfriend was from a junior college. She frequently belittled him for not being good enough for her, and expected him to comply with her demands.

This included him having to always to make her a priority over his friends, rushing down to meet her whenever she called him.

Despite his efforts to give in, eventually, his girlfriend broke up with him.

That affected his next relationship in which he became the one inflicting the abuse.

Said Ms Teo: "He felt very vulnerable and insecure... As a result, he became more controlling."

Fortunately, he was able to see how his past relationship affected the one after, and was later referred to another counsellor when he enlisted.