

God, Please Protect Our Youth From Sexual Violence

As the mother of a teenaged daughter, news that nearly 10 percent of adolescents report perpetrating some form of **sexual violence** in their lifetime disturbs me. The sexual violence list includes coercive sex, forced sexual contact—and even rape.

Can we blame the media? The study's name, "Growing Up With Media," suggests media is indeed playing a role in flashing images of **sexual violence** across the eyes of modern youth. Considering the **prince of the power of the air** is working overtime to pollute our young souls with all manner of immorality and violence, I think laying the some of the blame at the media's doorstep is appropriate. But laying blame isn't going to solve the problem. And the problem turns my stomach.

According to the study, 3 in 4 victims were romantic partners of their perpetrators. Coercive language and emotional manipulation are more common than physical force, but let's not underestimate the lasting impact of words. Sixty-three percent of perpetrators in the study said they used expressed anger toward their victims—or made them feel guilty—to coerce them. Five percent reported using outright threats, and 8 percent admitted using physical force to get their way with their victim.

This isn't something to brush under the rug. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), teens who experience intimate partner, or dating, violence are at risk for a host of negative outcomes. They are 4 to 6 times more likely to become pregnant than their peers. And in one study, they reported lower self-esteem and emotional well-being, more suicidal thoughts and attempts, and were more likely to have eating disorders than adolescents who did not experience

dating violence.

It should come as no surprise that the sexually violent perpetrators blame their victims. Fifty percent said the victim is completely to blame, and 60 percent get away with the sexual violence—or at least they think they do. God sees everything. And this study concludes that these troubled youth are seeing too much of what God doesn't want them to see: sexually violent media. The bottom line: Youth who reported viewing violent sex online, on television, at the movies or in magazines were more likely to commit violent acts.

Nevertheless, we can't blame all this on the devil or the media or even the sexually violent teens. We can't even lay all the blame at parents' feet. I know all too well that you can't completely control what your teenagers see or do 24/7—even if you install the best Internet monitoring software and smartphone spyware and have strict rules in your household. Peer pressure and “FOMO”—Fear of Missing Out—drive teens to explore all sorts of dangers that can lead them into the grip of sexual violence. So, ultimately, the blame game isn't solving the problem at this point. The **devil** isn't about to let go of his stronghold in the media.

The best way we can stop the rise of teen-on-teen rape is to stay vigilant and be ready to help. The American Bar Association lists warning signs as suspicious bruises or other injuries, failing grades, loss of interest in activities or hobbies that they once enjoyed, excusing their dating partner's behavior, needing to respond immediately to calls or texts from their partner and/or fearfulness around their partner.

If you suspect a teen you know is the victim of sexual violence, take action. You can contact the National Dating Abuse Helpline and other agencies to get advice. Please, just don't sit by and watch—and while we are at it, let's keep our homes free from media that depicts sexual violence.

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