



DANGER LURKS IN TEEN DATING GAME

RAPE, BEATINGS, BOOZE & DRUGS RAMPANT

By LUCY CARNE - December 10, 2007 –

Forget puppy love. New York's teen dating scene is a harsh reality of abusive 11-year-olds, 15-year-old rapists, beatings with broomsticks, and girls forced into cocaine addiction at 16.

City officials and parents were shocked and appalled last week by findings in the city Health Department's Teen Safety Report.

The study gave a disturbing insight into New York's teenage dating violence, which has spiked by 40 percent since 1999.

One out of 10 girls at New York high schools have been forced into sex, with reported rapes increasing by 34 percent.

One in 10 New York teens have experienced physical violence at the hands of a partner, the study of 8,000 students from grades 9 to 12 found.

"In public schools, the violence is way more up-front," said 17-year-old Alex Unger, a senior from an uptown school. "But in private schools, there is way more pressure to have sex, especially at private-school parties. Sex is expected."

Upper West Side junior Mike Avedon, 16, told of a classmate couple from his affluent high school, both 16 and embroiled in an abusive relationship.

"He would hit her with a broom. It was very emotional and unstable in everyone's eyes," Avedon said.

"They were always screaming at each other."

Private-school sophomore Sami Paprin, 15, could only watch as her best friend was manipulated into drug addiction by a boyfriend.

"She was 16 and she became addicted to cocaine," she said.

"When they were high, they would hit each other and have these huge physical fights.

"I know so many girls with boyfriends who beat down on them mentally or even physically, and they just stay with him because they think they love him."

Low self-esteem is one factor teens pinpoint as a possible reason behind the escalating dating abuse.

"There are a lot more insecurities with girls these days," said Maggie, 15, a sophomore from the prestigious Dalton School on the Upper East Side.

"They become reliant on it, and when the abuse starts, it's so much harder for them to get out."

Alcohol and drugs are common at school parties and often lead to abusive behavior, her classmate Emi, 15, explained.

"This party had finished and it was my friend and another guy left at the house, and he tried to physically force her to have sex," she said.

"Thankfully, she managed to fight him off."

Christian Burgess, the school program director for the Safe Horizon organization, said the abuse is escalating.

"This is happening not only among older teens, but in middle school, with children as young as 11 years old engaging in abusive behavior," he said.

Burgess said it is important for parents to have an open-door policy.

"Teens may feel isolated, but once the olive branch is offered, they will talk and they will take steps to get help," he said.