

**The Relationship Between Community Violence and Dating Violence
in Urban Adolescents
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**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor
of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Pace University.**

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I am so pleased to be writing this section because it indicates that I have reached one of the goals that I set for myself which was to earn a doctoral degree in Psychology. It has been a long road of sacrifice, struggles and achievements. It is an accomplishment that I would never had achieved had it not been for the many people in my life that were endless sources of support and who never asked "Aren't you done school yet?"

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PREVIEW

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Abstract

This study examines dating violence in an urban, ethnically and racially diverse sample of 134 adolescents to determine the relationship among community violence, attitudes toward dating violence, and dating violence. Findings reveal that adolescents in this sample experience a high level of dating and community violence regardless of gender. Community violence predicts physical and psychological dating violence for males and physical dating violence for females. In addition, attitudes toward dating violence predict dating violence for both genders. Specifically, males and females justify physical dating violence under conditions of self defense and humiliation. For males, self defense and humiliation predict psychological dating violence. Results indicate support for using gender specific models to study dating violence. Implications of this study and suggestions for interventions are addressed.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview

High levels of dating violence exist among high school and college students (Foshee, 1996). The dating violence research literature reflects prevalence rates as high as 43 percent among adolescents (Bergman, 1992; Foshee, 1996; O'Keefe, 1997; Schubot, 2001). One recent national survey found that 1 in 11 high-school students said they had been slapped, hit or hurt physically on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the past year (Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 1999). These findings indicate that dating violence is a significant problem among adolescents.

Studying dating violence among adolescents is important for several reasons. Dating is one of the primary activities of the adolescent period. Dating offers many important developmental experiences such as recreation, companionship and socialization. Dating also provides an opportunity for sexual experimentation and achievement of intimacy (Roscoe & Kelsey, 1986). Adolescents have the potential to develop patterns of relating to partners that often carry into adult relationships. Understanding dating violence within this age group may allow for interventions to interrupt the development of unhealthy patterns of relating to partners with violence by developing interventions for adolescents that confront accepting attitudes toward dating violence and moderate the impact of exposure to community violence.

The dating violence literature establishes several factors that are predictive of dating violence. For example, gender is a predictive factor in teen dating violence (Archer, 2000; Kreiter, Krowchuk, Woods, Sinal, Lawless & Durant, 1999; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987). Specifically, females initiate as many acts of violence and sometimes more, in dating relationships, as males but are more likely to sustain severe injuries from their partner than

males (Gray & Foshee, 1997). In addition, an accepting attitude toward violence in dating relationships is predictive of experiences with violence in dating relationships (Gray & Foshee, 1997; O'Keefe, 1997; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987).

The dating violence literature has been guided usually by social learning theory. According to social learning theory, children who observe violent models are more likely to learn violent behaviors and later imitate violent models in adult relationships and dating relationships than children who do not view violent models (Bandura, 1977). Riggs and O'Leary (1989) developed a theoretical model of dating violence, based on social learning theory, in an effort to define specific predictors that lead to dating violence in adolescents. The model is composed of contextual variables (e.g., accepting attitude toward dating violence, community violence exposure) and situational variables (e.g., alcohol use) that are used to predict dating violence. Much of the current dating violence research with adolescents is based on the Riggs & O'Leary (1989) model (e.g., Malik, Sorenson & Aneshensel, 1997; O'Keefe, 1998; O'Keefe & Treister, 1998).

Unfortunately, previous research (e.g., Gamache, 1991; Gwartney- Gibbs, Stockard & Bohmer, 1987) focuses on the influence of violent or abusive family models on experience with dating violence, overlooking the important contribution that exposure to community violence makes in learning and expressing aggressive behaviors, particularly in intimate relationships. Recent research (e.g., Heights & Kuther, 1999; O'Keefe, 1997), based on social learning theory, finds that just as violent or abusive family of origin experiences contribute to the use of abusive behaviors in dating relationships, exposure to community violence increases adolescents use of violence in dating relationships.

The adolescent interpersonal violence literature reveals that rates of dating violence perpetration and victimization are higher in urban settings than in suburban neighborhoods (O'Keefe, 1997; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). In urban environments, adolescents not only face

violence in intimate relationships but also in their community. Similarly, the community violence literature finds that adolescents exposed to chronic community violence tend to engage in higher rates of aggressive behavior than those not exposed to community violence (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman & Serafini, 1996; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; O'Keefe, 1997). These findings link exposure to community violence to dating violence. However, few studies have examined the impact of community violence on dating violence with the adolescent population.

Two recent studies examine the link between dating and community violence exposure in high school samples (Malik et al., 1997; O'Keefe & Treister, 1998). Both studies examine contextual and situational predictors of dating violence based on Riggs and O'Leary's (1989) model of dating violence. The first study (Malik et al., 1997), demonstrates that community violence exposure among adolescents is predictive of dating violence exposure for both males and females, after controlling for other variables such as socioeconomic status. In contrast, O'Keefe & Treister (1998), utilizing a similar, ethnically diverse, urban sample finds a relationship between community and dating violence but only for females.

Following the Riggs & O'Leary's (1989) model of dating violence, O'Keefe & Treister (1998) examine select contextual (e.g., attitudes toward dating violence, community violence exposure) and situational (e.g., seriousness of the relationship, length of time dating) variables and their ability to predict dating violence in adolescents. In their study, psychological and physical dating violence are combined to form a single measure of dating violence. The results indicate that females, in this sample, are more likely to have experience with dating violence if they are exposed to community violence and hold an accepting attitude toward dating violence. For males, the only significant predictor of inflicting dating violence is being the victim of dating violence by a partner. Thus, Riggs & O'Leary (1989)

find that for females in their sample, community violence exposure and an accepting attitude toward dating violence predicts dating violence. For male subjects in this study, attitudes toward dating violence and community violence are not predictive of dating violence.

This project addresses the relationship between community and dating violence among adolescents. Specifically, the relationship between dating and community violence for males and females is examined to determine the degree, if any, of association. This project is modeled after the study by O'Keefe and Treister, (1998) and expands on their research by looking at both psychological and physical dating violence and their relationship to community violence. An urban population was chosen for the current project because the participants are more likely to have experience with community violence than participants from a non-urban area.

The current study is guided by the Riggs and O'Leary (1989) model of dating violence and examines contextual variables (e.g., attitudes toward dating violence, community violence exposure) as predictors of dating violence. Attitudes toward dating violence are assessed to determine if a positive attitude toward dating violence is related to experience with dating violence. Attitudes toward dating violence, community violence exposure, and gender are selected as predictors of dating violence in this study because prior research (Archer, 2000; Grey & Foshee, 1997; O'Keefe & Treister, 1998) identified these factors as being associated with dating violence among adolescents.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The first time it happened, I was about fourteen and my boyfriend was sixteen. He saw me hug my brother in the hall at school, but he didn't know it was my brother 'cause we'd just started dating. He drug me out of school, behind a store and just beat me up, literally. He said if anyone asked me what happened, to tell'em I got into a fight with someone; not to dare tell anyone he hit me.

Eleventh grade girl (Gamache, 1991, p. 69)

After a while, when it starts getting worse, you get scared to leave him. I'd tell my boyfriend I didn't want to go out with him anymore, and it would get worse. He'd start slapping me and say 'I'm not going to quit until you tell me you're not leaving.'

Eleventh grade girl (Gamache, 1991, p. 69)

Prevalence Rates of Violence

Violence refers to immediate or chronic situations that result in injury to the psychological, social, or physical well-being of individuals or groups (American Psychological Association, 1993). Teens are bombarded with violence from multiple sources including dating relationships, community, school and the media. They may experience violence as victims or perpetrators and in ways that are destructive to themselves as well as others (Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

Children and adolescents are faced with higher rates of violence than ever before. The national statistics are chilling. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for persons 15 to 24 years of age (CDC, 1999). Violence is the leading cause of death for African Americans and is the second leading cause of death for Latino youth 15 to 24 years of age

(CDC, 1999). Homicide has been the leading cause of death among African American males and females between the ages of 15 to 24 years for more than ten years (Scarpa, 2001). Female victims of homicide are about ten times more likely to have been killed by an intimate partner than are male victims (Bell & Jenkins, 1993).

Dating violence has gradually been identified as a substantial problem in the dating relationships of high school students. Dating violence includes a range of verbal or physical abuse committed by one partner or both against the other in a dating relationship (Makepeace, 1981). The assaults may range from mild acts, such as verbal threats of violence, to violent acts such as using a weapon against the other person. Dating violence may include sexual, physical or emotional assault. Dating violence implies a power relationship in which one individual seeks to dominate another. Most of the literature (e.g., Gray, 1997; Makepeace, 1981; O'Keefe, 1997) on high school dating violence measures all forms of dating violence from mild to severe forms.

The literature separates sexual assault and rape from physical assault due to the unique experiences and implications of these forms of violence. Sexual assault includes a range of forced sexual acts including forced touching or sexual intercourse (Abbey, 2002). Rape typically refers to sexual behaviors involving penetration due to force, threat or inability of the victim to consent (e.g., intoxication or cognitive impairment) (Abbey, 2002). Sexual victimization and rape are not examined in this study. However, a few points of distinction between physical assault and sexual assault are highlighted below in this literature review.

Predictors of sexual assault are identified in the research literature (e.g., Koss & Harvey, 1991), predictors of sexual assault, however, are not commonly predictive of dating violence. For example, miscommunication about sexual intercourse, extreme heightened sexual arousal on the part of the perpetrator, and alcohol use are identified as predictors of sexual assault (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Furthermore, the research finds that an acceptance of

rape myths (e.g., the woman deserves to be raped if she is dressed provocatively) is often predictive of sexual assault (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Similarly, sexual abuse as a child and early sexual experiences are correlated with sexual assault (Koss & Harvey, 1991).

In addition, prevention strategies differ for dating violence and sexual assault. For example, in a sample of college students, Abbey (2002) finds that alcohol contributes to over fifty percent of reported sexual assaults and that interventions which focus on the impact of alcohol on sexual assault are effective. In contrast, the dating violence literature indicates that effective interventions focus on changing accepting attitudes toward dating violence (Foshee, Bauman, Freene, & Koch, 2000).

Much of the early research on relationship aggression focuses on adult relationships or marital abuse (e.g., Bowker, 1983; Cate, Koval & Ponzetti, 1984). These studies seem to indicate that dating violence only occurs in long term, committed relationships. Not until a landmark study by Makepeace (1981) did researchers begin examining dating violence in a younger population. Makepeace reports that a substantial proportion of college students experience violence in their dating relationships prior to entering college. Makepeace's research of college students is one of the first studies to pinpoint dating aggression as a problem for adolescents at the high school level. As a result, researchers (e.g., Bergman, 1992; Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999; Gray & Foshee, 1997) explored this phenomenon with young populations and found similarities across younger as well as older adolescent populations.

Dating violence occurs at significant levels in high school students' relationships. Recent literature reflects prevalence rates of dating violence among high school adolescents from 13 to 43 percent (Bergman, 1992; Foshee, 1996; O'Keefe, 1997; Schubot, 2001). The large variation across studies in prevalence rates may be due to the way dating violence is measured (e.g., life time prevalence or experience with dating violence in a prescribed period

of time). These prevalence rates were collected from a variety of studies that examine diverse populations of high school students. The prevalence rates of dating violence among high school students are similar to those found in the college population (Gamache, 1991; Grunbaum, Kann, Kinchen, & Williams, 2002; Scarpa, 2001). These findings indicate that dating violence is a significant problem among adolescents.

Community violence may be related to dating violence, since the community provides many social learning opportunities for children and youth. Community violence is a widespread problem that impacts an alarming number of children and adolescents particularly in inner-city environments. The literature has examined both witnessing acts of violence and being the victim of violent acts. Levels of witnessing various forms of violence are as high as 93 percent for inner-city children and teenagers (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Close to one half of pre-teenage and adolescents report being directly victimized by community violence, with male adolescents reporting particularly high levels of neighborhood victimization (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). The literature reports inconsistent rates of violence exposure; in part the inconsistencies are due to the different definitions of exposure as well as different methods of data collection.

The importance of examining both dating and community violence stems from similarities across these different types of violence exposure. Both dating and community violence pose a threat to the adolescent's personal safety. Violence challenges teens' perception that their immediate environment is safe and leaves parents and guardians less available for physical and emotional caretaking (Margolin, 1998). Furthermore, evidence for the spillover effect of aggression in one relationship to another has been found (Chase, Treboux, O'Leary & Strassberg, 1998). Chase et al. (1998) find that aggression with peers is common among those who experience dating violence. Similarly, peer aggression among

females during adolescence directly predicts later experience with marital violence (O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994).

Developmental Implications of Violence

Violence exposure impacts teens' physical health and safety in addition to their psychological adjustment, social relationships and academic achievement (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Violence exposure affects their views of the world and of themselves, their ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, and their expectations for happiness. Furthermore, the impact of violence extends beyond the period of exposure to many years later, affecting adolescents into adulthood. Specifically, earlier dating relationships serve as training grounds for later romantic relationships (Chase et al., 1998).

Children and adolescents face numerous developmental challenges (e.g., developing a sense of self and moral values), at various stages during their maturation. These various, typical developmental challenges can be impacted by abuse and violence. For example, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development points to developmental challenges from childhood through adulthood (Monte, 1995). Erikson defined stages that children and adults pass through and accompanying developmental tasks that individuals encounter at each stage. For adolescents, Erikson states that identity development is the primary task. Teens tend to look to their peer groups and role models to help them achieve an identity. However, one of the risks at this stage is that a teen will fuse with a peer group or distance themselves from peers, resulting in an avoidance of the struggle to form an identity. The adolescent that does not successfully struggle with identity development may leave this developmental stage with role confusion and a feeling that they have not found a place in society.

Dating violence typically includes a pattern of the victim being isolated from peer groups by the abusive partner (Gamache, 1991). This pattern of isolation interferes with the adolescent experiencing healthy peer relationships which foster identity development.

Similarly, chronic community violence has been found to lead to high levels of arousal in children and adolescents which often disrupts teens' efforts to engage in age appropriate academic and social pursuits (Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

Hagan and Foster (2001) use a developmental perspective to examine the impact of violence on adolescents' transition into adulthood. Adolescence is a somewhat protected time of development which allows teens to accomplish certain developmental tasks. The authors use Hagan and Wheaton's (1993) concept of adolescent role exits to understand the impact of violence on adolescent development. Adolescent role exits refer to potentially problematic routes of exiting teenage roles and premature entries into adulthood including dropping out of school, leaving home, suicidality and teenage pregnancy (Hagan & Foster, 2001). The premature, non-normative exit from adolescence can have potentially negative implications for the teen. Adolescents may prematurely exit this developmental stage in order to adapt to stressful circumstances such as violence (Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

Hagan and Foster (2001) survey an ethnically diverse, national sample of adolescents and find that exposure to intimate partner violence and community violence significantly increases the odds of premature adolescent role exit from that developmental stage into adulthood as measured by running away from home, thoughts of suicide, dropping out of school and pregnancy. Teens exposed to verbal intimate partner violence have a greater chance of experiencing at least one of the role exits and a significantly increased risk of teenage pregnancy for girls, than teens not exposed to intimate partner violence. The risk of a premature exit from adolescence increases when verbal and physical intimate partner violence is present. The risk of pregnancy increases by 60 percent when intimate partner violence is combined with community violence for teen girls (Hagan & Foster, 2001). Furthermore, the authors find that adolescents' exposure to violence, especially dating