

YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents' responses to the Youth Dating Violence Survey have previously been documented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1996). The present study on dating violence examined the responses of thirty-seven adolescents enrolled in an alternative high school program. Many reported psychological victimization in a dating relationship: their partners did something to make them feel jealous, damaged their possessions, said things to hurt their feelings, insulted them in front of others, tried to control them, threatened them, blamed them for bad things the dating partners did, and brought up something from the past to hurt them. In terms of perpetrating psychological abuse in a dating relationship, over half of the adolescents reported that they hurt their dating partners' feelings, insulted them in front of others, did something just to make them jealous, tried to control them, and damaged their possessions. Many of the adolescents had also been victims of physical violence in their dating relationships; they reported being scratched, slapped, slammed or held against a wall, kicked, bitten, forced to have sex, choked, and pushed, grabbed, or shoved, as well as having their arms twisted and fingers bent. Some perpetrated physical violence in dating situations, such as scratching their dating partners, hitting them with a fist or something hard, throwing something that hit their dating partners, kicking them, slapping them, physically twisting their arms, slamming or holding them against a wall, bending their fingers, biting them, choking them, and pushing, grabbing, or shoving them. The findings confirm that dating violence among adolescents is a serious health problem that needs to be addressed.

The majority of research on dating violence has focused on college students, a population that is not very representative of high school

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students and ethnic minority groups. However, researchers increasingly are examining intimate partner violence using high school samples (Barth & Derezotes, 1990; Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, & O'Leary, 1994; Foshee et al., 1996; Jaffe et al., 1992; Sundermann & Jaffe, 1993).

In their groundbreaking study of high school age youth, Henton and Cate (1983) found that 12% had experienced abuse in one of their dating relationships. Roscoe and Callahan (1985), examining middle-class high school students in a white Michigan community, found that 9% of the males and females had experienced physical violence while on a date, with 10% of the females reporting physical violence in a dating relationship. Among adolescents from both predominantly white suburban and rural schools and multiracial inner-city schools, it was found that approximately 20% had experienced violence from a dating partner (Bergman, 1992). Additional studies on adolescents experiencing at least one incident of physical violence in a dating relationship have reported the following rates: 19% (Roscoe & Kelsey, 1986), 27% (O'Keefe, Nona, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986), and 38% (Molidor & Tolman, 1995). Jezl et al. (1996), examining abuse in a coed, ethnically diverse, religiously affiliated high school sample, found that 59% had been the victim of physical violence, 96% had experienced some form of psychological abuse, and 15% had been forced to engage in sexual activity at least once in a past or current dating relationship. Foshee et al. (1996) investigated a racially diverse sample of adolescents (75.9% Caucasian, 20.2% African American, and 3.9% other racial/ethnic groups) and found that approximately 20% had experienced dating violence. O'Keefe's (1997) research on high school students (53% Latino, 20% white, 13% African American, 6.7% Asian American, and 7% other racial/ethnic groups) revealed that 43% of the females and 39% of the males had been physically aggressive toward a dating partner at least once.

These findings indicate that dating violence is a significant problem among adolescents. Thus, influences, contexts, and other relevant variables need to be further explored and clarified. The present study focused on the responses of high school students to questions on the Youth Dating Violence Survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996), pertaining to psychological and physical abuse in dating relationships.

METHOD

Data were obtained from 37 adolescents (17 males and 20 females) who were enrolled in an alternative high school program in the Pacific

Northwest. They ranged in age from 14 to 18 years (the average age was 16.58 for females and 16.95 for males). Ten were of mixed ethnic heritage, 10 were white, 8 were African American, 7 were Hispanic/Latino, 1 was Asian, and 1 did not report ethnicity. Ninety-five percent of the adolescents had a mother at home, 31% had a father at home, and 29% were living with either both mother and father, mother and stepfather, or two foster parents.

The adolescents were administered the Youth Dating Violence Survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996), which gathers information on demographics, dating behavior, and mediating variables. Examples of items pertaining to dating violence include the following: "It is OK for a boy to hit his girlfriend if she did something to make him mad" and "Boys sometimes deserve to be hit by the girls they date" (response categories: strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree). The following are examples of items measuring conflict management skills: "I threw something at the person I was mad at" and "I told the person why I was angry" (response categories: very often, sometimes, not very often, or never). Those adolescents who had ever been on a date were asked about psychological and physical victimization or perpetration: "How often has anyone that you have ever been on a date with done the following things to you?" and "How many times have you done the following things to anyone that you have been on a date with?" (see the list of behaviors appearing in the tables in the Results section), with different response categories for psychological abuse (very often, sometimes, seldom, or never) and physical abuse (10 or more times, 4 to 9 times, 1 to 3 times, or never). Additional data were collected on awareness of services for victims and perpetrators, help-seeking behaviors of victims and perpetrators, and belief in the need for the victim or the perpetrator to get help.

Parental consent was obtained from 42 of the 47 eligible adolescents, or 89%. Surveys were completed by 37 of these 42 adolescents, or 88% of those whose parents gave consent (5 adolescents did not complete the survey because they either were absent the day of data collection, did not answer all of the questions, or had reading difficulties that precluded completion of the survey during the allotted time). The survey was administered in accordance with local school district and university institutional review board policies (with special provisions related to school-based populations), and took approximately forty-five minutes to complete. In some instances, items were read aloud due to concerns about participants' reading and comprehension levels. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

RESULTS

Most of the adolescents had been victims of psychological abuse in one form or another in their dating relationships (see Table 1). Over three quarters reported that their dating partners did something to make them jealous. Approximately half indicated that their dating partners would not let them do things with other people, threatened to start dating someone else, told them they could not talk to someone

Table 1
Psychological Abuse: Victimization

<i>Victimization</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Damaged something that belonged to me	62%
Said things to hurt my feelings on purpose	63%
Insulted me in front of others	57%
Threw something at me but missed	41%
Would not let me do things with other people	49%
Threatened to start dating someone else	57%
Told me I could not talk to someone of the opposite sex	52%
Started to hit me but stopped	38%
Did something just to make me jealous	76%
Blamed me for bad things they did	54%
Threatened to hurt me	48%
Made me describe where I was every minute of the day	46%
Brought up something from the past to hurt me	62%
Put down my looks	35%

of the opposite sex, brought up something from the past to hurt them, and blamed them for bad things the partners did.

Table 2 presents the findings regarding adolescents' perpetration of psychological abuse. Over three quarters reported that they said things to hurt their dating partners' feelings on purpose. Approximately half said they damaged something that belonged to their dating partners, insulted them in front of others, threw something at them but missed, would not let them do things with other people, told them they could not talk with someone of the opposite sex, did something just to make them jealous, and brought up something from the past to hurt them.

Table 2
Psychological Abuse: Perpetration

<i>Perpetration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Damaged something that belonged to them	56%
Said things to hurt their feelings on purpose	76%
Insulted them in front of others	64%
Threw something at them but missed	49%
Would not let them do things with other people	57%
Threatened to start dating someone else	44%
Told them they could not talk to someone of the opposite sex	50%
Started to hit them but stopped	40%
Did something just to make them jealous	65%
Blamed them for bad things I did	39%
Threatened to hurt them	37%
Made them describe where they were every minute of the day	45%
Brought up something from the past to hurt them	52%
Put down their looks	32%

Many of the adolescents had been victims of physical violence in their dating relationships (see Table 3). From approximately a third to a half reported being scratched, slapped, slammed or held against a wall, kicked, bitten, forced to have sex, choked, and pushed, grabbed, or shoved, as well as having their arms physically twisted and fingers bent.

Table 4 indicates that some of the adolescents also perpetrated physical violence in dating situations. Approximately half reported scratching their dating partners, hitting them with a fist, and pushing, grabbing, or shoving them (around a quarter reported hitting their dating partners with a fist and pushing, grabbing, or shoving them 4 to 9 times). A third or more threw something that hit their dating partners, kicked them, and slapped them. About a fifth reported physically twisting their dating partners' arms, slamming or holding them against a wall, bending their fingers, biting them, choking them, dumping them out of a car, burning them, beating them up, and hitting them with something hard besides a fist.

DISCUSSION

The findings regarding physical and psychological aggression in dating relationships are consistent with those of previous studies. Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, and O'Leary (1994) found that 32% of the males and 52% of the females in their study of high school students had used aggression against a dating partner, while O'Keefe (1997) found that 39% of males and 43% of females had been physically aggressive with a dating partner at least once. Additionally, Foshee (1996) reported that females were more likely to be perpetrators of dating violence. Jezl, Molidor, and Wright (1996) found that 59% of their adolescent sample had experienced physical violence at least once in a dating relationship, 96% had experienced some form of psychological maltreatment, and 15% had been forced to engage in sexual activity. Significantly more males than females reported being victims of physical abuse.

The present study did not include an analysis of different types of dating profiles: (a) victim only, (b) perpetrator only, or (c) mutually violent relationship. In this regard, it is worth noting that adolescents in mutually violent relationships have been found to receive and perpetrate significantly more abuse as compared with adolescents in one-sided violent relationships (Gray & Foshee, 1997). Further research on these dating violence profiles is needed, and gender and ethnic group differences should be analyzed.

Table 3**Physical Abuse: Victimization**

<i>Victimization</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Scratched me	39%
Slapped me	50%
Physically twisted my arm	32%
Slammed or held me against a wall	35%
Kicked me	33%
Bent my fingers	33%
Bit me	45%
Tried to choke me	38%
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved me	53%
Dumped me out of a car	12%
Threw something at me that hit me	23%
Forced me to have sex	33%
Forced me to do other sexual things	26%
Burned me	19%
Hit me with a fist	27%
Hit me with something hard besides a fist	18%
Beat me up	15%
Assaulted me with a knife or gun	23%

Table 4

Physical Abuse: Perpetration

<i>Perpetration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Scratched them	44%
Slapped them	39%
Physically twisted their arms	21%
Slammed or held them against a wall	21%
Kicked them	33%
Bent their fingers	18%
Bit them	21%
Tried to choke them	21%
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved them	51%
Dumped them out of a car	18%
Threw something at them that hit them	33%
Forced them to have sex	15%
Forced them to do other sexual things	9%
Burned them	18%
Hit them with my fist	45%
Hit them with something hard besides my fist	24%
Beat them up	18%
Assaulted them with a knife or gun	12%

O'Keefe (1997) reported that high school males were more likely to harm a dating partner if they had witnessed interparental violence, believed that male-female dating violence was justifiable, used alcohol or other drugs, were the recipients of dating violence, and had experienced more conflict in their dating relationships. Females were more likely to be violent toward a dating partner if they believed that female-male violence was justifiable but male-female violence was not, had experienced more conflict in their dating relationships, were the recipients of dating violence, used alcohol or other drugs, and felt the relationship was more serious. O'Keefe noted contextual correlates, such as experiencing physical aggression, interparental aggression, acceptance of violence, history of aggression, and community and school violence. Additional research by O'Keefe (1998) indicated that, among adolescent males who witnessed high levels of interparental violence, those who abused their dating partners were differentiated from those who had violence-free relationships by the following variables: low socioeconomic status, exposure to community and school violence, acceptance of violence in dating relationships, and low self-esteem. Low socioeconomic status and acceptance of violence in dating relationships differentiated males who experienced dating violence and those who did not. For females, exposure to community and school violence, poor school performance, and experiencing child abuse differentiated those who abused their dating partners and those who did not, while poor school performance and experiencing child abuse differentiated females who experienced dating violence and those who did not. The present research would have benefited from the inclusion of such factors as socioeconomic status, acceptance of violence in dating relationships, self-esteem, school performance, child abuse, and exposure to family, community, and school violence. Nearly all of the adolescents in this study lived in an area where exposure to violence was not unusual.

Overall, the literature indicates that intimate partner violence during adolescence is a serious problem. The findings here reinforce the notion that at least 25% of adolescents experience psychological and physical abuse in their dating relationships. Romance and violence are increasingly gaining acceptance as a version of love and war among teenage dating couples. As greater understanding of the factors associated with dating violence is achieved, more effective prevention and intervention programs can be designed and implemented.

Gray and Foshee (1997) found that about 66% of the adolescents who reported violence in dating relationships stated that it was mutual. Moreover, social learning theory would indicate that individuals in such relationships may escalate the violence. Thus, future research should investigate the characteristics of mutually violent relation-

ships. The following questions should be addressed in this regard: Do violent adolescents seek out dating partners who are also violent? Does the violence escalate as a result of duration, frequency, and exclusivity of dating? It is also important to evaluate age, gender, ethnic background, family history, educational level, and other factors that might mitigate, or contribute to, adolescent dating violence.

The results indicated that males and females perpetrated psychological abuse and were victimized at about the same rate, but that males engaged in higher levels of physical violence in dating relationships. This finding is consistent with past studies of dating violence (Foshee, 1996).

Prevention programs focused on adolescent dating violence (see Foshee & Langwick, 1994; Foshee et al., 1998) need to include lessons and role-playing related to one-sided and mutually violent relationships (e.g., discussions should cover the characteristics and consequences of such relationships). Health providers and educators need to ensure that adolescents are taught social skills to replace the use of psychologically and physically abusive, controlling behaviors in dating relationships, and are given opportunities to reappraise beliefs about gender roles.

The low number of adolescents in the sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the results contribute to our understanding of the types and prevalence of dating violence among adolescents. The etiology and course of violent dating relationships should be a priority of future research. Findings will serve to provide a framework for the prevention of intimate partner violence among adolescents, a serious health problem that urgently needs to be addressed.

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