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PREVALENCE AND PROBLEMATIC OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH DATING VIOLENCE IN EMERGING ADULTS



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ABSTRACT

Dating violence is a prevalent problem among emerging adults. As young people explore novel romantic relationships, conflicts inevitably arise that sometimes escalate to the point of violence (Salvatore, Collins, & Simpson, 2012). It is important to understand the prevalence of dating violence among emerging adults and the negative implications that may result. The current study explored the predictive relationship between sexual, psychological, and physical forms of dating violence in both perpetrators and victims on internalizing outcomes. Participants included 209 undergraduate students (78% female) at Virginia Commonwealth University enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology course, between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 19.38$). Participants were 50% Caucasian, 23% African American, 15% Asian American, 7.2% multiracial, and 4.8% other; 9% indicated Hispanic ethnicity. Preliminary results indicated that dating violence was a prevalent concern among this sample of emerging adults; 53% of participants experienced at least one instance of dating violence perpetration, and 45% had experienced victimization. In addition, multiple regression analyses indicated that dating violence perpetration significantly predicted internalizing outcomes, $F(3, 205) = 5.10, p < .01, R^2 = .26$. The model for dating violence victimization also significantly predicted internalizing outcomes, $F(3, 205) = 8.40, p < .001, R^2 = .33$. Finally, differential results emerged between the various forms of perpetration and victimization. From our analyses, the results strengthen the notion that we need to examine each form of dating violence separately to understand how different forms of dating violence contribute to problematic outcomes in emerging adults.

INTRODUCTION

According to the CDC (2010), dating violence is defined as “physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship.” Approximately 24.3% of women and 13.8% of men experience some form of dating violence at some point in their life.

- Most of these experiences occur between the ages of 18 and 24 (CDC, 2010)

Problematic Outcomes

- Both victims and perpetrators of dating violence can struggle to regulate their emotions regarding a conflict within a dating relationship, leading to a spectrum of poor mental health outcomes (Cerny, 1988).
- Some typical examples of poor mental health outcomes are depression and anxiety.

Expanding the Literature

- Little research has been conducted so far examining the problematic outcomes associated with the three forms of dating violence separately (physical, sexual, and psychological/emotional) in an emerging adult sample.

HYPOTHESES

In this study, we hypothesized that dating violence of all three forms would be a prevalent problem in the emerging adult population, and dating violence would lead to more internalizing of outcomes, including depression and anxiety.

METHODS

Participants:

Participants included 209 undergraduate students (78% female) at Virginia Commonwealth University enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology course, between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 19.38$). Participants were 50% Caucasian, 23% African American, 15% Asian American, 7.2% multiracial, and 4.8% other; 9% indicated Hispanic ethnicity.

Measures:

1. Brief Symptom Inventory 12 (BSI-12)

The BSI (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983) is a brief psychological symptom self-report measure. Participants rated 12 items to indicate levels of depression and anxiety. An example of an item is, “How much were you distressed by nervousness or shakiness inside?” Cronbach’s alpha for the depression subscale is $\alpha = .85$ and for anxiety subscale is $\alpha = .83$.

2. Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships (CADRI)

The CADRI (Wolfe, Scott, Reitzel-Jaffe, Wekerle, Grasley, & Pittman, 2001) assessed abusive behaviors (physical, psychological and sexual) among adolescent dating partners. The author of the measure, David A. Wolfe gave written permission to use this measure with emerging adults (ages 18-25). The measure included 35 items which assess general relationship questions and about an individuals’ relationship during a conflict or argument. Participants rated items (e.g., “He/she brought up something bad that I had done in the past” or “He/she deliberately tried to frighten me”) based on conflicts in the past year, using a Likert Scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *seldom*, 3 = *sometimes*, and 4 = *often*). Cronbach’s alpha was .81.

Procedure:

Students who participated followed a direct link from the PSYC 101 research participant pool (SONA Systems©) to the secure external data capture and storage site known as RedCAP. First, student were presented with preliminary information containing all of the elements of consent and details about participation in the study. They were given an opportunity to download the approved consent form for their records and indicate their consent to participate on a single yes/no item. Next, the survey was administered via the RedCAP system directly. Students were thanked for their participation and credit was awarded.

RESULTS

Results indicated that dating violence was a prevalent concern among this sample of emerging adults. 53% of participants endorsed at least one instance of dating violence perpetration, and 45% for victimization. Females reported significantly higher ($M = 1.45$) rates of dating violence perpetration than males ($M = 1.30$), while there were no differences for dating victimization rates.

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptives Statistics for Study Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. DV Perpetration, Sexual	-						
2. DV Perpetration, Psychological	.38**	-					
3. DV Perpetration, Physical	.48**	.63**	-				
4. DV Victimization, Sexual	.44**	.38**	.49**	-			
5. DV Victimization, Psychological	.27**	.66**	.51**	.36**	-		
6. DV Victimization, Physical	.38**	.44**	.57**	.53**	.62**	-	
7. Internalizing Symptoms	.01	.25**	.10	.30**	.23**	.18*	-
Mean	1.15	1.30	1.66	1.22	1.27	1.64	.83
Standard Deviation	0.31	0.39	0.43	0.39	0.34	0.50	0.77

Note. DV = Dating Violence. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < .01$.

In addition to examining prevalence rates, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine specific dating violence predictors of internalizing outcomes (combined anxiety and depression). The overall model for dating violence perpetration significantly predicted internalizing outcomes, $F(3, 205) = 5.10, p < .01, R^2 = .26$. Specifically, psychological perpetration was a significant predictor of internalizing outcomes, $t(205) = .31, p < .01$, while sexual and physical perpetration were not. The overall model for dating violence victimization significantly predicted internalizing outcomes, $F(3, 205) = 8.40, p < .001, R^2 = .33$. Sexual victimization, $t(205) = 3.48, p < .001$, and psychological victimization, $t(205) = 2.18, p < .05$, were significant predictors of internalizing outcomes. Sexual victimization was a stronger predictor ($\beta = .27$) of internalizing outcomes than psychological victimization ($\beta = .18$).

Table 2. Regression analyses predicting internalizing symptoms

Variable	Internalizing Symptoms	
	B	SE
DV Perpetration, Sexual	-0.20	0.19
DV Perpetration, Psychological	0.55**	0.16
DV Perpetration, Physical	-.10	0.18
DV Victimization, Sexual	0.53**	0.15
DV Victimization, Psychological	0.28*	0.13
DV Victimization, Physical	-0.16	0.21

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$.

**Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

CONCLUSIONS

These results suggest that certain forms of dating violence are associated with more internalizing outcomes. As this was one of the first studies to examine how three different forms of perpetration and victimization predict internalizing outcomes, our results strengthen the notion that we need to examine the forms separately.

- Unique results emerged, suggesting that sexual and psychological forms of violence may be more predictive of internalizing outcomes than physical violence.

Implications

- These results have implications for understanding how different forms of dating violence may contribute to problematic outcomes in emerging adults
- Future research would benefit from examining moderators and mediators within these relationships to see what may buffer victims and perpetrators of dating violence from experiencing problematic outcomes.

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