Dating Violence Victimisation of Teenagers: Some Concerns about Teen Dating Relationships

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This paper reviews various social and psycho-social factors associated with teen dating violence. In particular, it is highlighted the family, personal relationship, and behavioural factors that increase the risk of dating violence victimisation among teenagers and try to penetrate on some methodological issues of contemporary empirical research. A review of the teenage dating violence literature indicates that risk factors occur in three spheres: individual, familial and societal. Now-a-days, the impact of peer and family relations, ubiquitous gendered violence, transactional sex and unsafe recreational spaces emerge as the major concerns. Irrespective of both boys and girls, the magnitude of victimisation is related to lower levels of life satisfaction and inter-personal violence. Furthermore, a wide range of researchers also identified the prevalence of substance use, especially the alcohol use as the robust risk factor for teen dating violence which leads to sexual aggression. Acculturation, victimisation experience, and sexual intimacy are significantly contributed to this issue. The co modification of relationships and the ego-centric social relations should be evaluated and altered accordingly for effective prevention.
*[**Key Words:** Dating violence; Aggression; Victimisation; Harassment; Romantic relationship.]*

Introduction

Teenage dating violence is a complex phenomenon, and researchers continue to examine a wide range of precursors and contributing factors (Prospero 2006). It is related to controlling, abusive, and aggressive behaviour in a romantic relationship. It can happen in "straight" or "gay" relationships. It can include verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse or a combination (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). While a substantial amount of social research examines the causes and context of youth dating violence, this paper focuses primarily on teenagers in abusive situations. There is far less critical discussion of teen dating violence, despite the fact that teen females between the ages of 16 and 24 are the most at-risk age group for relationship violence (Rennison and Welchans 2000). While the behaviours themselves of an abusive partner do not vary much between adult and teen, the limited experience and lack of education about relationships place teen victims in a particularly isolated situation. Dating

violence among teens has a significant social impact on millions of men and women worldwide.

Teen Dating Violence in Romantic Relationships

Teen relationship violence, however, is not a new social concern. Sociological studies on teen dating violence, identified in that specific of language, began appearing almost thirty years ago. One study on dating violence, consisting of a survey of 256 high school students in a California school district, was conducted in the 1982-83 school year. 9, according to the authors, a much broader survey had been planned, but school districts cited the material as "too personal, potentially controversial, or basically useless because remediation would be impossible" and refused the researchers entry to the district points to the circular reasoning behind a lack of recognition and awareness of the social issue (O'Keefe et al. 1986: 465). According to her, the lack of evidence indicates that there is no need to research teen dating violence; without any research, there is no support that the issue even exists. Carlson also believes that prominent myths lessen society's response to the issue, such as the thought that teen dating violence does not exist or is not as severe as adult intimate partner violence, or that teen relationships are nothing more than "puppy love" (Carlson 2003: 369). She believes, however, that 10 these relationships may prove even more dangerous for teen girls. She points to a number of reasons why this could occur, including exaggerated gender stereotypes that youths conform to, belief that boyfriends should "control" their girlfriends, a teen girl's lack of understanding or awareness, and her lack of experience (ibid: 351-357). Rather than use observation to identify the characteristics of teen relationships, a 2009 study interviewed teenagers themselves about their perceptions teen dating violence. Seven focus groups were conducted, with 52 boys and girls living in Washington, DC. The study identified four major themes from these focus groups (Guzman et al. 2009). The first theme stated, youth use different words to indicate the intensity or seriousness of a relationship, and they share in an understanding of these words' connotations. A second theme found that teens do essentially know what constitutes a healthy relationship. The third theme, however, found that despite this knowledge, teenagers' own relationships do not meet the 'healthy relationship' guidelines that they themselves described. The fourth theme established that teens and youths see their relationships as the same as matured adults (ibid: 1-5).

The current literature on correlates of dating violence perpetration among teenagers identifies several risk factors associated with adolescents and their families, schools, and neighbourhoods. Specifically, teenager risk factors for dating violence perpetration include: drug and alcohol use (O'Donnell et al. 2006), mental health problems, and externalising behaviours (Hilton and Harris 2005). Risk factors associated with teenagers' families include: parental domestic violence (Wolf and Foshee 2003), mother-adolescent hostility (O'Keefe 1994), father-adolescent hostility (Shek and Ma 2001), and low

parental monitoring (La Voie et al. 2002). School risk factors that are positively associated with teenagers' dating violence perpetration include: academic difficulties (Cleveland et al. 2003), low involvement in school activities (Thomas and Smith 2004), and involvement with antisocial peers (Schnurr and Lohman 2008). Finally, teenagers who live in neighbourhoods characterised by residential instability, concentrated economic disadvantage and racial segregation (Kowaleski-Jones 2000) as well as neighbuorhood crime are at increased risk for perpetrating violence. On the other hand, several protective factors those are associated with increased adolescent well-being and *prosocial* behaviour, including correlates of healthy romantic relationship development. Specifically, teenagers who experience: involved fathers (Veneziano 2000), high levels of parental monitoring, warm relationships with their mothers, a structured home environment, high academic achievement, extracurricular activity involvement, a cohesive neighbourhood, and positive neighbourhood friends exhibit more *prosocial* behaviours and more positive well-being than adolescents who do not experience these protective factors (Barry and Wentzel 2006). In addition, adolescents who have a warm relationship with their mothers and have positive neighbourhood friends are more likely to develop healthy romantic relationships (Seiffge-Krenke 2003). Dating violence victimisation are prevalent and devastating problems. Although there has been an abundance of research on these topics in recent years, researchers and institutional review boards often struggle with determining whether asking respondents questions on previous violence will result in increased emotional distress or other negative research outcomes.

Role of Social Media

Social media has profoundly altered the way in which individuals interact with one another. These venues have replaced personal, face-to-face communication and have also been a place where teenagers have been awarded the opportunities to construct and explore their identities (Hinduja and Patchin 2008). They have aided in their social development, through allowing them to develop and maintain meaningful relationships (Valkenburg and Peter 2011), gain empowerment through expressing personal opinions, and take calculated risks (Alvarez 2012). By the same token, however, electronic media has also enabled the perpetration of deviant behaviour, as it has served as an easily accessible means of expression that has opened the door for cyberbullying. The most common methods of cyberbullying include: posting damaging information on websites, sending unwanted text messages or instant messages, sexting, posting inappropriate photos or videos online and excluding an individual through social networking sites (Alvarez 2012). Cyberstalking is another way of teen dating violence through the use of social media. It has been used to describe behaviours that involve repeated threats and/or harassment through the use of computer-based technology, which would cause reasonable fear or concern for safety. Examples of these include: monitoring an individual's email communication, sending threatening, insulting and/or harassing emails, posting

inappropriate content about the individual on the internet, flooding an individual's email box, falsely using an individual's email identity, and using the internet to find personal information on the victim that can then be used to harass them (Alexy et al. 2005).

There are many commonalities between online and offline forms of bullying. Both of these involve repetitive behaviours and psychological violence (Valkenburg et al. 2011). The primary way through which online aggression differs from offline harassment is through the rapid speed and ease at which it can be perpetrated, as well as the ability for private information to become public. In order for an individual to aggress against an intimate partner offline, they must be in the same geographical location at the same time, whereas through the use of electronic communication, they are able to send threatening and harassing messages instantaneously from any location (Melander 2010). Teenagers who are victimised online are also more likely to be victimised offline. In addition, research has found that online dating violence often co-occurs with other forms of violence. In one study, half of the victims of sexual and non-sexual online dating violence were also victimised by physical violence, and a majority also experienced other forms of psychological abuse. A majority also experienced online sexual coercion, and were seven times more likely to have been victims of it than individuals who had not experienced online sexual violence (Zweig et al. 2013a). Both victims and perpetrators of online violence were approximately three and four times as likely as non-victims and non-perpetrators to also report having experienced or perpetrated these types of behaviours against an intimate partner (Zweig et al. 2013b). Most of the time, it is found that maintaining a casual friendship on a social networking site (e.g., Facebook, Google+) can aid in initiating an intimate relationship through the mediated environment that is provided by such a site.

The public nature of these types of environments also translates to their intimate relationships. It is expected that the relationships themselves will be publicly acknowledged online through social networking sites. Teens typically showcase their affection towards one another on these networks and passwords to each other's accounts may be shared. When relationships are terminated, teens may remove pictures they have online, de-friend their partners, and change their passwords if they were shared, similar to the traditional ways of ridding one's life of physical memorabilia of the relationship (Pascoe 2011). There are two important skills that teens develop as they start forming their identity: self-presentation and self-disclosure. The former involves being selective in which aspects one reveals of oneself, and the latter pertains to showcasing intimate aspects of oneself. Relational aggression consists of behaviours that involve damage to an individual's reputation, ostracism, manipulation, or exerting social control over another person. Common examples include: social exclusion, spreading rumors, gossip, and within dating relationships, purposely creating jealousy in a partner or threatening to terminate the relationship (Prather et al. 2011). Teenagers

consider that they are less likely than peers to become victims of violence by a boyfriend or girlfriend, despite some first-hand experience. Optimistic bias was predicted by prior knowledge of dating and relationship violence and perceptions about media influence.

Certain archetypes can be identified in portrayals of romance in popular media. There is the "Seeker", which is searching for true love or "enjoying the sexual infatuation of early relationships". "Fairy tale" love occurs when couples overcome obstacles to find each other or be together. "Mature" love occurs in long-term companions, when partners are comfortable in their relationship. Griffin pointed out two cultural ideals for long term love, one being "romantic" and based on emotional and physical responses, and the second "companionate", built on closeness and friendship (Griffin 2006: iii). The media's exploration of love must be understood in relation to the exploration of domestic violence. While the difference between news media and social media must be considered, it is the gaps in news media reporting that allow for social media to present inaccurate representations of violence, and have people accept it as the truth (Bullock and Cubert 2002). An overall trend noted in media coverage that incidents of dating violence seem isolated and as though they were happening to the 'other'. It is also evidenced that police officers aligned with a "just the facts" description, which tend to overlook the nature of the relationship (ibid: 490). They criticise journalists' approaches to domestic violence coverage, noting that their framing of the incident made those involved seem different from those reading the articles. Both victims and perpetrators were described by their ethnic and social background, and any past criminal or drug behaviour was noted. In this way, domestic violence is portrayed as something that happens far away, to someone else. In addition to neglecting key information in descriptions of incidents of violence, researchers have noted the lack of discussion of the social context of domestic violence when reporting it in news media (Wozniak and McCloskey 2010). Bullock and Cubert refer to past research on the subject matter, which consistently finds bias on the part of journalists and officers influencing the descriptions of intimate partner violence in media.

Relationship between Alcohol Use and Dating Violence Victimisation

A number of studies show the positive correlation between alcohol uses in dating violence among teens. The prevalence of dating violence among teens is high, with the majority of teens experiencing psycho-social aggression in their dating relationships. Psycho-social aggression is related to increased mental and physical health among victims and is one of the best-known predictors of physical aggression. In an effort to reduce the chances of future occurrences of physical aggression and the devastating health impact of sustained psycho-social aggression, research is needed that examines under what circumstances psycho-social aggression is most likely to occur. Leonard and Senchak postulated that acute alcohol intoxication is an immediate proximal antecedent condition to aggression between intimate partners, and that the

alcohol use by both partners is a significant contributing factor to aggression (Leonard and Senchak 1993). Alcohol use precedes and increases the risk of experiencing physical and sexual aggression victimisation among teens (Parks and Fals-Stewart 2004).

Additionally, alcohol use is associated with increased rates of perpetrating physical and sexual aggression against a dating partner (Luthra and Gidycz 2006; Shorey, et al. 2008), and adult intimate partners (Stuart et al. 2008). Heavy alcohol use is associated with increased odds of psycho-social aggression perpetration (not physical aggression), although negative affect increased the odds of aggression perpetration (psychological and physical). Nevertheless, once these independent predictors are allowed to interact, alcohol use was associated with aggression, although not always positively; it was associated with decreased levels of aggression in some contexts (Elkins et al. 2013). For psychological aggression victimisation, any and heavy alcohol use, as well as negative effect, increased the odds of aggression victimisation. For physical aggression, any alcohol use, but not heavy, and negative affect increased the odds of victimisation. The alcohol findings are consistent with prior research that has demonstrated the odds of victimisation increase with alcohol use (Parks et al. 2008).It is also likely that both partners engaged in aggression during the same conflict, as dating violence is often bi-directional (Shorey et al. 2008). In particular, interventions aimed at decreasing alcohol use may benefit from targeting individuals who are either prone to experience negative affect after the consumption of alcohol or those who drink alcohol when experiencing negative effect. For instance, interventionists could screen individuals for their propensities to experience negative affect when drinking, or general propensities to experience negative affect (e.g., high levels of neuroticism; poor emotion regulation skills; high trait anger), and provide those that demonstrate such propensities specialised interventions, such as brief motivational interventions. For example, brief motivational approaches may be most appropriate in college student samples involving drinkers who are not alcohol dependent and not seeking treatment. Interventionists could provide clients with personalised feedback on individual risk factors for alcohol-related aggression, such as drinking when experiencing negative effect, which could be presented to participants using the non-confrontational, supportive approach of motivational interviewing. Strategies could then be discussed to reduce the risk of aggression under these high-risk conditions. For instance, individuals could develop plans to either refrain from drinking when they are experiencing negative effect, thus overall decreasing their risk for aggressive behaviour, or, if they choose to drink, could implement harm reduction approaches for aggressive behaviour, such as drinking away from their partner and/or agreeing not to see their partner until they are sober. This approach could also be implemented with both members of the dyad, thus potentially decreasing the risk for both dating violence perpetration and victimisation simultaneously.

However, mindfulness interventions attempt to increase psycho-social health by focusing on present moment experiences, increasing self-awareness and learning that all experiences (e.g., emotions) naturally come and go, which help to decrease reactive and impulsive behaviour (Bell 2007). Theoretically, one of the mechanisms through which mindfulness-based interventions are believed to promote psychological health is through decreases in negative effect, which is achieved through the enhancement of adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Harned 2001). Indeed, a number of researches indicate that mindfulness interventions do effectively decrease negative effect in general. Thus, mindfulness-based interventions may help participants reduce the general experience of negative affect and/or learn more effective and adaptive ways to cope with negative affect when it occurs. Having reduced levels of general negative affect may, in turn, make it more likely that, when alcohol is consumed, affect will remain neutral or positive. It can be found that the odds of aggression would be considerably increased if both partners are drinking and experiencing negative effect, whereas the odds might be drastically decreased if both partners are drinking but experiencing low negative effect. Understanding the interplay of alcohol use and negative effect of both partners will further advance our understanding of alcohol-related aggression. Findings indicate that an absence of negative affect is one factor that makes inhibiting cues for dating violence less salient and thus one factor that moderates the effects of alcohol on aggression. Still, it is possible that there are other proximal, instigating or inhibiting factors that may increase or decrease the alcohol-aggression association. For instance, given that negative affect due to the partner may make aggressive cues particularly salient, it is possible that negative affect specific to a conflict with one's partner increases the risk for aggression when intoxicated more than does negative affect not related to the partner (ibid: 270-77). In addition, given that the presence of other people likely inhibits dating violence, the presence of other people may moderate the alcohol-violence link, such that alcohol may decrease the likelihood that alcohol will lead to aggression (particularly physical aggression) when other people are present. Likewise, given that empathy tends to inhibit aggression (Bjorkqvist et al. 2000), levels of empathy may moderate the effects of alcohol on violence such that alcohol increases the risk of aggression among people who experience little empathy but decreases the risk of aggression among people who experience more empathy.

Gender Role and Differences

Dating violence is clearly an important problem for teens, no consensus has emerged about the prevalence and gender distribution of violence between teen dating partners, and two major sources of data produce widely divergent estimates. Few studies have evaluated programmes for teens designed to prevent dating violence, and the results of the existing studies do not present conclusive evidence about the efficacy of these programmes. There are a number of challenges that face researchers interested in investigating teens

dating violence and this may explain the dearth of research in this area. Two studies have examined the relationship of dating violence victimisation and experience of maltreatment in the home. Roscoe and Callahan found that 59 per cent of the 17 adolescents who reported experiencing dating violence also reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of a family member (Roscoe and Callahan 1985). No other findings including this variable were reported. Wolfe and colleagues examined maltreatment, a combined category of sexual abuse, and emotional and physical abuse and neglect, in adolescents' family of origin. The results indicated that 30 per cent of non-maltreated boys compared to 49 per cent of maltreated boys reported experiencing sexual abuse by a dating partner. Among girls, the distribution was 38 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively (Wolfe et al. 2001). For physical abuse by a dating partner, 22 per cent of non-maltreated boys and 40 per cent of maltreated boys reported this experience. The proportions of both groups were smaller among girls - 15 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively. These findings indicate that the experience of maltreatment in the family of origin may be related to dating violence victimisation among adolescents and that this relationship warrants further study (Straus 1983).

For both boys and girls, dating violence victimisation is related to lower self confidence and depression. For girls, dating violence contributed significantly to posttraumatic stress and dissociation. Boys experienced less dating violence overall than girls, those boys who did experience dating violence differed little from girls who experienced dating violence (Molidor and Tolman 1998). During adolescence, individuals undergo significant emotional, social, and physical growth and experience many significant events that will help to determine their future paths. Peers and family members often have a profound impact on an adolescent's development and social well-being, and they determine the resources available to adolescents that affect adolescent coping strategies. There is a possibility that, teens who are engaged in dating offence are either as a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence or as a perpetrator of child abuse in their families of procreation. In a study on teenage school students of North California, Foshee found several dichotomy among males and females dating violence experience, (a) females perpetrate more mild, moderate and severe violence than males towards partners even when controlling for violence perpetrated in self-defense; (b) females perpetrate more violence than males out of self-defense; (c) males perpetrate more sexual dating violence than females; (d) males and females sustain equal amounts of mild, moderate and severe dating violence; (e) females sustain more sexual dating violence than males; (f) females sustain more psychological abuse than males from their partners; and (g) females receive more injuries than males from dating violence (Foshee 1996).

Despite the clear indication that dating violence is present among teenagers, researchers have focused far more attention on partner violence among school and college students. Many more descriptive studies have been

conducted with teenagers, and far more interventions have been designed (and evaluated) for school and college-age victims and perpetrators. Several factors may contribute to the slow accumulation of studies examining dating violence in adolescence and even slower accumulation of evaluation research examining dating violence programmes for teens. These factors can be divided into definitional issues, human participants' protection issues, and general legal issues relating to minors. First, defining who is a dating partner is difficult for any age group but particularly so among adolescents. In the existing literature, researchers often define partner violence as violence between married or cohabiting partners; however, among teens these relationship types are uncommon. Researchers interested in teens must operationalise partner violence in the context of non-cohabiting relationships that vary widely in their level of intimacy, role expectations, and duration. For example, a teen dating partner can represent the traditional concept of a long-term boyfriend or girlfriend who may or may not be sexually active, however "dates" may also take the form of a partner for single, planned events (e.g., school dance), a sexual partner in a casual unplanned encounter, a sexual partner in a series of casual encounters, or members of a group who regularly socialise together. Therefore, researchers face considerable challenges in operationalising teen dating relationships in a manner that captures their variation in form and meaning among teenagers. Furthermore, this variation complicates the design of intervention programmes intended to help teens recognise, report, and prevent dating violence because such programmes must address a broad range of relationships. In addition, teens tend to use specific terms to describe categories of dating relationships (e.g., terms reported recently in a study by Los Angeles Latino teens were "hanging out," "hooking up," "being sprung," "being friends with privileges," and "crushing on someone"), and these terms undoubtedly vary by region and ethnicity. Thus, relative to adults, research involving adolescents may require a more resource intensive methodology for instrument development or revision of existing instruments, particularly in multisite studies, to capture regional and ethnic variation in teen terminology. Second, requirements for human participants' protection in studies involving minors are more stringent in general when they involve teens relative to adults; even more so for studies that focus on violence. These requirements restrict potential research designs and may reduce researcher interest in examining teen dating violence. When studies are undertaken, active parental consent is often required for teen participation. This may result in a reduced response rate and the exclusion of the most vulnerable teens in particular. Participation in intervention programmes may also require parental consent, potentially reducing access for teens that are in need of services. However, Simple empirical description is needed to inform theoretical and programme development. For example, some research indicates that female and male teens use violence against a partner for different reasons (O'Keefe 1997). This issue needs to be carefully studied to determine the extent to which it is consistently empirically supported and if so whether it might suggest

differing approaches to prevention and intervention programmes for boys and girls.

Conclusion

This paper provides a critical assessment of our understanding of dating abuse and violence in teenage relationships. Initially, an overview is provided on various methodological issues in this area, examining how these dominant trends have influenced perceptions of this problem. In contrast, a more encompassing approach, incorporating gendered power relations and teenagers' own experiences in various researches are assessed. The importance of understanding the context in which such violence occurs, and the meaning it holds for teen people, are also significant. In an effort to better understand and prevent teen dating violence, this paper examined the risk factors associated with teen dating violence as well as methods of intervention and prevention. Six pivotal social aspects are important to understand teen dating violence victimisation: (a) the prevalence of teen dating violence, (b) the risk factors of teen dating violence, (c) reasons behind victims stay in abusive relationships, (d) the negative effects of teen dating violence, (e) support systems for teen dating violence victims, and (f) socially accredited methods of prevention and intervention policy. A number of contextual factors are also significant. Contextual factors to this issue include exposure to violence in the media, ethnic diversity, gender dynamics and socialisation of victims and perpetrators of teen dating violence. Nevertheless, teen dating violence is at a level of concern that warrants enhanced research attention, as well as a renewed interest in testing interventions. As a relatively new area of inquiry and intervention, teen dating violence is benefited from a co-consideration of epidemiological social research. It is imperative that teen dating violence be accorded due status as a socio-legal issue.

Although society has given increased attention to the problem of domestic violence, it has been reluctant to acknowledge that teenagers are the fastest growing population at risk. Dating violence is a serious and prevalent issue facing today's teenagers. Gender, childhood abuse, their attitudes, alcohol/drugs, depression, support systems, and prevention programmes all play an important role for teenagers who are victims and perpetrators of teen dating violence. Study of violence among teenagers dating partners is still scant, and much more work in this area is needed before we will have an understanding of the size and distribution of the problem. A few very general conclusions can still be drawn. Among these conclusions is that a range of violent and abusive behaviours take place within the context of teen dating relationships and that boys and girls are perpetrators and victims. Despite these challenges, greater attention on conducting methodologically rigorous descriptive studies of the phenomenon and high quality evaluations of programmes designed to prevent dating violence among teenagers are greatly needed.

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