

Dating Violence Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Dating violence is a significant problem on college campuses. More than one-fifth of the undergraduate dating population are physically abused by their dating partners and an even greater percentage are psychologically abused. Researchers have identified risk factors for college student dating violence. Preventive interventions are strongly recommended.

Keywords: Dating Violence; College Students

INTRODUCTION

The first study of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) in dating relationships was published by J. M. Makepeace in 1981. Since the time of that groundbreaking work, researchers have continued to present an eye-opening picture of the extent to which violence occurs, not only in marital, but in dating relationships as well. Studies suggest that between 20% and 47% of men and women are victims of physical dating violence in their relationships (Kaura & Lohman, 2007). Psychological victimization is more prevalent than physical or sexual victimization and is not limited to relationships that are physically aggressive (Lawrence, BaYoon, MaLanger, & MaRo, 2009). A study by Katz, Arias and Beach (2000) found that 90% of college women reported psychological victimization at some point in their relationships. Despite strong evidence that males and females engage in similar numbers of nonsexual violence against intimate partners, female victims of IPV have repeatedly shown to be at greater risk than male victims for sustaining physical and psychological injury. The outcome of IPV for females in early adulthood can be fatal, with women between the ages of 20 and 29 having the greatest risk of being murdered by an intimate partner (Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as "physical, sexual, or psychological harm to a person by a current or former partner or spouse" (Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 2005). Dating violence involves abusive behaviors that occur within the context of a dating relationship in which two individuals share an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual connection beyond a friendship, but they are not married, engaged, or in a similarly committed relationship. Dating violence can include physical, sexual, and psychological or emotional abuse and is common among college students (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Reported rates of physical dating violence for college students range from 20% to 45% (Amar & Gennaro, 2005).

In their review of the literature, Murray and Kardatzke (2007) concluded that sexual dating violence victimization is experienced by approximately one-third of female and one-tenth of male college students and psychological dating violence seems to be even more common.

RISK FACTORS FOR COLLEGE STUDENT DATING VIOLENCE

Researchers have identified individual risk factors for college student dating violence. The categories under which the risk factors fall include family history, peer influences, personal attitudes beliefs and perceptions, alcohol use and abuse, and psychological factors (Murray and Kardatzke, 2007).

Family history factors include observing violence between one's parents or having a personal history of child abuse (Hendy, Weiner, Bakerofskie, Eggen, Gustitus, & McLeod, 2003).

The influence of peer group norms increased the likelihood of experiencing college student dating violence (Capaldi, Dishion, Stoolmiller, & Yoerger, 2001). An examination of the perceptions of peer relationships found

that children who overestimated or underestimated their social competence with their peer group were more likely to have increased aggression. Personal attitudes and beliefs that justify the use of aggression during conflict have been useful predictors of dating violence. Hostile attitudes and acceptance of violence against women have been found to be a significant predictor of sexual aggression relationships (Carr & Van Deusen, 2002).

In their investigation into the attitudes of college students toward dating violence, West and Wandrei (2002) presented 157 college students with videotaped situations depicting dating violence victims. They found that male students, as compared to female students, were "somewhat more likely to hold generally violence-condoning, victim-blaming attitudes." College students' attitudes influence their likelihood of being involved in a violent dating relationship and people involved in abusive relationships tend to believe that dating violence is more common than it actually is (Murray, Wester, & Paladino, 2008).

Men's perception that the relationship is in jeopardy has been linked to physical abuse of their partner. Lloyd and Emery (2000) found that 70% of abused women mentioned a "perceived threat to the relationship" as the reason for violence against them by their partners.

Alcohol use and abuse has been linked to dating violence, and specifically, to incidents of sexual violence. Alcohol is involved in the overwhelming majority (80%) of cases of unwanted sexual activity (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Lundeberg, Stith, Penn, & Ward (2004) in a comparison of nonviolent, psychologically violent, and physically violent college men who were dating, found that physically violent men reported more problems with alcohol than did men in the other two groups.

In their review of the literature concerning psychological and emotional factors that seem to be linked to dating violence, Murray and Kardatzke (2007) report that factors such as low self-esteem, antisocial behavior, high levels of jealousy, and angry temperament have all been shown to relate significantly to college dating violence.

PREVENTION OF DATING VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Research has found the effectiveness of treating adults who have been perpetrators of IPV to be limited, with outcome studies often finding high recidivism rates (Schwartz & Waldo, 2003). As a result, alternative approaches that focus on prevention are needed.

Traditional efforts in education often take the form of didactic presentations in a lecture format, however, peer initiated interventions have been found to be more successful (Kuffel & Katz, 2002).

A criticism of education efforts about IPV involves the concern that many programs focus on the individual rather than addressing the social and cultural factors that underlie IPV, such as attitudes and beliefs regarding dating violence (Slep, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, & O'Leary, 2001). For example, research suggests that fraternity members may be more likely than non-fraternity members to endorse male-dominant, female-submissive gender roles (Robinson & Schwartz, 2004). Members of fraternities have been found to have higher rates of dating violence and sexual aggression (Davis & Lidell, 2002).

Schwartz, Griffin, Russell, and Frontaura-Duck (2006) describe an intervention program that deviates from traditional approaches in that it is student led and the depiction of vignettes that portrayed dating violence situations to which participants could relate and discuss with their peers may have contributed to the success of the intervention.

CONCLUSION

A one-time intervention will not change a culture. Schwartz, et al. (2006) also suggest that counselors lead small groups formed from those who attend a large presentation, the purpose of which is to foster a change in attitudes and beliefs related to dating violence and also to practice new skills.

In addition to using a peer counseling component and offering follow-up sessions, a number of researchers (Lundeberg, et al., 2004; Mahistedit & Welsch, 2005; Murry & Kardatzke, 2007) recommend focusing on anger management skills, addressing alcohol-related issues, and discussing power and control issues.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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