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Teen Dating Violence in a Sample of High School Students in the Rio Grande Valley

Gabriela Ontiveros
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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TEEN DATING VIOLENCE IN A SAMPLE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE RIO
GRANDE VALLEY

A Thesis

by

GABRIELA ONTIVEROS

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2019

Major Subject: Clinical Psychology

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE IN A SAMPLE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE RIO
GRANDE VALLEY

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GABRIELA ONTIVEROS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Arthur Cantos
Chair of Committee

Dr. Ruby Charak
Committee Member

Dr. Po-Yi Chen
Committee Member

August 2019

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ABSTRACT

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This study analyzes the extent of teenage dating violence (TDV) perpetration and victimization among a sample of high school students in the Rio Grande Valley and its relationship with the occurrence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and exposure to interparental violence. Two hundred and twenty participants out of 426 were eligible for analyses. Rates of male and female physical abuse perpetration and victimization were similar although females reported significantly higher perpetration and males higher victimization rates. Regression analyses indicated that females exposed to interparental violence reported higher rates of overall TDV perpetration and physical abuse perpetration.

Females with higher occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence were more likely to perpetrate physical abuse if they had difficulties regulating emotion. In addition, exposure to interparental violence was a significant predictor of emotional abuse perpetration in females. Males exposed to interparental violence were more likely to perpetrate emotional abuse if they had difficulties in emotion regulation.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work and research to my beloved parents, Gloria and Dario Ontiveros. Thank you for allowing me to make my own mistakes and in turn, forge my own path.

Dad, thank you for standing by me through not only the good, but the bad times as well. I now know how much you sacrificed in order for me to be in this position today. Mom, I keep your memory alive and not a day goes by when I don't miss you. I am who I am because you were a beautiful, hard-working woman that was not scared to be herself. You were and continue to be my strength.

Last, I dedicate this to Gabriel. You sweet boy, you'll move mountains.

To my family: *We* did it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The adolescent stage of an individual is typically marked with elements of insecurity, immaturity, and faltering emotional regulation (Faulkner, Goldstein, & Wekerle, 2014). The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a set of recommendations set in place to promote uniformity in the use of terminology associated with partner violence (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, Mahendra, 2015). These recommendations characterize teen dating violence (TDV) as having experienced either physical, sexual, psychological or emotional abuse while in a dating relationship. Experiencing TDV in adolescence may lead to long-term consequences such as depression, suicidal ideation, and intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood (Niolon, 2017; Niolon et al., 2019). Consequently, the study of dating violence in adolescence, will facilitate an understanding of risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Smith et al., 2017; Wolfe et al., 2003).

Data from the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) indicates that intimate partner violence oftentimes begins with teenage dating violence (TDV). The statistics reflect the reality that violence among youth has become pervasive in the United States (Niolon et al., 2015; Niolon et al., 2017). Niolon et al. (2015) found that among middle school students who were in a dating relationship in four U.S. cities, 77% reported perpetrating emotional/verbal abuse, 15% reported being perpetrators of

sexual abuse, and 32% reported perpetrating physical abuse. Additional findings from the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that 11% of students that reported dating in the past 12 months had been victims of sexual dating violence and 10% experienced physical dating violence (Kann et al., 2016). An estimated 8.5 million women and over 4 million men have reported physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner before the age of 18 (Niolon et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

Differences in gender are also important in studying potential precursors of dating violence as the existing research presents disparate findings regarding the prevalence rate of perpetration of males (O'Leary, Smith Slep, Avery-Leaf, & Cascardi, 2008). For example, Sabina, Cuevas, and Bell's (2013) in their study reported that 26.3% of male Latino adolescents had been victims of dating violence, as compared to 13.4% of females. In addition, 11.8% of males reported being victims of physical violence, compared to 1.9% of females (Sabina et al., 2013).

TDV in adolescence is a likely precursor to IPV in adulthood, and thus intervening earlier in an individual's life may lower the risk of the long-term effects that accompany such violence. Despite existing data supporting high rates of dating violence and some effective dating violence prevention programs, such as, the Safe Dates Program (Foshee et al., 2004), scarce research exists on the predictors that can lead to experiencing dating violence among adolescents. Even less literature exists on the experiences of Latino/as, and currently there are zero research studies that examine the experiences of youth from the Rio Grande Valley.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Predictors of Teenage Dating Violence

Although it has been well documented that teen dating violence is a major concern with lasting effects that can spill over into adulthood, little research exists on the potential risk factors (Arias, Samios, & O’Leary, 1987; Bergman, 1992; Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; O’Keefe, 2005). It is important to analyze the life events during adolescence that may increase the likelihood of violence perpetration if one is to employ effective preventive strategies and promote healthy dating behaviors. Research has consistently indicated that adverse childhood experiences, exposure to interparental violence, and difficulties in emotion regulation can predict dating violence perpetration (Aparício, Lopes, Ferreira, & Duarte, 2014; Black et al. 2010; Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2015).

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Exposure to Interparental Violence

A well-documented predictor of TDV is exposure to traumatic experiences during childhood and through adolescence (Aparício, Lopes, Ferreira, & Duarte, 2014; Davis, Port, Basile, Espelage, & David-Ferdon, 2019). Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, were first described by Felitti and colleagues in the ACE study of 1988. ACEs encompass three forms of traumatic exposure, namely, abuse, neglect, and household challenges (Felitti et al., 1988). Abuse can be classified as physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse, and neglect is characterized as being either physical or emotional (1988). Dr. Felitti and colleagues describe

household challenges as having experienced substance abuse in the home, incidence of mental illness in the household, parental separation or divorce, and presence of a criminal household member. Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, and Hamby (2015) analyzed telephone survey data from the 2014 National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. 18.1% of children between the ages of 14 through 17 reported having experienced physical abuse and 23.9% reported emotional abuse (Finkelhor, 2015). Their results also showed that 10.2% of children of the same age reported being victims of sexual assault. In addition, Finkelhor et al. (2015) found 18.4% of children reported neglect. Further, these findings indicate that a higher number of ACEs increases the likelihood of violence.

A review by Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, and Bangdiwala (2001) established that child abuse is consistently linked to violence perpetration in later relationships. Studies that investigated both outcomes and risk and protective factors of violence in relationships found that children who were abused and neglected by their parents were more likely to be victims of violence in their relationships, as well as perpetrators (Giordano, Kaufman, Manning, & Longmore, 2015; Renner & Whitney, 2012). These findings were consistent for both men and women. After conducting a study on 1,321 adolescents and their parents/guardians, Giordano et al. (2015) found that adolescents who were hit by their parents were significantly correlated with perpetration of TDV. This study also emphasized that individuals whose parents themselves reported using violence were more likely to report violence perpetration themselves. Eight six percent of adolescents who reported being hit by their parents reported utilizing violence in their most recent dating relationship (Giordano et al., 2015). However, there seems to be a substantial amount of variability in the findings. In a review by Kinsfogel & Grych (2004), the results show that adolescents who experience interparental violence do not go on to perpetrate violence; It

appears that although exposure to ACEs and interparental violence is a risk factor for perpetration of violence in dating relationships, there are other factors that make an adolescent more or less vulnerable to its effects.

Household dysfunction is a component of ACEs, and within this component lies exposure to interparental violence. Whitfield, Anda, Dube, and Felitti (2003) pose the following reflection, “The question of whether treating children violently is likely to induce them to treat others violently later in life is of great social and public health importance” (p. 167). However, disparate findings exist on the relationship between witnessing interparental violence and TDV perpetration (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001).

Among others, it is important to note two theories that support the relationship between ACEs and TDV perpetration, namely, social learning (Bandura, 1977) and intergenerational transmission (IGT) of violence (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010; O’Leary, 1988). Albert Bandura (1977) established social learning theory, which supports the idea that children will model the behavior they observe. Similarly, the theory of IGT of violence links witnessing interparental violence with violence perpetration in successive generations (Black et al., 2010; O’Leary, 1988). Through social learning processes and observational learning, violence becomes a learned behavior that is used as a habitual response when dealing with conflict in dating relationships (Bandura, 1986; Black et al., 2010; O’ Leary, 1988). Children then learn that violence can be an effective way to resolve conflict in their adolescent relationships and also gain control (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Black et al. 2010).

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

In regards to development, the ability of an individual to regulate emotions increases as they transition from childhood to adolescence, and ultimately adulthood (Gross, 2002). Research

by Larson & Lampman-Petratis (1989) showed early on that adolescents experience more intense emotions, as compared to other developmental stages in life. These intense and frequent feelings can be attributed to hormonal and neurological changes that are present normative of this developmental stage (Larson & Lampman-Petratis, 1989). While emotion dysregulation has been investigated as a potential risk factor for dating violence perpetration in adults (Gratz, Paulson, Jakupcak, & Tull, 2009; McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008), little is known about the relationship between emotion dysregulation and violence perpetration in teen dating relationships.

Statement of the Purpose

The current study aims to analyze the extent of dating violence in a sample of high school adolescents in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and examine gender differences in violence perpetration and victimization. A second aim is to understand the effect of adverse experiences in childhood, exposure to interparental violence, and emotion regulation difficulties on adolescent perpetration and victimization of violence.

Aims and Hypotheses

Aim 1. This study will examine the extent of teenage dating violence (TDV) perpetration and victimization among a sample of high school students in the Rio Grande Valley.

Aim 2. This study will examine whether gender differences (in heterosexual males and females and same-sex relationships) exist in teenage dating violence perpetration and victimization in terms of five factors, namely, threatening behavior, relational abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal/emotional abuse (Wolfe et al., 2001).

Aim 3. Additionally, this study will investigate occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence in an attempt to examine if such incidences predict a higher rate of overall violence perpetration among heterosexual adolescents (i.e., female-to-male and male-to-female relationships). It is hypothesized (Hypothesis 1) that adolescents with higher occurrences of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and exposure to interparental violence will be more likely to perpetrate violence in their dating relationships. The association between adverse childhood experience and exposure to interparental violence and perpetration of dating violence will be moderated by the adolescent's difficulty regulating emotions (Hypothesis 2).

Aim 4. Another goal of this study is to predict physical abuse perpetration among heterosexual adolescents by examining occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence. It is hypothesized (Hypothesis 3) that higher occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence will predict a higher rate of physical abuse perpetration among adolescents. Again, this association will be moderated by difficulty regulating emotions (Hypothesis 4).

Aim 5. Lastly, this study aims to predict emotional abuse perpetration among heterosexual adolescents by examining occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence. It is hypothesized (Hypothesis 5) that higher occurrences of ACEs and exposure to interparental violence will predict a higher rate of emotional abuse perpetration. This association will also be moderated by the adolescent's difficulty regulating emotions (Hypothesis 6).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Participants

Study participants were selected from three early college public high schools (ECHS) in the Rio Grande Valley that are part of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) school district: PSJA Memorial ECHS, PSJA North ECHS, and PSJA Thomas Jefferson T-STEM ECHS (see *Table 1*). The total sample was comprised of 426 adolescents ages 14 through 18 ($M = 16.05$, $SD = 1.153$) and enrolled in grades 9 through 12 ($M = 10.58$, $SD = 1.093$). Of the total sample, 220 (51.6%) had been in a relationship in the last 12 months and thus were included in subsequent analyses. Eighty four percent of the students were Hispanic/Latino and 15.9% other). A total of 43 adolescents reported having had a relationship in the last 12 months at PSJA Memorial ECHS, 93 at PSJA North ECHS, and 84 at PSJA Thomas Jefferson T-STEM ECHS. Male ($n = 97$) and female ($n = 123$) students were about equally represented in the total sample.

Measures

Dating Violence Perpetration

Estimates of violence perpetration and victimization in the dating relationship were measured using the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001). The CADRI is a 35-item self-report instrument tailored for adolescents that measures specific instances of abuse in the past twelve months in terms of five factors: threatening behavior, relational abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal/emotional abuse (Wolfe et

al., 2001). These five subscales, respectively, are measured with items such as “I threatened to hurt him,” “I spread rumors about him,” “I threw something at him,” “I kissed him when he didn’t want me to,” and “I blamed him for the problem” (Wolfe et al., 2001). The CADRI utilizes pronoun changes to distinguish between male and female respondents, and items are rated on a four-point Likert-type scale system with the following distinctions: 0 = *Never (0 times)*; 1 = *Seldom (1-2 times)*; 2 = *Sometimes (3-5 times)*; and 3 = *Often (6 or more times)*. Adolescents answered each question twice, first in relation to their behavior toward their dating partner and second in relation to their partner’s behavior toward them (in this way collecting perpetration and victimization data).

The CADRI was created to be sensitive to dating relationships in adolescents and has been shown to have strong internal consistency and adequate 2-week test-retest reliability for subscales ($r = .68$; Cascardi, Blank, & Dodani, 2019; Wolfe et al., 2001). In addition, reports of victimization and perpetration are Acceptable between female and male respondents. Alpha coefficients were acceptable for verbal or emotional abuse ($\alpha > .81$) and for physical abuse subscales ($\alpha > .76$), across sex and grade. Alphas for the threatening behavior subscale were somewhat lower, ranging from .54 to .73 (Wolfe et al., 2001).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

In order to identify childhood experiences of abuse and neglect, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questionnaire was used (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE questionnaire consists of 10-items that measure the occurrence of an adverse event during an individual’s first 18 years of life. The ACE questionnaire has three categories, including abuse (emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse), neglect (physical neglect and emotional neglect), and household challenges (substance abuse, incidence of mental illness in the household, parental

separation or divorce, and presence of a criminal household member). Responses are dichotomous (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*) with scores ranging from 0-10, and higher scores indicate a greater number of ACEs. This questionnaire is a valid scale used to assess childhood challenges and previous studies have found that the ACE questionnaire has good to excellent test-retest reliability (Dube et al., 2003).

Exposure to Interparental Violence

Three dichotomous (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*) items were used to assess exposure to interparental violence in the adolescent's life. Respondents were asked if they had ever witnessed the following: 1) Father hit mother; 2) Mother hit father; 3) Both parents hit each other.

Emotional Regulation

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), was used to provide a comprehensive measure of emotion regulation. This 36-item self-report measure examines six different aspects of emotion regulation: non-acceptance of emotional responses (nonacceptance), difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior (goals), impulse control difficulties (impulse), lack of emotional awareness (awareness), limited access to emotion regulation strategies (strategies), and lack of emotional clarity (clarity).

All DERS subscales are moderately to strongly correlated. Additionally, subscale internal consistency (Cronbach's α) ranges from .80 to .89, and the total scale internal consistency is .93. The DERS shows adequate test-retest reliability for a period of 4-8 weeks (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Medrano & Trógolo, 2016). Moreover, the DERS represents one of the most comprehensive available measures of emotional regulation since it assesses multiple aspects of emotional regulation at one (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Medrano & Trógolo, 2016).

Sociodemographic Variables

A brief demographic questionnaire was utilized to gather information about the participants. Gender was dichotomous: (1) for males and (2) for females. Age was reported using 5 categories, 14 through 18, and grade level was reported using 4 categories, 9 through 12. Due to the small proportion of ethnicities other than Hispanic/Latino, ethnicity was recoded into two categories: Hispanic/Latino (1) or Other (0). Parent's household income was assessed using 12 categories, with \$10,000 increments. Lastly, participants were also asked to provide information about their father and mother's highest level of education using six categories. The six categories are as follow: (1) Did not attend school; (2) Some high school; (3) High school graduate; (4) Some college; (5) College graduate; (6) Graduate school or Professional school.

Procedures

Recruitment Procedure

Participants were chosen by an assistant principal at each of the three high schools. Two classes in grades 9 through 12 were selected, for a total of eight classes at each school. Researchers met with students prior to data collection and explained the purpose of the study and its protocol. Researchers read a recruitment script and answered questions. Students between the ages of 14 and 18 could participate, but the active consent of a parent or guardian was required. Students were given consent forms to take home, and instructed to return them in a week. The consent form described the study in detail and requested the signature of a parent or guardian. Participants that were 18 years of age could sign for themselves. Only those students with a consent form were allowed to participate in the study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley authorized all the study procedures.

Questionnaire Administration

Participants completed the aforementioned measures as part of a larger, anonymous web-based Qualtrics survey. Researchers set up a computer laboratory at each high school with the web-based survey available at each computer. Only those students who had returned a signed consent form were taken to the computer laboratory during one of their scheduled 55-minute classes. Teachers were not present while students completed the survey. Before proceeding with the survey, participants were presented with a statement of assent explaining that they could terminate the research at any time or skip any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering without negative implications. Following completion of the survey, each class of participants was entered in a drawing for a chance to win two \$20.00 VISA gift cards. The two winning participants of each class were then asked to sign a tracker upon receipt of the gift card.

Analysis Overview

Participants were categorized into three subgroups: 1) male reporting being in a relationship with a female ($n = 93$); 2) female reporting being in a relationship with a male ($n = 113$); and 3) adolescents reporting being in a same-sex relationship ($n = 14$). The first two subgroups were created in order to analyze the rates of victimization and perpetration by gender. The third subgroup was created in order to combat further substantive heterogeneity as previous studies have indicated a higher incidence of TDV in same-sex relationships (Messinger, 2011; Rollè, Giardina, Caldarrera, Gerino, & Brustia, 2018). All the hypotheses were then examined with multiple regression analysis within each subgroup, respectively. Within each subgroup, the analytical procedure was divided into three stages.

Stage 1. First, descriptive statistics were analyzed to examine the rates of violence perpetration and victimization. In addition, the differences between male and female dating violence perpetration and victimization were assessed.

Stage 2. Bivariate Correlation matrices using Pearson's R correlation were calculated between the dependent variables and potential confounding variables (i.e., age, grade, race/ethnicity, primary language, household income, and mother and father's education level). This was conducted to empirically select out the significant confounding variables that would then be included in the follow-up regression analyses as the covariates.

Stage 3. Then, three multiple regression models were completed by using overall teenage dating violence (i.e., composite score of the CADRI), the physical abuse factor of the CADRI (i.e., composite score of the physical abuse subscale), and the emotional abuse factor of the CADRI (i.e., composite score of the emotional abuse subscale) as the dependent variables, respectively. The composite score of the ACEs questionnaire and the composite score of the three exposure to interparental violence items, plus the significant covariates found in stage 2 were jointly included in the multiple regression models as predictors. The purpose of such analyses was to examine the main effects of adverse childhood experiences and exposure to interparental violence on the dependent variables after controlling for the covariates.

Stage 4. Lastly, the interaction terms between the two independent variables (adverse childhood experiences and exposure to interparental violence) and the composite score of the DERS, plus DERS itself, was further included into the models (from stage 3) as extra predictors to examine the moderation effects of the DERS. All the analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.

Results

Aim 1

Teenage dating violence perpetration and victimization in terms of five subscales, threatening behavior, relational abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal/emotional abuse,

was assessed in heterosexual males and females. TDV of same-sex relationships was also assessed; however, there was no report of victimization (0%) or perpetration (0%) of violence when the adolescent was in a same-sex relationship. Table 2 describes all items in each subscale and shows the percentage of heterosexual respondents that reported perpetration and victimization in each.

Physical Abuse

Males reported being victimized physically more often as compared to females (14.1% and 12.5%, respectively). Nearly 10% (9.7%) of males reported that their dating partner threw something at them, while 5.4% of females reported this same abuse. In addition, 7.6% of males reported that their partner kicked, hit or punched them, as opposed to 4.5% of females. It is important to note that females reported a higher rate of victimization on two items: 1) *I slapped or pulled her hair*; and 2) *I pushed, shoved, or shook her*. Also, 5.4% of females reported being slapped or having their hair pulled, compared to 4.3% of males. 7.2% of females reported being pushed, shoved, or shook, compared to 3.3% of males.

In regard to physical violence perpetration, there was a well-defined difference between boys and girls. Females reported 14.2% of violent acts, as compared to males who reported 6.5%. In all four items of this subscale, females reported higher incidences. Although females reported a higher rate of victimization on the two items mentioned above, they also reported a higher rate of perpetration for the same items. 7.1% of females reported slapping or pulling their partner's hair, and pushing, shoving, or shaking them vs 2.2% in males).

Threatening Behavior

There was a 1.6% difference in overall victimization between males and females in regards to threatening behavior. 12.5% of females reported threatening behavior in their dating

relationship, in contrast with 14.1% of males. Three of the four items in this subscale were comparable, the differences ranging from .4% to 1.6%. One item, *I destroyed or threatened to destroy something [they] valued*, resulted in a 5.2% difference, with females reporting a higher rate of victimization (11.6% and 6.4%, respectively).

The rate of perpetration between genders was similar: 9.8% in females and 9.7% in males. Item two of this subscale, *I deliberately tried to frighten [them]*, was the same for both genders (5.4%). There was a .7% difference in both items three and four, where females reported more perpetration (1.8% females; 1.1% males). Lastly, 5.3% of females reported destroying or threatening to destroy something their partner valued, and 4.3% of males reported the same.

Sexual Abuse

Overall reporting of sexual abuse was similar between males and females. 15.2% of females reported being victims of this abuse, as opposed to 14.1% of males. The item with the highest rate of victimization in this subscale, *I kissed [them] when [they] didn't want me to*, resulted in a rate of 13.3% in females and 11.9% in males. Males reported no victimization when asked the following item: *She threatened me in an attempt to have sex with me*. However, 3.6% of females reported their dating partner threatened them in an attempt to have sex. More females reported being victims (5.3%) than males (4.3%) when asked if they had been touched sexually without consent. When asked if they had been forced to have sex when they did not want to, 3.3% of females reported being victims, compared to 1.1% of males.

There was more perpetration of sexual abuse reported by males than females (13% and 9.8%, respectively). 10.8% of males kissed their partner without consent, compared to 8.9% of females. In addition, 4.3% of males and 3.6% of females touched their partner sexually without consent. Although both males and females did not report threatening their partner in an attempt

to have sex, 1.8% of females reported actually forcing their partners to have sex. It is important to note that males did not report this behavior (0%).

Relational Aggression

Males reported more overall relational aggression (15.2%) than females (10.6%). On item one, 11.9% of males vs 8.1% of females reported that their partner tried to turn their friends against them. More than twice as many males (10.7% vs 5.3%) reported victimization on item two: *I said things to [their] friends about them to turn [them] against [them]*. Lastly, 3.6% of females reported that they spread rumors about their partner (perpetration), compared to 1.1% of males.

The rate of overall relational aggression perpetration between genders was similar: 5.4% in females and 5.5% in males. 3.3% of males and 2.7% of females reported trying to turn their partner's friends against them. Also, 3.3% of males and 4.4% of females reported saying things to their friends about their partner in an effort to turn them against their partner. There were no males that reported spreading rumors about their partner; in contrast, .9% of females reported spreading rumors.

Emotional/Verbal Abuse

This subscale showed the highest rates of perpetration and victimization when compared to the other scales. However, perpetration and victimization rates among genders were fairly similar. Overall, females reported being emotionally/verbally victimized more often than males (61.4% and 58.4%, respectively). Females reported a higher percentage of victimization on seven out of 10 items of this subscale (see *Table 1*). Males reported that their partner brought up something bad that they had done in the past .5% more than females (37.7% vs 37.2%). In addition, 12.9% of males experienced their partner insulting them with put downs. 9.8% of

females reported being victims of the same behavior. 19.4% of males and 14.2% of females reported that their partner attempted to end the relationship. The highest difference (25.6%) in percentage between gender victimization was found on item nine: *I accused [them] of flirting with another person*. Females reported more victimization (35.3%) than males (9.7%).

In regards to emotional/verbal abuse perpetration, more females reported overall perpetration than males (62.1% and 57.3%, respectively). Females reported a higher percentage of perpetration in nine out of 10 items of this subscale (see *Table 1*). Item five, *I insulted [them] with put downs*, was the only item where males reported a higher percentage of perpetration (11.9% vs 10.6%). The difference, however, was small (1.3%). Similar to the rate of victimization in item nine, *I accused [them] of flirting with another person*, females also reported a much higher rate of perpetration than males (39.9% vs 7.6%). Overall, rates of emotional/verbal abuse victimization and perpetration were consistent within genders.

Aim 2

After examining the rates of TDV in males and females, two differences were significant with respect to physical abuse perpetration and verbal/ emotional abuse perpetration. Females were significantly more likely to be perpetrators of physical abuse ($M=.61$, $SD= 1.55$) than males ($M=.16$, $SD= .58$); $t(139) = -2.15$, $p = .033$. In addition, females were significantly more likely to be perpetrators of verbal/emotional abuse ($M=7.46$, $SD= 6.16$) than males ($M=4.39$, $SD= 4.02$); $t(139) = -3.40$, $p = .001$.

Further, Cohen's effect size value for physical abuse perpetration in females ($d=.38$) suggested a small to moderate practical significance. With respect to verbal/emotional abuse perpetration in females, Cohen's effect size value ($d=.59$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance.

Aim 3

Correlation for Heterosexual Males. The correlation between potential covariates and overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual males was first examined. The results indicated that the father's education and household income were significantly and negatively correlated ($r = .30, p = .028$; $r = .309, p = .020$, respectively). Thus, these two variables were included in the regression analysis as covariates, where the composite score of the CADRI of male perpetrators was used as the dependent variable.

Correlation for Heterosexual Females. The correlation between potential covariates and overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual females was first examined. The results indicated that the primary language spoken at home is significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.258, p = .022$). Thus, this variable was included in the regression analysis as a covariate, where the composite score of the CADRI of female perpetrators was used as the dependent variable.

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Males. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual males based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis results show that neither ACEs nor Exposure to Interparental Violence significantly predicted overall TDV perpetration of males ($b = -1.859, p > .05$; $b = .715, p > .05$, respectively).

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Females. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual females based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis showed that the Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score is a significant predictor of overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual females ($b = 5.19, p < .05$). Its regression coefficient suggests

that one-unit increase in Exposure to Interparental Violence will result in 5.19-unit increase in overall TDV perpetration after controlling the effect of language spoken at home.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Males. The regression analysis results showed that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between ACEs to overall TDV perpetration of heterosexual males is not significant ($b = -.028, p > .05$). In addition, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence to overall TDV perpetration of heterosexual males is also not significant ($b = -.377, p > .05$). Thus, the relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence to overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual males is not affected by the DERS score.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Females. The regression analysis results showed that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between ACEs to overall TDV perpetration of heterosexual females is not significant ($b = .015, p > .05$). In addition, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence to overall TDV perpetration of heterosexual females is also not significant ($b = .106, p > .05$). Thus, the relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence to overall TDV perpetration in heterosexual females is not affected by the DERS score.

Aim 4

Correlation for Heterosexual Males. The correlation between potential covariates and physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual males was first examined. The results indicated that there are no significant variables and thus no covariates were added to the regression analyses.

Correlation for Heterosexual Females. The correlation between potential covariates and physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual females was first examined. The results indicated

that there are no significant variables and thus no covariates were added to the regression analyses.

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Males. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual males based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis results show that neither ACEs nor Exposure to Interparental Violence significantly predicted physical abuse perpetration of males ($b = -.038, p > .05$; $b = -.038, p > .05$, respectively).

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Females. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual females based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis showed that the Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score is a significant predictor of physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual females ($b = 1.190, p > .05$). Its regression coefficient suggests that one-unit increase in Exposure to Interparental Violence will result in 1.190-unit increase in physical abuse perpetration.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Males. The regression analysis results show that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between ACEs to physical abuse perpetration of heterosexual males is not significant ($b = .003, p > .05$). In addition, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence to physical abuse perpetration of heterosexual males is also not significant ($b = .003, p > .05$). Thus, the relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence to physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual males is not affected by the DERS score.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Females. The regression analysis results show that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between

ACEs to physical abuse perpetration of heterosexual females is significant ($b = .008, p < .05$). In addition, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence to physical abuse perpetration of heterosexual females is also significant ($b = .019, p < .05$). This indicates that the relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence with physical abuse perpetration in heterosexual females is affected by the DERS score.

Aim 5

Correlation for Heterosexual Males. The correlation between potential covariates and emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual males was first examined. The results indicated that the parent's household income was significantly correlated ($r = .287, p = .032$). Thus, this variable was included in the regression analysis as a covariate, where the composite score of the emotional abuse subscale of the CADRI of male perpetrators was used as the dependent variable.

Correlation for Heterosexual Females. The correlation between potential covariates and emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual females was first examined. The results indicated that the primary language spoken at home is significantly correlated ($r = -.289, p = .010$). Thus, this variable was included in the regression analysis as a covariate, where the composite score of the emotional abuse subscale of the CADRI of female perpetrators was used as the dependent variable

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Males. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual males based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis results show that neither ACEs nor Exposure to Interparental Violence significantly predicted emotional abuse perpetration of males ($b = -.381, p > .05$; $b = .266, p > .05$, respectively).

Regression Analysis of Main Effects in Heterosexual Females. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual females based on their ACEs score and Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score. The regression analysis showed that the Exposure to Interparental Violence sum score is a significant predictor of emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual females ($b = 2.599, p < .05$). Its regression coefficient suggests that one-unit increase in Exposure to Interparental Violence will result in 2.599-unit increase in emotional abuse perpetration.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Males. The regression analysis results show that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between ACEs to emotional abuse perpetration of heterosexual males is not significant ($b = -.006, p > .05$). However, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence to emotional abuse perpetration of heterosexual males was significant ($b = -.106, p < .05$). The relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence to emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual males is not affected by the DERS score.

Regression Analysis of Moderation Effects in Heterosexual Females. The regression analysis results show that the moderation effect of the DERS score on the relationship between ACEs and emotional abuse perpetration of heterosexual females is not significant ($b = .000, p > .05$). In addition, the moderation effect of the DERS on the relationship between Exposure to Interparental Violence and emotional abuse perpetration of heterosexual females is also not significant ($b = .035, p > .05$). This indicates that the relationship between ACEs and Exposure to Interparental Violence with emotional abuse perpetration in heterosexual females is not affected by the DERS score.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was unique in that it was able to quantify teenage dating violence perpetration and victimization among adolescents in the Rio Grande Valley, currently a region with scarce research in the field. An objective of this study was to assess the incidence of dating violence in terms of five factors: threatening behavior, relational abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal/emotional abuse (Wolfe et al., 2001). Table 2 summarizes the rate of violence perpetration and victimization reported for each factor. Females reported a higher rate of perpetration of physical abuse and emotional/verbal abuse, while males reported a higher rate of perpetration of sexual abuse. Perpetration of relational aggression and threatening behavior was similar for both.

Consistent with other studies, males were significantly more likely than females to report perpetrating sexual violence, and females were more likely to report perpetrating all other types of violence (Bergman, 1992; Hokoda, Martin del Campo, & Ulluo, 2012; Foshee, 1996).

Although the measure utilized (CADRI) in this study was not designed to distinguish if the violence was used in self-defense, the nature of the perpetration is not clear. There have been some theories that posit that females report more perpetration of violence because it is used under the circumstances of self-defense; that is, they sense imminent violence and strike out defensively (Gelles, 1974; Walker, 1984). However, this question requires further investigation.

In regards to victimization, males reported being victims of physical abuse, threatening behavior, and relational aggression more often, while females reported being victims of sexual

and emotional/verbal abuse more often. It is important to note that females reported higher victimization and perpetration of emotional/verbal abuse than males. One conclusion that can be drawn is that females perceive their actions and the actions of their partner to be more emotionally hurtful than males do (Hickman, Jaycox, Aronoff, 2004). In the review by Hickman et al. (2004), it is suggested that both males and females have different ideas of what emotional abuse really is and what constitutes this type of abuse.

After examining the rates of TDV across genders (male vs female), two differences were significant: physical abuse perpetration and verbal/ emotional abuse perpetration. Females were significantly more likely to be perpetrators of physical and verbal/emotional abuse. Although research has been conducted on the incidence and factors associated with TDV, there is relatively little research on the gender differences on the types of violence (Hokoda et al., 2012). Even among this research, the results are inconsistent. Much of the literature indicates that females are victimized more often, and males are more likely to be perpetrators (Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). However, there are many studies that provide contrasting results. Consistent with the results of this study, Hokoda et al. (2012) found that females were more likely to report perpetrating physical and verbal/emotional abuse. A review by Hickman et al. (2004) also supports these results. This data challenges the traditional stereotypical thought that males are strictly batterers and females are victims (Hokoda et al., 2012). However, replication of study findings is warranted.

In males, father's education was negatively correlated with overall abuse perpetration. That is, the probability of perpetrating any type of abuse in males increased if the father's

education level was lower. This sample indicated that an exogenous decrease in the number of years of school by the father).

Also in males, household income was negatively correlated with both overall abuse perpetration and emotional abuse perpetration. The lower the reported income, the higher the probability that males would perpetrate overall abuse and emotional abuse. There are not many studies that assess income level and TDV perpetration of males. Only three out of 11 studies on the topic reported statistically significant results (Edwards, Mattingly, Dixon, Banyard, 2014; Chang, Foshee, McNaughton Reyes, Ennett, Halpern, 2015; Longmore, Manning, Giordano, Copp, 2014). Chang et al. (2015) found that poverty based on the census was significantly associated with dating violence perpetration; however, this association was found only in females and not males. A study by Longmore et al. (2014) indicated that men and women who reported higher levels of poverty also indicated more physical TDV victimization. Research on perpetration and lower household income is scarce.

Being exposed to interparental violence increased the likelihood of emotional abuse perpetration only in those males that report difficulties in emotional regulation. Results of various studies have suggested that exposure to interparental violence, together with deficits in affect increase the rate of TDV perpetration (Cohen, Shorey, Menon, & Temple, 2018). Although attachment style was not assessed in this study, many studies have demonstrated a strong association between anxious attachment and perpetration of violence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals who may have experienced violence among parents in childhood may not have developed the ability to manage their own emotional responses during stressful periods

(emotional dysregulation) leading them to adopt an anxious attachment style (Flouri & Mavroveli, & Tzavidism, 2012).

The link between stressful life events (such as seeing violence in the home) and maladjustment in children and adolescents has been well documented (Coddington, 1972; Ford, Collishaw, Meltzer, & Goodman, 2007). It is important to note, that there is strong variability to the responses of adolescents and children to such stressors and there is evidence for resilience, or adaptation, to these adverse experiences (Ford, Collishaw, Meltzer, & Goodman, 2007). Gross (1998) describes emotion regulation as a strategy to deal with and appropriately respond to external demands, and resilience results from the dynamic interaction between an individual's protective factors and their adverse experiences (i.e., interparental violence).

Riggs and O'Leary (1989) included emotional regulation in their model of causes of dating violence, but there is little research on how affect is linked with dating violence perpetration. The data suggests that understanding associations between violence in the family and dating relationships requires examination of social-cognitive processes. In a 2004 study on adolescents and dating violence by Kinsfogel and Grych, males who witnessed higher levels of interparental violence were more likely to perceive aggression as acceptable in their relationships. This reasoning predicted higher rates of abuse in their dating relationships (as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Straus, 1979). The findings of Kinsfogel and Grych's (2004) study replicate the findings in Riggs and O'Leary's (1996) study on adolescents. Both studies support a specific pathway between violence in the dating relationship and the cognitive construct of justifying violence in the relationship. This, coupled

with emotional dysregulation, has the effect of increasing the probability that an individual will perpetrate violence.

O'Donnell et al. (2006) and Tschann et al. (2009) found considerable data supporting a positive association between exposure to interparental violence and teen dating violence perpetration. This association, however, has not been established consistently. Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) investigated ways in which exposure to interparental violence affected adolescent relationships in high school aged adolescents. Notably, their results showed that many adolescents that are exposed to interparental violence do not go on to become perpetrators of violence in their dating relationships. In the study, 63% of adolescents reported being exposed to interparental violence in the home; however, only 20% reported being perpetrators of violence in their dating relationships. This suggests that protective factors are at play that moderate this relationship; however, little research has been conducted on such factors (Vagi et al., 2013).

Further, females that reported having more difficulties regulating their emotions were more likely to utilize physical and emotional violence in their dating relationships. Having a lower awareness and understanding of their emotions and being less able to maintain situationally appropriate emotion regulation strategies makes it more likely that an adolescent female with prior exposure to interparental violence and more adverse life experiences will be physically and emotionally abusive towards their partner. It is important to mention, however, that more research would need to be conducted to examine which specific aspect of the DERS questionnaire is more likely to affect TDV. Adverse events in childhood increase the likelihood of overall abuse perpetration only in those females that also report difficulties in emotional

regulation. Females that experience adverse events and do not develop emotional regulation difficulties may be exposed to corrective influences/relationships that protect them, and thus may be more resilient. The concept of developing resilience in children as a moderator of adverse childhood experiences (such as exposure to interparental violence) is widely supported; however, there is not a lot of empirical data examining interventions that increase resilience the most to offset the impact of ACEs (Sciaraffa, Zeanah, & Zeanah, 2017; Soleimanpour, Geierstanger, & Brindis, 2017).

Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, utilizing only the self-reports of one partner as a representation of what is occurring in the relationship can lead to inaccurate results. Only using the self-reports of one partner in the CADRI, for example, can present methodological issues in which the researcher's understanding of violence perpetration in adolescent dating relationships can become skewed (Schnurr, Lohman, & Kaura, 2010). In addition, retrospective recall of childhood maltreatment and adverse childhood experiences can lead to bias in reporting (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993).

Second, such a small sample size (N=14; 6.36% of the total sample) of adolescents in same-sex dating relationships did not allow for conclusive results for this specific population. The small sample size was decreasingly representative of the entire population and thus limits the generalizability of these findings. Third, this study identifies that the selection of the high schools participating is convenience-based and thus it creates a selection risk to the study's

internal validity. Additionally, this study assumes that the contextual variables analyzed here precede perpetration of dating violence. Given that all the data was collected at the same time, it is important to be cautious about inferring causality.

Last, the default method in SPSS, listwise deletion or pairwise deletion, was utilized to handle missing data. This method eliminates any case in which data is missing (Jelicic, Phelps, & Lerner, 2010). In doing so, there is risk in losing statistical power (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The use of this method has the implication of affecting the generalizability of the study; therefore, listwise deletion and pairwise deletion is not largely an adequate way to handle missing data (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). For males, the missing data rate of the variables in the current study ranged from N= 61 to N= 93. In the male data set, the missing data rate was up to 34%. For females, the missing data rate of the variables in the current study ranged from N= 78 to N= 133. In the female data set, the missing data rate was up to 31%.

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study provide some insight as to further research directions in this region and area of study. First, the results suggest that adolescent males are experiencing more violence victimization, thus future research needs to explore the extent and impact of this victimization on males. Historically, research with this population has focused on perpetration and not victimization but given our current results, and the foundation set by other scholars (Sabina, Cuevas, & Cotignola-Pickens, 2016) there is a growing need to study these relationships further.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1 – Pharr-San Juan-Alamo District Study Site Characteristics

Table 1 - Pharr-San Juan-Alamo District Study Site Characteristics (Texas Education Agency, 2017)

High School	Campus Size (Students)	Grade Span	Economically Disadvantaged (%)
PSJA Memorial ECHS	1,871	9-12	89.8
PSJA North ECHS	2,153	9-12	81.0
PSJA Thomas Jefferson T-STEM ECHS	671	9-12	77.3

Note. ECHS = early college high school

Table 2 – CADRI items (perpetration and victimization) and frequency of endorsement

Table 2 - CADRI items (perpetration and victimization) and frequency of endorsement

Item	Respondents endorsing one or more occurrences of perpetration in percentage (n=93)		Respondents endorsing one or more occurrences of victimization in percentage (n=113)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Physical Abuse	6.5	14.2	14.1	12.5
I threw something at them	4.3	8.8	9.7	5.4
I kicked, hit, or punched them	2.2	5.3	7.6	4.5
I slapped or pulled their hair	2.2	7.1	4.3	5.4
I pushed, shoved, or shook them	2.2	7.1	3.3	7.2
Threatening Behavior	9.7	9.8	14.1	12.5
I destroyed or threatened to destroy something they valued	4.3	5.3	6.4	11.6
I deliberately tried to frighten them	5.4	5.4	7.5	7.9
I threatened to hurt them	1.1	1.8	2.2	2.7
I threatened to hit or throw something at them	1.1	1.8	4.3	2.7
Sexual Abuse	13	9.8	14.1	15.2
I touched them sexually when they didn't want me to	4.3	3.6	4.3	5.3
I forced them to have sex when they didn't want to	0.0	1.8	1.1	3.6
I threatened them in an attempt to have sex with them	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6
I kissed them when they didn't want me to	10.8	8.9	11.9	13.3
Relational Aggression	5.5	5.4	15.2	10.6
I tried to turn their friends against them	3.3	2.7	11.9	8.1
I said things to their friends about them to turn them against them	3.3	4.4	10.7	5.3
I spread rumors about them	0.0	.9	1.1	3.6
Emotional/Verbal Abuse	57.3	62.1	58.4	61.4
I did something to try to make them jealous	29.1	31.8	29.1	35.3
I brought up something bad that they had done in the past	32.3	43.3	37.7	37.2
I said things just to make them angry	26.9	36.3	29.1	35.3

I spoke to them in a hostile or mean tone of voice	18.3	42.5	29.1	39
I insulted them with put downs	11.9	10.6	12.9	9.8
I ridiculed or made fun of them in front of others	3.3	14.1	8.6	16.8
I kept track of who they were with and where they were	36.6	42.5	42	44.3
I blamed them for the problem	22.6	29.1	28	30.1
I accused them of flirting with another person	7.6	39.9	9.7	35.3
I threatened to end the relationship	14	25.7	19.4	14.2

Note: Item pronouns are changed to he/she in the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI). “Them” was utilized above to simplify the items for comparison between genders.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gabriela Ontiveros is a current resident of the Rio Grande Valley. Daughter of Gloria and Dario Ontiveros, she graduated from Weslaco High School, ranked 14th out of 600. Concurrently, Gabriela graduated from South Texas College with an Associate's Degree in Biology.

As a first-generation college student, Gabriela graduated *summa cum laude* from The University of Texas Pan-American in 2014 with a Bachelor's of Science in Biology and a minor in Spanish. That same year, Gabriela began a career as a secondary science teacher with the non-profit organization Teach For America. Working in the same low-income community that she grew up in, Gabriela went on to receive the Teacher of the Year award as a second year teacher.

In 2017, Gabriela continued her graduate studies at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. During this time, she worked with Central American children, ages 6 through 17, at a youth immigrant shelter. Gabriela would apply parenting skills, such as positive role modeling, and would co-facilitate groups in order to maintain a safe, secure and nurturing environment for these children. In August of 2019, she graduated with a Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology.

Gabriela was one of six candidates accepted to the first cohort of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Doctor of Philosophy training program in Clinical Psychology. She will begin her doctoral studies in August of 2019 under the direction of Dr. Arthur Cantos.

Gabriela can be reached at: gabriela.ontiveros01@utrgv.edu, and correspondence can be sent to 2617 Orizaba St. at Weslaco, Texas 78599.