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NO LAUGHING MATTER: ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DATING VIOLENCE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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NO LAUGHING MATTER: ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DATING VIOLENCE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate adolescents' opinions and perceptions of the prevalence of, dynamics involved in, and gender differences in adolescent dating violence. It was predicted that students would perceive that males perpetrate more physical violence than females, and that this male-perpetrated violence is taken more seriously than female-perpetrated violence. Focus groups were conducted with students at four different schools to gather and assess opinions regarding dating violence among students' peer groups. Several themes emerged from these focus groups, including students' relative awareness of overall rates of adolescent dating violence, differing responses of peer groups upon report of victimization and perpetration of abuse, the assertion that substances, home environment and media all play a part in the choice to use violence and the opinion that males perpetrate more violence than females. Implications, next steps and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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Abuse within relationships is a serious public health issue, leaving many victims in its path of destruction. Relationship abuse begins as early as adolescence in the form of dating violence and also occurs as domestic violence in married or common-law adult relationships. It affects men and women of all races, cultures, sexual orientations, religions and socioeconomic statuses (Chhabra, 2005; Chrisler & Ferguson, 2006). Figures and estimates regarding the severity, context and prevalence vary and are often difficult to obtain due to the private nature of the matter. Domestic abuse among adults is the most heavily researched type of relationship aggression. The research in the field has evolved from the time of the first shelters for abuse victims developing in the 1970's up to the current focus on intervention and prevention strategies (Wolfe & Jaffe, 1999).

Intimate partner violence has roots in a variety of different theoretical frameworks, which guide the development of research questions, assumptions and analyses. Particularly within the context of the study which was carried out, intimate partner violence has a basis within feminist theory, social ecological framework and social learning theory. The feminist theory aspect examines women's role within society, the gender inequality that exists, barriers present for women, stereotyping, and issues like objectification. The theory holds that gender is a primary category for analysis and that significant differences and power differentials exist for men and women (McPhail et al., 2007). Pertaining to this study, feminist theory highlights the fact that violence against

girls and women is a normative concept, and intimate partner violence is experienced and understood much differently by women than by men.

The social ecological model allows for an understanding of intimate partner violence as a phenomenon consisting of the interplay of many factors in society – situational, personal and cultural (Heis, 1998). This allows researchers to take into account different types of influences and situations which may explain the existence or development of interpersonal violence. White (2009) used this model to view, at each level, how gender interacted with all of the other variables and systems at work. This model is effective in qualitative settings and precipitates a more in-depth look at issues like intimate partner violence and the effect of many life systems.

Finally, social learning theory advocates that a behaviour will be used if positive results or consequences are viewed with that behaviour in others (Bandura, 1977). This is to say that if benefit or positive outcomes are viewed as a result of violence perpetrated, one will look to use violence in future situations. This theory looks at the influences of the social world that exists and the effects that it has on individuals. These three systems of thought are incorporated within the conceptualization of this study and present within the discussion.

Relationship abuse affects a significant number of men and women. A range from 29% to 62% of the women surveyed in 10 countries by the World Health Organization in 2005 admitted to having been victims of domestic violence in their lives. The study surveyed approximately 24 000 women in the following countries: Bangladesh, Brazil,

Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Sertia and Montenegro, Thailand and the United

Republic of Tanzania (World Health Organization, 2005). These results illustrate the

global and widespread scope of the problem. More specifically, in Canada, approximately

27% of women report having been battered by an intimate partner (Randal & Haskett,

1995).

The effects of domestic abuse extend beyond the home as well, affecting both

society and the economy. It is estimated that 8 million days of work are lost annually in

the United States alone, due to domestic violence as reported by the National Center for

Injury Prevention and Control in 2003 (as cited in Gomez-Beloz, Williams, Sanchez &

Lam, 2009). It is clear through these statistics that relationship abuse occurs widely

throughout the world, with little variation between first- and third-world countries.

Without recognition of the problem or any help, domestic violence can lead to serious

and permanent injury, or even death. To illustrate this: in 2005 alone, 74 spousal

homicides were reported to the police in Canada. Furthermore, 17% of all solved

homicides from 1996 to 2005 were classified as between spouses (Canadian Centre for

Justice Statistics, 2007). Statistics for 2008 show similar numbers, with 45 women and 17

men killed by a current or former spouse, and an additional 27 homicides committed by a

former or current intimate partner not classified as a spouse. Even with 62 spousal

homicides, the number of spousal homicides in 2008 was the lowest it has been in 40

years (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Abuse within relationships can start as early as adolescence (ages 12-19) when

youth start engaging in romantic relationships for the first time. Thus, adolescent dating

violence (ADV) has become an issue of major concern not only in schools, but society as a whole. The teenage years can be tumultuous. On a daily basis, teens negotiate peer influences on many of the decisions they make, media messages infiltrating their lives and affecting their thoughts, and developmental changes taking place with their emotional and physical states. Adolescence has been identified as a "dangerous passage" and a high-risk period for dating violence due to adolescents' lack of experience with romantic relationships (Smith, White & Holland, 2003; Jackson, Cram & Seymour, 2000; Prothrow-Stith, 1991; Wolfe, 1994; Hickman, Jaycox & Aronoff, 2004). Inexperience with romantic relationships and the pressure of dealing with the intimacy, emotionally-charged situations and decisions within relationships are a significant challenge for teenagers to handle, especially if they have not received education or guidance in these matters.

In addition, violence in adolescent dating relationships is an essential topic to research because it predicts violence later in life, including subsequent romantic relationships (Frieze, 2000; Prospero, 2006; Smith & Donnelly, 2001; Hettrich & O'Leary, 2007; O'Leary, Barling, Arias, & Rosenbaum, 1989; Munoz-Rivas, Grana, O'Leary, & Gonzalez, 2008). The potential effects and consequences learned have translated into increased research and inquiry into ADV in recent years. Education about prevention of abuse, prevalence rates, warning signs, in addition to education promoting healthy relationships have emerged from this research. It is evident that dating violence in adolescence is a matter which cannot be taken lightly and prevention strategies should be a priority.

Literature Review

The definition and understanding of dating violence has shifted and expanded, primarily over the last two decades. Once a term used predominantly to describe minor to severe physical abuse or battering toward a partner, it has now been expanded to include a continuum that encompasses: threatened or carried out physical, emotional/psychological, sexual, and economic acts of abuse toward a former or current partner (Hickman et al., 2004). The image of dating violence has changed as well – once seen as male-perpetrated abuse towards a female partner, images of dating violence now additionally include female-perpetrated abuse towards a male partner and female-female and male-male abuse in same sex romantic relationships. Currently, there is no consensus on the definition of dating violence. For the purpose of this study, it will be defined as "any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, causing some level of harm" (Wolfe et al., 1996).

Types and Prevalence of Dating Violence

Dating violence is commonly organized into three main categories: physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Each is detrimental in its own way to the person being victimized, and none is worse than another. Abusive relationships can and often include victimization in more than one of these areas. Although studies involving cross- and multiple- victimization are not well documented, a study of college men found that approximately 10% had co-perpetrated physical and sexual abuse within the same time period toward their partner (White and Smith, 2009).

Psychological abuse, although varying in definition, can be described as controlling and coercive behaviour, which includes but is not limited to: isolation, threats, humiliation, emotional neglect, jealousy, put-downs and verbal aggression towards a partner (Harper et al., 2005; Gormley & Lopez, 2010). Psychological abuse has also been shown to predict physical violence (O'Leary, 1999). In addition, psychological abuse in romantic relationships has been associated with a number of negative effects. Lowered self-esteem, depression, drug use and increased risk of suicide are all possible consequences of psychological victimization (Coker et al., 2002; Sackett & Saunders, 1999; Straight, Harper & Arias, 2003).

Psychological abuse has been found to be present in the dating history of approximately 90% of high school and college students, and of these, 78% have experiences multiple occurrences of victimization (Neufeld, McNamara & Ertl, 1999; Jezl, Molidor & Wright, 1996). This number is so high due to the lack of clarity regarding specification of intimate partners perpetrating the abuse as well frequency of abuse not taken into account in this study. Psychological abuse tends to be one of the most hidden forms of dating violence as it typically leaves no visible physical signs. Despite its hidden nature, it can be equally, if not more damaging and pervasive than physical abuse.

Sexual abuse is a less researched aspect of dating violence, which can be attributed to the fact that a sexual relationship is not only an implied but also the most private aspect of a romantic relationship. Nevertheless, a handful of studies have examined sexual abuse within relationships. Tjaden and Thoennes (2008), in their report on the findings of the National Violence Against Women survey outline sexual abuse as:

rape, unwanted sexual touching, forced sex or sexual acts, and violence (or the threat of) if one does not comply with sexual demands (as cited in Campbell & Soeken, 1999).

Statistics show that a significant number of women have been forced to have sexual intercourse with their partners at some point in a relationship. The National Violence Against Women Survey (1998) reported that 7.7% of U.S. women (over 7 million) were raped by someone they considered an intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Also disturbing are the findings that over 40% of battered women have admitted they were forced to have sex with their male partner (Campbell, 1989). Sexual abuse can be extremely problematic in that victims are reluctant to report. This reluctance is often due to the lack of realization that a person can be sexually abused while in a relationship or marriage, or because they are embarrassed to come forth regarding the problem. Further barriers exist for those in same sex relationships, who may be disclosing their sexual orientation by reporting sexual abuse by their partner.

Physical violence is the most blatant and potentially physically harmful form of abuse which occurs within relationships. It is the most researched type of abuse and is the easiest type of abuse to assess, as it encompasses physical acts. Physical abuse can encompass: hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, biting, pushing, hair pulling and other various physical acts (or threat of) toward a romantic partner.

Physical aggression is reported to occur in as many as 25 to 50% of community samples of couples that are dating, living together or married (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007; Leonard & Roberts, 1998). Similarly, a self-report study done with high school

students found that 24% of young men who identified as currently dating admitted to using at least one physically aggressive tactic towards their partner. In addition, this same study found that 40% of young women who identified as currently being in a relationship admitted to perpetrating physical violence towards their partner (O'Leary et al., 2008). Other studies involving youth have reported slightly less prevalence of physical violence. For example, research with adolescents in Spain yielded the result that approximately 18% of those surveyed had perpetrated physical violence toward their partner in a current or past relationship (Munoz-Rivas et al., 2008). A survey of youth by Jackson et al. (2000) found that 17.5% of girls and 13.3% of boys had experienced physical violence in a relationship.

When taking into account the various forms of violence, overall prevalence of adolescent dating violence, like domestic abuse, is staggeringly high. Hickman et al. (2004) found that rates of dating violence within adolescent romantic relationships ranged from 16 to 26% -- based on the conceptualization of dating violence, questions asked, the length of the study, and measures used. Even more concerning, a 2001 study on adolescent dating violence by Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, and Kupper found that nearly one-third (32%) of respondents had been abused by a partner in a past intimate relationship. Even studies from the 1980s and 1990s suggest rather high rates of ADV, ranging from 12% (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Christopher, 1983) to 59% (Jezl et al., 1996). Differences in the rates of prevalence from study to study are due to: the definition of violence, the survey instrument used, self-report versus couple data, questions asked and the timeframe considered in the study.

Consequences of Dating Violence

All types of abuse within a relationship can be extremely hurtful and detrimental both psychologically and physically. As previously mentioned, adolescent dating violence can have adverse consequences throughout the lifespan (Black, Noonan, Legg, Eaton, & Breiding, 2006). Victims of all types of abuse, and particularly adolescent female victims, are at a significant risk for substance abuse, unhealthy weight control behaviours, sleep disturbances, social isolation and pregnancy (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001; Ismail, Berman, & Ward-Griffen, 2007). Also associated with dating violence victimization for males and females are peer violence, suicidal behaviours and post-traumatic stress disorder (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2008; Bossarte, Simon, & Swahn, 2008).

Abuse by a romantic partner can take a significant toll on one's mental and physical health in both the short and long term. The well-being and safety of youth and students is paramount to both educators and parents; thus dating violence during adolescence is a topic that warrants consideration both within and outside the classroom. In order to effectively educate youth on how to navigate the world of dating, it is first imperative to understand how they view relationships and the social world around them.

Adolescents' Understanding of Violence in Relationships

It is essential to look at the previous research on adolescents' understanding of what violence is, namely within the context of a romantic relationship. These views of violence and what is acceptable behaviour in a relationship can affect how adolescents act

in their own relationships (Prospero, 2006). Knowledge of adolescents' attitudes towards and conceptualization of dating violence are critical to evaluate and create effective prevention and early intervention programs (Edelen, McCaffery, Marshall, & Jaycox, 2009). To this end, it has been suggested that qualitative research is required to gain a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of how adolescents view violence, and how this may differ from adults' understanding (Prospero, 2006).

Based on adolescents' views and perceptions of dating violence, boys and girls interpret cross-gender interactions differently, thus having different definitions and perceptions of violence (Edelen et al., 2009). In Edelen et al.'s assessment of adolescents' reactions to situations of dating violence, teens were most likely to identify with the same-sex role, regardless whether it is the perpetrator or victim. The implication of this is that abusive behaviour may be supported or condoned if peers are of the same sex as the abuser. This poses significant problems for the reduction of abuse within teenage romantic relationships due to the influence of peer reactions.

Adolescents also often hold misconceptions regarding romantic relationships, which can become a factor in their decision-making. Chung (2007) interviewed several adolescent females in Australia, asking them about conflict in relationships. They found that girls were sometimes confused between concepts such as intimacy and control and do not see themselves as victims because of the regret expressed by their boyfriends. Regret or apology is a common aspect of the cycle of abusive relationship following the instance of abuse and can be dangerous. Another observation made through this study was that girls feel that they will not be victims in the future if they have experienced an

abusive partner because they have the knowledge and will be able to recognize abuse in the future. This is a potentially risky assumption due to the range in types and severity of abuse. While they may have experienced physical abuse, they may not be able to recognize the signs of psychological abuse.

Further qualitative research with youth yielded other conceptions and understandings of abuse. A series of focus groups with teens led by Lavoie, Robitaille and Hebert (2000) in Quebec found that if violence followed frustration, it was seen as more acceptable and not as a general trait of the person. Violence was acceptable and preferred to passive victimization in instances where it was seen as self-defensive or a response to abuse. The same research study yielded compelling results regarding the conceptualization and perceived seriousness of sexual abuse. Young men chronicled stories of sharing ab intoxicated female virgin amongst several boys for the purpose of sexual intercourse – reporting this group rape humorously in the focus group. Some male participants in the focus groups condoned this type of behaviour, or gave reasons like alcohol use, as an explanation or excuse for their actions. Moreover, sexual abuse was not necessarily considered as sexual violence, because sexual violence could occur consensually in a relationship through the exploration of "rough sex" between consenting partners.

Sears, Byers, Whelan and Saint-Pierre (2006) conducted focus groups in Canadian high schools, and found that girls and boys both placed a great deal of emphasis on context when deciding if an action was abusive. Moreover, boys defined abuse by its intent and girls defined abuse by its impact. That is, boys felt that if an action was done

without the intention to harm, it was not considered harmful, whereas for girls the intention does not matter if the person feels harmed.

Through a review of qualitative data on how adolescents view abuse within relationships, it appears that there are a variety of misconceptions that adolescents hold about ADV. In addition, dangerous assumptions are being made that may end up harming students. The delivery of education to students about how to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships, while giving tailored messages to girls and boys regarding the unacceptability of violence, is crucial to cease the problematic ideas students have about what abuse looks like.

Factors Contributing to Use of Violence

While looking at adolescents' understanding of dating violence, it is also important to look at factors which may contribute to adolescents' use of violence with a romantic partner. Harmful acts of physical abuse are seldom consciously and deliberately done without remorse. Instead, a range of psychological, environmental, emotional, and physical factors influence one's choice to be violent. A variety of theories have been implicated and it is clear that several factors can be involved in this choice to use violence. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), those who perpetrate violence in relationships do so because socially they see others using violence and are aware of the positive results often associated with this use of violence. This theory can also apply to relationships with mutual violence because the victim may see these positive results and use violence to get their way in the relationship in return.

Another contributor to teens' use of violence in relationship is their exposure to and the effect of media. The causal relationship between media use and behaviour change remains an issue of debate among academics and practitioners alike although a growing body of evidence is demonstrating the strong linkages. Several studies have shown that exposure to media is associated with and can affect attitudes and behaviours (Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). Teens frequently use media – from six to eight hours a day - and through this consumption are gathering information regarding how to act in dating relationships and what romantic relationships are supposed to look like (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009).

The types of media that adolescents are most commonly consuming include movies and television shows, music, video games, pornography and other internet content. With respect to television shows, approximately 60% contain acts of violence and of those shows that contain acts of violence, there are typically 6 acts of violence shown per hour (University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Communication and Social Policy, 1998). Anderson and Bushman (2001) conducted a study involving video games, and those video games with violent content were shown to increase a number of aspects of aggressive behaviour in those who played them. With the plethora of media containing violent images and themes, and media showing power differentials between men and women, it is imperative that media content be critically debated and challenged. Failing to do so can condone unhealthy or abusive relationships and glamorize and glorify violence.

Both experience as a victim of child maltreatment and modelling by parental figures of domestic violence are predictors of domestic violence. Furthermore, a study by Dixon, Hamilton-Giachristsis, Browne, and Ostapuik (2007) tied the two together, and found that 40.7% of their sample perpetrated both intimate partner violence and child maltreatment. These parents were not only modelling the violence but also perpetrating it towards their children. Victims of child maltreatment can have much greater difficulty in forming healthy adolescent and adult relationships, and in fact are 3.5 times more likely to be involved in adult domestic violence (Coid et al., 2001; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). Effects associated with child maltreatment victimization include information processing biases, anger, and aggression (Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1994). Especially for maltreated youth, the strong feelings, physical closeness and the presence of a sexual element can trigger emotions and reactions tied to the initial abusive situation (Wekerle & Wolfe, 2003). Children develop beliefs, attitudes, values, and opinions about dating violence (among many other things) from their experiences growing up (Ismail, Berman & Ward-Griffen, 2007). Youth and adolescents can also be strongly affected by growing up in a violent household in which they witness acts of domestic violence. A study by Reitzel-Jaffe and Wolfe (2001) found that men are extremely influenced by an abusive family environment and that this witnessing of abuse, or even victimization, is a factor in the development of negative beliefs about gender and the acceptability of interpersonal violence.

Sex differences in Adolescent Dating Violence

Historically, research shows that perpetration of physical abuse has been predominantly committed by males rather than females (www.endabuse.org). However, particularly in the last five years, many academic research studies conducted with adolescents have found that females' rates of perpetration are equal to, if not higher than males' in heterosexual relationships, even when considering only physical violence (Wolfe et al., 2009; Sears, Byers & Price, 2007; Hickman et al., 2004; Windle & Mrug, 2009). These findings are consistent with those of general violence and delinquency among youth (Cummings & Leschied, 2002). From 1992 to 2003, arrests of adolescent girls increased by 6.4% while arrests of their male counterparts actually decreased by 16.4% (Chesney-Lind, 2004). To this end, many researchers studying the topic recently have approached it from a gendered perspective, comparing and contrasting males and females' behaviours and attitudes to further explore differences in their rates and types of abuse perpetrated.

White (2009) approaches the topic from a gendered perspective, exploring all types of abuse. She advocates for a social ecological theoretical framework, a model that incorporates gender at all levels of discussion and analysis while considering many other factors, including witnessing abuse, parental punishment, and childhood sexual abuse. She advocates for youth to realize and value the importance of the other gender, respect each other's sexuality, and view control and coercion as an unacceptable way to resolve conflict. In understanding and working to change adolescent dating violence, White encourages researchers to view the behaviours and actions in the socio-historic context of

gender inequality and how it intersects with other aspects of identity formation. With this lens and background, she believes a more effective approach to understanding gender interactions will emerge.

Molidor and Tolman (1998) examine victimization of dating violence by gender, using degrees of abuse to classify their results (overall, moderate, and severe). Their findings illustrated that although overall reports of experiencing violence were very similar although slightly higher for boys (37.1% for boys and 36% for girls), only 16.5% of boys reported having experienced severe violence, versus 27.1% for girls. Beyond the classification of their results by severity of abuse, Molidor and Tolman also broke down physical violence into specific acts. Physical acts of violence such as kicking, scratching, slapping, and pinching were reported at much higher rates of victimization for boys, whereas girls reported being on the receiving end of forced sexual activity, punching, and choking to a much higher degree than boys.

Foshee (1996) examined gender differences among adolescents, through self-administered questionnaires to eighth and ninth grade students. Her research resulted in a number of key findings. Foshee found that females reported perpetrating more abuse than boys both in self-defence (15.9% vs. 5.4%) and when self-defence was controlled for (27.8% vs. 15.0%). Conversely, males were twice as likely to perpetrate sexual abuse towards females (14.5% vs. 6.9%). Despite girls reporting higher perpetration, adolescent females and males report victimization at almost identical rates (36.5% for females and 39.4% for males).

Although reporting similar rates of victimization, a larger number of the female victims in Foshee's study (69.9%) reported having sustained an injury from victimization than males (51.6%). Surprisingly, despite these statistics of injury, reported emergency room visits by those involved in the study are almost the same, with 9% of females sustaining an injury from dating violence having visited the hospital in comparison to 8% of males. More exacerbated are the disparities in the rates of severe physical injury and hospital visits by adults involved in abusive relationships. A study on adults in abusive relationships by Cantos, Neidig and O'Leary (1994) found that wives reported sustaining considerably more injury than the husbands involved in the study. In fact 21% of women reported injury leading to medical attention, compared to only 4% of men.

As seen, many studies in the area of dating violence and domestic abuse are quantitative in nature as they are addressing rates and types of violence in relationships. To further investigate findings of adolescents' behaviours, some exploratory qualitative research in this area has been done to examine perceptions from adolescents regarding the presence, type, and context of abuse within ADV. One such study was composed of single-sex focus groups conducted at high schools in New Brunswick, Canada. The researchers found that several common themes emerged through the students' answers and opinions on the topic. They also found that boys use more physical abuse, girls use more psychological abuse, adolescents perceive a double standard associated with boys' versus girls' use of physical violence, and adolescents want skills to have healthy relationships (Sears, Byers, Whelan & Saint-Pierre, 2006).

Female Perpetration of Abuse

Due to an increase in female perpetration of dating violence in recent years, academic inquiry into this shift has grown in order to explore the motivation and the reasons behind the change. Reasons cited for women's perpetration of abuse include: female aggression as becoming more socially accepted, fewer consequences given for female perpetration of abuse, self-defence, poor emotional regulation, and provocation by their partner (Hettrich & O'Leary, 2007; Bossarte, Simon & Swahn, 2008; Schwartz, O'Leary, & Kendziora, 1997).

Graham-Kevan and Archer (2005) surveyed women and consistently came across a number of explanations for women's perpetration of violence. Women spoke about an increase in their use of violence due to the fear for their physical safety, as part of a reciprocal cycle of violence with their partner, and due to coercive tendencies. In total, Graham-Kevan and Archer found that 35% of the women surveyed had reported using physical aggression in the past year toward their romantic partner.

Williams, Ghandour and Kub (2008) examined the role of girls and women in perpetrating all types of abuse through a meta-analysis of literature involving abuse rates. They did so by comparing rates and types of abuse in teenage, college, and adult years. They addressed and compared numerous studies, finding that rates of perpetration by women are highest in comparison to their male counterparts in terms of emotional abuse, followed by physical abuse. Higher rates of physical violence perpetration were found in at-risk populations, and it was surmised that studies that found low rates of physical

violence perpetration were due to narrow definitions of physical violence not capturing all acts.

One significant overall conclusion from Williams et al.'s study was that female perpetrated violence does not appear to adhere to either of the two main developmental trajectories for the onset and progression of violent behaviours. These common trajectories are adolescent-limited and life-course-persistent. Adolescent-limited, also sometimes referred to as late course onset entails the development of violence either in early adolescence, with a peak during mid-adolescence and a decrease in late adolescence due to maturity and adulthood, whereas life-course-persistent begins in early childhood, increases in severity during adolescence and continues into adulthood (Moffitt, 1993).

Adolescent Dating Violence and Other Risk Behaviours

Many studies in the area of dating violence have focused solely on either adolescent or adult populations in order to better understand the many dynamics involved. This research includes assessing if there are any related risky behaviours in which perpetrators of abuse are consistently engaging in. Risk behaviours include substance use and abuse, negative peer relationships, peer violence, and risky sexual behaviours.

For example, Canadian researchers Sears, et al. (2007) examined prevalence of adolescents perpetrating multiple forms of abuse towards their partners, assessing other risk behaviours to look for possible relationships and correlations to better inform programming. In their study, Sears et al. expanded the notion of risk behaviours to

include detrimental opinions and ideals held. For boys, several related risk behaviours were identified consistently with those who perpetrated violence. Identified and positively correlated with boys' use of violence were traditional attitudes towards women's roles, fear of family violence, peers who use abusive behaviours in their relationships and experience of physical, psychological or sexual violence. For girls, accepting attitudes towards girls' use of physical and psychological dating violence, having peers who use violence in their relationships and experiencing of abuse were positively correlated with females' use of violence.

Wolfe, Jaffe and Crooks (2006) asserted that adolescent risk behaviours are correlated with one another – specifically the use of violence, involvement in substance use and abuse and risky sexual behaviours. The involvement of students in one of these risk behaviours is a strong predictor of involvement in one or all of the other behaviours. This finding is supported by a two-phase study over two years done by Kim-Goodwin, Clements, McCuiston and Fox (2009). In this study, physical dating violence among adolescents was associated with the initiation of alcohol experiences at both age 11 and 13, and daily smoking. In the first phase of the survey, physical dating violence was strongly correlated with weapon carrying, physical fighting, and suicidal tendencies. In the second phase of the survey, physical dating violence was positively associated with initiation of sexual intercourse at both age 11 and 13, sexual intercourse with more than four people, alcohol or drug use before sexual intercourse, current drinking, daily smoking, and marijuana use.

These studies illustrate that violence and abuse within relationships are not usually isolated incidents. Whether it is tied in with past experiences of violence, or involvement in other risky behaviours during adolescents, the issue must be addressed within a larger context rather than as a stand-alone problem.

Possible Solutions

Due to the alarming rates of adolescent dating violence, research correlating violence with risk behaviours, and the presence of peer influence in violent tendencies, programs and curricula have been designed to address this issue and give teenagers the tools to avoid and effectively deal with violence they may experience in relationships. Such programs have only been introduced within the past ten to fifteen years, once the need for this information was determined. Hickman et al. (2004) have highlighted the existence of some such programs, but lament the lack of thorough evaluation done to test the effectiveness. In addition, they point out that a wider variety of education and treatment programs are available for and thus designed for adults rather than adolescents, likely due to the fact that domestic violence has been researched more in depth and for a longer period of time.

There are a number of problems that exist with many of the programs and initiatives designed to reduce dating violence prevalence through education. A significant number of these programs are one-time events which involve either a guest speaker coming to talk to a class, division or school, or one lesson in a class containing information regarding dating violence and healthy relationships. While there is potential

for these one-time programs to have a positive effect on students, they are not getting the continuous message and reinforcement regarding healthy relationships required for sustained impact. Some programs are add-on programs which are designed to be implemented in addition to and outside of regular curriculum. These usually do not adhere to curriculum expectations, and are generally met with dismay and a lack of motivation from teachers who find they do not have the time to fit extra material in.

Gray and Foshee (1997) point out that most prevention programs are designed for dating couples in which there is one perpetrator and one victim whereas the most common profile of a couple is that of mutual violence, where both parties involved perpetrate and receive violence of some sort. Another general issue with programs is that they are assumed to work just because they contain information regarding dating violence, and not many of these have been evaluated or tested to see if students understand or are affected by the message they are receiving.

One of the few programs for adolescents that has been formally evaluated is entitled Safe Dates, created by Foshee and her colleagues (Foshee, Bauman, Ennett, Linder, Benefield & Suchindran, 2004). This U.S.-based program was initially tested from 1994-1995 in 10 schools in rural North Carolina. The program involved 10 classroom sessions lasting 45 minutes, a student drama presentation and a poster contest, aimed to reduce dating violence. Immediate feedback showed that the program reduced and prevented dating violence. Further information was gleaned four years after initial implementation, showing that the rates of victimization and perpetration remained lower than prior to program implementation (Foshee et al., 2004).

Another evaluated program is the Fourth R (Wolfe et al. 2009). This 21 lesson comprehensive health education program has been rigorously evaluated to determine its effectiveness at reducing risk behaviours among adolescents. The developers have taken a harm reduction approach in the design, incorporating role plays for students to practice the skills they are trying to develop, including assertive communication skills and tactics such as delay, negotiation and refusal.

Research was done on attitudes, behaviours, and actions of adolescents before, during and after the implementation of the curriculum. This research involved a randomized control trial and was carried over a five year period in a school board in London, Ontario. Schools receiving the intervention (the Fourth R curriculum) focused on healthy relationships at the Grade 9 level, and control schools received regular health education curriculum.

The findings from the randomized control trial illustrated that the curriculum was effective in reducing risk behaviours among adolescents. However, a significant gender gap emerged in self-reported levels of physical dating violence perpetration. Across both conditions, girls reported higher rates of physical violence perpetration than boys both in Grade 9 and Grade 11. In comparing the two test groups, boys in the intervention schools reported significantly lower rates of physical dating violence than those in control schools at the follow up point 2.5 years into the study. In contrast, results for girls were not significant, raising questions about the effectiveness of the curriculum on girls' views and actions in dating relationships. In addition to the reduction of physical dating violence for

boys, the curriculum was secondarily found to increase condom use among boys who were sexually active (Wolfe et al., 2009).

With exceptions of Foshee's and Wolfe's work, most of the educational programs designed to change students' attitudes and behaviours regarding dating violence have experienced difficulty in measuring change in these behaviours and beliefs. This lack of measurement is largely due to the early stage of development of these programs and the absence of effective measurement (Edelen et al., 2009). The most effective designs so far have been in the form of randomized control trials, which require a significant sample size of schools, cooperative school boards, and structured and effective survey tools.

Research Issues Involving Adolescent Dating Violence

One extremely important issue in the study of dating violence is that of effective measurement or construct validity. In other words, it is important to ascertain whether what is being measured through research is compatible with what researchers define and believe dating violence is. This can be difficult when studying a construct which is largely contextual in nature, a personal and private issue, and something perceived and experienced differently by different subjects. Foshee, Bauman, Linder, Rice and Wilcher (2007) have addressed the identification and measurement of dating violence within teen relationships as problematic. Foshee et al. explain that 90% of research studies endeavouring to use some sort of measurement of abuse use scales that ask about acts, ignoring the context and details surrounding incidents. This can prove problematic in the understanding of abuse and does not bode well for the transferability or comparison of

findings from research study to research study. Beyond issues with research scales, many of the instruments used for studies of adolescent dating violence are developed for domestic violence research, meaning that some of the items may not be appropriate for adolescents (Lavoie et al., 2000).

When measuring abuse within relationships, couples data is preferable to that of single report data, but it is absent in most of the studies done within the field. It is obviously more difficult to attain as it requires participation and cooperation from both members of a couple, but data from both parties definitely has a few advantages. Underreporting is much less of an issue when both partners participate in a given study while data from both people allows the researchers to view how perceptions may vary in a relationship – allowing a deeper insight into contextual issues of dating violence (Perry & Fromuth, 2005). Couples data allows for the observation of power imbalances, minimization of abuse and the comparison of definitions of abuse by gender.

Especially when comparing rates of violence, it is extremely important to look at the tools used to gather the data. For instance, general and global subjective questions asking if a person has ever been abused by their partner generally yield less affirmative responses and thus lower rates of prevalence than specific questions asked through tools like the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) which ask about individual acts (Watson, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf & O'Leary, 2001). This more detailed way of structuring the question allows the researcher to make the decision regarding whether certain behaviours are abusive; whereas with the former, participants may report they have not been abused, failing to

take into account actions like hair-pulling, biting, or scratching which may not be associated with abuse.

Foshee (1996) identifies an additional issue in the research and measurement of dating violence. She explains that selection bias can easily enter into self-report studies of dating violence. Since male perpetration of violence towards females is generally seen as socially less acceptable than female perpetration of violence against males, it is quite possible that males would be less inclined to sign up for or participate in a study and report on something they know is not acceptable. Similarly, due to this perception of acceptability of violence, males may also under-report the violence which they are perpetrating. Other reasons that males under-report perpetration of violence include denying responsibility and maintaining control and power. Additionally, females have been found to under-report the violence they are sustaining due to embarrassment and personal anguish over the matter (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999).

Purpose of Current Study

The purpose of the present study was to expand research on adolescent dating violence. Although research has been conducted in high schools looking into prevalence of dating violence, there are a couple of areas which need further attention. Qualitative studies that gather the opinions of students regarding why rates are the way they are reported need to be addressed. In addition, reasons for shifts that are occurring and an examination of the factors which are influencing teenagers to act the way they are both merit additional inquiry. Additionally, there has been very little work done to ascertain

what students think they need to be taught in order for rates of dating violence to decrease.

In addition to recent studies finding higher rates of perpetration for teenage girls, a significant study by Wolfe et al. (2009) illustrated that even when a curriculum was taught in Grade 9 Healthy and Physical Education specifically aimed at cultivating healthy relationships, rates of perpetration of physical violence minimally decreased for females. These findings were consistent across urban and rural schools, small and large schools, and diverse populations. The results raise the question of why female rates of physical violence perpetration were so high, and remained so high after girls were taught about healthy relationships, despite a curriculum which conversely proved effective in lowering males' rates of physical violence perpetration.

To successfully gather answers to explain why female rates of physical violence perpetration in dating relationships are higher than their male counterparts in recent studies, qualitative research was necessary to obtain student opinions and thoughts on the issue. Limited qualitative data has been gathered of students' perceptions through a few studies on adolescent dating violence, namely Sears et al. (2007) and Lavoie et al. (2000). Because violence prevention curriculum and similar programs educating about dating violence have been introduced predominantly at the high school level at a time where many students begin dating, it is imperative to determine what is working, what is not, and what youth feel they need to learn in order to effectively change thoughts and behaviours in regards to dating violence. Additionally, it is necessary to further examine

differences in understanding and perpetration of abuse by gender and address this when designing programs to reduce violence.

Given the questions that arose after a major evaluation of a comprehensive prevention program was finished and analyzed (Wolfe et al., 2009), a follow-up study was conducted. Focus groups were arranged with classes for this follow up to gather qualitative data. Specific research questions were devised:

1) Do students include all types and severities of abuse when defining dating violence?

2) What is different about girls' violence against boys than boys' violence against girls?

3) What effect does media have on dating violence, and in this respect, what messages is it giving to students?

4) Do peers, experience of childhood abuse, witnessing of violence or participation in other risk behaviours motivate teens to be violent?

Only recently has research been done on adolescents' relationships, and qualitative research regarding these teenage dating relationships is rare. To understand how to help teens navigate the confusing world of romantic relationships, more qualitative research needs to be done to inform educators, parents and service providers. This study serves to provide a glimpse into the complexities of teenage romantic relationships, and further examine adolescents' perceptions of the prevalence of dating

violence among youth to assess what is working in the field of education and what needs

to be changed to reduce rates of dating violence among adolescents.

Methodology

Participants

The current study involved participation of high school students in completion of

a questionnaire and involvement in focus groups at four different schools in a large

school board in South Western Ontario. This location was chosen because it was the same

school board in which the original study by Wolfe was conducted (Wolfe et al, 2009).

Additionally, since the results for the previous study were obtained in this school board,

qualitative research exploring the meaning of the results and students opinions was

logical because of consistency with school board values, school climate, and teachings.

Access to the classrooms was preliminarily gained through ethics approval already

granted through the previous study's granting agency and secondarily attained through

teacher responses to an offer to participate in a follow up study about dating violence.

One class was visited in each of the four schools selected, and through these four

class focus groups there were 83 participants (52 (63%) female and 31 (37%) male). All

of the students involved were in either Grade 11 (38.6%) or Grade 12 (61.4%) at the time

of the focus groups (see Table 1). These grades were specifically selected as it was

assumed they would have the most informed opinions, both through education and

experience with adolescent dating relationships either themselves or through friends. Of

the four classes involved, one class was a physical health and education, another was a

gender studies course, a third was a leadership course and the fourth was a languages class. All classes had both male and female participants. All classroom teachers remained present in the classroom for the duration of the study for accountability and school policy purposes. Table 1 illustrates the demographic of the participants by grade and by gender.

Table 1: Participants

Participants (n = 83)			
Male (n = 31)		**Female** (n = 52)	
Grade 11	Grade 12	Grade 11	Grade 12
8	23	24	28

Design and Measurement

Before the focus groups were conducted, the researchers involved met to discuss the survey instrument and design of the focus group. A mixed-methods approach was taken to gain some preliminary quantitative data from students regarding their perceptions, followed by qualitative focus groups to gain further insight into the complexities of the issue.

The survey instrument was designed to acquire students' independent and initial feelings and responses to a variety of questions regarding the prevalence of dating violence, and in addition, specifically physical dating violence in adolescent dating relationships. Questions were presented to students as multiple choice and they were asked to select an option. For general prevalence of dating violence, they were given ranges of percentages and asked to select the range they felt that best corresponded with rates of dating violence among high school students. They were then asked how often

they thought girls hit their boyfriends, and vice versa. For these questions, they were given the options 'never,' 'rarely,' 'sometimes' and 'often' to choose from. A copy of the questionnaire instrument used can be viewed in Appendix A.

A semi-structured format was selected for the focus group discussion. This was done because it allowed the researchers some structure in ensuring that certain themes and questions were discussed in each of the four focus groups. The open-endedness also gave students the opportunity to discuss what they felt was pertinent. It also encouraged the researchers to work with the flow of the discussion and ask follow-up questions based on the topics and opinions being discussed.

Procedure

The author and a research assistant from the CAMH Centre for Prevention Science were present in the class for each focus group – one led the focus group, delivered the questions, explained and facilitated the group activities and brainstorming, and the other recorded the discussion occurring in the classroom and any other details considered pertinent. Students were told by both their classroom teacher and the researchers that they were going to have a class devoted to a discussion on dating violence and were asked to participate in the activities and discussion. No written parental consent was required for the type of research done because of the nature of the research, the confidentiality of the students' identity, the fact that students were not asked to provide any identifiable data and because ethics approval had already been obtained

for the initial study. Students were asked not to include their name, and not to mention names of any other students during discussion.

Students were given a brief questionnaire with multiple choice questions regarding the prevalence and breakdown of dating violence among high school students (see Appendix A). The completion of the questionnaire was followed by a semi-structured focus group format. This semi-structured focus group involved the same four questions asked (see Appendix B), with discussion afterwards regarding the answers and additional questions built on what was brought up by the students.

For the focus group aspect of the research, the classes involved were divided into three groups of five to eight students – one all female group, one mixed-gender group and one all male group. This occurred at all schools with the exception of one. One class involved had only fourteen students, of which only one was male, so there were two all female groups and one mixed-gender group. This division of the class in this manner was to encourage different interactions, discussions and ideas to emerge and was based on the assumption that a mixed-gendered group may talk about different issues or have different interactions than a single-gendered group.

Students were administered the survey instrument and asked to answer the questions based on their initial thoughts. The aim of this questionnaire was primarily to introduce students to the concept being discussed, as well as to obtain their opinions and perceptions of levels and dynamics of dating violence in teenage relationships. This questionnaire was also used in reference to answers given in the discussion aspect of the

research in order to compare the ideas and perceptions shared later in the focus group to what they originally answered.

The initial activity in the focus group part of the research was a graffiti activity, in which each group was given a piece of paper with a different question written on it. Groups were given approximately five to seven minutes with the page, and asked to individually write down any ideas or answers they thought of. Naturally, discussion occurred within groups before individuals wrote down their thoughts and answers. After the time lapsed, the chart paper rotated from group to group. There were four pieces of chart paper circulating through three groups, so this rotation continued until all questions were answered by all groups. Groups (i.e. the all-male group) were given a specific colour of marker so that their responses could be identified and matched afterwards. The questions asked involved students definition of dating violence, the differences between girls' violence against boys and boys' violence against girls, motivations for teens to be violent, and media portrayals of violence.

This activity was designed to allow students to discuss and share ideas in a small, safe group in which they could gain affirmation, or write down what they thought independently. This learning strategy encourages a large variety of answers to be exposed, and in addition allows for researchers to view the prevalence of an idea as students are instructed to write down what they think, regardless of whether it has already been written down.

After this activity, answers were shared with the rest of the class and elaborated upon or clarified as necessary. Verbal questions were then asked regarding why adolescents do/do not report abusive behaviour, who they would tell, how friends would react if students told them they were being abused and under what circumstances adolescents respond with violence.

While one of the two researchers present in the room wrote all audible student responses, the two researchers also met after each focus group to add notes to what was recorded during the session through memory and recollection of anything said that may have been missed. In addition to this recorded data, the chart paper used for the graffiti activity provided verbatim student responses to questions for further analysis.

Data analysis was conducted afterwards. SPSS was used to analyze and determine statistical significance of the responses to the questionnaires by applying a non-parametrical chi-squared test. The chi-squared test was selected due to the non-continuous, and in this case categorical, variable of violence. Concept analysis was used to draw out the themes from the data collected. While there were few research questions asked, content analysis allowed any themes present to emerge, regardless of whether the questions were among the themes agreed upon and identified by the students.

Results

Several themes emerged from the questionnaire administered and the discussion and answers offered in the focus group. Despite discussion and some disagreement in the focus groups, teens largely agreed on the seven central themes that are outlined below.

These themes represent topics and sentiments raised from the discussion as well as patterns of responses from the questionnaire.

Theme 1: Students are aware of wide-ranging forms of abuse

Students were able to identify not only broad categories of abuse within relationships, but additionally more specific actions and types of abuse which fall under the categories when asked what dating violence entails. Identified frequently were the broad headings of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and financial abuse. Included in participants' conceptualizations of physical abuse were the following actions: "not playful" hitting, throwing things, breaking things, and punching. Psychological or emotional abuse entailed: stalking, jealousy, yelling, ignoring your partner, control issues, misunderstandings, superiority of one partner over the other, name calling, undermining your partner, fear, belittling, obsession, put-downs, and bully-type behaviour over the internet. Sexual abuse was named less frequently, but included unwanted physical contact, sexual refusal leading to rape, and rape. In addition to these answers, cheating was identified within every focus group as constituting dating violence. Cheating was also identified when a question was asked regarding what influences teens to be violent.

Theme 2: Teens are close at estimating ADV but tend to underestimate the problem

The students involved in the focus groups closely estimated the prevalence of adolescent dating violence among their peer groups. When asked about the general prevalence of adolescent dating violence, regardless of gender, results showed that teens did have a clear idea about the rate of ADV in their age group as they most frequently

reported 10-20%. The results were taken from the questionnaire that the students filled out at the beginning of the session, and a chi-squared test confirmed students' knowledge regarding prevalence rates, illustrating that they did not rate all categories equally, x^2 (4) = 40.795, p < .001. The available options were: under 5%, 5-10%, 10-20%, 20-30% and 30-50%. Participants selected the option of 10-20% prevalence most frequently, 5-10% and 20-30% with next greatest frequency and selected the "under 5%" option and the 30-50% option very rarely. In fact, none of the 52 females in the study selected the option of "under 5%" prevalence of dating violence (see Table 2).

Table 2: How common do teens think dating violence is among high school students?

Estimation of ADV (n = 83)	
Frequency	**Total**
5% or less	5
5 – 10 %	15
10 – 20%	37
20 – 30%	20
30 – 50%	6

Theme 3: Students feel that males perpetrate slightly more violence than females

In response to the question "How frequently do you think girls hit their boyfriends?" participants were found to have knowledge regarding the prevalence of female-perpetration of physical abuse, x^2 (3) = 39.169, p. < .001. Participants selected the options of "rarely" and "sometimes" with the highest frequencies, significantly higher than responding "never" and "often". Based on the provided definitions of the categories of response, participants believe that girls hit their boyfriends "once or twice a year" to "a few times a year". Males and females were quite close in their frequency of answers,

agreeing largely on the extent of physical violence perpetrated by females. The fact that the students largely neglected the option "never" illustrates that teens are aware that physical dating violence does occur. Table 3 illustrates the responses to the question "how often do you think girls hit their boyfriends?"

Table 3: How often do teens think girls hit their boyfriends?

Estimation of female-perpetrated physical violence (n = 83)	
Frequency	Total
Never	3
Rarely	38
Sometimes	31
Often	11

Participants answered the question "How frequently do you think boys hit their girlfriends?" with findings similar to the above, illustrating that they are aware of the general prevalence of abuse occurring, x^2 (3) = 58.253, p. < .001. There was a trend in the data that male and female participants alike selected "sometimes" with the highest frequency, followed closely by "rarely". They selected "often" with the next highest frequency, and rarely selected "never" (see Table 4). "Never" was only selected by one participant, illustrating that teens believe that males do perpetrate physical violence to some degree. Interestingly, fewer respondents selected "often" for this question than for the previous question pertaining to female-perpetrated abuse. Table 4 breaks down the responses by category.

Table 4: How often do boys hit their girlfriends?

Estimation of male-perpetrated physical violence (n = 83)	
Frequency	Total
Never	1
Rarely	27
Sometimes	45
Often	8

Slightly contrary to the answers given on the questionnaire, participants that verbally participated in the focus groups had the consistent opinion that males definitively used physical violence more than females. Furthermore, participants expressed that males tended to use violence and handle their emotions physically whereas females expressed violence and handle their emotions in a verbal manner. One male participant expressed: "boys would rather fight it out where girls would much rather talk it out in dealing with conflict." The way students dealt with their emotions in relationships was synonymous with how teens communicated that they interacted in same-sex peer groups.

According to the participants, this image of predominantly male-perpetrated physical violence is also reinforced through the media. Examples which were used to reinforce this statement included: Rhianna and Chris Brown, the 1950s television show *The Honeymooners*, WWE wrestling, *Degrassi*, TMZ, and *Law and Order*. Several students expressed that they had never seen, nor heard about a male victim of domestic or dating violence in the media. In addition to this, participants explained that they feel that rich and famous people can get away with dating or domestic abuse. Examples given

included: Kobe Bryant, O.J. Simpson and Chris Brown, all celebrities who have received mild or no punishment for their alleged rape, murder or physical abuse.

Theme 4: A Laughing Matter - Female-Perpetrated violence is considered funny, and less severe than that of males

Tied to the rates of perpetration above is the issue of the severity of abuse perpetrated by both males and females. This was a topic which provoked a great deal of discussion within the focus groups. Most participants spoke about the difference in strength between female physical violence and male physical violence, likening male-perpetrated violence to more severe forms of violence such as hitting and punching and female-perpetrated violence to less severe forms like slapping. Participants expressed that males are physically stronger and can do more damage. A number of male participants expressed sentiments of humour and indifference in reaction to girls' use of physical violence. The sentiments expressed by the male participants included: "when a girl hits, it doesn't hurt," "people thing that girls hitting stuff is funny!" and "if a girl hits a guy, he might think she was playing."

One focus group in particular yielded a discussion on legal consequences in regards to physical perpetration of violence. The group of all male participants explained to the rest of the group that "violence is violence" and that legal consequences should be the same for males and females. One participant at this focus group commented that currently, legal consequences for males are much more severe than for females who perpetrate violence, a sentiment also expressed in another focus group. He succinctly

remarked: "there is no difference in the violence – a punch is a punch." The group of all male participants advocated for the same legal response to occur for violence perpetrated by both genders, and expressed frustration that this was not happening. Furthermore, they commented that it is not the fault of males that they are physically bigger and stronger than females, thus it is not something they should be penalized for.

Theme 5: Substance use, modelling, media and peers can all influence teens to be violent with their partners

When participants were asked about the influences on teens that lead to violence, a number of different answers were raised consistently. Participants in all focus groups recorded that alcohol (and drug use) were often influences in teens' use of violence. Furthermore, it was emphasized that if alcohol was the main influence to be violent, it was thus not a fault of character because someone was under the influence and not acting on their own accord or how they would normally act. The participants expressed that the media only serves to reinforce this notion, showing that people are only violent because they are drinking – that being under the influence made them do it.

Another influence which results in adolescents using violence in their romantic relationships was identified as parent or sibling influence. This included values or beliefs taught at home as well as the witnessing of violence modelled by parents, or victimization of abuse either by siblings or parents. Participants discussed that if violence was present in the home, it was normalized for youths and it was logical for violence to appear in

romantic relationships. One female participant suggested "a lot of people still see [violence] at home and because of that, they think it's ok or something."

A strong influence identified by students across all focus groups, and brought up several times within the focus groups, was that of media. Not only was the discussion of violence only centered around male perpetrators, but participants agreed that there is more media discussion and resources available for violence against women. Participants identified video games as poor influences on adolescents, the messages given from the media regarding current abusive celebrity relationships, television shows and movies showcasing violence and mentioned that the consumers of these forms of media are primarily impressionable youth. A female participant commented: "boys get the wrong idea by playing these [video] games."

Specifically, the relationship involving pop music icons Rhianna and Chris Brown was used as an exemplar in the way it was handled by the media. The following comments were given by the young women in the focus groups about this relationship and its effect on youth: "teenage girls are Rhianna's fans, and now they think it's ok to forgive," "girls go back to their abusive boyfriends because the media says it's ok!" and "the media made the whole situation with Rhianna and Chris Brown look glamourous. What kind of message is that sending?"

Participants also identified the message the media sends in regards to women using violence towards men. Examples were given of movies like *Kill Bill, Mr. and Mrs. Smith* and participants commented that because these are the main images of girls using

violence and because they are so sexualized, the message is that it is 'sexy' and 'glamourized,' and that women are seen as 'tough girls'.

Jealousy was noted by several participants as an influence for a teen to be violent with their partner. One female participant elaborated that the jealousy is often sparked by an event like their significant other cheating on them, provoking them to become violent because they are upset or angry. Similarly, another female participant noted that girls would be more likely to be physically violent if they caught their boyfriend talking about someone else: "girls might be violent with their boyfriends if their boyfriends say something stupid, or comment on another girl or something."

The last topic consistently raised was that of peer influences. Participants spoke about the need to fit in with their friends and project a certain image. This social image which they felt the need to uphold, they felt, was under constant scrutiny from their peers. Specifically, male participants identified the need to uphold the image of the 'tough guy' and in order to do that, it was sometimes necessary to 'control your woman'.

Theme 6: Victimized females can find support in their friends but victimized males cannot

Participants were very vocal when questions were asked regarding reporting of violence in relationships and disclosures of violence. The answers given by the participants were largely varied depending on the gender of the perpetrator and reporter. Within each category, however, the answers remained largely of the same tone and tendency. The general consensuses reached for each situation are outlined below.

When the question was posed about female victimization of physical abuse at the hands of a male partner, participants generally responded that they would tell their friends and/or their parents. Across all focus groups, the consensus was that a female would tell someone if she was being hurt by her boyfriend. Female participants universally expressed the notion that they felt they had support systems available to them in terms of literature, friends, resources, caring adults and professionals.

When asked what would be done if a female friend disclosed that she was being abused, female participants responded that they would think negatively of the boyfriend and would suggest their friend break up with the boyfriend, would tell someone or would recommend professional help. Responses to this included the following: "I wouldn't necessarily tell my friend to report her boyfriend or the abuse, especially if it wasn't that serious, but I would definitely tell her that she shouldn't stay in that relationship," "if my friend disclosed that her boyfriend was abusing her, I would definitely recommend professional help" and "I would provide verbal support, provide open-ended questions and just listen to her." Female respondents were generally very empathetic and communicated that they would help their friend by reaching out to additional support systems available or help them to the best of their ability depending on the degree of severity of the situation.

In contrast, male participants openly stated that they would likely not disclose female-perpetrated abuse towards them because they would be afraid that their friends would not believe them or that they would be teased or put-down. Males expressed that they would likely just stay in the relationship because they do not see the violence as

much of a threat. If, however, they did end the relationship, the general consensus was that the real reason for ending the relationship would not be disclosed.

Male participants in the focus groups overwhelmingly expressed that if a friend came to them disclosing abuse perpetrated by his female partner, their reaction would be one of laughter, making fun or confusion. Several participants mentioned that they would make fun of their friends for not being "man enough." although the most common reaction was laughter. Several students also said that they would call their friends a "wuss" or a "suck" or a "girl". An assumption that the female was a "crazy bitch" or that she was "just playing" were also frequently expressed potential reactions. One young man expressed that he would probably react the following way: "I'd probably say, 'you let her hit you?'"

Different as well were the reactions regarding males and females disclosing perpetration of physical abuse. Female participants responded that they would applaud their female friends and inquire what their boyfriend had done if they were informed their friends had used physical violence towards their boyfriend. There was an assumption that the male deserved it or that he had said or done something to provoke the response of physical violence and perhaps that the girl was even reacting in self-defence. Reaction in self-defence was supported, but for friends of the male victims, it was still viewed as funny.

On the contrary, participants who were informed that their male friend had perpetrated physical violence to his girlfriend responded that they would criticize their

friend for using violence and ask reflective questions like "what did you do?" – assuming that the male has made a terrible mistake or transgression. There was no assumption of provocation in response to male violence towards females. Instead, it was commonly presupposed that the male had lost control or let his anger take the better of him.

Theme 7: Females need to be taught not to hit their boyfriends

Participants offered a few ideas for reducing the problem of adolescent dating violence. Due to the higher prevalence of female perpetrated physical violence, participants suggested that girls be given different messages, both through the school and the media. One female participant suggested: "there needs to be more in the media, like more commercials about it." Females need to be taught that physical violence is physical violence, regardless of what gender is perpetrating. Both female and male participants expressed that the message given to adolescents needs to be equal. One female participant commented: "hitting another person is hitting another person – gender doesn't matter, it's NOT ok."

While most participants felt that males have been frequently given the message not to hit their romantic partners, some thought this was a "dying message" – an outdated message not passed down from parent to child. Nevertheless, participants agreed that young women are not given this message at all, and really not given any messages to deter them from using physical violence. A young woman summed up her opinion on what young women need to learn: "girls need to be taught emotional maturity. They don't need to be gentile, and I mean they don't need to go backwards."

Discussion

The present study was undertaken to examine high school students' opinions regarding the prevalence of and gender dynamics within adolescent dating violence. The study's goals were achieved through the administration of brief questionnaires to students to assess their individual perceptions of prevalence and patterns of physical abuse by gender. This was followed by a focus group which explored themes of media as an influential factor, the difference between girls' and boys' abuse of one another, students' definitions of abuse, and issues involving reporting of abuse to friends and professionals. The purpose of this study was to examine students' beliefs and perceptions about an issue which they face, and to add to the qualitative literature on the subject, offering further insight into the complexities of why teenagers abuse and gender differences within reporting, power, prevalence and effects.

The seven themes that emerged from the focus groups were as follows: students are aware of wide-ranging forms of abuse; teens are close at estimating adolescent dating violence but tend to underestimate the problem; students feel that males perpetrate slightly more violence than females; female perpetrated violence is considered funny and less severe than that of males; substance use, modelling, media and peers can all influence teens to be violent with their partners; victimized females can find support in their friends but victimized males cannot; and females need to be taught not to hit their boyfriends. The discussion addresses these themes in the context of the existing literature in the field. Limitations, next steps and potential areas for further research are addressed as well.

Although students were aware of the various forms of abuse and were able to name a number of specific acts within each form of abuse, there were definitely actions that were missing from the answers given. Actions omitted from student definition of physical violence included: scratching, hair pulling, kicking, shoving, pushing, and biting. These actions are all arguably less severe forms of physical violence than those that were mentioned. This leads to questions about the conceptualization of abuse by adolescents. Perhaps they do not consider the actions that were left out as violent, or they are not reality in terms of violence in adolescent relationships. Other actions left out included: isolation of their partner from friends and family, and being put-down or made fun of in front of peers. This presents issues of construct validity because teenagers are not defining abuse by the standards that researchers are. Thus when questions are asked about abuse, teenagers are operating with a different construct.

As a result of this disparity, it is extremely important for researchers, when assessing rates of prevalence, to either provide a specific definition of dating violence with a list of examples and actions or to ask specific questions through their survey instruments. The use of a wide-spread scale, such as the Conflict Tactic Scale should be agreed upon and implemented as widely as possible, so that research findings are comparable from study to study, and across demographic groups.

Cheating was raised multiple times as a form of abuse, and this inclusion is addressed and echoed by a small number of qualitative studies. Wang and Petula (2007) discuss cheating as a form of psychological violence when committed, and also refer to females committing violence as a result of their partner cheating considering it not

violence, but a form of justice. Conversely, a study by Basile (2008) ties cheating to sexual abuse and sexual coercion in adult relationships. Ismail et al. (2007) found that adolescent females often included cheating and other forms of manipulation and control in their conceptualization of dating violence, extending the traditional notions of dating violence. Perhaps one of the reasons cheating is not discussed more frequently in the literature on dating or domestic abuse is because it is covered through other categories like lying, deceit, or betrayal. Furthermore, since cheating is a relatively indirect form of abuse, perhaps it is not necessarily considered abuse and thus not mentioned. Especially within teenage relationships, cheating is a very real problem and one that is interpreted as emotional or sexual abuse, if not a situation which leads to violence. Thus, it should be present, used and discussed in research with teenagers because of its relevance in the lives of adolescents.

The students involved in the focus groups were remarkably close in their estimation of adolescent dating violence among their peer group. Halpern et al.'s (2001) findings of 32% prevalence of adolescent dating violence and Hickman et al's (2004) findings of up to 26% represent average findings for this age group. The students involved in the focus groups significantly favoured the option of 10-20%, a slight underestimate of the average rates. The options of 20-30% and 5-10% were considered next and equally as favoured, meaning that students are as likely to accurately estimate rates of adolescent dating violence as they are to significantly underestimate these rates. Perhaps a product of students omitting less severe forms of physical violence in their

understanding and definition of dating violence, as discussed above, accounts for the tendency of students to underestimate or severely underestimate rates of dating violence.

These results tie into and support the findings by Watson et al. (2001) which illustrated that the more general the questions about abuse, the lower the results of prevalence. If, as shown here, adolescents tend to construct the definition of dating violence using only the more severe actions and are subsequently asked generally what they feel the prevalence of dating violence is, they are going to be more likely to underestimate the prevalence because their conceptualization does not include the entire gamut of abusive behaviours.

The slightly higher rating of male perpetrated abuse on the questionnaire is a contradiction of numerous studies, including Wolfe et al. (2009) and Jezl et al. (1996). These studies all show that females perpetrate more physical violence than their male counterparts. This contradiction may also be explained through students' conceptualizations of violence including primarily more severe forms. If adolescents are including only the more severe forms of physical violence and if they are also feel that females do not or physically cannot perpetrate these severe forms of violence, then it is logical that the perception of teenagers would be a higher amount of male-perpetrated violence. Also, Sears et al. (2007) found that girls identify abuse by its impact, and boys by its intent, a plausible explanation for disparities in perceptions versus actual prevalence. Beyond this, females may be perpetrating the same types of violence, with a less severe outcome. A factor in this may be the physical size difference – males are generally much larger and taller than their female counterparts, meaning that they can

physically inflict more damage (Walker, 1989; O'Leary et al., 1989). Cantos, Neidig and O'Leary (1994) highlight that regardless of physical injury sustained from dating violence neither the meaning nor the consequences of the abuse are the same for males and females. Further explained, females and males sustain and contextualize abuse differently than one another.

Students' opinions about the influence of substance on perpetration of violence and the resulting lack of personal responsibility for violent actions to one's partner is consistent with other studies, particularly the qualitative study by Lavoie et al. (2000). In both Lavoie et al.'s study and the current study, students largely believe that if someone is under the influence of a substance, violence committed is not a fault of personal character, but instead a character of the alcohol they are consuming. This point ties into social learning theory, and it is clear that teens are seeing the action of substance use, tied in with the use of violence, and less severe consequences for this violence due to the substance use, thus making this a more acceptable mode of perpetrating violence.

Students' identification of alcohol and drug use as a factor leading to abuse is also consistent with contemporary literature regarding dating violence and other risk behaviours. Students who are involved in substance use or risky sexual behaviours or violence are much more likely to be involved in another of these behaviours (Wolfe et al., 2006). New to the equation is the absolution of responsibility when violence is committed due to the consumption of alcohol. This is a dangerous belief for adolescents to hold, and a reason why education teaching students about healthy relationships needs to be combined with education regarding other risk behaviours.

Students are aware of the potential negative media impacts on their lives, however there was no clear sense from the students that they realize the depth of the impact that media has on their beliefs and attitudes. Through the focus group discussions, they were able to name several television shows, movies, or celebrities that either glamorized violence or at least desensitized viewers to the images of violence and unhealthy relationships. The issue of media ties into both social learning theory and the social ecological model. Students are seeing violence on television, the internet and on movies. This violence often communicates this behaviour as an acceptable way to get what you want. In addition, the social ecological model highlights media as pervasive in all spheres of existence and identity as a mode which reinforces the messages teens are receiving.

By the age of 18, the average youth has viewed approximately 200, 000 acts of violence on television alone, and this consumption of media leads to an increase in acceptance of violence as a method by which to effectively manage conflict and solving problems (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001). The American Academy of Pediatrics also communicates that due to the amount of time spent consuming media and the information given, media influences have taken over parents and educators as youth's primary teachers, role models, and educators about the society in which they live and how to behave. A statement released by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2009) clearly states "the evidence is now clear and convincing: media violence is one of the causal factors of real-life violence and aggression". As one student astutely pointed out, video games give youth – particularly males – the wrong idea of how to treat women.

This comment is backed by the fact that of 33 popular games, 21% feature violence against women (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009).

The significant impact that the media has on youth can be used to the benefit of educators and practitioners in educating students about healthy relationships. Through the creation of critical media lessons, projects, and assignments, students will learn to question the relationships and images portrayed in the media. This is already starting to happen in some schools and school boards. For instance, a coalition of educators, organizations, and individuals in the province of Ontario have created a Critical Media Literacy Resource CD, complete with lesson plans for teachers integrating media lessons into various subjects in both elementary and secondary contexts (www.crvawc.ca). Further, interactive resources such as educational games available through the Media Awareness Network provide a fun, student-aimed learning experience to tackle issues of the media (www.media-awareness.ca). Through incorporating positive media and both recognizing and challenging negative media images, educators may be able to decrease the negative impact that media can have on adolescents' beliefs and attitudes.

Responses from students were not only distinctly varied by gender and situation, but were particularly discouraging when it came to males reporting physical victimization by their female partners. Aside from being problematic for the health of young men, the lack of reporting and response undoubtedly reaffirms the use of physical violence as an acceptable option for young women to deal with their frustration and anger. Present again is social learning theory and the learned acceptability of a behaviour due to the positive consequences associated with it.

Help-seeking is a behaviour which can be quite effective and useful for victims, as it can offer both emotional support and informational support. Despite its helpfulness, contemporary findings suggest that teens largely do not actively help-seek, similar to the sentiments expressed in the focus group, particularly by the males (Ashley and Foshee, 2005). Further, those adolescents that do seek help usually do it in the form of family members or close friends, not professionals.

Also deterring help-seeking, in addition to future reporting, are the responses of peers. Overwhelmingly, male focus group participants reported they would laugh at or make fun of their male friend if he reported being physically abused. Although the literature is rather scarce on this topic, Molidor and Tolman (1998) found similar results in their study of gender differences and adolescent violence. While the topic of female perpetrated violence seen as humourous or worth ignoring or putting up with, girls conversely reported fighting back when their boyfriends physically abused them. The differences in both victim response to abuse and peer response to disclosure appear to dictate both prevalence of physical violence and reporting.

Implications for Programs

Through the results gathered from the focus groups, it is evident that female violence against men is different than male violence against women. This has been supported by many studies, including Sears et al. (2007), Lavoie et al. (2000) and Molidor and Tolman (1998). Further, female-perpetrated violence is considered less socially unacceptable than that of males. That is to say, while violence is generally not

accepted, it is more acceptable for a female to physically abuse a male than vice versa. In order for young women to learn (like their male counterparts) that violence is unacceptable, changes need to be made in the way programs are delivered. In making these changes, the background, and socio-historic context of the inequalities and challenges girls and women have faced need to be acknowledged. Too often, interpersonal violence is approached from a gender neutral position which does not take into account gender differences between males and females. This approach undermines the potential effectiveness of programs for both boys and girls. Boys and girls experience, see, understand and perpetrate violence differently and for different reasons, and this must be acknowledged and understood for programs to become effective (Reed, Raj, Miller & Silverman, 2010). As highlighted in feminist theory, a gendered perspective needs to be approached and used when trying to make changes.

An important area to be explored further is the motivation behind females' perpetration of violence. Currently, students expressed that they feel that young women are given the message to 'stand up for themselves' and 'be strong' through media, parents and friends. This is not only true with romantic relationships, but peer relationships as well. Girls believe that violence is not only okay in self-defence, but is acceptable in situations such as someone sleeping with their boyfriend (Cummings & Leschied, 2002). These messages of the situational acceptance of violence may account for one of the reasons that female-perpetrated violence both in relationships and otherwise has increased.

Health education is the avenue through which dating violence is most frequently taught, thus the lessons taught and resulting messages to girls need to be altered. In fact, due to the general increase in female-perpetrated violence, the bigger picture needs to be addressed. Girls need to be taught that physical violence is unacceptable, even if they are the ones perpetrating. Within the education they are given, alternatives to violence, positive self-talking strategies, causes of anger, effective communication skills, stress management, and conflict resolution need to be addressed. This same message about the unacceptability of female-perpetrated violence also needs to be delivered in health classes for young men, to hopefully change the current response of laughter and encourage reporting of female-perpetrated violence.

In addition to the messages in health education, this message of the unacceptability of violence could be delivered through retreats held at schools for girls, church groups, lunchtime or after school healthy relationships programs or through any applicable clubs. Females should be addressed in these programs as a single-gendered group because the blanket approach to teaching students about dating violence is not working – female rates of perpetration have increased in the past decade. Using single-sex avenues through which to discuss preventing violence will allow girls to get a message uniquely tailored to their needs and position within society. In addition, being reminded and taught not to use physical violence in a relationship in an all-female environment would make the situation and any following discussion safer and less intimidating than a mixed-gender group. Teaching girls (and doing this separately from boys) is imperative in order for them to receive the message and take it seriously.

Both female and male students also need to be taught about healthy versus unhealthy relationships, particularly the inherent power differential that exists in abusive relationships. This dynamic is in many ways similar to bullying, in which one person holds power over another and uses it to their advantage in a negative way. Through students practicing effective communication, and discussing the meaning of power, they may be able to more aptly recognize an abusive dynamic in a relationship and be their own agents of change.

Limitations of Study

While this study provided some insights into the opinions and perceptions of adolescents about dating violence, some limitations accompany the research and resulting analysis. Firstly, and most problematic in the analysis of the data, was the small size of the sample group. With only 83 participants, analysis of data proved a challenging aspect of the study. Further to this, only 31 of the 83 participants were male, making analysis of data by sex difficult. Within responses by gender, certain options were not selected by anyone, preventing analysis in SPSS from accurately being carried out. This was especially problematic in a study that was aimed at focussing on gender differences. A more equal ratio of males to females would have provided the opportunity for analysis by gender.

Additionally, the fact that only four schools were involved in the research could be considered a limitation. With additional participants, additional schools, or diversity in school districts, the findings would likely be more accurately representative of youth.

With the current sample, the information gleaned is helpful, however additional research should be done to ensure researchers understand how teens see and understand violence from a gendered perspective. The population involved in this research was also fairly homogenous from observation, and a more heterogeneous population would allow issues of class, race, and other layers of identity to become involved, illustrating a more diverse and representative picture of youth.

Further, the wording on the questionnaire provides limitations. The first question asked about the prevalence of abuse, without any qualification or definition of abuse. As addressed above, rates of prevalence are generally lower the more general the question. Had a definition been provided or specific acts specified within the question, perhaps the answers would have provided a more accurate representation. The current wording was acceptable for the qualitative study that was done, however if a more detailed qualitative study was performed on a wider scale, the wording of this question could use some attention.

Additionally, the wording of the second and third questions on the questionnaire regarding prevalence of abuse could be considered confusing. A more user-friendly format of the questionnaire and a more carefully worded question may have made answers more clear. The second and third questions read: "How often do you think girls/boys hit their boyfriends/girlfriends?" This wording assumes the researchers are referring to the general population, however the options given for response were never, rarely, often or sometimes, options which would be better suited for a question such as: Of those girls/boys who hit their boyfriend/girlfriend, how often does this happen?

One last limitation to this study, and study in this general area, is the fact that educators are not dealing with only heterosexual relationships, so the dynamics in same sex relationships may not be adequately represented within this study and discussion. Furthermore, males and females do not necessarily fit into the themes and observations attributed to them. Specifically tailoring programs and assuming that females and males are a certain way could prove dangerous. In mentioning this, it is clear that the status quo is not working, and the research by Wolfe et al. (2009) illustrates a significant gender gap in the effectiveness of current health education curriculum, precipitating the need to address this with specialized instruction for each sex.

Future Directions

This study, the results which emerged, and current literature in the area lend to several possibilities for new directions for research and academic inquiry. For results that can be generalized to a larger population, a similar study with a larger sample potentially including a variety of school boards would be beneficial. This larger-scale research would allow the development of new programs for students to be well informed and attuned to the needs and understandings of adolescents.

Additionally, while research has shown an increase in risk behaviours including dating violence from grade 9 to grade 10 (Wolfe et al., 2006), it is important to assess the opinions, needs and understandings of students from grade 9 to grade 12, to understand how they change through the duration of high school and what changes in the education system are in order.

Another direction which would provide a great deal of information and insight would be the gathering of couple data from adolescents, particularly those with abuse in their relationships. A method sometimes used for adults, this would allow for the ability to gather perceptions of violence and they dynamics of adolescent relationships. This data would provide researchers a further glimpse into the contextual details of relationships and would illustrate differences in reporting and perceptions of violence. These results would yield further information regarding gender differences in adolescent relationships.

Once further data was gathered from adolescents, particularly regarding gender differences, programs like Safe Dates, the Fourth R and related initiatives would benefit by adding to or adapting their program to reflect gender differences. Information and lessons tailored to specific sexes could be included, giving the teacher the opportunity to more narrowly focus their lessons.

Because most programs and studies are done in high schools, it would be beneficial to assess student opinions of abuse and relationships at a younger age. Since many youth do not start dating until mid-high school, self-report data about being abused within one's own relationship would not be appropriate, but rather assessing student's conceptualizations of what abuse, healthy and unhealthy relationships are. This would allow educators and parents the opportunity to start teaching their children at a younger age so they are prepared for the onset of romantic relationships in high school and are aware of what abuse is and what a healthy relationship entails.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adolescence is a tumultuous time during which many changes are occurring, including romantic relationships beginning with peers. Because of the strong influences of other risk behaviours, media, and home environment, students must be taught within a broader context about preventing violence within relationships so that they may translate into action the skills required to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships. The topic should be approached from a gendered perspective to most effectively help students learn, and to acknowledge the differences present in the understanding, experience of, and perpetration of violence for males and females.

Because peer groups provide such a strong reaction and influence, empathy needs to be taught to both genders, but particularly males. In addition, females need to be taught that "violence is violence" as their rates of perpetration have been equal to or greater than those of males in previous years. Future qualitative research is imperative to understand on a deeper level how to teach and reach students in a way they understand the world in order to decrease prevalence rates of all types of dating violence, particularly physical.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Dating Violence

High School Focus Group

Student Questions

Gender: F   M

Grade: _____

1. How common do you think dating violence is among high school students?
    a. 5% (or less)
    b. 5-10%
    c. 10 – 20%
    d. 20 – 30%
    e. 30 – 50%

In the space provided beside each option, write how often you think this might occur.

Rarely = once or twice a year

Sometimes = a few times a year

Often = a few times a month

2. How frequently do you think girls hit their boyfriends?
    a. Never
    b. Rarely
    c. Sometimes
    d. Often

3. How frequently do you think boys hit their girlfriends?
    a. Never
    b. Rarely
    c. Sometimes
    d. Often

Appendix B: Graffiti Questions

What do you believe constitutes dating violence?

What do you believe influences teens to be violent with their dating partner?

How is boys' violence against girls different than girls' violence against boys?

What messages do we get from the media about dating violence?

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Centre for Prevention Science
UWO Research and
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London Ontario
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Tel: 519 858 5144
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www.thefourthr.ca
www.camh.net

camh

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

May 15th, 2009

Dr. Peter Jaffe
Faculty of Education
UWO

Dear Dr. Jaffe:

Re: Ethics Protocol for Katie Lizmore

Your student, Katie Lizmore, has requested use of secondary data collected as part of a randomized trial, to be used towards her master's thesis. I have approved this request, and am writing to let you know that she would be using non-identifiable data from a study in which I received ethics approval in 2004 and 2005 from the Center for Addiction and Mental Health. I've attached a copy of the ethics approval for the study.

A PAHO/WHO
Collaborating Centre
Un Centre collaborateur
OPS/OMS

Affiliated with the
University of Toronto
Affilié à l'Université
de Toronto

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

David A. Wolfe, Ph.D.

David A. Wolfe, Ph.D., ABPP
RBC Chair in Children's Mental Health (CAMH)
Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology, OISE/University of Toronto
Editor-in-Chief, *Child Abuse & Neglect*

Mailing address:
CAMH Centre for Prevention Science
100 Collip Circle, Suite 100

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camh

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #149/2004
(Previously Protocol #48/2004)

March 25, 2005

David A. Wolfe, PhD
Professor and Director, CAMH Centre for Prevention Science
RBC Chair in Children's Mental Health
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
100 Collip Circle, Suite 130
London, ON N6G 4X8
Fax: 519-858-5149

Dear Dr. Wolfe:

Re: Research protocol #149/2004 entitled, "Controlled longitudinal evaluation of a
       school-based program to prevent adolescent dating violence and related risk
       behaviours" by D. Wolfe, P. Jaffe and C. Crooks

Thank you for returning the Annual Renewal of Ethics Approval form dated February 9,
2005 for the above-named study

We are writing to advise you that the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Research
Ethics Board (CAMH REB) has granted re-approval to the above-named research protocol
for a period of one year, ending at **March 25, 2006**[1]. If the study is expected to continue
beyond the expiry date, you are responsible for ensuring the study receives re-approval by
submitting the CAMH REB "Annual Renewal of Ethics Approval" form on or before
February 1, 2006. Should the study be completed prior to the annual renewal date, please
submit a final report.

During the course of the research, any significant deviations from the approved protocol
**(that is, any deviation which would lead to an increase in risk or a decrease in benefit to
human subjects)** and/or any unanticipated developments within the research should be
brought to the attention of the Research Ethics Office. *Best wishes for the successful
completion of your project.*

Yours sincerely,

Susan Filon, MHSc
Manager, Research Ethics Office, CAMH

Encl

cc: P. Darby

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[1] CAMH Investigators are reminded that should they leave CAMH, they are required to inform the Research
Ethics Board of the status of any on-going research. If a study is to be closed or transferred to another facility, the
REB must be informed and any advertisements must be discontinued

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