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# Parent Physical and Psychological Aggression and Youth Dating Violence: A Latent Class Analysis Approach

Heidi Adams Rueda<sup>1</sup>, Kaitlyn Paxton Ward<sup>2</sup>, and Steven Hoffman<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Nebraska Omaha, USA <sup>2</sup>University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA <sup>3</sup>Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Heidi Adams Rueda, Grace Abbott School of Social Work, University of Nebraska Omaha, 6001 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68182, USA. Email: hrueda@unomaha.edu

## Abstract

Adolescent dating violence is a national public health issue and research suggests that aggressive parenting may predict the likelihood that a child will subsequently experience abuse. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of parent physical and psychological aggression on adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Data derived from the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study resulted in a racially and ethnically diverse sample of adolescents in dating relationships at the age of 15 years ( $N = 952$ ). Utilizing both parent and adolescent data which assessed parenting practices at ages 3, 5, 9, and 15, and adolescent dating violence victimization and perpetration at age 15, we analyzed the data using a latent class analysis. Youth were typologized into three classes: the non- physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating class (Class 1; 16% of youth), the aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating class (Class 2; 76% of youth), and the aggressive parenting, aggressive dating class (Class 3; 8% of youth). Parents across all three classes utilized high levels of psychologically aggressive parenting. An important finding from this study is that parents' use of both physically and psychologically aggressive parenting only predicted subsequent dating violence victimization and perpetration among a small portion of adolescents. Findings suggest that additional risk factors, including household income and adolescent impulsivity, may help to elucidate pathways to adolescent dating violence. There is also a need to further explore the resiliency factors at play for youth who, despite having experienced both psychologically and physically aggressive parenting across the lifespan, did not experience dating violence victimization or perpetration.

## Keywords

physical abuse, child abuse, intergenerational transmission of trauma, youth violence, violence exposure, dating violence, domestic violence

## Introduction

Meaningful peer relationships are paramount to the well-being of youth (Mitic et al., 2021). During adolescence, youth often withdraw from their parents and experience increased intensity of peer relationships. The formation of new intimate partnerships is also common (Collins et al., 2009). The quality of these intimate

relationships has a significant impact on adolescent mental and physical health, health risk behaviors, and identity formation (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Shulman & Knafo, 1997). Unfortunately, adolescent dating violence is prevalent throughout the United States (Basile et al., 2020; Ybarra et al., 2016), and includes physical, sexual, and psychological forms of abuse (Wolfe et al., 2001; Ybarra et al., 2016). According to the nationally representative survey of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Basile et al., 2020), 8.2% of youth who had dated had been forced “to do sexual things” within the past year and 8.2% had been physically hurt “on purpose” by a dating partner (p.29). Data from a separate nationally representative survey also found that 40.9% of all youth ages 14 to 21 reported being victims of psychological abuse within a dating relationship (Ybarra et al., 2016).

A wealth of research has contributed to our understanding of risk factors for adolescent dating violence, and perhaps the most extensively studied is the role of violence in the home of origin. A recent meta-analysis found that witnessing interparental violence was a significant risk factor for being a perpetrator and a victim of physical dating violence, and that experiencing abuse directly as a child also significantly predicted physical dating violence perpetration (Emanuel et al., 2022). Of interest to the present study, poor parenting was also a significant risk factor for physical dating violence victimization (Emanuel et al., 2022). Poor parenting can include a host of behaviors, including psychological and/or physical aggression toward the child. These forms of parenting, which are reflected as adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 1998) are more frequent when neighborhood disorder is high, which is more common among ethnically diverse families living in poverty (Barajas-Gonzalez & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Riina et al., 2014).

While poor parenting has been broadly established as a predictor of adolescent dating violence, the effects of psychologically and physically aggressive parenting in particular on dating violence are understudied. Parental psychological and physical aggression has been associated with both child and adolescent impulsivity (Liu, 2019; Cuartas et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2021b), as well as engagement in multiple forms of aggression (eg, bullying, delinquency), including dating violence (Bresin, 2019; Duke et al., 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine patterns of parental physical and psychological aggression across childhood and adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Given the literature, we also explore how these patterns vary by sociodemographic status and adolescents’ levels of aggression and impulsivity.

## **Theoretical Lens**

In this study, we use the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence (Kalmuss, 1984) theory to better understand the role of parenting aggression on adolescent dating violence. This theory has commonly been utilized to understand parent-to-child aggression and its impact on subsequent child externalizing behaviors (Goncy et al., 2021). According to this theory, children learn to behave in ways that are consistent with how their parents treat them and treat one another. This theory is rooted in Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of observation and modeling in the development of human thought and behavior. According to Bandura (1977), human interaction consists of various reciprocal reactions between the self and the external world, which shape human functioning. As people move through their environment, they observe the behavior of others, and absorb both explicit and implicit messages from the society around them. This process begins in infancy. In fact, the first source

from which a child absorbs information and symbols is often their parents. The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence Theory posits that if children observe violence in their parent's relationship, they will be more likely to see violence as an acceptable behavior within their own relationships (Kalmuss, 1984). This theory is supported by research finding that adolescents who witness more frequent, verbally aggressive, and/or physically abusive interparental conflict are more likely to be involved as both victims and perpetrators of dating violence (Tschann et al., 2009). It is further supported by a recent meta-analysis finding that parent-to-child aggression consistently predicted subsequent dating abuse during both adolescence and young adulthood (Goncy et al., 2021).

## **Parental Aggression**

Aggressive parenting may be psychological or physical, and often has lasting effects on the well-being and health of children and across the lifespan. Aggressive parenting styles have been directly associated with higher rates of delinquency, as well as with dating violence perpetration and victimization among adolescents (Goncy et al., 2021; Tyler et al., 2011). While aggressive parenting is broadly associated with poor child developmental outcomes, the scientific measurement of psychological and physical aggression separately is important, since each operates utilizing distinct mechanisms, despite commonly being grouped together into a single aggression measure (see Goncy et al., 2021).

### *Physical Aggression*

The use of physical force on children is often referred to as corporal punishment, which has been defined as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing [bodily] pain, but not injury, for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior” (Straus, 2010, p. 1). Physical force used by parents has been associated with a host of negative outcomes, including anti-social behavior, decreased cognitive development, depression, illegal substance use, and future violence against intimate partners (Beckmann, 2021; Lynch et al., 2006; Temple et al., 2018). Further, research has established that physical punishment is associated with poorer child developmental outcomes, even under conditions of a secure parent-child attachment and high parental warmth (Beckmann, 2021; Ward et al., 2020), across races and ethnicities (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2018), in countries where physical punishment is normative (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2021; Pinquart, 2017), and across income levels (Lee et al., 2020). The most recent and rigorous meta-analysis on physical punishment suggests that it is associated with detrimental child outcomes across study designs, countries, and age groups (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Male children are more likely to be victims of parental physical aggression compared to female children, and Black mothers are more likely than White mothers to report using physical aggression to teach their children obedience (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Although parental attitudes toward the use of spanking in particular have declined in recent years, particularly among highly educated parents, high-SES parents, and parents living in non-Southern states (Hines et al., 2022), the use of physical force is still prevalent among parents in the United States (McGuier et al., 2021).

### *Psychological Aggression*

Parental psychological aggression is defined as a parenting behavior that utilizes power-coercion tactics to

encourage child compliance (Lansford, 2019). Psychological aggression may include behaviors such as love withdrawal, name-calling, invalidation, verbal abuse, yelling and screaming, withholding affection, and use of guilt (Barber, 1996; Rizvi & Najam, 2017). Like physical aggression, psychological aggression has been connected to negative externalizing and internalizing behaviors among children, including depression, anxiety, delinquency, and poor school performance (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., 2002; Rizvi & Najam, 2017). These associations have been found across racially and ethnically diverse populations (Barber et al., 2002). The use of psychological aggression by parents has also been associated with increased relational aggression among male and female children. In one study, children who experienced parental psychological aggression were more likely to damage or manipulate their social relationships when compared with children who did not experience parental psychological aggression (Lau et al., 2016). In another study, parental psychological aggression was a direct predictor of bullying behaviors among children (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2016). Unfortunately, national data reveal that the prevalence of parental psychological control is high in the United States. By age two, 90% of parents reported using at least one method of psychological aggression on their children in the last 12 months, and that increased to 98% of parents by the age of 5 years (Strauss & Field, 2003). Another study found that parents do not significantly decrease their use of psychological aggression across the child's lifespan (Meter et al., 2019).

## **Adolescent Dating Violence**

The formation of healthy adolescent relationships is an integral part of youth social development. The formation of new romantic relationships, in particular, is common among adolescents (Collins et al., 2009). Because adolescence is a formative period, the relational patterns that youth develop during this time often carry across the lifespan (Exner-Cortens et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, many youth experience violence within these relationships (Basile et al., 2020; Wincentak et al., 2017; Ybarra et al., 2016), and there is a need to differentiate risk and protective factors among youth who perpetrate and/or are victimized from those who do not experience abuse.

### ***Adolescent Dating Violence Perpetration***

Adolescent dating violence perpetration is a major health crisis in the United States (Korchmaros et al., 2013), although fewer studies have assessed perpetration as opposed to victimization. In a national study of adolescents ages 14 to 19, 46% of youth in romantic relationships reported perpetrating at least one form of teen dating violence in the last year (Korchmaros et al., 2013). A more recent meta-analysis found that 13% of boys as compared with 25% of girls had perpetrated physical violence (Wincentak et al., 2017). Adolescent dating violence perpetration has been linked with various negative outcomes, including illegal substance use, sexually transmitted infections, and depression (Espelage et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2014; Ulloa et al., 2014).

Using a clinical sample of youth involved in juvenile justice, Jouriles and Colleagues (2012) found that harsh parenting practices were associated with dating violence perpetration, and that trauma symptoms—specifically those related to anger regulation—mediated this relationship. Indeed, perpetrators of teen dating violence often cite anger as the cause of the violence (Adams & Williams, 2014; Giordano et al., 2016). A narrative review of

mediators for dating violence perpetration and victimization similarly found that emotional regulation difficulties, poor attachment style, and emotional distress mediated the relationship between child maltreatment and later dating violence (Cascardi & Jouriles, 2018). It may be that youth who experience child abuse in the form of harsh parenting do not witness healthy emotional regulation from their parents, and thus develop deficits in their own ability to recognize, process, and successfully navigate negative emotions, including an inability to control aggressive impulses (Cascardi & Jouriles, 2018). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis found that impulsivity is consistently and positively associated with aggression across diverse samples, including aggression that entails both verbal and physical violence (Bresin, 2019). Not all youth who experience a difficult homelife go on to perpetrate violence, however, and further exploration into protective factors is warranted. One recent study of high school students in the United States found that empathy, social support, parental monitoring, and school belonging protected the youth from dating violence perpetration (Espelage et al., 2020).

### *Adolescent Dating Violence Victimization*

Like adolescent dating violence perpetration, adolescent dating violence victimization is associated with various negative outcomes, including depression, suicidality, substance use, sexual risk behaviors, eating disorders, and low self-esteem (Cha et al., 2016; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013, Van Ouytsel et al., 2017). The strongest predictor of adolescent dating violence victimization is abuse during childhood (Hamby et al., 2012). Victimization odds are higher among youth who have been victim to multiple kinds of abuse, including child abuse or sexual assault (Hamby et al., 2012). Further, a meta-analysis found that poor parenting was a predictor of future dating violence victimization (Emanuel et al., 2022). Aggressive parenting is more common among families living in poverty (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017) and poverty is itself also a repeated risk factor associated with involvement in abusive relationships (Taquette & Monteiro, 2019; Saasa et al., 2021). Positive parenting, including parental consistency and monitoring, can protect youth against dating violence victimization (East & Hokoda, 2015).

### **The Present Study**

Research suggests that there may be patterns by which family functioning impacts adolescents' risk of involvement in abusive relationships. For example, a recent study of racially diverse 6th through 8th graders (64% African American; 14% Hispanic) used latent class analysis (LCA) to identify three profiles of family functioning, each of which impacted risk for dating violence perpetration and victimization. Levels of family functioning reflected family cohesion, parental monitoring, family structure, and parental endorsement of fighting in response to conflict. Adolescents from positive family contexts had parents who communicated mixed messages about the use of violence; youth from average family contexts had parents who consistently endorsed nonviolence; and adolescents from poor family contexts had parents who supported the use of violence/fighting in response to conflict. The former two classes (i.e., positive and average) demonstrated the lowest levels of adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization over time (Garthe et al., 2019). In another study, Mumford and Colleagues (2016) utilized LCA to distinguish whether there were distinct parenting profiles which could predict adolescent (61% White) dating violence perpetration and victimization. They found that youth whose parents were strict/harsh

or disengaged/harsh were more likely than youth whose parents utilized positive parenting to be victimized and to perpetrate dating violence 1 year later. A strength of this study was its use of both parent and youth reports. We build from these studies by similarly utilizing LCA, with both parent and youth reports. Further, given associations in the literature between harsh parenting, youth impulsivity, multiple forms of aggression, and poverty (Bresin, 2019; Duke et al., 2010; Liu, 2019; Saasa et al., 2021), we fill a gap in the literature by examining the patterns of parent psychological and physical aggression across the child's lifespan (beginning at age 3) and adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization at age 15. Importantly, we draw from a racially/ ethnically diverse sample of urban youths, responding to a current need for greater racial diversity in the dating violence literature (Goncy et al., 2021).

While we did not have a specific hypothesis regarding the number of classes for the LCA, in alignment with the existing literature, we expected that some adolescents who experienced aggressive parenting across childhood would experience dating violence in adolescence, and that adolescents who did not experience aggressive parenting across childhood would also not experience dating violence in adolescence. We also hypothesized that adolescents who experienced aggressive parenting across childhood would have higher levels of aggression and impulsivity and come from households with lower income, lower parental educational attainment, and areas of higher neighborhood risk.

## **Methods**

### *Participants and Procedure*

Data were derived from the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), a birth-cohort study that sampled nearly 5,000 mother-child dyads from 20 U.S. cities of 200,000 people or more. The FFCWS oversampled unmarried mothers by a 3:1 ratio, and resulted in a racially and ethnically diverse, low-income sample (for additional details about FFCWS study procedures and participants, see <https://ffcws.princeton.edu/>). The first wave occurred between 1998 and 2000, when children were born. The next waves occurred when children were ages 1, 3, 5, 9, and 15. Beginning when the children were 3 years old, the In-Home Longitudinal Study of Pre-School-aged Children ("in-home study") occurred, where some of our key variables of interest were measured. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study, including parents providing consent for their children to participate. We restricted our sample to adolescents who were in a current dating relationship at age 15 ( $N = 952$ ). The university's Institutional Review Board deemed our secondary analyses of these de-identified data exempt from oversight.

### *Measures*

*Parent Physical and Psychological Aggression.* Parent physical and psychological aggression were measured when children were ages 3, 5, 9, and 15. When children were ages 3, 5, and 9, parents were given the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (PC-CTS; Straus et al., 1998), wherein parents were asked to rate how often they had engaged in behaviors within the past year (0 = *never*, 1 = *once*, 2 = *twice*, 3 = *3–5 times*, 4 = *6–10 times*, 5 = *11–20 times*, 6 = *more than 20 times*). The five physical aggression items included "Spanked him/ her on the bottom with your bare

hand,” “Hit him/her on the bottom with something like a belt, hairbrush, a stick or some other hard object,” “Slapped him/her on the hand, arm, or leg,” “pinched him/her” and “shook him/her.” Items were recoded to reflect whether or not the parent had engaged in any of the five physically aggressive behaviors at each time point (0 = *no physical aggression*, 1 = *any physical aggression*). The five psychological aggression items included “Shouted, yelled, or screamed at (CHILD),” “Threatened to spank or hit (him/her) but didn’t actually do it,” “Swore or cursed at (him/her),” “Called him/her dumb or lazy or some other name like that,” and “Said you would send (him/her) away or would kick (him/her) out of the house.” Items were recoded to reflect whether or not the parent had engaged in any of the five psychologically aggressive behaviors at each time point (0 = *no psychological aggression*, 1 = *any psychological aggression*).

When children were at the age of 15 years, FFCWS modified the PC-CTS to be appropriate for teens. For physical aggression, parents were to rate how often they “hit or slapped” their child in the past year (1 = *never*, 2 = *some- times*, 3 = *often*). To achieve consistent coding across waves, this item was recoded to reflect whether or not the parent had engaged in the physically aggressive behavior (0 = *no physical aggression*, 1 = *any physical aggression*). For psychological aggression, parents were to rate how often they “shouted or swore at” their child in the past year (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*). To achieve consistent coding across waves, this item was recoded to reflect whether or not the parent had engaged in the psychologically aggressive behavior (0 = *no psychological aggression*, 1 = *any psychological aggression*). The correlations between physical and psychological aggression were moderate (child age 3:  $r = .46$ ; child age 5:  $r = .31$ , child age 9:  $r = .34$ , child age 15:  $r = .19$ ).

*Dating Physical and Psychological Aggression.* Dating aggression was measured using an FFCWS-adapted version of the Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study (Giordano et al., 2001) and the Relationship Dynamics and Social Life Study (Barber et al., 2008). Adolescents were asked two questions about dating aggression victimization: “Has your partner put you down in front of other people?” and “Has your partner pushed you, hit you, or thrown something at you that could hurt?” Adolescents were also asked two questions about dating aggression perpetration: “Have you put your partner down in front of other people?” and “Have you pushed, hit, or thrown something at your partner that could hurt?” Items assessed how often these behaviors occurred over the course of the romantic relationship (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*). Each item was recoded to be dichotomous (0 = *no aggression*, 1 = *any aggression*).

*Adolescent Aggression.* Adolescent aggression was measured at age 15 using the aggression subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist for children ages 6 to 18 (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Parents were asked to rate 11 items on a three-point scale (0 = *not true*, 1 = *somewhat true*, 2 = *often true*). Sample items include “Child is cruel, bullies, or shows meanness to others,” “Child gets in many fights,” “Child has temper tantrums or a hot temper,” and “Child argues a lot.” Items were averaged to create a scale. The internal reliability of the scale in our sample was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

*Adolescent Impulsivity.* Adolescent impulsivity was measured at age 15 using an abbreviated version of Dickman’s Impulsivity Scale (Dickman, 1990). Adolescents were asked to rate their own impulsivity by responding



to six items on a four-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *somewhat agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include, “Often, I don’t spend enough time thinking over a situation before I act,” “I often say and do things without considering the consequences,” and “I often make up my mind without taking the time to consider the situation from all angles.” The items were averaged to create a scale. The internal reliability of the scale in our sample was good ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Sociodemographic Characteristics.** Maternal-reported household income was continuous, measured at baseline, and divided by \$10k to promote interpretability. Maternal- and paternal-reported educational attainment were measured at baseline and were categorical (1 = *less than high school*, 2 = *high school*, 3 = *some college or technical school*, 4 = *college education or higher*). Neighborhood risk was measured with an eight-item Neighborhood Environment for Children Rating Scale, which was administered during the In-Home study at age 3. Mothers rated how often the incidents occurred on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Sample items include, “gang activity,” “drug dealers or users hang around,” “disorderly or misbehaving groups of adults,” and “young adults loitering.” The internal reliability in our sample was good ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Youth sex was categorical (0 = boy, 1 = girl), and youth race was inputted as a series of dummy variables (White (comparison category), Black, Hispanic, Other).

## **Analytic Approach**

The sample was restricted to adolescents who were in a current dating relationship at the age of 15 ( $N = 952$ ). Missing data on the parent physical and psychological aggression items across children ages 3 to 15 ranged from 0.84% to 28.26%. Missing data were handled using full-information maximum likelihood estimation, which provides superior estimates when compared to other missing data methods (e.g., listwise deletion and multiple imputation) in population-based studies such as FFCWS (Larsen, 2011; Lee et al., 2020). Data were cleaned and descriptively analyzed in Stata version

15.1 (Statacorp, 2017). A repeated measures latent class analysis (RMCLA) was conducted in Mplus version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998/2017). To determine the optimal number of classes, the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), Entropy, and the Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test (VLMR LRT) were used. Smaller BICs, higher Entropy, and a statistically significant VLMR LRT would suggest that the number of  $k$  classes were preferred over  $k-1$  classes. RM LCA results were imported to Stata, where Welch’s  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine mean differences in aggression and impulsivity across classes. Welch’s  $t$ -tests and chi-square tests were conducted to examine the sociodemographic differences across classes.

## **Results**

### ***Repeated Measures Latent Class Analysis***

Descriptive statistics of study variables can be found in Table 1. Youth in our sample ( $N = 952$ , ~52% male) came from households with an average income of ~\$27,000, had parents who had, on average, less than a high school education, and were majority Black (~55%). Results from the RMLCA suggested that the three-class solution best

fit the data (see Table 2). The three-class model had the lowest BIC, highest Entropy, and statistically significant VLMR LRT (BIC: 6,456.504, Entropy: 0.752, VLMR LRT: 210.938 [13],  $p < .001$ ) when compared to the two-class (BIC: 6,578.280, Entropy: 0.703, VLMR LRT: 412.947 [13],  $p < .001$ ) and four-class solutions (BIC: 6,466.921, Entropy: 0.646, VLMR LRT: 78.744 [13],  $p = .010$ ). Class 1 was labeled the *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating class* ( $N = 151, 15.86\%$ ); Class 2 was labeled the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating class* ( $N = 726, 76.26\%$ ); the Class 3 was labeled the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating class* ( $N = 75, 7.88\%$ ).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables ( $N = 952$ ).

| Variable                        | N   | %     | M    | SD   | Min | Max   |
|---------------------------------|-----|-------|------|------|-----|-------|
| Parent physical aggression      |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Age 3                           | 620 | 86.47 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 5                           | 554 | 81.11 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 9                           | 577 | 70.99 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 15                          | 127 | 13.45 |      |      |     |       |
| Parent psychological aggression |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Age 3                           | 667 | 92.77 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 5                           | 644 | 94.15 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 9                           | 761 | 91.47 |      |      |     |       |
| Age 15                          | 683 | 72.43 |      |      |     |       |
| Dating physical aggression      |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Victimization                   | 55  | 5.78  |      |      |     |       |
| Perpetration                    | 57  | 5.99  |      |      |     |       |
| Dating psychological aggression |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Victimization                   | 48  | 5.06  |      |      |     |       |
| Perpetration                    | 44  | 4.63  |      |      |     |       |
| Youth sex                       |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Boy                             | 496 | 52.10 |      |      |     |       |
| Girl                            | 456 | 47.90 |      |      |     |       |
| Youth race                      |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| White                           | 143 | 15.66 |      |      |     |       |
| Black                           | 500 | 54.76 |      |      |     |       |
| Hispanic                        | 205 | 22.45 |      |      |     |       |
| Other                           | 65  | 7.12  |      |      |     |       |
| Maternal education              |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Less than high school           | 353 | 37.20 |      |      |     |       |
| High school or equivalent       | 331 | 34.88 |      |      |     |       |
| Some college or technical       | 204 | 21.50 |      |      |     |       |
| College or higher               | 61  | 6.43  |      |      |     |       |
| Paternal education              |     |       |      |      |     |       |
| Less than high school           | 318 | 34.83 |      |      |     |       |
| High school or equivalent       | 359 | 39.32 |      |      |     |       |
| Some college or technical       | 181 | 19.82 |      |      |     |       |
| College or higher               | 55  | 6.02  |      |      |     |       |
| Aggression                      |     |       | 0.34 | 0.34 | 0   | 1.64  |
| Impulsivity                     |     |       | 2.60 | 0.69 | 1   | 4     |
| Household income                |     |       | 2.71 | 2.74 | 0   | 13.38 |
| Neighborhood risk               |     |       | 1.90 | 0.92 | 1   | 4     |

Note. Household income was divided by \$10k. Education was coded 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college or technical school, 4 = college education or higher.

**Table 2.** Fit Statistic Comparison by Model.

| Model                    | BIC              | Entropy      | VLMR LRT               |
|--------------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Two-class model          | 6,578.280        | 0.703        | 412.947 [13]***        |
| <b>Three-class model</b> | <b>6,456.504</b> | <b>0.752</b> | <b>210.938 [13]***</b> |
| Four-class model         | 6,466.921        | 0.646        | 78.744 [13]*           |

BIC=Bayesian Information Criterion; VLMR LRT=Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Bold indicates the model that was identified as the best-fit model.

The RMLCA results expressed in probability scale can be found in Table 3 and Figure 1. The probability scale reflects the probability of an endorsed variable within the particular class. Within the *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1), the majority of parents did not use physical aggression across children ages 3 to 15. However, approximately two-thirds of these parents used psychological aggression between children ages 3 to 9, and approximately half used psychological aggression at age 15. Neither dating violence victimization nor perpetration were found in this class.

Within the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2), over 98% of parents used psychological aggression between children ages 3 to 9, and 79% used psychological aggression at age 15. Further, over 90% of parents used physical aggression between children ages 3 to 5, 82% used physical aggression at children aged 9, and 15% used physical aggression at age 15. Despite these high rates of physical and psychological aggression, adolescents in this class did not report dating violence perpetration or victimization.

**Table 3.** Latent Class Analysis Results in Probability Scale (N=952).

| Variable                           | Class 1<br>(N=151) | Class 2<br>(N=726) | Class 3<br>(N=75) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Age 3, Physical aggression         | 0.46               | 0.95               | 0.98              |
| Age 3, Psychological aggression    | 0.66               | 0.99               | 1.00              |
| Age 5, Physical aggression         | 0.45               | 0.91               | 0.80              |
| Age 5, Psychological aggression    | 0.77               | 0.99               | 0.94              |
| Age 9, Physical aggression         | 0.19               | 0.82               | 0.87              |
| Age 9, Psychological aggression    | 0.64               | 0.98               | 0.94              |
| Age 15, Physical aggression        | 0.04               | 0.15               | 0.23              |
| Age 15, Psychological aggression   | 0.45               | 0.79               | 0.78              |
| Dating psychological perpetration  | 0.05               | 0.00               | 0.38              |
| Dating psychological victimization | 0.04               | 0.00               | 0.42              |
| Dating physical perpetration       | 0.00               | 0.03               | 0.42              |
| Dating physical victimization      | 0.00               | 0.02               | 0.46              |

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of individuals within each class engaged in each respective variable. Dating variables were measured in children aged 15.

Within the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3), over 90% of parents used psychological aggression between children of ages 3 to 9, and 78% used psychological aggression at age 15. Further, over 80% of parents used physical aggression between children of ages 3 to 9, and 23% used physical aggression at age 15. Regarding dating violence victimization, 42% and 46% of adolescents in this class experienced psychological and

physical aggression respectively. Regarding dating violence perpetration, 38% and 42% of adolescents indicated engaging in psychological and physical aggression, respectively. A key distinction of this class was the relatively high rates of parental physical aggression that occurred at age 15 (23% in Class 3 vs. 15% in Class 2, and 4% in Class 1).

### Aggression and Impulsivity Bivariate Comparisons

Results from bivariate comparisons can be found in Table 4. Adolescents in the *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1) had lower aggression scores than the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2;  $t = -3.78$  [239.13],  $p < .001$ ) and the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = -3.43$  [166.99],  $p < .001$ ). Adolescents who came from both of the *aggressive parenting* classes (Classes 2 and 3) did not significantly differ in aggression ( $t = -1.59$  [85.80],  $p = .116$ ). Regarding impulsivity, adolescents in the *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1) had lower impulsivity scores than the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2;  $t = -3.34$  [224.08],  $p = .001$ ) and the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = -5.22$  [179.58],  $p < .001$ ). Adolescents in the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1) had lower impulsivity than adolescents in the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = -3.43$  [101.62],  $p < .001$ ).

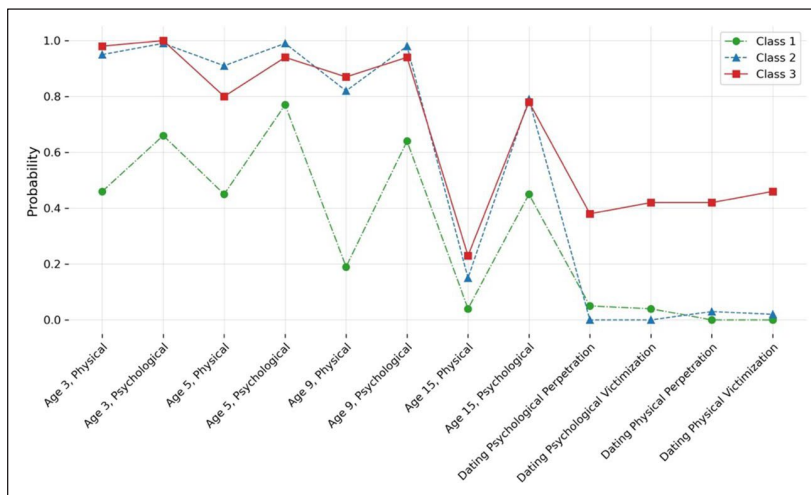


Figure 1. Probability of aggressive parenting and dating violence by class.

### Sociodemographic Bivariate Comparisons

There were no significant differences in maternal or paternal education between classes. The *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1) had higher household income than the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = 4.02$  [224.54],  $p < .001$ ), but did not significantly differ from the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2;  $t = 1.06$  [213.40],  $p = .290$ ). The *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2) had higher household income than the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = 4.41$  [131.04],  $p < .001$ ). The *non-physically aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 1) had lower neighborhood risk than the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive*

*dating* class (Class 2;  $t = -4.54$  [179.23],  $p < .001$ ) and the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = -2.34$  [113.52],  $p = .020$ ). However, the *aggressive parenting, nonaggressive dating* class (Class 2) did not significantly differ in neighborhood risk from the *aggressive parenting, aggressive dating* class (Class 3;  $t = 0.70$  [72.52],  $p = .486$ ).

## Discussion

In this study, we examined the patterns of aggressive parenting across childhood and dating violence perpetration and victimization at age 15. Using latent class analysis, we unveiled three classes of youth: Class 1 (approximately 16% of youth) consisted of adolescents who, by and large, did not experience physical aggression from their parents throughout childhood and did not experience dating violence in adolescence; Class 2 (approximately 76% of youth) consisted of adolescents who experienced both psychologically and physically aggressive parenting throughout childhood, but did not experience dating violence in adolescence; and Class 3 (approximately 8% of youth) consisted of adolescents who experienced both psychologically and physically aggressive parenting throughout childhood and did experience dating violence in adolescence. Youth who experienced patterns of physically aggressive parenting throughout their childhood (Classes 2 and 3) had higher aggression and impulsivity and came from households with lower income and higher neighborhood risk, than those who had parents who did not use physical aggression (Class 1).

**Table 4.** Bivariate Comparisons of Latent Classes ( $N = 952$ ).

| Variable           | Class 1 ( $N = 151$ ) Non-Physically Aggressive Parenting, Nonaggressive Dating | Class 2 ( $N = 726$ ) Aggressive Parenting, Nonaggressive dating | Class 3 ( $N = 75$ ) Aggressive Parenting, Aggressive Dating |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Aggression         | 0.24 (0.02) <sup>a</sup>  | 0.35 (0.01) <sup>b</sup>   | 0.42 (0.05) <sup>b</sup>                                     |
| Impulsivity        | 2.42 (0.05) <sup>a</sup>  | 2.62 (0.03) <sup>b</sup>   | 2.85 (0.06) <sup>c</sup>                                     |
| Mother's education |   |  |  |
| Less than HS       | 50 (33.33)  | 271 (37.43)  | 32 (42.67)   |
| HS                 | 47 (31.33)  | 259 (35.77)  | 25 (33.33)   |
| Some college       | 41 (27.33)  | 149 (20.58)  | 14 (18.67)   |
| College            | 12 (8.00)   | 45 (6.22)  | 4 (5.33)   |
| Father's education |   |  |  |
| Less than HS       | 58 (40.00)  | 233 (33.48)  | 27 (37.50)   |
| HS                 | 49 (33.79)  | 282 (40.52)  | 28 (38.89)   |
| Some college       | 25 (17.24)  | 143 (20.55)  | 13 (18.06)   |
| College            | 13 (8.97)   | 38 (5.46)  | 4 (5.56)   |
| Household income   | 30,072.85 (2,342.31) <sup>a</sup>   | 27,354.03 (1,034.75) <sup>a</sup>                                | 18,194.21 (1,799.56) <sup>b</sup>                            |
| Neighborhood risk  | 1.57 (0.08) <sup>a</sup>  | 1.97 (0.04) <sup>b</sup>   | 1.89 (0.11) <sup>b</sup>                                     |

Note. Superscripts denote statistically significant differences. HS = high school.

This study was informed by the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence theory (Kalmuss, 1984). Our findings coincide with previous studies that found associations between exposure to violence in the home and dating violence (Smith-Marek et al., 2015; Stith et al., 2000), and also parallel studies that link aggressive parenting to adolescent dating violence (Emanuel et al., 2022; Hamby et al., 2012). As a whole, these findings suggest that the home environment—specifically psychologically and physically aggressive parenting—is a key part to understanding how violence can be perpetuated inter-generationally. Our findings also support work that establishes associations

between parental aggression and child behavior problems (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016) and studies that call for the elimination of psychological and physical aggression in the home (Ma et al., 2022a; Ward et al., 2022).

Our findings also coincide with studies that suggest most youth who date do not exhibit physical violence toward their romantic partner (Kann et al., 2018). Rates of physical dating violence victimization in our sample were roughly equivalent to what other researchers have found in a nationally representative sample (~6% in our sample compared to 7% of 9th graders; Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey; Kann et al., 2018). However, the age of participants in our sample is an important factor to consider when understanding dating violence rates. Specifically, nationally representative data point to an increase in physical dating violence prevalence by 12th grade (Kann et al., 2018). Although the FFCWS data set has not yet assessed youth dating violence at later ages, future research should repeat our study to capture potentially higher rates of dating violence victimization and perpetration occurring in later adolescence. Further, it is important to note that the youth who experienced physically and psychologically aggressive parenting throughout childhood were still more aggressive and impulsive than their counterparts who did not experience such parenting, which may be associated with dating or marital conflicts and violence later in the lifespan (Bresin, 2019; Cascardi & Jouriles, 2018; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997).

Although risk factors for dating aggression have been previously studied, less is known about protective factors (Ngo et al., 2022). A recent longitudinal study found that protective factors for dating violence, including empathy, social support, parental monitoring, and school belonging, significantly differentiated perpetrators of dating violence from non-perpetrators (Espelage et al., 2020). A secure attachment is another known protective factor against perpetrating violence in romantic contexts. Miyagawa and Kanemasa (2022) found that due to low self-compassion, attachment anxiety and avoidance lead to a higher likelihood of engaging in psychological aggression within romantic relationships. Of importance, recent studies have pointed to prosocial peers, parental monitoring, parental support, and positive ecological contexts to include positive school and community programs as additional buffers against dating violence perpetration and victimization (Gerino et al., 2018; Hebert et al., 2019).

These protective factors are more likely present among youth who are not living in poverty, as wealthier communities have greater access to resources, including education, socioemotional learning programs, and after-school programs (Rueda et al., 2022). Indeed, bivariate comparisons in our study found that youth in Classes 1 and 2 (the youth who did not experience dating violence) had a higher household income than those in Class 3. Further, youth in Class 1 (the youths who did not experience physically aggressive parenting or dating violence) had the lowest neighborhood risk scores. Poverty, on the other hand, has been associated with a greater proclivity to witness violence across ecological contexts, which then translates to a greater acceptance of violence as a conflict tactic (Williams & Rueda, 2022). Our study underscores the importance of continued research into what differentiates some youth who experience dating violence from others who do not, particularly among youth who have experienced aggressive parenting.

It is noteworthy that there were high rates of psychologically aggressive parenting across all classes of youth, particularly in early childhood. Youth whose parents were not also physically aggressive, however, reported lower aggression and impulsivity. Longitudinal research has established direct effects of both harsh discipline and impulsivity on externalizing behavior (Ahmad & Hinshaw, 2017; Leve et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2021b). Of

importance, research also suggests that youth who act more impulsively are also more likely to select delinquent peers (Ragan et al., 2022). In a recent study, male adolescents who associated with deviant peers were more likely to perpetrate dating violence and both males and females with anger issues were also more likely to do so (Ngo et al., 2022). This same study also found that females who experienced child abuse, to include being hit frequently as a teenager by a parent, were more likely to perpetrate dating violence. Research has repeatedly found that female adolescents perpetrate physical dating violence at higher rates compared to males (Wincentak et al., 2017), although the reasons for this are debated and we did not explore gender differences in the present study. We recommend that future studies explore how aggressive parenting may interact with peer affiliation, impulsivity, and conflict management style to predict dating violence differentially by gender.

While our study addresses important gaps in the literature and, unlike most parenting research which predominantly centers White, rich, and educated samples (Henrich et al., 2010), examines predominantly Black families from low-resourced settings, our study did not examine other cultural variables that could be important predictors of dating violence. For example, studies have unveiled links between gender inequality (both country-level and family-level) and aggressive parenting behaviors (Ma et al., 2022b; Stark & Filtcraft, 1998). Therefore, parental gender attitudes and gender inequality within communities may be important factors to account for in future research. Further, parental attitudes toward physical punishment have consistently shown to be strong predictors of parental aggression and abuse in samples of over 50 countries (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2021a). From a social learning theory perspective (Bandura, 1977), it is possible that such parental attitudes also shape children's attitudes toward violence and may predict how these children will engage in relationships in adolescence and adulthood. Though our research was informed by the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence Theory and suggests that parent-to-child aggression is an important factor in such transmission, future research should understand how parental attitudes and broader cultural influences (e.g., violence portrayed in the media; Forsyth & Ward, 2021) also account for such transmission. Such studies that acknowledge macro-level and cultural-level influences in the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence would help to provide an ecological perspective of violence transmission (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

## **Limitations**

Our study is limited in its generalizability in that the FFCWS dataset oversampled unmarried mothers from large U.S. cities. We did not assess how family structure may have impacted parenting practices, although some research suggests that girls from two-parent households are less likely to experience poor family contexts, including violence-condoning messages from parents (Garthe et al., 2019). Moreover, the FFCWS sample was racially diverse, consisting largely of Black, Hispanic, and low-income families. Thus, findings may not be generalizable to rural adolescents, adolescents from wealthier families, youth of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, or to youth outside of the United States.

Another limitation of the present study was that, while we control for gender in our analyses, we did not explicitly explore gender differences. Research has repeatedly found that female adolescents perpetuate physical dating violence at higher rates compared to males, although the reasons for this are debated. Ngo and Colleagues

(2022) found that females who experienced child abuse, defined as being hit frequently as a teenager by parents, were more likely to perpetuate dating violence. Further, deviant peer group affiliation may have a greater impact in predicting male perpetration (Ngo et al., 2022). Males are also more likely to experience physically aggressive parenting (Rodriguez et al., 2021). We recommend that future studies explore how harsh parenting may interact with these potentially significant domains by gender. Future research should also consider mutual aggression, which is common among adolescent samples.

A further limitation of this study is that we were unable to understand the specific proximal contexts surrounding aggressive parenting. Our data collection focused on understanding the presence of physical and psychological aggression, rather than the context or cultural norms surrounding parental behaviors. Since this study was unable to capture such contexts, we do not know whether this contributed to the differences between Class 2 and Class 3. Our measure of psychological dating aggression only captured relational aggression, which is just one aspect of emotional/psychological violence (Wolfe et al., 2001). Future research should utilize full measures of both psychological and physical victimization and perpetration.

A final limitation was the need to dichotomize parental physical and psychological aggression. Ideally, accurate reporting of the frequency and intensity of discipline would be captured. However, in multiple validation studies using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), researchers have found that parents are highly inaccurate reporters of frequency-related variables, and that parents tend to severely underreport and underestimate the frequency of abuse (e.g., Archer, 1999; Straus; 1990; Straus et al., 1998). Therefore, researchers using the CTS are generally advised to dichotomize these items to account for such inaccuracies.

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this study contribute to the larger body of research that indicates that aggressive parenting is associated with violence and aggression in youth, and also reinforces the notion that there may be factors at play that negate the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating dating violence. Previous research has found a link between aggressive parenting and negative outcomes such as violence toward future partners, to which our findings added (Beckmann, 2021; Lynch et al., 2006; Temple et al., 2018). Our findings also contribute an additional perspective by acknowledging Class 2, the group of individuals who did experience both psychological and physically aggressive parenting but did not bring this into their romantic relationships. There is a need for future research with regard to why there were such salient differences in dating aggression outcomes between Class 2 and Class 3. More specifically, research examining the processes by which many youths are resilient is needed.

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## **ORCID iDs**



Heidi Adams Rueda <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4321-1943>  
Kaitlyn Paxton Ward <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0780-2359>  
Steven Hoffman <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2764-4207>

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overlap of physical, psychological, and sexual dating abuse perpetration and victimization in a national sample of youth. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45(5), 1083–1099.

### **Author Biographies**

**Heidi Adams Rueda**, PhD is the John E. Christensen Community Chair in Child Welfare at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the Grace Abbott School of Social Work. Her research focuses on adolescent dating and sexual relationships, particularly among understudied youth populations. She aims to prevent teen dating violence and foster strong foundations for healthy adolescent and lifelong partnering.

**Kaitlyn Paxton Ward**, PhD is a mixed-methods researcher and fully licensed mental health professional. She works as a People Analytics Researcher at Google and as a research scientist at the University of California, Berkeley. Her work prioritizes empowering and advocating for vulnerable populations, including research related to family and child well-being.

**Steven Hoffman**, PhD is an associate professor in the Brigham Young University School of Social Work. Prior to joining the faculty at BYU he worked as an Institute for Education Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellow at The University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and as an assistant professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio.