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Research article

Changes in acceptance of dating violence and physical dating violence victimization in a longitudinal study with teens



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ABSTRACT

Teen dating violence is a pervasive issue in adolescence and has been linked to maladjustment (Temple, Shorey, Fite et al., 2013). Physical dating violence is a particularly significant problem with one in five adolescents reporting experiencing physical teen dating violence (TDV; Wincentak et al., 2017). Acceptance of violence has been suggested to increase the risk of TDV; however, most studies to date have been cross-sectional. The purpose of the current study is to examine patterns of acceptance of dating violence and TDV victimization across time. Participants were ethnically diverse teenagers ($N = 1042$; ages 13–18) who were followed over a four-year period. Multivariate latent growth curve modeling techniques were used to determine trajectories of physical TDV victimization and attitudes accepting of dating violence. Results showed two trajectories for physical TDV victimization, linear and quadratic, and two trajectories for acceptance of dating violence, non-linear and quadratic. Parallel models investigating the interplay between TDV victimization and acceptance demonstrated two possible trends; however, we did not find any evidence for a longitudinal relationship between the two variables, suggesting that change in acceptance was not related to change in physical TDV victimization. Instead, our results suggest a significant amount of heterogeneity in these trajectories. These findings suggest studies are still needed to further explore longitudinal patterns of TDV to better understand how to reduce the risk of teen dating violence.

1. Introduction

Teen dating violence (TDV) is common among adolescents (Wincentak, Connolly, & Card, 2017) and has been strongly associated with a host of negative psychosocial outcomes (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Greenman & Matsuda, 2016; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003; Temple & Freeman, 2011; Temple, Shorey, Fite, Stuart, & Le, 2013). Previous studies suggest childhood exposure to violence and attitudes accepting of violence are associated with a higher risk for TDV; however, most studies have been cross-sectional. In the current study, we investigate the interplay among childhood exposure to violence (i.e., witnessing interparental violence), acceptance of dating violence, and physical TDV victimization across a four-year period.

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1.1. Teen dating violence

Prevalence of TDV varies by the type of abuse, as well as the gender of the perpetrator and victim. In a meta-analytic review of 101 published studies between 1980 and 2013 (i.e., 96 studies for physical TDV and 31 for sexual TDV), [Wincentak et al. \(2017\)](#) found that 20% of teens ages 13–18 reported physical TDV and 9% reported sexual TDV. Studies examining past-year incidence rates found that one in three teenagers were victims of physical and/or psychological TDV and one in five were perpetrators ([Coker et al., 2014](#)). In adolescents with a history of maltreatment or abuse, TDV rates have been documented to be higher than in adolescents with no such history. For instance, [Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle, and Pittman, \(2001\)](#) found that 25% of teenage girls and 40% of teenage boys with a history of childhood maltreatment were victims of physical TDV.

With respect to gender, teenage girls (14%) are more likely than boys (8%) to be victims of sexual TDV and boys are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual TDV (10% vs. 3%; [Wincentak et al., 2017](#)). However, for physical and psychological TDV, the results are more mixed. Some studies suggest that girls are more likely to be the victims and the perpetrators of physical and psychological TDV ([Coker et al., 2014](#)), which may at least partly be due to methodological issues with under- and/or overreporting ([Wincentak et al., 2017](#)). Other studies suggest higher rates of physical TDV perpetration among girls (25% vs. 13%) but similar rates for physical victimization (21%; [Wincentak et al., 2017](#)). On the other hand, studies have fairly consistently shown that boys generally report perpetrating more severe and injurious TDV, and are less impacted by their own victimization ([Molidor & Tolman, 1998](#)). Although victim and perpetration rates differ by gender, many adolescent relationships are characterized by mutual violence (e.g., perpetration and victimization). In Coker's study, the highest rates were for victimization only (17.6%) followed by mutual TDV (15.8%) and then perpetration only (4.4%). Similarly, [Taylor and Mumford \(2016\)](#) conducted a national survey with early to late adolescents (ages 10–18) and found psychological and sexual TDV victimization was correlated to psychological and sexual perpetration ($r = 0.30\text{--}0.86$).

Experiencing TDV is associated with increased risk for substance use, risky sexual behavior, psychological distress, poor school functioning, difficulties with future relationships, and TDV perpetration ([Banyard & Cross, 2008](#); [Greenman & Matsuda, 2016](#); [Silverman, et al., 2001](#); [Smith, et al., 2003](#); [Temple & Freeman, 2011](#); [Temple, Shorey, Fite et al., 2013](#)). For instance, [Temple and Freeman \(2011\)](#) found older adolescents who experienced physical TDV were 2.5–4 times more likely to report smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and using other illicit substances compared to non-victimized youth. [Silverman et al. \(2001\)](#) found that adolescent girls who reported physical and/or sexual TDV were at an increased risk, compared to non-victimized counterparts, for substance use, suicidality, and risky sexual behavior three years later. TDV has also been associated with violence in adulthood ([Cui, Gordon, Ueno, & Fincham, 2013](#); [Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, Bunge, & Rothman, 2017](#); [O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994](#); [Smith et al., 2003](#)). In a longitudinal study that spanned over eight years with over 5500 adolescents who had been in a dating relationship, [Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman, \(2013\)](#) found that participants who experienced psychological or physical (or both) victimization were more likely to report long-term adverse health outcomes than participants without a history of TDV. A similar study by [Ackard, Eisenberg, and Neumark-Sztainer, \(2007\)](#) found that adolescent girls who experienced physical or sexual TDV (or both) were at higher risk for depressive symptoms, cigarette use, and suicidality five years later.

1.1.1. Changes in physical TDV over time

While mounting research has examined the antecedents and consequences of TDV, less is known about how TDV develops over time. A recent study found that TDV statuses are fairly stable in adolescence ([Choi, Weston, & Temple, 2017](#)). The researchers examined different types (e.g., psychological, sexual, and physical) and patterns (e.g., perpetration and victimization) of violence and found evidence for five distinct but homogenous groups of teens: non-violence (40.7%), emotional and verbal abuse (30.6%), forced sexual contact (11.7%), psychological and physical violence (8.7%), and psychological abuse (8.3%). These groups differed in terms of several psychosocial factors (e.g., gender and SES) and mental health outcomes, suggesting prevention and intervention efforts might need to be tailored toward specific TDV patterns.

To our knowledge, only three studies have investigated longitudinal patterns of physical TDV victimization ([Brooks-Russell, Foshee, & Ennett, 2013](#); [Choi et al., 2017](#); [Orpinas, Hsieh, Song, Holland, & Nahapetyan, 2013](#)). [Orpinas et al. \(2013\)](#) investigated TDV trajectories using the *Healthy Teens Longitudinal Study* dataset, which followed 588 6th graders for seven consecutive years. The investigators found that TDV trajectories differed between boys and girls. For boys, there were two trajectories for physical TDV victimization: high and low victimization; 62% of the boys were in the low victimization group. Similarly, there were two trajectories for physical TDV victimization for girls, and the majority (71%) were in the low victimization group. The second group of girls showed an increase in victimization over time.

[Brooks-Russell et al. \(2013\)](#); $N = 2566$) investigated trajectories of physical TDV victimization in a sample of 8th–12th graders. Results indicated that girls' physical victimization over time was best conceptualized into three distinct classes: 1) girls who reported no victimization or lower levels of physical TDV victimization over time (89% of the sample), 2) girls who reported lower levels of physical TDV victimization at the beginning and the end of the study with higher, moderate levels in the middle (8% of the sample), and 3) girls who reported higher levels of physical TDV victimization with the highest levels during the middle of the study (3% of the sample). Importantly, all three groups showed an increase in victimization during the middle of the study and a decrease towards the end of the study. The trajectories for physical TDV victimization were different for boys. A two-class model was the best fit, with the first class showing a similar pattern to the girls' first class (e.g., no or low levels of physical TDV victimization; 94% of the sample) while the second class reported moderate to high levels of physical TDV victimization that increased during the beginning of the study, decreased during the middle, and then increased again at the end of the study (6% of the sample).

Similarly, longitudinal studies on physical TDV perpetration have found support for a curvilinear pattern ([Foshee et al., 2009](#);

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