



## Original article

Developmental Outcomes of Using Physical Violence Against  
Dates and Peers

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## A B S T R A C T

**Purpose:** The negative impact on adolescents of being a victim of violence is well documented, but the impact of being a perpetrator of violence is less well known. Knowing the negative outcomes of being a perpetrator could inform clinical interactions with adolescents, development of violence prevention strategies, and estimates of the societal burden of violence. This longitudinal study examined the effects of physical dating violence (DV) and peer violence (PV) perpetration on internalizing symptoms, relationships with friends and family, academic aspirations and grades, and substance use.

**Methods:** The four-wave longitudinal study (N = 3,979), conducted in two North Carolina counties over 2½ years, spanned grades 8–12. Generalized linear mixed models were used to examine prospective lagged effects of each type of violence perpetration on each outcome and sex and grade as moderators of effects.

**Results:** Perpetrating DV significantly predicted lower college aspirations and greater likelihood of marijuana use. The effect of DV perpetration on increased family conflict was moderated by school grade; the effect decreased in significance across grades. Perpetrating PV significantly predicted greater likelihood of cigarette and marijuana use. The effects of PV perpetration on increased internalizing symptoms and alcohol intensity and decreased college aspirations were moderated by school grade; effects decreased in significance across grades. Neither type of perpetration predicted changes in number of reciprocated friendships, social status, or academic grades, and no effects varied by sex.

**Conclusions:** These detrimental outcomes for the perpetrator need to be considered in clinical interactions with adolescents and violence prevention programming.

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IMPLICATIONS AND  
CONTRIBUTION

This longitudinal study found that perpetrating violence against dates and peers predicted detrimental consequences for adolescents, including increased internalizing symptoms, family conflict, alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use, and decreased college aspirations; these need to be considered in clinical interactions with adolescents and violence prevention programming.

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The negative impact on adolescents of being a victim of violence is well documented. Adolescent victims may be injured, sometimes fatally, and are at risk for depression, anxiety, suicide, substance use, delinquent behaviors, and poor academic performance [1–5]. Adolescents who perpetrate violence may themselves experience negative outcomes that interfere with their development, but this has rarely been examined with empirical research. However, knowing the outcomes for

adolescents of using violence against others is important for informing clinical interactions with adolescents, developing violence prevention strategies, and informing estimates of the societal burden of violence. This study (1) examined prospectively a wide range of potential developmental outcomes of perpetrating physical dating violence (DV) and peer violence (PV) and (2) determined whether the outcomes varied by sex of the perpetrator or adolescent development from grades 8 to 12.

A longitudinal study design allows for distinguishing predictors from outcomes of perpetrating violence. Only three studies have used longitudinal data to examine outcomes of adolescent physical DV perpetration, and they examined a limited number of outcomes. One found that DV perpetration predicted later depression [6]; another found that it predicted suicidal ideation [5]; and the third found that it led to changes in social information processing, including an increased tendency to attribute hostile intentions to partners during conflicts and anticipate positive consequences from using violence [7]; only the latter study, however, controlled for temporality in associations [7]. Many studies have examined outcomes of bullying that combined acts of physical and nonphysical bullying (personal insults, threats, and actions intended to harm relationships) [1,8–12] and of antisocial behaviors that included physical violence perpetration as only one of several behaviors [13–15]. However, the outcomes of physical PV perpetration could not be uniquely distinguished in these studies. The few longitudinal studies that uniquely examined outcomes of physical PV perpetration found that perpetration predicted later substance use [16] and decreased likeability by peers [17] but increased popularity [17,18].

This study used data from a large, multiwave study of adolescents to examine outcomes of physical DV and PV perpetration across grades 8 through 12. The principle of multifinality, which asserts that a single adverse event (e.g., perpetrating violence) can lead to different outcomes in different people, guided our decision to examine multiple potential outcomes of the perpetration rather than focus on a single outcome. This principle, which is central to theories of developmental psychopathology [19] and has received extensive empirical support [20], suggests that the impact of an adverse event could be underestimated when examining a single outcome. The specific outcomes examined include internalizing symptoms, peer relationships (friendships and social status), academic aspirations and performance, family relationships (family conflict), and substance use (alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana use). Each of these outcomes could be proximally affected by perpetration of violence, impact adolescent development, and affect life-course trajectories of physical and mental health, happiness, productivity, and income potential [21]. We hypothesized that DV and PV perpetration would negatively impact all the outcomes, except for social status, which we hypothesized to be positively impacted by violence perpetration; this latter hypothesis was based on numerous studies which have found that adolescent bullying/aggression is correlated with high social status, particularly during early adolescence [22].

Historically, girls have been considered less violent than boys; thus many studies examining outcomes of bullying/aggression during adolescence have been limited to boys [9–11]. However, the prevalence of physical DV perpetration is about equal for boys and girls [23], and PV perpetration by girls has risen substantially over time [24]. Both boys and girls are included in the present study, allowing for examination of sex differences in the

outcomes of violence, which have been found for both DV [3,4] and PV [2] victimization, although findings have been inconsistent.

We also examined whether outcomes of DV and PV perpetration varied over time. Social, academic, peer, and family environments change considerably across adolescence, as does adolescent social and biological development; thus, outcomes of perpetration could manifest differently across this period. For example, during early adolescence, a time when desire for social status peaks, bullying, which is viewed by peers as challenging adult authority, has been associated with higher social status [25]. However, as adolescents mature and develop higher level cognitive processing skills, aggressive peers may “lose their luster” and become less well tolerated [26]; thus being aggressive may not lead to higher social status in later adolescence.

## Methods

### Study overview

Data were from a longitudinal cohort sequential study of adolescent health risk. The present study used four waves of data collected over 2½ years starting when participants were in the eighth, ninth, or 10th grades (wave 1) and ending when participants were in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades (wave 4). Six-month time intervals separated the first three waves and a 1-year interval separated waves three and four. Eligible participants were all the adolescents enrolled in 19 public middle and high schools in two predominately rural US counties except those who were unable to complete the questionnaire in English (1–4 students per wave), in long-term suspension (1–4 students per wave), or in special education programs (.04%–.05% of students). Questionnaires were administered in various classrooms by trained data collectors. Schools were provided a monetary incentive to participate. Study information was sent to parents via mail and through the school. Parents could refuse consent for their child's participation by returning a written form or calling a toll-free telephone number. Assent was obtained before the survey from adolescents whose parents had not refused consent. The institutional review board at the sponsoring university approved study protocols.

Response rates ranged from 77% at wave 1–73% at wave 4. Analyses were conducted with 3,979 adolescents, of whom 7% provided only one wave of data and 73% provided three or more waves of data. About half of the sample were male (49%), approximately 50% were black, 43% white, and the remaining 7% of other race/ethnicities, including Latino, Asian, American Indian, or mixed race.

### Measures

**Dating violence and peer violence perpetration.** A short version of the Safe Dates Physical Perpetration Scale was administered at each wave [27]. Adolescents were asked if they had ever been on a date, defined as “informal activities like meeting someone at the mall, park, or at a basketball game as well as more formal activities like going out to eat or to a movie together.” Those who answered with “yes” were then asked “During the past 3 months, how many times did you do each of the following things to someone you were dating or on a date with? Don't count it if you did it in self-defense or play.” Two examples of the six items that

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