



SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

Conflict in adolescent dating relationships: a study of factors involved

Graça Aparício^{a,*}, Ana Lopes^b, Manuela Ferreira^a, João Duarte^a

^aEscola Superior de Saúde de Viseu, CI&DETS, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal

^bEscola Superior de Saúde de Viseu, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal

KEYWORDS

Dating violence;
Adolescent dating;
Conflict behaviours

Abstract

Background: Dating violence is a relevant current social and public health problem, not only due to adolescents exposure to risk of physical and mental injury, but also because it's at this age that romantic relationships begin with the possibility of these patterns of interaction to be perpetuated throughout life. The aim of this study is to characterize behaviours of violence and to identify the factors of conflict in adolescent dating relationships.

Material and methods: Transversal and correlational study, with a non-probabilistic sample of 243 mostly Portuguese adolescents, 56.0% female (mean age = 16.29 years; SD = 1.02), 71.2% living in rural areas and who attended between the 10th and 12th year at school. A socio-demographic questionnaire and on the contextual characteristics of dating was applied as well as a validated and adapted version for the Portuguese population of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory.

Results: Of the adolescents, 91.7% live with their parents and the vast majority is dating or has dated. The victimization conflict behaviours superseded those of perpetration and the boys showed more conflict strategies (of the self and the other) compared to girls, while girls and older boys had demonstrated more non-abusive strategies of the self. The conflict behaviours were significant in adolescents who initiated their sexual activity earlier and non-abusive strategies when dating couples or friends talk about sex.

Conclusions: The results justify the need to integrate the topic of dating violence in adolescent education, using active methods with effective participation of everyone involved in the process.

© 2014 Elsevier España, S.L. All rights reserved.

*Corresponding author.

E-mail: gaparicio5@hotmail.com (G. Aparício).

Background

Research has revealed disturbing levels of violence within intimate relationships between adult couples, but only recently has it focused on violent behaviour in dating relationships among adolescents.

Such violence, in addition to being a human rights violation, profoundly affects physical, psychological, sexual, reproductive and social development, with consequences on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, not only in the short run, but also in the medium and long run, possibly resulting in death.¹ There are, however, forms of violence that go unnoticed and are even socially accepted, with frequent trivialization and even romanticizing of some violent acts.²

Dating violence can be defined as an act of violence, a singular occurrence or continuous, committed by one partner or both, in order to control, dominate and have more power than the other in the relationship. According to the evidence, this type of relationship is an act that does not discriminate gender with male and female victims and offenders.³

Violent behaviour in dating adolescent couples is a significant problem, not only because they generate damage to physical and mental health,⁴ but also because they occur at a stage in life where romantic relationships begin and patterns of interaction with others are learned, leading to the risk of lasting into and throughout adulthood.⁵ Moreover, adolescents have difficulty in recognizing physical and sexual abuse as such, interpreting these behaviours as jealousy and signs of love.⁴

When understood as such, dating violence is normally a personal experience characterized by feelings of shame, hindering calls for help for most adolescents. The fear of being blamed, that the secret will not be kept, that adults will pressure them to end the relationship or the fear of parental punishment keeps adolescents from disclosing the experience they are living. Their main confidants are usually friends, but in most cases, they do not have the conditions to provide due support, because they are also involved in abusive relationships or because they legitimize a set of beliefs that perpetuate the phenomenon.⁶ For this reason, violence in intimate relationships is a phenomenon surrounded by silence and pain, thus causing an underestimation of the real extent of the problem.¹

Acts of violence in teens romantic relationships are a social and important public health problem because, apart from the abusive acts, they can expose young people to other health risks such as sexual risk behaviours, increasing the likelihood of unplanned adolescent pregnancy⁷ or sexually transmitted diseases.⁷ According to some studies,^{3,8} episodes can go from insults, slander, threats, humiliation and slaps to more aggressive behaviour, which, although less frequent, may endanger the partner's life.⁹

Although it is commonly assumed that in these situations the man is the perpetrator and the woman is the victim, multiple investigations conducted in this area reveal that violence, especially non-sexual violence among dating adolescent couples, is often characterized by mutual exchanges of aggression.^{3,9-11} Furthermore, studies corroborate the idea that girls are more often the target of sexual victimization, having nevertheless greater self-defence

strategies with regards to violence, when compared to boys.¹² Justifications that are cultural and gender-specific in nature will form the basis of differences in conflict management among dating couples.

In 2000, the Center for Disease Control¹³ (CDC) reported that about 12% of dating adolescent couples was living in conflict situations. A Portuguese study, released in 2008^{14,15} conducted on a sample of 4667 young people between 13 and 29 years reported that between 25% and 30% of Portuguese young people already had been victims of violence in their intimate relationships. In several investigations, the most commonly received/perpetrated behaviours were "lesser forms" of violence, such as insults, slander or making serious claims to humiliate or hurt, yelling or threatening with intent to frighten, intentionally breaking or damaging objects and slapping,^{16,17} without significant gender differences.

In experiencing these situations, known risk and protection factors include psychological, biological and sociocultural factors including gender (in)equalities.¹

Adolescence has been regarded as a period of great vulnerability to intimate violence, given the emotional immaturity, inexperience with relationships and initiation into sexuality which characterise this stage. This is especially the case in younger adolescents as a result of poor communication and inappropriate perceptions and expectations about the partner's behaviour.¹ In this context, the integration of sex education in schools, as recommended in Portugal since 1990, can constitute an added value in recognising the behaviours of abuse and violence in dating relationships by its positive effect on knowledge and awareness of healthy values and attitudes that facilitate communication with partners and parents, thus promoting healthier relationships.¹⁸

It was in this context that the objectives of this study were defined: to characterise the behaviours of violence and to identify the factors of conflict in dating relationships between adolescent couples.

Material and methods

This was a cross-sectional, descriptive and correlational study conducted with a non-probabilistic sample of 243 mostly Portuguese adolescents; 56.0% were female, aged between 15 and 21, years old, mean 16.29 years (SD = 1.02), 71.2% living in rural areas and who attended between the 10th and 12th year of schooling. A questionnaire on socio-demographic and contextual characteristics of dating as well as the Inventory of Conflict in Dating Relationships among Adolescents, adapted from the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory,¹⁹ developed and validated by Wolfe, Scott, Reitzel-Jaffe, Wekerle, Grasley & Straatman (2001) and validated for the Portuguese population by Saavedra, Machado, Martins & Vieira in 2008.²⁰ This inventory allows us to evaluate the use of positive (or non-abusive) and abusive conflict resolution strategies in adolescent dating relationships, distinguishing behaviour of the self (perpetration – 35 items) and behaviour of partner(s) (victimization – 35 items). It assesses the occurrence of specific forms of abuse: threatening behaviour, relationship abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional or verbal abuse. It is completed individually by dating adolescents or those who have been in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3457261>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3457261>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)