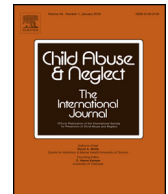




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Child Abuse & Neglect



### Research article

# One-sided and mutually aggressive couples: Differences in attachment, conflict prevalence, and coping

William J. Burk<sup>a,\*</sup>, Inge Seiffge-Krenke<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> University of Mainz, Germany

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 31 March 2015

Received in revised form 7 August 2015

Accepted 12 August 2015

Available online xxx

#### Keywords:

Romantic relationships

Adolescence

Physical and relational aggression

PERSON-oriented approach

### ABSTRACT

This study investigated concurrent links between adolescent romantic couples' reports of aggression (relational and physical) and relationship functioning (e.g., attachment security, conflict prevalence, coping strategies, jealousy, and affiliative and romantic relationship quality) using a pattern-oriented approach. The sample included 194 romantic partner dyads (*M*<sub>age</sub> = 16.99 years for females and *M*<sub>age</sub> = 18.41 years for males). A hierarchical cluster analysis identified five distinct subgroups of dyads based on male and female reports of relational and physical aggression, ranging from nonaggressive couples (42%), to those characterized by aggressive females (18%), aggressive males (14%), physically aggressive females (20%), and mutually aggressive females and males (6%). Clusters in which one partner was perceived as either relationally or physically aggressive were characterized by higher rates of conflict, less adaptive coping, and more jealousy (particularly in males). The mutually aggressive couples showed the least adaptive relationship functioning, with high rates of conflict, a deficit in reflection and emotion regulation in conflict situations, and a lack of affiliative relationship qualities. The discussion focuses on the formative character of aggression in these early romantic relations, the aggravating impact of mutual aggression on relationship functioning, and the gender-specific functions of aggression in relationships characterized by unilateral aggression.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Adolescent romantic experiences are a normative and salient aspect of adolescence. They are characterized by strong positive emotions such as happiness and infatuation (Brown, 1999; Demir, 2008) as well as negative emotions, extreme mood swings, and conflicts (Fisher, 2006; Joyner & Udry, 2000). In some situations romantic partners may act aggressively toward one another, and there is some indication that such aggressive behaviors emerge early in the relationship and are perpetuated over time (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). The present study was designed to shed light on how physical and relational aggression are related to other aspects of relationship functioning, such as affiliation, attachment, jealousy, and whether and how coping with conflicts occurs. Because aggressive interactions unfold in a dyadic context and involve perpetrators as well as victims, this study set out to examine the links between aggressive interactions and relationship functioning in adolescent couples from the perspectives of both partners. As there is diversity in romantic relationship development and quality, we adopted a person-oriented approach to identify distinct subgroups of couples based on dyadic reports of physical and relational aggression. We further explored differences in dyadic relationship functioning in these subgroups.

\* Corresponding author at: Behavioral Science Institute, Radboud University Nijmegen, P.O. Box 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

## Physical and Relational Aggression in Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

There is an extensive and informative body of research that has focused on physical aggression and violence within adolescents' romantic relationships (Connolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2010; Herrera, Wiersma, & Cleveland, 2008). Physical aggression is the intentional use of physical force that could hurt the partner and includes mildly aggressive behavior such as pushing, shoving, or scratching as well as severe violent behaviors such as choking, shaking, slapping, or attacking with weapons. Studies investigating aggression in adolescent romantic relationships have reported that a substantial proportion (between 12 and 65%) of romantically involved adolescents have experienced at least one act of physical aggression occurring in their relationship within a six month period (Gray & Foshee, 1997; O'Keefe, 2005), with prevalence reported in various studies differing as a function of the age of participants, as well as the type and severity of aggressive behaviors assessed. Within romantic relationships, 15% of the girls and 8% of the boys have reported repeated aggressive acts toward their partners (O'Leary & Slep, 2003). Many researchers have demonstrated the negative effects of physical aggression in adolescent romantic relationships and related it to externalizing problem behavior, depression, and drug and alcohol use (Jouriles, Garrido, Rosenfield, & McDonald, 2009; van Dulmen, Gony, Haydon, & Collins, 2008) as well as relationship deterioration and break-ups (Sprecher & Fehr, 1998).

Aggressive behavior, however, is not limited to physically aggressive and violent acts. Other forms of aggression encompass relational aggression, for example, name calling, verbal attacks, defamatory gossip, exclusion, subtle flirting with another partner in an effort to elicit jealousy, and threatening to end the relationship. Relationship aggression in romantic relationships is associated with psychosocial maladjustment, depression, and lower levels of relationship quality (Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Landbeater, Bannister, Ellis, & Yeung, 2008; Welsh, Grello, & Harper, 2003). Compared to the large body of research on physical aggression both in the romantic and the peer domains, research on relational aggression in romantic relationships has been relatively scant (Nocentini et al., 2011; O'Leary et al., 1989; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2008). The few existing studies pertaining to this topic have shown that relationship aggression is not only relatively common, but also quite damaging for overall development and for relationship formation and maintenance (Prinstein, Boegers, & Vernberg, 2001). There is also some evidence that relationship aggression is especially salient for females. Females, as compared to males, use and are more bothered by relational aggression, perceive it to have a greater impact on their relationship, and spend more time thinking about and discussing it (Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004).

As romantic aggression develops within a relational context, and because males and females differ in their use of aggression and perceptions of relationship functioning, a dyadic perspective is clearly needed to better understand the role of aggression in these close relationships. To date, the majority of studies have approached aggression in romantic relationships by investigating a single source (either the male or female), and mainly asking adolescents about their romantic experiences retrospectively. Reliance on a single reporter and use of retrospective reports tends to underestimate rates of aggression (Jouriles et al., 2009). Utilizing the reports of both relationship partners will provide a more nuanced understanding of male and female aggression in romantic relationship by not only examining associations between self-reports of aggression and relationship functioning, but also investigating associations between partner reports, e.g., the association between female reports of aggression and male reports of relationship functioning. In the subsequent subsections two types of correlates of romantic aggression are described: interpersonal conflicts and social-cognitive risk factors.

## Conflicts and Coping Styles as Correlates of Romantic Aggression

Romantic relationships are highly central and salient during adolescence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). Although many romantic partnerships formed during adolescence dissolve (Sprecher & Fehr, 1998), patterns of interactions in adolescents' romantic relationships have implications for subsequent relationships in adulthood (Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). For example, physical aggression, which is relatively stable over time within adolescents' romantic relationships (O'Leary & Slep, 2003), has also been found to predict aggression in adults' marital relationships (O'Leary et al., 1989). Thus, in the context of early romantic relationships, it is critical for adolescents to learn and practice constructive strategies for coping with and resolving interpersonal conflicts. Romantic experiences are associated with a number of stressors and conflicts because they alter existing relationships with parents and friends and may introduce conflicts of loyalty between a friend and a romantic partner (Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Schad, Szewedo, Antonishak, Hare, & Allen, 2008). A frequent source of conflict concerns how partners allocate their time: As romantic partners become increasingly important, the amount of time spent with best friends usually decreases. The frequency and intensity of conflicts is associated with romantic aggression. Specifically, adolescents who report dating aggression often describe higher levels of conflict and less satisfaction with the partner than those who do not report having an aggressive partner (Williams et al., 2008).

Adolescents' romantic stress revolves around concerns about identity, about how their romantic relationships might affect their interactions with peers or their standing in the peer group, and uncertainty about how to act in the romantic relationship. Seiffge-Krenke and Nieder (2001) found that early adolescents reported having experienced higher levels of stress and lower levels of intimacy and affection in their romantic relationships than middle and late adolescents. Thus, early adolescents who date may find themselves in new and stressful scenarios that fail to offer them emotional support. By middle adolescence, romantic stress decreases and greater intimacy and affection in the relationship may offset some of the demanding aspects of the dating experience. In addition, increasing coping competence (e.g., the more frequent use of active coping strategies such as discussing the problem with the romantic partner or seeking support from peers) contributes to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832547>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832547>

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