EXAMINING ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE BELIEFS, AND FAMILY AND PEER FACTORS IN RELATION TO TEEN RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

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Examining Acceptance of Violence Beliefs, and Family and Peer Factors in
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"The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you will see."
-Winston Churchill
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Examining Acceptance of Violence Beliefs, and Family and Peer Factors in Relation to Teen Relationship Violence
by
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Teen relationship violence (TRV) is a serious problem that is associated with numerous negative consequences that include depression, substance abuse, poor school performance, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Centers for Disease Control, 2013). Researchers examining risk factors associated with TRV have focused on individual factors (e.g., acceptance of violence beliefs) and family factors (e.g., exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting), but fewer studies have examined peer influences (i.e., perceptions of peer TRV) in addition to these individual and family factors over time. The research objective was to examine the joint predictive ability of several time one risk factors across individual, family, and peer contexts, and to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of later TRV when accounting for the predictive ability of other risk factors. The specific risk factors examined were: acceptance of violence, exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting, and perception of peer TRV to determine the predictability of perpetration of teen relationship violence. Two hundred and four participants (93 boys, 111 girls) were recruited from 7th, 9th, and 11th-grade classes in a middle and high school in south San Diego County. Students ranged in age from 12 to 17 years, and 75% were Latinos. They completed surveys twice over a 10-month period; surveys assessed perpetration of TRV, acceptance of couple violence beliefs, exposure to interparental conflict, exposure to harsh parenting and perceptions of peer TRV. Regression analyses revealed that the perception of peer TRV and harsh parenting were significant predictors of TRV 10 months later. Implications for school-based prevention programs targeting educators and parents of ethnically diverse middle school and high school-aged youth are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teen relationship violence (TRV) or dating violence among teenagers is a serious problem that has been well documented. Some of the negative consequences of relationship violence include anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance abuse (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Jouriles, McDonald, Garrido, Rosenfield, & Brown, 2005; Reed, Silverman, Raj, Decker, & Miller, 2011). Additionally, O’Leary, Slep, Avery-Leaf, and Cascardi (2008) found that 22% of men and 33% of girls in dating relationships reported that they had injured their partners. Adolescent girls are more likely than boys to report physical injuries and psychological distress from being victimized by a partner.

Literature examining risks associated with TRV have focused on individual factors such as attitudes and beliefs associated with violent behaviors. For example, attitudes about gender roles and acceptance of violence beliefs have been found to relate to dating (e.g., Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). Furthermore, several studies have also examined family influences on TRV, focusing primarily on family members modeling relationship violence. For example, studies have found a relationship between exposure to domestic violence and interparental conflict and later involvement in TRV (e.g., Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Jouriles, Mueller, Rosenfield, McDonald, & Dodson, 2012; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003). In addition, studies further examining family influences have linked harsh parenting and child abuse to TRV as well (e.g., Gomez, 2011; Wekerle et al., 2009).

Although previous literature has focused on individual and family risk factors associated with TRV, fewer studies have examined peer influences. Research has found that teens are often more willing to discuss their relationships with other teens than family members. Wolfe and Feiring (2000) found that the influence that peers have on teen relationships varies depending on the stage of the relationships; the beginning of any
relationship is a crucial period for peers to influence the engagement of negative behaviors. Subsequently, in 2004 Arriaga and Foshee’s study explored the relationships between peers’ dating violence, exposure to interparental conflict, and TRV perpetration. They found that both peer dating violence and exposure to interparental conflict acted as antecedents and were strongly predictive of TRV perpetration.

Given the central importance given to peer influences during this developmental period, more research is needed examining the relative contribution of individual, family, and peer factors to TRV. This study examines perpetration of TRV during a critical period when dating and dating violence often first begins, in adolescents between the ages of 13-18. In addition to focusing on individual risk factors (i.e., acceptance of violence beliefs) and family factors (i.e., exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting), this 10-month longitudinal study will examine peer influences (i.e., the perception of peer TRV) on TRV in 7th, 9th, and 11th-grade students at a second time point. The research objective was to examine the joint predictive ability of several time one risk factors across individual, family, and peer contexts, and to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of later TRV when accounting the predictive ability of other risk factors.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Among the many concerns plaguing teenagers, relationship violence has been of increasing global concern in the United States due to its high prevalence. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013), 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 6 boys have experienced some type of relationship abuse before the age of 18. Teen Relationship Violence (TRV) is a type of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and is defined as any physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence, including stalking and online perpetration, among teens in current or past relationships (CDC, 2013). Researchers have used different definitions and report varying prevalence rates for different types of TRV. For example, Carden (1994) defined physical violence as involving the use of physical force to control an intimate partner (e.g., pushing, grabbing, slapping, biting, throwing an object at the person, punching, and assaulting with a weapon). Rothman, Johnson, Azrael, Hall, and Weinberg in 2010 found that 9.6% of males and 26.6% of females reported using physical aggression against their current dating partner. Carden (1994) describe sexual abuse as forcing partners to engage in sexual activities against his or her will through the use of unwanted kissing, touching, or sexual coercion. Correspondingly, Silverman, Raj, Mucci, and Hathaway in 2001 found that 20% of the female high school students reported sexual abuse in a dating relationship. Lastly, psychological abuse was defined Carden (1994) as the use of verbal or nonverbal behaviors intended to isolate, humiliate, intimidate, or control a partner. In 2012, a study found that 38% of boys and 44% of girls in their sample reported experiencing psychological violence in their relationship (Orpinas, Nahapetyan, Song, McNicholas, & Reeves, 2012).
CONSEQUENCES OF TEEN RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE (TRV)

TRV is associated with numerous negative consequences that include depression, low self-esteem, substance abuse, suicidal behavior, poor school performance, and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; CDC, 2013). Silverman et al. (2001) reported that teenage girls who are in abusive relationships were more likely to have substance abuse problems (i.e., heavy smoking, binge drinking, driving after drinking, cocaine use), be involved in unhealthy weight control (i.e., diet pill use, laxative use), demonstrate risky sexual behaviors (i.e., first intercourse before the age of 15 years, not using a condom at last intercourse, more than 3 sex partners in the past 3 months), become pregnant, and suicidal ideation and behaviors.

Although few studies have investigated the long-term impact of dating violence on adolescents and adults, Ackard et al. (2007) examined adolescent dating violence and subsequent health risks between 1999 and 2004. At Wave 1, the authors found that suicidal ideation and substance use and/or abuse were health consequences of teen relationship violence for both male and females. For example, 30.4% of male participants and 50.0% of female participants that reported adolescent dating violence had significant health risks (Ackard et al., 2007).

ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE

Several studies have found an association between individual factors, specifically, acceptance of violence beliefs and perpetration of TRV. For example, Lichter and McCloskey (2004) discussed three types of dating beliefs that can have an effect on relationships: family roles, beliefs about traditional gender roles, and attitudes justifying the use of aggression in dating relationships. They report that traditional attitudes regarding family roles and acceptance of violence beliefs related to relationship violence. Similarly, in 2004, Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, and Collins examined the relationship between dating violence and attitudes and knowledge of dating violence in a Latino population. The results indicated that attitudes about use of violence and dating violence norms were negatively correlated with dating violence, for both boys and girls. In 2004, Hickman, Jaycox, and Aronoff looked at teens perpetrating in dating violence and the use of violence. The results
showed that for girls, the justification for dating violence was a strong predictor of using violence in their relationships. Furthermore, Foshee et al. (2001) found that for teen males, holding attitudes that are accepting of dating violence predicted dating violence perpetration. Additionally, Karlsson, Temple, Weston, and Le (2015) found that both genders were more accepting of female-perpetrated violence as opposed to male-perpetrated or general dating violence. Similarly, Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen, and Arnett (2000) found that while dating violence was viewed unacceptable overall, there was still more acceptance for females versus males to perpetrate dating violence. Subsequently, Shen, Chiu, and Gao (2012) described that Chinese student teenagers’ beliefs about circumstances that justify the use of violence on one’s own dating partner. Teens were mostly in agreement that violence is okay if the partner hits them first during an argument if they are caught flirting with someone else, and if they cheat. Similarly, in 2009, Edelen, McCaffrey, Marshall, and Jaycox found that teens expressed approval to the use of violence by the opposite sex as long as the partner was also using violence.

EXPOSURE TO INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT

In addition to individual influences such as acceptance of violence beliefs, research has identified several parent and family factors that may relate to increased risks for dating violence (e.g., Cantrell, MacIntyre, Sharkey, & Thompson, 1995). For example, 65% of mothers who reported IPV within their romantic relationships had children who were later involved in severe relationship violence as teens (Jouriles, Mueller, et al., 2012). Additionally, the authors examined whether teens’ experiences of harsh parenting and their exposure to severe IPV each contribute to the prediction of dating violence perpetration. Results indicated that only severe IPV was associated with teen dating violence perpetration. Subsequently, Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) were looking to test the impact of parental conflict on adolescent dating behavior. Results indicated that exposure to interparental conflict was related to the boys’ tendency to view aggression in a romantic relationship as justifiable. However, interparental conflict was not associated with girls’ reports of aggression toward their dating partners.

Research reports that continuous exposure to violent parental role models may encourage the development of violence later in children. For example, studies have found
that children who witnessed aggression between their parents were more likely to be involved in relationship violence (physical and emotional) as adults (Kalmuss, 1984; Kwong et al., 2003). Additionally, Ehrensaft et al. (2003) found that over a ten-year period, exposure to parental violence put participants at a higher risk of being a victim of IPV than children not exposed to parental violence. Witnessing violence between parents can teach children to believe that it is normal to act that way towards others because it is occurring at a crucial age (O'Keefe, 1998). Similarly, Gagné, Lavoie, and Hébert (2005) report a link between witnessing interparental conflict and perpetrating physical and emotional dating violence.

Researchers have begun to examine the mechanisms by which exposure to family violence may influence TRV. Ponce, Williams, and Allen (2004) found that having a history of family violence was significantly related to having more disturbed schemas, leading participants to be more likely to find relationship violence acceptable. Other studies have suggested that acceptance of violence beliefs may mediate the relationship between exposure to conflict and violence in the family, and later TRV. For example, Clarey, Hokoda, and Ulloa (2010) report that acceptance of violence beliefs mediated the relationship between family violence and TRV. Additionally, Karlsson et al. (2015) found that acceptance of violence partially mediated the relationship between exposure to interparental conflict and TRV perpetration. Exposure to violence between parents may indicate to teenagers that violence is an acceptable or effective means of resolving conflicts between partners.

Other researchers have proposed other mediators influencing the relationship between exposure to family violence and TRV. Jouriles, McDonald, Mueller, and Grych (2012) suggest that repeated exposure to chronic family violence renders teens who are more sensitive to becoming reactive to similar stressors with dating partners. Other factors (e.g., trauma symptoms, lack of anger control skills, lack of parental monitoring), associated with exposure to violence, have also been proposed to mediate the relationship between family violence and TRV (Friedlander, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2007; Lavoie et al., 2002; Wolf & Foshee, 2003).

**EXPOSURE TO HARSH OR ABUSIVE PARENTING**

In addition to exposure to interparental conflict, exposure to violent parents who perpetrate violence towards their children has been linked to TRV. For example, Bernard and
Bernard (1983) report that girls who were abused by their fathers as children were more likely to be victims in their current dating relationships. A one-year longitudinal study done on youth in grades 7 to 12 found that 19% of IPV perpetrators and 18% of IPV victims reported abuse in their childhood (Gomez, 2011). Similarly, Wekerle et al. (2009) examined teen relationship violence in adolescents who Child Protection Services reported had experienced physical or emotional abuse as children. The results indicated that females who experienced either physical or emotional abuse were more likely to be victims of teen relationship violence than females who had not experienced earlier abuse.

Another study exploring family factors in relation to TRV examined harsh parenting and exposure to interparental conflict in teens who had been involved in TRV (McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). This study examined marital violence and children who witnesses fathers abuse their mothers and assessed the youths’ expression of physical aggression towards dating partners, peers, and parents. The results indicated that children from violent homes were more likely to be aggressive against their dating partner. Additionally, males were more likely to be aggressive towards their mother as teenagers if their father was also abusive towards his partner. Lavoie et al., in 2002, looked at family violence (e.g., harsh parenting, lack of parental monitoring, and interparental conflict) in late childhood and early adolescence and teen dating violence. Their results suggested that exposure to harsh parenting practices in late childhood predicted future dating violence. They also report that lack of parental monitoring in late childhood was also related to experiences of dating violence in early adolescence.

**Peer Factors in Relation to Teen Relationship Violence**

Most of the research examining risk factors associated with TRV has focused on individual factors (e.g., beliefs) and family factors (e.g., exposure to family violence). However, increasingly, researchers have investigated peer influences on TRV as they note that during adolescence, teenagers tend to identify with others of the same age (e.g., Sullivan et al., 2012). Hertzog and Rowley (2013) indicated that teens believed their peers have less healthy relationship beliefs than the participants themselves. For example, participants believed that their male peers would support “calling each other degrading names are a part
of normal fights between couples”, but participants themselves did not endorse this belief. Peers serve a purpose in helping define violence in a relationship and they influence beliefs about whether name calling and fighting is normal between couples (Friedlander et al., 2007).

It is also important to mention that the perception of having friends who perpetrate teen relationship violence is associated with one’s own perpetration (Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009). A study found that teens who have perpetrated in their current relationship believed that 20% of their peers had also perpetrated in their own relationships (Reed et al., 2011). Additionally, Foshee et al. (2013) found that peers play a significant role in influencing perpetration of TRV. This study reported that the more friends a girl had, the lower levels of dating violence perpetration they tended to report, but the same effect was not seen in boys. Subsequently, Reidy et al. (2015) found that teens with fewer peers had stronger acceptance of dating violence attitudes than those with more friends.

GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines risk factors associated with TRV perpetration in adolescents 13 –18 years. Several broad theoretical perspectives, such as Bandura’s (1973) social cognitive theory, attachment theory (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1991; Bowlby, 1969), and social ecological theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986) guide the focus of the study by linking the literature on individual, family and peer factors.

SOCIAL LEARNING

Bandura, in 1973, described people as having the capacity to learn new behaviors every day. Some of these behaviors can be attributed to two types of learning methods: learning by imitating, experiencing, and observing the behaviors of others and motivational reinforcement (Bandura, 1973). Bandura suggests that people model people who are most similar to them (e.g., same-sex parent, peers versus parents). Several studies examining risk factors associated with TRV propose social learning as the mechanism by which TRV is learned. Social learning theory suggests that observing interparental aggression affects boys and girls differently, depending on which parent is the aggressor and the recipient (O’Leary, 1988). O’Keefe (1998) describes teen males witnessing their father hitting their mothers and
learning to repeat the behavior with their own dating partner. Additionally, Arriaga and Foshee (2004) suggested that adolescents learn to be violent toward dating partners by observing the behavior of important others (e.g., models such as parents and friends) and its consequences. The intergenerational transmission theory posits that children may model abusive behavior as adults either because they were abused as children or because they witnessed interparental abuse (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998).

**Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory has also been applied to the understanding of individual and family risk factors associated with TRV. Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as the bond between parent and infant that develops over time. According to this theory, children form mental representations of relationships based on their history with their parents; these mental representations are referred to as an internal working model. This internal working model, which reflects the quality of early attachment relationships, then influences the quality of later relationships. An infant who is securely attached will expect other people to act in a supportive way, and thus will act in ways that will encourage future secure attachment relationships. In contrast, infants who have insecure attachment will expect others to act in ways that are inconsistent, unresponsive, or scary, and will act in ways that encourage people to show those behaviors, leading to further insecurely attached relationships.

Researchers have examined attachment theory in relation to relationship violence, particularly in adult couples involved in domestic violence. Hazan and Shaver (1987) reported that insecurely attached individuals characterized their most important relationship as involving jealousy and emotional lability, among other characteristics like fear of intimacy (avoidant style) and obsessive preoccupation (anxious-ambivalent style). This study found that secure individuals tended to describe their connection towards a partner as happy, friendly, and trusting, reporting a positive view of partnerships, as compared to persons endorsing insecure attachment styles. Similarly, Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, and Bartholomew (1994) report a link between insecure attachment styles (anxious and ambivalent) and perpetration of domestic violence in men. Both insecure attachment styles were described by the authors as negative self-models of intimacy, causing the men to be at risk to be hypersensitive and to cause harm within their intimate relationships. The study
indicates that both insecure attachment styles correlated with scores on dominance/isolation and emotional abuse scales.

Wekerle and Wolfe (1998) related insecure attachment to the perpetration of TRV in adolescents with a history of family violence. The authors suggest that the earlier attachment with parents was influenced by those children suffering from maltreatment, which then influenced their dating relationships. Similarly, Ponce et al. (2004) suggest that exposure to family violence leads children to develop negative schemas about relationships that lead them to find violence more acceptable in intimate relationships when they are older. Thus, the research presented above provides support that attachment theory can be useful in explaining risk factors (e.g., relationship beliefs, family violence) associated with TRV.

**ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) states that development is the result of the relationship between an individual and their environments. This theory includes several systems in the individual’s environment that influence the individual and also influence each other.

The microsystem refers to the relation between the development of a person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g., family, peer group, school, neighborhood, workplace, etc.). A setting is defined as a place with particular physical features in which the individuals engage in particular activities in particular roles (e.g., daughter, parent, teacher, employee, etc.) for particular periods of time. The factors of place, time, physical features, activity, participant, and role constitute the elements of a setting. In this case, it is the relation that is experienced by the adolescent with other people, such as family, peers, or teachers.

Research has identified factors within the microsystem, specifically within the family, that are related to TRV. For example, Jouriles, Mueller, et al. (2012) found that severe interparental conflict was associated with teen dating violence perpetration. Similarly, Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) found that exposure to interparental conflict was related to teens’ beliefs that aggression in a romantic relationship is justifiable. In addition to exposure to interpersonal conflict, other family factors within the microsystem that influence TRV is
exposure to harsh parenting (Lavoie et al., 2002; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003) and what else? If there isn’t another example, just say another factor instead of “factors.”

Other factors within the microsystem, that may be increasingly influential during adolescence involve peers. For example, teenagers might be surrounded by peers involved in relationship violence on a regular basis, and this could create a negative schema about their own relationship with a partner (Ponce et al., 2004). The perception of having friends who perpetrate teen relationship violence is associated with one’s own perpetration of violence (Miller et al., 2009), again demonstrating that peers in their immediate environment can influence teens’ likelihood of perpetrating TRV. Thus, several studies describe factors within the microsystem that can influence TRV.

The mesosystem involves the connections between systems within the microsystem, for example, the interactions between home and school or between family and friends are part of the mesosystem (Bergman, 1992). For example, a parent who is involved with their child’s school performance as a way to help improve their child’s overall achievement would be within the mesosystem. Other examples of the mesosystem that may be associated with TRV include: parental involvement in their child’s school, parent involvement in child-peer relationships, parents meeting and forming relationships with dating partners, and school-based outreach to parents focused on reducing risk factors for children.

The exosystem involves the indirect influence of the broader environment that does not directly interact with the adolescent (beyond the microsystem) but some aspect of the microsystem influences the adolescent. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), there are three factors within the exosystem that are especially likely to affect the development of the child, primarily through their influence on family members and thus on family processes. The first of these is the parents' workplace, the second is parents' social networks, and the third includes community influences on family functioning. For example, work stressors may affect the family functioning and impacted the child’s development at home. Any aspect of the broader exosystem environment that affects parents, teachers, or peers could in turn affect an individual’s development and TRV for that individual.

The macrosystem reflects any type of ideology that influences all of the other systems (microsystem mesosystem, exosystem). Cultural influences on individuals, families and communities are considered part of the macrosystem. In our study, large majorities of the
teens were from Mexican immigrant families, and thus, many of them shared a common cultural background comprised of common identity, heritage, and values. As one example of a macrosystem effect, the family violence experienced by older generations within the Latino culture might affect the type of relationship younger Latinos have with their partners. The ideologies of the macrosystem evolve over time because the following generation would have their own set of personal values and beliefs. A study by Ulloa et al. (2004) found an association between acculturation and the perception of Latino youth regarding abusive behavior and associated sanctions regarding that abuse. The study found that Latino youth accepted the idea of being abused by their partner but it was unacceptable for them to become the abusers.

Another example of a possible cultural influence on TRV is described by Rayburn et al. (2007). This study examined the justification of using violence, attitudes, and abusive behavior expressed among Latino teens. The authors suggest that in Latino culture it was acceptable for female perpetrators to be aggressive in their relationships but it was not acceptable for Latino men to be the aggressors in the relationship.

Yet Gover, Jennings, and Tewksbury (2009) report another example of an influence on TRV within the macrosystem. They describe a federal law for preventing dating violence in schools. The idea of this initiative is that the federal law acts as a general blueprint and it is up to the districts to interpret and implement it in the school system. In 2014, Jackson, Bouffard, and Fox were evaluating the effectiveness of the policies that were set in place by several school districts to prevent TRV. The authors found that a majority of the districts had developed and adopted the basic parts of policies for identifying and punishing perpetrators while neglecting to implement policies that would benefit the victims.

The last level in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Theory is the chronosystem. The chronosystem reflects the influence of the passage of time on the individual, such as major life transitions or historical events that influence development. Bronfenbrenner (1986) described the life transitions in the chronosystem as normative (e.g., school entry, puberty, driving, working, marriage, retirement) and as non-normative (e.g., severe illness in the family, divorce, dating violence, moving, and death of a family member). For example, a child immigrating to a new country is a major life transition that is likely to have an effect on the child’s development. Major life transitions that may be particularly like to be associated
with perpetration or victimization may include: transition to middle school, going on a first date, onset of sexual activity.

**Research Objectives**

The research presented above indicates that teen relationship violence is a prevalent and serious problem. The research objective was to examine the joint predictive ability of several time one risk factors across individual, family, and peer contexts, and to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of 10 month TRV when accounting the predictive ability of other risk factors. The specific risk factors examined were: acceptance of violence, exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting, and perception of peer TRV to determine the predictability of teen relationship violence. Few studies have examined all these variables together in one study, or have examined these variables longitudinally. The purpose of this study is to broaden our understanding of risk factors associated with TRV by examining individual, family and peer influences as it relates to TRV perpetration in adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 over a 10-month period. Given past research, this study will determine what predictors are unique in the contribution of teen relationship violence.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Two hundred and thirty-nine participants from an urban neighborhood were recruited from 7th, 9th, and 11th-grade classes in south San Diego County. Out of these 239 participants in this study, 72 of them were not able to continue in the study, reflecting 30% attrition. This study focuses on examining the 162 participants for whom there was both time one and time two data.

Students ranged in age from 12 to 17 years old (M= age 14.91, SD = 1.57). Seventh graders were 22 boys and 18 girls (M age = 12.78, SD =.55); ninth graders were 25 boys and 27 girls (M age =14.54, SD = .56); and eleventh graders were 29 boys and 45 girls (M age = 16.45, SD =.50). The sample was ethnically diverse, composed of 2.4% Asian, .6% African-American, 40.1% Mexican American, 12% Mexican, 22.2% Latino, 0.6% Filipino, 11.4% White, and 9% other.

PROcedures

This is a cross-sequential study examining TRV and related individual, family and peer factors in teens recruited from 7th, 9th and 11th-grade classes (ages 12 – 17). The researchers visited classrooms in one middle school and one high school to describe the study to students and hand out parental consent forms. Researchers returned one week later to collect parental consents, hand out student assent forms and administer a pencil and paper survey to those who wished to participate. Participants completed the survey in thirty minutes in the library, with researchers available to answer questions and to supervise to ensure privacy and individual answers. This procedure was repeated 10 months later to the participants who had given consent to participate in the study at Time 1. Students were given
a debriefing at both time points, a list of referrals to local counseling resources, and school staff was given educational workshops and resources as well.

**Attrition**

As indicated above, there was a 30% attrition rate for this study. There is not data documenting why these participants were lost to follow-up. The students could have moved, decided not to participate at time 2, or simply not have been at school the day of the time 2 assessment. A series of independent t-tests were completed to examine differences between participants who remained in the study and those who dropped out for all the key variables of interest: perpetration, acceptance of violence, family violence, and perception of peer TRV. The only significant difference between groups was found for interparental conflict. Specifically, there was significantly more reported interparental conflict for participants who remained in the study ($M = 10.39, SD = 4.998$) compared to those who dropped out of the study ($M = 7.99, SD = 5.319, t(223) = 3.23, p = .001$). This suggests that students who remained in the study may actually have been a higher risk, reflected by the higher reported interparental conflict, than those who dropped out. This also suggests that data is not completely missing at random. Because of this, the conservative approach was taken to only examine data for participants with data at both time one and time two. It is noteworthy that perpetration at time one, the key dependent variable examined, was not significantly different for those who remained in the study ($M=6.16, SD = 4.559$) versus those who dropped out ($M=6.50, SD = 4.375, t(217) = .50, p = .62$)

**Measures**

The Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationship Inventory (Wolfe et al., 2001) is a 34 item self-response measure using a 4-point Likert scale with answers ranging from one (never) to four (often). Twenty-four items assess perpetration of TRV in five subscales. The Physical abuse subscale (4 items) yielded a reliability alpha of .81; a sample item is “I kicked, hit, or punched my dating partner.” The Sexual abuse subscale (3 items) yielded a reliability of .68; a sample item is “I touched dating partner sexually when they didn’t want it.” Verbal-emotional abuse (10 items) yielded a reliability of .93; a sample item is “I said things just to make my dating partner angry.” Threatening Abuse (4 items) yielded a
reliability of .60; a sample item is “Threatened to throw something at the other person.”
Relational Abuse (3 items) yielded a reliability of .53; a sample item is “I said things to my
dating partner’s friends about him/her to turn them against my dating partner.”

The measure of Acceptance of Couple Violence was developed by Foshee, Fothergill,
and Stuart (1992). The measure has 9 items and assesses acceptance of male on female
violence, acceptance of female on male violence, and acceptance of general violence. Sample
questions include “Girls sometimes deserve to be hit by the boys they date,” “A girl angry
enough to hit her boyfriend must love him very much,” and “Sometimes violence is the only
way to express your feelings.” The respondents are asked to circle the option that
corresponds to their beliefs, on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to
“strongly agree.” The Cronbach alpha for this scale is .81.

Exposure to Interparental Conflict was assessed using a scale developed by Moos and
Moos (1994). The Cronbach alpha was .85. Sample items include “My parents often insult or
yell at each other” and “My parents have serious arguments”. Students rate how true each
statement is on a 5-point Likert scale labeled “Never, A Little, Sometimes, Pretty Much, A
Lot”.

Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ) is an 18 item scale that was modified from
the original 62 item PPQ scale (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). The Cronbach
Alpha for the authoritarian scale was .92; subscales include items that assess verbal hostility
(e.g., "Explodes in anger towards child"), corporal punishment (e.g., "Spanks when our child
is disobedient") non-reasoning, punitive strategies (e.g., "Uses threats as punishment with
little or no justification", and directiveness (e.g., "Scolds and criticizes to make child
improve"). Students rate how true each statement is on a 5-point Likert scale labeled at its
endpoints “Never, A Little, Sometimes, Pretty Much, A Lot”.

Perception of Peer TRV scale was derived from Wolfe et al., 2001 CADRI scale that
measures peers’ perception of teen relationship violence. The adapted scale consists of 6
different items measuring the perception of abusive dating behaviors of peers. The sample
items were teens rating the perception of peer’s relationship violence, 2 of the items were
physical “Pushed or shoved their dating partner”, 2 of the items were emotional “Yelled at
their dating partner”, and 2 of the items were sexual” Kissed their dating partner when the
partner did not want it”. Students rated on a 5-point Likert scale labeled “None of Them,
Very Few of Them, Some of Them, Most of Them, All of Them.”. A Cronbach score on this scale was found to be .80, revealing good internal consistency.

**PROPOSED ANALYSIS**

A multiple regression analysis was used to determine which time one variables predicted perpetration at time two. A two-step process was used to control for age and gender at time one. The process of backwards elimination was then used to determine the best predictor model after considering the control variables. The backwards elimination process sequentially removed variables that do not contribute to the model by significantly accounting a substantial amount of variance after considering the other independent variables. A change in R-squared was computed from step 1 to step 2 to reflect the variance accounted for by the reduced model after controlling for age and gender.

![Thesis mind map](image)

**Figure 1. Thesis mind map.**
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVES

One hundred and forty-three teens (59.9%) reported perpetrating at least one act of dating violence during the assessment period (90 females and 76 males). The mean score on the CADRI scale was 6.17 (SD = 4.489, range: 0-19), with 78 females and 64 males reporting perpetrating in their dating relationships.

For teens' experiencing some perception of peer TRV, 76.2% (182/239) of the teens reported having a peer involved in at least one act of severe dating violence in their lifetime. The mean score on the perception of peer TRV scale was 3.51 (SD = 3.422, range: 0-15), with 123 females and 103 males experiencing some type of perception of peer TRV. Almost all of the teens, 79.5% (190/239), reported experiencing at least one type of harsh parenting during their lifetime. The mean score on the parenting practices questionnaire scale was 28.48 (SD = 17.457, range: 0-82), with 97 females and 87 males experiencing some type of harsh parenting.

For teens' experiencing some interparental conflict, 91.8% (201/219) of the teens reported having their parents involved in at least one act of conflict in their lifetime. The mean score on the exposure to interparental conflict scale was 9.67 (SD = 5.201, range: 0-21) with 118 females and 83 males experiencing some type of interparental conflict. For teens' experiencing some acceptance of violence, 98.6% (215/218) of the teens reported having used violence on a dating partner. The mean score on the acceptance of couple violence scale was 7.42 (SD = 3.640, range: 0-27), with 119 females and 96 males experiencing some type of acceptance of violence.

Pearson’s correlations were used to explore overall associations between the predictor and outcome variables focused on in the current study. These correlations indicated a significant association between TRV perpetration and interparental conflict ($r = .229, p$
These correlations indicated a significant association between interparental conflict and harsh parenting \((r = .430, p = .000)\), perception of peer TRV \((r = .185, p = .006)\). There was also a significant association between harsh parenting and perception of peer TRV \((r = .284, p = .000)\). (see Table 1 for the matrix of correlations).

### Table 1. Correlation of Predictor and Outcome Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>TRV Perpetration</th>
<th>Acceptance of violence</th>
<th>Interparental conflict</th>
<th>Harsh parenting</th>
<th>Perception of peer TRV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>TRV Perpetration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of violence</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0.229****</td>
<td>0.430****</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interparental conflict</td>
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<td>0.637</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.430****</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsh parenting</td>
<td>0.331****</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.185**</td>
<td>0.284****</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of peer TRV</td>
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<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( \leq .05 \), ** \( \leq .01 \), *** \( \leq .005 \), **** \( \leq .001 \)

### Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using the backward elimination technique to find the best significant predictive model. The following variables were entered into the model: age, gender, perception of peer TRV, harsh parenting, interparental conflict, and acceptance of violence. The backward elimination method removed all independent variables that did not significantly contribute to the variance explained in the dependent variable. The final predictive model included only: gender, perception of peer TRV, and harsh parenting. The control variable entered at step one, age \((\beta = .207, p < .012)\), and gender \((\beta = .222, p < .007)\) significantly accounted for a portion of the variance in perpetration \((R^2 = .316, F(2,137) = 7.579, p < .001)\).

It is noteworthy to mention that perpetration of TRV was reported more often by the female participants \((\beta = .222, p < .007)\). Additionally, TRV perpetration was higher in older teens \((\beta = .207, p < .012)\). The combination of perception of peer TRV and harsh parenting at time one significantly accounted for a substantial amount of variance in perpetration above and beyond the control variables \((R^2 = .526, \Delta R^2 = .177, F(4,135) = 12.890, p < .001)\).
<.001). Specifically, higher perception of peer TRV at time one predicted more perpetration at time two (β = .342, p < .001). An increase of harsh parenting at time one predicted more perpetration at time two (β = .184, p < .019). Interparental conflict and acceptance of violence did not significantly contribute to the overall model. (See Table 2 for Multiple Regression Analysis)

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Key Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Step 1</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>2,137</td>
<td>7.579</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>4,135</td>
<td>12.890</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of peer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsh parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent Variable: Perpetration
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY

The main focus of this study was to examine individual, family and peer risk factors related to teen relationship violence (TRV) in adolescents aged 12 to 17 years old. The research objective was to examine the joint predictive ability of several time one risk factors across individual, family, and peer context and to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of later TRV when accounting for the predictive ability of the other risk factors. The specific risk factors examined were: acceptance of violence, exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting, and perception of peer TRV to determine the predictability of teen relationship violence. The study is important because peer factors are understudied as a risk factor for TRV, despite the importance peers play in influencing at-risk behaviors in teens (Sullivan et al., 2012). In addition, few studies have examined individual, family and peer risk factors in the same study, or have examined the influence on TRV over time.

The results of this study highlight the importance of TRV in that over half of the participants reported that they had at one point perpetrated at least one act of dating violence. Moreover, this study found that 76.2% of the teens perceived their peers had perpetrated TRV. The statistics for peer perpetration of TRV are high compared to those found in the literature by Reed and colleagues (2011), which indicated that in cases where a teen perpetrates TRV, 20% reported that their peers were also involved in at least one act of severe dating violence in their lifetime. Furthermore, this study found that 79.5% of the teens had experienced some type of harsh parenting compared to Gomez (2011), which found that only 19% of the population had suffered from some type of harsh parenting during their lifetime. Although the statistics provided by this study are more prevalent, other studies examined severe parenting behaviors that included abuse. In this study, harsh parenting was assessed using questions that asked teens to report parenting behaviors such as, “argue with
you,” “scold or criticize you when your behavior doesn't,” “yell or shout when you misbehave,” and “tell you what to do.” Comparatively, items included in the Gomez (2011) study assessed behaviors perpetrated by a parent or caregiver before the sixth grade, that included being slapped, kicked, or hit and being forced to have sex. This would account for the difference in prevalence rates described between this study and past literature. Moreover, the older the participant, the more likely they were to perpetrate. Subsequently, the female participants were more likely to report perpetrating a dating partner.

The findings from this study indicate that a combination of teens' experience with harsh parenting and perception of peer TRV predicted later teen relationship violence perpetration. Specifically, harsh parenting at time one predicted more perpetration of TRV at time two. Additionally, more perceived peer TRV at time one predicted more TRV perpetration at time two. These results suggest that out of all of the multiple predictors of teen relationship violence examined in this study, the perception of peer TRV and harsh parenting were the strongest predictors given that only these two variables contributed to a predictive model after taking into account the control variables of age and gender. It is therefore important in future research to take into consideration both peer and family context to understand the emergence of teen relationship violence.

Even though interparental conflict did not significantly contribute to the regression model-predicting perpetration of TRV in this study, there was an association between TRV perpetration and interparental conflict. It is likely that interparental conflict did not predict well in the overall model because interparental conflict was also correlated with harsh parenting, and harsh parenting was more salient of a predictor of TRV perpetration than was interparental conflict (accounted for the mutual variance of these two variables). Many studies have reported an association between parental violence and TRV (e.g. Jouriles, Mueller, et al., 2012). In this study, interparental conflict was broadly defined as the quarreling between partners whereas domestic violence was defined as the abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) between partners. In this study the teens were asked if their parents: insult or yell at each other, had serious arguments, argued about the same things over and over again, fought a lot, often criticize each other, and if they sometimes got so angry they threw things. Thus, again, differences in measurement may explain why our study did not find that exposure to interparental conflict contributed to predicting to TRV.
Although this study did not replicate the results of several other studies that link exposure to interparental conflict and acceptance of violence beliefs to TRV (e.g., Clarey et al., 2010; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004), the present results are consistent with those of at least one other study suggesting that harsh parenting contributes to the perpetration of teen relationship violence over and above interparental conflict (Jouriles, Mueller, et al., 2012). Another study (Bernard & Bernard, 1983) that is consistent with the results from this study reported that harsh parenting was a significant contributor to teen dating violence. However, it is important to notice that family violence (e.g. Interparental conflict, harsh parenting) has the ability to affect the teens development of TRV and it could be better understood by the attachment model (Bowlby, 1969) that bases its theory on children's internal working model that forms a mental representation of their parents' relationships. Another factor in this study that affected the perpetration of a dating partner was the perception of peer TRV. A study that found similar results (Friedlander et al., 2007) found that peers served a purpose in defining relationship violence and influencing the beliefs about violence between couples. They found that TRV was affected by the perception of peer violence. Additionally, Miller et al. (2009) found similar results indicating that harsh parental involvement and peer TRV each were significant contributors to TRV. Similarly, Hertzog and Rowley (2013) reported that the perception of peer partner violence related to teens endorsement of accepting of violent beliefs. Thus, the entanglement of peer involvement affected the development of TRV, which is consistent with the interpretation of social learning (Bandura, 1973), suggesting the perception of peer violence attitudes precede the use of intimate violence, although, it is also possible that the rationalization for peer norms can occur after the use of violence in TRV.

These studies highlight the importance of peers’ influence during adolescence as they often spend more time with peers and less time with parents during this developmental period. Given the results of this study future research should focus on peers as they may have more of a proximal influence than the family during adolescence. It does not mean that families are no longer important or significant in explaining dating violence, but rather that teens may be influenced by more proximal variables associated with a specific developmental stage (Erikson, 1994). To address this issue, a range of violence-related
variables needs to be assessed, including the nature and degree of parental and peer violence, and acceptance of violence beliefs, in relation to TRV over time.

**IMPLICATIONS**

It is noteworthy to mention that over half the participants of this study were Latinos. Culture and traditions of the participants could have affected dating violence, as it did in studies conducted by Rayburn et al. (2007) and Ulloa et al. (2004). Both articles mention the cultural traditions of justifying the use of violence to perpetrate on a dating partner. In both studies, they found that attitudes about use of violence and dating violence norms were negatively correlated with dating violence and that dating violence was acceptable for one gender (which gender) more than the other.

According to a study by Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, and Black (2007), teens are more likely to disclose dating problems to peers rather than other groups. The disclosure of dating violence among peers would depend on the severity, such as the less severe the more likely that teens would talk it over with peers and the most severe cases would not mention it to their peers, but when it was compared to adults it was stronger with peers. As it is, many of TRV interventions favor peer education, and it is based on the idea that adolescents communicate better with one another than adults communicate with teens. This is a typical developmental behavior exhibited during adolescence to self-identify with others and communicate in ways that professional staff cannot (Weisz et al., 2007). These programs emphasize the premise that young adults or teenagers lend credibility to a message when those who seem similar to themselves deliver it. Several studies support the idea that involving peers in prevention and education programs is worthwhile. For example, a couple of studies indicated that bringing peers into support groups and involving them in interventions has a greater impact of sending a message to reduce relationship violence (Weisz & Black, 2008, 2010).

Currently, some programs are school-based prevention programs that focus on increasing knowledge about TRV and challenging attitudes that tolerate aggression (e.g., Klem, Owens, Ross, Edwards, & Cobia, 2009; Ngo et al., 2008; Paciorek, Hokoda, & Herbst, 2003; Weisz & Black, 2010). The current study found that a higher instance of harsh parenting at time one predicted more perpetration at time two. The results also indicated that
peer influences, as well as hostile parenting, affected the perpetration of a dating partner and this should be taken into account for future prevention programs. An example, Foshee et al. (1998) established an intervention program at school directed towards teens involved dating violence. The program aimed to reduce perpetration and victimization by giving parents information on dating violence and using peers to perform activities to reduce stereotypes and beliefs on dating violence. Other programs (e.g., Kataoka et al., 2003) have focused on trauma based interventions aimed at community violence experienced by Latinos with PTSD. The results provided evidence that the school based intervention was associated with reducing PTSD symptoms in Latinos who had experienced community violence. The study also found that there were differences across Latino subgroups when controlling for treatment and found that it needed to be tailored for specific ethnic groups.

Foshee et al. (1998) established an intervention program at school directed towards teens involved dating violence. The program aimed at reducing perpetration and victimization by giving parents information on dating violence and using peers to perform activities to reduce stereotypes and beliefs on dating violence. Although it is important to stop ongoing family violence, prior exposure to harsh parenting appears to have lasting negative schemas, which most likely need to be considered in clinical efforts to help teens who have been exposed to it. It seems that teens require continual support to solve prior violence within the family (Wolfe et al., 2001). Interventions should also include resources for those affected by family violence as well as teen relationship violence.

**LIMITATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to examine acceptance of violence beliefs, exposure to interparental conflict, harsh parenting, and peer influences on the perpetration of TRV over time in 7th, 9th, and 11th graders. One of the limitations of this study is that it is a correlational and not experimental design, therefore, and thus it is not possible to determine causality because there is no intervention or manipulation to determine causal associations between variables.

Other limitations include a low number of overall participants (N = 219) and an attrition rate of 25% of students who completed surveys in 2008 did not return in 2009. The outcome of this attrition analysis determined if there were differences between participants.
who only completed a baseline questionnaire at time one and the participants who completed
the questionnaire at time one and also completed the questionnaire at time two. The analysis
indicated that the drop out status did not differ across groups. It is unknown why students did
not continue to participate in our study 10 months later; students might have decided to drop
out of the study because of the content being asked, because they missed class that day, or
because they changed schools.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research should include the assessment of protective factors within the family
and peer group that can reduce the incidence of TRV. For example, parental monitoring and
supervision about teens’ peers and dating relationships could be further examined as a
protective factor for TRV (Friedlander et al., 2007; Lavoie et al., 2002). Determining ways to
develop empathy and challenge acceptance of violence beliefs may provide protection from
exposure to models of violence, such as, exposure to harsh parenting and perceptions of peer
TRV. The reason behind using protective factors would be to determine if over time it affects
the perpetration of a dating partner based on the severity of harsh parenting and peer factors.

In addition, other directions for future studies is that researchers should also extend
the duration of this study to include multiple time points lasting longer than 10 months to
observe the changes that occur over different stages of development. Additionally, some of
the additional items that can be included for future research are culture, ethnicity, community
violence (Rayburn et al., 2007; Ulloa et al., 2004) policies, gang violence to evaluate if they
contribute to the variance in the perpetration of a dating partner. Each of these factors has
been found to exacerbate teen relationship violence, as an example, the Latino culture can
alternate family values and responsibilities that can affect how a teen should act towards a
partner. Some of the cultural, community and gang violence items that are included will help
in the understanding, defining and expectations that are normally found in healthy
relationships.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of the present study are of importance because they show the link between
harsh parenting, peer influence, and perpetration among teens after controlling for age and
gender. Since both this research and previous research has found that younger teens with high negative peer influences and harsh parenting reported the highest scores of teen relationship violence perpetration, prevention programs could be established to target them early on (Friedlander et al., 2007; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). The results of this study suggest that harsh parenting and peer behaviors should be a focus of prevention efforts that challenge perpetration early on in the relationship. Foshee, Bauman, & Linder (1999) established a program called Safe Dates aimed at reducing dating violence in teens by using peer performed activities that reduce stereotypes and beliefs. Interventions that aim to be similar to the Safe Dates program should integrate a parental component to help model appropriate behavior and reduce teen dating violence.
REFERENCES


