

Risk Markers for Physical Teen Dating Violence Perpetration: A Meta-Analysis

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?


This study is a meta-analysis examining risk and protective factors for perpetration of physical teen dating violence (TDV) among both males and females. Physical TDV refers to acts of pushing, shoving, slapping, punching, or kicking, and is associated with depression, post-traumatic stress, suicidal ideation, and poor academic outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand correlates of physical TDV perpetration among adolescents aged 13-19, in order to help guide prevention efforts. To organize risk factors, the current study used a specific theoretical framework that assessed participant's individual-level risk and protective factors (ontogenetic level), as well as the influence of their immediate surroundings (i.e., family, friends, neighborhood, etc.; microsystem level), societal structures that function independently of the child but affect their immediate environment (i.e., government or legal system, etc.; exosystem level), and finally their larger cultural context (i.e., their school, socioeconomic status, or parent's workplace, etc.; macrosystem level).

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers of this study conducted a meta-analysis (a compilation of studies) to assess 37 publications on TDV perpetration from the United States. Specifically, to be included, studies had to: assess physical TDV, sample adolescents between the ages of 13-19 years, be written in English, come from the United States, and provide specific statistical information that the authors needed in order to assess risk and protective factors. Of the 37 studies, 20 used a longitudinal data collection method (i.e., collected data at more than one point in time), and 17 used a cross-sectional method (i.e., collected data at one point in time). The total sample size across all studies was 33,537 (41% white).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- This research explores specific risk and protective factors that may influence physical TDV perpetration.
- Findings suggest that TDV often includes multiple forms/bidirectional use of violence, and that more research is needed at the exo- and macrosystem levels to fully understand risk for TDV perpetration.
- The findings of this review are key for TDV prevention programs, as they suggest important prevention targets.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found 26 risk markers for physical TDV perpetration, but only at the ontogenetic and microsystem levels (i.e., they did not find any at the exo- or macrosystem levels, likely due to the lack of research conducted at these levels). At the ontogenetic level (individual level factors), significant risk markers included¹: externalizing behaviors (e.g., delinquency), approval of violence, risky sexual behaviors, anger, alcohol use, depression and delinquency. The only significant protective factor at the ontogenetic level was conflict resolution skills. At the ontogenetic level, the strongest predictor of physical TDV perpetration was externalizing behavior, a risk factor.

At the microsystem level (i.e., the participant's immediate surroundings, like family and friends), significant risk markers included: experiencing physical TDV victimization, experiencing emotional TDV victimization, previously perpetrating physical TDV, perpetrating emotional TDV, perpetrating TDV generally, using controlling behaviors, having peers that perpetrated TDV, witnessing parental intimate partner violence, using violence towards peers, experiencing child abuse, and poor parenting. The only significant protective factor at the ontogenetic level was relationship quality with parents. At the microsystem level (and overall), the strongest predictor of physical TDV perpetration was experiencing physical TDV victimization, a risk factor.

When looking at results by gender specifically, the researchers found that perpetrating TDV generally and depression were stronger risk markers for females than males, while controlling behaviours were stronger risk marker for males than females.

¹Risk and protective factors in this section are listed in order of strength of association (strongest to weakest).

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This work can be used by educators who are interested in effective intervention and prevention strategies aimed at decreasing TDV among adolescents and increasing awareness regarding possible risk factors/markers that may make some children more susceptible to TDV perpetration. The authors also recommend that healthy relationships programs specifically focus on decreasing approval of violence and increasing conflict resolution skills.

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