

Adolescent Stalking and Risk of Violence

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research begins by discussing how there is little research on adolescent stalking (i.e., unwanted and/or repeated surveillance by an individual or group toward another person), even though stalking is considered a form of teen dating violence. Further, little is known about how other forms of teen dating violence relate to adolescent stalking. As such, this study's goal was to determine the frequency of stalking behaviour among youth in the 6th and 9th grades, and the connection between stalking and other violent behaviour among adolescents. Further, the researchers were interested in the kinds of stalking behaviours adolescents take part in, and whether there were gender differences in these behaviours.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- This research adds to the literature on adolescent stalking and can provide researchers with a better understanding to inform prevention strategies.
- This study identified distinct profiles of stalking behaviour, and indicated that groups with high use of these behaviors may benefit from targeted teen dating violence prevention.
- Since this study only considered in-person stalking behaviours, future research on cyberstalking is needed.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

In this study the researchers surveyed 1236 6th and 9th grade youth from 13 middle and high schools in the United States. The average age of the students who participated in the study was 13.6 years old. To assess stalking, they asked students 14 questions about specific stalking behaviours (e.g., leaving unwanted messages, following the person around), using the following prompt: "People sometimes go after relationships without realizing that the other person does not want one. How often have you pursued, or has someone else pursued you, in order to start or continue a relationship that wasn't wanted. Please fill in the bubble for how many times you did each of these things IN THE PAST YEAR." They also asked youth 5 questions about intentionally threatening/intimidating behaviours (i.e., whether they did various acts like restraining someone, threatening someone, sending messages or emails implying that they would hurt someone). To look at associations between stalking and teen dating violence, youth were asked to report on physical dating violence perpetration in the past year (15 items; Safe Dates scale) and sexual violence perpetration in the past year (4 items; modified Revised Conflict Tactics Scale). Finally, the students were asked how many times they participated in the following generally violent acts in the past year (i.e., peer violence, teacher violence, sexual assault, physical assault, instrumental violence, weapon carrying).

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

To analyze the data, the researchers used a technique called latent profile analyses. In this technique, participants are assigned to groups based on similarity of responses. For boys, the researchers found three groups: non-perpetrators (NP; 62.5%); hyper-intimate

pursuers (HIP; 31.1%) and comprehensive stalkers (6.4%). For girls, the researchers found two groups: NP (76.9%) and HIP (23.1%). For both boys and girls, the most common group was NP, which indicated little to no stalking behaviour reported. The next most common group was HIP. Participants in the HIP group reported a high frequency of stalking behaviors focused on unwanted expressions of attention and doing things the person didn't ask for, but low levels of other forms of stalking behaviours. The CSP group (which was found for boys only) reported a high level of stalking across all indicators. In addition, boys in the CSP group reported significantly more violence than boys in the NP or HIP groups. In particular, boys in the CSP group reported much more threat/intimidation behavior and physical TDV than boys in the NP or HIP groups. In addition, girls in the HIP group were found to be violent than boys in the HIP group, but less violent than boys in the CSP group. These findings indicate the boys using CSP behaviors and girls using HIP behaviors may be important to target in as part of secondary teen dating violence prevention efforts.

Unpacking how TDV may develop, the researcher describes that a child's disposition, peer influence, and the way their parents influenced their development could also impact their chances of engaging in TDV. If a child has grown up in an environment where aggression and violence were acceptable, for example, they may be more likely to use this as a tool to resolve conflict in their own romantic relationships. This is especially true if the child was predisposed to engage in aggressive behaviours, and they lacked a strong, healthy support system.

Lastly, the researchers highlight positive relationships as a preventive measure for TDV. Specifically, this work suggest that educators should start early, and provide several opportunities for youth to engage in supportive, positive, social contexts that support their learning and increase their knowledge about what healthy relationships look like.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This work can be used by public health educators as well as policy makers since the findings concerning violent behaviours among the CSP group could have an impact on both the health care and criminal justice systems. Indeed, this work could be used to inform current laws and policies regarding stalking behaviour and require an amendment of the current practices to address how this would be legally handled when it comes to adolescent stalking. Moreover, this work has practical implications for educators, school administrators, and principals looking to implement prevention and intervention strategies within schools.

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