

Trajectories of psychological dating violence perpetration in adolescence

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The purpose of this study was to explore use of psychological teen dating violence (TDV) by adolescents over the course of one year. Psychological aggression (e.g., threatening or manipulating a partner) is the most commonly experienced type of TDV, but not much is known about pathways of use across time. This study also examined risk factors associated with engaging in different patterns of psychological TDV perpetration. The researchers conducted this study with a sample of 449 adolescents (78.6% girls) from Quebec, and surveyed them three times over the period of 12 months.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- This study found that the majority of adolescents engage in low levels of psychological TDV perpetration.
- There are various characteristics and life experiences that may contribute to the chance of an adolescent engaging in higher levels of psychological TDV perpetration.
- This research sheds light on potential risk factors that can increase an adolescent's likelihood of engaging in psychological TDV.
- Highlights that there are distinct psychological TDV perpetrator profiles, which is important information for prevention efforts.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers aimed to identify risk factors along with pathways of psychological TDV perpetration in adolescence. This study was completed as part of a larger project called the Youths' Romantic Relationships (YRR) survey. The YRR uses a longitudinal design (i.e., surveys were conducted at 3 points in time, in 6-month intervals). This study included the 449 adolescent participants who were in a dating relationship at all three time points. The risk factors that the researchers explored were: demographics (gender, age, family structure); individual risk factors (self-esteem, witnessing psychological or physical parental violence in childhood); relationship characteristics (how long the participant has been in their current dating relationship, attachment style, TDV victimization); risky behaviours (drug or alcohol use, other antisocial behaviors); and peer characteristics (friend antisocial behaviors, whether their friends experienced TDV victimization). To identify pathways of psychological TDV perpetration, the researchers used a technique called latent profile analyses. In this technique, participants are assigned to groups based on similarity of responses.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The average age in this sample was 15.4, and most of the participants were girls. The researchers found that there were four types of psychological TDV perpetration in their sample: 1) Absence of perpetration (AP; 30.7% of participants); 2) Low perpetration (LP; 61.3% of participants), 3) High descending perpetration (HD; 4.2% of participants), and 4) Moderate elevating perpetration (ME; 3.8% of participants). Those in the AP group reported no use of psychological TDV on any survey; those in the LP group reported low but consistent use of psychological TDV across all three surveys; those in the HD group reported a lot of psychological TDV perpetration on the first survey, but less over time; and those in the ME group reported some psychological TDV perpetration on the first survey, and increased their use over time. (continued...)



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers then looked at whether different risk factors predicted which group adolescents belonged to (AP, LP, HD or ME). Comparing the LP and AP groups, those in the LP group were more likely to have also experienced TDV victimization, report a lot of marijuana use, and report that their peers used more antisocial behaviors (e.g., stealing, staying out all night), as compared to those in the AP group. Comparing the HD and AP groups, those in the HD group were older and were more likely to have also experienced TDV victimization, witnessed father-to-mother parental violence and have peers who experienced TDV victimization, as compared to those in the AP group. Comparing the ME and AP groups, those in the ME group were older and were more likely to have also experienced TDV victimization, to have an anxious attachment style and to have low self-esteem, as compared to those in the AP group. Finally, comparing the HD and ME groups, the researchers found that TDV victimization was the only difference between these two groups, Specifically, those in the HD category more likely to have experienced TDV victimization themselves than those in the ME group, while those in the ME group were more likely to have friends that experienced TDV victimization than those in the HD group.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

For psychological TDV perpetration, this study demonstrates that the majority of adolescents may fall in low violence and absence of violence categories. This suggests that universal healthy relationships program that focus on positive conflict negotiation skills are promising for the majority of adolescents. This work also provides support for early prevention efforts. However, approximately 1 in 12 adolescents in this sample used higher levels of psychological TDV perpetration, and may require more targeted intervention. As such, this work can be used by youth care workers looking to develop prevention programs aimed at teens who may be susceptible to psychological TDV perpetration. As TDV victimization was found to be an important predictor of membership in all groups except absence of perpetration, it also important that practitioners and researchers explore adolescents' use and experience of TDV to better understand risk.

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