



Does Gottman's Marital Communication Conceptualization Inform Teen Dating Violence? Communication Skill Deficits Analyzed Across Three Samples of Diverse Adolescents

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Teens use a variety of communication strategies to deal with conflict in their relationships, but compared to young adults, teens' conflict resolution strategies are less mature. Certain communication strategies, such as screaming insults or blaming, are linked to dating violence in teens. In adult married couples, Gottman's marital communication conceptualization is used to identify positive and negative communication behaviours. This conceptualization is used to develop interventions to improve relationships and reduce violence in adult couples. However, very little research has applied Gottman's conceptualization to understanding the role of communication in teen dating violence.

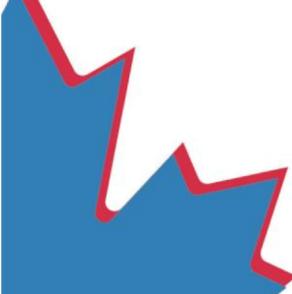
This study examined the relationship between teen dating violence and communication behaviours using Gottman's marital communication conceptualization. The study looked at three diverse samples of adolescents. In particular, the researchers were interested in determining whether maladaptive or adaptive communication strategies were related to the likelihood that youth would experience dating violence.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Study participants were youth (ages 13 to 20) from a high school, a foster care residence for pregnant and parenting adolescent mothers, and after school programs in urban areas in the United States. Participants answered questionnaires about their communication skills, relationship satisfaction and commitment, and dating violence in a recent dating relationship. The dating violence questionnaire included several types of dating violence, including emotional, physical, sexual, relational, and threatening behaviours.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Youth used communication strategies that were similar to those used by adults.
- The communication strategies that youth used predicted their involvement in dating violence.
- Certain strategies were related to increased violence, while others were related to decreased violence.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Many behaviours that are known to be destructive in married couples were also related to dating violence in all three samples of youth in this study. In particular, adolescents who engaged in the “four horsemen” communication behaviour, which involves criticism followed by spiraling negative behaviours and eventually partner withdrawal, were more likely to be involved in several forms of dating violence. Another maladaptive behaviour, “flooding,” which involves feeling overwhelmed and being unable to communicate calmly, was also related to all forms of dating violence.

Communication strategies that are known to be helpful in conflict resolution for married couples were more common than negative behaviours. These adaptive behaviours, which included being interested in understanding a partner's point of view and attempting to de-escalate conflict, were related to reduced dating violence in two of the groups that were studied. Relationship satisfaction was also related to reduced dating violence in two of the groups.

Overall, the communication strategies used by youth in this study were similar to those commonly used by adults. These communication strategies predicted youth's involvement in dating violence, which highlights the importance of focusing on improving youth's communicative skills in order to prevent violence in teen relationships.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Findings from this study could inform the development of skill-building modules in teen dating violence prevention programs. This work can be used by helping professionals, such as social workers or school counselors, to assess youth relationships and support youth in developing their communication skills, in order to reduce their risk for dating violence.

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