



Neighborhood Income Inequality and Adolescent Relationship Aggression: Results of a Nationally Representative, Longitudinal Study

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This study focused on how characteristics of the community might impact physical (e.g., hitting) and/or sexual (e.g., forcing someone to have sex) teen dating violence (TDV). One community characteristic that might be important for understanding TDV is *income inequality*. Income inequality refers to how much household income varies from one neighbour to the next. If everyone in the neighborhood has similar incomes, there is low income inequality. However, if there are big differences in household income from one neighbour to the next, there is high income inequality.

Income inequality might be associated with TDV because of its impact on social cohesion, or the amount of connectedness within a community. If some people in a neighbourhood have a very low income, and others have a very high income, that community might lack connectedness across all neighbours. This is problematic, as community connectedness can help protect against violence. For these reasons, the researchers investigated the association between income inequality and teen dating violence.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Researchers used data from the Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV) study. The Okeke et al. (2022) study used data from 723 teenagers who had been in a dating relationship in the last year. An income equality score was calculated for each teenager, which showed how much variation in household income there was in the teenager's neighbourhood. Each teenager also completed a survey where they reported on their use of (i.e., perpetration) and experience of (i.e., victimization) teen dating violence (TDV) over the past year. Researchers then investigated if income equality was associated with TDV, and if it differed by factors like gender and race/ethnicity.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

When teenage girls from higher-income families live in neighbourhoods where one family's income is vastly different from another family's income, they are at increased risk of experiencing teen dating violence. These findings are important because it helps us understand how characteristics of a community might impact one's experience of TDV. More research is needed to understand how we might best support teenage girls from higher-income families who live in mixed-income neighbourhoods.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Researchers found that overall, income inequality was not associated with TDV, regardless of gender or race/ethnicity. However, they also found that there was a specific combination of conditions that did increase risk of TDV. Specifically, teenage girls from higher-income families were at greater risk of experiencing TDV when they lived in neighbourhoods where one family's income was vastly different from another family's income.

In this study, the researchers weren't able to explain why this is. However, they did offer a few speculations. The researchers speculated that financially privileged girls who live in diverse communities might lack awareness of the potential dangers of dating relationships. Future research is needed to understand if this is true. If so, targeted strategies could be developed to increase financially privileged girls' understanding of TDV and how it can impact anyone.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This study highlighted the importance of understanding community characteristics to understand TDV. Researchers should continue to investigate how community characteristics might impact one's experience of TDV. Consequently, policymakers should also consider developing prevention strategies that take community characteristics into account. Although this study did not provide an explanation as to why teenage girls from homes with higher incomes living in mixed-income neighbourhoods were at greater risk of being victims, the authors did provide some speculations and suggestions. For example, interventions could be developed to teach teenage girls from higher income families about TDV, and that everyone (regardless of one's family income) can be affected by TDV.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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Dating violence, community-level risk factors, income inequality, disparity, neighborhood

FULL REFERENCE

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