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Middle School Predictors of High School Dating Violence Among At-Risk Early Adolescents

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OBJECTIVE

- The few studies on dating violence (DV) among young adolescents suggest that DV behaviors are prevalent in middle school relationships and continue into high school (Orpinas et al., 2013a; 2013b).
- Youth with mental health symptoms are at greater risk of DV (Wolfe et al., 1998), but we know little about dating violence (DV) among young adolescents with mental health problems.
- Previous studies suggest that family factors, like parental communication (Wilson & Donenberg, 2004), and individual factors, like emotion regulation (ER; Shorey et al., 2011), are associated with DV among youth.
- Early adolescent ER deficits are associated with risky behavior in later dating relationships (Hessler & Katz, 2010).
- ER skills (higher ER, lower emotional lability/negativity) and greater parental communication in 8th grade will be associated with less frequent DV involvement in 9th grade for at-risk early adolescents.

HYPOTHESIS

METHOD

- Data are from two waves of Project TRAC, a randomized controlled trial of an affect management skills prevention intervention for high-risk early adolescents at urban junior high schools in Providence County, Rhode Island.
- Participants were 420 students with mental health symptoms recruited for the study in 7th grade.
- Data are from the one- and two-year follow up assessments, in 8th and 9th grade.
- The final sample for this study comprised 220 students who were dating in 9th grade (M age=15.08, 53% male, 38% Caucasian).

MEASURES

- Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC): 8th Grade**
 - (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997; 1998)
- Parent ratings of emotion self-regulation skills: 2 subscales
 - Ability/Negativity
 - Emotion Regulation
- Miller Sexual Communication Scale (MSCS): 8th Grade**
 - (Dutra, Miller, & Forehand, 1999)
- Communication with parents about dating and risk behavior

MEASURES (Continued)

- Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI): 9th Grade**
 - (Wolfe et al., 2001)
- Threatening behaviors and physical DV
- Perpetration and victimization

Generalized Estimating Equations Predicting 9th Grade DV

Threatening Behavior: Perpetration

Variable	Estimate (SE)	Wald χ^2
MSCS Communication with Parents	-.02 (.05)	.10
ERC Emotional Lability/Negativity	-.19 (.32)	.34
ERC Emotion Regulation	.26 (.22)	1.41

Physical DV: Perpetration

Variable	Estimate (SE)	Wald χ^2
MSCS Communication with Parents	-.06 (.09)	.43
ERC Emotional Lability/Negativity	-.32 (.32)	1.03
ERC Emotion Regulation	-.40 (.10)	14.57***

Threatening Behavior: Victimization

Variable	Estimate (SE)	Wald χ^2
MSCS Communication with Parents	-.08 (.04)	5.05*
ERC Emotional Lability/Negativity	-.37 (.18)	4.14*
ERC Emotion Regulation	.18 (.10)	3.50*

Physical DV: Victimization

Variable	Estimate (SE)	Wald χ^2
MSCS Communication with Parents	-.08 (.07)	1.05
ERC Emotional Lability/Negativity	-.39 (.24)	2.81*
ERC Emotion Regulation	-.14 (.11)	1.47

Note. Covariates (gender, condition) omitted for brevity. Degrees of freedom = 1 for all variables. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

ANALYSES

- Primary analyses were conducted using generalized estimating equations (GEE) controlling for intervention condition and gender.
- GEE models included an independent correlation structure and random effect of school, with normal distribution and identity link.

RESULTS

- Frequency of DV reported in 9th grade:
 - 28% threatening behavior perpetration
 - 20% physical DV perpetration
 - 25% threatening behavior victimization
 - 17% physical DV victimization.
- 8th grade ER was associated with less frequent physical DV perpetration in 9th grade. There was a trend-level association between higher 8th grade ER and more frequent threatening behavior victimization.
- More emotional lability/negativity in 8th grade was related to less frequent victimization from threatening behaviors in 9th grade, and at the trend level, less frequent physical DV victimization.
- More communication with parents in 8th grade was related to less frequent 9th grade threatening behavior victimization.

CONCLUSIONS

- Early adolescents with mental health symptoms reported significant involvement in DV at age 15 as both perpetrators and victims.
- Both ER skills and parental in 8th grade were related to DV perpetration and victimization in 9th grade, but only for certain types of behavior.
- Our results support the need for further research on the links between ER and DV in early and mid-adolescence, particularly given the surprising associations between ER and DV victimization.

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