The Role of Emotion Regulation in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

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Introduction

Adolescent Dating Violence

✓ About one-third of adolescents experience some form of victimization in their romantic relationships, and about 12% of adolescents in romantic relationships are victims of physical aggression (Halpern et al., 2004).

✓ At least 90% of high school and college students have experienced abuse at some point in their dating history (Judd, Moos, & Wright, 1996).

✓ Between 10% and 18% of female adolescents have been sexually victimized by a dating partner (Farish, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2004).

✓ Understanding the factors that influence adolescent dating aggression is an important step in preventing these experiences.

Emotion Regulation

✓ The Read-React-Respond Model describes how individuals respond to sexual pressure or coercion and, disruptions in these processes can increase the risk for victimization (Kil & Gym, 2011).

• Read: evaluating a situation appropriately in terms of a possible threat.

• React: when a threat is perceived in a situation, the “fight-or-flight” response is activated.

• Respond: how an individual responds to the perceived threat.

✓ Control over negative emotional impulses can prevent aggressive behavior (Graz & Roemer, 2004).

Attitudes about Dating Aggression

✓ Holding attitudes that are accepting of dating violence predict dating violence perpetration by males (Farish, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2004).

✓ Permissive attitudes about sex have been directly and positively associated with sexually aggressive behavior (Athey, Jacques-Tiura, & Ledbetter, 2011).

✓ Most research concentrations on perpetration by males; focusing on females could lead to improved intervention plans.

The Present Study

✓ The present study examined the following research questions:

1) Do difficulties with emotion regulation and attitudes about dating aggression predict experiences of sexual victimization in males and females?

2) Does one’s ability to regulate emotions moderate the relationship between attitudes about dating aggression and sexual victimization?

Method

Sample

• 540 adolescent participants, ages 18-23

• Recruited from an undergraduate research pool

• Adolescent Dating Aggression: (Jezl, Molidor, & Wright, 1996)

• Attitudes about Dating Aggression: (Farish, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001)

• Emotion Regulation: (Graz & Roemer, 2004)

Measure

• 31% were male, 69% were female

• 77% Caucasian, 73% Asian, 6% African American, 5.9% Latino/Hispanic

Results

Research Question 1: Linear Regression Analyses for Variables predicting Sexual Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>2.96</td>
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<td>Dating Aggression Attitudes</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulties with Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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Research Question 2: Moderation of Emotion Regulation for the Relationship Between Sexual Attitudes and Sexual Victimization

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Dating Aggression Attitudes</td>
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Discussion

Conclusion

✓ For both males and females, having more accepting attitudes about dating aggression predicted more experiences of sexual victimization.

✓ However, difficulties with emotion regulation only significantly predicted more experiences of sexual victimization for females.

✓ Further exploration of emotion regulation as a moderator revealed that for females, emotion regulation significantly moderated the relationship between dating aggression attitudes and sexual victimization.

• Such that, females with better emotion regulation abilities endorsed fewer experiences of sexual victimization regardless of their attitudes about dating aggression.

However, for females with difficulties regulating their emotions, having more acceptable attitudes about dating aggression predicted more experiences of sexual victimization.

Implications & Future Directions

✓ In accordance with the Read-React-Respond model, it appears that more accepting attitudes about aggression may put adolescents at greater risk for victimization, as threat may not be accurately read in aggressive situations.

✓ However, in female adolescents, ability to react or effectively regulate their emotional response to this threat may allow them to respond appropriately and protect them from victimization.

✓ Thus, successful dating violence interventions should focus on helping adolescents more accurately perceive threat in situations that may be potentially dangerous.

✓ Additionally, improving adolescent emotion regulation abilities to help them react more appropriately in threatening situations should be incorporated in dating violence interventions.

Selected References


