The Role of Parent Child Attachment Quality in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

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Introduction

Adolescent Dating Aggression
- About 1/3 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, Oslak, Young, Martin & Lawrence, 2001).
- Estimates for perpetration of adolescent dating violence range from 26 to 46% for physical violence and 3 to 12% for sexual violence (Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff, 2004).
- As dating aggression is a major issue that many adolescents experience, it is important to understand what factors may contribute to perpetration or victimization.

Parent-Child Attachment Security
- Parent-child relationship quality may play a crucial role in the growth and preservation of behaviors leading to either victimization or perpetration of dating violence (Linder, Crick & Collins, 2002).
- Insecure and disorganized parent-child attachment predicts increased aggression throughout childhood (Ooi et al., 2006; Lyons-Ruth, 1996).
- Attachment to a caregiver provides the foundation for expectations and behaviors in relationships, and the role that attachment plays in dating aggression could be better understood.

The Present Study
- The present study examined the following research questions:
  1. Does parent-child attachment quality predict experiences of victimization and perpetration in adolescent dating aggression?
  2. Do these results vary when examining experiences of physical, sexual, and verbal/emotional dating aggression separately?

Method

Sample
- 540 participants, ages 18-23
- Recruited from Marquette University
- 35% were male, 65% were female
- 77.5% Caucasian, 7.3% Asian, 6.1% African American, 5.9% Hispanic, 3.2% other

Procedure
- Participants were recruited using an undergraduate research pool.
- Participants completed measures of maternal and paternal attachment security, as well as a measure of dating aggression, including questions regarding physical, verbal/emotional, and sexual aggression.

Measures
- Adolescent Dating Aggression
- Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001)
- Includes subscales for victimization and perpetration.

Results

Linear Regression Analyses For Attachment Security Predicting Physical Dating Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Perpetration</th>
<th>Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Attachment</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternal Attachment</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>3.51*</td>
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Linear Regression Analyses For Attachment Security Predicting Verbal/Emotional Dating Aggression

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Linear Regression Analyses For Attachment Security Predicting Sexual Dating Aggression

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<td>Maternal Attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paternal Attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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Discussion

Conclusion
- Overall, more secure parent-child attachment predicted less aggression in adolescents’ romantic relationships, including physical, sexual, and verbal/emotional aggression, with more secure paternal attachment having a unique contribution.
- When analyzing types of dating aggression separately, differences were found in the role of parent-child attachment:
  - More secure paternal attachment significantly predicted less victimization in all three types of dating violence: physical, sexual, and verbal/emotional.
  - More secure paternal attachment also predicted less perpetration of sexual aggression.
  - Having a more secure attachment to a maternal caregiver predicted less sexual victimization.

Implications & Future Directions
- Maternal attachment tends to be the focus in research regarding parent-child relationships; however, these results indicate that a child’s relationship to a father-figure may be important to understand risk and protective factors for teen dating violence.
- The current study did not examine gender differences in these effects; however, it is possible parent-child attachment effects males and females differently.
  - For instance, females who do not have a strong relationship with a paternal caregiver may seek this relationship elsewhere in romantic partners, putting them at risk for victimization.
  - For males, lacking a quality relationship with a male role model may be a risk factor for experiencing aggression in dating relationships.
- Additionally, possible mediators for the relationship between parent-child attachment and dating aggression should be explored, including romantic attachment security and emotion regulation.

Selected References