Electronic Dating Aggression among Middle School Students: Demographic Correlates and Associations with Other Types of Violence

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1. Background

A survey conducted by RTI (Cutbush et al., 2010) of 4,282 9th grade students found that:

- Electronic dating aggression is psychological abuse victimization and/or perpetration among dating partners via the use of technology or electronic media, including text, e-mail, instant messaging, web chat, and blogs.

- A survey conducted by the Associated Press and MTV (2009) of 382 teens aged 13 to 18 who identified as homosexual, bisexual, or questioning found:
  - 12% reported that a boyfriend or girlfriend has called them names, harassed, or put them down using a cell phone, email, or Facebook.
  - 22% were asked via cell phones or the Internet to spread rumors about them.
  - 25% were threatened via electronic media, including text, e-mail, instant messaging, web chat, and blogs.

However, little is known about the study’s sampling methods or how to generalize findings beyond study population.

2. Objectives

- Identify prevalence of dating among middle school students in a large, diverse sample
- Identify prevalence of electronic dating aggression among middle school students in a large, diverse sample
- Examine associations between electronic aggression among teen dating partners and demographic and academic characteristics
- Examine other types of teen dating violence and other types of relationship violence

3. Methods

A survey conducted by RTI and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2010) of 4,247 students aged 14 to 24 from an online panel reported that 25% of the respondents in a romantic relationship reported that their partner has checked the last messages on their cell phone without their permission.

A survey conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2009) reported that 37% of respondents in a romantic relationship said their partner has used a cell phone, email, social networking site, or Facebook to check on where they are, what they are doing, who they are with, or who they are dating.

Self-report data collected in the 2010-2011 school year for all items.

4. Measures

- Dating
  - Lifetime measure of dating using a single item, “Have you ever had a boyfriend/girlfriend?”
- Electronic dating aggression (Picard, 2007)
  - Past 6-month perpetration (p < .05) or victimization (v < .05) each measured using eight items, including:
    - Called you names, put you down, or said really mean things to you using a cell phone, email, IM, texting, a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook
    - Contacted you when you did not want them to, just to make you mad, using a cell phone, email, or Facebook
    - Made you afraid by using a cell phone, email, or Facebook
    - Braden survey or reassuring pictures/video of you to others using a cell phone, email, or Facebook
    - Threatened to hurt you physically by using a cell phone, email, or Facebook
    - Repeatedly checked up on you to see where you were using a cell phone, email, or Facebook
    - Called/demanded: 1 or more times for any item(s) vs. none for all items

- Data Collection and Study Sample

A. Total sample of 1,430 7th grade students from 6 schools in 4 states
- 57% parent completion rate (range from 44%-71% across schools)
- 96% survey completion rate among those with parent permission

B. Data collected during the 2010–2011 school year

- Paper-and-pencil questionnaire administered in groups at school

- Participants:
  - Mean age: 12.3 years (SD=0.66)
  - 50% female

- Percentages of Respondents in Each Racial/Ethnic Group

- 12.0% Asian
- 25.4% Hispanic
- 37.0% White
- 25.4% African American

- Other relationship violence

- Sexual harassment (American Association of University Women, 2007) defined as any unwanted sexual advances or sexual verbal behavior

- Other types of violence

- Physical dating violence (Foxlee et al., 1998)
- Physical dating violence perpetration
- Physical dating violence victimization

- Psychological dating abuse perpetration
- Psychological dating abuse victimization

5. Analyses

- Calculated percentages of teens reporting electronic dating aggression perpetration or victimization
- Conducted separate multiple logistic regression analyses predicting electronic dating aggression perpetration or victimization
- Both regression models accounted for school-level clustering (SAS PROC GLIMMIX)

- Multi-level Multiple Logistic Regression Predicting Electronic Dating Aggression among Middle School Students

- Independent variables
  - Gender
  - Parent’s education
  - Parent’s income
  - Grade
  - Other relationship violence
  - Psychological dating abuse
  - Physical dating violence

- Prevalence of Dating among Middle School Students

6. Discussion

- Our results show that the majority of middle school students had or were exposed to some form of dating violence.
- Consistent with previous studies, our results show that electronic dating aggression among middle school students is common.
- Electronic Dating Aggression perpetration is positively associated with:
  - Psychological dating abuse perpetration
  - Psychological dating abuse victimization
  - Physical dating violence perpetration
  - Physical dating violence victimization

- Self-report

- Survey measures physical and psychological dating violence also increase risk for electronic dating aggression.

7. Limitations

- Convenience sample limits external generalizability
- Data do not prohibit causal inferences
- Self-report
  - Possible social desirability bias

8. Implications

- Incorporate health promotion programs into middle school curriculums
- Promote healthy dating relationships
- Preventing sexual violence
- Incorporate electronic aggression content into existing violence prevention programs
- Include electronic aggression in existing policies about bullying, sexual harassment, and violence in schools and other settings
- Evaluate prevention programs to determine what approaches prevent or reduce electronic dating aggression among middle school students
- Determine whether risk factors for psychological and physical dating violence also increase risk for electronic dating aggression.

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