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***Dating Violence Amongst New Brunswick
Adolescents: A Summary of Two Studies***

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Dating Violence Amongst New Brunswick Adolescents: A Summary of Two Studies

Intimate violence is a serious problem in Canada. However, violence in adolescent dating relationships has only recently become the focus of research. Nonetheless, research has indicated that psychological, physical, and sexual abuse are characteristic of many teenage heterosexual dating relationships (Gagné, Lavoie, & Hébert, 1994; Mercer, 1988; Pedersen & Thomas, 1992). Studies have also shown that dating violence may begin as early as age 13 (Mercer, 1988; Smith & Williams, 1992) and may continue throughout the teenage years (Roscoe & Callahan, 1985) and into adulthood (Marshall & Rose, 1990). For example, Gagné and Lavoie (1995) surveyed high school students in Quebec and found that 16% of the girls and 25% of the boys reported having experienced some form of physical violence. Similarly, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, and Killip (1992) found that 24% of girls and 16% of boys attending high school in Ontario had had a dating partner use “verbal force” against them. Poitras and Lavoie (1995) studied adolescents in Quebec who were between 15 and 19 years old and found that 54% of the girls and 13% of the boys reported having experienced sexual coercion in a dating relationship. However, few studies have examined all three forms of dating violence - psychological, physical and sexual - amongst the same group of adolescents, and even fewer studies have included adolescents as young as 12 and 13 years old, the age when dating violence may begin. Finally, although attitudes towards the use of violence in dating relationships may contribute to the perpetuation of violence (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992), few studies have investigated the extent to which adolescents view dating violence as acceptable.

The research described here was designed and conducted by the Dating Violence Research Team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research at the University of New Brunswick. This is a multi-disciplinary team that has been involved in conducting action research on dating violence for the past six years. The team consists of academics, government employees, persons working in the schools and in community based agencies, and graduate students. The goal of the team is to make programmatic recommendations and to participate in the implementation and evaluation of strategies aimed at the prevention of all types of dating violence between teenagers - psychological abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Although the team's primary concern has been the prevention of dating violence, early in our history we decided that in order to accomplish this goal we first needed to determine the prevalence of as well as attitudes towards dating violence among New Brunswick adolescents. There were two primary reasons for adopting this as the first step of our action research program. First, we believed that we needed to have information about dating violence that was specific to New Brunswick and its rural context if we were to design truly effective prevention strategies. Second, we felt that this information would demonstrate the pervasiveness and seriousness of dating violence in New Brunswick to government and other potential partners in future prevention programs.

Therefore, the team conducted two studies in which we examined dating violence in adolescents' heterosexual dating relationships. In Study 1, students from grades 7, 9, and 11 in New Brunswick schools completed questionnaires. In Study 2, students participated in focus groups in which they discussed their understanding of the nature and impact of psychological and physical violence in dating relationships. These studies aimed to determine New Brunswick adolescents' experiences with and attitudes towards psychological, physical, and sexual dating violence. We also investigated adolescents' understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of dating violence. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the methods and results of these studies.

STUDY 1

Participants

Almost seventeen hundred students (886 boys and 812 girls), attending both English and French schools in New Brunswick, participated in this study. They ranged in age from 11 to 20 years ($M = 14.6$ years, $SD = 1.9$). In order to reduce the number of participants while including adolescents who varied in the extent of their dating experience, we sampled adolescents from grades 7, 9, and 11. Participants were enrolled in approximately equal numbers in each grade. About 44% of the participants reported that they were English Canadian, 50% were French Canadian or Acadian, 3% were Native Canadian and 3% checked "Other". The majority of the participants lived in rural communities (86%), and approximately 84% of them had begun dating. The participants indicated that they had been involved in an average of four "steady" dating relationships.

Procedure

Six school districts representing urban and rural areas of New Brunswick participated in the study. In consultation with school district administrators, three classes at each of the targeted grade levels representing students at different levels of academic ability were selected to participate. Either the home room teacher or a guidance counsellor explained the nature of the study to the participants in the selected classrooms. Students who volunteered to participate were given

an information letter about the study to take home to their parents. Upon arriving at the study location in the school, the students were read an informed consent sheet that stressed anonymity, confidentiality and freedom to withdraw from the study. After the questionnaires were completed, the participants were given a presentation on dating violence and an opportunity to ask questions regarding the study. They also were given information about dating violence and a list of resource people in their school and community whom they could contact about dating violence. Questionnaires were completed in the language of instruction of the school.

Measures

The participants completed a questionnaire that included measures of demographic characteristics, experiences of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in a dating relationship, use of psychological, physical and sexual abuse in a dating relationship, attitudes towards male-to-female and female-to-male dating violence, attitudes towards traditional roles for girls and women, peer use of sexual and physical violence, self-esteem, and a few experimental questions on fear of violence in the family. Only data on experiences of dating violence and attitudes towards dating violence are included in this report. Therefore, only these scales are described below.

Almost 1700 students completed a questionnaire that included measures of demographic characteristics, experiences of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in a dating relationship, use of psychological, physical and sexual abuse in a dating relationship, attitudes towards male-to-female and female-to-male dating violence.

Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised.

Participants completed two versions of a revised 7-item version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). One version was used to measure the frequency with which the respondents had experienced psychological and physical abuse from their heterosexual dating partners. Students who had begun dating were asked to think about the girls/boys whom they had “gone out with” in responding to each item and to indicate whether they had experienced each item using a 3-point scale (“Never” to “Sometimes” to “Often”). Four items assessed psychological abuse (e.g., insults, threats, controlling behaviour) and three items assessed physical abuse (e.g., slapping, pushing, hitting). After they completed the seven items regarding their experiences of dating violence, participants were asked to think about their worst physical or psychological abusive experience, and to indicate how upsetting the experience was for them on a 7-point scale ranging from “Not at all upset” (1) to “Extremely upset” (7). For the purpose of data analysis, and based, in part, on the results of Study 2, data on experiences of physical and psychological abuse were combined. Participants were categorized as having experienced psychological and/or physical abuse if: (1) they reported having experienced either psychological or physical abuse or both; and, (2) they rated the experience as upsetting (i.e., a rating of 5, 6 or 7).

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Participants completed two versions of a revised 9-item version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). The scales were used to measure the frequency with which respondents had used and/or experienced sexually coercive behaviours in their heterosexual dating relationships. The items assessed three levels of sexual coercion (forced kissing and touching, attempted sexual intercourse, and sexual intercourse) and three coercive strategies (using arguments and/or pressure, drugs and/or alcohol, and threats and/or physical force). Respondents indicated the number of times they had experienced sexual coercion on a 3-point scale (*No*, *Once*, and *More Than Once*). After completing the nine items regarding their experiences of sexual coercion, participants were asked to think about their worst experience and to indicate how upsetting the experience was for them on a 7-point scale ranging from “Not at all upset” (1) to “Extremely upset” (7). As with the variable measuring experience of physical and/or psychological abuse, participants were categorized as having experienced sexual coercion if: (1) they reported having experienced sexual coercion; and, (2) they rated the experience as upsetting (i.e., a rating of 5, 6, or 7).

Sexual Experiences Survey-Revised.

Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales.

Upsetting sexually coercive experiences were reported by 19% of the girls and 4% of the boys. Overall, 29% of the girls and 13% of the boys had experienced some type of dating violence that was upsetting to them.

These results demonstrate that violence in dating relationships is a significant problem among adolescents as young as age 11.

In order to assess students' attitudes towards dating violence, respondents completed the six Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales (Byers & the Dating Violence Research Team, 1995; Price, Byers, & the Dating Violence Research Team, in press). Three of these scales assess, respectively, attitudes towards use of psychological, physical and sexual dating violence by boys with their female dating partners and are called the Attitudes Towards Male Psychological Dating Violence Scale (AMDV-Psyc), the Attitudes Towards Male Physical Dating Violence Scale (AMDV-Phys), and the Attitudes Towards Male Sexual Dating Violence Scale (AMDV-Sex). The other three scales assess, respectively, attitudes towards use of psychological, physical and sexual dating violence by girls with their male dating partners and are called the Attitudes Towards Female Psychological Dating Violence Scale (AFDV-Psyc), the Attitudes Towards Female Physical Dating Violence Scale (AFDV-Phys), and the Attitudes Towards Female Sexual Dating Violence Scale (AFDV-Sex). Each scale has between 12 and 15 items. Response options on all six scales range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) with higher scores indicating a greater acceptance of abusive behaviour. Copies of these scales in English are included in the Appendix.

Results and Discussion

Prevalence of Violence in Dating Relationships

We examined the proportion of boys and girls who reported having had an upsetting psychologically and/or physically abusive experience in a dating relationship. We also examined upsetting experiences of sexual coercion. These data are reported in Table 1. Of the students who reported that they had begun dating, 22% of the adolescent girls and 12% of the adolescent boys reported having had an upsetting psychologically and/or physically abusive experience. More than half of these experiences involved both psychological and physical abuse. Upsetting sexually coercive experiences were reported by 19% of the girls and 4% of the boys. Overall, 29% of the girls and 13% of the boys had experienced some type of dating violence that was upsetting to them.

These results demonstrate that violence in dating relationships is a significant problem among adolescents as young as age 11. Significant numbers of girls and boys reported having had upsetting abusive experiences. The percentages for each type of dating violence are similar to those found in previous research (Bergman, 1992; Mercer, 1988). In addition, these results indicate that when all types of dating violence are examined together, estimates of the percentage of girls who have experienced dating violence are higher than in studies examining each type of violence alone. Further,

more girls than boys reported having experienced dating violence, indicating that the experience of psychological, physical and sexual abuse is a problem that is encountered more often by girls than by boys.

Attitudes Towards Dating Violence

The average total scores on the six Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales are provided in Table 2. The majority of the girls and boys were not accepting of psychological, physical or sexual dating violence perpetrated by boys or by girls. That is, on average the students disagreed with statements that were supportive of the use of psychological, physical or sexual violence with a dating partner by boys or by girls. However, a comparison of attitude scores on each of the scales using Analysis of Variance (see Table 2) indicated that on all six scales the boys were more accepting of psychological, physical, and sexual dating violence than were the girls. Further, as indicated by the range of scores, at least some students were accepting of each type

of dating violence. Although this constituted a minority of students, these percentages represent substantial numbers of students who believe that dating violence is acceptable. For example, just over 10% of the boys were accepting of each type of violence when the violence was perpetrated by boys. Inspection of individual items indicated that, although they were not accepting of dating violence overall, many students agreed that specific abusive behaviours are appropriate in dating relationships. For example, 6% of girls and 15% of boys agreed that Girls who cheat on their boyfriends should be slapped; and, 12% of girls and 17% of boys agreed that Sometimes girls have to threaten their boyfriends so that they will listen.

STUDY 2

Participants

To complement the quantitative data on adolescents' experiences of psychological and physical abuse in

dating relationships and to provide further information on boys' compared to girls' use of violence in dating relationships, we conducted a qualitative study using focus groups to explore adolescents' understanding of dating violence. Students attending some of the English and French schools we sampled in Study 1 and some other schools were recruited to participate in this study. Sixteen focus groups (8 with girls and 8 with boys) were conducted to discuss adolescents' ideas about psychological abuse in dating relationships; an additional 10 focus groups (5 with girls and 5 with boys) were conducted to discuss adolescents' ideas about physical abuse. As few girls had reported using sexual coercion in dating relationships, we did not conduct focus groups on sexual coercion. Students were recruited for the focus groups from Grades 9 and 11 only because dating and dating violence were reported more often by youth in these grades. Each focus group consisted of between 8 and 12 students.

Table 1

Percentages of Adolescents Who Reported Experiencing Dating Violence

Type of Abusive Experience	Girls (<i>n</i> = 717)	Boys (<i>n</i> = 729)	
Psychological and/or Physical Abuse	22%	12%	$F(1, 1444) = 24.86^*$
Sexual Abuse	19%	4%	$F(1, 1420) = 87.71^*$
Any Type of Abuse	29%	13%	$F(1, 1371) = 6.68^*$

* $p < .001$

Table 2

Adolescents' Scores on the Six Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales							
	Girls (n = 810)			Boys (n = 886)			F (1, 1694)
	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	
Male Psychological Dating Violence (15 items ^a)	27.3	7.6	15-54	33.2	9.9	15-75	183.39*
Male Physical Dating Violence (12 items ^b)	21.4	7.9	12-47	25.3	9.3	12-57	89.69*
Male Sexual Dating Violence (12 items ^b)	17.4	6	12-40	23.8	9.7	12-58	256.33*
Female Psychological Dating Violence (13 items ^c)	26	7.7	13-52	29.1	7.8	13-57	70.49*
Female Physical dating Violence (12 items ^b)	25.1	9.1	12-54	30	8.9	12-58	123.07*
Female Sexual Dating Violence (12 items ^b)	19.4	6.7	12-48	26.6	9.4	12-60	328.69*
^a Possible range of scores is 15-75 ^b Possible range of scores is 12-60 ^c Possible range of scores is 13-65 *p <0.001							

Procedure

We followed the suggestions of Feldman (1995) and Silverman (1993) in determining the procedure for conducting the focus groups as well as for analyzing the focus group data. Focus groups were conducted in the language of instruction of the school. School guidance counsellors or teachers in participating schools were used to recruit volunteers. When the teenagers arrived for the focus group, they were greeted by the group leaders (a moderator and a recorder.) A focus group introduction sheet was used to inform participants about the purpose of the group and was read to them by the moderator. Participants were asked if they had any questions about the procedure for conducting the group, and adolescents who felt uncomfortable were given the option to leave the group (none did).

In facilitating the focus groups, the moderator followed an interview guide that had been prepared by the research team and is available in English and French from the authors. All groups were audio-taped. Upon completion of the focus group, participants were thanked for their participation and were given a Debriefing Form which provided information about dating violence as well as a list of resource people and telephone numbers in their school and community that they could contact to discuss any issues about dating violence. Focus group sessions typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

The audio-tapes of the group sessions were transcribed and the text was coded in relation to the questions in the interview guide. These coded statements were then compiled under general headings (e.g., adolescents'

definitions of psychological abuse). The main themes of the transcripts that emerged under these headings were edited and summarized, reducing the transcripts to a more manageable size (8 to 10 pages). Members of the research team then independently reviewed the abridged transcripts and submitted written feedback about primary themes. The themes in the transcripts also were discussed during an audio-taped meeting among research team members. The written and verbal comments made by members of the research team served as the basis for the results reported from the study.

Results and Discussion

Four primary themes representing teenagers' ideas about dating violence and its occurrence emerged from the

focus groups. In the English version of this report, we have included excerpts from the transcripts of the focus groups conducted in English to illustrate the themes in the adolescents' words; in the French version of the report we have included excerpts from the focus groups conducted in French. The same themes emerged from the French and English focus groups.

Theme # 1

The adolescents listed behaviours that they thought were physically abusive, but they had more difficulty describing behaviours that they thought were psychologically abusive. They were not clear about when specific behaviours (e.g., yelling, use of control, insults) were acceptable and when these behaviours “crossed the line” and were abusive.

Boys' Groups

Student 1:

If a person doesn't know where the line is then they need to...

Student 2:

...obviously if you hit somebody then that is considered abuse, but there are so many shades of grey in emotional abuse that it is kind of hard to tell what exactly is acceptable and what is not.

Girls' Groups

Student 3:

I probably do it, but I'm not realizing it's emotional abuse, like

just joking around, yelling and stuff...

In addition, boys tended to define abuse in terms of its intent whereas girls tended to define abuse in terms of its impact.

Boys' Groups

Student 4:

Yeah, if you intend to hurt a person by doing it, it's violence, but if you are just you know you are playing around and it gets a little out of hand and it's an accident, I mean it is still not right but it's just an accident.

Girls' Groups

Student 5:

Joking or not, if it hurts you then...

Student 6:

If it hurts you, then it is not a joke.

Theme #2

The adolescents viewed psychological and physical abuse in dating relationships as being integrally connected. They did not make a clear distinction between psychological and physical abuse in their discussions; instead, they saw psychological abuse as leading to physical abuse. They also identified

The adolescents were not clear about when specific behaviours (e.g., yelling, use of control, insults) were acceptable and when these behaviours “crossed the line” and were abusive.

jealousy and the desire to gain control as important factors prompting use of physical abuse.

Girls' Groups:

Student 7:

I think that people can mentally abuse people without physically abusing them. But I also think that when people physically abuse, I think that mental abuse always just always goes with it.

Student 8:

I think it's a cycle of abuse.

Student 9:

It probably starts, like the controlling and that jealous stuff and controlling who you hang around with or where you go...and then like the hitting...

Student 10:

...it starts with the emotional and then once their self-esteem is broken down, after a while like after the possessiveness gets started, then they find it easier to hit them.

Boys' Groups

Student 11:

...when it starts emotional then it gets to physical...I have never seen a lot of cases that's just stayed at emotional.

Student 12:

The emotional abuse is like the warning sign for physical abuse.

Theme #3

The adolescents stated that both boys and girls use physical abuse and psychological abuse in dating relationships. However, they also believe that there is a double standard for boys and girls regarding the use of physical violence; that is, when girls use physical abuse, this behaviour is more acceptable and is perceived differently by peers and society than when boys use physical abuse.

Girls' Groups

Student 13:

Actually, I can see a girl using physical abuse...

Student 14:

Me too, because they just think well I'm going to hit you but you are not going to hit me back.

Student 13:

Yeah, he would have 20 guys after him if he hit a girl, but if he said she hit me who is going to beat the girl up...

Boys' Groups

Student 15:

...if a girl hits a guy then the guy can't do nothing...

Student 16:

You are not supposed to hit a girl.

Student 17:

...it is more common that the male will beat up the girl, but like nobody really wants to talk about or admit that the girl is beating up the guy...

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Student 18:

Because nobody will believe them that the girl is beating up the guy, but they will believe that the guy is beating up the girl...

The students also emphasized that boys are not encouraged to talk about their feelings or problems. They perceived that boys' use of physical violence occurs because it is not acceptable for boys to express their feelings. Instead, boys tend to keep their emotions contained until they build up and then explode physically and/or emotionally.

Girls' Groups

Student 5:

Actually I think they keep it bottled because most of them do keep everything bottled up inside.

Student 19:

That's what leads to physical violence. It is that they keep so much inside of them.

Student 6:

They don't have anyone to talk to.

Student 20:

They keep it all inside and then one little thing will get them going real bad and then they will just let it all out at once.

The boys had similar perceptions of the relationship between societal proscriptions against emotional

expression by boys and their use of violence in dating relationships.

Theme #4

The adolescents indicated that dating violence is an issue that is of concern to them. They were willing to participate in this research and they also were willing to be part of a solution. They specifically asked for assistance with developing skills for having healthy relationships.

Boys' Groups:

Student 21:

It should be talked about.

Student 22:

They should have talks and stuff in school about it, like they do for like drinking and driving...

Student 23:

They need it at junior high level when they start dating. Get it before it starts.

Girls' Groups

Student 13:

We always focus on the bad relationships, but there are people who work through their problems and have good ones. All you are talking about is what happens in the bad ones. How do you make it better?

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Student 3:

...like look for these things, this is how you know that you are in a good relationship

Conclusions

Our research findings are consistent with the reports of teachers and guidance counsellors: dating violence is a serious and pervasive problem among adolescents in New Brunswick. Almost one third of the adolescent girls across grades 7, 9, and 11 stated that they have had an upsetting psychologically, physically and/or sexually abusive experience in their dating relationships. Although fewer boys reported having had an upsetting abusive experience, our results indicate that dating violence is also a problem faced by a small proportion of boys.

The results from Study 1 show that most adolescents do not believe that it is acceptable to use psychological, physical, or sexual violence in dating relationships. However, an alarming minority of the students believed that abusive behaviour is appropriate. Further, compared to the girls, the boys were significantly more accepting of all forms of abuse whether perpetrated by girls or by boys. These results suggest that neither attempts to raise awareness of family violence in the media nor dating violence prevention programs in the schools have been entirely successful as there is still a

significant proportion of students who believe that use of violence in this context is acceptable. The findings are even more significant when one considers that at least some students likely understated their actual acceptance of dating violence due to an awareness that these attitudes are no longer socially acceptable. Given that individuals who hold these types of violence-supportive attitudes are more likely to engage in abusive behaviour (Price et al., in press), it is important that we seek to further reduce adolescents' acceptance of dating violence.

The results from Study 2 elucidate the complex nature of adolescents' understanding of psychological and physical abuse in dating relationships. Although both the girls and the boys were able to list physically abusive behaviours, the boys considered that these behaviours were abusive only when the **intention** was hurtful. However, the girls defined these behaviours as abusive when the **impact** was hurtful. The difference in perceptions between the boys and the girls may partially explain abuse among teenagers. That is, if boys do not believe that the consequence of their behaviour is harmful to their partners, they may have little reason to stop their actions. If girls feel that their partner's behaviour is hurtful yet they do not communicate their feelings, the behaviour will likely continue. This highlights the need to teach boys to be more empathetic to their partner's experiences as well as to understand that honourable intentions

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They described a progression of dating violence within relationships beginning with behaviours which adolescents may not readily identify as abuse (e.g., insults, controlling behaviours, and jealousy) but which may lead to physically abusive behaviours.

because, regardless of intentions, the impact is hurtful. Further, we need to teach girls that it is no more acceptable for them to engage in aggressive behaviour than it is for boys to do so. Finally, we need to teach adolescent boys and girls to communicate more effectively with their boyfriends about the impact of their behaviour. This fits with the teenagers' own expressed need to learn about healthy relationships and to develop skills to resolve conflicts and disagreements without violence.

The adolescents in the focus groups also provided us with insightful explanations of abusive behaviour in teenage relationships. First, they described a progression of dating violence within relationships beginning with behaviours which adolescents may not readily identify as abuse (e.g., insults, controlling behaviours, and jealousy) but which may lead to physically abusive behaviours. However, they were unclear about when certain behaviours, such as yelling, insulting, and physical horseplay, were abusive. This suggests that dating violence may begin with teenagers' lack of certainty about whether particular behaviours constitute abuse. Second, the adolescents perceived a double standard for boys and girls with respect to the use of violence, in that abuse perpetrated by girls is considered more acceptable than abuse perpetrated by boys. If their perceptions are accurate, we need to create a fundamental shift in societal attitudes about violence toward the belief that violence is unacceptable regardless of the gender of the

perpetrator. Finally, the adolescents noted that boys have few appropriate outlets for their negative emotions as they have been socialized to "bottle up" their feelings. They saw this as leading boys to express these emotions through physical and/or emotional violence. We agree with the teenagers that boys, like girls, should be encouraged to discuss and express their feelings and that these feelings should be taken seriously.

The Contribution of Action Research

The findings of these two studies have contributed to our understanding of adolescent dating violence. However, their contribution was enhanced by combined experience and expertise of the research team and the methodologies used in the research. First, the research was conducted by a multidisciplinary team made up of academic, government and community members. As such, the design of the studies, the methodologies employed, and the interpretation of the results were informed by a wide variety of perspectives. For example, although we have used the term "dating" in this report, we did not use this term in Study 1. Rather, we asked adolescents to think about people they had "gone out with." This terminology was adopted because Research Team members who work in the schools questioned whether New Brunswick adolescents use the word "dating" in the way that we intended and asked students in their

do not excuse violent behaviour

schools what the best term to use would be. Similarly, the idea of running focus groups as a follow-up to our quantitative study (Study 2) arose during a team meeting in which we were discussing the meaning of the results from Study 1. In this context, one of the non-academic members suggested that we ask adolescents for their interpretation of the results. Second, representatives of the New Brunswick Department of Education were members of our research team. Thus, the Department not only contributed resources, but also eased our entry into the schools. As a result, we were able to collect data in grade 7 classrooms and thus to include younger adolescents in our sample than has been the case in many other studies of dating violence. Further, as a partner in our research, the Department of Education has provided us with a grant to facilitate the dissemination of our findings to student, school, and parent groups in the province.

Third, the research combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitative research on intimate violence, particularly using the Conflict Tactics Scale, has been criticized in the past for failing to assess other aspects related to violence such as its context and meaning (DeKeserdy & Kelly, 1993). By combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, we were able not only to acquire data that provide estimates of the extent of dating violence and of violence supportive attitudes in New Brunswick (findings that can only be acquired through survey methods),

but also to provide information on adolescents' understanding of dating violence (data best acquired through qualitative methods). Among other contributions, the qualitative data provided a sense of the similarities and differences between violence perpetrated by boys and by girls. The qualitative results also helped identify potential problems in interpreting the results from quantitative studies of dating violence: student confusion over the definition of dating violence suggests that some items on questionnaires designed to assess dating violence may not have validity for adolescents. Finally, we did not treat the quantitative and qualitative studies as separate from each other. Rather, we used the results from Study 1 to frame the questions we wished to pursue in the focus groups. Conversely, we used the results from Study 2 to guide our decisions about how to present some of the quantitative data. For example, we had designed Study 1 assuming that psychological dating violence and physical dating violence are distinct phenomena. However, adolescents did not draw clear distinctions between these two forms of violence, and they repeatedly noted that these two forms of violence are integrally linked. Thus, we decided to combine the data on physical and psychological abuse in the present

Adolescents did not draw clear distinctions between psychological dating violence and physical dating violence, and they repeatedly noted that these two forms of violence are integrally linked.

report. Similarly, the distinction adolescents made between the impact and the intent of operationally defined violent behaviours led us to use ratings of how upset teenagers had been by particular behaviours (i.e., the impact of the behaviour) in our determination of the percentage of youth who had experienced dating violence.

The two studies described are part of an action-research program aimed at the prevention of dating violence between teenagers. In 'traditional' research, the submission of written manuscripts for publication and dissemination to other researchers often signals the final stage of these projects. In keeping with the philosophy of action-oriented research, however, we view the dissemination phase as an active effort to transform research findings into effective interventions. As such, given our research goal of preventing dating violence among teenagers, we will be conducting a series of meetings with groups of students, parents, teachers and school officials to discuss the findings from this project. These discussions will provide these key stakeholder groups an opportunity to engage in an open dialogue about the research findings. The meetings will also provide an excellent opportunity for participants to identify strategies and interventions to deal with teen violence that are based on their day-to-day experiences in their own communities. In this way, we hope to provide a clearer understanding of adolescent dating violence. As well, we hope to be able to make

recommendations for interventions that are based on the values, concerns and ideas of teenagers, parents, and school personnel.

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Discussion Questions

In keeping with the policy for publications of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, the following questions are provided to facilitate discussion about the results of the research:

1. Boys considered certain behaviours as abusive only when the **intention** was hurtful. Girls defined behaviours as abusive when the **impact** was hurtful.

- a. What are the implications of these findings with regard to dating violence in general? How does this pattern help us to understand adolescents' experiences of dating violence?
- b. How can we use these results to improve prevention programs?

2. Both adolescent boys and girls noted that boys, generally, have few outlets to express their feelings. They felt that this may give rise to boys' emotionally and physically abusive behaviour.

a. Do you agree or disagree with their perceptions? What are the implications of this finding?

b. Given that the notion that limited expression of emotions is a pervasive and ingrained part of the concept of masculinity in our culture, how can we teach boys to express their feelings without increasing their risk of being rejected by peers for being "overly sensitive"?

3. Clearly, more girls than boys have experienced all forms of dating violence yet at least a percentage of boys have also experienced dating violence. Further, boys are more accepting of many abusive behaviours than girls.

a. How can we use these findings to demonstrate to boys that dating violence is a serious problem for girls without making boys feel defensive? What types of proactive methods will keep both non-abusive and abusive boys interested in making changes?

b. How can we help girls understand that their use of abusive behaviours is harmful to their dating partners while still communicating that the experience of violence is a problem more often faced by girls than by boys?

4. A substantial minority of students believe that dating violence is acceptable, or acceptable under certain circumstances.

Appendix

The Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales

Instructions

- a. How can we change attitudes about dating violence?
- b. How can we change peer norms about the acceptability of dating violence used by friends?
5. Both adolescent boys and girls identified the need to learn how to have healthy relationships.

The following are six different questionnaires. The statements on the questionnaires describe attitudes toward a variety of behaviours in dating relationships which different people have. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions. Therefore, it is very important that you answer each question honestly. Please express your feelings about each statement by indicating whether you:

- a. What types of skills do adolescents need to learn?
- b. When should they begin learning the skills?
- c. How do we integrate these skills into school curriculum? Into families? Into community programs? Into the media?

- (1) Strongly Disagree
- (2) Mildly Disagree
- (3) Neither Disagree nor Agree
- (4) Mildly Agree
- (5) Strongly Agree.

N.B. Items marked with * are negatively worded items. Ratings must be reversed before scores are added.

Attitudes Towards Male Psychological Dating Violence Scale

1. A guy should not insult his girlfriend.*
2. A guy should not tell his girlfriend what to do.*
3. A girl should ask her boyfriend first before going out with her

friends. Relationships always work best when girls please their boyfriends.

5. There is never a reason for a guy to threaten his girlfriend.*
6. Sometimes guys just can't help but swear at their girlfriends.
7. A girl should always change her ways to please her boyfriend.
8. A girl should always do what her boyfriend tells her to do.
9. A guy does not need to know his girlfriend's every move.*
10. There is never a good enough reason for a guy to swear at his girlfriend.*
11. It is understandable when a guy gets so angry that he yells at his girlfriend.
12. It is o.k. for a guy to bad mouth his girlfriend.
13. There is never a reason for a guy to yell and scream at his girlfriend.*
14. A girl should not see her friends if it bothers her boyfriend.
15. It is important for a girl to always dress the way her boyfriend wants.

Attitudes Towards Male Physical Dating Violence Scale

1. A girl should break-up with a guy when he hits her.*
2. Some girls deserve to be slapped by their boyfriends.
3. It is never O.K. for a guy to hit his girlfriend.*

4. Sometimes guys just cannot stop themselves from punching girlfriends.
5. There is no good reason for a guy to push his girlfriend.*
6. Sometimes a guy cannot help hitting his girlfriend when she makes him angry.
7. There is no good reason for a guy to slap his girlfriend.*
8. Sometimes jealousy makes a guy so crazy that he must slap his girlfriend.
9. Girls who cheat on their boyfriends should be slapped.
10. Sometimes love makes a guy so crazy that he hits his girlfriend.
11. A guy usually does not slap his girlfriend unless she deserves it.
12. It is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it.

Attitudes Towards Male Sexual Dating Violence Scale

1. When a guy pays on a date, it is O.K. for him to pressure his girlfriend for sex.
2. Guys do not own their girlfriends' bodies.*
3. When guys get really sexually excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex.
4. Guys should never get their girlfriends drunk to get them to have sex.*
5. A guy should not touch his girlfriend unless she wants to be

- touched.*
6. It is alright for a guy to force his girlfriend to kiss him.
7. Often guys have to be rough with their girlfriends to turn them on.
8. To prove her love, it is important for a girl to have sex with her boyfriend.
9. A girl who goes into a guy's bedroom is agreeing to sex.
10. It is no big deal to pressure a girl into having sex.
11. It is alright to pressure a girl to have sex if she has had sex in the past.
12. After a couple is going steady, the guy should not force his girlfriend to have sex.*

Attitudes Towards Female Psychological Dating Violence Scale

1. There is no excuse for a girl to threaten her boyfriend.*
2. There is never a good enough reason for a girl to swear at her boyfriend.*
3. Girls have a right to tell their boyfriends how to dress.
4. A guy should always do what his girlfriend tells him to do.
5. If a girl yells and screams at her boyfriend it does not really hurt him seriously.
6. Girls have a right to tell their

- boyfriends what to do.
7. It is important for a guy to always dress the way his girlfriend wants.
8. Sometimes girls just can't help but swear at their boyfriends.
9. A guy should always ask his girlfriend first before going out with his friends.
10. It is O.K. for a girl to bad mouth her boyfriend.
11. It is understandable when a girl gets so angry that she yells at her boyfriend.
12. Sometimes girls have to threaten their boyfriends so that they will listen.
13. A girl should not control what her boyfriend wears.*

Attitudes Towards Female Physical Dating Violence Scale

1. It is O.K. for a girl to slap her boyfriend if he deserves it.
2. It is no big deal if a girl shoves her boyfriend.
3. Sometimes girls just cannot stop themselves from punching their boyfriends.
4. Some guys deserve to be slapped by their girlfriends.
5. Sometimes a girl must hit her boyfriend so that he will respect her.
6. A girl usually does not slap her boyfriend unless he deserves it.

7. A girl should not hit her boyfriend regardless of what he has done.*
8. There is never a reason for a guy to get slapped by his girlfriend.*
9. Pulling hair is a good way for a girl to get back at her boyfriend.
10. It is never O.K. for a girl to slap her boyfriend.*
11. Some girls have to pound their boyfriends to make them listen.
12. A guy should break-up with a girl when she slaps him.*
- change his mind.*
9. After a couple is going steady, the girl should not force her boyfriend to have sex.*
10. Girls should never lie to their boyfriends to get them to have sex.*
11. To prove his love, it is important for a guy to have sex with his girlfriend.
12. It is O.K. for a girl to say she loves a guy to get him to have sex.

**Attitudes Towards Female Sexual
Dating Violence Scale**

1. A girl should not touch her boyfriend unless he wants to be touched.*
2. There is nothing wrong with a guy changing his mind about having sex.*
3. A guy should breakup with his girlfriend if she has forced him to have sex.*
4. A girl should only touch her boyfriend where he wants to be touched.*
5. A guy who goes into a girl's bedroom is agreeing to sex.
6. It is alright for a girl to force her boyfriend to kiss her.
7. Girls should never get their boyfriends drunk to get them to have sex.*
8. If a guy says "yes" to sex while drinking, he is still allowed to