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FINAL REPORT

Developmental Antecedents of Violence against Women:

A Longitudinal Approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this proposed study was to investigate longitudinally the developmental antecedents of physical and sexual violence against young women, using a theoretically based multi-causal model that includes characteristics related to the victim, the perpetrator and the environment. The analyses were based on a data set from a NIH-funded five-year longitudinal study of victimization and perpetration among college students (N=2,269; over 1500 women and 800 men) demographically representative of undergraduate women and men in state-supported universities in the US. (MH45083).

As men and women establish intimate relationships, dominance and violence can surface in the form of sexual and physical aggression. Culturally influenced aggression in the relations between the sexes begins early in life, becomes patterned, repetitive, and may well escalate into seriously assaultive behavior. In recent years there has been increasing national recognition that relationship violence, largely hidden from public view, is widespread, cutting across regional, socioeconomic, ethnic and racial lines.

CURRENT THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

The review of the research on dating violence and sexual assault as well as the review of previous intervention/prevention efforts, suggest that the most effective approach to understanding intimate partner violence is to examine factors at each level: socio-cultural (the school/community), social networks (peer relationships and teacher/student relationships), dyadic (intimate partner conflict resolution/communication patterns), situational (use of alcohol and drugs and dating patterns) and individual (student attitudes towards gender roles and violence in relationships). Hence, our work is conceptualized in terms of White and Kowalski's (1998) integrative contextual developmental model that examines a wide range of factors across various forms of violence against women and which reveals their commonalities. The model provides a meta-theoretical framework within which to conceptualize violence against women. The model describes five levels of interacting factors: socio-cultural, social networks, dyadic, situational, and individual. This perspective examines individual behavior in context. This model suggests that individual variables are expressed within a cultural and social context, while also reflecting the influences of

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personality, attitudes and beliefs, cognitive processes, and learning history. Thus, certain individual variables predict violence, but only in specific situations.

The model assumes that patriarchy operating at the historical/socio-cultural level affects the power dynamics of all relationships. Shared patterns of ideas and beliefs passed down from generation to generation define one's social networks. Historical and socio-cultural factors create an environment in which the growing child learns rules and expectations, first in the family network, and later in peer, school, intimate, and work relationships. Early experiences define the context for later experiences. Embedded in these social networks are characteristics of the personal relationships in which individuals act violently. Power dynamics become enacted in social networks and result in the internalization of gendered values, expectations, and behaviors. Thus, cultural norms governing the use of aggression as a tool of the more powerful to subdue the weaker combines with gender inequalities to create a climate conducive to violence against women.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is mounting evidence that the onset of serious acquaintance violence begins in early adolescence and tends to persist into adulthood. Both victimization by and perpetration of physical and sexual assault mark the lives of a significant segment of American teenagers and young adults. Early victimization, either by a family member, other adult, or peer, tends to lead to repeated victimization later in life. Also, the younger the perpetrator of sexual or physical assault, the more likely the offender is to become a recidivist in early adulthood. Yet, little is known about the beginnings of acquaintance violence--the formation of patterns of victimization and perpetration, the risk and protective factors which influence the trajectory of acquaintance violence, and its adverse consequences. Although the prevalence of intimate partner violence is well documented, its precipitants are less well understood. What is known about the precipitants of acquaintance violence is largely derived from cross-sectional analyses.

Investigations of the physical and sexual victimization of women have largely relied on cross-sectional designs. While these studies have identified possible risk factors associated with interpersonal violence against women, cross-sectional analyses do not permit an assessment of the predictive power of those factors. Our understanding of violence against women has been hampered by: (a) the largely atheoretical nature of prior investigations, (b) the inability of cross-sectional designs to discern the relative predictive power of previously identified risk factors for victimization and perpetration, (c) a lack of consideration of the change in risk factors for

victimization and perpetration across developmental stages (childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood), (d) inattention to the predictors of multiple victimizations and perpetrations, and (e) lack of analyses of the co-occurrence of physical and sexual assault. The analyses conducted in the present project were designed to address these gaps in our knowledge of violence against women, with a particular focus on co-occurrence.

To remedy the major drawbacks of previous research, we originally undertook a comprehensive five-year longitudinal study that drew upon (1) an interactive model of intimate partner victimization that draws together the central components of several theoretical perspectives, in particular those focusing on the individual (perpetrator and victim), the situation in which the violence occurred, and the larger social context (specifically family and peer group), and (2) a longitudinal design, the optimum method for analyses of precursors and consequences of assaultive relationships.

The theoretical model which has guided our analyses integrates the central psychological and sociological risk factors for involvement in sexual and physical relationship violence. This model includes characteristics of the victim, characteristics of the offender, and the social context of the offense itself. The risk of assault (either as a perpetrator or victim) is influenced by the extent of convergence of a vulnerable victim, a motivated offender, and a situation that provides a suitable opportunity for an assault (see Cohen and Felson, 1979).

In the present project we focused on experiences with interpersonal violence at three stages in the life course: childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Childhood and adolescent data were retrospective. Data collected across the four collegiate years were prospective. Therefore, we have been able to test the model in two ways: (1) at each life stage separately, childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, and (2) developmentally. Developmentally, we assessed the influence of risk factors at a prior life stage on involvement in relationship violence at a later life stage.

HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED

The research goals of the proposed investigation were focused on physical violence and its co-occurrence with sexual assault among acquaintances, paralleling the work we have already done on experiences with sexual coercion. The analyses fill a gap in our knowledge about violence against women by addressing the relationship between experiences of sexual and physical violence as either victim or perpetrator. The specific hypotheses are outlined below:

Hypotheses related to victimization:

I. There will be statistically significant relationships between the various forms of victimization, i.e., women who experience one form of partner violence will also experience other forms.

II. Early victimization experiences are significant risk factors for further victimization. Specifically, childhood victimization will increase the risk of verbal, sexual and nonsexual partner violence during adolescence, which in turn will increase the risk of victimization during the first year in college, which then increases the risk of further victimization in subsequent collegiate years.

III. An additive model of revictimization is predicted. Prior victimization during childhood and adolescence increases significantly the risk of revictimization during the collegiate years. However, indices of sexual promiscuity and alcohol and/or drug use, along with gender role attitudes, values (religiosity), and involvement in heterosexual interpersonal conflict during adolescence will account for a significant portion of the variance in victimization during the collegiate year (i.e., these factors are predictors of victimization independent of prior victimization).

Hypotheses related to perpetration:

IV. There will be statistically significant relationships between the various forms of perpetration, i.e., men who commit one form of partner violence will also commit other forms.

V. Early perpetration and victimization experiences are significant risk factors for further perpetration. Specifically, childhood victimization will increase the risk of sexual, physical or both forms of acquaintance assault as an adolescent, which in turn will increase the risk of perpetration as a young adult.

VI. An additive model of reperpetration is predicted. In addition to the effects of childhood victimization and adolescent perpetration as predictors of collegiate perpetration indices of sexual promiscuity, alcohol/drug use, delinquency, and involvement in heterosexual interpersonal conflict, along with attitudes/values (including gender role attitudes and religiousness), hostile masculinity, and dominance/nurturance ratio (self-centeredness untempered by sensitivity to others) will be significant predictors of collegiate acquaintance assault.

METHODS

In 1990, the National Institute of Mental Health awarded Drs. White and Humphrey a grant to conduct a five year longitudinal study (1990-1995) of the risk of sexual and physical assault among university students. The

longitudinal study was designed to examine prospectively the relationship among the major risk factors that retrospectively have been identified as the best predictors of sexual victimization and perpetration among university undergraduates.

Two incoming classes of women were surveyed regarding a variety of social experiences. Approximately 83% of the 1990 class (n=825) and 84% of the 1991 class (n=744) provided useable surveys. The sample consisted of 25.3% African-American women, 70.9% Caucasian, and 3.8% other ethnic groups. Three incoming freshmen classes of men (1990, 1991, 1992) were also administered a survey of a range of social experiences (N=835). Of the total number of incoming men, 65% completed the first survey.

DESIGN. A classic longitudinal design, replicated over two cohorts (those born in 1972 and 1973), each assessed first when 18 years old, and again when 19, 20, 21, and 22 years old was used. We assumed that there would be no significant time of measurement effects. Each survey covered a non-overlapping year in the student's life. Students were given a fixed reference point that limited the recall interval to the previous year. Furthermore, the attitude and personality measures asked student to report how they feel presently.

RESULTS

CO-OCCURRENCE OF CHILDHOOD PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE IN WOMEN. Within our sample, 62% of women reported no forms of abuse before age 14, 7% co-occurrence of physical and sexual abuse, 18% only physical abuse, and 12% only sexual abuse. Analysis of variance and chi-square analyses were conducted to assess differences among these abuse groups on various outcomes in adolescence years (ages 14-18). These outcomes were considered under three basic domains: risky behaviors which included number of sex partners, frequency of unprotected sex and alcohol use during adolescence; interpersonal factors which included sexual revictimization and injuries from a romantic partner during adolescence; and individual characteristics which included psychological stress and eating disorders during adolescence. Analyses indicated significant group differences in varying patterns on all outcome variables. Women experiencing both or either form of abuse had significantly more psychological distress, unprotected sex, eating disorders, alcohol use and adolescent sexual victimization than those with no history of abuse. Post-hoc analyses indicated further group differences among the different abuse groups. Women with co-occurrence of abuse reported significantly more sex partners and sexual victimization than those women with only physical abuse.

CONSEQUENCES OF CO-OCCURRENCE OF SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL VICTIMIZATION DURING ADOLESCENCE

SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL REVICTIMIZATION. Results revealed a significant effect for the type of adolescent experience (sexual only, physical only, both, none) on the total number of sexual victimizations across the four years of college, as well as the total number of physical assaults. Examination of sexual victimization across time revealed that adolescent co-occurrence resulted in significantly more sexual victimizations, followed by adolescent sexual victimization. Physical victimization in the absence of sexual victimization in adolescence, did not result in any more future sexual victimization than for women with no adolescent victimization experiences. A time x type interaction was due to no change across time in sexual victimization for women with no or only physical victimization whereas those who had experienced only sexual victimization or both types showed a decline in total number of victimizations across time. Examination of physical victimization across time revealed a similar pattern except that it was adolescent sexual victimization that did not differ from none, whereas both produced the highest levels of further physical victimization followed by physical only.

INJURY BY ROMANTIC PARTNER. Although injury reports declined across time, women who had experienced co-occurrence during adolescence and the first year of college remained at higher risk for further injury in the subsequent years of college relative women who had experienced no victimization or only sexual victimization.

MENTAL HEALTH. Women who experience no victimization reported the lowest levels of psychological distress (a composite score based on measures of anxiety, depression and loss of control). Women who experienced co-occurrence reported the highest levels of psychological distress, with other women reporting intermediate levels. Additionally, these differences were maintained across time. By the 4th year in college, women who had experienced co-occurrence in both adolescence and the first year of college or had been sexually assaulted remained at higher levels of psychological distress than other women.

PHYSICAL HEALTH. Analyses of women's ratings of their overall physical health during the fourth year of college, as well as reports of the number of visits to a medical doctor in the past six months (rating provided during the fourth year of college) indicated a significant effect for the cumulative co-occurrence of sexual and physical assault during adolescence and the first year of college. Women who experienced co-occurrence at both points in time reported more visits to the doctor than women with no assault experiences. In general, women who had repeatedly experienced only physical assault rated their overall general health lower than other women.

PROBLEM BEHAVIORS: SUICIDALITY, SEXUAL BEHAVIORS, AND ALCOHOL USE. Women who experienced co-occurrence during adolescence were more likely to report suicidal thoughts during adolescence, more than other women, but suicidal thoughts in subsequent years were not related to co-occurrence in adolescence. With regard to sexual behaviors, an increased number of sex partners was associated with all types of victimization. During adolescence, the women who had experienced co-occurrence and those who had been only sexually victimized had the greatest number of sex partners, followed by those who had been only physically assaulted. These patterns did not change across time. Also, by the end of the fourth year of college, women who had been victimized in adolescence or the first year of college were more likely to have engaged in unprotected sex at sometime during college. The likelihood was greatest for those who had experienced co-occurrence. Finally, co-occurrence had a significant effect of alcohol use. Alcohol use was highest for women who experienced co-occurrence in adolescence and the first year of college, whereas women with no victimization were the lowest, and other victimized women were intermediate. Although alcohol use decline across time this same ordering persisted.

PREDICTORS OF REVICTIMIZATION. First year college victimization appears to have an impact in several areas of young women's functioning, even when pre-existing victimizations and level of functioning are controlled for. Women's values and attitudes, sense of self--as reflected in self-image and general psychological well-being, behaviors (use of intoxicants and dating patterns), and knowledge of peer sexual experiences are altered. Furthermore, analyses indicated that childhood experiences with family violence and sexual abuse contribute to increased psychological distress (i.e., anxiety, depression, loss of control, lack of emotional ties), increased use of intoxicants, a negative self-image, acceptance of male violence, and a tendency to engage in interpersonal physical aggression in dating relationships as an adolescent. Additionally, even when controlling for the impact of early childhood sexual and non-sexual aggression, adolescent sexual victimization is associated with significant increases in psychological distress, negative self-image, involvement in interpersonal aggression, increased use of intoxicants, and higher levels of dating a larger number of different people

Thus, in the context of early childhood experiences with family violence and sexual abuse, combined with further adolescent sexual victimization, it becomes easier to conclude that some women are at greater risk than others for further sexual victimization as a young adult. Finally, a number of consequences of childhood and adolescent sexual victimization appear to become predictors of further victimization in the first year of college, even when childhood and adolescent sexual

victimizations are controlled for. These include religiosity, endorsement of chivalrous attitudes, loss of control, having verbally aggressive personality style, and being physically aggressive toward dating partners.

CO-OCCURRENCE OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ASSAULT IN MEN

For adolescence and each of the four years of college, the co-occurrence of sexual and physical assault is common, although the percentage declines across time from 9.2% in adolescence to 4.5%, 4.0%, 4.4%, during the first three years of college, to 2.1% in the fourth year. analyses of co-occurrence during adolescence and during each of the four years of college indicate a significant relationship between sexual and physical assault that exceeds that predicted by the marginal totals. This suggests that one type of perpetration increases the risk of the other type. Overall, a young man who commits one type of assault is 5 times more likely to commit the other type during adolescence (these odds vary somewhat from year 1 to year 4, 5.3, 2.8, 5.8, 4.5, respectively).

THE EFFECTS OF WITNESSED AND EXPERIENCED FAMILY VIOLENCE. Analyses indicate a significant relationship between type of perpetration and indices of both witnessing family violence and experiencing family violence. Young men who commit both sexual and physical assault witnessed significantly more family violence and experienced more family violence than an men who committed either none or just one type of assault.

THE EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE. A significant relationship was found between childhood sexual victimization and the co-occurrence of sexual and physical assault in adolescence. Although men who were sexually assaultive or who showed co-occurrence reported more childhood sexual abuse than the men with no assault history or who were only physically assaultive, only en who were only sexually aggressive experienced more childhood sexual abuse than men with no perpetration history during adolescence.

CORRELATES OF CO-OCCURRENCE. A series of analyses revealed that co-occurrence of sexual and physical assault was significantly related to alcohol and drug use, number of sexual partners, engaging in delinquent behavior, and attitudes towards women, specifically, approval of women taking the initiative in relationships and male use of violence toward women. In all cases men who had engaged in sexual and physical assault had the highest mean on each of these measures and men committing neither had the lowest means on each. However, in some cases there were no differences among men who were assaultive in some way (alcohol and drug use, delinquency, number of sex partners, and acceptance of male violence).

PREDICTORS OF PERPETRATION. The pattern of responding across time indicated that during adolescence, 22.3% of the men admitted to some form of sexually aggressive behavior during adolescence; 10.8% reported unwanted contact as their most serious sexually aggressive behavior; 3.1% admitted to using verbally coercive tactics to obtain sexual intercourse, while 8.5% reported actions meeting the legal definition of rape or attempted rape. Results also show a decline across time for each form of sexually aggressive behavior. For unwanted sexual contact the biggest decline occurred from adolescence to the first year in college (48%), with an overall decline of 51% by the end of the fourth year of college. For rape and attempted rape, on the other hand, the largest decline occurred between the third and fourth years (70% decline, from 4.7% to 1.4%), followed by a decline of 48% (8.5% to 4.7%) from adolescence to the first year in college, with an overall decline of 84%. For verbal coercion, on the other hand, a decline is apparent until the end of the third year of college, with an overall decline of 55%. These declines in sexual aggression do not appear to be due to a general disengagement from sexual activities with women in general. We also found a steady increase in the percentage of men reporting involvement with only consensual sexual activities, with a 19% increase from 77.6% to 92.9%). These patterns of results hold for both the men who participated in the survey but dropped out at sometime during the project, as well as for just those who participated in the entire project. Thus, we do not think these patterns are biased by those men who did or did not complete the project. Related to this pattern is the question of whether the same men are repeatedly offending across time. To begin to answer this question, we first categorized men as having engaged in pre-college sexual assault or not. Second, based on responses to the first follow-up survey, at the end of the first year in college, men were classified as having engaged in sexual assault or not. An analysis revealed a ratio of 4:1. Men who had engaged in adolescent sexual assault were 4 times more likely to sexually assault during the first year of college than men without a prior self-reported history of sexually assault.

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