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Social and Environmental Contexts of Adolescent and Young Adult Male Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence: A Qualitative Study

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The purpose of the current study was to examine qualitatively the life contexts of young males enrolled in programs addressing perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV). Semistructured interviews were conducted with 19 males recruited from these programs. Interviews were coded to examine life contexts and analyzed using a content analysis approach. Five themes emerged across interviews: (a) disruptive home environment; (b) lack of positive male role models; (c) a peer context characterized by substance use, gang involvement, and behaviors supporting the sexual maltreatment of girls; (d) school circumstances

characterized by a lack of academic support; and (e) community exposures to violence. These factors were often interrelated within the various contexts of participants. Further research is needed to provide insight into whether and how these issues may contribute to IPV perpetration. Efforts to support young males regarding a broad array of concerns should be included in programming to reduce IPV perpetration.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; dating violence; adolescent and young male development; contextual factors; male perpetrators

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widely recognized public health and human rights issue disproportionately affecting women (Rennison, 2003); almost one third of women in the United States report experiencing IPV in their lifetime

(Coker et al., 2002). More recently, male-perpetrated partner violence among youth has been recognized as a significant public health concern. A study of public high school students reported that 1 in 5 adolescent girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a dating partner, with the vast majority indicating only male dating partners (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001).

Although a large number of studies have focused on the experiences of IPV victimization among women and girls (e.g., Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, & Hannan, 2003; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006; Coker et al., 2002; Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2005; Raj, Silverman, & Amaro, 2000; Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2004; Silverman et al., 2001), few have focused on factors related to the perpetration of IPV by adult men, and even fewer among young males (e.g., Harper, Austin, Cercone, & Arias, 2005;

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Silverman et al., 2006; Tilley & Brackley, 2005). The paucity of studies focused on the relational and contextual factors related to adolescent and young adult male interpersonal violence perpetration confounds efforts to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies (Silverman et al., 2001; Sturdevant et al., 2001; Wingood, DiClemente, McCree, Harrington, & Davies, 2001).

Existing research on adult male perpetrators of IPV has focused on individual-level risk factors for perpetration, including problems with shame and anger (Dutton, van Ginkel, & Starzomski, 1995; Harper et al., 2005), substance use (Fals-Stewart, Golden, & Schumacher, 2003; Moore & Stuart, 2004; Roberts, 1998; Schafer, Caetano, & Cunradi, 2004), sexist attitudes toward women (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White, 2006), more traditional attitudes toward male gender norms (Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, & Silverman, 2006), and previous experiences of sexual and physical violence victimization (Loh & Gidycz, 2006; Luthra & Gidycz, 2006). Research has documented the increased likelihood of problem behaviors, including non-partner-specific interpersonal violence perpetration, among young males with more troubled life contexts (i.e., family, school, and social environment; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Jessor, 1993, 1998; Jessor & Jessor, 1978; Lerner & Simi, 2000; Youngblade et al., 2007), suggesting the critical importance of social and environmental contexts. Relational factors include parental conflict or low parental support (Carr & VanDeusen, 2002; McCord, 1979; Simons, Wu, Conger, & Lorenz, 1994; Wasserman and Seracini, 2001) as well as an association with delinquent peers (Ingoldsby & Shaw, 2002; Ingoldsby et al., 2006; Scaramella, Conger, Spoth, & Simons, 2002). Contextual factors include lack of school connectedness and academic difficulties at school (Youngblade et al., 2007) and family, peer, and community violence exposure (e.g., Palmeri Sams & Truscott, 2004; Silverman & Williamson, 1997; Singer, Miller, Guo, Slovak, & Frierson, 1998; Rosario, Salzinger, Feldman, Ng-Mak, 2003; Widom, 1989, 1991). In-depth investigation of such contexts among young male perpetrators of IPV is necessary to develop models for building effective prevention and intervention efforts.

To better understand the broader context related to perpetration of IPV, the current qualitative study uses an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1998) to explore family, peer, school, and community contexts among a sample of predominantly urban young

male perpetrators of IPV. An ecological model focuses examination on participants' exposure to various environments and settings that influence their development and provides a framework for understanding how adverse experiences in any one context may influence both the individual as well as other contextual levels. The goal of the present study was to explore the potential relevance of social and environmental contexts to young adult and adolescent males' IPV perpetrating behaviors.

Method

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 young males recruited from five school- and community-based IPV intervention programs for male perpetrators located in New England metropolitan areas (Boston, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Burlington, Vermont). Participants of these intervention programs were adolescent males referred by school or youth programs as a result of perpetrating IPV, either from self-reported IPV perpetration to a school or program counselor or in response to an incident reported by a family member, a teacher, counselor, or other staff. Program participants indicating an interest in study participation were provided with a time to meet with researchers by the director of their program. To assure inclusion of only confirmed perpetrators of IPV, of the 25 interviews conducted, 19 were included in present analyses based on self-reported IPV perpetration (physical, sexual, and/or threats of physical violence) in either a brief survey ($n = 17$) or during the interview ($n = 2$), beyond programmatic referrals described.

Procedure

Interviews used an open-ended narrative interview strategy to encourage free-flowing stories related to relationships and violence experiences. Female research associates with experience in interviewing and content areas conducted the interviews. The use of female facilitators was justified given that many of the intervention programs use female group leaders and prior evidence that, in addition to males, females are also effective in facilitation of sensitive discussions with male interviewees (Lamb & Garretson, 2003; Pollner, 1998). The interview probed for history, nature, and context of IPV perpetration, including stories about intimate relationships, sexual risk

and sexual experiences, STD/HIV history and risk perceptions, pregnancy involvement, and experiences of personal victimization. General information about living situation, family, education, peers, community, and future goals were obtained during the interviews. Given the semistructured nature of the interviews, no specific questions were devised by the research team; however, interviewers were trained to cover these specified topics with participants. Immediately prior to the start of each interview, interviewers informed participants of the objectives and format of the interview, provided assurance of anonymity, and obtained verbal consent for participation; parental consent was waived for this study, as participants were recruited from confidential services.

Interviews were of approximately 90 minutes and audiotaped. Following the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief, anonymous survey assessing demographics, sexual health behaviors and outcomes, pregnancy involvement, and IPV perpetration. A unique identifier linked participants' interview and survey data. After completion of the survey, participants were provided a listing of local mental health, substance use, and violence-related services. Participants received a \$30 gift card as compensation for their time. The protocols for this study were reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Committee at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Data Analyses

Interviews were professionally transcribed; transcripts were reviewed for accuracy against the recording. Transcribed and deidentified (i.e., removal of all names and other information that could allow identification of individual participants), interviews were analyzed using a content analysis approach (Ryan & Weisner, 1998) using Atlas-ti Version 5 software (The Knowledge Workbench, 2001). Content analysis involves generating and applying codes to sections of text and then reviewing the text by various codes and "code families" to identify recurrent themes. For this study, the first five interviews were coded using an initial a priori code list created by the entire coding team (four investigators) that were based on key domains of interest as noted above (e.g., types of abusive behaviors, relationships, sexual behaviors, family disruption). An expanded code list emerging from the interviews was then generated. The expanded code list included codes pertaining to subtopics raised by participants, such as peer behaviors, substance use, and school-related issues. All

interviews were independently coded by two investigators, compared to ensure agreement, and finalized. Additions of new codes or changes in code definitions were determined via consensus among the entire research team. No new codes emerged after two thirds of the interviews were coded, suggesting content saturation was achieved. For this particular analysis, coded texts were retrieved regarding participants' peer, family, school, and community contexts, and additional subcodes were generated related to observed patterns in their narratives; subcodes were then applied to all passages related to these contexts to facilitate further inferences and selection of illustrative quotations.

Themes related to these contexts were derived from patterns apparent across multiple participants. Results are organized at two levels: (1) level of social ecology—family, peer, school, and community; and (2) content of themes within each ecologic level—(a) describing general conditions and experiences and (b) related to perpetration of violence or other maltreatment of women or girls, including negative messaging or attitudes (i.e., factors likely more proximally related to perpetration of IPV). Because of lack of discussion of issues related to maltreatment of women and girls within the contexts of school and community, only general themes are described for these ecologic levels.

Quantitative data collected via survey were analyzed descriptively to help characterize the sample and complement qualitative findings; specifically, data on demographics (age, race/ethnicity, nativity) as well as IPV perpetration histories were examined. In terms of quantifying IPV perpetration and types of perpetration, both participants' surveys and interviews (via codes referring to sexual or physical abuse or threats of violence against a partner) were evaluated for reports of IPV perpetration. Two participants reported perpetration of sexual abuse against an intimate partner during the interviews, which was not reported in these participants' surveys; such reports were included in the prevalence of reported perpetration of sexual abuse or coercion against a partner in this sample.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Sample characteristics and IPV perpetration behaviors. Participants ($N = 19$) were aged between 17 and 21 years (mean age = 19 years) and were predominantly

White ($n = 9$, 47%), Black ($n = 7$, 37%), or Latino ($n = 2$, 11%); one participant reported an “other” race/ethnicity. The majority of participants ($n = 17$, 89%) were US born. Thirty-seven percent ($n = 7$) reported attending Grades 10 to 12 in high school. The majority ($n = 11$, 58%) reported that their father or male guardian physically hurt their mothers or female partners. Half of the sample ($n = 10$, 53%) reported perpetration of physical violence (e.g., twisting arms or pulling hair so that it hurt; hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, or choking; causing a sprain, bruise, or other injury), two thirds ($n = 13$, 68%) reported threats of physical violence (e.g., destroying her property, threatening to hit, throw something at, or otherwise hurt), and one third ($n = 6$, 32%) reported perpetration of sexual abuse or coercion (e.g., using pressure to make her have sex against her will, threatening to have sex with others if she did not have sex, pressuring to not use a condom) against a dating or sexual partner.

Qualitative Findings

The life contexts of participants revolved around realms related to family and home environment, peers, school, and community. With the exception of school and community contexts, participants described factors related to these ecological contexts that were separated into the following two categories: (a) general factors often related to disruption and instability and (b) factors related to negative treatment of or attitudes toward women or girls (factors likely more proximal to IPV perpetration).

Family and Home Environment

Four main themes emerged from participants’ descriptions of their home contexts: (a) chaotic and insecure family and home environments (e.g., family substance use), (b) residential instability, (c) absence of fathers and lack of positive male role models, and (d) witnessing older male role models’ maltreatment of female partners and other delinquent behaviors.

General findings related to family and home life. Participants often reported disruption in family life, often related to their mothers’ substance use.

It was like sixth grade when they got separated, and like, I seen a bunch of shit. Like my mom was doin’ heroin and all that, and my dad was tryin’ to make her stop, but it wasn’t happenin’.

My mother, like, in the beginnin’, we had a strong relationship when I was younger. As I got older, I grew away from her, um . . . she had a drug habit and stuff like that.

My mother was an alcoholic . . . my father was a workaholic. . . . My mother, . . . she wasn’t a smart woman. She was, she dropped outta eighth grade . . . she was an alcoholic.

Many participants described being removed from their homes by state authorities and being placed with grandparents or foster parents. Residential instability was common as they went back and forth between residing with parents, grandparents, or other family members and foster parents.

The courts removed me from my house . . . and put me at DSS [Department of Social Services], and they just placed me all over the state. . . . I really don’t look too far, like, down the road. Like, I mean . . . ‘cause things for me change day by day.

Grew up in SC. . . . lived there, while I was down there, I lived with my grandmother, my cousin, my grandfather and my brother. Then we moved back up here to [name of town], ‘cause my mother was off drugs, so, she was doin’ better.

Participants often reported not having a stable presence of a father in their lives.

My father . . . we was like close in my younger stages. . . . And then, the only thing I remember about my childhood most is when I was in middle school, and every day after school, at my bus stop, I would always . . . want him to be on my grandmother’s porch when I got home. That was like someone that was close to me when I was younger [but he never came].

So there’s like no male, father-figure in the house, or whatever. So it was kind of hard, between my mom bein’ a single parent, raisin’ two boys, and not knowin’ anything about ‘em ‘cause she’s a female, you know?

Then he [father] left, and . . . I don’t know what really happened. I asked, “Where’s my dad? Where’s my dad?”

Factors related to the negative treatment of or attitudes toward women or girls within the context of family and home life. Domestic violence was commonly reported by various participants in the sample; qualitative

findings regarding exposure to domestic violence echoed quantitative survey findings, that is, 58% reported abuse between parents perpetrated by the male parent, guardian, or stepfather.

He (my dad) cheated on my mom, he beat my mom.

He [stepfather] called my mom, "bitch." I tell him, don't call my mom a bitch no more . . . And then he keeps sayin' it . . . I wanted to fight him, but . . . he just wanted to break . . . break us all apart. My mom left him for it, but then, he crawled back to my mom.

Available male role models (e.g., brothers or other male family members) were often reported as behaving in disrespectful ways toward female partners. Participants admired these older male family members who had money, girls, and power and described wanting to be like them.

'Cause I seen, . . . my uncles . . . they'll have girlfriends and like treat 'em wrong. . . I liked the money part because they were . . . [dealing] I mean, 'cause . . . they were buyin' like a lot of stuff. Like, they were buyin' like . . . three cars every week. I was like, "Damn!" So . . . for that, I wanted to be like them.

Participants' narratives often drew together a confluence of multiple factors associated with family disruption in their lives, including witnessing domestic violence, unstable living situations and guardianship, and delinquent behavior.

And my mother . . . I got taken away from her when I was six, 'cause her boyfriend used to hit her. And, . . . DSS [Department of Social Services] took me away and gave me to my grandmother . . . after like two foster homes. And I was in Florida and, um . . . I found out that my mom had HIV, so like . . . they didn't want to send me back with my mom, so I did everything bad . . . so, my grandma [would] send me to my mom. I lived with my mom . . . I came out here, and I started selling drugs.

Peer Context

Regarding relationships with peers, participants generally talked about their friends in terms of social events, gang involvement, substance use, and issues related to girls and sex, which often included maltreatment of female sex partners.

General findings related to peer context. Major general themes regarding participants' peers included

identification of substance use as a norm as well as gang involvement. Participants reported that it was common to drink alcohol or smoke (marijuana) among their groups of friends.

I mean, if it's at a party, obviously, everyone's drinkin' already, so. Or, smokin' already, so, you know, everyone's getting drunk.

My friends—they love weed . . . they sell it, and they get mad money off of it, you know? . . . My friend lives off of it. . . they love drugs. They don't do . . . they don't do crack. . . They don't do all that . . . they do e-pills . . . or they do . . . weed and stuff.

Well, I . . . well, drugs are like their way out. You know what I mean? . . . I don't have any heavy drug addict friends, I have friends who will smoke weed. They may even smoke like four or five times a week. . . They're functional potheads.

Participants often described experiences with gangs and associated violence.

'Cause I'm a CRIP and, you know, we have . . . enemy BLOODS, BOY SOLDIERS, and then we have the LATIN KINGS, we have . . . a lot of rivals.

Like, "[gang] bangin'," means like, you're wearin' your colors . . . you're goin' out . . . you wanna do everything every day. You wanna go out and chase them dudes, or to kill them, or to try to . . . the way you sort of think about it. You try to kill them. If you . . . 'cause they're gonna try to kill you, so you better think about trackin' 'em down before they kill you.

Many participants revealed the influence of older male role models for determining gang involvement, emphasizing the confluence of family and peer contexts in participants' lives.

[I have been in a gang] . . . basically, all my life. Since I was like eight . . . years old. . . How did I get into it? My brother. He, he's a leader of it, so, you know, he's more like a OG. That's "original gangster." Yah so . . . I follow his steps, but like now he's in jail. So. I can't really follow his steps no more, 'cause I'm not tryin' to go that way.

Peer context and factors related to maltreatment or negative attitudes toward women or girls. Participants often described peer norms regarding sex that supported "turning girls out" and "running trains." Turning girls out was reported as finding a girl who

might be perceived as innocent or a virgin and getting her to have sex or do sexual things with them or their friends. Trains usually involved various males taking turns having sex with one girl. Both these activities reflect a peer context for sexual behaviors that promotes and affords positive value and esteem to the maltreatment of girls.

Participants commonly described having ownership of girls, bragging to friends, and a general degrading attitude toward girls when talking about “turning a girl out” or “running a train,” in many instances tied explicitly to male social stature among peers.

He could basically brag, sayin’, “Oh, I turned her out. That’s MY ‘ho.’”

Yeah, we have like . . . we have like competitions. Like . . . what we call it is “turnin’ a girl,” “turnin’ her out.” Like, say one of my buddies gets a girl, we’d be like, “Oh, bet you can’t turn her out.” . . . It’s all like competition. “Oh, I bet you can’t do this . . . with her.” . . . When I was [living] out in [name of town], I used to do it . . . every night.

They [girls] don’t know no better . . . Their mind’s not strong enough to basically get over it, ‘cause like, a guy could talk to a girl, like, “You bitch, you fuckin’ ho’, this and that,” but she’s gonna like it because she’s gonna think he loves her . . . Like, he could hit a female, . . . and she might cry. But when she go home, she’s gonna . . . love you even more. . . . It’s all in the way you talk to a girl . . . she don’t have that mind power to figure out that you’re playin’ her. . . . Like, she’ll go for the bait, and after that, it’s do whatever you want. Turn her out, whatever.

He turned her around, and like he makin’ money with her. . . . That’s even more braggin’ rights. . . . Turnin’ them out to basically make money, like ho’s. . . . They [the girls] get money. But the guys, they get MORE money, ‘cause they’re pimpin’ ‘em . . . I think the easiest girls to like turn out. Other than a virgin. Is a run-away. . . . That’s the easiest whore.

My boy had a party, and there was like a couple of girls there . . . we were tryin’ to DO somethin’ . . . with ‘em, and . . . we just like laced the blunt . . . put coke in it . . . I don’t think she knew about it. . . . her face was like purple, then . . . after that, I just seen her on the knees for like the whole day (chuckles), like . . . she was doin’ everybody. She [probably] felt like she was getting . . . terrorized or somethin’, like . . . they, . . . put her in slavery or somethin’.

School

In terms of educational attainment, many participants described a general lack of support around their ability to succeed academically; several discussed how problems and disruptions occurring in other life contexts (e.g., family) interfered with their ability to obtain an education.

Several participants reported that their difficulty with school was a result of coping with problems at home and residential instability.

Well, I grew up in a lotta places, ‘cause I . . . lived in like cities all over MA, like, that’s why I go to this school because, uh . . . I had troubles and I missed two years of school, and I should’a been graduated already, but.

You know, 11 years of my life I don’t know I have a brother, and now my brother suddenly like, steps into my life and . . . I kinda felt like they were payin’ more attention to him . . . I was like, “All right, well, you know, they’re caterin’ to him, so I’m gonna lash out,” . . . I was drinkin’ . . . even in . . . high school, I was drinkin’ really bad. I went to school drunk, half the time, and that’s . . . a lot of it came from that, too.

I would have to go to a prep school to higher my GPA, ‘cause my GPA’s like 1. ‘Cause I never showed up . . . [So, what do you think it was?] My family. They didn’t, uh . . . [So . . . that sort of disruption in your home life made it hard for you to . . .] Yeah. . . . It was like sixth grade when they got separated, . . . I seen . . . my mom was doin’ heroin and all that.

Participants often reported that economic insecurity further affected their ability to both remain in school and do well academically.

Nope. I . . . dropped out of twelfth, ‘cause I . . . needed the money, BAD. So I had to go to the job, ‘cause the job was in the morning, so I had to go to the job in the morning.

Yeah, I was actually workin’ while I was in high school—skippin’ school and just goin’ to work.

Community Context

The main theme that emerged from discussions of the community-level context of participants’ lives was the impact of exposure to violence. Many participants described pervasive exposure to and fear of violence in their communities.

I was worried about takin' the bus! About somebody stabbin' me and robbin' me and stuff like that. They're like, "You're wearin' a red t-shirt." They'd beat me half to death or kill . . . shoot me, just for gettin' . . . wearin' a colored shirt. . . . I've seen people get shot, stabbed . . . people got beat to death. All kinds of stuff.

My dad got shot . . . in the projects.

There's violence over drug spots . . . there's violence over . . . a lot of things. . . . I guess people are raised around that . . . and that's what they're used to seeing and stuff, so I guess that's what they do . . . I was raised around that, . . . and when I got older, that's what I started doin'. I started . . . playing with guns.

Violence . . . it's all around. You know? It's just all around. . . . Like, I'm walkin' down the street—this was the other day [walking home]—and these guys ran up on me . . . and basically pulled a gun on me.

I was jumped . . . and I've been shot (chuckles lightly), I've been stabbed . . . I've been shot at multiple times. And this is just from bein' in the wrong place at the wrong time . . . I was never in a gang . . . But that's just how I look at it. You know? If I gotta die, I gotta die.

Discussion

The current study highlights relational and contextual factors both distal (e.g., guardianship and residential instability, lack of support around education) as well as more proximal to IPV perpetration (e.g., witnessing maltreatment of women within participants' peer and family contexts) as common to this sample of young males from programs for perpetration of IPV. Such data provide a multifaceted view of the lives of young males who perpetrate IPV and allow for generation of hypotheses regarding how such contexts potentially relate to each other as well as to IPV-related behaviors. Although this qualitative study does not establish whether specific factors identified by young males within these contexts are associated with heightened risk for IPV perpetration, it provides insight into potentially relevant settings for intervention programs serving lower-income urban young IPV perpetrators and suggests directions for future research.

Previous studies have demonstrated that family problems are common among young males engaged in maladaptive behaviors (e.g., delinquency, substance use; Barnow, Schuckit, Lucht, John, & Freyberger,

2002; Coie, Watt, & West, 1993; Jaffee, Moffitt, Avshalom, Taylor, & Arseneault, 2002; Maddahian, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1988; McCloskey, Figuerado, & Koss, 1995; Singer et al., 1998); however, only a few studies have examined family dysfunction in association with IPV perpetration among young males (Lavoie et al., 2002; Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998). Although many studies have documented the association between witnessing parental violence as a child and subsequent perpetration of IPV as an adult (e.g., Riggs & O'Leary, 1996; Silverman & Williamson, 1997), given the other forms of family dysfunction (e.g., parental substance use) and unstable living situation and guardianship also reported among this sample of young male perpetrators, a broader array of forms of family dysfunction as potential risk factors for young males' IPV perpetration need to be tested.

Regarding male role models, previous studies have often focused solely on the effects of parents or guardians as male role models (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000; Sampson, 1987; Steinberg, 1987); however, given the current study findings on the relevance of nonparental male role models in these young males' lives, future studies might examine quantitatively the influence of nonparental male role models and their messaging and modeling regarding women and girls and perpetration of IPV. Young males are likely to behave in ways that parallel the actions of those around them, particularly other males regardless of whether these men are parents, family, or other acquaintances; formulating research and intervention focused on this aspect of young males' lives, including engaging men and boys in gender-based violence prevention, may be one innovative direction.

At the level of peers, young males largely focused discussions on substance use, gang involvement, maltreatment of girls, and obtaining sex. Although substance use has been previously found to be associated with young males' delinquent behaviors and IPV perpetration (Rivera-Rivera, Allen-Leigh, Rodriguez-Ortega, Chavez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2007; Tontodonato, & Crew, 1992), the current study further highlighted the social and peer context around gangs and sex. Previous research has demonstrated that gang involvement among youth is often a result of urban community environments characterized by marginalization and poverty (Jackson, 1991; Klein, 1995), factors common to the sample in the current study. Studies have not examined how gang involvement may be relevant to young men's IPV perpetration; however, given

some evidence for an association between witnessing community violence and IPV perpetration among young males (Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensek, 1997), future studies are needed to examine, specifically, the relation between involvement in gangs or witnessing gang-associated violence and IPV perpetration among young males.

Regarding participants' descriptions of girls and obtaining sex, activities such as "turning girls out" and "trains" emphasized entitlement to objectify and maltreat girls sexually (Rothman et al., in press). Such behaviors are likely tied to perceptions of male status and perpetuate negative attitudes toward women, potentially disposing young males to behaviors related to gender-based violence including IPV perpetration (Forbes et al., 2006). Research is needed to investigate specific mechanisms by which young males' social contexts support the maltreatment of girls and women. For example, the effects of young males' exposure to male role models who abuse female partners within the family context may permeate other social and environmental contexts and create a peer environment that similarly endorses and enables the maltreatment and sexual objectification of girls; such behaviors thus become the norm throughout contexts of young adult and adolescent males' lives. Furthermore, the importance of the peer and family contexts in establishing such norms may be relevant to consider when developing interventions; use of group interventions may be more successful via altering young men's exposures to social environments and simultaneously changing group norms to become less tolerant of the maltreatment of girls, for example.

In accordance with reports of circumstances unresponsive of education and the potential link to family stressors, previous studies document an association between family problems and academic trouble (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995). Such an environment unresponsive of opportunities for education may be disempowering. Education is correlated with developing status, self-esteem, and self-confidence among adolescents and young adults, and such factors are often linked to decreased risk for IPV perpetration among adult men (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2003; Cunradi, Caetano, Clark, Schafer, 2000; O'Neil & Harway, 1997). Future studies are needed to examine the relevance of school difficulties to IPV perpetration, including whether a greater opportunity for school connection and educational attainment may serve as a protective factor for IPV perpetration.

The findings from this sample of low-income urban young males from programs for perpetrators of IPV regarding exposure to community violence are consistent with findings from neighborhood-level quantitative studies conducted among adults indicating the presence of high levels of community violence and IPV in urban neighborhoods characterized by poverty (Cunradi et al., 2000; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006; Raghavan, Mennerich, Sexton, & James, 2006). Previous quantitative studies among urban youth, though not specific to perpetration of IPV, have demonstrated that exposure to violence in the community is linked to other types of delinquency and problematic behaviors (Heinrich, Schwab-Stone, Fanti, Jones, & Ruchkin, 2004; Miller, Wasserman, Neugebauer, Gorman-Smith, & Kamboukos, 1999). However, such studies have not largely examined IPV perpetration, and there are few existing studies conducted among adolescents and young adults (Malik et al., 1997). Our findings point toward an important setting influence; the examination of whether exposure to general violence in communities may lead to adolescent male IPV perpetration may be a key focus for prevention efforts.

The present findings should be considered in light of several limitations. Although this qualitative study of young males who are in programs for perpetration of IPV describes the social context of participants' lives, more research is necessary to determine whether any of the described contextual and social factors are related to perpetration of IPV. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to establish temporality in examining factors related to family, peers, school, and community exposures in determining the outcome of young males' overall risk for IPV perpetration. The 19 participants in this study were recruited from urban IPV perpetration programs and, hence, are unlikely reflective of all adolescent and young adult male perpetrators of IPV regarding either forms or severity of violence, demographic characteristics, or life contexts. For example, those referred to programs for perpetrators may be at higher risk for other types of delinquent involvements (e.g., drug dealing, gang involvement) compared with those who may perpetrate IPV but who have not been referred to such programs. Because the study involved a small, convenience sample from New England, future studies with larger and more representative samples (e.g., clinic- and school-based samples) are needed to confirm and further explore the current findings. Study participants often

underreport stigmatized behaviors such as partner violence, and therefore, descriptions of violence perpetration are likely minimized in this study. Interviewers were White, college-educated women; having females as interviewers may have had disadvantages related to inhibited disclosure. However, interviewers used techniques that normalized the reporting of socially undesirable behaviors and perceived that respondents spoke freely about their experiences.

The current findings reveal the multitude of contextual challenges reported by a sample of adolescent and young adult males identified as perpetrators of IPV. The qualitative nature of this study not only provided description of multiple adversities and inequitable gender norms within each context but also suggested relevance of the confluence and interactions of setting effects across ecological contexts (i.e., how exposures within one context may influence other ecological contexts). The clustering of vulnerabilities and setting influences identified suggest that programs that address gang involvement, substance abuse, and community violence could better serve participants by incorporating issues related to IPV perpetration and that these social and environmental influences have an effect on a range of behaviors. IPV interventions for adolescent male perpetrators may increase effectiveness by addressing this range of factors across young males' life contexts rather than focusing on isolated, specific aspects of young males' lives (e.g., peers or family) as separate issues. However, additional research is needed to establish whether such clustering of vulnerabilities is influential in determining IPV behavior, including how these may have additive or multiplicative effects. Although more research is needed, the findings of the current study suggest that to address prevention of perpetration of IPV against girls by young males, additional efforts, both with research and programming, should consider the importance of broader social and environmental contexts as well as the interaction of these contexts in influencing IPV perpetration.

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