

Psychosocial Correlates of Physical Dating Violence Victimization Among Latino Early Adolescents

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This study examined the association between dating violence victimization and psychosocial risk and protective factors among Latino early adolescents. An anonymous, cross-sectional, self-reported survey was administered to a convenience sample of Latino youth ($n = 322$) aged 11 to 13 residing in suburban Washington, D.C. The dependent variable was physical dating violence; the independent variables included violence, substance use, emotional well-being, prosocial behaviors, and parenting practices. Multivariate logistic regression models were constructed and adjusted odds ratio and 95% confidence interval were examined. Overall, 13.5% ($n = 43$) of Latino early adolescents reported being a victim of physical dating violence within the past year. The prevalence was 14.4% for girls and 12.9% for boys. Among the girls, binge drinking was the sole risk behavior associated with dating violence. Gun carrying, alcohol consumption, and having considered suicide were associated with dating violence among the boys. Physical dating violence appears to affect a small but significant proportion of Latino early adolescents and is associated with other risk behaviors. Healthy dating relationship programs are warranted for middle school youth with some tailoring to reflect gender differences in risk profiles.

Keywords: *Latino; adolescence; gender; dating violence; risk behavior*

Promotion of healthy dating relationships and prevention of dating violence has become an important focus among public health researchers and practitioners. Data from the most recent national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) suggest that roughly 1 in 10 female and male adolescents report physical dating violence victimization in the past year; that is, their boyfriend or girlfriend had hit, slapped, or physically hurt them on purpose (Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007; Howard, Wang, & Yan, in press). Numerous studies indicate that the impact of dating violence on adolescents is enormous. In addition to injury (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2003), victims of dating violence also face higher risk of substance abuse, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behaviors, pregnancy, and suicidal behavior (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, & Hannan, 2003; CDC, 2002; Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff, 2004; Howard, Beck, Hallmark-Kerr, & Shattuck, 2005; Howard & Wang, 2005; Howard et al., 2007, in press; Silverman, Raj, & Mucci, 2001).

Given the alarming rates of dating violence victimization among adolescents, there is little information on the experience of dating violence victimization among Latino youth, although there is some concern that they may be particularly vulnerable (Howard et al., 2005). When national data are examined by ethnicity, prevalence of dating violence victimization appears higher among Latino high school students compared to their White peers (9.3% vs. 7.0%; Grunbaum et al., 2004). In a study conducted among a suburban Washington, D.C., population of Latino mid-adolescents, youth who reported carrying a gun, involvement in physical fights, and having suicidal thoughts were more likely to report dating violence (Howard et al., 2005). Gender differences were noted as well. Girls who reported a stronger sense of self were less likely to report dating violence, whereas among boys, gun carrying and having considered suicide were associated with dating violence. Spending time each week with a mentor was also positively associated with male dating violence victimization. Dating violence appeared to cluster with other risk behavior engagement (Howard et al., 2005). This risk profile adds further evidence that such victimization may fit the framework of problem behavior theory (Basen-Engquist, Edmundson, & Parcel, 1996; DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996; Dryfoos, 1990; Farrell, Danish, & Howard, 1992; Howard et al., 2005; Jessor, 1982, 1991; Resnick et al., 1997). The problem behavior theory framework (Jessor, 1991) is composed of variables specified as either protective factors against, or risk factors for, involvement in problem behavior. Protective factors provide models for positive, prosocial behavior; personal and social

controls against problem behavior; and support to sustain prosocial commitment. Conversely, risk factors are associated with an increased likelihood of problem behavior engagement. The protection/risk conceptual framework encompasses not only a range of psychological factors (e.g., attitude, values, and beliefs) but also an array of measures of social contexts including family and peer influence (Steinberg & Moris, 2001).

Concern about dating violence among Latino youth is underscored by changing demographics in the United States. Latinos are the fastest-growing minority group in the United States, and they are relatively younger: 35% are under 18 years of age, compared to 26% of the total U.S. population. In addition, Latino youth are more likely than their White counterparts to live in urban communities that are associated with violence (Dryfoos, 1990). The fear of crime and violence occurring in places where Latinos live and attend school may affect their psychosocial functioning (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005). Moreover, it has been suggested that Latino's understanding of norms about gender roles, egalitarianism, and intimate relationships may differ from other ethnic groups (Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004). For example, research on Hispanic culture and violence suggest that some aspects of Hispanic culture (e.g., machismo) are associated with more acceptance or prevalence of violence (Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, & Reininger, 2004). Clearly, there are emerging needs to examine the dating violence among Latino adolescents so as to better support the development of culturally sensitive prevention and intervention efforts.

In an effort to study the experience of physical dating violence among Latino early adolescents, we examined the prevalence and psychosocial correlates of dating violence among a sample of urban and suburban Washington, D.C., Latino youth aged 11 to 13. We adopted the problem behavior theory as the framework for this study because there appears to be a subset of vulnerable Latino adolescents who are prone to multiple problem behaviors in tandem, including dating violence victimization. This syndrome may derive from personal and socioenvironmental antecedents (Lavery, Siegel, Cousins, & Bubovits, 1993). In addition, this study examined whether and to what extent gender shaped the risk profiles of Latino youth exposed to dating violence. Our research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: Is dating violence victimization associated with emotional states or other behavioral engagement, such as violence, substance use, or prosocial activities?

Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between parenting practices or family dynamics and dating violence victimization?

Method

Study Design

The study was a cross-sectional, anonymous, self-administered survey of Latino adolescents. Data used for this study were drawn from a needs and strengths assessment, conducted with middle school-aged Latino youth, as part of a larger effort to develop, implement, and evaluate a culturally competent integrated HIV and substance abuse prevention curriculum.

Participants

The primary target population was Latino youth aged 11 to 13 residing in Montgomery County, MD. Youth were recruited from 8 to 10 mandatory English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes through direct invitation using a central location intercept strategy. This recruitment was conducted by three professionals (a parent resource teacher, parent/community coordinator, and an ESOL counselor) from the Montgomery County Public Schools Division of ESOL. Eligible youth had to self-identify as Latino, be 11 to 13 years of age, be enrolled in middle school, and reside in Montgomery County at least 50% of the time. Youth were included regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or English speaking and reading ability. The survey was administered in either Spanish or English, depending on the participants' preference. A total of 325 youth completed the survey. Three out of the 325 completed surveys were not used because the youth who completed them were not Latino. The final sample included 149 boys (46.3%) and 167 girls (51.8%), along with 6 youth (1.9%) who did not indicate their gender. Slightly less than half (49.4%) completed the survey in English. The response rate for completion was not formally recorded; however, interviews with the supervising staff who oversaw data collection indicated that the response rates for parents and students were high (estimated to be at least 85%). This was due to the high level of rapport that had been established between the ESOL staff and the Latino community in Montgomery County.

Montgomery County is home to a high percentage of Maryland's Hispanic population. As of July 2004, 13.2% of the total population in Montgomery County was Hispanic ($n = 121,415$), accounting for over 40% of the total Hispanic population in the state (U.S. Census, 2005). About 90% of Hispanics in the county identified their race as White, and 5% identified as Black or African American (U.S. Census, 2005). Overall, county

residents appear well educated (55% of county adults held at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 45% in the region). Yet, only 22% Hispanic/Latino were college graduates compared to nearly 60% of White residents, and 39% of the Hispanic/Latino population had less than a high school education. In Montgomery County, some county elementary and middle schools have over 50% Latino enrollment.

Procedures

Using a recruitment script, ESOL staff members described the project and the purpose of the study to Latino youth in ESOL classes. Youth were encouraged to take consent forms (offered in either English or Spanish, depending on the participant's preference) home and share it with their parent(s). Active informed consent, signed by eligible youth and their parent(s), was obtained from both parent(s) and youth. To maintain privacy, participants completed the survey in a predetermined, quiet environment (e.g., similar to a classroom environment during a test). The survey took approximately 1 hr to administer. Trained survey administrators supervised the completion of the surveys, which were placed in a privacy folder immediately on completion. Respondents received incentives for participation that included a US\$5.00 gift certificate for Burger King, movie tickets, or Safeway gift certificates. In addition, youth were also provided with a resource sheet containing information about a local, nonprofit, Latino youth service organization; local health service agencies; and relevant hotlines. The Institutional Review Board approved the research protocol, and the data were collected from April 2003 to June 2003.

Survey and Measures

The survey used in this study was the Identify Positive Youth Development Survey for Latino Youth. It is a comprehensive, two-part, 10-page questionnaire. The survey was constructed after a rigorous development process that included an extensive literature review, feedback by a team of experts, and cognitive testing and pilot testing with 110 male and female Latino adolescents (Kerr, Beck, Shattuck, Kattar, & Uriburu, 2003). Part I of the survey included questions regarding a variety of social indicators of youth well-being, such as prosocial behavior, family connectedness, and academic support and encouragement. Part II of the survey concentrated on a developmentally appropriate risk assessment, including use of a variety of licit and illicit substances, violence-related behaviors, sexual practices, and emotional status such as depression and suicide ideation. The survey also

included questions pertaining to the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and their parents/guardians, such as age, gender, country of origin, length of U.S. residence, and parent/guardian educational level. The survey questionnaire has been validated and also used to measure the psychosocial correlates drinking behavior of Latino youth of similar age (Yan, Beck, Howard, Shattuck, & Kerr, 2008).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, physical dating violence victimization, was identical to the question in the national YRBS—"During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend or girlfriend ever hit, slap, or physically hurt you on purpose?" Due to the small number of victims ($n = 43$), the response categories were coded as *ever* versus *never*. This question has been repeatedly used and validated as a measure of physical dating violence victimization (Howard, Qiu, & Boekeloo, 2003; Howard & Wang, 2005; Howard et al., 2005, 2007; Olshen, McVeigh, Wunsch-Hitzig, & Rickert, 2007; Sanderson et al., 2004; Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2004).

Independent Variables

The independent variables included five dimensions: (a) violence-related behaviors, (b) substance use, (c) emotional well-being, (d) prosocial behaviors, and (e) parental/familial factors. The frequency distributions of each variable were examined. The majority of questions used to assess these dimensions were taken from the CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Furthermore, due to small cell sizes, some independent variables were recoded as dichotomous variables. In each case, a coding of 0 indicated *never* use while 1 indicated *ever* use.

Violence-related behaviors consisted of the following four questions: (a) "During the past year, how often did you ever carry a gun?" (b) "During the past year, how often did you carry another weapon such as a knife or bat?" (c) "During the past year, how often did you get in a physical fight?" and (d) "Have you ever been involved in gang-related activities or ever been a member of a gang?" Response options were *yes* and *no*. We combined two questions, gun carrying and other weapon carrying, into a single item (gun or other weapon carrying in the past year): Adolescents who reported "ever carrying a gun" or "ever carrying another weapon" in the past year were coded as *ever*. Those who answered "never" to both questions were coded as *never*.

Substance use was measured by the following five questions: (a) "During the past year, how often did you have at least one drink of alcohol?"

(b) “During the past year, how often did you have five or more drinks of alcohol on one occasion?” (c) “During the past year, how often did you use marijuana (also called weed)?” (d) “During the past year, how often did you use any form of cocaine?” and (e) “During the past year, how often did you use ecstasy?” Cocaine and ecstasy usage were combined into a single question—other drug use. Response options were *ever* and *never*. Youth who reported using either cocaine or ecstasy were coded as *ever* users, and those who reported using neither of the drugs were coded as *never* users.

Emotional well-being was measured by two unitary questions: (a) “Did you ever feel depressed every day for at least 2 weeks in a row? (i.e., too sad to do usual activities)” and (b) “Did you ever seriously consider suicide?” Response options were *yes* and *no*.

Youth’s sense of self was measured by an eight-item subscale developed and validated by Silverberg in 1991 (Stanton, Li, & Galbraith, 2000). Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with statements addressing how they thought about themselves and their future, using a 4-point Likert-type scale in which 1 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine whether the eight-item scale captured multiple dimensions. Two meaningful factors emerged. The first factor was labeled *self-worth* (e.g., I make good decisions, I like who I am, I express myself clearly, I feel good about my future) and had high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$); the second factor, *social competence* (e.g., I value helping others; I am honest, even in difficult situations; I try to solve problems without violence; I try to avoid negative situations), also had high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$). Adolescents who reported *strongly agree* or *agree* to each of the four self-worth items were designated the high self-worth group ($n = 219$; 68%), whereas the remainder constituted the low self-worth group. Adolescents who reported *strongly agree* or *agree* to each of the social competency items were designated the high social competency group ($n = 229$; 71.1%), whereas the remainder constituted the low social competency group.

Prosocial behaviors were measured by the following three questions, coded *yes* or *no*: (a) “During an average week in the past year, did you spend time with a mentor, a caring adult other than a family member?” (b) “During an average week in the past year, did you help other people without getting paid?” (c) “During an average week in the past year, did you go to programs, groups, or services at a church or other religious or spiritual place?”

Parental/familial factors were measured by three distinct domains: (a) parental monitoring, (b) family connectedness, and (c) parental academic encouragement. Parental monitoring reflected parental interest and

engagement in their adolescent's social life (e.g., knowledge of adolescent's whereabouts, activities, and friends) and referred to the active supervision of adolescent's activities, including rule setting and enforcement (Baumrind, 1991). Response categories (scored 1-4) included *never*, *sometimes*, *most of the time*, and *all of the time*. A previously developed algorithm was used to distinguish the most frequently monitored adolescents from those less frequently monitored (Beck, Boyle, & Boekeloo, 2004; Howard et al., 2003, 2005). Adolescents who reported that their parent/guardian engaged in each of the four monitoring behaviors *most* or *all of the time* were considered the high monitored group ($n = 201$; 62.4%), whereas the youth who reported *never* or *sometimes* were considered the less monitored group.

Family connectedness consisted of three questions and measured the degree of closeness and companionship surrounding parent/guardian-adolescent and familial relationships. These questions included the following: (a) "I go to my family for help when I have a problem," (b) "I like to do things with my family," and (c) "I enjoy talking with my family."

Parental academic encouragement consisted of a five-item scale that assessed the care, support, encouragement, and associated behaviors of family members regarding the adolescent's academic achievement. These questions included (a) "My parent/guardian says good things to me when I do well," (b) "My parents/guardian encourages me to participate in after-school activities," (c) "My parent/guardian encourages me to graduate from high school," (d) "My parent/guardian attends parent-teacher meetings or conferences at my school," and (e) "My parent/guardian helps me with homework."

The response categories for both family connectedness and parental academic encouragement were as follows (scored 1-4): *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Adolescents who reported strongly agree or agree to each of the three family connectedness items were considered the high family connectedness group ($n = 168$; 52.2%); all other youth were designated the low family connectedness group. Adolescents who reported *strongly agree* or *agree* to each of the five-items measuring academic encouragement were labeled the high parental academic encouragement group ($n = 108$; 33.5%); all other youth were designated the low parental academic encouragement group.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using SAS version 9.1.2 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC). First, cross-tabulations were conducted to estimate the

prevalence of dating violence victimization by each independent variable, for the overall sample and by gender. Chi-square tests were used to examine the strength of the associations between each of the independent variables and physical dating violence victimization. Second, univariate logistic models were computed between the dependent variable and each independent variable. Analyses were performed on the entire sample and separately by gender. Unadjusted odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were examined. In these analyses, the level of significance was set at $p < .01$ to control for a Type I error. Finally, multivariate logistic regression was used to identify the most significant variables in relation to dating violence. The final model included all statistically significant independent variables ($p < .01$) from the univariate logistic regression models. A backward stepwise elimination procedure sequentially removed variables that were not significant at the $p < .05$ level in the logistic models. Adjusted ORs and 95% CI were examined to assess the significance of their unique relationship to dating violence victimization.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The final sample included 149 boys (46.3%) and 167 girls (51.8%), along with 6 youth (1.9%) who did not indicate their gender. By grade level, 11.3% of the sample were fifth graders, 27.8% were sixth graders, 32.6% were seventh graders, and 29.4% of youth were in the eighth grade. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 13, with a mean age of 12.4 years ($SD = 0.76$). Slightly less than half of respondents (44.1%) were born in the United States. Of those who were foreign born (55.9%), the majority were from El Salvador (18%), Mexico (5.9%), Peru (5.9%), and other Central American countries (26.1%). With regard to residence status, 53.9% were U.S. citizens. Of those non-U.S. citizens, 83.6% had resided in the U.S. for more than 5 years. With regard to the highest education level parents completed in school, 17.7% completed eighth grade or less, 28.2% completed high school or got a certification, 22.4% graduated from college (31.7% did not know).

Prevalence of Dating Violence Victimization

Overall, 13.5% ($n = 43$) of Latino youth reported being victims of physical dating violence within the past year (see Table 1). There were no

Table 1
Prevalence of Physical Dating Violence Victimization
Among Latino Early Adolescents According to Personal,
Psychological, and Behavioral Risk and Protective Factors (%)

Risk Factors	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Grade			
Fifth Grade	5.88	15.38	0.00
Sixth Grade	15.91	10.87	20.00
Seventh Grade	11.65	13.79	9.30
Eighth Grade	17.20	18.37	16.28
Violence engagement			
Gun or other weapon carrying			
Yes	52.63***	58.33***	50.00***
No	8.51	10.97	5.69
Physical fighting			
Yes	30.83***	37.25***	25.37***
No	3.52	4.31	2.53
Gang membership or involvement			
Yes	38.24***	46.67***	29.73***
No	7.14	7.30	7.27
Substance use past year			
Alcohol use (at least one drink)			
Ever	35.96***	36.96***	35.71***
Never	5.19	5.79	3.81
Binge drinking			
Ever	55.56***	68.42***	43.75***
Never	8.45	7.43	9.16
Marijuana use			
Ever	62.50***	90.91***	38.46**
Never	9.80	8.97	10.45
Other drug use (i.e., cocaine, ecstasy)			
Ever	41.38***	53.85***	33.33*
Never	11.00	11.04	10.61
Emotional well-being			
Depression			
Ever	27.03***	29.69***	24.44**
Never	6.25	4.85	6.93
Suicidal ideation			
Ever	35.19***	33.33***	35.00**
Never	9.09	9.70	8.80
Self-worth			
Low	30.39***	34.00***	27.08***
High	5.96	5.98	6.06

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Risk Factors	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Social competency			
Low	20.65*	21.95	20.83*
High	10.96	11.90	9.09
Prosocial behaviors			
Time with mentor			
0 hr	16.75*	18.56	15.69
More than 0 hr	8.62	8.70	6.67
Volunteerism			
0 hr	16.58	17.92	15.73
More than 0 hr	9.24	8.20	8.93
Religious involvement			
0 hr	18.18*	19.12	16.67
More than 0 hr	10.22	10.20	10.47
Parental/familial factors			
Parental monitoring			
Less strong	25.83***	35.42***	18.57
High	6.50	5.88	7.79
Family connectedness			
Low	24.34***	30.56***	18.67*
High	4.17	2.11	6.94
Parental academic encouragement			
Low	18.87***	20.95**	16.83*
High	3.70	3.23	4.35

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

significant differences across gender. The prevalence of dating violence victimization was greatest for eighth graders. Involvement in a host of risk behaviors was associated with a higher prevalence of dating violence, including weapon carrying, fighting, gang membership/involvement; alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine use; as well as suicidal ideation and depression. Higher level of self-esteem, coping skills, parental monitoring, and family connectedness were significantly linked with a lower reported prevalence of dating violence victimization.

Bivariate Relationship Between Physical Dating Violence and Psychosocial Factors

Table 2 displays the unadjusted OR for relationships between each psychosocial factor and physical dating violence victimization. In all analytic models, never being the victim of dating violence served as the reference

Table 2
Unadjusted Odds Ratios^a for Relationships Between
Physical Dating Violence Victimization and Personal,
Psychological and Behavioral Risk, and Protective
Factors Among Latino Early Adolescents (95% CI)

Risk Factors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)		
	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Violence engagement			
Gun carrying or other weapon			
Yes	11.94 (5.58-25.59)****	11.36 (3.25-39.8)***	16.57 (5.49-50.06)****
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Physical fighting			
Yes	12.23 (5.24-28.55)****	13.18 (4.56-38.07)****	13.09 (2.9-59.09)***
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Gang membership or involvement			
Yes	8.05 (4.06-15.96)****	11.11 (4.24-29.13)****	5.4 (1.97-14.77)***
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Substance use past year			
Alcohol use (at least 1 drink)			
Ever	10.25 (4.96-21.15)****	9.55 (3.62-25.18)****	14.03 (4.30-45.74)****
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Binge drinking			
Ever	13.54 (6.21-29.51)****	26.98 (8.58-84.86)****	7.71 (2.44-24.42)***
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Marijuana use			
Ever	15.34 (6.17-38.16)****	N/A	5.36 (1.54-18.64)**
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Other drug use (i.e., cocaine, ecstasy)			
Ever	5.71 (2.5-13.04)****	9.4 (2.83-31.26)***	4.22 (1.26-14.11)*
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Emotional well-being			
Depression			
Yes	5.56 (2.76-11.19)****	8.28 (2.91-23.57)****	4.35 (1.56-12.12)**
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Suicidal ideation			
Yes	5.43 (2.7-10.92)****	4.65 (1.85-11.71)**	5.58 (1.84-16.9)**
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Self-worth			
Low	6.89 (3.41-13.89)****	8.10 (3.09-21.19)****	5.76 (2.03-16.33)***
High	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social competency			
Low	2.11 (1.10-4.06)*	2.08 (0.83-5.20)	2.63 (0.99-6.99)
High	1.00	1.00	1.00

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Risk Factors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)		
	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Prosocial behaviors			
Time with mentor			
More than 0 hr	0.47 (0.22-0.99)*	0.42 (0.16-1.12)	0.38 (0.11-1.39)
0 hr	1.00	1.00	1.00
Volunteerism			
More than 0 hours	0.51 (0.25-1.06)	0.41 (0.14-1.16)	0.53 (0.18-1.55)
0 hr	1.00	1.00	1.00
Religious involvement			
More than 0 hr	0.51 (0.27-0.98)*	0.48 (0.2-1.17)	0.58 (0.22-1.54)
0 hr	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parental/familial factors			
Parental monitoring			
High	0.2 (0.1-0.4)****	0.11 (0.04-0.30)****	0.37 (0.13-1.04)
Less strong	1.00	1.00	1.00
Family connectedness			
High	0.14 (0.06-0.31)****	0.05 (0.01-0.22)****	0.33 (0.11-0.96)*
Low	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parental academic encouragement			
High	0.17 (0.06-0.48)*****	0.13 (0.03-0.56)**	0.23 (0.05-1.02)
Low	1.00	1.00	1.00

Note: CI = confidence intervals; NA = due to the extreme small cell size, the parameter estimate is not available.

a. The last category was used as the reference.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. **** $p < .0001$.

category for each comparison. Victimization was positively associated with violence-related behaviors, substance use, negative emotional states, low self-worth, and low social competency. Conversely, youth who reported spending time with a mentor and religious involvement were significantly less likely to report victimization. Parental monitoring, family connectedness, and parental academic encouragement also appeared protective against victimization.

Girls who reported a high level of parental monitoring, family connectedness, and parental academic encouragement were less likely to report victimization, whereas only family connectedness was seen as protective for boys. In some instances, the magnitude of the association between risk behavior and physical dating violence victimization was much greater for girls than boys. The most dramatic gender difference was observed for binge drinking. Girls who reported binge drinking were almost 27 times as likely to report victimization as those who did not report binge drinking.

Male binge drinkers were 7 times as likely to be victims. Adolescents who reported gang involvement were more likely to report dating violence victimization. On the other hand, boys who reported high family connectedness were much less likely to experience dating violence victimization than girls with similar perceived levels of family connectedness.

Multivariate Relationships Between Physical Dating Violence and Risk Protective Factors

To detect risk factors that were uniquely associated with physical dating violence victimization, multivariate logistic regression analyses were conducted, including all significant variables from the univariate models (see Table 3).

Overall, adolescents who reported engagement in physical fighting were more likely to also report dating violence victimization (OR = 3.21, CI = 1.10~9.30). Among girls, binge drinking was associated with more than a 10-fold increased risk of victimization. Among boys, weapon carrying, alcohol use, and suicidal ideation were significantly associated with dating violence victimization. None of the protective or prosocial behaviors were linked to the odds of being a victim of physical dating violence.

Discussion

These findings present some of the first evidence that physical dating violence occurs among early Latino adolescents and at levels that are comparable, if not higher, than what has been reported among nationally representative samples of high school students (Avery-Leaf, Caascardi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997; Howard et al., 2007, in press). Almost one in eight Latino early adolescents reported having been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend. An earlier study, conducted among a similar population of somewhat older Latino youth, reported much lower prevalence of dating violence (Howard et al., 2005). Although no systematic pattern emerged by grade level, girls in the eighth grade reported some of the highest prevalence and more boys in the sixth grade experienced dating violence victimization than any other group of middle school students. These findings are cause for alarm, given the young age of the victims and the potentially acute, as well as long term, harm that may result. Clearly, prevalence studies need to be conducted to assess the pervasiveness of physical dating violence among early adolescents. These studies should be complemented with more qualitative research that probe more

Table 3
Adjusted Odds Ratios^a for Relationships Between Physical Dating Violence Victimization and Personal, Psychological, and Behavioral Risk and Protective Factors Among Latino Early Adolescents

Risk Factors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)		
	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Violence engagement			
Gun carrying or other weapon			
Yes	2.52 (0.85-7.49)	0.48 (0.05-5.05)	6.86 (1.15-41.02) ^{b,*}
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Physical fighting			
Yes	3.21 (1.10-9.30) ^{b,*}	1.81 (0.31-10.69)	4.95 (0.70-34.85)
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Gang membership or involvement			
Yes	2.07 (0.78-5.47)	2.54 (0.40-16.00)	1.70 (0.32-9.17)
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Substance use past year			
Alcohol use			
Ever	1.70 (0.54-5.34)	0.30 (0.04-2.01)	21.81 (3.11-152.86) ^{b,**}
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Binge drinking			
Ever	2.96 (0.88-9.90)	10.98 (1.63-74.23) ^{b,**}	3.07 (0.34-28.06)
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Marijuana use			
Ever	2.11 (0.55-8.09)	9.38 (0.79-111.63)	0.44 (0.02-9.07)
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Other drug use (i.e., cocaine, ecstasy)			
Ever	0.66 (0.18-2.42)	8.20 (1.22-55.16)	0.20 (0.02-2.74)
Never	1.00	1.00	1.00
Emotional well-being			
Depression			
Yes	1.70 (0.55-5.28)	2.86 (0.44-18.52)	1.04 (0.21-5.25)
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Suicidal ideation			
Yes	1.74 (0.61-4.97)	0.86 (0.15-4.85)	15.96 (2.02-126.03) ^{b,**}
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Self-worth			
Low	1.19 (0.42-3.35)	1.25 (0.25-6.39)	2.66 (0.46-15.33)
High	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social competency			
Low	0.70 (0.26-1.90)	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
High	1.00	1.00	1.00

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Risk Factors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)		
	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Prosocial behaviors			
Time with mentor			
More than 0 hr	0.97 (0.36-2.63)	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
0 hr	1.00	1.00	1.00
Volunteerism			
More than 0 hr	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
0 hr		1.00	1.00
Religious involvement			
More than 0 hr	0.53 (0.21-1.34)	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
0 hr		1.00	1.00
Parental/familial factors			
Parental monitoring			
High	0.63 (0.24-1.66)	0.36 (0.07-1.94)	<i>ns</i>
Less strong	1.00	1.00	1.00
Family connectedness			
High	0.83 (0.27-2.58)	0.11 (0.01-1.12)	5.66 (0.86-37.29)
Low	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parental academic encouragement			
High	0.54 (0.13-2.22)	1.29 (0.08-21.02)	<i>ns</i>
Low	1.00	1.00	1.00

Note: CI = confidence intervals; *ns* = not a significant predictor at univariate models. Age, gender, grade, and ethnicity were treated as covariates in the final model.

a. The last category was used as the reference.

b. Indicates significant results in each risk factor.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

deeply into the personal, social, and cultural factors that are related to perpetration of dating violence and its psychosocial and physical sequelae. This is particularly important given the earlier age at which physical maturation, dating, and sexual debut now occur (Close, 2005).

Although the prevalence of dating violence victimization did not differ significantly by gender, differences in the psychosocial correlates of dating violence victimization were evidenced among this sample of Latino early adolescents. Among the girls, binge drinking was the sole risk behavior associated with dating violence. Gun carrying, alcohol consumption, and having considered suicide were associated with dating violence among the boys. These findings suggest a potentially different constellation of risk factors at play.

One of the most robust findings in the dating violence literature is that gender role stereotype is a powerful predictor of violence-related beliefs and behaviors, especially for boys (Marin, Gomez, Tschann, & Gregorich, 1997; O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995). Ulloa et al. (2004) found that youth with less stereotypic beliefs were less accepting of dating violence; furthermore, boys tended to endorse more gender stereotypical views about partner abuse, whereas girls held less positive norms and attitudes about dating violence. Thus, particular cultural beliefs about gender roles may influence knowledge, attitudes, and norms about dating violence. Gender socialization in Latino families may legitimize controlling or aggressive behavior among boys and a submissive or self-sacrificing response from girls, as a means of maintaining family harmony (Kasturirangan & Williams, 2003; Sugihara & Warner, 2002). Some research on Latino culture and violence suggest that certain aspects of Hispanic culture (e.g. machismo) are associated with more acceptance or prevalence of violence (Sanderson et al., 2004). Future qualitative studies are needed to further explore how specific gender-role stereotypes in Latino cultures are associated with dating violence.

It is unclear whether the subset of Latino early adolescents who reported dating violence fit a profile of problem behavior proneness, that is, co-occurring involvement in multiple risk behaviors, as has been suggested elsewhere (Howard et al., 2007, in press; Jessor, 1991), or whether the experience of dating violence victimization precipitates such engagement. For example, Howard et al. (2007) found a strong association between reports of physical dating violence and such behaviors as fighting, gang involvement, and substance use (Howard et al., 2005). This overlap between various forms of violence-related behaviors has been well replicated (Roberts, Auinger, & Klein, 2005; Silverman et al., 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and may suggest an affinity for peer associations where violence is more normative and if not expected then tolerated. Contextual and longitudinal research is needed to shed light on early and persistent influences on adolescent aggressive behavior and vulnerability for victimization.

Similarly, both alcohol and illicit drug use have long been associated with risk behavior engagement among youth (Howard & Wang, 2003b) and among girls; the severity of courtship violence has been found to increase with consumption of alcohol by either the perpetrator or victim (Makepeace, 1981; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). These findings underscore the need for ongoing research to identify and address antecedent personal and socioenvironmental factors that may lead youth to engage in various risk behaviors. Also needed are secondary prevention efforts

targeted to high risk youth who already report coengagement in health risk behaviors.

Although our data do not permit cause–effect relationships to be inferred, youth who reported victimization also reported emotional distress, in the form of depression, suicidal ideation, and low self-worth. Only suicidal ideation, however, remained significant among boys, after all factors were considered simultaneously. These findings substantiate what has been reported elsewhere regarding emotional states and violence involvement, and specifically dating violence (Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, & Noonan, 2007; Howard et al., 2007, in press; Roberts, Klein, & Fisher, 2003). Similar prevalence of physical dating violence victimization for boys and girls and the heightened risk of suicide among male victims underscores the need to take seriously the experiences of boys, and not just as potential perpetrators (Close, 2005; Howard & Wang, 2003a; Howard et al., 2003, 2007, in press). This is critically important given current concerns that use of antidepressants with youth amplifies the risk of suicide, particularly among boys and youth residing in low-income regions (Olfson, Marcus, & Shaffer, 2006; Olfson, Shaffer, Marcus, & Greenberg, 2003; Sakinofsky, 2007).

Having a strong connection to one's parents and family seemed to offer protection against dating violence victimization, particularly for girls, but only when examined independent of other factors. We did not find evidence that parental or familial factors uniquely affected the likelihood of victimization. Although parental monitoring has been shown to protect against youth engagement in a host of risk behaviors, including sexual, drug and delinquency-related behaviors (Pilgrim, Schlunberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2006; Yang et al., 2007), its effect may be mediated by peer relationships and school engagement, factors not examined in this study. Similarly, positive family characteristics have been related to adolescent social competence and self-esteem, lowered levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior, and academic problems (Youngblade, Curry, Novak, Vogel, & Shenkman, 2006; Youngblade et al., 2007), yet these influences may operate more indirectly to affect risk of dating violence. Further research is needed to examine pathways leading to dating violence victimization and specifically the role of family factors.

In Latino culture, dating at such early ages (13–15 years) is generally prohibited, particularly for girls (Sullivan, 2002). It is possible that the Latino youth in our sample were a selective subset of the larger Latino community, who were less influenced by traditional norms and/or more likely to engage in risk behaviors. It is also possible that the Latino youth

in our sample were dating in secret and thus did not access social and emotional support from their family network (i.e., getting dating advice from their parents). These findings underscore the need for future studies to examine the roles of parental monitoring within the context of Latino culture. Indeed, few studies have addressed the role culture-specific parental factors may play in exposure of youth to dating violence. Sanderson et al. (2004) suggested that familismo (emphasis on family and its interaction), a central aspect of traditional Latino culture, might be protective against partner violence. The familismo can provide an extended network of social support including socioemotional support (Vega, 1990), which may be protective against risky behaviors and violence. Thus, for Latino youth with strong links to their families and those who gain social and emotional support from family networks, the risk of dating violence victimization and perpetration may be reduced.

Alcohol use remained one of the few uniquely significant correlates of physical dating violence victimization. Alcohol use during the previous year was strongly associated with victimization among boys but not girls; however, among girls, binge drinking was significantly linked to victimization. Although we do not know the contexts in which alcohol use occurred, social drinking has been linked elsewhere with greater opportunities for violence exposure and victimization (Well & Graham, 2003; Wells, Graham, Speechley, & Koval, 2005). Future research needs to examine the social context of drinking among Latino adolescents to determine the specific factors that lead to violence-prone behaviors.

Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow a determination of the temporal and causal nature of relationships. Second, the self-report nature of the survey, the unitary nature of the dating violence measure, and the young age of the respondents create some issues with interpretability and the level of confidence in the data. For instance, perceptions of intentional harm are highly subjective and may be contextually based with variability in the assessment of purposefulness by gender and age. Terms such as *dating* or *boyfriend* and *girlfriend* might have different meanings among young adolescents of different cultures. Future research into the connotative and denotative meaning of such terms, particularly among younger youth and across cultural groups, is needed. Third, the lack of gender differences in dating victimization may be due to limitations in

our ability to explore contextual factors and motivations prompting dating violence engagement (e.g., self-defense vs. self-initiated). Although national prevalence estimates indicate little gender variability in the report of dating violence perpetration, more probing studies have suggested that a substantial amount of the violence committed by girls maybe in self-defense or fighting back (DeKeseredy, Saunders, Schwartz, & Alvi, 1997). Furthermore, data suggest a relationship between women's repeated victimization, whether physical or sexual, and their likelihood of reporting the personal use of violence in self-defense (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). As regards familial and parenting factors, a much more textured understanding is needed of how ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships are developed, modeled, and reinforced among Latino youth in the context of their family and peer affiliation networks. In this regard, issues of multicollinearity, that is the highly correlated nature of many risk and protective factors, may have accounted for some lack of significance in the multivariate analysis. Lastly, our sample was collected in Montgomery County, Maryland, and is not nationally representative. Although the sampling method used in the survey was designed to include Latinos from different geographic areas of Montgomery County, the results are not necessarily representative of the Latino population in Maryland, or the United States.

Conclusion

Physical dating violence appears to extend into early adolescence among Latino youth with prevalence that approximates, if not exceeds, estimates among Latino high school students. Both girls and boys experience victimization; however, profiles are sufficiently different to warrant further study along gender lines. Programs that promote healthy dating relationships and educate youth about dating violence and its prevention need to be developed and implemented at the elementary school level.

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