

EXPLORING THE TRAJECTORY AND PATTERNING OF IPV PERPETRATION FROM ADOLESCENCE TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD: A GROWTH-CURVE ANALYSIS

Angela M. Kaufman¹, Alfred DeMaris², Peggy C. Giordano², Wendy D. Manning²,
Monica A. Longmore²

Assumption College¹
Bowling Green State University²

Abstract

National statistics indicate that 9.4 percent of high school students report experiencing physical abuse in their intimate relationships (CDC 2011); and, if left unchecked, these violent experiences may also carry over into adulthood (O’Leary, Malone and Tyree 1994). For instance, one in five women and nearly 1 in 7 men who report ever experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) report their first experience occurring between 11 and 17 years of age (CDC 2010). It is also during this time that individuals display the most fluctuation in their propensity for violent crime generally, experiencing continuing increases throughout adolescence followed by sharp declines in early adulthood (Mosher, Miethe and Phillips 2002). Yet, much of the past research on IPV among adolescents and young adults still relies on retrospective and cross-sectional data, ignoring the possibility that intimate violent experiences may vary in different periods of the life course and across time.

Earlier work also demonstrates that one of the most consistent predictors of IPV experiences in adolescence and young adulthood is exposure to violence in the family-of-origin (e.g., Ferguson 2011; Hetzel-Riggin and Meads 2011; Renner and Whitney 2012; Simon and

Furman 2010). Yet, we know that such violent exposures do not lead in a deterministic fashion to violent behaviors in young adulthood (e.g., Fang and Corso 2008; Schafer, Caetano and Cunradi 2004, Smith et al. 2011). This leads to the conclusion that other potential antecedents of IPV need to be taken into account. One such precursor is the quality of the parent-child relationship. According to attachment theory (Bowlby 1982), an insecure attachment style developed in response to dysfunctional parenting practices may inhibit the social skills necessary to initiate or maintain healthy relationships with others (Dutton 1994; Dutton, Starzomski and Ryan 1996), leading to increased conflict and other problematic relationship characteristics (Busby et al. 2008; Wekerle et al. 2009).

Familial background factors, such as parental violence (i.e., child maltreatment) and parent-child relationship quality (PCRQ), are also particularly important to measure across time when examining adolescent and young adult outcomes. It is during the adolescent years that individuals are likely to experience the greatest variety of and alteration in their social roles, given the many transitions experienced along the pathway to adulthood. These young adult transitions often include leaving the parental home, starting college, entering a cohabiting or marital union, and beginning their careers. As a result, adolescents become less dependent on their parents over time and may be less, or differently, influenced by them.

To address these issues, the present study seeks to examine the trajectory in IPV over time from adolescence to young adulthood, with a specific focus on how familial factors continue to matter across the life course of adolescents and young adults. Specifically, growth-curve analysis (GCA) is employed using five waves of longitudinal data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS) to investigate the trajectory and pattern of IPV perpetration from adolescence to young adulthood ($N = 950$ respondents, 4,750 person-periods). Analyses first assess whether the pattern of IPV perpetration takes a linear or nonlinear form during this formative and often fluid stage of the life course. Second, we investigate how the trajectory is further affected by individual characteristics which are both time varying, i.e. parental violence and parent-child relationship quality, as well as time-invariant, i.e. race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Finally, the present study analyzes whether the effects of time-varying measures differ by between-subjects characteristics, i.e. whether parental violence and parent-child relationship quality effects vary as a result of gender.

Results indicate that the IPV perpetration trajectory of respondents is nonlinear over time, mimicking the general age-crime curve. Specifically, individuals' risk for IPV perpetration continues to increase for approximately five years, and then slowly begins to decline. Considering the average respondent is 15 years of age at the wave I interview, most individuals' risk for violence in intimate relationships thus begins declining around 20 years of age, a pattern which is marginally delayed but generally similar when compared to the general age-crime curve (Johnson et al. 2014; Mosher et al. 2002).

Findings from growth-curve analyses also demonstrate that individuals with parental violence experiences and lower parent-child relationship quality have a higher initial likelihood of IPV perpetration. Specifically, at any given point in time, individuals who experience parental violence are significantly more likely to report perpetrating IPV than those individuals who are never victimized by their parents. Meanwhile, parent-child relationship quality is a significant and negative predictor of IPV perpetration. In other words, as the quality of the parent-child relationship improves, the risk of perpetrating violence in romantic relationships declines. Results also indicate that there is a marginally significant difference in the effect of PCRQ among males and females. At any given point in time, the effect of parent-child relationship quality in dampening the risk for IPV perpetration is larger for males than females. Finally, poor PCRQ aids in a pronounced increase in the risk of IPV perpetration over time. More specifically, while at any given point in time, having a poorer relationship with one's parents increases the risk for IPV, the effect of poor PCRQ becomes more detrimental as individuals age.

The findings presented here thus contribute to the literature on IPV among adolescents and young adults in several ways. First, results indicate that in addition to parental violence, parent-child relationship quality is also an important predictor of violence in intimate relationships. This supports the notion that individuals learn how to view and interact with others based on the quality of their relationships with parents, just as they learn how to view violence based on the violence they view or experience via their parents. Second, PCRQ appears to be a marginally better predictor of males' experiences with IPV perpetration than females. This suggests that males and females may have different thresholds for violence. Specifically, due to gender-based ideologies concerning cross-gender violence, poor PCRQ may serve as one avenue through which males' gendered norms concerning female-directed violence are weakened. As a

result, efforts to deter young men's experiences with IPV may need to place an especially strong emphasis on repairing or coping with troubled parental relationships.

Finally, the increasingly negative effect of positive PCRQ on IPV over time suggests one of two potential mechanisms. One, as individuals move toward adulthood, sustaining a positive relationship with parents may become increasingly important as intimate relationships also take on greater significance during this stage of the life course. Two, PCRQ may illustrate a sort of cumulative risk for violence experienced in romantic relationships. More specifically, it may be that cumulatively positive PCRQ serves as a protective factor against IPV, while cumulatively negative PCRQ may be a marker for a poor life course trajectory overall, which may include a heightened risk for IPV. Additional implications, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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