

"It was very scary": Fear in young women's accounts of adolescent dating abuse

**Candace W. Burton, PhD, RN, FNE
Assistant Professor of Nursing
Virginia Commonwealth University
Academy on Violence & Abuse Biennial
2013**



Disclosures & Acknowledgements

- ♦ No conflicts of interest to disclose
- ♦ Author received support from the National Institutes of Health Institutional Nursing Research Service Award (T-32) Symptom Research Fellowship, University of California San Francisco (NIH NRSA #2 T32 NR07088-10) during her doctoral education
- ♦ Thank you to the members of my dissertation committee: Drs. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher, Sally H. Rankin, Roberta S. Rehm, & Janice C. Humphreys

Background

- ❑ **A majority of adolescents aged 13-18** report involvement in an intimate or dating relationship.
- ❑ **65% of US female adolescents** report experiencing dating or intimate partner abuse (IPA).
- ❑ IPA has been linked to **numerous adverse mental and physical health outcomes**—these include **depression, unplanned pregnancy, substance abuse, suicidality, & reproductive coercion**.
- ❑ The **experience of ongoing fear related to adolescent IPA** has not been well described.

Objective & Methods

- ♦ The purpose of this retrospective recall study was to develop better understanding of the experiences and life health consequences of abusive dating relationships for young women.
- Data were collected via questionnaires & semi-structured interviews.
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed and a thematic analysis technique applied via ATLAS.ti.
- Themes emerged from raw data through iterative inference and extraction, involving review of recordings and text.

Sample Demographics

	<i>Total Sample</i>		<i>Interviewed Subsample</i>	
<i>Variable</i>	Mean (SD)	Min/Max value (<i>n</i>)	Mean (SD)	Min/Max value (<i>n</i>)
<u>Current age</u> (years)	25.9 (5.25)	19.0/35.9 (97)	26.16 (5.44)	15.4/19.0 (10)
<u>Age at time of abusive relationship</u> (years)	16.31 (1.67)	11/20 (100)	15.7 (0.95)	14.0/17.0 (10)
<u>Length of relationship</u> (months)	36.42 (31.3)	1.0/120.0 (99)	38.1 (25.61)	3.0/96.0 (10)
<u>Time since relationship</u> (years)	9.64 (5.45)	0.73/22.37 (97)	10.46 (5.29)	4.32/19.41 (10)
	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percent	Frequency (<i>n</i> =10)	Percent
<u>Ethnicity:</u>				
African-American	33	33	6	60
Caucasian	60	60	4	40
Asian	1	1		
Hispanic/Latina	2	2		
Mixed	4	4		
	(100)			

Thematic coding matrix

Open code tags	Clusters	Thematic family assignment
Number one fear So scared Scared to death That was scary Scared to lose He used to scare [it] out of me You're afraid	Feeling afraid Living in fear	Fear for self
Feeling trapped A very strenuous job It's a lot of stress Scared to lose Riding a roller coaster Didn't want to lose him	Managing the situation Status changes	Fear for other relationships
I still duck I can't stop worrying I got paranoid Not knowing what's going to happen It really gets me It just scares me Freaks me out	High alert What might happen	Fearful expectation

Theme 1: Fear for Self

This theme emerged from descriptions of fearing injury or loss during the abusive relationship

“I kept coming back to him, because he used to scare...me. He used to call and say that he was going to pour kerosene around the house...and that he’d light it on fire while I was sleeping...”

“So probably after a month or two of whatever..., he started to get very jealous and always wanted to know where I was, and it was pretty scary because I had never really dealt with anyone like that before.”



Theme 2: Fear for Other Relationships



- ♦ Fear for Other Relationships described concerns about **how others' views of her might change** if the IPA were exposed.
- ♦ ***“For a while there, I had it made. I was the “it girl.” And after things went south with us, I was still the It girl, because to everyone else, we never lost that...even when things went south towards the end ...we always tried to maintain that perfect couple image. There were a couple times when it broke, like when he screamed at me in...school.... He preferred to break me down in private.”***
- ♦ ***“Whenever his family’s around, or my friends, I just wanted to hide. Because of the way he was keeping me under his thumb, and everyone...seeing it.”***



Theme 3: Fearful Expectation

- ♦ Fearful Expectation described fear of things that might yet occur.

“And if I’m ever with a friend and her boyfriend...I’ll feel them out to see how they are, just because I don’t think anyone should tolerate [abuse].”

“I’ve got three children, so...sometimes I think of all this as a blessing, to keep me...[aware] of what’s going on with my children because I’m really going to make an effort to find out what’s going on in their lives...their teenage years.”

“And to this day I still don’t like to be around drama, or fights or anything else, anything loud. It really gets me, my stomach goes into knots....”

Conclusions

Fear is a **significant, lasting experience** among young women following adolescent IPA.

It is crucial for healthcare providers to understand how **young women experience fear related to IPA** in and after adolescent relationships.

Increased understanding of the persistence of fear can inform **development of health intervention strategies** for young women following adolescent IPA.

Thank you!



Questions?



- ♦ National Institutes of Health. Research on Teen Dating Violence. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; 2010.
- ♦ Teten AL, Ball B, Valle LA, Noonan R, Rosenbluth B. Considerations for the definition, measurement, consequences, and prevention of dating violence victimization among adolescent girls. *Journal of Women's Health*. 2009;18(7):923-7.
- ♦ Halpern CT, Oslak SG, Young ML, Martin SL, Kupper LL. Partner violence among adolescents in opposite-sex romantic relationships: findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2001;91(10):1679-85.
- ♦ Eaton DK, Kann L, Kinchen S, Shanklin S, Flint KH, Hawkins J, et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance--United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Surveillance Summaries*. Volume 61, Number 4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 1600 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30333. Tel: 800-311-3435; Tel: 404-639-3311; Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov>, 2012 ISSN-1546-0738.
- ♦ Miller E, Decker MR, McCauley HL, Tancredi DJ, Levenson RR, Waldman J, et al. Pregnancy coercion, intimate partner violence and unintended pregnancy. *Contraception*. 2010;81(4):316-22. Epub 2010/03/17.
- ♦ Silverman JG, Raj A, Mucci LA, Hathaway JE. Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidality. *JAMA*. 2001; 286(5):572-9
- ♦ Csoboth, C. T., Birkás, E., & Purebl, G. (2005). Living in fear of experiencing physical and sexual abuse is associated with severe depressive symptomatology among young women. *Journal of Women's Health*, 14(5), 441-448.