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Review Title: Examining the relationship between adolescent violence exposure and adulthood violence perpetration among urban Black and African American men.

Reviewers: Desmond Upton Patton, PhD, MSW and Reuben Jonathan Miller, PhD, AM


Article Summary:
Brief Overview:

Exposure to violence, particularly victimization, continues to disproportionately affect urban Black and African American males between the ages of 10 and 25 in the United States (Patton et al.2012). The experience of violence not only has deleterious affects on socio-emotional health and development, but it has been linked to increased risk for violence perpetration in young adulthood. However, there is a dearth of research that examines how experiencing violent victimization during adolescence, impacts future violence perpetration beyond young adulthood (30 years and older).

The authors of this study sought to enhance and extend our understanding of the relationship between violent victimization in early and late adolescence and violent perpetration in adulthood among Black and African American men. Data were drawn from a sample of 703 Black and African American men (to include ethnic origins in Africa, the Caribbean, West Indies, etc.) participating in the
Black and African American Men’s Health Study (BAAMH). Men age 18–65 who reported having sex with two or more partners in the past year and demonstrated no cognitive impairments were included in the study. Men were recruited from general medicine clinics in a northeastern city in neighborhoods characterized by above rates of violence, in comparison with the city average. Recruitment was conducted on different days and times in an effort to reduce selection bias. During the recruitment phase, 2,331 men were approached to participate in the study; 85% (n=1,988) of whom agreed to be screened to ensure they met inclusion criteria. Among those screened, 47% (n=930) were eligible and 81% (n=754) agreed to participate and were surveyed. Due to not meeting eligibility criteria, 7% of the 754 surveys collected were excluded. Reported results were limited to a cross-sectional analysis of 455 participants who were at least 30 years old.

The survey, which took approximately 20-25 minutes to complete, was administered using audio computer-assisted self-interviews (ACASI). ACASI have been shown to reduce respondent bias and increase response rates to sensitive questions. The survey assessed demographic variables (income, education, race, immigration, employment), neighborhood level factors, including participants’ perceptions of their neighborhoods, perpetration of violence and other health-related risk and environmental factors (e.g. substance use, incarceration). Participants were given social and health service referrals and $35 dollars as compensation for their participation.

The researchers assessed several demographic variables, including national origin education level, employment and homelessness status. Adolescent physical victimization (12-21) served as the independent variable. More specifically, participants were asked about their experience of violence victimization, defined as beating, kicking, choking, or threats with a knife. Participants were also asked to report the age at which these events happened (infant to 11; 12-16; 17-21; and 22 and older). Those who reported experiencing violence between infancy and 11 years of age were reported as experiencing childhood violence. Two dependent variables (intimate partner violence (IPV) and street violence) were used to capture experiences with violence in adulthood. Intimate partner perpetration was measure with a four question scale that included physical abuse, sexual abuse, and injuries from abuse. Physical intimate partner violence was assessed with a single item on whether the respondent had physically hurt their current partner. Participants that responded yes to this item were identified as IPV perpetrators. Past six-month street violence involvement included one item asking participants if they engaged in a street fight or other form of street violence.

Relevant Findings:
The relationship between adolescent physical victimization and demographic variables were assessed using bivariate and frequency analysis. The mean age of the sample was 42 years old. Within the sample, 46% reported having a high school diploma or GED and 24% reported less than a high school education. In addition, approximately two thirds of the sample reported being unemployed.

Experiences with physical violence victimization were more common during adolescence. Ten percent of the participants reported experiencing physical violence victimization during early adolescence (12-16 years of age) or late adolescence (17 to 21 years of age). Approximately 9 percent of the
sample reported a history of childhood victimization, which was statistically associated with reported adolescent victimization. From those who reported childhood victimization, 23.1% also reported victimization during early or late adolescence compared to 8.4% who reported no childhood victimization. Notably homelessness was found to be significantly associated with adolescent victimization; men who reported violence exposure during adolescence were more likely to be currently homeless. A quarter of the men reported involvement in street violence in the past 6 months and involvement in IPV perpetration in the past year.

To assess the relationship between adolescent victimization and adult perpetration of intimate partner violence and street violence, crude and adjusted logistic regression models were utilized. Findings suggest that men 30 years and older who reported experiencing physical violence during adolescence were 3.7 times more likely to report involvement in street violence for the past 6 months than men who reported no physical violence victimization during adolescence. Adjusted regression models supported these conclusions.

**Author’s Conclusions:**
Black and African American men who experience violent victimization as adolescents were more likely to be perpetrators of street and intimate partner violence as adults. This finding extends research on the negative effects of early experiences with violence but highlights the increased risk and long term impacts that are specific to the developmental period of adolescents. These findings are also consistent with prior research that suggest violence experienced during adolescence increases risk taking behavior such as criminality and deviance, substance use and violence perpetration. The authors highlight the importance of early violence prevention, particularly during adolescence, in order to prevent future violence perpetration. The authors suggest that additional work is needed to address consequences associated with adolescent violence victimization in particular, especially factors that mediate the relationship between adolescent victimization and perpetration of violence into adulthood. Study findings also have programmatic implications. Community and school-based violence prevention programs typically focus on behavior modification strategies and social skills training focusing on perpetration. The authors believe the aforementioned findings highlight the need to address the psychosocial and emotional effects related to high rates of violence victimization among young Black and African American men.

**Potential Limitations:**
The authors note several limitations. First, the reports of violence victimization may be underestimated in part due to stigma attached to societal notions of how men should respond to violence. Moreover, while an association between adolescent victimization and adulthood perpetration was identified, the researchers were not able to assess the extent to which this varies by perpetrator type. In addition, due to the cross-sectional design, recall bias may have impacted underreporting of participant experiences with violence. Generalizability is limited to Black and African American men who are at risk for violence victimization and access urban community-based health clinics. As such, these findings cannot be generalized to Black and African American men seeking traditional or primary care. Last, the use of a cross-sectional design does not allow for the establishment of causality between adolescent physical violence victimization and adult perpetration.
victimization and violence perpetration in adulthood.

**Reviewer’s Comments:**
This study is important because it extends our understanding of the long-term effects of violence victimization during adolescence and its impact on the perpetration of violence into adulthood. This study is also unique in that it examines the experiences of Black and African American men recognizing the diversity among individuals who are a part of the African Diaspora. However, as qualitative scholars, we noted several contextual issues that may complicate one’s interpretations of the findings. First, while research participants are overwhelmingly undereducated (only 46% had a high school diploma or GED) and under-employed (2/3 were unemployed), little is known about the conditions outside of homelessness in adulthood that characterize this sample. Is there something unique about this sample that may explain their increased physical violence victimization in adolescence and violence perpetration in adulthood? Could housing instability explain this sample’s vulnerability to victimization and violence perpetration? In addition, recent studies show that 30% of Black men will be arrested for a non-traffic violation by age 18, with 49% arrested by age of 23 (Brame et al. 2014). With 1 in 3 working age Black men predicted to spend time in jail or prison (Maurer, 2011) and the pervasive and cyclical nature of incarceration, arrest and confinement for poor people of color more broadly (Miller, 2014), we were concerned that incarceration, while mentioned as a variable in the study, was not fully explored. Future research should consider qualitative methods that describe mechanisms and processes that would better explain the relationship between poverty and violence exposures. Finally, we do not know much about the types and patterns of childhood and early adolescent victimization, participants experienced, leaving us to speculate about the extent to which the kind of violence one experiences in adolescence translates into the kinds of violence one perpetrates as an adult. Overall, this is an important and timely study that extends our understanding of the link between violence victimization in adolescence and violence perpetration in adulthood. Future research should examine, with greater specificity, the links between the childhood violence victimization and adult violence perpetration, the context in which violence is experienced and enacted, and the character of violence in adulthood.

**References:**

