

Romantic Partner Violence in Adolescence: Examining the Role of Girls' Exposure to Maternal Interparental Violence

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INTRODUCTION

Violence perpetrated by young women typically occurs in close relationships (1), and is associated with a history of trauma, including exposure to maltreatment and interparental violence (IPV; 2). As few girls are solely perpetrators, victimization is also prevalent in adolescent relationships, and linked to IPV exposure (3). Few studies however, have examined risk factors for both girls' perpetration and victimization in romantic relationships, particularly in high-risk samples.

The current study examined two such factors: exposure to maternal interparental violence and sensitivity to interpersonal rejection (Rejection Sensitivity; RS) in a subgroup of young women at elevated risk for aggression.

HYPOTHESES

Based on prior research (4) we expected that:

1. Maternal IPV would predict higher levels of girls' aggression and victimization in romantic relationships in adolescence and into young adulthood
2. RSA would serve to mediate the relationship between IPV and girls' aggression and victimization in adolescence and into young adulthood

METHOD: Measures

Family Background Questionnaire (FBQ). The FBQ is a self-report measure of lifetime experiences of interparental violence and maltreatment by mothers and fathers (5). Items were selected to measure exposure to IPV perpetrated between caregivers and their partners.

RS Questionnaire-Revised (RSQ-R). The RSQ-R is a revised version of the Children's RS Questionnaire (6), consisting of hypothetical situations in which rejection by a close friend/romantic partner are possible. The RS anger subscale was used in this study.

Aggression and victimization in romantic relationships were measured using both the *Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; 7)* and the *Conflict Tactics Scale Revised (CTS2; 8)*. A modified version of the CTS was used at Time 1 and the CTS2 was used at Time 2. CTS2 items with the same item content as the modified CTS items were selected and used to measure both aggression towards and victimization by romantic partners in young adulthood.

METHOD: Participants and Procedure

Participants were part of a longitudinal study of high-risk youth in North America. The current study examines associations at Time 1 and Time 2. At the time of enrollment, girls ranged in age from 13 to 19 ($M = 16.26$ years, $SD = 1.25$). Five years later, 120 of the participants were reassessed in the community ($M_{age} = 21.19$ years, $SD = 1.43$). Girls completed semi-structured clinical interviews, diagnostic assessments, and self-report measures as part of the study. Prospective and mediated relationships were tested within a path analysis framework.

Graph 1. Mean Values of Victimization and Perpetration at Time 1 and Time 2

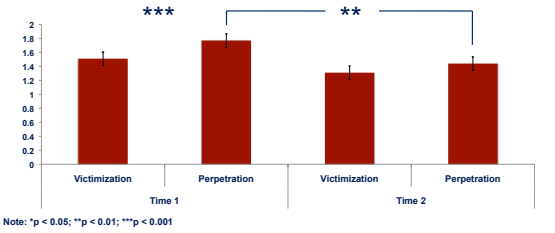
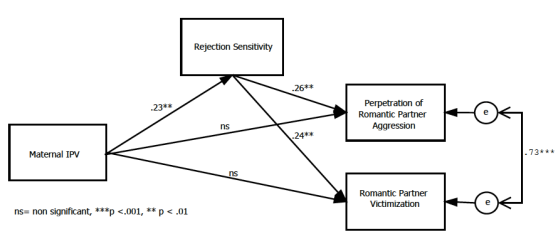


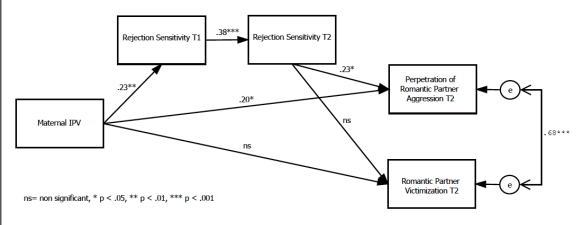
Figure 1. Time 1 Maternal IPV, RS, Perpetration and Victimization in Adolescence ($\chi^2(8) = 5.72, p = .22; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .06$)



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Figure 2. Time 2 Maternal IPV, RS, Perpetration and Victimization in Young Adulthood ($\chi^2(8) = 8.14, p = .42; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .01$)



RESULTS

Both models fit the data well (see Figures 1 and 2). The effect of exposure to maternal IPV on both girls' romantic partner victimization and perpetration in adolescence was mediated through RS ($Z_{sobel} = 1.90, p = .06$ and $Z_{sobel} = 1.98, p = .05$, respectively). RS was not found to mediate these associations in young adulthood.

Girls' aggression towards romantic partners was associated with both exposure to maternal IPV and greater RS in young adulthood. This was not found for romantic partner victimization. These effects remained stable when paternal IPV and other forms of abuse were controlled.

DISCUSSION

Findings suggest that in adolescence, exposure to mothers' IPV and a tendency to perceive threat in relationships increased girls' risk of both aggression towards and victimization by their romantic partners. In young adulthood however, these associations differed for perpetration and victimization. Maternal IPV and RS were only found to exert significant direct effects on perpetration of aggression toward romantic partners. RS was no longer found to mediate this association. These results speak to the need for further research on risk factors for romantic partner violence. They also add to the growing evidence that maternal IPV plays a particular role in shaping adolescent daughters' vulnerability to both romantic partner victimization and aggression.



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