

HOW AGE OF FIRST DATING EXPERIENCE, NUMBER OF DATING
PARTNERS, AND LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP
RELATES TO DATING VIOLENCE
VICTIMIZATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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Dating violence is a serious social and health problem for young adolescent in many parts of the world. The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between three independent variables: (1) age of first dating experience; (2) number of dating partners; and (3) length of dating relationships with one dependent variable: (1) dating violence victimization among African American middle school youths. A review of the literature indicated conflicting results regarding the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variables. One-way ANOVA was used to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results of this analyses indicated that age of first dating experience and length of relationship were not significantly related to dating violence victimization. However, the number of dating partners was identified to be significantly related to dating

violence victimization for girls. Findings from this study indicate the need for further research to research the relationship between dating characteristics and levels of victimization with diverse samples of youth. Limitations of the study and implications for future research, social work practice, and policy are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dating violence is considered a significant social problem (Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003) as well as an important public health issue (Close, 2005; Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, & Noonan, 2007; Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2008; Pradubmook-Sherer, 2009). Studies suggest that dating violence is an extensive problem among teenagers (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). Many adolescents experience some type of dating violence before completing high school (Ramisetty-Mikler, Goebert, Nishimura, & Caetano, 2006). Many adolescents report that they have either been a perpetrator or a victim of dating violence in a present or past relationship (Cornelius & Resseque, 2007). The risk for violence increases as the relationship gets more serious (Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006).

1.1 General Overview

Dating violence is a problem not only in the United States, but in other parts of the world as well. Sherer (2009) found that a high percentage of Israeli youths experience several types of dating violence and Pradubmook-Sherer (2009) found high percentages of male and female Thai youths had experience with dating violence. Manseau, Fernet, Hebert, Collin-Vezina, and Blais (2008) found high rates of dating violence victimization among Canadian girls. Dating violence is also a serious problem among Mexican youth (Rivera-Rivera, Allen-Leigh, Rodriguez-Ortega, Chavez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2007). Although we know that dating violence is widespread with significant mental and physical health effects on youth, there is still a dearth of knowledge about how some dating characteristics relate to dating violence victimization.

Many studies focus on high school and college samples and the majority of studies have been conducted with European American youth. We know much less about dating violence among middle school youth and African American youth. Thus, the goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of dating violence among middle school youths. Specifically, this study seeks to gain a better understanding of how the age of first dating experience, number of dating partners, and length of dating relationship relate to dating violence victimization. Currently, very few studies examine the prevalence of dating violence by age of first dating experience, number of partners or length of relationships. The lack of research in these areas represents an important gap in our understanding of the dynamics related to dating violence. Findings from the study may assist in creating age appropriate and culturally sensitive prevention and intervention programs for young adolescents.

1.2 Importance of Dating Violence: Prevalence

Although reports on the prevalence of adolescent dating violence vary depending on the type of measure used, we know rates are high. Based on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1997), psychological and physical violence was similar for both males and females among adolescent ages 12 to 21. Research (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001) suggests that nearly three of every ten adolescents had experienced some sort of violence victimization in their relationships during the past 18 months. In addition, one in five adolescents suffered psychological victimization and one in ten suffered physical victimization, usually in addition to, psychological victimization (Halpern et al., 2001).

In a sample of African American females, ages 14 to 18 years, Wingood, DiClemente, McCree, Harrington, and Davies (2001) found that 18.4% of adolescents had a history of physical dating violence of which 30.2% of them had been abused within the past six months. In a longitudinal study, Raiford, Wingood, and DiClemente (2007) found that 28% of the adolescents had experienced dating violence victimization. Of those victimized, 34.7% suffered

verbal abuse, 18.4% suffered physical abuse, and 46.9% suffered both verbal and physical violence. In a sample of 13 to 19 year old European Americans and African Americans from a southern Michigan high school, Callahan et al., (2003) found that 45.7% of adolescents had experienced dating violence victimization in their lives.

The high rates of adolescent dating violence are supported in other studies. In a sample of female students in 9th to 12th grade who completed the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), almost one in ten adolescent girls were victims of dating violence. Females in 12th grade had the highest rate of dating violence and African American girls were twice as likely to have been victims of physical dating violence (Howard & Wang, 2003). Similarly, in a sample of 9th to 12th grade male students who completed the 2005 YRBS, approximately one in ten males have been physically victimized in dating relationships; suggesting that males and females experience similar rates of dating violence victimization (Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2008). In a sample of male and female high school students who completed the 2007 YRBS, 9.9% of students had suffered dating violence victimization. Males (11.0%) reported higher rates of dating violence victimization than females (8.8%). Results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed a higher rate of dating violence victimization among minority students (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2008).

Studies focusing on minority youth also report high rates of dating violence. In a study focused on African American middle school youth, Black and Weisz (2003) found that only 11.5% of seventh graders had not been a victim of some form of dating violence within the past six months. Using a focus group of Mexican American youth between the ages of 11 to 16, Black and Weisz (2005) found that (36%) of the statements made by the youth related to the eminent violence present in their lives and (30%) of these statements were referring to physical violence. The number of statements made was almost equal between genders (Black & Weisz, 2005).

Holt and Espelage (2005) add support to these high rates of dating violence found in other studies. They found in a sample of African American (39%) and European American (61%) students from a Midwestern city middle school (54%) and high school (46%) that 43% males and 32% females had experienced dating violence victimization and 61% males and 63% females had experienced emotional abuse within dating relationships. African American students had a higher rate of physical dating violence victimization than European American, but the rates for emotional victimization were similar for African Americans and European Americans. The study found that males experienced higher rates of physical dating violence victimization than females. However, rates for emotional abuse were similar for African American as well as for European American males and females (Holt & Espelage, 2005).

1.3 Importance of Dating Violence: Impact

Dating violence is an extensive problem and results in serious effects for the victims (Tschann, et.al, 2008). The high rates of violence among dating adolescents foretells the risk for harmful relationships (Close, 2005). According to Kaura and Lohman (2007), little research is available on the effects on male victims. However, the literature addresses many effects on females. The evidence suggests that the consequences of dating violence are greater for females than for males (Carr & Vandeuken, 2002; Callahan et al., 2003). The following section discusses many of the effects of dating violence and several of the problems related to dating violence including sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, mental health, and suicide.

1.3.1 Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Dating violence can result in sexually transmitted diseases (STD) (Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006). Female adolescent victims of dating violence are at increased odds of having multiple sex partners increasing their risk of getting HIV or other STDs than non-victim adolescent females (Silverman et al., 2001). Wingood et al., (2001) found that adolescents with a history of dating violence were 2.8 times more likely to have an STD. Collin-Vezina et al.,

(2006) indicate that many teens suffer serious sexual health problems needing medical care as a result of dating violence. One third of the teens reported suffering victimization in which their partners forced them to have sex without a condom (Collin-Vezina et al., 2006).

1.3.2 Pregnancy

Adolescent girls who experienced dating violence are at higher risk of experiencing health problems such as pregnancy. Wingood et al., (2001) found that adolescents with a history of dating violence were half as likely to use condoms consistently during the past six months, and 2.1 times more likely to have been pregnant . In Silverman's et al., (2001) study, the high school females experiencing dating violence victimization were almost four to six times more at odds of ever been pregnant than the non victimized females. Ismail's (2007) study indicated that all the female participants who experienced dating violence resulted in pregnancy while still in the relationship; implying that many unwanted pregnancies occurs among these adolescents. Manseau et al., (2008) found that 28.8% of teen girls who experienced dating violence had been pregnant compared to 7.6% of teen girls who never experienced dating violence.

1.3.3 Mental Health

Research has shown that dating violence victims have more problems with mental health than those who have never been victimized (Ismail, 2007; Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006). Kaura and Lohman (2007) study found that dating violence victimization affects the mental health of both males and females. However, females showed higher rates of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Holt and Espelage (2005) found that anxiety and depression increased with dating violence victimization. Dating violence victimization is associated with lower psychological well-being for both males and females. Higher rates of dating violence victimization were associated with higher rates of posttraumatic stress and

dissociation for females and anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress for males. Male victims reported less posttraumatic stress than females (Callahan et al., 2003).

1.3.4 Suicide

The risk of suicide is high for adolescent girls who experienced dating violence. Suicide thoughts and attempts were almost six to nine times as prevalent among the female adolescents who experienced sexual or physical victimization from dating partners (Silverman et al., 2001). Similarly, Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) found that those who suffered date violence and rape were more likely to be suicidal than those who were not abused.

The previous section describes the numerous studies that document the prevalence of dating violence among youth. The previous section also describes the serious problems associated with dating violence victimization. The wide prevalence of and the severe consequences of dating violence victimization compel us to learn more about the issues associated with dating violence and to develop programs to help prevent it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although we need to know more about how many variables relate to dating violence, this study will focus on three variables: age of first dating experience, number of partners, and length of relationships in adolescents. Each section describes studies related to these issues of dating violence victimization. Some studies show a relationship between these three variables and dating violence victimization, some studies show no relationship, and some studies cannot determine whether there is a relationship. Our knowledge about the relationship between these three variables and dating violence victimization is limited and more research is required to better understand the relationship.

2.1 Age of First Dating Experience

This section starts off by discussing the literature on the relation between dating violence victimization and age of adolescents. While some studies agree that age has an effect on dating violence, other studies found little or no effect. Next, this section discusses the literature on the relation between dating violence victimization and age of first dating experience. Some studies indicate that early initiation of dating and sexual activities relate to dating violence victimization and other studies found no relation between age of first date and dating violence.

2.1.1 Age

Although research has shown a relationship between age and dating violence in the U.S. as well as Canada, age has not been a strong indicator of dating violence. Older adolescents have greater opportunities for dating, and females have higher chance of being sexually abused. However, little is known about the relation between the increased rates of

aggression with age, or if there is an interaction between gender and age (Pradubmook-Sherer, 2009).

Gouinnsky and Yassour-Borochowitz (2007) study found that partner violence is largely prevalent among couples who are dating rather than among married couples. This may be due to the connection between age and violence suggesting that dating violence is higher among younger individuals. Violence also occurred more frequently among couples who lived separately which may be due to the fact that more couples live together as they get older. The research also suggests that violence decreases as age increases (Gousinnsky & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2007).

Contrary to the previous study suggesting that dating violence is higher among younger adolescents, Silverman et al., (2001) found that younger adolescent females were less likely to experience dating violence since they were less likely to be dating or engaging in sexual activities. Halpern et al., (2001) found that for both genders, victimization was more likely to occur among older adolescents since older individuals may have more dating experience than younger individuals. Females age 18 to 21 had higher odds of psychological victimization than females age 12 to 14 (Halpern et al., 2001). Similarly, Pradubmook-Sherer (2009) found that older adolescents experience higher rates of dating violence.

In a recent study, Noonan and Charles (2009) examined dating violence among a diverse sample of middle school youth in the metropolitan area of Atlanta. This study found that most youth in middle school are just starting to date. Results from the study indicated that youths did not have much opportunity to have serious relationships because of their age (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Young adolescents do not have many places they can be by themselves, they do not have much money, and they are too young to drive. Participants indicated that many of their parents do not allow their daughters (especially in sixth or seventh

grade) to start dating or have boyfriends at a young age allowing for school hours to be the only time boyfriends and girlfriends spend together (Noonan & Charles, 2009).

The rate of those who have been involved in dating relationships increases as the adolescents gets older. Findings from the focus groups indicated that older adolescents have more privacy and less adult supervision than younger adolescents which create greater opportunities for them to get involved in risky behaviors (Noonan & Charles, 2009). African American and Hispanic youth start sexual activities at a younger age (before age 13) than other racial groups. Dating relationships may precede sexual activities; however, sexual activities may be used as a substitute for those relationships. Many adolescent participants of a focus groups discussed how their sexual activities and dating relationships began when in higher grades (Noonan & Charles, 2009).

2.1.2. Age of First Dating Experience

Age of first dating experience is a different issue than age of adolescents. In one important study addressing this topic, Silverman et al., (2001) found that female adolescents having their first sexual relation before age 15 was related to both physical and sexual dating violence victimization (Silverman, 2001). The sample consisted of the Massachusetts YRBS survey (1997 and 1999), a sample of 9th to 12th grade high school females ages 14 to 18 and older. The majority of the sample was European American (73% in 1997; 72.7% in 1999), with the remainder Hispanic (9.4 in 1997; 11.0% in 1999), African American (6.3% in 1997; 6.7 in 1999), Asian (5.7% in 1997; 6.1% in 1999), and other races (5.7% in 1997; 3.5 in 1999).

Silverman, Raj, and Clements (2004) found that adolescent female victims of physical dating violence were more likely to have had initiated early sexual relations than non-victim adolescent females. The sample was based on the 2001 YRBS, consisting of female high school students with the majority being European American (68%), African American (13%), Hispanic (11.9%), Asian (3.4%), and other races (3.6%). Silverman et al. (2004) found that

initiation of sexual relations before the age of 15 was related to dating violence; adolescent girls who experienced dating violence were twice as likely to have had first sexual relations before age 15 than females who did not experience dating violence.

In another study, Sanderson, Coker, Tortolero, and Reininger (2004) found that having sex at an early age was found to be related to dating violence victimization in both male and female adolescents. The study found that females (8.7%) were more likely to experience physical dating violence than males (6.4%) (Sanderson et al., 2004). The sample consisted of 13 high schools in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley representing 24% of students in ninth grade. The students identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino and were 14 years and older (Sanderson et al., 2004).

In a sample of Native Hawaiian and European American high school students in 9th to 12th grade in Hawaii, Ramisetty-Mikler et al. (2006), found that 7.8% of students experienced physical violence victimization with similar rates for males (7.6%) and females (8.0%). Ramisetty-Mikler et al. (2006) suggest that while most adolescents start dating by age 16, some start at an earlier age and many are victimized as early as age 15. Teens that started having sex at age 13 or younger had the greatest risk of victimization compared to those who never had sex (Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006).

Eaton et al., (2007) also found that the risk of being victimized is higher for teens who start having sex while very young. Dating violence victimization was higher for both male and female students who started having sex before and after age 13 than those who never had sex. The sample was based on the 2003 YRBS. The sample of 9th to 12th grade students consisted of (48.7%) females and (51.3%) males age 14 and older. The majority of the sample was European American (61.5%), Hispanic (16.6%), African American (13.9%), and (8.1%) some other race.

In a sample of Canadian adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 18 under CPS care, Manseau et al., (2008) found that the girls experienced different forms of victimization in their first dating experience. Particularly, nine out of ten girls experienced psychological victimization during their first dating experience. Girls who experienced severe physical dating violence had their first consensual sexual relations at an earlier age. Those who had their first sexual relationships at an older age were less likely to have experienced severe physical dating violence (Manseau et al., 2008).

In a recent study, Kelly, Cheng, Peralez-Dieckmann, and Martinez (2009) found that younger age and age at first sexual experiences were related to dating violence. Having their first sexual experience at an early age, specifically at age 13 or younger was strongly related to dating violence victimization. Kelly et al., (2009) found that 44% of the girls in the study had their first sexual encounters when they were 13 years old or younger. The sample consisted of girls from Bexar County Texas Juvenile Justice System. The age of the girls ranged from 11 to 18 with the average age of 15. The majority of the girls were Hispanic (72.46%), European American (11.23%), African American (10.51%), and the rest were from some other race (Kelly et al., 2009).

In contrast to the studies previously discussed, in an early study, Bergman (1992) found no significant relation between the age one started dating and dating violence. The sample consisted of three Midwestern high schools including a rural and suburban school with predominantly European American and inner city school with about 14% African American students.

Similarly, in another early study, Vicary, Klingaman, and Harkness (1995), found that age of first date did not indicate sexual abuse from dates or boyfriends. The sample was based on the 1993 YRBS consisting of public high school students in 9th to 12th grade. The sample consisted of (52%) females and (48%) males. The majority of the students were European

American (60%; 30% males and 30% females) and the remaining students were African American (40%; 18% males and 22% females) (Vicary et al., 1995).

Using a sample of 13 to 17 year old females referred to Quebec Child Protective Services for alleged sexual abuse, Cyr, McDuff, and Wright (2006), found that age did not have a significant influence on psychological violence nor did it relate to physical violence. Similarly, in a sample of Jewish and Arab youth (mean age: 16), Sherer (2008) found that age did not have an effect on dating violence among the Jewish or Arab youths. Jewish youth start dating at a younger age and dated younger partners than Arab youths, however, age had little effect on dating violence victimization for both Arab and Jewish youths (Sherer, 2008).

Little research is available on the relationship between age of first dating experience and dating violence. Much of the literature focuses on first sexual experience. We do not know if first sexual experience took place in the context of a dating experience or not. However, we can assume that dating experiences increase the likelihood of sexual experiences occurring.

2.2 Number of Dating Partners

Research on the relation between the number of partners and dating violence is also contradictory. While some studies have found that having multiple partners increases dating violence victimization, other studies found that having fewer partners increased victimization and others found no relationship between number of partners and dating violence victimization. This section first discusses the studies that found a relationship between numbers of partners and dating violence then discusses studies that found no relation between the two.

In one of the earlier studies on dating violence, Bergman (1992) found in a sample of high school students that greater numbers of dating partners related to dating violence. According to Bergman (1992), adolescents have a higher chance of being exposed to many different dating circumstances. Having many partners can mean that the individual is more interested in dating as a whole and are less particular in picking partners when dating

(Bergman, 1992).

Other studies suggest that being exposed to a greater number of partners, especially sexual partners can put women at higher risk for abuse from partners. Neufeld et al., (1999) in a sample of undergraduate females aged 17 to 41, consisting of freshman (81.1%), sophomores (12.9%), juniors (4.1%), and seniors (1.3%) found that having a greater number of partners was related to increased rates of physical and psychological violence. When measuring the rate of occurrence of dating violence, Neufeld et al., (1999) found that having more sexual and emotional partners increased psychological violence.

Kreiter, Krowchuk, Woods, Sinal, Lawless, and DuRant's (1999) study based on a sample of 8th to 12th grade students (females 49.8%; males 50.2%) found a relationship between same sex couples and date fighting among male participants. Among males, the number of male sexual partners was related to fighting with a date. The more sexual male partners, the greater chance males had of being involved in a date fight (Kreiter et al., 1999). The study also found that in females, the number of sexual male partners was related to date fighting. As the number of male sexual partners increased so did the risk of engaging in a fight with a dating partner. Females who fought with a dating partner had a higher likelihood of having multiple male sexual partners and coercive sex than females who never had a fight (Kreiter et al., 1999).

In another study, a strong relationship was found between the number of sexual partners and dating violence victimization among white females (Valios, Oeltmann, Waller, and Hussey, 1999). Among European American males there was also a strong relation between the numbers of sexual partners and being a victim of rape. For African American males and females there was a relation between the numbers of sexual partners and being a victim of date rape and dating violence victimization (Valios et al., 1999). Based on a sample of adolescents ages 12 to 21, Halpern et al., (2001) found that having more partners were related to higher

probability of psychological, physical, or both types of victimization for males as well as females. Females who had multiple relationships are particularly more susceptible to physical victimization (Halpern et al., 2001).

Silverman et al., (2001) and Silverman et al., (2004) found that for female adolescents having three or more sex partners within the past 3 months was related to both physical and sexual dating violence victimization. However, the authors suggested that it is uncertain whether having multiple partners place these adolescents at a higher risk because of greater exposure to possible violent dating partners, or if the impact of dating violence increases the likelihood of adolescent females to engage in multiple sex partnering, or if other factors are the cause of higher risk of both dating violence and multiple partners. These findings add strong support that having a greater number of sexual partners leads to a higher risk of dating violence victimization. (Silverman et al., 2001).

In a sample of college students ranging from age 17 to 52, Harned (2002) found that an increasing number of dating partners and psychological violence toward each other indicated higher odds of psychological victimization for both males and females. The majority of the sample was European American (76%). Harned (2002) also found that more casual dating partners and sexual aggression indicated higher odds of sexual victimization for both genders. Sexual victimization was related to casual dating while multiple serious dating partners related to psychological victimization (Harned, 2002).

Many additional studies suggest a strong relationship between number of sexual partners and experiences with dating violence. In a sample of female high school students, Howard and Wang (2003) found that girls who had two or more sexual partners within the past three months were at a greater risk of experiencing physical dating violence, suggesting that having multiple sexual partners and not using a condom can result in sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and dating violence. Adolescent girls who were involved in risky sexual

behaviors were at greater risk of victimization. The odds of being victimized were almost seven times greater for girls who had sex with multiple partners. For both males and females, the odds for dating violence victimization increases as the number of lifetime sexual partners increases (Howard & Wang, 2003).

In a sample of Native Hawaiian and European American high school students, Ramisetty-Mikler et al., (2006) found that those who had multiple partners experienced more dating violence. Eaton et al., (2007) found that for both male and female students, the number of lifetime sex partners was related to dating violence victimization. The odds of dating violence victimization were higher for students who had multiple lifetime sexual partners than for those students who had never had sex. For both male and female students having sexual intercourse was related to dating violence victimization. Dating violence victimization was almost twice as high for African American students than European American students. Both male and female students who had multiple sex partners were at a higher risk for physical violence in their dating relationships. The relationship between the number of sex partners and dating violence victimization may be mistaken with the fact that adolescents who have more sex partners may have been in more dating relationships which increases the chance for dating violence to occur. Eaton et al., (2007) found that adolescents who had more than one sex partner experienced more dating violence victimization. The greater the number of sexual partners and risk behaviors, the greater the probability of dating violence for both male and female students (Eaton, et.al, 2007).

The relationship between the number of several partners and dating violence victimization has also been found among Mexican youth. Rivera-Rivera et al., (2007) found that dating violence victimization was related to having two or more lifetime sexual partners among both males and females. The representative sample consisted of central Mexico's public school (junior-high, high school, and university) students aged 11 to 24. Females (9.37%) experienced

more psychological victimization from dating partners than males (8.57%) (Rivera-Rivera et al., 2007). In a sample of girls in the juvenile justice system, Kelly et al., (2009) also found that dating violence victimization was strongly associated with having more than one partner within the previous six months. Manseau et al., (2008) found that teen girls were more likely to have had more than ten sexual partners if they had experienced severe physical dating violence.

Contrary to the many studies finding a relationship between the number of dating and sexual partners and dating violence victimization, Stets and Pirog-Good (1987) indicate that having fewer partners increased the chance for victimization. Stets and Pirog-Good (1987) found that when the number of dating partner was increased by one, it decreased the risk of experiencing violence by 41%. Thus the fewer number of dating partners women have, the higher the chance of being victimized, suggesting that there is a lower risk for violence when an individual has multiple dating partners. The number of dating partners can be an indication of the extent of how serious the relationship is. The greater the quantity of dating partners, the less chance there is that any of those relationships are serious, suggesting that violence is more likely to occur in serious relationships. However, when someone is engaged in a serious relationship and has multiple dating partners, there can be an issue with jealousy which may result in violence (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987).

Similarly, according to Patton and Mannison (1995), forced sexual relations occur more often in relationships with only one dating partner. The sample consisted of students enrolled in first year courses at an Australian university. Most of the students were born in Australia. Their ages ranged from 17 to 22 years with the mean age of 18 years for females and 19 for males. More than 50% of the students were between the ages of 17 and 19 years and were mostly in their first or second year of high school (Patton & Mannison, 1995).

A few studies found no relationship between the number of partners and dating violence victimization. In their sample of females between the ages of 13 to 17 Cyr, McDuff, and Wright

(2006), found no relationship between the number of dating partners and physical or psychological violence. In a sample of male high school students, Howard et al., (2008) found a relation between having had sex within the past 3 months and dating violence regardless of the number of partners involved (Howard et al., 2008).

2.3 Length of Relationship

Studies on the effect of relationship length and dating violence concur that longer relationships are related to dating violence. Studies have consistently shown that physical dating violence victimization occurs more frequently in long lasting relationships of a serious nature involving regular dates (Harned, 2002). However, the research is in less agreement in the relationship between length of relationship and sexual victimization (Harned, 2002). Research has found that for both men and women, physical and psychological violence is greater among dating partners in long term relationships, however, sexual victimization occurred in irregular relationships (Harned, 2002).

According to Stets and Pirog-Good (1987), when the length of dating relationship increases by a month, the risk of violence increases by eight percent. Long-term relationships can be an indication of the seriousness of the relationship, suggesting that violence is more likely to occur in serious relationships. The more serious the relationships is, the more an individual may feel they have a right to control the other which can result in violence (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987).

When looking at the rate and extent of occurrence of dating violence victimization in a sample of undergraduate females aged 17 to 41, Neufeld et al. (1999) found that longer lasting relationships increased psychological violence. When measuring the rate of dating violence, the longest relationship within the past six months was unquestionably related to more psychological victimization and when measuring the extent of dating violence, longer estimated lengths of the average relationship length were related to greater prevalence of psychological

victimization. The majority of the females indicated that the typical length of their relationships was four months or more and 62.6% indicated that their present relationship lasted longer than six months (Neufeld et al., 1999).

In a sample of Jewish undergraduate students in Israel, Gousinsky and Yassour-Borochowitz (2007) found that relationship length was strongly related to partner assault. The longer the relationship lasted the greater the chance of abuse from dating partner. Minor assault increased by 75% and severe assault increased by 44% as the relationship length increased (Gousinsky & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2007).

In a sample of Thai youth, Pradubmook-Sherer (2009) found more dating violence among the females who considered their long lasting relationship important. According to the research, males tended to be controlling or violent toward females and tried to impose their authority in longer lasting relationships. Physical dating violence was speculated to be greater in more committed relationships as the bond between the couples grows; making couples feel they have the right to control their partners and that using violence is a natural way to solve conflicts in their relationships (Pradubmook-Sherer, 2009).

In Sherer's (2009) study of Jewish and Arab youths, longer relationships resulted in higher rates of dating violence victimization among Jewish youth. Dating violence was found to increase with the length of the relationship among the Jewish youths. The length of the relationship increased dating violence more among the Jewish females than the males. In contrast, length of relationships had little effect on the Arab youths. This may be due to the different views of dating among the two groups. While dating for amusement is supported by the Jewish, Arabs usually had a traditional view that dating meant future marriage (Sherer, 2008). The Jewish participants, in particular females, engaged in longer more important relationships than Arab females which may explain the relation between length of relationship and dating violence between the two sectors (Sherer, 2009).

Sherer (2009) also found that important relationships had lower levels of violence for both Jewish and Arab youths, indicating that longer relationships may not always be important ones and that while longer relationships lead to violence, importance of the relationship prevents violence in dating relationships. Sexual victimization occurred in casual dating relationships while psychological victimization occurred in a higher number of serious, longer relationships (Sherer, 2009).

2.4 Conclusion

Although many aspects of the dating experience needs further study, this research focuses on three important variables. We especially know little about the influence of these variables among African American youth and middle school students. Most studies focus on age of dating participants rather than age of first dating experience. Research on the relationship between age of first dating experience and dating violence victimization is contradictory. While some studies agree that adolescents who have their first dating experience at an earlier age have a higher risk of dating violence victimization, other research suggests that adolescents who have their first dating experience at an older age are at a higher risk.

A few studies found no relation between age and dating violence victimization. Similarly, some studies find that dating violence victimization increases with multiple partners, some indicate that victimization increases with fewer partners, and others found no association. Research on dating violence victimization and length of the relationship were consistent that dating violence is higher in longer lasting relationships. With the conflicting results and few studies looking at middle school African American youth, further research is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the degree of influence these variables have on dating violence victimization.

The majority of existing research about dating violence is based on high school and college samples. This approach fails to capture the experiences of middle school students

where dating begins for many youth. The purpose of the present study is to extend our knowledge of dating violence by sampling a wider range of younger adolescents who are dating. Specifically the study focuses on dating violence among middle school youth.

Cultural competence is important to create appropriate prevention and intervention for youth when addressing the issue of dating violence. Knowledge on distinct information about cultural groups allows social workers to be culturally sensitive and competent when working with different cultures. There are special issues one should consider when working with African American youth dealing with dating violence. For example, readings on racial and ethnic diversity showed that religion and strong family bond were common characteristics among African Americans (Johnson & Munch, 2009) Dating violence among African Americans has been shown to be a result of gender roles, economic inequality and oppressive images of African American men and women (Bougere, Rowley, & Lee, 2004). Knowledge of this information can be useful in working with African American youth affected by dating violence.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The current research seeks to add to our knowledge base about the factors relating to dating violence victimization among African American middle school youth. Although studies have explored how various dating dynamics related to violence victimization, we still know little about how age of dating experiences, number of dating partners and length of dating relationship relates to violence victimization among African American youth and middle school youth. This study addressing the following questions: 1) How does age of first dating experience relate to dating violence victimization? 2) How does number of dating partners relate to dating violence victimization? and 3) How does length of dating relationship relate to dating violence victimization?

Based on the literature, I hypothesize: (1) The younger the age at first dating experience, the greater the dating violence victimization for both males and females; (2) The greater the number of dating partners, the greater the dating violence victimization for both males and females; (3) The longer the duration of the relationship, the greater the violence victimization for both males and females.

3.1 Procedure

A dating violence and sexual assault prevention program was presented at two inner-city middle schools in a Midwestern city during the school years of 2002-2006. In one school, students in health classes were selected for the program. In the other school, students in a Life Skills class were selected to receive the program. Students were surveyed before and after the program. Comparison groups were also surveyed in both school settings. Only pretest data were used in this study. Data were collected from youth who were going to participate in the

prevention program and youth who were serving in the comparison group prior to the presentation of the program. All students completing the survey received parental consent and assented to participate.

Both schools had approximately 700 students; 76% of students in both schools participated in the free lunch program, and both schools had rampant problems with fighting, absenteeism, and suspensions. Less than 25% of students in both schools met the state's educational attainment standards. The study received university human subject approval (see Appendix A).

3.2 Instrument

Black (2004) developed a survey to examine attitudes about and experiences with dating violence and sexual assault among middle school youth. The survey included standardized instruments, questions about dating dynamics and demographic information. The current study focused on specific portions of the survey. This study examined responses to the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996) and three specific questions on the survey: 1) How old were you when you had your first dating partner? 2) How many dating partners have you had? 3) How long have you been hanging out with your dating partner?

For the question "How old were you when you had your first dating partner?" response categories were provided: 10 years or younger, 11, 12, 13, 14, over 14 years old, and I have never had a dating partner. For the question "How many dating partners have you had?" response categories were 1, 2, 3-5, 6-10, more than 10, and I have never had a dating partner. For the question, "How long have you been hanging out with your dating partner- just the two of you?", response categories were less than one month, 1-3 months, 3-6 months, 6 months to 1 year, and more than 1 year.

Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus et al., 1996) measured respondents' levels of dating violence victimization. This scale is a widely used scale with high validity and reliability (Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri, 1992). The scale includes 26 items with subscales on victimization and perpetration. Only the victimization subscale (13 items) of the revised Conflict Tactics Scale will be used in this study. Examples of victimization items include: 1) My dating partner shouted or yelled at me, 2) My dating partner threw something at me that could hurt, 3) My dating partner grabbed, pushed, or shoved me, 4) My dating partner slapped me, 5) My dating partner beat me up, 6) My dating partner tried to kiss or touch me after I told him or her no to, and 7) My dating partner made me kiss or touch him or her in a sexual way even though I didn't want to.

3.3 Sample

A total of 577 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students completed the survey related to dating violence and sexual assault. More than half the sample was female (55.3%). Over 98% of the youth in the program were African American. More than one third of the students lived with both parents, and a little over half of the students lived with a single mother. More than half of the youth considered their neighborhood to be friendly and safe; about one third of the youth felt that their neighborhood was not very friendly but they felt safe. See Table 1 for further details about the sample of all youth who completed the survey. Out of the 577 youth who completed the survey, 395 said that they had had a dating partner.

Table 1. Participants Individual Demographics

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	557	
Female	308	55.3
Male	245	44.0
Grade	552	
6	55	10.0
7	204	37.0
8	293	53.1
Neighborhood	479	
Friendly and safe	264	55.1
Not friendly but safe	148	30.9
Not very safe (drugs, guns, abandoned houses)	61	12.7
Violent and scary	6	1.3
Living Arrangements	482	
Mother and father	156	32.4
Mother	251	52.1
Father	20	4.1
Foster family	3	.6
Relative (grandmother aunt, uncle)	44	9.1
Other (group home, family friend)	8	1.7

3.4 Data Analysis

SPSS Statistics software package was used to conduct data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there are any gender differences regarding the independent variables. A t-test was conducted to explore gender differences regarding victimization. Analysis of variance determined if there was a relationship between the independent variables (age of first dating experience, number of dating partners and length of dating relationship) and the dependent variable (level of dating violence victimization). Post hoc comparison analyses were used to assess which means regarding the number of dating partners was different among the female youth.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between three independent variables: (1) age of first dating experience; (2) number of dating partners; and (3) length of dating relationships with one dependent variable: (1) dating violence victimization among African American middle school youths. The following section addresses each variable and provides a summary of characteristics for both genders. Then it addresses each hypothesis.

4.1 Independent Variables

4.1.1 Age of First Dating Experience

As presented in Table 2, a high number of participants had their first dating experience at a young age. Almost half 46.5% (n = 184) of the participants' who had ever dated, had their first dating experience when they were 10 years old or younger. Only 13.6% (n = 51) had their first dating experience when they were 13 years old or older. Females and males differed significantly in how old they were when they had their first dating experience $\chi^2(1, N = 387) = 29.77, p < .001$. More boys had their first dating experience at a younger age than girls. More than half 60.4% (n = 116) of boys had their first dating experience when they were 10 years or younger compared to 32.8% (n = 64) girls. Only 16.9% (n = 33) girls and 9.4% (n = 18) boys had their first dating experience when they were 13 years old or older.

Table 2. Age of First Dating Experience by Gender

Age	Girls (n = 195)		Boys (n = 192)		Total (n = 387)	
		%		%		%
10 years old or younger	64	32.8	116	60.4	180	46.5
11 years old	55	28.2	31	16.1	86	22.2
12 years old	43	22.1	27	14.1	70	18.1
13 years old or older	33	16.9	18	9.4	51	13.2

4.1.2 Number of Dating Partners

The second independent variable in this study was the number of dating partners (Table 3). A high number of the participants that had ever had a dating partner had 3-5 dating partners 30.6% (n = 118) or more than 10 dating partners 22.3% (n = 87). Only 12.4% (n = 48) of the participants had only had one dating partner. There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of the number of dating partners they ever had χ^2 (2, N = 386) = 37.81, p < .001). A higher percentage of boys 35.4% (n = 67) compared to girls 10.2% (n = 20) had ever had more than ten dating partners. Thirty three percent of the girls (n = 65) and 28% (n = 53) boys had between three and five dating partners. Only 16 (8.5%) boys and 16.2% (n = 32) girls had only one dating partner.

Table 3. Number of Dating Partners by Gender

Number of Dating Partners	Girls (n = 197)		Boys (n = 189)		Total (n = 386)	
		%		%		%
1	32	16.2	16	8.5	48	12.4
2	43	21.8	25	13.2	68	17.6
3-5	65	33.0	53	28.0	118	30.6
6-10	37	18.8	28	14.8	65	16.8
More than 10	20	10.2	67	35.4	87	22.5

4.1.3 Length of Relationships

The third independent variable used in this study was the length of dating relationships (Table 4). On average the participants' dating relationships lasted between less than one month 26.8% (n = 96) and 1-3 months 28.2% (n = 101). There was a statistically significant difference in the length of dating relationships for boys and girls χ^2 (3, N = 350) = 10.60, p = .031. More

boys 34.9% (n = 61) compared to girls 19.4% (n = 34) had short term relationships lasting less than a month. Twenty percent of the girls (n = 35) and 16% (n = 28) of the boys reported that their dating relationships lasted for more than a year.

Table 4. Length of Dating Relationships by Gender

Length of Dating Relationships	Girls		Boys		Total	
	(n = 175)	%	(n = 175)	%	(n = 350)	%
Less than one month	34	19.4	61	34.9	95	27.1
1-3 months	54	30.9	45	25.7	99	28.3
3-6 months	27	15.4	22	12.6	49	14.0
6 months to 1 year	25	14.3	19	10.9	44	12.6
More than 1 year	35	20.0	28	16.0	63	18.0

4.2 Dependent Variables

4.2.1 Dating Violence Victimization

Dating violence victimization was the only dependent variable used in this study. This variable measured the level of victimization of participants. Participants were considered to have been victimized if they had ever experienced any form of violence from a current or most recent dating partner at least once. Out of the 355 youth who responded, a total of 230 reported victimization. Victimization score was calculated using the responses to the CTS questions and included all forms of violence (verbal, physical, sexual). There were a total of 13 questions assessing verbal, physical, and sexual victimization from a current or recent dating partner. Each question had a score of 0-6 for never (0), once (1), twice (2), three times (3), four times (4), five times (5), and six (6) or more times to measure the number of times of victimization. Scores for each of the 13 questions were added together to create a total victimization score. Total victimization scores for participants ranged from 0 to 60.

The greatest percentage of the youth 35.2% (n = 125) reported that they had never been victimized (58.5% (n=213) physical and 37.7% (n=95) verbal victimization). A slightly higher percentage of girls 37.1% (n = 66) than boys 32.4% (n = 56) had never experienced dating violence victimization. Less girls, 44.1% (n=112) than boys 45.6% (n=98) never

experienced physical violence and 39.5% (n=49) girls and 34.9% (n=44) boys never experienced verbal victimization. Results of the t-test for equal variance indicated that boys (M= 5.22; SD= 8.03; n = 167) experienced more dating violence victimization than girls (M= 4.37; SD= 7.18; n = 163). However, differences were not statistically significant $t(328) = -1.00$, $p = .158$.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1. The Younger the Age at First Dating Experience, the Greater the Dating Violence Victimization for both Boys and Girls.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was first calculated on participants' (boys and girls combined) CTS scores and their age at first dating experience. The CTS for age at first dating experience can be seen in Table 5. The analysis was not significant $F(3, 330) = .429$, $p = .733$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$, (Table 6). CTS scores showed no consistent pattern by age. Youth who had their first dating experience at 12 years old (M = 5.37; SD = 8.31; n = 59) reported the most victimization compared to youth who had their first dating experience at 10 years old (M = 4.96; SD = 8.24; n = 158), 13 years old or older (M = 4.23; SD = 6.90; n = 44), and 11 years old (M = 4.08; SD = 5.80; n = 73).

ANOVA was also calculated on youths CTS scores by gender. The analysis was not significant for boys $F(3, 163) = .569$, $p = .636$ $\eta^2 = 0.576$, or girls $F(3, 159) = .524$, $p = .666$ $\eta^2 = 0.424$, (Table 6). CTS scores were higher for boys who had their first dating experience at 12 years old (M = 7.17, SD = 10.22; n = 23) compared to 11 years old (M = 5.31; SD = 7.39; n = 26), 10 years old (M = 4.88; SD = 7.61; n = 102) and 13 years old or older (M = 4.38; SD = 8.52; n = 16). CTS scores were higher for girls who had their first dating experience at 10 years old or younger (M = 5.20; SD = 9.41, n = 55) compared to girls who had their first dating experience at 13 years old or older (M = 4.42; SD = 6.07; n = 26), 12 years old (M = 4.34; SD = 6.80, n = 35) and 11 years old (M = 3.40; SD = 4.65; n = 47). Therefore, age of first dating experience was not related to victimization. The first hypothesis stating that the younger the age at first dating

experience, the greater the dating violence victimization for both boys and girls, was not supported.

Table 5. CTS for Age at First Dating Experience

Age of 1 st Dating Experience	Boys (n = 167)			Girls (n = 163)			Boys and Girls (n = 334)		
	n	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Age first dating experience									
10 years old or younger	102	4.88	7.61	55	5.20	9.41	158	4.96	8.24
11 years old	26	5.31	7.39	47	3.40	4.65	73	4.08	5.80
12 years old	23	7.17	10.22	35	4.34	6.80	59	5.37	8.31
13 years old or older	16	4.38	8.52	26	4.42	6.07	44	4.23	6.89

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA for Dating Violence Victimization by Age of first Dating Experience

Gender		SS	df	MS	F	P
Female	Between Groups	81.821	3	27.274	.524	.666
	Within Groups	8272.351	159	52.027		
	Total	8354.172	162			
Male	Between Groups	111.058	3	37.019	.569	.636
	Within Groups	10601.181	163	65.038		
	Total	10712.240	166			
Boys and Girls	Between Groups	74.565	3	24.855	.429	.733
	Within Groups	19132.803	330	57.978		
	Total	19207.368	333			

SS = Sum of Squares; df = degrees of freedom; MS = mean square

4.3.2 Hypothesis 2. The Greater the Number of Dating Partners, the Greater the Dating Violence Victimization for both Boys and Girls.

A one-way ANOVA was also calculated on participants' (boys and girls combined) CTS scores and their number of dating partners. The CTS for the number of dating partners can be seen in Table 7. Significant difference emerged $F(4, 329) = 2.84, p = .025, \eta^2 = 0.033$, (Table 8). Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated that youth who had 6-10 dating partners ($M = 6.44$; $SD = 9.19$; $n = 59$) and youth who had more than 10 dating partners ($M = 6.03$; $SD = 9.11$; $n = 74$)

reported the most victimization compared to youth who had 3-5 dating partners (M = 4.27; SD = 6.65, n = 104), 2 dating partners (M = 3.64; SD = 6.85, n = 55), and one dating partner (M = 2.26; SD = 3.59; n = 42).

In looking at number of dating partners and CTS scores by genders, differences emerged for girls but not boys. CTS scores were higher for girls who had more than 10 dating partners (M = 9.59; SD = 14.65; n = 17) compared to girls who had 6-10 dating partners (M = 5.53; SD = 7.46; n = 32), 3-5 dating partners (M = 3.88; SD = 5.38; n = 56), 1 dating partner (M = 2.68; SD = 4.12; n = 28), and 2 dating partners (M = 2.53; SD = 3.91; n = 32). There was a statistically significant difference for girls $F(4, 160) = 3.68, p = .007, \eta^2 = 0.66$; Tukey post hoc comparisons indicated there was no difference in victimization between girls who had more than 10 dating partners and girls who had 6-10 dating partners. There was a significant difference in victimization for girls who had more than 10 dating partners and girls who had 3-5 dating partners, one dating partner, and two dating partners.

CTS scores were higher for boys who had 6-10 dating partners (M = 7.81; SD = 11.06; n = 26) compared to boys who had 2 dating partners (M = 5.41; SD = 9.61; n = 22), more than 10 dating partners (M = 4.96; SD = 6.46; n = 57), 3-5 dating partners (M = 4.83; SD = 7.96; n = 47), and 1 dating partner (M = 1.46; SD = 2.15; n = 13). However, as shown on Table 8, no significant differences for boys were found $F(4, 160) = 1.43, p = .226, \eta^2 = 0.34$.

The second hypothesis stating that the greater the number of dating partners, the greater the dating violence victimization was partially supported. Girls who reported a greater number of dating partners, reported more victimization however, the number of dating partners did not make a difference on victimization for boys.

Table 7. CTS for Number of Dating Partners

Number of dating partners	Boys (n = 165)			Girls (n = 165)			Boys and Girls (n = 334)		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
1	13	1.46	2.15	28	2.68	4.12	42	2.26	3.59
2	22	5.41	9.61	32	2.53	3.91	55	3.64	6.85
3-5	47	4.83	7.96	56	3.88	5.38	104	4.27	6.65
6-10	26	7.81	11.06	32	5.53	7.46	59	6.44	9.19
More than 10	57	4.96	6.46	17	9.59	14.65	74	6.03	9.11

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA for Dating Violence Victimization by Number of Partners

Gender		SS	df	MS	F	P
Female	Between Groups	707.688	4	176.922	3.68	.007
	Within Groups	7684.287	160	48.027		
	Total	8391.976	164			
Male	Between Groups	368.74	4	92.187	1.432	.226
	Within Groups	10303.156	160	64.395		
	Total	10671.903	164			
Boys and Girls	Between Groups	640.195	4	160.049	2.837	.025
	Within Groups	18561.796	329	56.419		
	Total	19201.991	333			

SS = Sum of Squares; df = degrees of freedom; MS = mean square

4.3.3 Hypothesis 3. The Longer the Duration of the Relationship, the Greater the Dating Violence Victimization for both Boys and Girls.

Youths' length of dating relationships by gender is presented in Table 9. One-way ANOVA was calculated on participants' (boys and girls combined) CTS scores and the length of their dating relationships (see table 9). The analysis was not significant $F(4, 308) = .110, p = .979, \eta^2 = 0.00$, (Table 10). CTS showed no consistent pattern by length of dating relationships. Youth who had a dating relationship lasting 3-6 months ($M = 5.28; SD = 9.60; n = 43$) reported the most victimization compared to youth who had relationships lasting less than 1 month ($M = 4.88; SD = 6.96; n = 87$), more than 1 year ($M = 4.75; SD = 7.23; n = 51$), 6 months to 1 year ($M = 4.60; SD = 10.30; n = 40$), and 1-3 months ($M = 4.38; SD = 6.68; n = 92$).

No significant relationships emerged between CTS scores and length of relationship by gender. CTS scores were higher for boys who had dating relationships that lasted more than 1 year ($M = 5.77$; $SD = 9.04$; $n = 26$) compared to boys that had dating relationships that lasted 1-3 months ($M = 5.68$; $SD = 8.31$; $n = 40$), 3-6 months ($M = 5.32$; $SD = 11.33$; $n = 19$), less than 1 month ($M = 5.02$; $SD = 7.31$; $n = 57$), and 6 months to 1 year ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 5.98$; $n = 16$). CTS scores were higher for girls who had dating relationships that lasted 6 months to 1 year ($M = 5.30$; $SD = 12.72$; $n = 23$) compared to girls who had dating relationships that lasted 3-6 months ($M = 5.25$; $SD = 8.24$; $n = 24$), less than 1 month ($M = 4.79$; $SD = 6.40$; $n = 29$), more than 1 year ($M = 3.79$; $SD = 4.69$; $n = 24$), and 1-3 months ($M = 3.45$; $SD = 4.97$; $n = 29$). However, the analyses were not significant for boys $F(4, 153) = .172$, $p = .952$ $\eta^2 = 0.33$, or girls $F(4, 146) = .432$, $p = .786$ $\eta^2 = 0.66$ (Table 10). Therefore, length of relationship was not related to victimization. The third hypotheses stating that the longer the length of relationship, the greater the dating violence victimization was not supported.

Table 9. CTS for Length of Relationship

Length of Relationship	Boys ($n = 158$)			Girls ($n = 151$)			Boys and Girls ($n = 313$)		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Less than 1 month	57	5.02	7.31	29	4.79	6.40	87	4.89	6.96
1-3 months	40	5.68	8.31	51	3.45	4.97	92	4.38	6.68
3-6 months	19	5.32	11.32	24	5.25	8.24	43	5.28	9.60
6 month to 1 year	16	3.88	5.98	23	5.30	12.72	40	4.60	10.30
More than 1 year	26	5.77	9.04	24	3.79	4.69	51	4.75	7.23

Table 10. One-Way ANOVA of Dating Violence Victimization by Length of Relationship

Gender		SS	df	MS	F	P
Female	Between Groups	94.730	4	23.682	.432	.786
	Within Groups	8010.714	146	54.868		
	Total	8105.444	150			
Male	Between Groups	47.569	4	11.892	.172	.952
	Within Groups	10576.228	153	69.126		
	Total	10623.797	157			
Boys and Girls	Between Groups	26.984	4	6.746	.110	.979
	Within Groups	18846.473	308	61.190		
	Total	18873.457	312			

SS = Sum of Squares; df = degrees of freedom; MS = mean square

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between the age of first dating experience, number of dating partners, length of dating relationships, and dating violence victimization among African American middle school youths. The study further explored differences of the independent variables by gender. The findings of this study are important because we know little about how these variables impact middle school African American youth. This chapter discusses findings from the study, limitations, and implications for future research, practice, and policy.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Hypothesis 1

Findings from this study suggest that there is no significant relationship between the age of first dating experience and dating violence victimization for the African American middle school youth. This is consistent with findings in the literature (Bergman, 1992; Vicary et al., 1995) suggesting that there was no relationship between age of first dating experience and dating violence victimization. Findings from the current study indicated that there was no difference in dating violence victimization for boys or girls regardless of how old they were when they had their first dating experience. Most of the previous studies finding a relationship between age of first dating or sexual experience and level of dating violence victimization were based on high school and college samples. Middle school youth in this study had their first dating experience at very young ages (10 years or younger) which suggests that they were in elementary school (4th grade) when they had their first dating experience. The young age of their first dating experience could have precluded finding a relationship between age of first dating experience and level of victimization.

Several studies (Halpern et al., 2001; Silverman et al., 2001; Noonan & Charles, 2009) suggest that younger adolescents have less opportunity and dating experience which can prevent victimization. Findings from Noonan and Charles (2009) indicated that middle school aged youth did not have much opportunity to have serious relationships because of their age. Stets and Pirog-Good(1987) also suggests that dating violence victimization occurs most in serious relationships. Many parents do not allow their daughters (especially in sixth or seventh grade) to start dating or have boyfriends at a young age allowing for school hours to be the only time boyfriends and girlfriends spend together (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Outside of school dating experience for the youth may mean talking on the phone or going out to public places (mall, movies, six flags, school dances) with a group. This could be a possible explanation as to why there was no relationship between age of first dating experience and victimization.

Findings in the literature (Silverman et al., 2001; Sanderson et al., 2004) indicate that there is a relationship between girls that had their first sexual relation at an early age especially before age 15 and dating violence victimization. Other literature suggests that teens that start having sex at age 13 or younger are at greater risk of dating violence victimization than those who never had sex (Sanderson, Coker, Tortolero, & Reiningger, 2004; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006; Eaton et al., 2007; Kelly, Cheng, Peralez-Dieckmann, & Martinez, 2009). Many of the previous studies finding a relationship between age of first dating experience and level of dating violence victimization were based on first sexual experience rather than first dating experience. Due to the young age of the sample used in the current study, they may not be involved in sexual activities. First sexual experience may have a different influence on victimization than first dating experience. Comparing victimization by age of first dating experience and victimization by age of first sexual relationship and both combined could provide us with information on whether there is a difference between the two.

5.1.2 Hypothesis 2

Findings from the current study suggest that the African American middle school girls experienced more dating violence victimization when they had a greater number of dating partners. These findings were consistent with findings in the literature (Bergman, 1992; Neufeld, 1999; Halpern et al., 2001; Harned, 2002; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006). Many other studies found a strong relationship between sexual partners and dating violence victimization (Neufeld et al., 1999; Valios et al., 1999; Silverman et al., 2001; Howard & Wang, 2003; Eaton et al., 2007; Manseau et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2009). This study found that victimization was especially higher for girls who had more than ten dating partners which is similar to other literature (Manseau et al., 2008) indicating that teen girls with more than ten partners experienced more dating violence victimization.

Findings from this study contrast with findings in other literature (Cyr et al., 2006) suggesting that there was no relationship between the number of dating partners and dating violence victimization in teen girls. Findings from the current study also found no relationship between number of dating partners and dating violence victimization for boys. These findings were consistent with findings in the literature (Howard et al., 2008) suggesting no significant relationship between the number of dating partners and dating violence victimization in high school boys. Harned (2002) found that a greater number of dating partners increases dating violence victimization for both boys and girls. Other literature also suggests that there is a relationship between a greater number of sexual partners and dating violence victimization for both genders (Howard & Wang, 2003; Eaton et al., 2007; Rivera-Rivera et al., 2007). Findings from this study also contrast with findings in other literature (Stets and Pirog-Good, 1987; Patton & Mannison, 1995) suggesting that fewer partners increase dating violence victimization.

One possible explanation why the current study found that number of dating partners leads to dating violence for girls may be that boys may not have provided an accurate report of victimization and that girls provided more honest responses. Another explanation for the gender

differences in the study may be that boys were the ones perpetrating violence instead of being victimized. In Molidor and Tolman (1998) study, girls reported that boys initiate dating violence most of the times.

5.1.3 Hypothesis 3

The findings of this study suggest that there is no relationship between length of dating relationships and dating violence victimization among the African American middle school youth. These findings were consistent with (Sherer, 2009) indicating that length of relationship had little effect on dating violence victimization among Arab youth. Findings from this study contrast with findings in the literature (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987; Neufeld et al., 1999; Gousinnsky & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2007; Pradubmook-Sherer, 2009; Sherer's 2009) suggesting that longer lasting relationship relates to dating violence victimization. Many of the previous studies finding a relationship between length of relationships and level of dating violence victimization were based on high school and college samples. Middle school youth in this study do not have long relationships. The short-term nature of young adolescent relationships could have precluded finding a relationship between length of relationship and level of victimization.

5.2 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be considered. The data was self-reported which creates vulnerability to response bias (Mitchell & Oltean, 2007). Due to the age of the youth in this study, many may not have experienced dating violence yet or even started dating so a larger sample size may provide more accurate information as to the extent of dating violence victimization among middle school youth. Additionally, all youth who completed the survey did not answer all the questions which may have influenced the study results. Another limitation is that the definition of dating partner was not specified. It is unclear how the many youth were defining dating partner as they answered the questions.

The survey instrument had several limitations. The instrument asked participants to identify the number of dating partners they ever had. Although the instrument provided participants with various options regarding the number of dating partners, the data collected was categorical and did not allow us to do a more rigorous analysis. The survey did not provide consistent numbering. For example, providing options on the instrument such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, more than 10 would have provided us with more accurate information. Using a range of numbers did not provide accurate information since it was not possible to tell whether participants had 3, 4, or 5 dating partners when they selected the 3-5 option on the survey or 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 when they selected the 6-10 option. Another problem with the instrument was how it asked the participants to identify the length of their relationship. Although various options were provided regarding the length of relationship, more clear consistent options should have been provided. For example, providing options on the instrument using all months instead of months and year (12 months instead of 1 year), or grouping numbers in consistent intervals would have provided more accurate information regarding how long their relationship. Using a range of numbers did not provide accurate information since it was not possible to tell whether participants had 1, 2, or 3 months when they selected the 1-3 option on the survey or 3, 4, 5, or 6 months when they selected the 3-6 months option. Another problem with the options for this question was that the numbers overlapped. For example 3 months is included in the 1-3 months option and the 3-6 months options, and 6 months is included in 3-6 months option as well as the 6 months to 1 year option so there is no way of telling specifically what number of months participants were reporting.

5.3 Implications for Future Research

The majority of existing research about dating violence, and especially those looking at age of first dating experience, number of dating partners, and length of relationships is based on high school and college samples (Bergman, 1992; Neufeld, 1999; Halpern et al., 2001; Silverman et al., 2001; Harned, 2002; Howard & Wang, 2003; Sanderson et al., 2004;

Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006; Eaton et al., 2007). We know little how these factors influence the dating experiences of middle school students. Although little research has focused on middle school adolescents, the few studies that have (Black & Weisz, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2005), indicate that the prevalence of dating violence among middle school youth almost matches that of high school youth. We especially know little about the influence of these variables among African American youth. With the few studies looking at middle school African American youth, further research is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the degree of influence these variables have on dating violence victimization.

Additional research comparing dating violence victimization at first dating experience to victimization at first sexual experience can be helpful in understanding the influence these variables may have on victimization. Most of the literature (Silverman et al., 2001; Sanderson et al., 2004; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2006; Eaton, 2007) findings were based on first sexual experience but we do not know if the first sexual experience occurred during first dating experience or if it even occurred in a dating experience. These findings should be explored further to understand how these variables influence dating violence victimization for boys and girls. The exploration of this topic is important because it adds to the limited research on dating violence among middle school youth, particularly African American youth. Since this is an area with little research, it may increase awareness of how age of first dating experience, number of partners and length of relationship influence dating violence victimization. There is a need for research on appropriate prevention and intervention for youth of young ages. Any additional research exploring dating violence among middle school and African American youth will be valuable information in understanding dating violence among these youth and help create appropriate prevention and intervention programs.

5.4 Implications for Social Work Practice

The study findings suggest that African American boys and girls start dating at a very young age and have on average 3-5 dating partners from short term relationships. Social work professionals can use these findings to address dating violence in a more effective way. This information can be very helpful to social work professionals to address dating violence before it begins. Social workers need to be aware of this information so they can create age appropriate prevention and intervention programs since age can play an important factor in how they may need to address the issue. Since addressing a younger group of kids, social workers will have to make sure that discussions regarding dating violence are appropriate. Social work professionals need to be aware of cultural differences when addressing dating violence among African Americans. They need to create cultural sensitive prevention and intervention since intervention may be different with African Americans than with youth of other cultures. For example African Americans experience specific issues such as economic inequality and oppressive images of men and women in their culture which leads to dating violence among this group (Bougere et al., 2004). Also African Americans seem to be very religious and have strong family bonds (Johnson & Munch, 2009). This is helpful information for social workers to know when trying to address the issue.

Findings from this study also indicated a significant difference between genders. This is important for social work professionals to be aware of so that they can create gender specific prevention and intervention programs. These findings highlight the special effect the number of dating partners has on dating violence victimization for girls which social workers can use when addressing the issue. It is clear that efforts to prevent dating violence victimization among middle school youth is necessary and that social work and social workers play an important role in addressing this issue. Social work professionals must explore resources for preventive measures as they relate to age of first dating experience, number of dating partners, and length of relationship. Social workers and other health practitioners could use this information to

develop effective programs that promote education and awareness of dating violence on victims. Further research is needed on the assessment and intervention of dating violence educational and prevention programs in middle schools. Based on the study's findings, prevention programming should address how the number of dating partners influences dating violence victimization. Programs could help adolescent realize some of benefits of not "going solo" and not always being in a relationship. Programs could also work with youth to learn to choose partners judiciously. This needs to be especially emphasized for girls since the study found a strong relationship between a greater number of partners and victimization among the female youth.

5.5 Implications for Policy

In Texas, Senate Bill 121 was signed into law requiring that all school districts in Texas select and implement a dating violence policy. This policy suggests that school districts include age appropriate education on dating and sexual violence in their yearly health curriculum for students in 7th-12th grade. Findings from the current study of 6th to 8th grade students suggests that many middle school students had their first dating experience at 10 years old or younger suggesting a need to create age appropriate dating violence educational program for students in younger grades as well. These findings suggest that there needs to be revisions to the current policy or create new policies to address dating violence among younger students. Policy should support and fund more research on dating violence in middle school. Data collection and research can be helpful to lawmakers and school officials in creating the proper laws and school policies to address the issue.

5.6 Conclusion

The study explored how age of first dating experience, number of dating partners, and length of relationship related to dating violence victimization. The findings indicated that although youth in the study had their first dating experience at a very young age, there was no

relationship to victimization. A relationship between a greater number of dating partners and victimization was found among female youth. Findings also indicated that youth in the study had short term relationships that showed no relationship to victimization. Based on these findings there is a need for further research to better understand the real influence these variables may have on victimization.

APPENDIX A

APPROVED IRB PROTOCOL

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN
SUBJECTS**

**IRB FORM #1A:
PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
APPLICATION FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH**

Faculty, staff, students, or employees who propose to engage in any research, demonstration, development, or other activity involving the use of human subjects must have review of that activity by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB), prior to initiation of that project. Applications for exemption must be reviewed and documented as exempt by the IRB. The IRB is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of subjects who participate in the activity. If you require further assistance in completing this form or need additional information, please contact Research Administration at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

*This version of Form #1A is intended to be used in conjunction with a submission to the IRB via the electronic protocol submission system:
<https://www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen.php?view=50>.*

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

- 1. Please list any NON-UTA Protocol Personnel that could not be entered via the electronic submission face page.**

Name:	Affiliation:	Participant Status (Co-Investigator, Collaborator, etc.):

2. **Expected Start Date:** 08/24/09 (You are not authorized to begin any research involving human subjects until the IRB has reviewed and approved the research protocol.)
3. **Expected Completion Date:** 5/10/2010

SECTION B: FUNDING (If this research is not supported by funding, please skip to section C.)

4. **Source:** **FEDERAL** (Specify Agency: _____)
 INDUSTRY SPONSORED (Specify Agency: _____)
 Departmental **State** (Specify Agency: _____) **Other:**

Funded Grant/Contract Number:

- Check here if grant is pending** (Date of Grant Submission: _____)

SECTION C: EXEMPTION STATUS OF THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Human subject research qualifying as exempt must correspond with one or more of the exempt categories mandated by the human subject research federal regulations, Title 45 CFR Part 46.101. This section is intended to determine if your research project can appropriately be designated as exempt.

Special Note Regarding Prisoners as Subjects

Human subject research involving prisoners as subjects is not eligible for exemption. Instead, please complete IRB Form #1 (Application for Non-Exempt Research) and IRB Form #2C (Application for Prisoner). A Prisoner is defined as any individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution. The term is intended to encompass individuals sentenced to such an institution under a criminal or civil statute, individuals detained in other facilities by virtue of statutes or commitment procedures which provide alternatives to criminal prosecution or incarceration in a penal institution, and individuals detained pending arraignment, trial, or sentencing.

Instructions

Please check the box of one or more of the categories below that apply to your research, then in Section D, provide specific details describing your research project in relation to the exemption category. If none of the exemption categories listed below apply to your research, please submit IRB Form #1 instead for non-exempt human subject research.

- A. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special**

education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

- B.** Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, **unless:** (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **and** (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. (*Research must meet both conditions i and ii to be disqualified from this exemption.*)

Special Note Regarding Children as Subjects

*If your research project includes children, ages 0-17, then exemption B only applies if, in addition to the conditions above, your research involves **ONLY** educational tests or public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed. The exemption for surveys or interviews does not apply to children as subjects.*

- C.** Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph B of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; **or** (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- D.** Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, *if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.*
- E.** Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:
(i) *Public* benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- F.** Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and

Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

SECTION D: RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND SUBJECT SELECTION

5. Does your research involve mentally incapacitated subjects? NO

Yes No

If yes, please also complete and submit IRB Form #2A.

6. Does your research involve pregnant women, human fetuses, neonates of uncertain viability, or nonviable neonates? NO

Yes No

If yes, please also complete and submit IRB Form #2B.

7. Does your research involve children, ages 0-17?

Yes No

If yes, please also complete and submit IRB Form #2D.

8. Please describe your research procedures in layman's terms. Specifically, describe how your research meets one or more of the exemption categories chosen above.

My research will be based on secondary data that has been collected by Dr. Black. I will not have any contact with participants.

9. How many subjects will be enrolled in this research project? N/A

10. Please describe how and where subjects will be recruited. N/A

11. Please describe your process/procedures for obtaining informed consent, if applicable. N/A

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Marcella Smith was born in Belize Central America in 1977. She is the first and only out of 13 siblings to achieve a college degree. She graduated with honors from Louisiana State University in Shreveport in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. In January 2008, she entered the University of Texas at Arlington's School of Social Work. She will graduate with a Master of Science in Social Work with a concentration in Community and Administrative Practice in May 2010. Her immediate plans are to pursue a doctorate degree in Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington in August 2010. She seeks to be a successful researcher and social work professor.