CHAPTER 6

Dating Relationships among At-Risk Adolescents

An Opportunity for Resilience?

KATREENA SCOTT, LAURA-LYNN STEWART, & DAVID WOLFE

Childhood maltreatment is a potent risk factor for psychological and social difficulties across the life span. Relationship difficulties, in particular, are associated with experiences of abuse and neglect. Maltreated children show high rates of hostility and aggression in relationships (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999; Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998) and are more likely than non-maltreated children to be rejected by their peers (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994). In adolescence, these individuals are less likely to report close, supportive friendships (Bolger & Patterson, 2001) and are at elevated risk of becoming involved in violent dating partnerships (Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle, & Pittman, 2001). Patterns of relationship dysfunction continue into adulthood, where childhood maltreatment is associated with both domestic violence (Bevan & Higgins, 2002) and child abuse in the next generation (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987; Newcomb & Locke, 2001; Pears & Capaldi, 2001).

Despite the multiple negative outcomes associated with childhood maltreatment, it is important to recognize that such outcomes are not inevitable or consistent. Some abused and neglected individuals seem able to overcome some of the initial harm stemming from maltreatment, and develop normally or with few impairments. Such "unexpected"

outcomes may be due to the relatively brief or minor abuse they received, the benefits of early intervention, correction of the problems associated with maltreatment (e.g., parental conflict; alcohol abuse, etc.), or the inherent resources of the individual. A study by Wolfe and colleagues (2001), for example, involved non-clinically referred, high school adolescents who reported a history of moderate to severe child maltreatment experience. They found, on the one hand, that a history of childhood maltreatment was strongly associated with elevated risk of negative outcomes such as anger, depression, post-traumatic stress, delinquency, abuse perpetration or victimization. However, between 60% and 90% of teens reporting prior maltreatment did not exhibit clinically significant symptoms. These latter individuals who experience adversity but avoid developing clinically or socially significant difficulties are often described as "resilient." They have caught the attention of researchers attempting to find strategies to prevent problems and promote healthy outcomes in high-risk populations.

Over the past decade, we have focused on adolescence as an important window of opportunity for interventions that break the cycle of violence and promote healthy, resilient functioning (Wolfe, Wekerle, & Scott, 1997). We have studied normative adolescent transitions and development, and have designed and evaluated a prevention and promotion program targeting high-risk youth, the Youth Relationships Project (YRP). In this chapter we review previous studies on prevention with adolescents at high risk for problematic outcomes due to a history of child maltreatment. We also present results that support intervention at this stage for reducing rates of violence perpetration and victimization in adolescent intimate relationships. We then explore the role adolescent relationships may play in promoting these positive outcomes. Our aim is to try to identify whether particular aspects or patterns of dating may be related to resilient functioning among at-risk youth.

THE CONTEXT OF ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS

In adolescence, a key developmental task is the establishment of healthy, non-familial intimate relationships. Progress towards this goal begins in early adolescence, with the development of close-knit groups of same-sex peers and small groups of mixed-sex friends. These groups form a springboard for dating involvement, and by age 14 or 15, about half of all adolescents move from mixed-friend groups to single- or group-dating experience (Connolly & Johnson, 1996; Feiring, 1996). Dating at this early age is a short-term, rapidly shifting affair, as adolescents

learn methods of interpersonal and sexual relatedness and experiment with romantic identities. For example, the average length of relationship among 15 year-olds in one study was approximately four months (Feiring, 1996). After a period of experimentation in multiple casual relationships, youth generally progress to more serious, exclusive dating relationships that become increasingly important sources of support relative to parents and peers (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). By 18 years of age most adolescents have had at least one steady relationship (Thornton, 1990), and dyadic relationships are the norm (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). Romantic relationships at this age are more intense, committed, and satisfying and, it is theorized, form an important basis for later intimate, long-term partnerships (Brown, 1999).

During this rapidly shifting developmental period, youth are consistently challenged to negotiate conflicting family, peer and partner pressures and develop new means of relating interpersonally, all while managing the sometimes intense emotions that arise during this time of life (Larson & Ham, 1993). Given the difficulties inherent in these tasks, it is perhaps not surprising that rates of intimate partner aggression and abuse are particularly high. Approximately 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 teens report being a victim of a relatively severe form of physical aggression or sexual coercion from a dating partner (Centers for Disease Control, 2000; Coker et al., 2000; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). When behaviors such as verbal and psychological intimidation, isolation and degradation are included, rates are much higher with as many as one half of adolescents reporting experiences as a victim, perpetrator or both (Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997; Wolfe et al., 2001).

Due to their history of relationship disadvantage, youth with a history of childhood maltreatment are at particular risk for becoming involved in violent and abusive adolescent dating relationships. Wolfe and colleagues (2001) found that male adolescents who had experienced moderate or severe childhood maltreatment were 1.8 times as likely to report experiencing sexual abuse and 2.8 times as likely to report being threatened. Female adolescents reported even higher risk, with odds of abuse perpetration and victimization for girls who had been maltreated 2.1 to 3.3 times higher than those with no maltreatment history.

YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS PROJECT

Program Description

Given the convergence of developmental pressures and vulnerability, we reasoned that adolescence may offer an important window of

opportunity for altering the developmental course of youth at-risk for abusive intimate relationships (Wolfe et al., 1997). Adolescents are interested in exploring a variety of models of intimacy and are actively engaged in experimenting with different dating partners and patterns of relatedness. Moreover, we reasoned that lessons learned at this stage will likely have a rippling effect, shaping the patterns of later, long-term intimate partnerships. As such, this stage may represent an opportune time for promoting youths' entry onto a healthy trajectory of relationship functioning.

The YRP is a prevention program designed to capitalize on this opportunity for prevention. Targeted at male and female youth aged 14 to 16 who are considered to be at-risk of developing abusive relationships due to their own history of maltreatment experiences, this 18-session, psychoeducational program aims to both prevent abusive behavior and promote healthy nonviolent relationships (Wolfe, et al., 1996). The program is based on aspects of attachment theory, social learning theory and feminist explanations of relationship violence. The YRP is also youth-centered in that it aims to partner with adolescents to assist them in making informed choices and in enhancing their relationship competencies, rather than "treat" deficiencies. Youths were involved in the development and planning of this program and are active participants in facilitating groups and planning a social action activity. Groups are operated in community locations and are attended voluntarily.

The YRP curriculum is organized around four major objectives: 1) Understanding the relationships of power to interpersonal violence; 2) Considering the role of choice in abusive and healthy relationships; 3) Appreciating the societal contexts of relationship violence; and 4) Making a difference in abuse through community action. Education and awareness sessions focus on helping adolescents recognize and identify abusive and healthy behavior across a variety of relationships (e.g., woman abuse, child abuse, sexual harassment). Equality is emphasized as a major component of relationship health. Program participants are directed to consider the "power" that they have gained through access to resources, jobs, education, family income, race, sexual orientation, etc., and to be attentive to responsibilities inherent in having this power. They consider the nature of choices made around relationships through open cross-sex discussion of desirable and less desirable characteristics of dating partners. Societal pressures to choose and act in stereotypically male and female roles and the relation of these roles to dating violence are explored through analyses of video and print material. Finally, explicit information about gender-based violence, sexual assault and its impact is presented through guest speakers, videos and discussion sessions.

The YRP program complements education and awareness sessions with skills development and social action. Healthy and unhealthy listening, empathy, emotional expressiveness and problem solving are modeled and practiced. Teens are then encouraged to apply these skills to both hypothetical and real situations and to share these experiences with the group.

Finally, social action activities provide adolescents with information about resources in their community and with an empowering community development experience. In this section of the program, pairs of youth are given hypothetical problems related to dating violence and are challenged to find social service agencies that may be helpful. With the support and assistance of co-facilitators, they call agencies and arrange a visit to gain information that they then report back to the group. This exercise helps teens overcome their prejudices or fears of community agencies and develop help-seeking competencies. In addition, program participants plan and implement a social action fund-raising event (e.g., walk to end violence against women) or community awareness event (e.g., mall poster display) that allows youth to be part of the solution to ending violence in relationships (Grasley, Wolfe, & Wekerle, 1999).

YRP Program Evaluation

Evaluation of the impact of the YRP was recently completed (Wolfe et al., 2003). One hundred and ninety one adolescents (92 boys and 99 girls) randomly assigned to either the YRP program or to a non-treatment control group were followed over a period of 2 years. Participants completed assessment measures during intake and on completion of the intervention/control period. They were then contacted bi-monthly by telephone. Adolescents who were, or had been, dating during the previous 2-month period were scheduled to complete assessment questionnaires that included information on their dating relationship and activities, abuse perpetration and victimization, relationship competencies, and symptoms of emotional distress. In addition, face-to-face assessment interviews were scheduled with all youths at 6-month intervals. At this time, participants were interviewed about their current life situations, patterns of dating involvement, emotional distress and help-seeking competencies.

Growth modeling was used to compare the progress over time of adolescents who did and did not receive preventative intervention. Briefly, growth modeling is a powerful method for analysis of individual change over time (Willett, Singer, & Martin, 1998). In using this method, all available data is used to estimate each individual's trajectory

of change over time on a target outcome variable. For our purposes, for example, we estimated the trajectory of youths' dating violence perpetration and victimization from the data we collected each 2-month period that youths were dating. Due to the flexibility of this method of data analysis, trajectories could be estimated regardless of the number and timing of assessments. For example, the trajectory for one youth could be estimated on the basis of data collected at 18, 20, 24, and 30 weeks after program initiation. If a youth delayed romantic involvement, his or her trajectory could be estimated from data collected 52, 60, 68, and 80 weeks following program initiation. Once these trajectories are estimated, it is then possible to examine whether healthier patterns of change in abuse perpetration and victimization were due to program involvement and/or other variables, such as gender.

Results of analyses showed a number of positive effects of YRP group participation. In terms of abuse perpetration, all adolescents showed an overall reduction in physical and emotional abuse perpetration over time. Importantly though, the decline in physical abuse rate was greater for both male and female adolescents who had participated in the YRP than for youth randomly assigned to non-intervention (see Figure 6-1). To put these results in perspective, we compared the rates of violence among youth during the follow-up period to a normative sample. Among treatment youth, follow-up rates of physical abuse were similar to those found in a normative sample (21% and 11% for

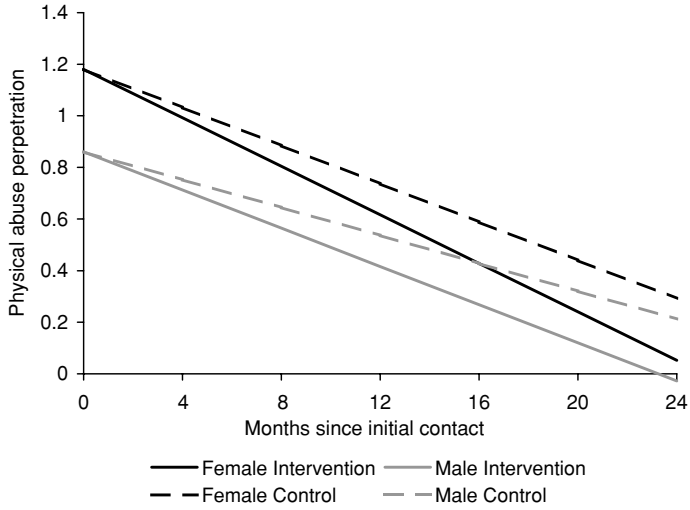

Figure 6-1 Growth curves for physical abuse perpetration for males and females in the intervention and control condition.

Table 6-1 Rates of Victimization by a Dating Partner among Youth Randomly Assigned to Intervention or Control as Compared to Rates in a Normative Sample

	Normative ($N = 1419$)	Intervention ($n = 96$)	Control ($n = 62$)
Boys			
Physical abuse victimization	28%	29%	33%
Emotional abuse victimization	15%[1]	10%	29%
Threatening victimization	24%	7%	43%
Girls			
Physical abuse victimization	19%	18%	18%
Emotional abuse victimization	15%	21%	32%
Threatening victimization	21%	24%	27%

[1] Cut-off point set at the 85th percentile in a large independent normative sample of youth (Wolfe et al., 2001).

girls and boys, respectively). In contrast, 41% of girls and 19% of boys in the comparison group reported physical abuse perpetration during their final assessment.

Results were even more striking when victimization was considered. In this case, adolescents who participated in the YRP showed significantly greater reductions in all forms of victimization than nonintervention youth. The resulting growth curve lines were similar to those shown in Figure 6-1. Female adolescents tended to report higher levels of victimization than male adolescents and rates of abuse victimization declined for all adolescents over time. However, for both boys and girls, the rate of decline was significantly steeper for intervention youths as compared to control. Once again, we can put these results in perspective by comparing rates of abuse victimization at follow-up to reported rates in a normative sample. As shown in Table 6-1, rates of abuse reported by intervention youths at follow-up were generally similar to or lower than those reported in a normative sample. Youths from the control group, in contrast, tended to report rates of abuse victimization that were considerably higher than the norm. The most striking of these results is the rate of emotional abuse and threat reported by boys in the control group, both of which are over 19% higher than normative rates.

This reduction in self-reported victimization is important for a number of reasons, even beyond reduced victimization itself. Studies with adolescents and adults have consistently shown that intimate violence most often occurs in relationships that are mutually hostile and aggressive (Burman, John, & Margolin, 1992; Cordova et al., 1993). This is not to say that the likelihood of injury or degree of responsibility to

both partners is equal—females are clearly more likely to be the victims of serious and physically harmful assaults (Rennison, 2001; Scott, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, in press). Nevertheless, a reduction in victimization reported by male and female adolescents may be indicative of a relationship that is less hostile overall, and one where perpetration may also be expected to be relatively low.

A second reason that reductions in self-reported victimization are important concerns the potential cognitive biases associated with reporting these events. Among boys who have been maltreated, there is a clear tendency to attribute hostile intent to others in ambiguous situations (Price & Glad, 2003), and the same process likely occurs in adolescents. This cognitive bias also corresponds with male batterers' tendency to see themselves as "victims" of their partners' hostile and aggressive actions (Dutton, 1998). Reductions in self-reported victimization may, then, also reflect more realistic processing of intimate partner intent in ambiguous situations.

In summary, results suggest that adolescents who participated in the YRP program showed trajectories of decreasing frequency and severity of abuse as compared with the control group across several types of violence. Over the 2 years of follow-up, YRP youth were less physically abusive towards their dating partners and reported less physical, emotional and threatening forms of abuse by their partners towards themselves. These results are significant as they suggest that youth who received intervention are on a less abusive relationship trajectory. Cumulative effects may include better self-image and confidence in relationships, healthier expectations and choices with regards to dating partners, greater emotional support from intimate partners and eventually, better marriages and healthier, less-abusive parent-child relationships. From the perspective of resilience then, intervention may have been effective in preventing the development of problems and potentially promoting healthy, "resilient" relationship functioning.

MECHANISMS OF ADOLESCENT RESILIENCE

Although the results from the YRP are promising, several issues remain of concern. How can an 18-week intervention change a trajectory of relationship dysfunction that has taken 14 to 16 years to establish, even if adolescence is a period of normative development and change in this area? What components of the program are most important—increased knowledge and awareness, skills development, feelings of empowerment generated though participation in social action, or aspects of the

group experience that are not directly targeted in the intervention, such as the support received from other adolescents? What changes go along with reductions in abuse perpetration and victimization? Human behavior is multi-determined and complex, and finding any single explanation for change is likely impossible. Thus, it is intriguing to begin to "unpack" the development of these adolescents in an effort to identify those factors that relate to positive change.

In our past work we have found that one important factor for change in the trajectory of relationships is trauma symptomatology, especially youths' trauma-related anger (Scott, Wolfe, & Wekerle, 2003). A secondary finding of the study of the YRP was that intervention youth showed greater reductions in trauma symptomatology than non-intervention youth. In an independent study, we have found that level of trauma symptomatology mediates the relationship between a childhood history of abuse and involvement in an abusive dating relationship in adolescence (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998). Finally, we have presented data to suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between trauma and dating violence, with each more likely in the presence of the other (Scott et al., 2003). In combination, these results suggest that trauma is one driving factor for continuity and change in patterns of adolescent dating relationships.

Herein we consider another potential mechanism of resilience among these youth—choices made with regard to entering and remaining in relationships. We examine if there is a difference in the frequency or intensity of dating relationships among at-risk adolescents who move into a generally healthy, or less healthy, trajectory in terms of overall adaptation. Two relationship patterns, in particular, are associated with resilience in popular literature and academic scholarship—development of a committed relationship and avoidance of romantic connections.

Escape through Romance: Relationships as Resilience

As long idealized in movies and books, romantic relationships are often seen as a way to escape from disadvantaged and at-risk circumstances. In this respect, romantic relationships in adolescence may function to help at-risk youth shift from patterns of unhealthy family and peer relationships to healthy intimacy and generally adaptive functioning in other life domains. In the developmental literature, adolescent dating is generally considered as a subset of peer relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck, Sienberuner, & Collins, 2001) and part of the normative transition from peer friendships to adult romantic relationships. In

childhood and adolescence, peer relationships are seen to influence development positively in that they help to promote social competence, provide emotional security and social support, act as an impetus for amicable conflict resolution, and prepare individuals for later romantic attachments and adult love relationships (Shaffer, 1994). During adolescence, peer relations become more intense and help to fulfill developmental goals such as identity development, socialization into heterosexual behavior, and peer status structuring (Zani, 1993). As adolescents transition to dating relationships, they are potentially provided with additional sources of support and companionship. In addition, these relationships provide the context for youths' developing romantic identities and confidence with intimate sharing. If dating partners provide adolescents with support, companionship, and intimacy, is it possible that opportunities for resilience exist within these relationships?

Empirical research has shown some support for the relationships as resilience theory. Early studies revealed that adolescents considered at risk for unhealthy parenting or criminal involvement were often able to escape negative pathways after forming close intimate relationships. For example, in a longitudinal study of women raised in institutional settings, Quinton, Rutter, and Liddle (1984) found that support from a non-deviant spouse provided a moderating protective effect from negative outcomes. Specifically, women who formed healthy and supportive relationships showed an increased likelihood of exhibiting good parenting in comparison to the women who did not engage in such relationships. Similarly, researchers have shown that young offending males who enter early, cohesive marriages, or marriages with a non-deviant spouse, show decreases in their criminal behavior, suggesting that an adolescent's investment in a socially cohesive marriage has a potentially preventive effect on criminal offending over time (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Quinton, Pickles, Maughan, & Rutter, 1993). Taken together, these findings are important in that they show the potential for romantic relationships to help ameliorate the negative trajectories of at-risk individuals.

There is a limitation of the above studies for understanding adolescent relationships, given the focus on marital relations. The question remains as to whether the shorter-term relationships typical of adolescence can also lead to healthier functioning among at-risk youth. Recent empirical work has provided evidence supporting the potentially positive impacts of dating in adolescence. Davies and Windle (2000), for example, followed a sample of 701 middle to late adolescents over 1 year to explore the correlates of dating. They found that although increased involvement in casual dating was associated with rising

trajectories of problem behavior, steady relationships were associated with fewer problematic outcomes. In fact, adolescents who became involved in steady relationships saw themselves as more attractive, showed declines in depressive symptoms, reported more self-disclosure in close friendship dyads and exhibited decelerating trajectories of problem behavior, such as delinquency and alcohol use. Thus, they suggest that greater involvement in steady dating relationships in adolescence may facilitate social and self-development, and may lead to early "maturing out" of the somewhat deviant norms of teen subcultures. Similar findings were also reported by Zimmer-Gembeck, Sienberuner, and Collins (2001), who found that adolescents who engaged in steady relationships perceived themselves as being more socially accepted, physical attractive, and romantically appealing than did their peers who reported lower levels of dating involvement. Again, these results were not found among adolescents with shorter relationships. If dating relationships function in a similar way for at-risk youth, then, steady romantic partnerships during adolescence may be able to provide adolescents with opportunities for resilience.

Avoiding the Pitfall of Adolescent Romance: Relationships as Risk

An alternate model of resilience in adolescent relationships suggests just the opposite—that the best strategy for at-risk adolescents is to delay serious romantic involvement. This recommendation follows from research on the negative correlates of adolescent dating. Failure to delay dating activities and, in particular, the early establishment of committed relationships, is generally thought to be a source of considerable risk for adolescent social and emotional development. From a theoretical perspective, premature stability in romantic relationships is thought to preclude healthy exploration and commitment to the process of identity formation with resultant effects on the adolescents' perusal of other important developmental goals, such as the attainment of education and employment (Erikson, 1968; Samet & Kelly, 1987). In addition, it is reasoned that demands for intimacy and commitment at this age may overwhelm adolescents and restrict autonomous social and emotional growth, so that early dating adolescents fail to develop a full range of negotiation, disclosure, and emotional regulation skills (Samet & Kelly, 1987). Finally, theorists have pointed to the importance of dating as a catalyst for greater affiliation with peer culture, so that adolescents involved in dating may be increasingly at-risk for involvement

in normative adolescent misconduct, such as delinquency and experimentation with alcohol and drug use (Davies & Windle, 2000; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Research has provided considerable support for theorized risks of early adolescent dating involvement. Early dating initiation has been associated with adolescent problem behaviors, such as teen pregnancy, decline in academic grades, smoking, drinking, and delinquency (Billy, Landale, Grady, & Zimmerle, 1988; Ostrov, Offer, Howard, Kaufman, & Meyer, 1985; Neemann, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995). On the basis of a summary of data, Miller and Benson (1999) suggest that delaying dating long enough to develop a close friendship first increases the chance of engaging in responsible sexual behavior, thereby decreasing the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy. There is also some evidence that dating itself, rather than just the initial predictors of early involvement, predicts negative outcomes. Neemann, Hubbard, and Masten (1995) followed a sample of 205 students over childhood and adolescence to explore correlates of dating. They found that involvement in dating in late childhood and early to middle adolescence was associated with increases in conduct problems and decreases in academic and job achievement. Dating involvement in late adolescence did not have these negative associations.

Evaluating the Hypotheses

Follow-up data from adolescents involved in the YRP program allowed us to examine these contrasting ideas and to determine if there is a path to resilience through either involvement in or avoidance of committed intimate relationships. To evaluate these two potential paths to healthy functioning in adolescence, we examined the dating patterns of the 96 youth who were involved in the YRP program (48% male) over the 2-year follow-up period, and their relation to negative outcomes. Focus was placed only on negative outcomes that are generally agreed to be severe deviations from a path of healthy development; specifically, the number of adolescents who reported regular or daily use of alcohol, regular or daily use of illegal drugs, who dropped out of or were expelled from school or who reported being arrested or convicted for a criminal offense. In this high-risk sample, a full 44% of youth reported at least one of these outcomes over the follow-up period.

We next examined whether youths' dating patterns were associated with their risk of these severe outcomes. Teens were grouped according to greatest level of reported dating involvement over follow-up. Three groups resulted—those who reported no dating at all over follow-up

Table 6-2 Percentage of Youth Reporting Severe Problems at Least Once during Follow-Up According to Their Pattern of Dating Involvement

Dating Pattern	Percent Reporting Severe Problems at Least Once During Follow-Up
Not dating ($n = 20$)	22%
Some dating ($n = 11$)	27%
Steady dating ($n = 41$)	58%

Note: $\chi^2 = 8.22$, $p < .05$. Differing levels of background risk and initial presenting difficulties did not predict dating pattern. Moreover, steady dating involvement was related to greater risk for youth even controlling for these background factors.

(26%), those who reported dating either periodically or regularly as their greatest involvement (16%), and those who reported going steady on at least one follow-up assessment (58%). A chi-square analysis was then used to determine if the chance of someone reporting a serious negative outcome was associated with his or her dating pattern. Results, as shown in Table 6-2, clearly indicated that steady dating, though not casual dating, was associated with a higher rate of problematic outcomes. About one quarter of youth who reported no dating or some dating also reported at least one serious negative outcome over follow-up, compared to a full 58% of those youth reporting steady dating.

In addition to information about youths' general adaptation and development, we collected data about negative outcomes in relationships—specifically, teenage pregnancy, and experiences of dating violence perpetration or victimization (Victimization and perpetration experiences were self-reported, but then verified with an interview to screen out incidents that were "teasing" and not upsetting to either dating partner). With these data we could examine whether patterns of dating (i.e., some dating or steady dating) were also associated with these negative outcomes. Results showed that overall, negative outcomes were relatively common among adolescents who reported dating—29% reported experiencing dating violence, 29% reported perpetrating dating violence, and 17% reported being pregnant. In combination, 54% of adolescents reported at least one of these negative outcomes.

The association of these negative dating outcomes with youths' dating patterns was next examined. Here, some important sex differences were suggested. For girls, results showed the same pattern of greater risk with greater dating involvement. Among girls who reported casual dating, 50% reported experiencing at least one serious negative outcome, compared to 60% of girls who reported going steady. Among boys this pattern was reversed—among those reporting causal dating,

57% reported at least one serious negative outcome as compared to 39% of male adolescents reporting steady relationships. Limited confidence can be placed in these results however, due to the relatively low number of at-risk male and female adolescents available and the resulting instability in estimates.

In summary, evidence from this high-risk sample of youth suggests that greater dating involvement is not associated with resilience in adolescence. In contrast, greater involvement in dating may be associated with significantly greater risks for negative outcomes at this age. The exception may be for males; although non-dating is still the best option, for boys who are dating, steady commitment may lead to healthier outcomes than casual dating. If there is a path towards resilience, then, it may be by helping youth to think carefully about delaying dating and serious commitment until adulthood (Irwin, Burg, & Cart, 2002).

As a final note around these findings, it is important to recognize that the optimal developmental trajectory of at-risk youth may differ from that of youth more generally. Specifically, the finding that non-dating is associated with better outcomes for at-risk youth does not necessarily imply that all adolescents should avoid committed relationships. Adolescents with a childhood history of maltreatment may be particularly at-risk for negative correlates of dating, whereas adolescents with a firm history of supportive relationships may avoid these pitfalls. Adaptive progression through phases of romantic involvement is predictable from adolescents' past relational experiences, primarily those with peers and family members. In general, successful romance follows from peer competence, which follows from healthy and secure parent-child relationships (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). Further research is clearly needed on patterns of dating in normative and at-risk youth and on their correlates for negative and healthy outcomes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The pervasiveness of relationship difficulties among individuals who have been maltreated points to the need for theory-based relationship violence prevention strategies across the life span (Chalk & King, 1998). In this chapter, we have provided evidence that adolescence is a viable time to offer preventative interventions. At-risk youth who participated in a high-quality, theory-driven intervention group reported lower rates of dating violence over a 2-year follow-up period.

Identifying at-risk youth who do and do not avoid problematic outcomes is a first step towards considering resilience. In our work,

rather than try to identify those individuals who are resilient, we are trying to uncover processes and changes that place youth on a healthier developmental trajectory. In the current chapter, we explored the possibility that youths' pattern of relationship involvement may be related to healthy or less healthy functioning. We found that adolescents who avoided steady romantic relationships were also more likely to avoid negative outcomes, such as school dropout and criminal involvement. These results add to the growing evidence that for at-risk youth, in any case, becoming involved in serious intimate relationships does not generally lead to positive outcomes, as often portrayed in popular media. Rather, these relationships may strain the limited capacity of at-risk youth to achieve healthy adaptation.

Continued research is needed to identify those processes most associated with healthy development in at-risk populations. Adolescence remains an important period for change in developmental trajectories, and for interventions to help youth avoid the potentially serious negative outcomes associated with deviations from a healthy developmental path.

REFERENCES

Bevan, E., & Higgins, D. J. (2002). Is domestic violence learned? The contribution of five forms of child maltreatment to men's violence and adjustment. *Journal of Family Violence, 17*, 223–245.

Billy, J. O., Landale, N. S., Grady, W. R., & Zimmerle, D. M. (1988). Effects of sexual activity on adolescent social and psychological development. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 51*, 190–212.

Bolger, K. E., & Patterson, C. J. (2001). Developmental pathways from child maltreatment to peer rejection. *Child Development, 72*, 549–568.

Brown, B. (1999). "You're going out with who?" Peer group influences on adolescent romantic relationships. In W. Furman, B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 291–329). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, J., Cohen, P., Johnson, J. G., & Smailes, E. M. (1999). Childhood abuse and neglect: Specificity of effects on adolescent and young adult depression and suicidality. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 38*, 1490–1496.

Burman, B., John, R. S., & Margolin, G. (1992). Observed patterns of conflict in violent, nonviolent, and nondistressed couples. *Behavioral Assessment, 14*, 15–37.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (June 9, 2000). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 1999. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 49*(5), 1–96.

Chalk, R., & King, P. A. (Eds.) (1998). *Violence in families: Assessing prevention and treatment programs.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Cicchetti, D., & Rogosch, F. A. (2002). A developmental psychopathology perspective on adolescence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 70*, 6–20.

Coker, A. L., McKeown, R. E., Sanderson, M., Davis, K. E., Valois, R. F., & Huebner, E. S. (2000). Severe dating violence and quality of life among South Carolina high school students. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 19*, 220–227.

Connolly, J., & Goldberg, A. (1999). Romantic relationships in adolescence: The role of friends and peers in their emergence and development. In W. Furman, B. B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 266–291). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Connolly, J. A., & Johnson, A. M. (1996). Adolescents' romantic relationships and the structure and quality of their close interpersonal ties. *Personal Relationships, 3*, 185–195.

Connolly, J., Pepler, D., Craig, W., & Taradish, A. (2000). Dating experiences of bullies in early adolescence. *Child Maltreatment: Journal of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 5*, 299–310.

Cordova, J. V., Jacobson, N. S., Gottman, J. M., Rushe, R., & Cox, G. (1993). Negative reciprocity and communication in couples with a violent husband. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 102*, 559–564.

Davies, P. T., & Windle, M. (2000). Middle adolescents' dating pathways and psychosocial adjustment. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 46*, 90–118.

Dodge, K. A., Pettit, G. S., & Bates, J. E. (1994). Effects of physical maltreatment on the development of peer relations. *Development and Psychopathology, 6*, 43–55.

Dutton, D. G. (1998). *The abusive personality: Violence and control in intimate relationships*. New York: Guilford Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* Oxford, England: Norton & Co.

Feiring, C. (1996). Concepts of romance in 15-year-old adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 6*, 181–200.

Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1992). Age and sex differences in perceptions of networks of personal relationships. *Child Development, 63*, 103–115.

Grasley, C., Wolfe, D. A., & Wekerle, C. (1999). Empowering youth to end relationship violence. *Children's Services: Social Policy, Research, and Practice, 2*, 209–223.

Irwin, C. E., Burg, S. J., & Cart, C. U. (2002). America's adolescents: Where have we been, where are we going? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*(Suppl6), 91–121.

Kaufman, J., & Zigler, E. (1987). Do abused children become abusive parents? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 57*, 186–192.

Larson, R., & Ham, M. (1993). Stress and "storm and stress" in early adolescence: The relationship of negative events with dysphoric affect. *Developmental Psychology, 29*, 130–140.

Laub, J. H., Nagin, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (1998). Trajectories of change in criminal offending: Good marriages and the desistance process. *American Sociological Review, 63*, 225–238.

Malik, S., Sorenson, S., & Aneshensel, C. (1997). Community and dating violence among adolescents: Perpetration and victimization. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 21*, 291–302.

Miller, B.C., & Benson, B. (1999). Romantic and sexual relationship development during adolescence. In W. Furman, B. B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence.* (pp. 99–121). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Neeman, J., Hubbard, J., & Masten, A. S. (1995). The changing importance of romantic relationship involvement to competence from late childhood to late adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology, 7*, 727–750.

Newcomb, M. D., & Locke, T. F. (2001). Intergenerational cycle of maltreatment: A popular concept obscured by methodological limitations. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 25*, 1219–1240.

Ostrov, E., Offer, D., Howard, K.I., & Kaufman, B. (1985). Adolescent sexual behavior. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality, 19*, 28–36.

Pears, K. C., & Capaldi, D. M. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of abuse: A two-generational prospective study of an at-risk sample. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 25*, 1439–1461.

Price, J. M., & Glad, K. (2003). Hostile attributional tendencies in maltreated children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 31*, 329–343.

Quinton, D., Pickles, A., Maughan, B., & Rutter, M. (1993). Partners, peers, and pathways: Assortative pairing and continuities in conduct disorder. *Development and Psychopathology, 5*, 760–783.

Quinton, D., Rutter, M., & Liddle C. (1984). Institutional rearing, parenting difficulties and marital support. *Psychological Medicine, 14*, 107–124.

Rennison, C. M. (2001). *Intimate partner violence and age of victim, 1993–1999.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Samet, N., & Kelly, E. W. (1987). The relationship of steady dating to self esteem and sex role identity among adolescents. *Adolescence, 22,* 231–245.

Scott, K. L., Finkelhor, D., & Ormrod, R. (in press). *Juvenile victims of intimate partner violence*. Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Scott, K. L., Wolfe, D. A., & Wekerle, C. (2003). Maltreatment and trauma: Tracking the connections in adolescence. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 12*, 211–230.

Shaffer, D. R. (1994). *Social and personality development.* Pacific Grove, CA; Brooks/Cole Publishing.

Shulman, S., & Scharf, M. (2000). Adolescent romantic behaviors and perceptions: Age-and gender-related differences, and links with family and peer relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 10*, 99–118.

Silverman, J. G., Raj, A., Mucci, L. A., & Hathaway, J. E. (2001). Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidality. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 286*, 572–579.

Thornton, A. (1990). The courtship process and adolescent sexuality. *Journal of Family Issues, 11*, 239–273.

Wekerle, C., & Wolfe, D. A. (1998). The role of child maltreatment and attachment style in adolescent relationship violence. *Development and Psychopathology, 10*, 571–586.

Willett, J. B., Singer, J. D., & Martin, N. C. (1998). The design and analysis of longitudinal studies of development and psychopathology in context: Statistical models and methodological recommendations. *Development and Psychopathology, 10*, 395–426.

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., Scott, K., Straatman, A., Grasley, C., & Reitzel-Jaffe, D. (2003). Dating violence prevention with at-risk youth: A controlled outcome evaluation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*, 279–291.

Wolfe, D. A., Scott, K., Reitzel-Jaffe, D., Wekerle, C., Grasley, C., & Straatman, A. (2001). Development and validation of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory. *Psychological Assessment, 13*, 277–293.

Wolfe, D. A., Scott, K., Wekerle, C., & Pittman, A. (2001). Child maltreatment: Risk of adjustment problems and dating violence in adolescence. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*, 282–298.

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel-Jaffe, D., & Lefebvre, L. (1998). Factors associated with abusive relationships among maltreated and non-maltreated youth. *Development and Psychopathology, 10*, 61–85.

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel-Jaffe, D., Grasley, C., Pittman, A., & MacEachran, A. (1997). Interrupting the cycle of violence: Empowering youth to promote healthy relationships. In D. A. Wolfe, R. J. McMahon, & R. DeV. Peters (Eds.), *Child abuse: New directions in prevention and treatment across the lifespan* (pp. 102–129). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., & Scott, K. (1997). *Alternatives to violence: Empowering youth to develop healthy relationships.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., Gough, R., Reitzel-Jaffe, D., Grasley, C., Pittman, A., et al., (1996). *The youth relationships manual: A group approach with adolescents for the prevention of woman abuse and the promotion of healthy relationships.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zani, B. (1993). Dating and interpersonal relationships in adolescence. In S. Jackson & H. Rodriguez-Tome (Eds.), *Adolescence and its social worlds* (pp. 95–119). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M., Siebenbruner, J., & Collins, W. A. (2001). Diverse aspects of adolescent dating: Associations with psychosocial functioning from early to middle adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 313–336.