

The Role of Self-Efficacy and Attitudes Toward Dating Violence in College Students

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV), or dating violence, among college students, has increasingly become an area of grave concern. One study reported that young adults between ages 18-24 experience the highest rates of IPV and that college students are at an increased risk for certain types of IPV as compared to same age non-college peers (Beaulieu, Dunton, McQuiller Williams, & Porter, 2017). In response to this increased risk for IPV, colleges have begun implementing programs that reduce an individual's likelihood of becoming a victim of intimate partner or dating violence (Anassuri, 2016). However, to this point, research on evidenced based interventions targeting IPV is lacking.

The primary aims of the current investigation were to determine whether participation in a two-hour relationship workshop that draws upon the relevant IPV literature increased levels of romantic relationship self-efficacy and decreased accepting attitudes toward dating violence in a sample of undergraduate college students. Specifically, self-efficacy and attitudes toward IPV and dating violence were selected as points of intervention based on research which found that a lack of general self-efficacy was associated with increased rates of IPV and dating violence (Riggio et al., 2013). Further, researchers concluded that attitudes toward dating and intimate partner violence are also a risk factor for IPV and dating violence (Flood & Pease, 2009). For this study, participants were asked to complete questionnaires, measuring perceived self-efficacy in romantic relationships and attitudes toward dating violence, at separate time points. Preliminary analyses show that overall self-efficacy in romantic relationships increased from pre- to post-test. Further, findings from the study indicate significant changes in psychological attitudes toward female and male dating violence from pre- to post-test. It is hoped that the findings from this study can assist colleges in developing workshops to help curtail the epidemic of IPV on college campuses.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is an "umbrella term for psychological, physical, and sexual abuse experienced between couples of any status that are in a relationship with one another" (Beaulieu et al., 2017, p. 1729).

Sexual assault is a specific form of IPV and dating violence which can occur in intimate or dating relationships. Sexual assault is pervasive among college students in the United States. Though rates of victimization vary slightly by study, in 2015, 8.8% of female students and 2.2% of male college students reported victimization of rape, or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation (Cantor, Fisher, Chibnall, & Townsend, 2015). Mellins et al. (2017) found that 22% of students had reported an incident of sexual assault since starting college.

The prevention of IPV and sexual assault, particularly on college campuses, has become an issue of national urgency (Vladutiu, Martin, & Macy, 2011). As a result, there has been an increase in healthy relationship programs, funded by the federal government and its agencies to provide education on healthy relationships to a range of target populations (Antle, Sullivan, Dryden, Karam, & Barbee, 2011).

Multiple studies found that a lack of general self-efficacy was associated with increased rates of IPV, dating violence, and sexual assault victimization and perpetration (Riggio et al., 2013). General self-efficacy is defined as "one's sense of competence and confidence in performing behaviors to achieve an outcome" (Valois, Zullig, & Revels, 2017, p. 270). Relationship self-efficacy is a new concept and in previous studies, has been operationalized as "one's confidence to engage in a broader array of relationship barriers," such as, expressing personal needs and accepting a partner's desire to spend time with other people (Weiser & Weigel, 2016, p. 153).

Positive relationship self-efficacy is directly related to positive relationship satisfaction and outcomes (Riggio et al., 2013). Additionally, Cui and colleagues (2008) found that self-efficacy beliefs regarding ability to resolve conflict was significantly related to less romantic relationship conflicts.

Attitudes toward violence in intimate relationships have long been a central focus in the prevention of dating violence (Flood & Pease, 2009). An individual's attitudes toward the acceptance of dating violence strongly influences whether they will be involved in a violent relationship in the future (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992). Flood and Pease (2009) concluded that attitudes play a major role in the perpetration of violence, women's responses to victimization, and finally, community responses to violence against women.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that participating in a workshop that targets relationship self-efficacy and dating violence would contribute to increased relationship self-efficacy and decreased acceptance of dating violence among workshop participants.

"Things to Know Before You Say Go" by Elsbeth Martindale, PsyD

"Things to Know Before You Say Go" (TTK) is a workshop developed by Dr. Elsbeth Martindale and was designed to specifically target relationship self-efficacy and attitudes toward dating violence. During the workshop, participants examine a "vast range of behaviors and attitudes they may encounter when dating. They assess which traits are most and least appealing and realize the need to know more before making a deep emotional investment" (The Dibble Institute, 2018).

TTK is unique in that it offers a peer engagement component. Given that previous studies indicate that intervention programs that include time for peer engagement are more effective than didactic presentations or lectures, this is an important aspect of TTK that makes it more likely to be an effective tool in the campaign against sexual assault on college campuses (Schwartz, Griffin, Russell, & Frontaura-Duck, 2011). Specifically, TTK participants spend a considerable amount of time interacting with one another, unlike many other dating violence intervention programs that "often take the form of didactic presentations in a lecture format" (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 91).

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a sorority at a small undergraduate college in the Northwestern United States.

A total of 24 students agreed to participate in the study, however, only 11 students completed the measures at all three time points.

The mean age of the participants was 19.76 ($SD = 0.995$).

Measures

Participants were asked to complete the measures at three time points: one week prior to the workshop, immediately after the workshop, and one week after the workshop.

Participants completed the **Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships (SERR)** measure at all three time points. The SERR is a self-report measure of self-efficacy in romantic relationships and directly taps into the constructs of relationship anxiety, relationship success, and other self-efficacy beliefs (Riggio H. R. et al., 2011). The SERR contains 12 items, such as "I find it difficult to put effort into maintaining a successful romantic relationship" and "I am just one of those people who is not good at being a romantic relationship partner" (Riggio et al., 2011). Responses are recorded using a 9-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very unlikely to strongly agree (Riggio et al., 2013). Total scores on the SERR are computed by summing all 12 items on the measure.

Participants completed the **Attitudes Toward Dating Violence (ATDV)** scales at all three time points. The Attitudes Toward Dating Violence Scales consist of three (psychological, physical, and sexual) Attitudes Toward Male Dating Violence (ATMDV) scales and three (psychological, physical, and sexual) Attitudes Toward Female Dating Violence (ATFDV) scales (Price & Byers, 1999).

The ATMDV scale contain a total of 39 statements that describe attitudes toward a variety of male behaviors in dating relationships which different people have.

- Examples of statements included on the ATMDV scales are "A guy should not insult his girlfriend," and "There is no good reason for a guy to push his girlfriend."

The ATFDV scales contain a total of 37 statements that similarly to the ATMDV scales, describe attitudes and beliefs toward a variety of female behaviors in dating relationships which different people have.

- Examples of statements included on the ATFDV are "There is no excuse for a girl to threaten her boyfriend," and "Sometimes a girl must hit her boyfriend so that he will respect her" (Price & Byers, 1999).

Responses on the ATDV scales are recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Total scores on the Attitudes Toward Dating Violence scales are computed by summing all 76 items on the measure (Price & Byers, 1999).

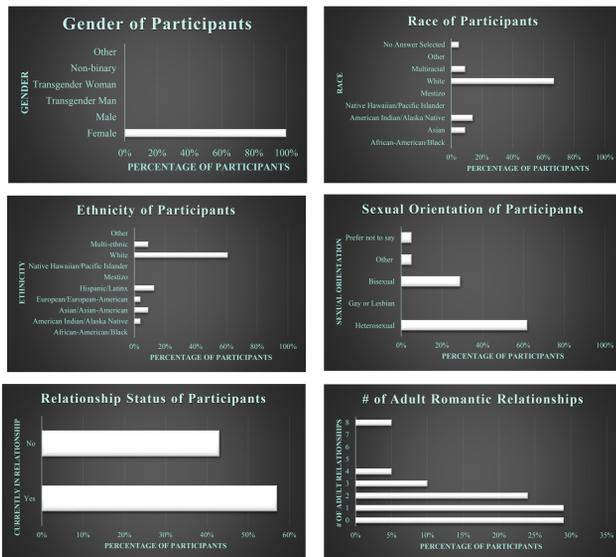
Procedures

The developer and facilitator of the workshop, Dr. Elsbeth Martindale, recruited participants from a sorority at a small, undergraduate college, located in the Northwestern United States

Participants were divided by the workshop leaders into groups of four to five students. Workshop leaders included Dr. Elsbeth Martindale and clinical psychology graduate students from a university affiliated with the college where the study was conducted.

Student participants engaged in the 90-minute TTK workshop. After the conclusion of the workshop, the SERR and Attitudes Toward Dating Violence scales were again administered to participants at the conclusion of the workshop.

Demographics for Participants



Results

Consistent with hypothesis 1, the perceived self-efficacy in romantic relationships average score at posttest ($M = 81.56, SD = 18.68$) was significantly higher than perceived self-efficacy in romantic relationships average score at pretest ($M = 74.38, SD = 17.84$); $p = .003, 95\% CI [2.95, 11.43]$. Additionally, as hypothesized, the perceived self-efficacy in romantic relationships average score at follow-up ($M = 83.81, SD = 22.07$) were significantly higher than the average score at pretest; $p = .004, 95\% CI [3.61, 15.27]$. Perceived self-efficacy in romantic relationships at follow-up was not significantly different than perceived self-efficacy at posttest; $p = .23, 95\% CI [-1.56, 6.06]$.

Consistent with hypothesis 2, the total ATMDV average score at follow-up ($M = 43.86, SD = 5.67$) was significantly less than at pretest ($M = 47.86, SD = 8.78$); $p = .03, 95\% CI [-7.62, -0.38]$, indicating a decrease in accepting attitudes toward dating violence. The total ATMDV average score at posttest ($M = 44.93, SD = 8.66$) was also significantly less than at pretest; $p = .04, 95\% CI [-5.76, 0.10]$. The total ATMDV average score at follow-up was not significantly different than the ATMDV average score at posttest; $p = .53, 95\% CI [-4.66, 2.52]$.

Inconsistent with hypothesis 3, the total ATFDV average score at posttest ($M = 42.0, SD = 6.30$) was not significantly different than at pretest ($M = 41.93, SD = 4.13$); $p = .96, 95\% CI [-2.70, 2.83]$. The total ATFDV average score at follow-up ($M = 43.73, SD = 3.71$) was significantly higher than the ATFDV average score at pretest; $p = .03, 95\% CI [0.25, 3.34]$, which indicated more accepting attitudes toward dating violence following the workshop. The total ATFDV average score at follow-up was not significantly different than the ATFDV average score at posttest; $p = .15, 95\% CI [-0.69, 4.15]$.

ATMDV Psychological Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.07	0.02*	0.02*
2	0.07	0.49	0.49
3	0.02*	0.49	0.49
M	21.73	19.2	18
SD	7.28	7.59	4

*p < .05

ATFDV Psychological Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.77	0.02*	<0.01**
2	0.77	0.02*	0.02*
3	<0.01**	0.02*	0.02*
M	15.56	15.38	14
SD	2.63	3.48	1.59

*p < .05 **p < .01

ATMDV Physical Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.77	0.71	0.71
2	0.77	0.87	0.87
3	0.71	0.87	0.87
M	12.75	12.88	12.94
SD	1.88	2.33	1.77

*p < .05

ATFDV Physical Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.61	0.61	0.61
2	0.61	0.60	0.60
3	0.61	0.60	0.60
M	13.25	13.56	13.25
SD	2.41	2.53	2.44

*p < .05

ATMDV Sexual Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.24	0.32	0.32
2	0.24	0.32	0.32
3	0.32	0.32	0.32
M	13.2	12.67	12.67
SD	1.78	1.91	1.59

*p < .05

ATFDV Sexual Subscale	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Time Point 3
1	0.70	<0.01**	<0.01**
2	0.70	<0.01**	<0.01**
3	<0.01**	<0.01**	<0.01**
M	13.13	12.93	16.4
SD	1.51	2.63	1.12

*p < .05 **p < .01

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

There were several notable limitations in this study. First, the size of the sample was limited in number.

Second, the participants in this study were recruited from the same sorority on a small, undergraduate campus.

Third, all participants included in the study identified as female.

Fourth, the participants primarily identified as White and heterosexual

Finally, participants completed self-report measures, which are known to have considerable limitations.

Future Research

Future research should attempt to recruit a broader sample of participants to determine whether these findings are generalizable to the overall population of college students. This may include students from different racial and ethnic groups, students of different sexual orientations, male identifying students, students in public and private universities and colleges, and participants ages 18-22 who are not currently students.

Clinical Implications

Despite the limitations, there is valuable information to be gleaned from this study.

First, it appears TTK can be a valuable part of dating violence reduction programs targeting self-efficacy in romantic relationships and attitudes toward dating violence in a group of female-identified college students.

Next, it appears that peer engagement can be an important part of these dating violence reduction trainings.

Finally, it appears that understanding the impact that a dating violence reduction training has on participants includes examining responses over the course of several time points. Specifically, it appears that some changes can be detected immediately following the TTK workshop, while others need more time to emerge.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a two-hour relationship workshop on self-efficacy in romantic relationships and attitudes toward dating violence as measured by the Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships (SERR) measure; the Attitudes Toward Male Dating Violence (ATMDV) scale, and the Attitudes Toward Female Dating Violence (ATFDV) scale at three separate time points (one week prior to the workshop, immediately following the workshop, and one week after the workshop).

There were three hypotheses addressed in this study.

The first hypothesis was supported, indicating that participation in a workshop targeting reflection and dialogue around healthy and appropriate romantic relationships increased the participant's belief that they could successfully handle difficulties within their own romantic relationships. There was no significant change in romantic relationship self-efficacy between posttest and follow-up indicating that the change associated with the workshop is notable immediately following the workshop. Additionally, this change appears to be maintained one week after the workshop as well. This suggests that the most significant changes in perceived romantic relationship self-efficacy occurred between the one week period prior to the workshop and immediately following the workshop and were sustained during the one week following the workshop.

The second hypothesis was also supported, suggesting that participation in a relationship workshop targeting attitudes toward dating violence results in less accepting attitudes toward dating violence. These findings also indicate that accepting attitudes toward male dating violence decreased between the conclusion of the workshop and one week following the workshop. This finding is consistent with previous research which indicates that programs targeting intimate partner and dating violence are more successful when a peer-engagement component is incorporated. The significant decrease in accepting attitudes toward male dating violence in the one-week period following the workshop could suggest the possibility that engaging with peers that also participated in the workshop could affect one's attitudes. Furthermore, it appears that the changes in attitudes toward dating violence were stable for the week following the workshop as well.

Finally, the third hypothesis was not supported, indicating the workshop did not affect participant's overall attitudes toward female dating violence at significant levels. Interestingly, overall ATFDV scale scores significantly increased between pretest and follow-up, indicating more accepting attitudes toward female dating violence after participation in the relationship workshop.

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