Articles

When Will Adolescents Tell Someone About Dating Violence Victimization?

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This study examined factors that influence help-seeking among a diverse sample of adolescents who experienced dating violence. A sample of 57 high school students in an urban community reported on the prevalence and characteristics of dating violence in their relationships. Someone observing a dating violence incident and a survivor's attaching an emotional meaning to the event significantly influenced adolescents to talk to someone. When dating violence occurred in isolation, survivors were more likely to receive no support from others in the aftermath of the incident. Differences between boys' and girls' help-seeking and implications for dating violence intervention and prevention programming are discussed.

Keywords: *adolescents; dating violence; help-seeking*

Adolescents rarely seek help for the many issues they face during their teenage years. However, when adolescents do ask for help, it is most often their peers to whom they turn. It is rare for adolescents to seek help from professionals of any kind (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick, & Morrissey, 1997). The literature addresses a variety of factors that influence adolescent willingness to seek help, including the type of problem (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Seiffge-Krenke, 1993; Wintre & Crowley, 1993), but few studies have addressed adolescents' willingness to seek help for dating violence.

Studies suggest that about one third of high school students have had experiences with dating violence (Foshee et al., 1996; Jezl, Molidor, & Wright, 1996; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997; Molidor & Tolman, 1998) and that dating violence

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impacts their psychological well-being (Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). The prevalence and impact of dating violence among American adolescents suggests that it is an important problem with which adolescents need assistance. However, few studies focus on adolescents' help-seeking behaviors when they experience violence in their relationships (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Black & Weisz, 2003; Foshee et al., 1996; Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, & Killip, 1992). Thus, in our review, we will also draw upon studies related to college students help-seeking with dating violence.

This study examines what influences adolescents' help-seeking in response to violence in a dating relationship. In this study, talking to someone about dating violence is viewed as an indicator of seeking help. Identifying factors that might influence adolescents' decision to talk to someone or seek other help may guide the development and implementation of effective intervention and prevention programs for adolescents.

Literature Review

Correlates of Help-Seeking Behaviors

Help-seeking appears to be a function of multiple factors, including the characteristics of the adolescent and others in the social network, the type of problem, and potential sources of help (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). The relationship between the various factors, including adolescents' need for assistance, attitudes about seeking help, and help-seeking behavior, remains complex and understudied (Kuhl et al., 1997).

One important factor in help-seeking is the type of problem that adolescents face (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Wintre & Crowley, 1993). Wintre and Crowley (1993) found that the likelihood of adolescent consultant choice (family adult, expert adult, familiar peer) was determined by an interaction between type of problem (impersonal, interpersonal with a peer, or interpersonal parent problem types), youths' locus of control, and youths' self-worth. Although youth preferred to turn to their peers for all problem types, youth with negative self-worth and external locus of control tended to prefer to turn to adult experts as a consultant choice with impersonal problem situations. For interpersonal problems with peers, youth with positive self-worth and an internal locus of control preferred consulting with their peers (Wintre & Crowley, 1993).

Boldero and Fallon (1995) found that adolescents most often choose friends for help with interpersonal problems; teachers were chosen if they had specific educational problems. Fallon and Bowles (1999) similarly found that 77% of youth who experienced problems in the interpersonal domain went to their friends for help, whereas 60.6% of those who experienced problems in the family went to their parents. Among those with health-related problems, 42.2% went to health professionals.

Researchers report varying findings with regard to the influence that severity of the problem may serve on adolescents' help-seeking. Fallon and Bowles (1999) found that more adolescents asked for help with their major problems versus their minor problems. Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, and Jackons (2003) also found among a sample of male adolescents that perceptions about the severity of the problem served as a motivator to seek help. In contrast, Seiffge-Krenke (1993) found that increased distress caused a decrease in help-seeking due to increased withdrawal. Similarly, Ciarrochi, Deane, Wilson, and Rickwood (2002) found that adolescents who needed help the most were the least likely to seek help. Tishby et al. (2001) found that level of distress adolescents experienced over their problems was unrelated to their willingness to seek help.

Some authors explain help-seeking from a social exchange perspective. They suggest that help-seeking entails psychological costs, such as feeling dependent and inferior and that one's self-esteem can be threatened. Tishby et al. (2001) suggested that for adolescents there can be unacceptably high psychological costs to seeking help because it might threaten their fragile self-esteem and the feeling of independence that is so important to them. Raviv, Sills, Raviv, and Wilansky (2000) found that adolescent help-seeking from professionals correlated negatively with self-image, whereas help-seeking from a parent for a severe problem correlated positively with self-image. The authors suggested that adolescents might conclude that the costs (social stigma and self-esteem) outweigh the benefits (coping and recovery) when seeking help for a minor problem, whereas the benefits outweigh the costs for severe problems.

Demographics and Help-Seeking

Among the demographic factors studied, gender has been most consistently found to influence adolescent help-seeking behaviors (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996; Tishby et al., 2001). Females are significantly more likely than males to seek help with the problems they face (Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Leong & Zachar, 1999; Raviv et al., 2000; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996).

In terms of age, older adolescents turn to friends for help more often than younger adolescents; younger adolescents turn to family members more often than older adolescents (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Tishby et al., 2001). However, Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) found that younger adolescents were less likely to seek help from professionals and their fathers compared to older and middle adolescents. In contrast, Fallon and Bowles (1999) found no association between help-seeking and school-year level.

Much of the literature supports the concept of help-seeking as a culturally determined behavior (Kuhl et al., 1997). Munsch and Wampler (1993) found that European American youth turn to friends more often with social and emotional problems, whereas Mexican American and African American youth are most apt to turn to immediate and extended family members. However, Cauce et al. (2002) cautioned that the role of culture in adolescent help-seeking is as yet undetermined. Several

studies have found few or no ethnic differences among adolescent help-seeking behaviors (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Copeland & Hess, 1995).

Dating Violence and Help-Seeking

Little research has examined the factors related to adolescents' willingness to seek help related to dating violence. Instead, the literature on dating violence and help-seeking has primarily focused on adolescents' unwillingness to seek help and, if they do seek help, to whom they are most likely to turn (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Bergman, 1992; Black & Weisz, 2003; Foshee et al., 1996). We know that adolescents often do not seek help from others when they experience violence in their dating relationships, just as they rarely seek help for other problems. Jackson, Cram, and Seymour's (2000) study of primarily White European high school seniors in New Zealand found that 46% of both genders talked to nobody about the sexual coercion they experienced in dating relationships; 55% of the girls and 46% of the boys told no one about physical abuse in their relationships. Molidor and Tolman (1998) found that 30% of high school students told no one about being victimized by their dating partner. Ashley and Foshee (2005) found that 60% of the adolescents did not seek help with dating violence victimization.

Literature on help-seeking consistently finds that adolescents do not view formal community resources or school personnel as viable options for help with their problems. Law enforcement or community agencies are among the resources adolescents are least willing to use. Mahlstedt and Keeny (1993) found that only 9% of college women victimized by dating violence informed a criminal justice official. In a national survey, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Hanson, Resnick, and Walker (1999) found that less than 12% of girls under age 18 reported rapes to any kind of authority and suggested that teens' reluctance to report rape stems from fear of what would happen if they told. Adolescents also do not turn to their teachers or school counselors when they experience violence in their relationships (Tishby et al., 2001). Jaffe et al.'s (1992) study of the behavioral intentions of high school students found that there was a low probability that teens would seek out teachers or school guidance counselors for assistance in dating violence situations and that participation in a dating violence prevention program had little bearing on adolescents' willingness to seek assistance. Molidor and Tolman (1998) similarly found that less than 3% of high school students reported incidents of dating violence to authority figures (e.g., police, counselors, teachers). Watson, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, and O'Leary (2001) found that only 8% of high school students used formal sources of help when confronted with dating aggression.

Similar to other problems, adolescents seek help less often from service providers and adults because they fear being blamed and are concerned that information will not be held in confidence (Foshee et al., 1996). As early as 1985, Hall and Gloyer (1985) documented the importance of confidentiality in adolescents' use of services

at a sexual assault treatment center. They found that only 54% of the females and 52% of the males reported that they would go to a treatment center for assistance if parents were told about the services adolescents received at the center.

Although many adolescents are reluctant to seek help from anyone when confronted with violence in a relationship, when they do seek help, it is peers to whom they are most likely to turn. In an early study on violence in dating relationships, Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, and Christopher (1983) found that among the adolescents willing to talk to someone, they were most likely to talk to friends about the violence (67%). Molidor and Tolman (1998) found that of the 61% of adolescents who told someone about the abuse, they told a friend. Ashley and Foshee (2005) found that 89% of victims who sought help turned to their friends.

Jackson et al. (2000) found that adolescents wanted to talk about dating violence with their friends because it provided them an opportunity to "sort things out" and/or feel supported. Tishby et al. (2001) suggested that parents' views and guidance on relationships may be viewed as irrelevant and intrusive, whereas friends seem to understand the social scene and have a better perspective on what is relevant.

In contrast to high school students, middle school students and college students appear more likely to discuss dating violence with others. Black and Weisz (2003) found that a high percentage of African American middle school students experiencing dating violence reported they would be willing to seek help from their mothers. Mahlstedt and Keeny's (1993) study of predominantly European American college students reported that 92% of the females involved with dating violence told someone about the violence. Eighty percent of the young women confided in a friend, 47% told a sister, and 43% told their mother. Among the small number of African American women in their sample, the authors found that they were more willing to confide in their brothers about the abuse than the European American women. No other racial differences were found.

Gender Influences

The few studies on adolescent help-seeking related to dating violence have reported mixed findings related to gender differences. Watson et al.'s (2001) study of high school students found that females were significantly more likely than males to talk to friends about dating violence they experienced, whereas males were significantly more likely to do nothing. However, when only looking at the African American adolescents, the authors found that the gender differences disappeared.

Jackson et al.'s (2000) study of primarily European American high school seniors in New Zealand examined gender differences in discussing emotional, physical, and sexual dating violence. They found that significantly more males (29%) than females (10%) talked to no one about emotional violence they experienced in a relationship. However, in the other areas of violence, girls and boys reported a similar unwillingness to seek help from others. Forty-six percent of both genders talked to no one

about the sexual coercion they experienced; 55% of the girls and 46% of the boys told no one about physical abuse in their relationships (Jackson et al., 2000). Both boys and girls reported a similar unwillingness to talk to family members or counselors about any form of violence in their relationships (Jackson et al., 2000).

Ashley and Foshee's (2005) study found interesting gender differences in adolescent dating violence help-seeking. Male perpetrators were more likely to seek help than female perpetrators. Male victims and perpetrators in the study also used formal or professional sources of help more frequently than female victims and perpetrators.

Among the few studies addressing adolescents' help-seeking for dating violence, most have focused on to whom adolescents turn for assistance. None of the studies addressed the factors that relate to adolescents' seeking help with dating violence. This study begins to address this gap and examines variables that explain help-seeking among a diverse sample of adolescents who experienced violence in their dating relationships. We explore how specific variables or the context of a dating relationship assist in explaining when adolescents turn to others for assistance with dating violence. The study explores how turning to others for assistance with dating violence relates to the following variables: (a) who saw what happened, (b) where it happened, (c) what happened and who did it, (d) how the adolescent reacted to what happened, (e) what meaning the adolescent attached to these events when they happened, (f) why the adolescent thinks this happened, (g) how badly the adolescent was emotionally hurt, and (h) to whom the adolescent talked about the situation.

Method

This study is part of a larger study that examined dating violence in an urban, public high school located in southeastern Michigan with approximately 526 students. The sample consisted of students drawn from predominately lower to middle class families. Within this school, 65% of the students scored below average in reading and math. Permission slips describing the purpose and goals of the study and requesting the active consent of a parent were mailed to the adolescents' homes and distributed to the students in the school. Participants received a $5 payment for completing the self-administered questionnaire. Data were collected from 224 students. Twenty-seven cases were omitted from the data analyses because students indicated that they had no dating experience or left many questions incomplete. Thus, 197 usable cases remained. However, this study focused on only those 57 (29%) students who reported that they had been victimized by dating violence.

Program Participants

Of the 57 students completing the section of the survey for respondents who had been victimized by dating violence, 44% (*n* = 25) were male and 56% (*n* = 32) were

female. African American students composed 47% of the dating violence sample ($n =$ 27); European American composed 41% ($n = 23$) of the dating violence sample. Of the remaining 12% ($n = 7$) of the students, 3 identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino, 1 identified as Asian, and 3 students did not identify a racial background. Forty-four percent ($n = 25$) of the students in the sample received a free lunch at school. Students were from the 9th- through 12th-grade levels, with the following distribution: 28% ($n = 16$) from the 9th grade, 23% ($n = 13$) from the 10th grade, 28% ($n = 16$) from the 11th grade, and 21% ($n = 12$) from the 12th grade.

Instruments

Two sections of the larger survey developed to explore dating violence among high school students were used in this study. First, a modified version of the Revised Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) measured the prevalence and severity of dating violence. The CTS2 is a modified and updated version of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979) and is the most widely used measure of interpersonal violence. Adolescents reported the number of incidents of victimization and perpetration on an ordinal scale (never, one time, two to five times, and more than five times). The scale does not report if the violence was perpetrated in self-defense. In our analyses of victimization, we analyzed mild and severe acts of violence. We used Straus et al.'s (1996) distinction between mild and severe violence to create scales for mild and severe violence victimization. The Mild Victimization scale includes the six mild items from the Physical Assault scale (e.g., partner grabbed me; partner pushed or shoved me). The Severe Victimization scale includes the remaining six severe items from the Physical Assault scale (e.g., partner choked me; partner beat me up) plus two items from the Sexual Coercion scale (partner used threats to make me have sex; partner used force to make me have sex). This distinction has commonly been used in other research (Gelles, 1991; Johnson, 1995) but has not been validated. The Cronbach's alphas for all adolescents in the study were .81 for mild violence and .80 for severe violence.

Following the CTS2 scale, students were asked about injuries from the violence they experienced. They reported "yes" or "no" if they had the following injuries as a result of the violence: (a) scratch, small bruise, swelling; (b) fracture, minor burn, cuts, large bruises; and (c) major wounds, severe bleeding or burns, knocked out.

The second section of the larger survey used in this study asked students to think about the worst physical or violent behavior when responding to the following questions: (a) Who saw what happened? (b) Where did it happen? (c) What happened and who did it? (d) How did you react to what happened? (e) What meaning did you attach to these events when they happened? (f) Why do you think this happened? (g) How badly were you emotionally hurt? and (h) Whom did you talk to about the situation? For specific response options to these questions, see the appendix.

Questions were analyzed separately in relation to youth talking to someone about the violent incident. For the question, "Who saw what happened?" eight response categories were collapsed to form the variable "Saw" (somebody saw the violence and nobody saw the violence). For the question "What meaning did you attach to what happened?" a factor analysis was conducted on the responses. Three factors emerged: (a) anger and threaten, (b) love and protect, and (c) control and jealousy. However, factor groupings only had two items each. We created slightly different subscales: (a) anger and jealousy, (b) love and protect, and (c) control and threatened because the anger and jealousy subscale had a stronger relationship to the dependent variable than the other variables.

Analyses

The relationships between the dating violence characteristics, the context variables, and talking to someone about dating violence were examined with chi-square analysis. Logistic regression was used to show the combined effects of the variables and their contributions when controlling for other variables.

Results

The majority of students (67%) in the study reported that they talked to someone about the dating violence they experienced. Fifty-two percent of the boys ($n = 13$) compared to 78.1% ($n = 25$) of the girls reported that they talked to someone. This gender difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 57) = 4.311, p = .038$. All adolescents who talked to someone reported that they talked to a friend. Only five adolescents (13%) reported that they talked to a parent or other adult in addition to a friend. No other demographic characteristics, including race, grade level, or receiving a free lunch at school related to talking with someone about dating violence.

As shown on Table 1, someone seeing the violence and attaching anger and/or jealousy to the violence were the only two violence-related characteristics that were significantly associated with talking to someone about the violence. Youth who had someone see the violence and youth who associated anger and jealousy with the violence were significantly more likely to have talked to someone.

Where the violence happened, what happened and who did it, how they reacted to the violence, how badly they were emotionally hurt by what happened, and why they thought the violence happened were all unrelated to talking to someone about the violence. Severity of violence and if youth were physically injured (scratched, small bruises, or swelling) were also unrelated to talking to someone about the violence. However, the small sample may have precluded finding gender differences in the relationship between physical injury and talking to someone. The limited number of youth reporting that they had experienced more severe injuries (severe bleeding,

Table 1
Violence Characteristics by Percentage of Youth Who
Did and Did Not Talk About the Violence

	Violence Characteristics							
	Somebody Saw Violence				Anger/Jealousy Meaning Attached to Violence			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Talking	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Talked to somebody	83.8	31	31.6	6	79.4	27	47.8	11
Talked to nobody	16.2	6	68.4	13	20.6	7	52.2	12
Chi-square			15.26***				6.16*	

*p < .05. ***p < .001.

burns, cut, large bruises) limited the ability to find a relationship between level of injury and talking to someone about the violence.

Seeing the Violence

Sixty-six percent ($n = 37$) of the adolescents who had experienced violence in a dating relationship reported that someone saw the violence they experienced. Twelve adolescents (21%) reported that more than one other person saw the violence. Friends were the most likely people to see the dating violent event. Friends were identified as the person seeing the violence 91% of the time. Parents or school personnel saw the violence on only four occasions (10% of the time).

As shown in Table 1, 83.8% ($n = 31$) of the adolescents who had someone see the violence they experienced talked to someone about the violence; 31.6% ($n = 6$) of the adolescents who had nobody see the violence talked to someone. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 37) = 15.26$, $p < .001$. Gender differences are reported in Table 2. Of the females who had someone see the violence, 95.1% ($n = 19$) talked to someone. Only 45.5% ($n = 5$) of the females who had no one see the violence talked to someone, a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 32) = 9.97$, $p = .004$. For the males who reported that someone saw the violence, 70.6% ($n = 12$) talked to someone. When no one saw the violence, only 12.5% ($n = 1$) of the males talked to someone, also a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 25) = 7.354$, $p = .011$. The severity of the violence experienced was not related to whether a violent episode was seen or not seen. Physical injury experienced was not related to whether a violent episode was seen or not seen.

Of the 24 adolescents who reported that a female friend saw the dating violence, 66.7% ($n = 16$) talked to a female friend. The remaining 33.3% ($n = 8$) of the adolescents who did not talk to a female friend talked to no one. However, of the 32 adolescents who

Table 2
Somebody Seeing Violence by Percentage of Youth Who
Talked About the Violence Within Each Gender

| | Somebody Saw Violence | | | | |
| | Yes | | No | | |
Talked to Somebody	%	n	%	n	Chi-Square
Males	70.6	12	12.5	1	7.35**
Females	95.1	19	45.5	5	9.97**

**p < .01.

did not have a female friend see the dating violence, only 28.1% ($n = 9$) talked to a female friend. Differences were significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 8.243$, $p = .004$. Similarly, adolescents were much more likely to talk to male friends if male friends were the ones to witness the violence. Of the 15 adolescents who reported that a male friend saw the dating violence, 66.7% ($n = 10$) talked to a male friend. Of the 41 adolescents who reported that a male friend did not see the violence, only 19.5% ($n = 8$) reported they talked to a male friend. The difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 11.196$, $p = .001$.

Anger and/or Jealousy Meaning Related to Violence

As shown in Table 1, attaching the meaning that the offender was angry and/or jealous was significantly related to talking to someone about the violence. Across all respondents, 79.4% ($n = 27$) of those adolescents who attached an anger and/or jealousy meaning (rather than a controlling or protecting/loving meaning) to the violence talked with someone. Of those adolescents who did not attach an anger and/or jealousy meaning to the dating violence event, 47.8% ($n = 11$) talked to someone. Gender differences were not significant.

Logistic Regression Prediction of Talking With Someone

Table 3 shows the impact of gender and the two violence characteristics that were significantly related to talking to someone about dating violence. Across all adolescents, having someone see the violence significantly increased the odds ratio of an adolescent's talking to someone about the violence by 26.79, and attaching an angry and/or jealousy meaning to the violence significantly increased the odds ratio of adolescents talking to someone by 7.31. Witnessing and attaching meaning remained significant when controlling for gender. Gender also contributed significantly to the likelihood of talking to someone even after controlling for witnessing and anger and/or jealousy meaning.

Table 3
Logistic Regression for Talking to Someone About Dating Violence

Violence Characteristics Variable	B	Significance	Exp (B)
Saw	3.288	.000	26.786
Anger/jealousy meaning attached to violence	1.989	.015	7.310
Gender	–2.218	.014	0.109
Constant	1.807	.033	0.164

Discussion

Findings from this study indicate that the majority of the high school adolescents talked to someone about the violence they experienced in their dating relationships. This finding contrasts with the findings of other studies (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Bergman, 1992; Jackson et al., 2000) that suggest that many adolescents fail to tell anyone when experiencing dating violence. However, findings from this study support Black and Weisz's (2003) findings that African American middle school youth report a willingness to talk with someone about violence in their dating relationships.

Findings are consistent with the general help-seeking literature indicating that adolescents rarely speak with adults about interpersonal problems (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). Findings also support the dating violence help-seeking literature (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Foshee et al., 1996; Jaffe et al., 1992; Molidor & Tolman, 1998) indicating that adolescents rarely turn to parents or other adults for concerns and issues related to violence in their dating relationships. When adolescents talk about their relationship violence, they talk with their friends.

Except for having the violence witnessed, attaching an angry and/or jealousy meaning to the violence, and gender, no other contextual or demographic variables related to adolescents' decision to talk to someone about the dating violence event. Where the violence occurred, reaction to the violence, the severity of the violence, who initiated the violence, what happened, why the violence began, how badly they were emotionally hurt by the violence, and if they were physically injured by the violence were not related to adolescents' talking to someone about the violence. Although these findings support Tishby et al.'s (2001) findings that level of distress experienced by adolescents is unrelated to their willingness to seek help, the findings conflict with some other studies suggesting that severity of a problem will influence adolescent help-seeking (Raviv et al., 2000; Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). Seeking help with dating violence may be very different for adolescents than seeking help for other issues they face. The differences may be related to the developmental "newness" of dating or to social norms about privacy in intimate relationships (Rice & Dolgin, 2001; Sanders, 2003). Developing and maintaining peer relationships separate from adult and parental influences is critical for adolescent personal and social development, and acknowledging difficulties and seeking help in this area could be especially difficult for adolescents.

When someone witnesses dating violence, adolescents may feel more compelled to talk about it and interpret the situation for those witnessing the event, expressing fears, embarrassment, and perhaps at times justifying what happened. It is also likely that when a person witnesses violence, he or she becomes concerned and initiates a conversation with the victim. This interpretation is supported by the evidence because the gender of the person witnessing the violence and being talked with is always the same when girls witness and almost always the same when boys witness. In contrast, when no one witnesses dating violence, adolescents are significantly less likely to talk about it and, thus, less likely to benefit from anyone else's perspective or support. Adolescents who experience violence in isolation may be at particularly high risk. It is these adolescents who may have few friends and experience multiple risk factors. Adolescents who experience violence with no witnesses may also be the youth who have abusers who know how to isolate their victims.

Adolescents' turning to their peers for help with dating violence presents persistent concerns and challenges for prevention and intervention programs. Most adolescents are not trained to assist with severe problems and may give inappropriate, victim blaming, and/or risky advice to their friends. Among the students in Jackson et al.'s (2000) study who talked with someone about the abuse in their relationships, only 25% of the girls and boys reported a change in the relationship. Furthermore, Black and Weisz (2003) found that willingness to approach friends in dating violence situations was related to violence victimization for girls and violence perpetration for boys. Adolescents need to learn how to constructively talk with their peers about dating violence.

Many prevention programs are beginning to address how adolescents can help their peers (Weisz & Black, in press), and the Family Violence Prevention Fund (n.d.) offers information on "Help a Friend in Need." However, findings from this study suggest that prevention programs may need to assist adolescents in responding to dating violence when they witness the violence. Prevention programs should help both males and females think through what types of immediate intervention, if any, would be most effective. Programs need to provide knowledge and skill training on how to intervene without increasing the danger to the youth who intervenes.

Adolescents in the study who attached an angry and jealous meaning to the dating violence they experienced were more likely to talk to someone about the violence than adolescents who attached a controlling or protective/loving meaning to the dating violence. This suggests that adolescents may interpret dating violence they experience in different ways or experience different forms of violence. The emotional intensity from anger and jealousy may compel some survivors to discuss their victimization. Jealousy is an acceptable justification for violence in dating relationships for many adolescents (Black & Weisz, 2004; MEE Productions, 1996; O'Keefe, 1997); therefore, they may be more willing to talk with their friends about violence that emanates from jealousy than other factors. They may be more comfortable talking about a situation that appears understandable. On the other hand,

violence perceived as related to anger or jealousy may also be more frightening for youth than violence perceived as "cool" and controlling and may be related to different types of abusers (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000). Both victims and their friends might be more concerned about violence associated with jealousy or anger and thus more willing to talk about it. We need to learn more about how youth interpret dating violence. Prevention programs need to explore and challenge adolescents' interpretations of dating violence, in addition to teaching them nonviolent ways to cope with intense feelings of anger and jealousy.

Findings from the study support the persistent gender differences in dating violence and help-seeking found elsewhere (Black & Weisz, 2003; Jackson et al., 2000; Tishby et al., 2001). More girls than boys in the study were willing to talk to someone about dating violence. Saunders et al. (1999) suggested that females may simply be more willing to identify that they have a problem. Gender differences found in the study suggest that adolescents may benefit from attending gender-separate prevention programs that may differentially target perceptions about seeking help related to dating violence. Prevention programs targeting boys may specifically address help-seeking attitudes and behaviors. Content might also focus on male socialization that often implies that seeking help is a sign of weakness (Meth, 1990; Pollack, 1998). Perhaps prevention programs targeting males may better use their time to teach boys how to help others and to problem-solve about violent relationships, rather than to seek help for themselves.

A clear limitation of the study lies in its lack of specificity of the questions asked about adolescents' help-seeking behaviors. More specific questions and detail on the instrument about adolescent help-seeking behaviors would have provided more information to better understand their thinking and actions related to seeking help. We do not know when respondents told someone about the dating violence or what influenced their decisions to tell someone. When someone saw violence being perpetrated on a friend, we do not know who initiated the talking about the violence or if it was mutual. We have no knowledge of whether the talking included discussion of help-seeking or justification for the violence. In addition to asking to whom one talked about dating violence and the nature of the conversation, future research on adolescent help-seeking should include questions clarifying the relationship between someone observing the violence and adolescents' decisions to talk about it. Another limitation of the study is the sample. The small numbers of students in the sample limits the generalizability of the findings, especially with regard to gender differences. A larger number of adolescents may reveal more information on how females and males differently attach emotional meaning to dating violence, which, in turn, may influence them to seek help.

Although we know little about what influences adolescents to seek help, we do know that adolescents often see the violence in their friends' relationships. When someone sees the violence, adolescents are more willing to talk about it. Talking about the violence can be an important first step in intervening to end violence and preventing future dating violence.

Appendix
Response Options for Survey Questions

Who Saw the Violence:

    1. no one
    2. male friend
    3. female friend
    4. brother or sister
    5. mother
    6. father
    7. other family member
    8. adults in the school (teacher, principal, lunch, aide)
    9. other who?

Where did it happen?

    1. at your home
    2. at your school
    3. at your friend's house
    4. in a car
    5. in the street
    6. at your boyfriend's/girlfriend's house
    7. at a party
    8. in a public place
    9. other place?

What happened and who did it?

    1. grabbed the other person
    2. pushed or shoved the other person
    3. threw something or threatened to throw something at the other person that could hurt
    4. slapped the other person
    5. kicked the other person
    6. punched or hit the other person with something that could hurt
    7. choked the other person
    8. beat the other person up
    9. forced the other person to engage in sexual activity against their will
   10. threatened to use or used a knife or gun on you

How did you react to what happened?

    1. I fought back to defend myself.
    2. I fought back out of anger.
    3. I didn't do anything.
    4. I talked to my boyfriend/girlfriend
    5. I talked to someone else.
    6. I left the scene.
    7. I laughed
    8. I cried.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

What meaning did you attach to these events when they happened to you?

1. he/she loved me
2. he/she hated me
3. he/she was trying to control me
4. he/she was trying to threaten me
5. he/she was angry
6. he/she was jealous
7. he/she was being protective
8. other?

Why do you think this happened? What was the cause of it?

1. drinking or getting high
2. a disagreement
3. stress
4. disagreement about sex
5. wanting to end relationship
6. disagreement over money
7. jealousy
8. other?

How badly were you emotionally hurt?

1. not at all
2. a little
3. moderately
4. a lot
5. severely

Whom did you talk to about this situation?

1. nobody
2. male friend
3. female friend
4. boyfriend/girlfriend
5. brother or sister
6. mother
7. father
8. other family member
9. adults in the school (teacher, principal, counselor)
10. adults in the community (police, minister, therapist)
11. other

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