

Intimate Partner Violence in College Students: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract

Violence against women has been recognized as a worldwide problem. Among college women dating violence and acquaintance rape are common types of intimate partner violence. Preliminary findings from concurrent studies of American college women indicate the presence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in both community colleges and universities. Comparable data specific to IPV among German college women are not available; however, the need for gathering gender-specific data is discussed.

Introduction

Adolescent and college-age women in America represent a particularly vulnerable group for intimate partner violence (IPV). Common forms of IPV experienced by young women are dating violence, acquaintance rape and date rape. An average of 28% of high school and college students experience dating violence at some time (ABA Commission on Domestic Violence, 2000), while one in five college women report having been forced to have sexual intercourse during their lifetime (National College Health Risk Behavior Survey, 1995). These high rates of intimate partner violence in the United States are the result of a complex cultural belief system that fosters the inequality and objectification of women.

Currently many nations recognize violence against women as a world wide problem. A contributing factor to this problem is considered to be the lower status afforded to women in patriarchal societies. Within these societies violence against women can occur partly due to the effects of traditional or customary practices (Beijing Declaration, 1995). In addition to cultural practices and beliefs, the United Nations cites all acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion which serve to perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and society as contributing factors to this global problem (Beijing Declaration, 1995).

Intimate Partner Violence in the United States

Any examination of violence against women needs to be placed within the larger context of interpersonal violence against women in the general population. In the United States public awareness of interpersonal and intrafamilial violence as a social and public health issue has progressed slowly. Indeed, it was not until 1962 that child abuse was recognized as a syndrome that required attention within the health and social service sectors (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962).

Raising the awareness of the public as well as professionals in the health, criminal justice and education sectors often requires an effort from parties with particular concerns in that arena. For example, forcible rape and spousal rape became issues of the women's movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In 1978, when marital rape was a considered a crime in only four states, the Rideout case in Oregon gained national prominence when a woman brought rape charges against her husband. The influence of this case led to successful campaigns in several states such as California and New York, resulting in changes to their criminal statutes in regards to spousal rape (National Clearinghouse on Marital and Date Rape, 2000).

The increased awareness of interpersonal violence in America led to the identification and study of a number of separate types of violence. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) IPV Fact Sheet (2000), domestic abuse, spouse abuse, domestic violence, courtship violence, battering, marital rape, and date rape are common terms used to describe IPV. The wide range of behaviors that are included in this definition encompass the violent behaviors most often experienced by college women.

According to Hughes and Sandler (1987) intimate partner violence in the form of date rape occurs in the United States for a number of reasons. However, the three key elements present are socialization, miscommunication, and/or changing sexual mores. In addition, Hughes and Sandler cite a lack of consideration for a woman's rights and wishes as a major reason for the occurrence of date rape.

Rates of dating violence and date rape in the United States are significant. The CDC's IPV Fact Sheet (2000) reports that 92% of women raped in 1992-1993 knew their assailants. In addition, friends or acquaintances commit approximately 50% of all rapes and sexual assaults against women and 26% are raped by intimate partners. A report by the Commission on Domestic Violence of the American Bar Association (2000) recounts that an average of 28% of high school and college students experience dating violence at some point in their college careers.

The report also states that the abuse can take many forms such as insults, humiliation, monitoring the victim's movements, isolation of the victim from family and friends, suicide threats, threats to harm family or property, and physical or sexual abuse. Victims also stated that their abusers typically blamed them for the abuse, or used an excuse of jealousy.

Intimate Partner Violence among American College Women

In an attempt to better understand IPV among American college women, two concurrent studies are being conducted at the College of Public Health at the University of South Florida. One study explores the dating violence experiences of students while attending college (Noland, 2000), and the other study investigates the lifetime experience of college students with forced intercourse or rape (Daley, 2000). Each of these behaviors is included within the broad category of IPV.

Preliminary findings indicate that among college students, IPV is a particular threat to college women. The studies conducted at a community college campus and a large four-year university, utilized the Conflict Tactics Scale II (CTSII) and the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (NCHRBS), respectively.

IPV Among A Community College Sample

The purpose of this study was to explore the IPV experiences among community college students (N=528). The survey was administered at a large

urban community college during the Spring 2000 semester. Data were gathered using a modified version of the CTSII. The sample consisted of 52.9% females and 47.1% males. The majority of students classified themselves as freshmen (80%), while 14.4% said they were sophomores and the remaining 5.6% of students indicated other types of class standing. The overall mean age for this sample was 22.74 years. The mean age for females was 23 years and for males 23.5 years. Nearly 52% of the respondents were white, 20.3% were Hispanic and 13.1% were African-American. The demographics of this sample differed slightly from the general population of the community college since white students are under-represented and minority students are over-represented.

The modified version of the CTSII included questions designed to measure the respondent's experience as a victim of IPV. Respondents were asked how many times during the last 12 months a particular behavior had occurred. Response options ranged from 0 for never, 1 for once, 2 for twice, 3 for 3 to 5 times, 4 for 6 to 10 times, 5 for 11 to 20 times, and 6 for a behavior that occurred more than 20 times within the past 12 months. Violent behaviors ranged from minor ones such as receiving insults or being sworn at by a date to severe behaviors such as having experienced actual weapon use by a date or intimate partner. For the purposes of this study, a date or an intimate partner is defined as a person who may be a friend, boyfriend, girlfriend, or significant other. Table 1 summarizes the IPV experiences of the respondents.

Table 1. IPV experienced during the past 12 months

During the past twelve months did	N	Yes	% Yes	% Female	% Male
Your date insult or swear at you?	520	229	44.0	58.5	41.5
Your date call you fat or ugly?	513	53	10.3	66.0	34.0
Your date slap you?	517	44	8.5	50.0	50.0
Your date throw something at you that could hurt?	520	48	9.2	64.6	35.4
Your date push or shove you?	519	69	13.3	69.6	30.4
Your date angrily grab you?	517	84	16.2	76.2	23.8
Your date punch or hit you with something that could hurt?	514	37	7.2	73.0	27.0
Your date choke you?	514	19	3.7	94.7	5.3
Your date beat you up?	514	16	3.1	75.0	25.0
Your date use a knife or gun against you?	514	4	.78	100	0

Within the past 12 months 44% (N=229) of the respondents had been insulted or sworn at by a date. Females comprised 58.5% (N=134) of this group. Approximately 59.7% of the females had been insulted or sworn at 3 or more times during the past year. Among the males 65.3% had been verbally victimized 3 or more times. Of the students who indicated that on

at least one occasion a date had called them fat or ugly (N=53), the majority (66%) were females. Among the students responding affirmatively to this question, 71.7% indicated the behavior had occurred once or twice during the past year.

When asked whether a date had ever thrown something at them that could hurt, 9.2% (N=48) of the

students responded in the affirmative. Nearly 65% of the students experiencing this behavior were females. In addition, more females than males reported having been pushed or shoved by a date. Approximately 35% (N=24) of the females and 11.6% (N=8) of the males experienced this behavior 3 or more times. Students were also asked whether they had been angrily grabbed by a date. Among the respondents indicating that they had experienced this behavior (N=84), 76.2% were female.

Approximately 7% of the respondents (N=37) stated that on at least one occasion a date had punched or hit them with something that could hurt. Of these students, 73% (N=27) were females. In addition, among both genders, approximately 41% indicated that this behavior happened 3 or more times. When asked whether they had ever been choked by a date 3.7% of the sample (N=19) answered in the affirmative. Of these students nearly 95% (N=18) were female. Nearly 32% (N=6) of the women indicated that this had happened more than 3 times during the past year.

Three percent (N=16) of the students stated that within the past 12 months they had been beaten up by a date. Of the students responding to this question, 75% of those who reported being beaten up were women (N=12). In addition, approximately 31% (N=5) of the women had been beaten up more than 3 times during the past year, with males reporting the occurrence of this behavior on only one or two occasions. In addition, four female respondents indicated that within the past year they had been victimized by a date using a knife or gun. None of the male respondents reported experiencing this behavior.

Based upon these results both males and females in this population have experienced IPV however, it appears that females experience the more severe forms of IPV. Admittedly there are a number of limitations to this study. The data is based upon the respondent recalling events during the last 12 months, therefore it is acknowledged that some events may have been forgotten or recalled inaccurately. Certainly another limitation of this study is an inability to determine the circumstances surrounding some of the IPV. In addition, the length of time that the partners had been dating cannot be determined or whether the answers were based upon an experience with only one partner or with several partners.

While an ability to gather quantitative gender-specific data relating to one's experience with IPV is a necessary step in understanding the problem, qualitative data gathered through the use of individual interviews or focus groups can serve to provide a contextual picture of IPV. It is the combination of qualitative and quantitative data that will enable a greater understanding of this phenomenon and the development of effective interventions and health education programs.

IPV Among A University Undergraduate Sample

A study of temperament type and health risk-taking behaviors among college students was conducted at a

large four-year university, using a web-based survey. The sample consisted of 987 respondents, with 841 who met the study criteria of class standing and age. While the ethnicity of the sample closely mirrored that of the university, gender rates differed somewhat from the school, which has an undergraduate population with 58.2% females and 41.8% males. In this study, 68.5% of the participants were female and 31.5% were male. The mean age of the respondents was 19.75, with 19.1% of the sample aged 18 years old, 34.5% aged 19, 22.5% aged 20, 13.4% aged 21, 7.6% aged 22, 2.9% aged 23 and 2.3% aged 24. More than two-thirds of the sample were lower division students, with class standing percentages as follows: 42.8% were freshman, 27.6% were sophomores, 21.4% were juniors and 8.2% were seniors.

The web-based survey was comprised of a temperament instrument (the Keirseley Temperament Sorter II) and the NCHRBS, an instrument that measures the six leading causes of morbidity and mortality among college students (CDC-MMWR, 1997). The instrument was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a version of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), which assesses trends in risk-taking behaviors among adolescents in six categories: alcohol and other drug use, tobacco use, intentional and unintentional injuries, sexual practices, dietary practices and physical activity.

Within the sexual behavior subscale of the NCHRBS, three questions asked about lifetime experience of forced sexual intercourse. The questions were:

- During your life, have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse against your will?
- How old were you the first time you were forced to have intercourse?
- How old were you the first last you were forced to have intercourse?

The responses to the first of these questions reflects a smaller percentage than the national average for college students, which was 20% (CDC, 1997) -- in this study, 11.4% of the responses were positive for this question. One possibility for the lower rate of forcible rape among this college sample may have to do with the class standing of the respondents. In this study, the class standing is predominantly of freshman and sophomore, and these students have not been in a college environment very long. The ages of first and last time of incidence of forcible rape are very similar: 64% of the females who responded positively to the question of forcible intercourse were between ages 17 and 24 the first time this occurred, while 74% were within those same ages the last time it occurred. As these female college students are reporting the majority of forcible rapes within their college years, both first and last occurrence, this may be reflective of the well-documented risk of acquaintance rape on college campuses. The data in Table 2 reveal the frequencies of the responses to the three questions related to sexual violence.

Table 2. Lifetime experience of Forced Sexual Intercourse

	Yes	No
During your life, have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse against your will?	11.4%	88.4%
How old were you the first/last time you were forced to have intercourse? (female responses only, n = 88)	First Time	Last Time
12 years or younger	2%	1%
13-14 years	14%	10%
15-16 years	16%	12%
17-18 years	24%	21%
19-20 years	31%	36%
21-24 years	9%	17%
missing data	4%	3%

Intimate Partner Violence in Germany

The knowledge of IPV in the United States stems from approximately 25 years of data collection. Tracking the rates and prevalence of IPV is a critical component in the understanding of the phenomenon of interpersonal violence and its effects on society as a whole. In 1995 the Beijing Declaration cited "the absence of adequate gender-disaggregated data and statistics on the incidence of violence" as a major difficulty in effecting change in this area.

Currently, rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Germany are not available; the German health care system does not collect gender-specific data (Niehuis, 2000). While the rates of IPV are not known, there is a recognition by the German government that domestic violence is a serious social problem affecting German women, and one that must be addressed immediately (Bergmann, 2000).

While there are many factors contributing to the problem of IPV in Germany, it is believed that the traditional, gender-specific division of labor existing in German families has allowed this type of violence to remain unrecognized. Within Germany a traditional family system exists whereby family work is assigned to women. Most often the woman's work within the family is unpaid and remains largely unrecognized. In addition, the need for women to reconcile job and family responsibilities hinders career opportunities, leads to less income, and provides fewer pension benefits (Niehuis, 2000). The gender imbalance also exists within the corporate world where women are typically relegated to jobs with lower pay and lower status, while males perform the jobs offering greater status and opportunities for social involvement. It is this imbalance of power between men and women, and the lesser status afforded to women that is believed to

contribute to male-to-female violence. Many believe that the levels of violence existing between men and women will continue until the imbalance between genders in both the home and workplace is eliminated (Niehuis, 2000).

In a February 1, 2000 press release, Dr. Edith Niehuis, the Parliamentary State Secretary for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth noted that a key priority of the current Federal Government of Germany is the "Action Plan to Combat Violence against Women." (Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, 2000). This plan applies to all levels of the federal government, as well as jurisdictional areas of the state and municipalities and contains a comprehensive overall concept to reduce daily violence against women. The plan focuses on the areas of prevention, legislation, cooperation among institutions and projects, networking of assistance services, working with violent offenders, and awareness-building among experts and the public-at-large. Niehuis states that the plan calls for an integration of services while recognizing the futility of delivering isolated, selective measures when attempting to address an issue as complex as interpersonal violence.

In an attempt to create a more favorable social climate for women in Germany the federal government is promoting several measures designed to reduce male-female violence. These measures include advocating for a violence-free upbringing for German youth, coupled with school programs designed to address the subject of interpersonal violence. The school programs will include the implementation of special projects designed to encourage children and youth to manage conflict without using violence, as well as presenting programs that challenge the stereotypical role models of young men (Niehuis, 2000).

The German government also plans to discuss legislative measures intended to improve protection for female victims of domestic violence. This improved protection includes a recognition of the need for a network of assistance services at the national level for women who experience or are threatened by intimate partner violence. While the networking of women's shelters in Germany has occurred over the last 20 years, a need exists for the nationwide networking of crisis hotlines and counseling centers (Niehuis, 2000).

There is also a growing recognition of the need to prosecute violent offenders, and to sufficiently protect women from their violent partners. This recognition has also illuminated the need for offender treatment programs that will help alter patterns of violent behavior. To date, the majority of offender treatment programs are in the developmental phases (Niehuis, 2000).

In an effort to gain information on gender-specific health issues the first comprehensive study of the health status of women in Germany was commissioned in 1999 by the federal government. This study, which is intended to serve as the basis for the establishment of gender-specific health reporting, involves 18 female scientists from 5 German universities (Niehuis, 2000). It is believed that this study will provide a mechanism for collecting data on many gender-specific health issues affecting German women.

Conclusions

IPV is a problem that transcends nations and cultures. Many nations have recognized the high rates of violence against women as both a health and social concern, and have acknowledged the need for the greater empowerment of women. However, while a few of the industrialized nations have been gathering data on this topic, there is a lack of data worldwide. It is hoped that the current realization of the need to improve the status of women throughout the world will cause both public and private entities to begin the process of collecting data on IPV. While data collection is a necessary first step towards greater knowledge of IPV, it will not solve the problem. Whether considering IPV in the United States, Germany, or some other nation, the data must be accompanied by programs that promote equality in the home, workplace and society. While equality is not the only issue that should be addressed in programs promoting gender equity, it is however a necessary first step towards addressing the need for cultural awareness of IPV and its individual and societal consequences.

The German government has outlined preventive measures that are designed to begin countering a long existing cultural belief system that fostered the inequality of women. It will be through long-term data driven efforts, provided by studies such as the gender-specific study on the health status of German women, or through programs offered to children in the

school system, or educational programs designed to enable more German women to obtain university degrees that will result in an increased status for women in the workforce, which will ultimately affect the IPV rates.

In the United States, the most recent report on IPV from the CDC (2000) reiterates the risk for injury and death that women experience as a result of their gender. The CDC estimates that women are more likely than men to experience IPV in their lifetime, and are three times more likely than men to experience injuries from IPV. Data gathered in the U.S. indicate that the majority of women experience their first episode of IPV in high school or college. Ironically these are the very settings that can increase the potential for the social and economic equality of women (ABA Commission on Domestic Violence; NCHRBS, 1995).

It is expected that the experience of IPV among German women is similar to that of women in the United States. An understanding of this problem within the secondary school and university system in both countries is important since both nations stress the importance of education as a preventive measure for IPV. The study of IPV among college students, and its long-term effects on young women is an important endeavor. It is imperative that the educational opportunities designed to increase the status of young women are not negated through an increased risk of exposure to IPV in the university setting.

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