

Abstract

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In close relationships and through sexual intimacy, most adolescents and young adults have opportunities to develop the ability to experience emotional intimacy and trust. This thesis focuses on problematic phenomena that can occur in these situations. Study I addressed limitations in the literature on dating violence concerning prevalence rates, dynamic risk factors, and the effectiveness of intervention programs. The results showed that prevalence ratings of physical dating violence ranged between 10% and 20%, and that psychological/emotional violence is the most frequently experienced type of abuse. Peer influence was found to be an important risk factor for dating violence. Interventions were found to have short-term positive effects on behavioral change. In Study II, 88 adolescents participated in focus group sessions. The aim was to determine the extent to which a universal set of themes about dating violence could represent adolescents' attitudes, as part of a study across four European countries. The study identified four superordinate themes: gender roles, television as an educator, perceived severity, and the decision to seek help. Study III, concerning sexual risk-taking, involved a survey of young men (N=452) who were testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Results revealed that the young men had a relatively high average number of partners (3.8) with whom they had had unprotected sex i.e., they had done so at some point in the past. In addition, almost a fifth of them were reluctant to use a condom due to erection difficulties. A relatively high proportion had been subjected to sexual coercion (14.7%). Study IV explored 30 young men's descriptions of how members of their social networks had influenced them to seek psychological help. Results showed that young men were influenced by their networks mainly through exhortation and drawing attention to their needs. Friends who were role models were especially influential in helping them overcome obstructive masculinity norms and move from reluctance toward more constructive attitudes regarding help-seeking. This thesis focuses on young men's experiences with relationship violence, as well as their sexual and psychological health needs, all of which have clinical implications.

Keywords: dating violence; young men; sexual risk-taking; social network; help-seeking