



# Introduction to the Special Section “The Impact of Youth Violence on Sexual Health of Adolescents from National and International Perspectives”

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Youth violence and the sexual health of adolescents continue to be public health concerns that require immediate attention. Meta-analysis and systematic reviews consistently find that many forms of youth violence across the globe (e.g., bullying, gang violence, sexual violence) are significant predictors of numerous adverse health and psychosocial outcomes, such as alcohol and drug use, delinquency, future violence, internalizing symptoms, and suicidal ideation and behavior (Fry et al., 2018; Polanin et al., 2021; Pyrooz et al., 2016). Research has also pointed to the significant relationship between experiences of youth violence and concurrent and longitudinal risky sexual behavior and negative sexual health outcomes (Holt et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2016; Turanovic & Pratt, 2015). Several theories have been identified in understanding the association between youth violence and negative sexual health outcomes. These theories include psychological, sociological, and feminist explanations, depending on the discipline of the investigators. To design interventions to prevent youth violence and subsequent negative sexual health outcomes, it is critical to engage with scholars across diverse theoretical perspectives and disciplines.

To this end, this Special Section aims to bring together scholars from around the globe to examine how youth violence might be related to the sexual health of adolescents. Youth violence consists of bullying (including

cyberbullying), relational aggression, sibling violence, teen dating violence, gender-based violence, gang violence, non-consensual sexting, sexual violence/assault, poly-victimization (and poly-perpetration), and stalking behavior (World Health Organization, 2015). Sexual health is conceptualized by risks, such as unwanted pregnancy, sexually risky behaviors, multiple sex partners, sex under the influence of drugs, prostitution, and acquisition of sexually transmitted infections as well as protective elements, such as consent, condom efficacy, condom negotiation and use, sexual pleasure and well-being, sex education, and discussions with parents and teachers about sex (Bearinger et al., 2007).

In the article by Baćak et al. (2023), the study considered the role of mental health and delinquency on the pathway between sexual victimization and sexual aggression in two independent longitudinal samples of Croatian adolescents. Using data from the first panel (six data waves, 2015–2018;  $n = 1289$ ), analyses from the structural equation modeling pointed to a psychosocial mechanism, a combination of symptoms of depression/anxiety and delinquency, that mediated the association between sexual victimization and self-reported sexual aggression. The study also suggests a significant role of family environment in the psychosocial mechanism. The pattern of findings was partially replicated in the second panel with five waves of data (2015–2017;  $n = 750$ ).

In the article by Dion et al. (2023), the study examined the longitudinal associations between dating violence victimization and sexual well-being among 1442 sexually active adolescents (aged 14 and 17 years) who completed at least one of three data waves (51.1% girls; 45.7% boys; 0.3% non-binary; 3.0% varying gender identity). The study also explored whether these associations differed by gender identity and sexual minority status. The participants completed online questionnaires on electronic tablets during class. The study found that psychological, physical (except for boys),

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and sexual dating violence victimization were all associated with lower sexual satisfaction and greater sexual distress over time. Also, the between-level associations between dating violence and poorer sexual outcomes were stronger among girls and gender-diverse adolescents than among boys. The within-level association between physical dating violence and sexual satisfaction was significant among adolescents with non-varying sexual minority status, but not among those with a non-varying heterosexual status or that varied in sexual minority status.

In the article by Frøyland et al. (2023), the study investigated sexual victimization, physical victimization by parents, and physical victimization by peers and their associations with sexual health, mental health, and substance use. The study utilized data from a nationally representative sample of Norwegian 18–19-year-old students in their final year of high school ( $N = 2075$ ; 59.1% girls). The results indicated that 12.1% of the adolescents reported sexual victimization. Physical victimization was more prevalent: 19.5% of the respondents had been exposed to victimization by parents and 18.9% by peers. Multivariate analyses revealed specific associations between sexual victimization and a range of sexual health indicators, including early sexual intercourse debut, many sexual partners, engaging in sex without contraception while intoxicated, and participating in sexual acts for payment. Neither physical victimization from parents nor peers was associated with these variables. However, all three forms of victimization were related to impaired mental health and potential substance use problems.

In the article by Hong et al. (2023a), the study examined the association between polyvictimization and offline and online sexual harassment and whether the association might be mediated by internalizing problems, low school satisfaction, and dropping out of school. Data were derived from the Children and Youth Rights Survey in South Korea, comprising 6353 adolescents' responses to the sexual harassment question and a set of other questions in the middle and high school questionnaires. Results indicated a direct association between polyvictimization and offline and online sexual harassment. Adolescents who were polyvictimized were more likely to be victims of both forms of sexual harassment. Moreover, polyvictimization was positively associated with dropping out of school, which was positively related to offline sexual harassment.

In another article by Hong et al. (2023b), the study explored the association between youths' exposure to peer and neighborhood violence and early sexual initiation. It also investigated whether caring relationships with teachers would moderate this association and whether results differed for heterosexual versus non-heterosexual African American youth. The study sample included 475 heterosexual and 105 non-heterosexual youths, 319 female and 261 male, ages 13–24 years. Youth were assessed for peer and neighborhood

violence, relationship with teachers, early sexual initiation, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The findings suggested a positive association between exposure to peer and neighborhood violence and early sexual initiation for heterosexual youth but not those identified as non-heterosexual. Further, identifying as female (vs. male) was significantly related to later sexual initiation for both heterosexual and non-heterosexual youth. In addition, caring teachers moderated the association between exposure to peer violence and age of sexual initiation among non-heterosexual youth.

In the article by Hsieh et al. (2023), the study, applying the target congruence theory, examined unwanted online sexual solicitation (UOSS) risk and protective factors from a national-representative adolescents sample in Taiwan. In 2020, 19,556 students (grades 5–12,  $M_{\text{age}} 15$  years, 50% male) participated in the school-based online survey. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to determine the significance of UOSS predictors. Results indicated a 15.4% prevalence of UOSS. Taking age and gender into consideration, target-vulnerability variables (self-esteem, bullying victimization, psychological distress) and target-gratifiability variables (online self-disclosure, time spent online) were significantly associated with UOSS. Bullied youth had greater psychological distress and online self-disclosure and increased Internet use were prone to UOSS, while self-esteem mitigated risks. Bullying victimization and online self-disclosure were the strongest correlates of UOSS, followed by psychological distress, Internet usage, and self-esteem.

In the article by Kim et al. (2023), the study investigated the association between bullying victimization and the non-use of condoms, considering the moderating role of teacher and parental relationships. The study utilized a series of logistic regression models to explore these relationships among a sample of sexually active South Korean adolescents ( $n = 153$ ; ages 11–17 years old). Findings indicated that bullying victimization was significantly associated with greater non-use of condoms. Also, relationships with teachers and parents moderated the impact of bullying victimization on the non-use of condoms, which suggests that positive relationships with teachers and parents were protective buffers against sexual risk-taking behavior for victims of bullying.

In the article by Livingston et al. (2023), the study explored the prospective association between peer sexual harassment and experiencing sexual victimization in the following year among a community sample of 13–15-year-old adolescents ( $N = 800$ , 57% female) from the northeastern USA. The study also investigated whether risky alcohol use and delinquency mediated the relationship between sexual harassment and sexual assault victimization, as well as whether the pathways differed by gender. Results suggested that sexual harassment victimization prospectively predicted later sexual victimization for both girls and boys. Using a parallel mediation path

model, they determined that, for girls, sexual harassment victimization predicted both risky alcohol use and delinquency, but only risky alcohol use was predictive of sexual victimization. For boys, sexual harassment victimization predicted delinquency but not risky alcohol use. Risky alcohol use was not linked to sexual victimization for boys.

In the article by Makubuya et al. (2023), the study reported evidence of violence related to initiation and traditional male circumcision (ITMC) in South Africa. The study was conducted through a search of the newspaper databases *Newsbank* and *News24* from January 1, 2016 to August 31, 2023, and a content analysis of newspaper articles that referenced violence in South African newspapers was carried out. The initial search yielded 1796 articles; after screening for relevance and duplicates, 41 articles published in 16 South African newspapers and one online source were included in the analysis of the data. Most articles (41%) were published in 2016. Five major types of violence were identified at three unique stages of the ITMC process: (1) bullying; (2) mental and emotional abuse; (3) neglect; (4) physical violence, and (5) gender-based violence. At the pre-initiation stage, the findings of the studies reviewed suggested that boys were forced, abducted, and trafficked into the initiation schools. While at the initiation schools, various forms of bullying, beating, fighting, slapping, assaulting, torturing, burning, neglecting, and physical, mental, and emotional abuse were reported. At the post-initiation stage, physical violence and mental abuse were reported. Moreover, some articles reported violence prevention efforts during ITMC.

In the article by Rivas-Koehl et al. (2023), the study explored the association between two potential risk factors and three sexual risk behavior outcomes. The study examined how experiencing cybersexual violence victimization (CVV) and using pornography during early adolescence was associated with condom use, birth control use, and use of alcohol and drugs before sex among 974 U.S. high school students. The study also explored multiple forms of adult support as potential protective factors of sexual risk behaviors. The study found that CVV and porn use were related to risky sexual behaviors for some adolescents. Also, parental monitoring and support from adults at school might be two ways to support healthy adolescent sexual development.

In the article by Trub et al. (2023), the study hypothesized that general mindfulness and early sexual and online dating debuts are related to mental health outcomes and sexual behavior through pathways that include sexual awareness (i.e., assertiveness, consciousness, appeal, and monitoring). A sample of 2379 heterosexually active young adult women participated in the study by completing an online survey. The path model showed that both early sexual debut (before 15 years of age) and early online dating debut (before 18 years of age) had positive associations with anxiety and depression scores. Early online dating was also related to condomless

sex with casual male partners. However, both early sexual debut and early online dating debut were indirectly related to greater sexual risk through greater appeal, and to lower sexual risk through sexual assertiveness. Moreover, greater monitoring was associated with more depression for youth with an earlier sexual debut. These findings point to potential risks that are linked to early online dating.

In the article by Vasilenko et al. (2023), the study, guided by life history and cumulative disadvantage theories, utilized longitudinal latent class analysis and data from the Future of Families and Child Well-being Study ( $N = 3396$ ; 51.1% female, 48.9% male) to investigate how longitudinal patterns of multiple types of violence exposures across ages 3–15 years were related to early sexual initiation in adolescence. Findings indicated that experiencing persistent physical and emotional abuse across childhood was related to the greatest prevalence of early sexual initiation. Early exposure to violence was not consistently associated with a greater likelihood of sexual initiation; instead, early abuse was more strongly linked to sexual initiation among boys, and late childhood abuse was more strongly associated among girls.

In the article by Verbeek et al. (2023), the preregistered (PROSPERO, ID: CRD42022281220) map of sexual and dating violence (SDV) prevention programs targeted male youth, including their characteristics (e.g., content, intensity), intended psychosexual outcomes, and empirically demonstrated effectiveness, guided by the principles of the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Searches in six online databases for published, peer-reviewed quantitative effectiveness studies on multi-session, group-focused, and interaction-based SDV prevention programs for male youth ending March 2022 were conducted. After screening 21,156 hits using PRISMA guidelines, 15 studies on 13 different programs from four continents were included. Narrative analysis indicated, first, broad ranges in program intensity (2–48 h total) and a few program curricula included explicit discussion of relevant aspects of the TPB. Second, the programs' main intended psychosexual outcomes were to change SDV experiences, related attitudes, or norms. Third, significant effects were found mostly on longer-term behaviors and short-term attitudes. Other theoretical proxies of SDV experiences, such as social norms and perceived behavioral control, were sparsely investigated; thus, the program's effectiveness on these outcomes remains unknown. Assessed with the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool, moderate to serious risk of bias arose in all studies.

In the article Chen et al. (2023), a latent class analysis to classify 335 sexually exploited girls in Taiwan into subgroups based on their probability of experiencing each syndemic condition was conducted. Syndemic class membership was used to predict their sexual health outcomes, such as pregnancy, abortion, and the acquisition of STDs. The study found three classes, which were “low-risk syndemic,”

“moderate-risk syndemic,” and “high-risk syndemic.” The risk of STD acquisition among sexually exploited girls in the “high-risk syndemic class” and “moderate-risk syndemic class” was 239 and 135% higher, respectively, than the risk of STD acquisition among the “low-risk syndemic class.” Differences in pregnancy and abortion between these three classes were not significant. The findings are consistent with the syndemic theory that a pattern of syndemic conditions would be related to an increased risk of acquiring STDs. Interventions aimed at reducing STD acquisition among sexually exploited girls in Taiwan need to take a comprehensive approach to address such co-occurring conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Findings from these studies have major implications for intervention and policy, and it is our fervent hope that researchers from all over the world will continue to investigate how violence is linked to sexual health in children and adolescents.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: The paper by Chen et al. (2023) was inadvertently published in the May 2023 issue of the Journal.