Reviewer’s report

Title: Adolescent Females’ Perceptions of the Dating Experience: Grounded Theory

Version: 1 Date: 1 April 2007

Reviewer: Kristin F Lutz

Reviewer’s report:

General
Violence among adolescents is a growing problem that has not been extensively studied, particularly from the perspective of adolescents. This is an interesting paper that provides important insight into adolescents’ perceptions of dating relationships and intimate partner violence. The stated purpose of the study was clearly defined. This is a relevant topic for nursing and public health and will be of particular interest for nurses who care for adolescents.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1) A very brief overview of what is known about teens and dating would be useful to include in the literature review.

2) Our understanding of intimate partner violence has been hampered by a lack of clarity regarding terminology. Using a standard definition for abuse would be helpful for readers and would allow for comparisons with other reports on intimate partner violence.

3) Overall, the methods are appropriate and the methodology is described, but in general rather than specific terms. The paper would be strengthened and the credibility of the study methods and findings would be enhanced if specific examples of the analytic processes for this study were provided. Providing specific examples or the range of emergent codes and categories that were considered early on and briefly explaining how those categories influenced the second stage of sampling – including participant selection and/or focus of interviews, and how those codes, categories, and theoretical relationships were subsequently refined or discarded would be very informative to the audience. For example, on page 5, please provide information about the concepts that were used for relational sampling and also provide information about what theoretical saturation is and when it actually occurred in the study. Please describe how the Circle was chosen as the central element of the theory. Providing specific information about how and when theoretical saturation occurred in this study would also be informative for readers. Each of these recommendations could be done within the text or by developing a table that depicted the process and examples of codes, categories, and supporting data. Please describe the processes that were utilized to enhance the credibility of the research process and findings.

4) While some of the grounded theory terms were defined, definitions should be provided for terms such as theoretical saturation and microanalysis to clarify their meaning.

5) On page 4, in the description of the sample, other than listing the age range, ethnicity, and insurance status, there was very little information provided about the sample. The lack of sample description limits the transferability of the findings. If the data are available, I would suggest providing information about: dating abuse (verbal, emotional, physical and sexual versus negative dating experiences), whether or not there was any history of prior abuse exposure, the mean age of the sample, and the number of dating relationships (range and mean), and duration (range and mean) of dating relationships. This information could be presented within the text or in tabular format.

6) Limited data (participant quotes) are presented in this report. If at all possible, I would like to see more data included in order to provide sufficient evidence for the readers to reach conclusions regarding the credibility of the findings. In part, this would be addressed by expanding the methods section and providing specific examples for analytic decisions/processes. However, additional participant quotes would supplement the current examples that are utilized, but are very short. Adding information about whether there were many examples like the ones presented and whether there were qualitative data that contradicted the construct being examined would be instructive.

7) The description of the stages of dating (presented on page 7) raised a number of questions for me. Were
the stages discrete, ordered, did they range from least involved/connected to most involved/connected? Did all of the participants go through each stage? How much time was spent in each stage? Can you provide more information/data about how many relationships teens had and how quickly teens moved through stages (page 7)? Could you describe the range or variation for “seriousness” and “activities” of stages and “exclusivity rules” (page 7)? The second and third sentences in the last paragraph on page 7 seem to be contradictory. On page 8, does experiment physically mean sexual experimentation? On page 9, the sentence beginning “Physical intimacy was not seen...” seems to contradict the last sentence of that paragraph that begins with “They admitted that teens would become physical...” Do you have any examples that you could provide about the ways in which the circle activated the assistance of parents or other adults?

8) Regarding the circle, how does isolation from the group lead to the enabling of negative events (on page 11)? Could you provide a specific example? On page 17, when the text described the circle as the central factor, I wondered whether the circle ever increased female teens’ risk for violence. For example, did circle norms for some groups ever include or endorse violence or control?

9) I did not feel that the figure was easily understood as it was presented. What is presented by the figure? Is it the grounded theory? A title was not provided for the figure and would be very useful to the reader. In addition, terms used in the text (page 16) and in the figure are not always consistent. Why not include the stages of the dating relationship in the figure?

10) In the discussion/conclusion section, I would like to see more integration of the findings from this investigation with what is known about adolescent dating, adolescent violence, and violence against women. How does this qualitative investigation illuminate existing survey/prevalence data? How does it relate to other qualitative investigations of adolescent violence and violence against adult women? What are the implications for future research? This discussion would help to situate the findings within the existing knowledge base.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1) There were a number of places that had minor typographical or grammatical errors.

2) In addition, the use of terms without definitions or using terms in differing ways (e.g., abuse, intimacy, physical experimentation, circle vs. group) was confusing.

3) The current title, “Adolescent females’ perceptions of the dating experience: Grounded theory” is not very specific to the findings presented in the report nor is it very compelling. The title does, however, provide information about the focus and method. A more descriptive title might be something that builds on the subheading used on page 16 of the manuscript. For example: A grounded theory of female adolescents’ dating experiences and factors influencing safety: The dynamics of the circle.

4) The prevalence range is quite large. Why is that? Also, a number of the references cited concerning the prevalence of dating violence are quite dated; there are a number of more recent resources that might be more relevant, including:


Banister "Like, what am I supposed to do?": adolescent girls' health concerns in their dating relationships. The Canadian Journal of Nursing Research 2003; 35:16-33


Howard, D. Qiu, Y. & Boekeloo, B. Personal and Social Contextual Correlates of Adolescent Dating Violence Journal of Adolescent Health 2003; 33:9-17


Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence (Report #: NCJ...
5) In a number of sections, you used language suggesting comparisons without providing information regarding what is being compared. Please correct that. For example, on page 3, the statement is made: “Emotional and verbal abuse are more common in the adolescent population.” Please clarify whether the reference is comparing forms of abuse or populations. And further down on the page, the following statements are written: “Data also suggest that teens most often fail to report dating violence. Female and/or younger adolescents are least likely to seek help in response to dating violence.” Both of these statements also suggest comparisons among groups. It would be useful to know which groups are being compared. On page 4, the following sentence was written: “In a sample of public high school students, females experiencing severe dating violence reported suicide ideation or attempt, but didn’t test lower on life satisfaction measures”. What is meant by didn’t test lower? What is the lower score compared to? I also wondered what Dr. Toscano or the authors of the referenced study thought that particular finding meant.

6) “Number of sexual intercourse partners [11], sexual favors, rejection, intoxication [1], breakdown in conflict resolution [12], and jealousy [13] have also been suggested as both contributors to, and in one study justifications [14] of dating violence.” I assume that an increased number of sexual partners contributes to dating violence, but that was not clearly stated.

7) On page 5, please clarify what a “student free block” is.

8) On page 5, “Tell me about you dating experiences: what is dating like for you” should be changed to “Tell me about your dating experiences: what is dating like for you?”

9) On page 5, please clarify what you mean by the statement that begins “The attributes that constitute abuse were examined…”

10) On page 4, the author states, “An assumption of this study was that intimacy and abuse exist as a result of symbolic interactions within the context of the individual in society” and cites Strauss and Corbin, 1998. I do not believe that the statement is correctly cited.

11) What were some of the limitations of the study?

12) Please look at the punctuation of quotations within quotations of participants.

13) Reference # 3 is missing the publication year.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1) On page 4, instead of “Adolescent females who were married or had children were not included in the sample”, it would be clearer to state that adolescents who were married or parents were not eligible for inclusion in the study.

2) “Other reasons cited for the violence include anger, confusion, love, sadness, and a small percent (6%) to hatred [15].” This sentence could be written more clearly.

3) In the last paragraph in the literature review, the terms “deny” and “denial” were used in relationship to teens’ reporting experiencing or knowing about a violent relationship. I would like a bit more discussion about what is known about victims’ perceptions of violence and issues about screening for violence.

4) A summary paragraph at the end of the literature review would provide a useful transition to the methods section of the paper.

5) The statement, “…said this…” was frequently used to introduce a quotation. You may want to vary the way in which quotations are introduced.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests.
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.