

## **Associations between Parenting Practices and Acceptance of Dating Abuse Norms Among 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Students**

**Amanda Yeazel, BSW, Alexis Krones, Sarah Aronson**

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

Dating violence, including physical and psychological forms of abuse, is highly prevalent.

Dating violence in early adolescence can have a lifelong impact, for this period is critical for a child's development of a framework for future relationships. Therefore, research needs to understand what variables may be influencing unhealthy and abusive norms about dating.

Previous research has indicated parenting practices are associated with early adolescent's norms and behaviors. Therefore, we hypothesized positive parenting practices will be associated with less acceptance of dating abuse norms. Study participants include 59 7th-grade students from an Illinois urban area. They completed surveys to evaluate the impact of an intervention cultivated to prevent dating violence. Analyses were conducted in SPSS software to examine 1) how early adolescent's norms about dating relationships change from before to after the intervention, and 2) how parenting practices are associated with the acceptance of these dating abuse norms.

Findings are intended to address gaps within this literature, including better understanding the role parents can play in dating violence prevention. With this information, practitioners can use this research to implement interventions and programming to better address dating violence.

*Keywords:* norms, violence, messages

*About the authors: Amanda Yeazel, BSW, currently is an MSW student at UIUC with a concentration in mental health. Her research interests are in mental health as well.*

*Alexis Krones is a Social Work student who anticipates graduating in Spring, 2020. Her research interests include gender non-conforming youth, and the mental health of adolescents and women.*

*Sarah Aronson, also anticipates graduating in Spring, 2022. Her major is Social Work, with a minor in Anthropology. Her research interests revolve around children and schools.*

# Associations Between Parenting Practices and Acceptance of Dating Abuse Norms Among 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Students

Amanda Yeazel, BSW, Alexis Kronos, & Sarah Aronson Mentors: Rachel Garthe, PhD & Shongha Kim, MSW  
School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## INTRODUCTION

### General Concern of Dating Violence

- Dating violence, including physical and psychological forms of abuse within dating relationships, is highly prevalent (CDC, 2021).
- Dating violence can begin in early adolescence (ages 11-14) and it can have a lifelong impact.
- This period is critical for a child's development of a framework for future relationships.
- Research needs to understand what variables may be influencing unhealthy and abusive norms about dating.

### Dating Violence Prevention Program

This program is intended to target middle school students and help prevent dating violence. The program aims to defy negative relationship norms and overall improve the quality of the relationships in which students engage.

During this program, the agency discussed a multitude of things such as: 1) what is dating violence, 2) what it looks like, and 3) what a healthy relationship looks like and why everyone is deserving of one.

### Previous Research

Several studies have indicated parenting practices are associated with early adolescent's norms and behaviors (Garthe et al., 2019; Korucu et al., 2020).

### Hypothesis:

We hypothesized positive parenting practices will be associated with less acceptance of dating abuse norms after youth participate in a dating violence prevention program.

## Current Study

This study examines pre and post-test data from middle school students.

### Research Question:

Is there a relationship between parental messages about how to handle conflict (e.g., violently or nonviolent) and adolescents' dating violence norms?

This study is intended to address gaps within this literature, including better understanding the role parents can play in dating violence prevention.

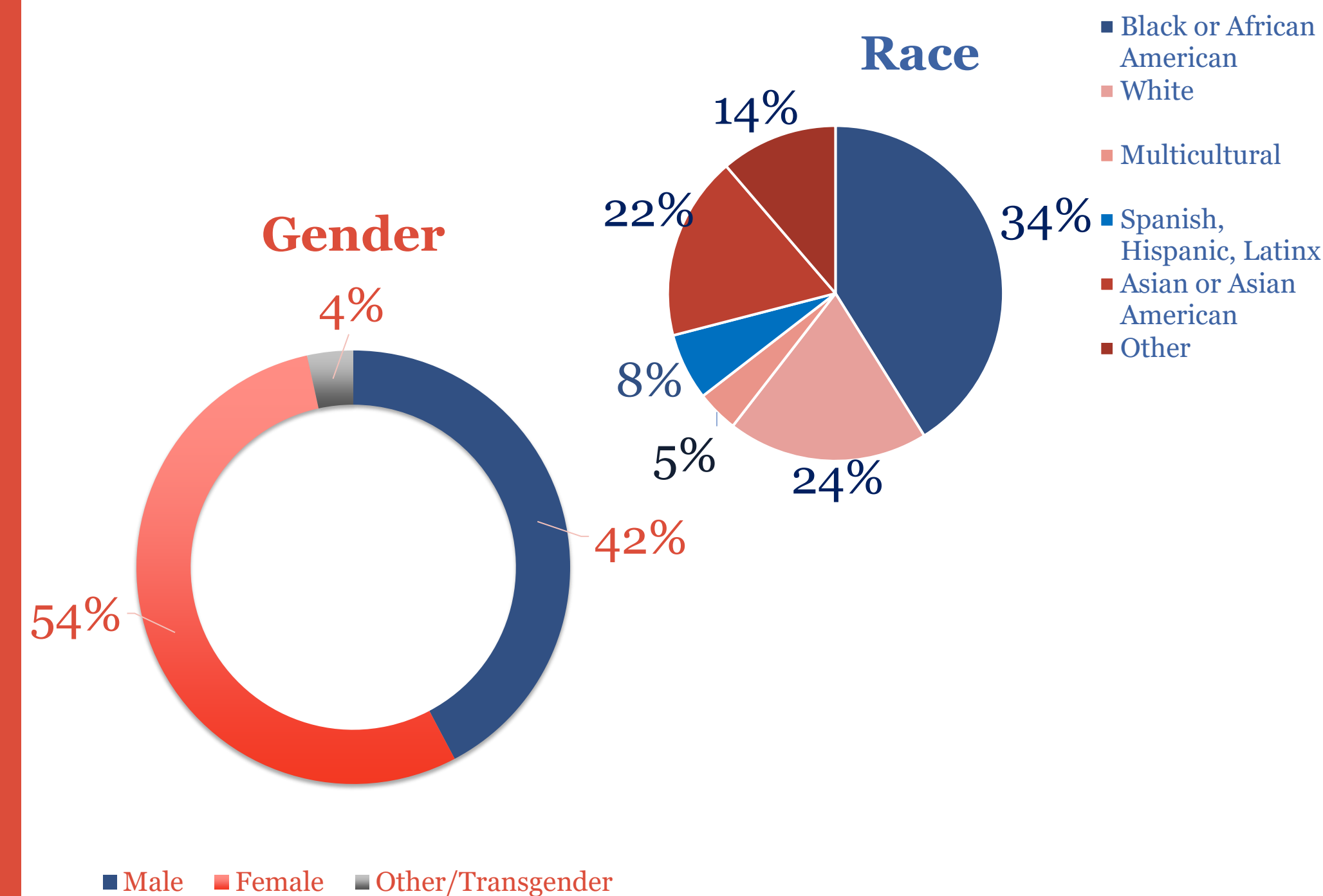
With this information, practitioners can use this research to implement interventions and programming to better address dating violence.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants in this study included 59 (N=59) 7th-grade students from an urban area in Illinois.

Ages varied between 12 (67%), 13 (30.5%), and 14 (1.7%).



### Procedure

Students participated in surveys to evaluate the impact of an intervention cultivated to prevent dating violence. The five-week program was during health class.

Students completed a pre and post-test survey.

They were surveyed about dating violence norms (Foshee et al., 1998) and parental messages supporting violent and nonviolent responses to conflict (Orpinas et al.).

This research focuses on two variables that were examined within these surveys.

1. dating violence norms (before and after programming)
2. parental messages

Example items include:

### Dating Violence Norms:

- "It is okay for a boy to hit his girlfriend if she did something to make him mad."
- "Girls sometimes deserve to be hit by the boys they date."

### Parental Messages:

How to Respond to Conflict:

- If someone wants to fight you – walk away.
- It's okay to fight if someone else starts it.

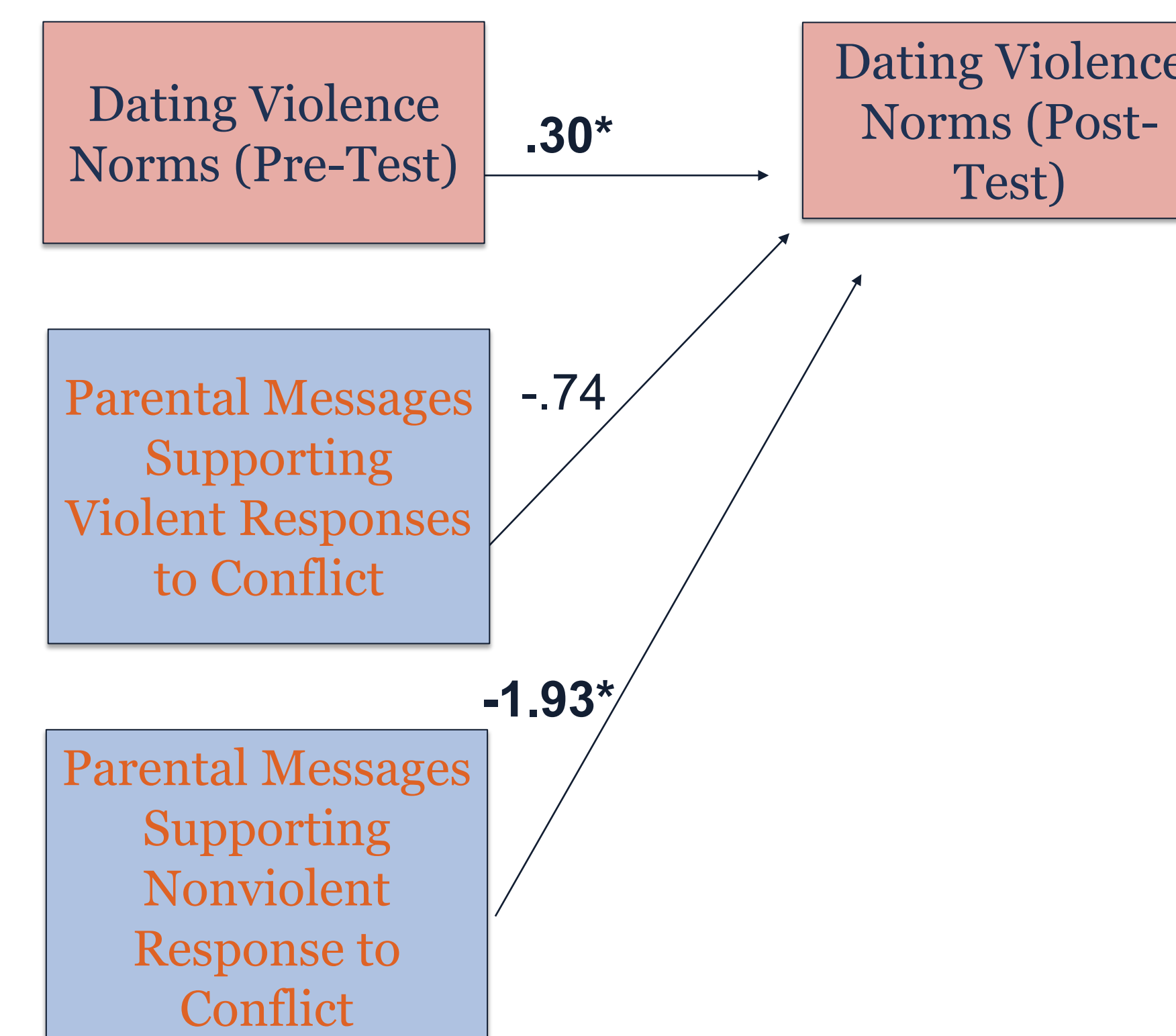
### Data Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in SPSS:

1. How early adolescent's norms about dating relationships change from before and after the intervention.
2. How parental messages are associated with the acceptance of these dating abuse norms.

## RESULTS

- No statistical significance was found within parental messages supporting violent responses to conflict and dating violence norms post-test.
- Statistical significance was found within parental messages supporting nonviolent response to conflict and dating violence norms post-test.



- Perceptions that their parents supported nonviolent responses to conflict was associated with fewer norms of dating violence at post-test.
- Perceptions that their parents supported violent responses to conflict was not associated with changes in dating violence norms at post-test.

## Discussion

### Parental Messages Supporting Nonviolent Responses to Conflict, Dating Violence Norms (Post-Test):

- These findings indicate the parental messages for nonviolent responses to conflict have a significant impact on children's perspectives about this issue.
- This may be an important topic to include in future trainings to prevent physical violence within relationships.
- Importance of including parents within dating violence prevention programs:
  - Youth are listening to what their parents suggest.
  - If parents suggest nonviolent solutions to conflict, youth are less likely to accept dating violence norms after programming.

### Parental Messages Supporting Violent Response to Conflict, Dating Violence Norms (Post-Test):

- These messages were not associated with changes in dating violence norms.
- These findings invite future researchers to investigate parental messages to better understand how to prevent violent responses to conflict when kids deem these behaviors to be normal based off situations they may have witnessed.

## Limitations

- Small sample size
- Different countries and areas such as rural vs. urban may differ in results
- Results may not be generalizable to all middle school students
- Other variables may exist (mediators) that impact the relationships found such as peer messages, student teacher relationships, self esteem etc.

## Implications

The organization using this program can use these findings to implement more effective training on dating violence for middle schoolers.

- **Include parents in the program**
- **Messages from parents supporting nonviolent responses to conflict may further protect youth from dating violence**

Social workers can use this research to broaden their knowledge and implement new skills, ideas and resources for dating violence.

It is important to teach middle school students about this information and to provide support in order to prevent dating violence in their current and future relationships.

## References and Contact Information

References are available upon request.

For more information on this study, contact:  
Amanda Yeazel  
ayeazel2@Illinois.edu

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