

**+ Impact of Biological Fathers On Dating Violence and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among A National Sample Of Adolescent Girls**

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- November, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014
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**+ Introduction**

- According to the CDC, dating violence among teenagers is defined as physical, sexual, and/or psychological/emotional abuse in a dating relationship
- Currently, between 9% to 40% of adolescents report experiencing dating violence
- A cluster of risk-related behaviors has been identified among adolescents who experience dating violence
  - High number of sexual partners
  - Inconsistent condom use
  - Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

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**+ Introduction Con't**

- Close parental relationships can protect youth from abusive dating relationships by helping them develop a sense of self-worth to reduce the possibility of becoming involved or staying in an abusive dating relationship
- While there has been much research on mothers, and their impact on reducing risk behaviors, to date little research has focused on the impact of fathers on reducing risk behaviors among their daughters, particularly as it pertains to dating violence and sexual risk behaviors among this population.

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### Father Involvement

- Historically, the study of father involvement in the lives of their children has not been an integral focal point in the social science literature
- In the past two decades, scholars have begun to recognize the importance of fathers in the family structure, noting the vital role that their presence plays in the healthy social and emotional development of their children
- In general, research suggests that children who grow up in homes without a father are more likely to be poorer than their peers from two-parent homes, and they're more likely to experience negative long-term health outcomes including delinquency, stunted emotional development etc

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### The Present Study

- The present study explored the relationship between biological father involvement (contact and closeness) and its impact on sexual risk behaviors and dating violence victimization among a national sample of adolescent girls.

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### Hypotheses

- Girls who report closeness to their biological fathers would be less likely to be victims of dating violence.
- Girls who report closeness to their biological fathers would engage in less risky sexual behaviors.
- The experience of dating violence will mediate the effect of father closeness on sexual risk behaviors.

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## Subjects

- Subjects in this cross-sectional analysis were a part of Wave 2 in the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, collected when respondents were between 13-21 years of age.
- Subjects were selected if they reported being female, being sexually active, and having had a romantic partner in the previous 18 months.

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## Variables

- Sexual risk behaviors – frequency of contraception use and report of contraception use during last sexual encounter (higher value, more risk)
- Dating violence – incidence reports of ever being sworn at, insulted, threatened, pushed, or the target of a thrown object (aggregated for each of three partners)
- Father closeness – frequency of communication, report of shared activities in the previous month, and respondent report of perceived quality of the father-daughter relationship.

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## Methods

- Structural equation model (STATA12 SE) utilizing a maximum likelihood missing values algorithm with normally distributed standard errors.
- Group SEM was used to evaluate difference by race (White/non-White). The latent variables were determined to be measuring the same constructs across groups.
- The proposed model is a good fit to the data (RMSEA = .03, CFI = .987, TLI = .985)

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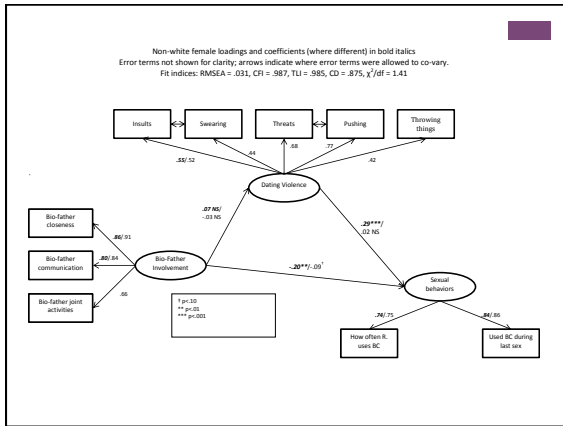
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## Results

- **H1: Father Closeness and Dating Violence**
  - There is no relationship between father closeness and dating violence (White,  $B = -.03, ns$ ; non-White,  $B = .07, ns$ ). This hypothesis is not supported.
- **H2: Father Closeness and Sexual Risk Behaviors**
  - The more father involvement a respondent reports, the less likely she is to engage in sexual risk behaviors. This relationship, however, is stronger for non-White girls ( $B = -.20, p < .01$ ) than for White girls ( $B = -.09, p < .10$ ). This hypothesis is supported.
- **H3: Mediation of Dating Violence**
  - Because there was no relationship between dating violence and father closeness, there is by definition no mediation. However, non-White girls who report dating violence are more likely to engage in sexual risk behaviors ( $B = .29, p < .001$ ).

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## Discussion

- The observed association of father involvement with adolescent sexual behaviors supports our hypothesis that greater father involvement is associated with less sexual behaviors
- This finding is consistent with previous research that has suggested that high-quality fathering is associated with less risky sexual behavior among adolescent daughters
- We also found support for our hypothesis that dating violence would be directly and positively associated with risky sexual behaviors
- That is, the more dating violence an adolescent female experienced, the more likely she was to report engaging in risky sexual behaviors

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## + Implications For Future Research

- Future studies should also consider father figures such as step-fathers and grandfathers in addition to biological fathers
- This analysis theorized that the father-daughter relationship was the imprinting relationship for a romantic relationship. It is possible that the actual imprinting relationship is the observed relationship between the father and the mother
- Professionals should strongly consider integrating fathers into prevention programs and policies to help reduce and prevent adolescent risky sexual behaviors

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## + Acknowledgements

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