Examining the Impact of Social Support and Child Maltreatment on Dating Violence Victimization Among Young Adult Women

[1]Damanjit Sandhu, [2]Mohd Ayub

[1]Professor, [2]Research Scholar
Department of Psychology, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Abstract- **This study investigates the interplay between social support, child maltreatment, and dating violence victimization among young women aged 18-26. A sample of 318 women from diverse localities and educational backgrounds was examined to elucidate these relationships. The study found significant correlations between dating violence victimization, perceived social support, and childhood maltreatment. Specifically, dating violence victimization demonstrated a negative correlation with perceived social support and a positive correlation with childhood maltreatment. Moreover, the findings reveal that both childhood maltreatment and social support serve as significant predictors of dating violence victimization among young women. These results underscore the critical importance of addressing both social support systems and childhood experiences in preventing and mitigating dating violence victimization among young women. Implications for intervention and future research directions are discussed.**

Key words: Dating violence victimization, childhood maltreatment and perceived social support.

1 Introduction

Dating refers to the process of individuals engaging in social interactions with romantic intentions, often with the aim of finding a compatible partner for a relationship. In traditional Indian society, arranged marriages have historically been prevalent, with families taking a central role in selecting a spouse for their children. However, recent years have witnessed a shift towards greater individual autonomy and choice in matters of relationships and dating. This evolution is evidenced by the rising popularity of dating apps and online platforms in India, particularly among the youth residing in urban areas. Despite this trend, dating and premarital relationships may still carry social stigma, particularly in more conservative communities. In certain regions of India, dating may be regarded as taboo or as a concept influenced by Western culture and not widely embraced. Additionally, religious beliefs and customs in conservative communities may impose restrictions on dating practices (Ragavan et al., 2021).

Dating encompasses a spectrum of experiences, ranging from enjoyable and thrilling to challenging and occasionally stressful. This is especially true for individuals who are new to the dating scene or who have encountered negative situations in the past. Unfortunately, dating can take a dark turn when one partner exerts power and control over the other, manifesting in various forms of abuse. Such abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal in nature, ultimately culminating in what is termed as dating violence (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999).

Partner violence against women is a significant global public health concern, with substantial short and long term effects on women's physical and mental health. A study by Sardinha et al. (2022) found that in 2018, the lifetime prevalence of physical, sexual, or both forms of dating violence among females aged 15 to 24 was approximately 24% to 26% worldwide. Additionally, the past year prevalence of such violence was reported to be 16% globally. Studies on dating violence in India are scarce. Som (2006) discovered that out of a total sample of 489 individuals, only 99 were involved in dating relationships, constituting approximately 20%. Similar findings have been observed in the Asian context. Researchers noted that the average duration of relationships in India was 13.8 months. Additionally, Chan et al. (2008) reported that 31.1% of females experienced suicidal thoughts due to violent dating relationships. According to their study, within the past 12 months, 26.7% of females in India were victims of assault, 6.7% experienced injurious assault, and 14.6% were victims of sexual assault.

2   Predictors of Dating violence Victimization

2.1 Child maltreatment and dating violence victimization

Dating violence and child maltreatment are both significant societal issues with profound and lasting negative impacts on individuals and communities. Observational learning, wherein individuals learn behaviors by observing others, can contribute to the perpetuation of both dating violence and child maltreatment. For instance, children may witness violent or abusive behavior between their parents or other adults, leading them to internalize such conduct as

acceptable social interactions. Likewise, individuals in romantic relationships may observe their partner engaging in abusive behavior and come to believe that such actions are permissible within a relationship. Research indicates that exposure to violence and abuse during childhood increases the likelihood of perpetrating dating violence during adolescence and adulthood. Similarly, individuals who have experienced or witnessed dating violence may be at higher risk of engaging in child maltreatment when they become parents themselves (Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle & Pittman, 2001).

Women with a history of childhood sexual abuse are particularly susceptible to dating violence (Clark et al., 2014). Recent research on school adolescents found that girls with a maltreatment history are more prone to abuse than boys, with elevated risks of anger, depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress-related prob- lems (Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle, & Pittman, 2001). Avoidant and insecure attach- ment styles have been identified as potential moderators of the effect of child- hood maltreatment on dating violence (Stover, Choi, & Mayes, 2018). Emotional abuse emerges as a significant risk factor for later sexual victimization and perpetration among survivors of childhood maltreatment (Zurbriggen, Gobin & Freyd, 2010). Childhood victimization increases the likelihood of further victimization in later childhood and adulthood (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1998; Krahe´,Scheinberger-Olwig, Waizenho¨fer & Kolpin, 1999; Liem & Boudewyn, 1999; Banyard, Arnold, & Smith, 2000). Moeller, Bachmann, and Moeller (1993) found that women with a history of maltreatment were more likely to experience adult domestic violence compared to those with no history. Similarly, Coid et al. (2001) observed a significant co-occurrence of sexual and physical abuse in childhood and adulthood, with higher chances of adult victimization among those with childhood victimization experiences. Some women may employ strategies to resist or escape violence in abusive relationships, while others may exhibit learned helplessness responses, stemming from perceptions of loss of control and helplessness learned from childhood experiences (Walker, 2016).

2.2 Social support and dating violence victimization

Perceived social support plays a crucial role in addressing dating violence victim- ization (Richards, Branch & Ray, 2014). Higher levels of perceived social support provide individuals with emotional, practical, and advice-based resources to cope with such challenges. Research indicates that this support acts as a protective fac- tor, empowering individuals to seek help, set boundaries, or leave abusive relationships (Holt & Espelage, 2005). Conversely, those with lower perceived social support may feel isolated and lack resources to address victimization, potentially increasing their risk of remaining in abusive relationships. Understanding this relationship is vital for developing effective interventions (Sa´nchez, Zafra, Go´mez, Lo´pez, Ortega, Ruiz & Viejo, 2024; Callahan, Tolman & Saunders, 2003). By strengthening social support networks and addressing barriers to seeking help, interventions can mitigate the risk of dating violence victimization and promote the well-being of affected individuals.

Social support acts as a protective factor against mental health issues stemming from intimate partner violence (IPV) or dating violence across different cultures and demographics (Ragavan et al., 2020; Banyard & Cross, 2008; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Richards et al., 2014; Escriba`Agu¨ir et al., 2010; Coker et al., 2002; Machisa, Christofides & Jewkes, 2018; Shuman et al., 2016). For instance, Ragavan et al. (2020) found that marginalized teens with high social support were less likely to experience relationship abuse. Banyard & Cross (2008) observed that dating violence was associated with mental health problems among those with lower social support. Holt & Espelage (2005) found that perceived social support moderated the relationship between emotional dating violence and depressive/anxiety symptoms among African American males. In a longitudinal study, Richards et al. (2014) discovered that increased support from friends led to decreases in physical and emotional dating violence perpetration and victimization. Similarly, Escriba`Agu¨ir et al. (2010) found that social support, particularly from family, mitigated the negative impact of IPV on psychological well-being. Coker et al. (2002) reported that consistent emotional support from friends, family, and nonabusive current partners reduced the risk of poor mental health outcomes. Additionally, Machisa, Christofides & Jewkes (2018) found that social support indicators were associated with increased resilience among abused women. Shuman et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of social support mechanisms in reducing shame, stigma, and isolation associated with IPV experiences.

Several studies have explored the interplay between social support, childhood maltreatment, and dating violence victimization. These studies have found that individuals who have experienced childhood maltreatment and lack adequate social support are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of dating violence. Conversely, those who have experienced childhood maltreatment but have strong social support systems may be better equipped to recognize and address unhealthy relationship dynamics, reducing their risk of victimization. Based on these studies we hypothesized that Childhood maltreatment and Perceived social support will predict dating violence victimization among women.

3   Methodology
3.1 Participants and Procedure

This study aimed to investigate the risk factors associated with dating violence victimization among young adult

women. A total of 710 participants from various cities in Punjab and Chandigarh were initially surveyed using convenience sampling. Among them, 345 participants currently in dating relationships were included, while 365 participants not in dating relationships were excluded. Finally, 318 young women aged 19 to 26 years who scored at least 1 on the Dating Violence Questionnaire by Rodr´ıguez D´ıaz et al. (2017) were selected after obtaining prior consent.

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants

Demographics	Count	Percentage (%)
Locality		
Rural	125	39
Urban	193	61
Educational Qualification		
UG	139	44
PG	124	39
PG & Above	55	17
Age		
Mean	22	
Range	19 – 26	
N		318

3.2 Demographics
The demographics of dating violence victimization suggest that the majority of participants were from urban areas (61%) compared to rural areas (39%). In terms of educational qualification, a slightly higher percentage of participants had completed undergraduate (UG) studies (44%) compared to those with post-graduate (PG) qualifications (39%). A smaller proportion of participants had attained PG & Above qualifications (17%). The mean age of the participants was 22 years, with the age range spanning from 19 to 26 years. These demographics indicate a diverse sample in terms of locality, educational background, and age, reflecting the broader population of young adult women in the study region.

3.3 Instruments
The Dating Violence Questionnaire-Revised (Rodr´ıguez D´ıaz et al., 2017): DVQ-R is a reliable scale designed to assess victimization within dating relationships. It consists of 20 items categorized into five subscales: Coercion, Detachment, Physical violence, Humiliation, and Sexual violence. These subscales cover various forms of abusive behaviors such as testing love, irresponsibility, physical violence, criticism, and sexual coercion. The scale is suitable for individuals aged 15 to 26 and has demonstrated good psychometric properties, with a coefficient alpha of 0.85.
The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988): This is a reliable scale consisting of 12 items, each rated on a seven point Likert scale ranging from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree." Developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in 1988, it assesses perceived social support across three dimensions: family, friends, and significant others. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 for the overall scale, indicating strong reliability. Additionally, the MSPSS has shown fairly good construct validity. Its psychometric properties have been examined in various cultural contexts, and multiple studies by researchers such as Akhtar et al. (2010), Stewart et al. (2014), and Laksmita et al. (2020) have confirmed its reliability and validity. The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire Short Form (CTQ-SF), developed by Bernstein and Fink in 1998, is a 28 item self report inventory designed to screen for histories of abuse and neglect during childhood. It is suitable for adolescents aged 12 and older as well as adults.
The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire Short Form (CTQ-SF) (Bernstein & Fink, 1998): The CTQ-SF assesses

five types of maltreatment or abuse: Emotional Maltreatment, Physical Maltreatment, Sexual Maltreatment, Emotional Neglect, and Physical Neglect. Each type is represented by five items, and individuals respond to statements about childhood events using a 5 point Likert scale based on the frequency of their experiences. Psychometric validation studies have consistently demonstrated the reliability and validity of the CTQ-SF. Various research studies, including those conducted by Georgieva et al. (2021), Viola et al. (2016), and Loy et al. (2020), have confirmed its valid factor structure and excellent reliability.

3.4 Statistical Analysis
For the presented study, descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of the sample characteristics. These statistics included means and standard deviations to summarize dating violence victimization, childhood maltreatment and perceived social support. Furthermore, correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between dating violence victimization, childhood maltreatment and perceived social support. Regression analysis was then employed to predict dating violence victimization among the participants. By using the "olsrr" package in, regression models were constructed, with dating violence victimization as the dependent variable and childhood trauma and perceived social support. This analysis allowed for the determination of the unique contributions of each predictor to the variance in dating violence victimization. Data were analyzed by R version 4.2.1. (R Core Team).

4　Results
Dating violence victimization exhibits a mean score of 38.22 (SD = 6.56). Notably, significant negative correlations are observed between dating violence victimization and perceived social support from friends ($r = -0.37$, $p < 0.01$), parents ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$), and significant others ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of social support correspond to lower levels of dating violence victimization. Conversely, positive correlations are noted between dating violence victimization and emotional maltreatment in childhood ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), physical maltreatment ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), sexual maltreatment ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), emotional neglect ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), and physical neglect ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) [see Table 2.].

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of the Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DVV	38.22	6.56								
Friend	4.25	1.34	-.37**							
Parent	3.75	1.11	-.40**	.59**						
Other	4.51	1.02	-.46**	.60**	.55**					
E.M.	7.23	3.10	.28**	-.12*	-.18**	-.19**				
Phy.M.	5.77	2.02	.36**	-.32**	-.14*	-.08	.41**			
Sexual.M.	5.66	3.08	.41**	-.31**	-.15**	-.09	.30**	.38**		
Emo.Neg.	8.93	3.63	.42**	-.26**	-.21**	-.18**	.20**	.46**	.55**	
Phy.Neg	6.70	2.76	.31**	-.37**	-.24**	-.14*	.39**	.33**	.30**	.63**

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01
DVV = dating violence victimization, Friend = friends social support, Parent = parents social support, Other = others social support, E.M. = emotional maltreatment, Phy.M. = physical maltreatment,Sexual = sexual maltreatment, Emo. Neg. = emotional neglect, Phy.Neh. = physical neglect.

The stepwise regression analysis was applied. In the stepwise regression analysis, the unstandardized (*b*) and standardized (*β*) regression coefficients for each predictor variable were examined at each step. In a stepwise regression analysis examining predictors of dating violence victimization among young adults, each model revealed significant contributions of different variables. The initial model, comprising only significant others' social support, significantly predicted dating violence victimization ($b = -2.94$, $β = -0.46$, $p < .01$), explaining 20.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .207$, $p < .01$). Subsequent models added sexual maltreatment, physical maltreatment, parental social

support, emotional neglect, and friends' social support, each incrementally increasing the explained variance. Sexual maltreatment ($b = 0.79$, $\beta = 0.37$, $p < .01$), physical maltreatment ($b = 0.74$, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .01$), and emotional neglect ($b = 0.24$, $\beta = 0.13$, $p < .05$) emerged as significant predictors, with higher levels associated with increased victimization. Conversely, parental social support ($b = -0.88$, $\beta = -0.15$, $p < .01$) and friends' social support ($b = -0.65$, $\beta = -0.13$, $p < .05$) were associated with lower victimization levels. The percentage of variance increased at each step is given in table 3.

5   Discussion

The current study's findings align with prior research demonstrating that emotional neglect significantly predicts dating violence victimization (Gagne´ et al., 2005; Shorey et al., 2011; Wolfe et al., 2003; Banyard et al., 2001). Childhood emotional neglect has enduring consequences, leading to psychological distress and increased susceptibility to dating violence victimization (Gagne´ et al., 2005). Recognizing emotional neglect's role as a risk factor underscores the importance of providing children with emotional support to prevent future dating violence victimization. Early intervention programs targeting emotional neglect may effectively mitigate the risk of dating violence victimization. This echoes previous research highlighting the association between childhood emotional neglect and subsequent experiences of dating violence.

Research consistently underscores childhood sexual maltreatment as a significant risk factor for dating violence victimization among women (Bonomi et al., 2013; Widom & Wilson, 2015). Bonomi et al. (2012) conducted a study revealing a positive relationship between childhood sexual maltreatment and dating violence victimization among women. Similarly, Widom and Wilson (2015) found that women with histories of childhood sexual maltreatment faced an elevated risk of intimate partner violence victimization. These findings emphasize the enduring impact of childhood sexual maltreatment on later experiences of violence in romantic relationships. Addressing the trauma of childhood sexual maltreatment through appropriate interventions is crucial for preventing dating violence victimization and promoting healthy relationship dynamics among women.

This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the association between physical maltreatment and dating violence. Exner, Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman (2013) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that childhood physical

Table 3: Stepwise Regression Predicting Dating Violence Victimization among Young Adult Women

Model	Predictor	b	β	R^2	ΔR^2
1	Significant Others	-2.94**	-0.46	$R^2 = .207$**	
2	Significant Others	-2.73**	-0.42		
	Sexual Maltreatment	0.79**	0.37	$R^2 = .342$**	$\Delta R^2 = .135$**
3	Significant Others	-2.67**	-0.41		
	Sexual Maltreatment	0.61**	0.29		
	Physical Maltreatment	0.74**	0.23	$R^2 = .386$**	$\Delta R^2 = .044$**
4	Significant Others	-2.16**	-0.33		
	Sexual Maltreatment	0.58**	0.27		
	Physical Maltreatment	0.70**	0.22		
	Parent Social Support	-0.88**	-0.15	$R^2 = .401$**	$\Delta R^2 = .015$**
5	Significant Others	-2.08**	-0.32		
	Sexual Maltreatment	0.46**	0.22		
	Physical Maltreatment	0.58**	0.18		
	Parent Social Support	-0.88**	-0.14		

	Emotional Neglect	0.24*	0.13	$R^2 = .412$**	$\Delta R^2 = .011$*
6	Significant Others	-2.43**	-0.38		
	Sexual Maltreatment	0.51**	0.24		
	Physical Maltreatment	0.67**	0.21		
	Parent Social Support	-0.88**	-0.18		
	Emotional Neglect	0.22*	0.12		
	Friend Social Support	-0.65*	0.13	$R^2 = .420$**	$\Delta R^2 = .008$*

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

abuse significantly predicts both perpetration and victimization of dating violence during adolescence and adulthood. Furthermore, Vagi et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating that experiencing physical dating violence during adolescence increases the likelihood of experiencing physical intimate partner violence in adulthood. These studies underscore the enduring impact of childhood physical maltreatment on subsequent experiences of violence in romantic relationships, emphasizing the need for interventions to address and prevent such violence across the lifespan.

Research consistently demonstrates the predictive role of social support from friends in dating violence victimization. Edwards et al. (2015) found that low levels of friend support correlated with increased physical and psychological dating violence among young adult women. In concurrence, Swartout et al. (2015) revealed a negative association between social support from friends and intimate partner violence victimization among college students. Richards, Branch & Ray (2014) highlighted the protective function of friend support in reducing both perpetration and victimization of dating violence among female adolescents. Jankowiak et al. (2020) emphasized the pivotal role of social support in buffering adolescents from the detrimental effects of dating violence. Pe´rez, Mart´ınez et al. (2021) unveiled a link between lower parental support and greater acceptance of violence, while Greenman & Matsuda (2016) emphasized the enduring influence of family and peer support on dating and adult intimate partner violence. These findings underscore the multifaceted dynamics of social support in mitigating the risk of dating violence victimization.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from various studies underscore the multifaceted nature of dating violence and its association with childhood experiences and social support dynamics. Emotional neglect, childhood sexual maltreatment, and physical maltreatment have all been identified as significant risk factors for dating violence victimization, highlighting the enduring impact of early life adversity on later relationship experiences. Recognizing these risk factors emphasizes the importance of early intervention and support programs to address childhood trauma and promote healthy relationship dynamics. Moreover, the predictive role of social support, particularly from friends and parents, in mitigating the risk of dating violence victimization emphasizes the importance of fostering supportive relationships across different developmental stages. Parental support may also show direct associations with dating violence, its broader importance in shaping attitudes and behaviors related to violence underscores the need for comprehensive support systems. Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between individual, relational, and societal factors in shaping experiences of dating violence, underscoring the importance of multifaceted approaches to prevention and intervention efforts.

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