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# THE EXPERIENCE OF DATING VIOLENCE AMONG LATINO ADOLESCENTS

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# THE EXPERIENCE OF DATING VIOLENCE AMONG LATINO ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents begin to form romantic relationships during middle school and high school years. Some, however, may face dating violence and other forms of victimization including child maltreatment, conventional crime (e.g., physical assaults), peer and sibling victimization, stalking, and sexual victimization. Dating violence in particular has been associated not only with physical injury, but appears to also lead to smoking, marijuana use, depression, binge-eating and suicide attempts (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). Adolescents who experience dating violence are also at greater risk of experiencing other forms of victimization, and may subsequently experience additional difficulties due to the effects of this polyvictimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). Yet, we know the majority of victims of dating violence do not seek help likely for reasons including stigma, wanting to maintain privacy, lack of knowledge about resources, and not recognizing violent acts as worthy of intervention (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). Though much has been done by researchers and advocates to understand, address, and prevent dating violence, certain groups, such as Latinos are understudied. It is important to understand dating violence for this group and explore the ways cultural factors such as familism and acculturation may influence these processes.

## GOALS OF THE DAVILA STUDY

1. Determine the extent of dating violence in a sample of male and female Latino adolescents.
2. Determine the coexistence of other forms of victimization among those who experienced dating violence.
3. Examine formal service utilization among Latino adolescents who experienced dating violence.
4. Examine informal help-seeking among Latino adolescents who experienced dating violence.
5. Examine culturally-relevant factors associated with the experience of and responses to dating violence.
6. Determine the psychosocial impact of dating violence on Latino adolescents.
7. Evaluate the role of social resources on victimization and psychosocial functioning among victimized Latino adolescents.

## THE STUDY

The National Institute of Justice funded the Dating Violence Among Latino Adolescents (DAVILA) Study which sought to gain an understanding of dating violence experienced by Latino adolescents. The study sought to understand how many Latino teens are victims of dating violence (including psychological, physical, sexual and stalking dating violence) and how dating violence overlaps with other victimization experiences (i.e., child maltreatment, conventional crime, peer and sibling victimization, sexual victimization and stalking). Further, the study examined adolescents' psychosocial functioning (i.e., depression, anxiety, hostility, school performance, delinquency), help-seeking efforts (i.e., formal and informal), culturally relevant characteristics (i.e., immigrant status, acculturation, and familism), and social support. The DAVILA study surveyed 1,525 Latino adolescents and their caregivers across the nation. Phone interviews were conducted either in English or Spanish. The sample consisted of both male (48.8%) and female (51.2%) adolescents ages 12-18 with an average age of 14.85 years. The majority of these adolescents were born in the United States (79.9%), heterosexual (92.8%), and not employed (90.1%). Their caregivers were generally married (67.5%), had a high school education or less (66.3%), and had household incomes of less than \$29,999 (61%).

## RATES OF VICTIMIZATION

Overall, findings from DAVILA show that 19.5% of Latino teens experienced dating violence in the past year- equivalent to 1 in 5 Latino adolescents. The prevalence of each form of dating violence was:

- Psychological dating violence (14.8%)
- Physical dating violence (6.6%)
- Sexual dating violence (5.6%)
- Stalking dating violence (1%)

**Overall, findings from DAVILA show that 19.5% of Latino teens experienced dating violence in the past year- equivalent to 1 in 5 Latino adolescents.**

Victims of dating violence were often victimized in other ways. Seventy-one percent of dating violence victims also experienced at least one other form of victimization in the past year as shown in second figure on page 4. Those who experienced dating violence

were 2.75 times more likely to experience conventional crime, 2.32 times more likely to experience peer/sibling victimization, and 5.25 times more likely to experience sexual victimization compared to those who did not experience dating violence.

These results show that dating violence is prevalent in the Latino community, as it is among other ethnicities (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). The bulk of the dating violence reported in DAVILA was psychological in nature. Boys were significantly more likely to report any dating violence, physical dating violence, sexual dating violence and psychological dating violence than girls as shown in the first figure. Specifically, boys were more often slapped or hit by a dating partner, pushed or shoved, beat up, threatened, had something destroyed by their boyfriend/girlfriend, and had partners insist on sex. Girls, however, tended to report more attempted rape. Dating violence victims were also significantly more likely to experience all forms of victimization than those who did not experience dating violence as shown in the second figure. Thus, dating violence victims are more likely to be victimized in multiple ways. Prevention and intervention efforts should ensure programs are inclusive of male victimization experiences and also responsive to other forms of violence victims of dating violence experience.

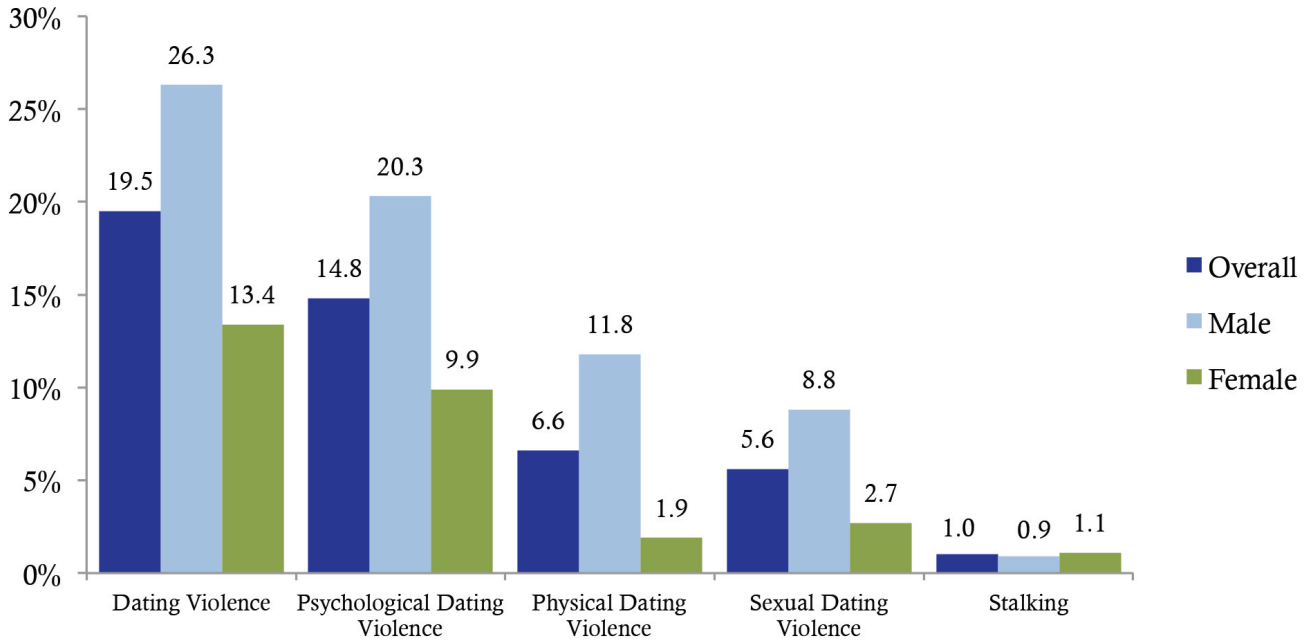
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**Dating violence victims were also significantly more likely to experience all forms of victimization than those who did not experience dating violence.**

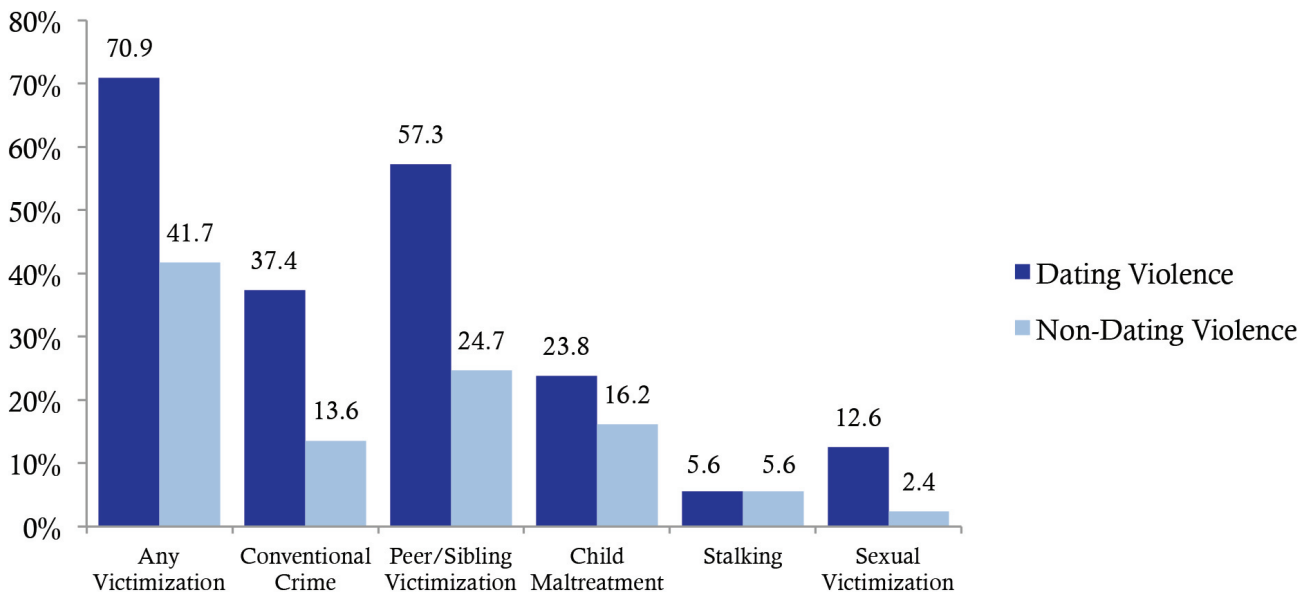
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## Dating Violence Prevalence



## Prevalence of Victimization by Dating Violence Status



## HELP-SEEKING

Help-seeking efforts were ascertained for a subset of those who experienced physical, sexual and/or stalking dating violence (not psychological). Overall, 15.6% of Latino victims of physical, sexual, and/or stalking dating violence sought help from a formal source. Adolescents were most likely to seek formal help from school personnel (9.2%), indicating a need for school-based prevention and education programs addressing victimization and resources for potential first-responders. Boys were significantly less likely to seek formal help overall, school-based help, social services, restraining orders, or medical help. Services may not be welcoming to boys or boys may be less likely to seek services given the stigma of being a victimized male. Utilization of Latino male survivors of dating violence as role models and direct discussion of masculinity may help boys be more open about their experiences in prevention and intervention programs. Reasons for not seeking formal help included, in order from most to least common, “I didn’t think of it,” “I wanted to keep it private,” “Too minor,” and “Shame and embarrassment.” These reasons indicate that Latino adolescents may not recognize certain acts as dating violence and efforts should also be made along these lines.

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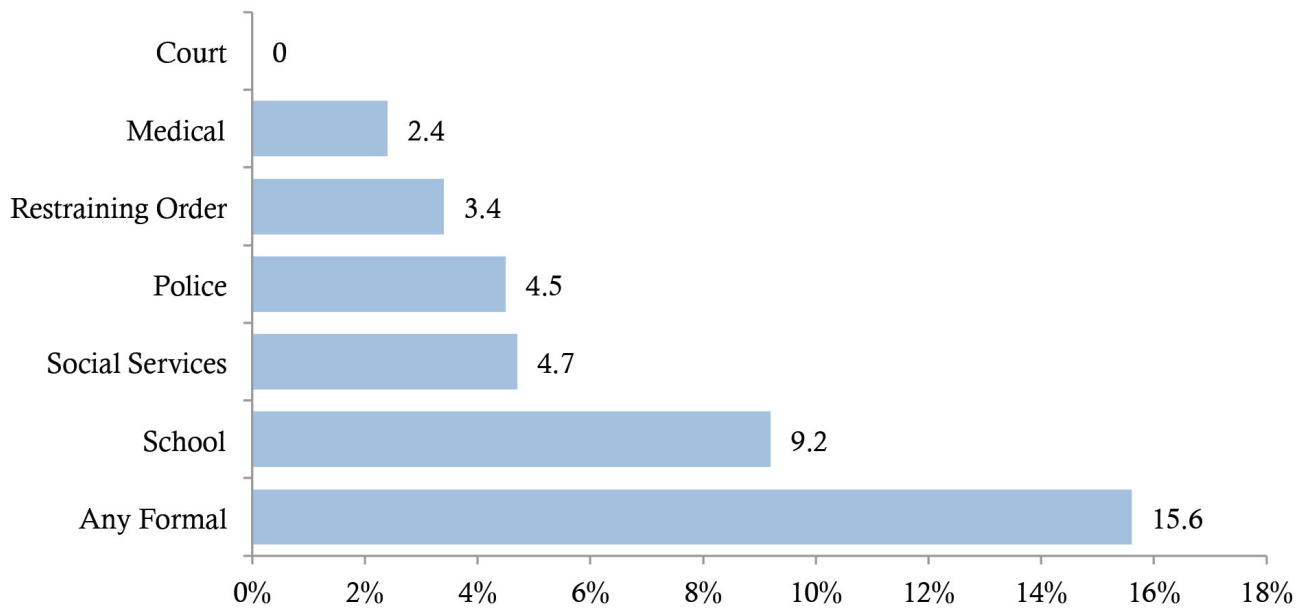
**About 37% of teen victims of physical, sexual, and/or stalking dating violence sought neither formal nor informal help—that is, they did not talk to anyone about what happened.**

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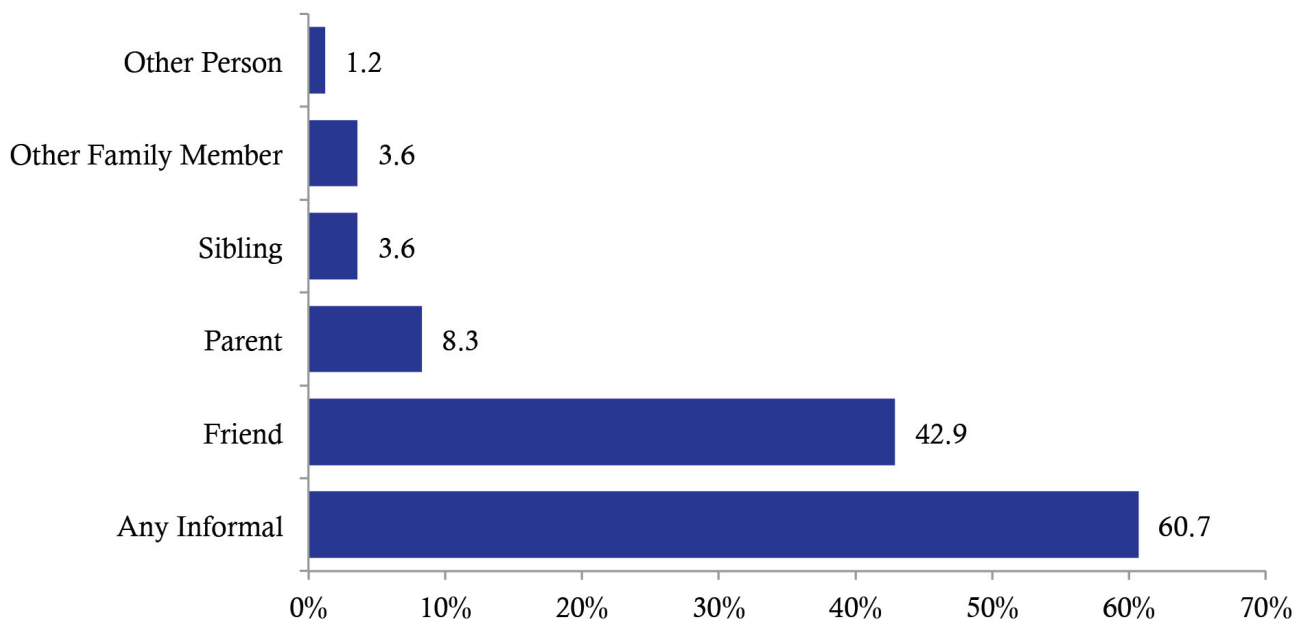
More Latino adolescents who had been victims of physical, sexual, and/or stalking dating violence sought help from informal sources (60.7%). When examining sources of informal help, adolescents were most likely to seek help from a friend (42.9%). While similar proportions of males (43.6%) and females (41.4%) sought help from friends, a higher proportion of females (17.2%) spoke to parents about their victimization than males (3.6%). About 37% of teen victims of physical, sexual, and/or stalking dating violence sought neither formal nor informal help—that is, they did not talk to anyone about what happened. Given that peers are common confidants for victims of dating violence, peers should be educated on steps to take if a friend comes to them for help after a victimization experience.



## Formal Help-Seeking



## Informal Help-Seeking



## CULTURAL FACTORS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Acculturation and immigrant status were examined in relationship to dating violence and help-seeking. Those who were high on Latino orientation had lower odds of experiencing any dating violence, physical dating violence and psychological dating violence than those low on Latino orientation. This difference in victimization experiences could be attributed to multiple factors including cultural values that emphasize family support, connectedness, and the welfare of the collective group. Immigrant status did not influence the likelihood of experiencing dating violence. Help-seeking was not influenced by acculturation or immigrant status, but familism was associated with higher odds of formal help-seeking. Families can act as gatekeepers of services or perhaps teens in cohesively families are able to more openly talk about dating violence, leading to help-seeking.

Social support was an influential aspect of victimization, as adolescents with greater social support were less likely to experience any dating violence, physical dating violence, sexual dating violence, psychological dating violence and polyvictimization. For the full sample, social support decreased depression, anxiety and hostility, but the influence on hostility did not hold when dating violence was present. Thus, while social support generally decreased hostility, it did not for victims of dating violence. The likelihood of delinquency was also diminished when social support was present even for those who experienced dating violence. School performance was also bolstered when social support was present for the full sample, but this did not extend to dating violence victims. In other words, social support was not sufficient to improve academic performance if an adolescent had experienced dating violence.

## THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF DATING VIOLENCE

Symptoms of psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and hostility were self-reported by participants. Dating violence was associated with mental health variables. Clinical levels of depression

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**Clinical levels of depression were apparent in 5.5% of dating violence victims while 5.1% exhibited clinical levels of anxiety and 5.9% exhibited clinical levels of hostility.**

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were apparent in 5.5% of dating violence victims while 5.1% exhibited clinical levels of anxiety and 5.9% exhibited clinical levels of hostility. When taking into account demographic variables and the total level of victimization (inclusive of conventional crime, child maltreatment, sexual victimization, peer/sibling victimization, and stalking), only psychological dating violence was

associated with clinical levels of hostility. Clearly, examinations of psychological functioning need to screen for a full range of victimizations.

School-related outcomes were also associated with dating violence. Parents of teens who experienced dating violence reported that their children received below average (6.7%), average (36.9%), and above

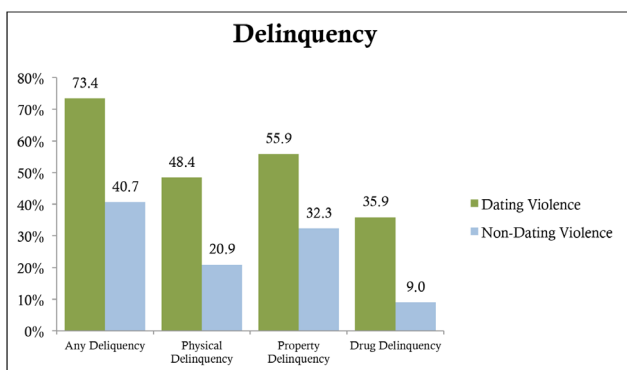
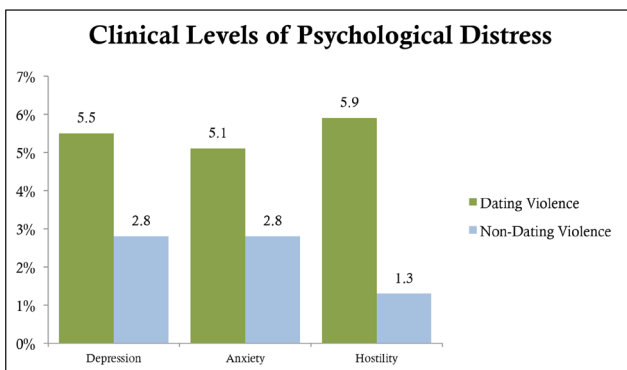
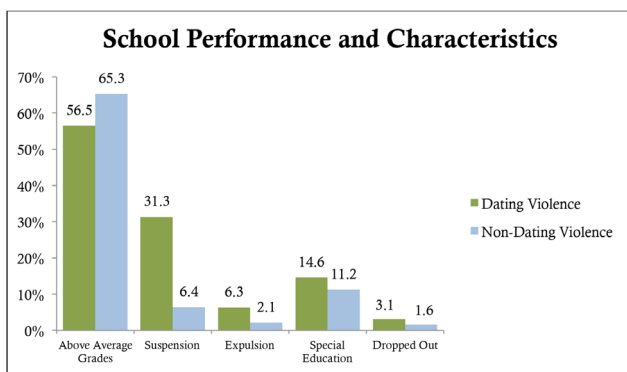


average (56.5%) grades. Additionally, 31.2% of victims of dating violence were suspended from school and 3.1% dropped out of school. About 15% received special education services. Grades and the rate of being suspended varied significantly from those who did not experience dating violence. In comparison, those who did not experience dating violence received below average (6.5%), average (28.1%), and above average (65.3%) grades and 6.4% were suspended. Experiencing physical dating violence was associated with receiving special education services. Total victimization, but not dating violence specifically, was associated with school performance. As total victimization increased, the odds of

**31.2% of victims of dating violence were suspended from school and 3.1% dropped out of school.**

doing well in school decreased. In sum, there are serious consequences that victims face and these individuals may require additional guidance and resources, especially in the school setting.

Delinquency was common among victims of dating violence with 73.4% engaging in some delinquent act, 48.4% engaging in physical delinquency, 55.9% engaging in property delinquency, and 35.9% in drug delinquency. In comparison, 40.7% of those who did not experience dating violence engaged in some delinquent act, 20.9% in physical delinquency, 32.3% in property delinquency, and 9% in drug delinquency. There was thus a significant difference between those who experienced dating violence and those who did not experience dating violence on delinquency. When taking demographic factors into account, psychological dating violence increased the likelihood of engaging in delinquency, and this remained the case even after accounting for total victimization. Thus psychological dating violence victimization was strongly related to delinquent behavior. Given the influence of psychological dating violence on psychological functioning and delinquency, its effects need to be taken seriously and should be investigated in future studies.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continued emphasis on dating violence prevention and intervention is needed, including possible use of bystander intervention programs. Expansion of programs should consider the commonality and consequences of psychological dating violence. Teens should be educated in recognizing and addressing all forms of dating violence, including psychological dating violence.
2. Programs and services for dating violence also need to acknowledge and appropriately respond to the full range of victimizations teen dating violence victims experience.
3. There should be an emphasis on perpetration and victimization for both genders. Gender specific programs may direct attention to aggression and acknowledgment of victimization. Culturally informed conversations of these dynamics are needed.
4. School districts should work to bolster the ability of schoolteachers and staff to recognize and appropriately respond to dating violence.
5. Service providers need to outreach to Latino boys as they are especially unlikely to seek services.
6. Programs should build on the cultural strengths of Latino teens. Values such as family cohesion, *respeto*, *personalismo*, and ethnic pride can be brought into youth prevention/intervention efforts.
7. Social support is important in the experience and response to dating violence. As social support is strengthened, teens may be less frequently victimized or get help when they are.

## PUBLICATIONS FROM DAVILA

Sabina, C., Cuevas, C.A. & Bell, K.A. (2013). *Final report: Dating Violence Among Latino Adolescents (DAVILA)*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Sabina, C., Cuevas, C.A., & Rodriguez, R. (2012). Who to turn to? Latino teens, dating violence, and help-seeking. Submitted to *Psychology of Violence*.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on data from the Dating Violence Among Latino Adolescent (DAVILA) Study, a bilingual national phone survey conducted between September 2011 and February 2012. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from both principal investigators' institutions and the data were collected by Abt SRBI, a survey firm with prior experience on sensitive topics such as dating violence. The study assessed the experiences of a national sample of 1,525 Latino adolescents and their caregivers living in the United States by 1) random-digit dialing families living in high-density Latino areas, and 2) sampling from a list of households with Latino surnames. Households were screened for 12-18 year olds who self-identify as Latino. Questions were asked to both the primary caregiver and the adolescent. Parents consented to both their own participation and the participation of their children (if 17 years old or younger). All participants were given the contact information for the National Child Abuse Hotline. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish. The minimum cooperation rate (i.e. ratio of completed and partial interviews to all interviews, refusals, and break-offs) of the sample was 55%.

Adolescents were evaluated using the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005) to assess childhood victimization including conventional crime, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, and sexual assault, and an additional question was added to gauge stalking victimization. Dating violence was assessed via the JVQ and the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 Short Form, which asked about psychological, physical and sexual violence in the past year (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Scales of the Brief Symptom Inventory concerning depression, anxiety, and hostility (Derogatis, 1993) were measured in addition to Frequency of Delinquency Behavior (Dahlberg, Toal, & Behrens, 1998), School Performance and Involvement (Brown, 1999), and a help-seeking questionnaire (Block, 2000; Gelles & Straus, 1988). Acculturation was assessed through the Brief Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans-II (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) which asked about an individual's level of linguistic ability, linguistic preference, and personal associations. Social support was determined through the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) that assessed support from family, friends, and significant others. Familism was evaluated through the familism subscale of the Mexican American Cultural Values Scale for Adolescents and Adults (Knight, et al., 2010).

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Dr. Sabina is an Assistant Professor of Social Sciences and contributes to the Applied Behavioral Science and Sociology majors, along with the Community Psychology and Social Change masters program. She earned her doctorate in Applied Social Psychology from Loyola University Chicago with a certificate in Women's Studies. Her research centers on interpersonal victimization, especially understanding cultural influences on victimization and help-seeking responses among Latinos. Dr. Sabina has also worked to examine the service needs of victims across Pennsylvania. She is specifically interested in intimate partner violence among Latinos.



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Dr. Cuevas is an Associate Professor at Northeastern University in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. He earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University. Dr. Cuevas's research interests are in the area of family violence, victimization and trauma, and sexual offending. His scholarly work examines interpersonal violence and its association to other forms of victimization, psychological distress, and service utilization, particularly among ethno-racial minorities. His research also looks at the role of mental health in understanding the victimization-delinquency link. Additionally, Dr. Cuevas is a licensed psychologist providing community-based clinical services to victims of family violence and sexual offenders.





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