

Evaluation of a Study on the Role of Outside Advice in Relationships With Dating Violence

Jessica S. Triska¹

College of Nursing, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, USA

Abstract

The grounded theory study by Martsof et al. (2011) on how adolescents incorporate the views of others in dealing with troubled dating relationships was critiqued for quality and support of conclusions. The study was methodologically sound but lacked logical flow and made too many important statements that were unsupported or unrelated to each other or the purpose of the study. Overall, dependability of this study is medium, but no groundbreaking new information was discovered nor were important previous studies confirmed.

Critique of the Introduction

In the article “Listening to the Voices of Important Others: How Adolescents Make Sense of Troubled Dating Relationships”, the authors Martsof, Draucker, Bednarz, and Lea (2011) emphasized the incidence rates and prevalence of adolescent dating violence (ADV) and that dating violence normally occurred within the “context of adolescent psychosocial development” with the adolescent’s goal of “developing autonomy” and experimenting with “risk taking behaviors” (p. 1-2). This statement shows the complexity of adolescence in regards to personal relationships and ADV. However, risk factors and negative outcomes associated with ADV are not critical to the study purpose yet an entire paragraph was dedicated to relating this information.

The second paragraph in the background and significance section did relate directly to the

purpose of the study, since the literature review cited studies that show how adolescents interact with other people for advice on dating relationships. However, several off topic sentences were included that deal with how an adolescent in a relationship might seek to justify ADV, the reluctance of their peers to discourage troubling relationships, and other statistics unrelated to the study purpose.

The third paragraph was helpful because it deals with who adolescents are likely to ask for advice and why they are willing to do so. The fifth paragraph attempted to provide a semblance of why the study should be conducted, namely that if programs can be implemented to help adolescents “recognize behaviors that are considered to be unhealthy in dating relationships”, then perhaps ADV incidence might be lowered (Martsof et al., 2011, p. 2). Unfortunately, yet more information was provided about the response of peers to those involved in ADV relationships, but this distracted from the true study purpose once again.

¹Corresponding Author: J.S. Triska, 369 Belmont Drive, Bristol, TN, 37620, triska@goldmail.etsu.edu.

After having moved the reader in several different directions about where the introduction is heading, the study purpose was revealed. The investigators sought to “develop a typology of ways by which adolescents incorporate the views of important others in making sense of their troubled dating relationships” (Martsolf et al., 2011, 3). However, they based this purpose on the fact that there was not much information available about how adolescents implement the advice of others into their ADV relationships. This was contradictory to the authors’ statements about previous studies in the introduction, such as, “...teens rarely consult their parents or other family members for assistance....Adolescents fear that their parents will overreact or not believe them” (Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 2). This contradicted the statement that not much study had been done on this point before, making the purpose seem somewhat unsupported.

The introduction provided a clear study purpose, but much of the literature review presented gave no evidence as to why the study should be conducted in the first place, with several unnecessary and repetitive information included, jumping around on different topics. Readers do not have a clear picture of the importance of the study, giving the purpose statement a high rating and the introduction low or medium rating.

Critique of the Methodology

Sampling

Saturation was not used to determine sample size, and it is unknown what method was used to determine sample size, but the final sample size of 90 participants is excellent. In order to facilitate diversity, twelve communities were chosen by purposive sampling for recruiting, but a representative sample was not used because ultimately sampling was on a volunteer basis, so the generalizability of the findings was unknown. Transferability of the study was possible to similar groups because demographic information was provided, however rich information about the community and individuals who participated in the study was not provided, limiting transferability.

Procedures

Overall, evaluation of study methodology indicated logical flow between paragraphs as well as clearly written individual sentences. Although a well-defined picture of the context of the study was

portrayed, credibility and confirmability were inaccurately described as being obtained. Peer debriefing was used since monthly meetings were held between the interviewers and investigators to affirm that the generation of explanations would be accurate. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation was established, but no member check was secured with participants. Negative case analysis revealed some cases did not fit with the presupposition of the researchers, but they did not sufficiently analyze why those cases occurred.

Confirmability was partially achieved through intense transcript analysis by several people, but the study did not state whether the research team consisted of unbiased outsiders in knowledgeable insiders. Similarly, it was unclear how the person who determined whether the theory was grounded was involved because it was also that stated he/she was not involved in the coding process.

Interviewer corroboration was used and auditability was addressed by audiotaping and transcribing all interviews and affirming with the interviewers that the transcriptions were accurate. Also, memos were created after each coding session to document progress and direction, and promote auditability. Independent analysis corroboration was partially achieved because the analysis was conducted by more than one person, but it would have been better if they had analyzed the data independently from a person outside of the research group. Bracketing and balance were not addressed but one could deduce that at least both genders were represented in the group that interviewed and analyzed data. Because at least half of all possible methodology rigor criteria were met and logical flow was present, the methodology section is rated as medium-high.

Critique of the Results

The sample statistics in the first paragraph of the results section might have been more helpful if located in the methodology section where sampling was discussed. The second paragraph conveyed that a significant main theme was found among almost all study participants. The theme was “listening to the voices of important others” in regards to ADV relationships. At first glance, this might seem to be an important finding to readers (Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 5). However, it turned out that the research team was only restating an obvious fact, namely, that participants either had “people in their lives who were influential” or did not

(Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 5). This gave the impression that the theme was not based on the interview material.

The third paragraph revealed how the information gained from the study fell into six categories (themes), and those categories were named. The first way of listening found to exist among the adolescents who experienced ADV (named preventing by researchers) was supported by three direct quotes. However, there was a quote and description included (to which an entire paragraph was dedicated) but that the quotes were not related to this particular category.

The second finding was unsupported except by one direct quote. Two other tangential quotes were included as support, one of which was not related to the finding at all and one that was contradictory to the author's previous statement that deflecting the voices of important others was "primarily related to their need... to differentiate from their parents" (Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 7). Many sentences are redundant.

There were similar problems with the third through sixth findings. The main problems with the findings presented were that each section had trouble keeping on topic, with a lot of jumping around between ideas, with half of the quotes being unresponsive of the proposed findings, and much irrelevant information to the subject of the study was provided regarding the viewpoints of the individuals who were not experiencing the ADV. Although the sentences in this section were well-written and clear, overall, due to the lack of support for the categories, the results section is rated as low.

Critique of the Discussion

The sentences and paragraphs of this section were clear and easy to understand. The discussion section's first paragraph summarized the information nicely, implying that finding that adolescents have various ways of listening somehow supports and extends previous knowledge about adolescent social relationships. First, this statement appeared to have little to do with the stated study purpose. Second, the authors did not clarify how the findings show any new information about adolescence. Several vague or tangential statements were made about decision making in adolescence.

The second paragraph listed "notions" about adolescent decision making (Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 11). Some logical explanations or insightful

claims about the study findings would have been helpful at this point. The third paragraph continued in emphasizing that decision making was a key issue in the study, but each statement used to support this idea is information that was previously known before the study began. The findings were said to support previous decision making theories, but the manner in which they supported it was not explained. The information that was provided on this issue were mostly common, universal ideas, but the ideas were presented as if they were from the findings of the study, when the information had not been presented anywhere in the results.

The statement was also made that the study found that "adolescents frequently do not tell others about the dating violence that they are experiencing" (Martsolf et al., 2011, p. 11). The problem with this statement is that this was not presented, or even mentioned, in the results section. Although the individual sentences were well-written, the discussion section was difficult to read because the main ideas of paragraphs and even of individual sentences had a rambling quality and many passages had illogical flow. For this reason, and because the main findings were not presented in such a way as to build a good foundation for the conclusion, the quality discussion section is rated as low.

Critique of the Conclusion

The limitations and conclusion sections were mixed. The acknowledgement of limitations was clear and frank. The authors honestly stated that because the study was done years after the actual ADV incidences occurred, the recall ability of participants may have been affected. The authors were also upfront about the fact that the use of one geographical region could have affected the results, and explained how care was taken to include several different races and backgrounds. This excellent disclosure could have been improved somewhat if other limitations were also presented, including lack of a generalizability due to sampling method, negative case analysis, member check, and bracketing. Even though the results and discussion sections did not build a strong foundation for the conclusion, the explanation of the importance and application of the study results to practice was excellent. While the application to practice was discussed, it was also stated that although the study did result in learning more about how adolescents incorporate the views of important others, more

information was needed to determine why some adolescents listened in one way and others listen in another. Given the large amount of interview material collected, it was surprising that this issue was not addressed in this study. However, although much of the conclusion clearly related how information in this research area has clinical applications, due to the fact that very little mention is made of any main new findings that came out of this study, like the discussion section, the quality of the conclusion section is also rated as low.

Summary

The study was methodologically sound but lacked logical flow and made too many important statements that were unsupported or unrelated to each other or the purpose of the study. Overall, dependability of this study is medium, but no groundbreaking new information was discovered nor were important previous studies confirmed.

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- Martsof, D. S., Draucker, C. B., Bednarz, L. C., & Lea, J. A. (2011). Listening to the Voices of Important Others: How Adolescents Make Sense of Troubled Dating Relationships. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*. Advance online publication doi: 10.1016/j.apnu.2011.01.001