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Youth intimate partner violence

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Introduction

A body of research confirms that many youth are subjected to physical, psychological and/or sexual violence by a partner, challenging our previous understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) as primarily an adult problem (Barter, 2011). This phenomenon, generally described as ‘dating’ violence, or adolescent/teenage/youth intimate partner violence,\(^1\) sheds light on violence that occurs within youths’ own intimate romantic relationships. The severity of such violence may vary, as well as its impact. Nevertheless, it is clear that this social and public health problem is important to address, not least from a life-course perspective, as it has been shown that the strongest predictor of adult IPV victimisation and perpetration includes earlier forms of exposure and peer approval of dating violence in adolescence (Herrenkohl & Jung, 2016). Hence, victimisation during youth is strongly associated with recurrent episodes of victimisation later in life (cf. Arriaga & Foshee, 2004).

Moreover, a number of scholars have observed that youth IPV differs from adult IPV in certain ways (Cutter-Wilson & Richmond, 2011; Murray & Azzinaro, 2019), arguing for the need to specifically focus on youth and IPV. Building on this, this chapter will present research on youth IPV, aiming to discuss what it is like to be subjected to, as well as perpetrate, IPV during youth. Theoretically, this chapter departs from social constructivism theory, and the social studies of childhood and youth, drawing upon the notion that how youth and IPV are understood and constructed, is dependent on the societal and social contexts (Burr, 2015; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011). Further, thus, age, or more specifically youth, is viewed as a construed social position (Krekula, Närvänen, & Näsman, 2005). Moreover, societal, social and individual aspects of youth (Furlong et al., 2011) will be acknowledged, addressing how they may affect IPV (cf. Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020; Gottzén & Korkmaz, 2013). This approach follows scholars who have argued for the need to focus on IPV and youths’ conditions specifically. For example, Murray and Azzinaro (2019) present teen dating violence as an ‘old disease in a new world’ (article title), arguing that it is critical to identify the key differences between adolescent and adult victims of IPV, since adolescent victims have unique features that affect their victimisation, such as experiences, anatomy, attitudes and their use of technology (Murray & Azzinaro, 2019). The contextual, situational and relational aspects
of IPV among youth have also been the focus of additionally recent research in order to further
the understanding of such violence (Överlien, Hellevik, & Korkmaz, 2019).

Furthermore, through an intersectional lens, the chapter aims to point out how youth are
a heterogeneous group (Wood, Barter, & Berridge, 2011; Barter & Stanley, 2016; Pentaraki,
2017), proposing that their vulnerability is influenced by the interactions of different social
positions (e.g. ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexuality) (Crenshaw, 1991; Dono-
van & Hester 2015). Firstly, the chapter will focus on terminology and definitions, followed by
discussion on the challenges to understanding youth IPV. Thereafter, youth and IPV will be
examined, drawing upon existing research and literature. Lastly, prevention and implications for
policy, practice and research will be addressed.

A few words on terminology and definitions

Most definitions of violence in youths’ relationships incorporate all prevalent violence typolo-
gies: physical, psychological and/or sexual violence (e.g. Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence, & Price,
2014). In recent years, it has been acknowledged that violence can also be perpetrated online,
using technologies, such as smartphone applications or a computer (Stonard et al., 2014; Luc-
ero, Weisz, Smith-Darden, & Lucero, 2014; Barter et al., 2015; Cutbush, Williams, Miller,
Gibbs, & Clinton-Sherrod, 2018; Øverlien, 2018; Hellevik, 2019). However, there is no com-
mon terminology or overall internationally accepted definition used to capture violence in
youths’ intimate relationships, with numerous terms seemingly aiming to identify this phe-

omenon. In North America, where the research field regarding violence in young people’s
romantic relationships was originally established, such violence is commonly termed ‘dating
violence’ or ‘teen dating abuse’. These concepts, or variations of them (e.g. ‘dating aggression’),
are to some extent also used in Europe; however, their applicability outside North America
has been questioned (Barter, 2009). Instead, in Europe, English terms such as ‘teenage inti-
mate partner violence and abuse’ or ‘youth intimate partner violence’ are additionally used to
underline intimate partner violence in young people’s romantic relationships. In a non-English
speaking context, there are a few examples of youth-specific terms (to the best of the author’s
knowledge), similar to ‘dating violence’. Overall, the lack of a common terminology and defi-

tion may give rise to challenges in investigating this phenomenon, which will be discussed
further in the next section.

Violence in youths’ relationships: challenges in understanding
the phenomenon

In the following, some challenges when conducting research on youth IPV will be addressed,
specifically the factors to consider when interpreting research results. Further, the question
of gender with regards to understanding and unpacking youth IPV as a phenomenon will be
presented.

Challenges when conducting research on youth IPV

A substantial body of quantitative evidence on youths’ experiences of IPV show an extensive
social problem deserving our attention. Many studies present rates of perpetration and vic-
timisation, widening our understanding of how common these experiences are. These rates are
often divided by gender (occasionally gender identity and sexuality, too), and usually distinguish
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between physical, psychological and sexual violence. However, measurements, definitions (i.e. broad or narrow), the age of sample and populations studied vary greatly, making it a challenge to compare research results and policy initiatives across the globe.

Cultural factors may also make it hard to compare studies and interpret and use research results (Barter & Stanley, 2016; Stanley, Ellis, Farrelly, Hollinghurst, & Downe, 2015; Hamby, Nix, De Puy, & Monnier, 2012; Nocentini et al., 2011). For example, external cultural factors may influence informants’ willingness to report, as addressed by Lysova and Douglas (2008) when they discuss the significant differences in IPV perpetration rates between men and women in their sample of Russian university students. The authors suggest that the difference might be explained by the deterrent effect of the Russian army, as in Russia, if found to abuse a woman, a male student may be expelled from the university and instead enlisted into military service. Moreover, cultural factors may also affect what expressions of violence are culturally accepted or not, since, for example, mild expressions of violence may be more culturally accepted in some countries but unacceptable in others (Viejo, Monks, Sanchez, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016). Further, it has been argued that teenagers do not always identify their experiences with equivalent definitions of violence used in research (Karlsson, Calvert, Rodriguez, Weston, & Temple, 2018), proposing that it is challenging to examine the phenomenon of youth IPV. Overall, these factors are important to consider when reading and interpreting studies on youth IPV; nevertheless, it is also vital to acknowledge that experiences of IPV might in fact vary across countries and samples.

With regard to reported prevalence rates, studies do show a great variation. For example, Stonard et al.'s (2014) review revealed a broad range of estimates when looking at studies investigating prevalence and impact of adolescent dating violence. Similarly, in their data synthesis on sexual and physical forms of teen dating violence (TDV), Wincentak, Connolly and Card (2017) found a great variation. Conducting a meta-analysis of 101 studies with samples consisting of teens between the ages of 13 and 18, they estimated a 20% overall prevalence rate of being subjected to physical TDV, irrespective of gender. Regarding perpetration of physical TDV, gender differences were significant, suggesting that girls perpetrate more violence when compared with boys (girls 25% vs. boys 13%). The authors note that these findings appear to support previous research that indicates that female youth are equally or even more disposed to report perpetrating physical violence within a romantic relationship. However, regarding sexual TDV, it was observed that girls reported lower rates of perpetration compared to boys (3% vs. 10%), and higher rates of victimisation (14% vs. 8%). Overall, these rates suggest some gendered implications; however, studies have explored the factor of gender further (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Barter et al., 2015; Gadd, Fox, Corr, Alger, & Butler, 2015; Barter & Lombard, 2019).

The question on gender

Gendered patterns concerning rates of victimisation and perpetration respectively, are the focus for a number of researchers conducting work on youth IPV. Some studies have presented data on reciprocal involvement, suggesting that both boys and girls involved in aggressive behaviour are generally aggressors as well as victims (Viejo, 2014). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that a greater proportion of girls and young women report more severe forms of IPV victimisation compared to young men (Foshee, 1996). Related, it has also been shown that young men are involved in more severe physical aggression (Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O’Leary, & González, 2007) and perpetrate more sexual violence and aggression than young women (Fernández-González,
O’Leary, & Muñoz-Rivas, 2013; Sebastían, Verdugo, & Ortiz, 2014; Stanley et al., 2016). Overall, undisputable, gendered patterns are a central debate within the research field.

Over two decades ago, Jackson (1999) reviewed the existing literature on dating violence and concluded that it is essential to describe violence as a gender issue. Jackson argued that this required an extension of the parameters of the research ‘beyond measuring acts of violence to a more extensive investigation of consequences, context, motivation and meaning’ (p. 241). Nevertheless, arguably, there are challenges to extensively investigate the role of gender in relation to IPV victimisation as well as perpetration. Hamby and Turner (2013) assert that ‘IPV may be particularly hard to assess in ways that are equally valid for males and females’ (p. 335), and that teen dating violence (TDV) may be an even more challenging violence phenomenon to assess, due to its unique developmental and relational aspects. Further, Hamby and Turner underline the need to consider aspects of the context of TDV, similar to the arguments of Jackson a decade earlier. In 1999, Jackson addressed methodological limitations in the studies reviewed that have led to the suggestion that men and women are equally violent. As a conceivable solution to these limitations, Jackson highlighted the need for qualitative research methods to elicit rich contextual data, providing understanding from the perspective of participants.

Today, largely, it is possible to point out two different standpoints within the research field on youth IPV, whereas it is sometimes framed as a more or less gender-neutral phenomenon, and at other times considered in relation to unequal gender and power relationships (Jackson, 1999; Gadd et al., 2015; Korkmaz, 2017; Barter & Lombard, 2019). This distinction has also been described as a turn within the field. Baker and Stein (2016) describe how the lack of a gender-based analysis reflects a shift from a feminist framing of violence, to a more conservative and individualistic focus. Nevertheless, considering all data on the importance and significance of gender, gender is unquestionably a key variable when investigating youth IPV and will therefore be examined throughout in this chapter.

**Analysis and discussion**

In the following section, existing research and literature are drawn upon and structured thematically on a societal, social and individual level (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; see Hagemann-White, Kelly, & Römkens, 2010 for a similar approach), in order to discuss aspects of youth on each level that arguably affect victimisation as well as perpetration of IPV for young people (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020; Overlien et al., 2019; Gottzén & Korkmaz, 2013; Gadd et al., 2015). This approach takes its stance within the social constructionist theory, underlining that how we understand a phenomenon is bound to historical and cultural specificity, as well as social processes (Burr, 2015). Furthermore, this approach also departures from the social studies of childhood and youth (James et al., 1998), which offer the notion of youth as socially constructed. Youth is not just an age attribute, but dependent on both social and societal contexts (Jones, 2011), and thus also a social position (Krekula et al., 2005; Staunæs, 2003).

Thereby, through a social constructionist lens, an examination of a societal level of IPV will highlight the cultural and societal context (Furlong et al., 2011). Moreover, social processes will be in focus on a social level, as the focus is on youths’ social networks and their responses to youth IPV (Hydén, Gadd, & Wade, 2016). Here, youths’ everyday life will also be addressed, as this level also includes the immediate social context (Overlien et al., 2019). Lastly, on the individual level, individual aspects of youth IPV will be highlighted, focusing on childhood risk factors, the impact of victimisation, and young perpetrators of IPV. Overall, the aim is to broadly portray what it is like to be young and be subjected to, or perpetrate, IPV.
Societal aspects

Societal aspects of youth IPV vary, naturally, due to how it is constructed within a specific cultural and societal contextual setting (Burr, 2015). In this chapter, societal aspects refer to the cultural and societal norms that govern young people’s lives. Beliefs about IPV, gendered power relations, gendered behavioural expectations, gendered (in)equality, and norms on youth can affect the notion of who is a potential victim (cf. Christie, 2001) and perpetrator of IPV, as well as influence which acts that are defined as violence (Chung, 2005, 2007; Gadd et al., 2015; Överlien et al., 2019). Overall, these societal aspects can affect the experience of IPV for young people.

Alongside, governmental awareness of youth IPV play an important role. In 2015, an extensive five-country European study, ‘Safeguarding teenagers’ intimate relationships’ (STIR) (Barter et al., 2015), showed that legislation, public policy and action plans disregard teenage intimate partner violence (online and offline) or acknowledge it to only a limited degree. The lack of governmental awareness arguably connects to the notion of who is a potential victim and perpetrator of IPV, making teenage and youth invisible from a governmental point of view. However, there are examples of governmental acknowledgement of youth IPV as a genuine problem as well. For example, in the UK in 2013, the government implemented a new definition of domestic violence and abuse as follows: ‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality’ (Home Office, 2013). The Home Office aimed that this revision would encourage young people to come forward and seek support, since, prior to that point, the definition had not included young people aged 16–17 years. Thus, the change reflects a governmental awareness that this age group can be victims as well as perpetrators of IPV. Similarly, in Sweden in 2014, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare introduced binding regulations (SOSFS, 2014:4) for the social services on domestic violence, including partner violence among youth under the age of 18. These binding regulations mean that the children’s services are mandated to assess the need for help and support when a young person under the age of 18 has been subjected to partner violence. Furthermore, with regards to the prevention of youth IPV, there are some examples of governmental actions. For example, in the state of Ohio, USA, age-appropriate dating violence prevention education is incorporated into the curriculum for grades 7 through 12 (involving 12–18 year olds), education which includes instruction in recognising dating violence warning signs and the characteristics of healthy relationships (Ohio Substitute House Bill 19).

These examples highlight governmental awareness and societal aspects of youth IPV. These examples of governmental awareness can indicate how norms on youth are conceptualised. It can show how youth are regarded legally as children and thereby formally (more) protected by the governmental system due to their status as a child. However, even though youth are positioned as potential victims or perpetrators of IPV and formally protected, there can still be societal prejudices regarding these experiences.

A body of research reveals numerous prejudices regarding youth and IPV, prejudices that may prevent youth from seeking help. Some prejudices are on youth and their intimate relationships, reflecting a belief that youth do not have ‘serious relationships’ (Carlson, 2003; Chung, 2005; Hellevik & Överlien, 2016). Related, there are prejudices that it would be easier for youth to end an abusive relationship, since they may not have children or live together with the abuser (Chung, 2007). Regarding the perpetration of IPV, stereotypes of the ‘domestic violence perpetrator’ as a shameful man who is not identifiable nor relatable, may also hinder young men who are at...
risk of being abusive, to get support (Gadd, Fox, Corr, Butler, & Bragg, 2013; Gadd et al., 2015). Moreover, certain prejudices might mark some youth even more. For example, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth may be even more affected by societal prejudices since there are heteronormative views on IPV; in other words, beliefs exist that \textit{violence does not occur in same-sex relationships} (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012).

In summary, the societal and cultural contexts convey certain aspects that are important to consider when focusing on youth IPV. Through a social constructionist lens, these aspects reveal how youth IPV is constructed within a society, whether it is considered as a social problem, or not. Related, the mentioned prejudices can also reflect a distinction between youth IPV and ‘adult’ IPV, and how they are constructed as two separate phenomena. Furthermore, governments may acknowledge youth as potential victims as well as perpetrators of IPV, providing help and support due to their status as children (James et al., 1998), and thus address youth IPV as a social problem. Conversely, a lack of societal awareness can reflect that youth IPV is not considered as a serious issue. It is noteworthy that societal aspects and how youth IPV is constructed can arguably vary within countries, and even cities as well as neighbourhoods, since an area’s concentration of disadvantage can inflict local cultural norms (e.g. acceptance of violence) (Garthe, Gorman-Smith, Gregory, & Schoeny, 2018). Furthermore, the period of youth may also reflect prejudices that affect how a young person is supported and helped. Thereby, through an intersectional lens, it is important to acknowledge that youth are not a homogeneous group (Wood et al., 2011; Barter & Stanley, 2016), and that societal aspects may vary due to youths’ societal positions (e.g. socioeconomic status, sexuality).

**Social aspects**

The social aspects of youth intimate partner violence (IPV) refer to youths’ social network and immediate familial context. In the following discussion, research that investigates these aspects will be presented, focusing on parents, the role of schools and friends, and digital means. Overall, the aim in this section is to address the social sphere of youth IPV, including social and familial relationships (cf. Överlien et al., 2019).

**Parents**

Having a youth’s social network and immediate context in view, parents arguably are present since youth are often cared by and still live with their parents. The role of parents in relation to youth intimate partner violence (IPV) seems to have been examined extensively within the field of developmental research, aiming to explore parental roles with respect to children’s subsequent victimisation. A body of knowledge suggests that violence in young people’s intimate relationships has its origins in childhood externalising behaviour, and that parents play an important role in the development and maintenance of such behaviour (Morris, Mrug, & Windle, 2015; Livingston et al., 2018). For instance, \textit{maternal warmth and sensitivity} in early childhood is presented as a protective factor against involvement in teen dating violence (Livingston et al., 2018). Further, ‘\textit{positive parenting practices}’ has been highlighted as a key protective factor that may attenuate teen dating violence involvement for adolescents who have been exposed to IPV (Garrido & Taussig, 2013).

Parents may also have the opportunity, as well as the responsibility, to detect when their children are subject to, or are perpetrating, violence within an intimate romantic relationship. Concerning this, communication is essential. Corona, Gomes, Pope, Shaffer and Yaros (2016)
showed in their study on maternal caregivers’ strategies to discussing dating violence with their young adolescents, how ‘healthier’ messages about risky dating behaviours (e.g. focus on the meaning of love, identifying red flags in the relationships), increased parent-youth communication in this respect. Nevertheless, youth with experiences of dating violence have been found to report lower overall communication with their parents, and more problematic communication (Ombayo, Black, & Preble, 2019).

Further, parents are shown to respond to youth IPV in different ways (Preble, Black, & Weisz, 2018; Weisz, Black, & Hawley, 2017). In a study drawing upon qualitative interviews with IPV victimised youth, questions were asked regarding the parents’ (their own as well as the abuser’s) responses when they found out about the informants’ IPV victimisation. The youth described different kinds of parental responses: some that helped bring an end to the violence they were experiencing, where, for example, parents broke up the abusive relationship; and some responses which enabled the abuse to continue, for example forms of responses that best can be described as a lack of response where the parents did not act upon the violent situation (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020). Overall, it is found that parents play an important role and have a unique opportunity to interact and respond to their children’s IPV experiences.

**Schools**

Schools are important arenas for many youths’ everyday lives: they spend most of their day on school premises and largely interact with their social networks within the school setting. Further, schools can provide opportunities for psychosocial interventions that can improve children’s resilience (Ungar, Connelly, Liebenberg, & Theron, 2017). Nevertheless, schools can also be a setting where youth experience different forms of violence (Klein, 2006; Carlson, 2003). For example, it is described how many girls experience sexual harassment by male peers at school, and, further, how this is linked to sexual dating violence victimisation (Gagné, Lavoie, & Hébert, 2005).

Regarding IPV, schools have been identified as important when it comes to safeguarding youths’ wellbeing through challenging the normalisation of IPV, as well as addressing instigation and supporting victims (Barter, 2014). Arguably, the schools’ role is highly relevant as youth may attend the same school, or even belong to the same class, as their abusive partner. In the school setting, adults are also present (i.e. teachers), making them part of youths’ social network and a possible resource for help, depending on their responses (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020; Weisz et al., 2007). Classmates and peers can also intervene to help victims of IPV. Nevertheless, teachers play an important role in encouraging the reporting of dating violence, and it is crucial that youth perceive them, rather than fellow students, to have more expertise to respond effectively (Storer, Casey, & Herrenkohl, 2017). This places considerable responsibility on teachers, as their responses may affect whether a victim approaches them, as well as if a bystander acts to help. Overall, the schools’ potential as an arena where youth IPV can take place, as well as an arena where youth can get help and support, is clear.

**Friends**

Friends also play an important role in relation to social aspects of youth intimate partner violence (IPV). Youth see their friends every day at school, and as they are starting to distance themselves from their parents, friends arguably become a key part of youths’ social network. Thereby, friends are often present to witness relationships interaction, and may have the opportunity
to intervene (Landor et al., 2017). Further, it is shown that youth are more likely to disclose dating violence or romantic relationship problems to friends rather than others (Weisz et al., 2007; Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008). In addition, support from friends is associated with significantly less dating violence perpetration and victimisation, but only for girls (Richards & Branch, 2012).

Moreover, friends seem to influence what is considered as acceptable dating behaviours or not, underlining the meaning of friends’ perception of relationships and behaviours. In addition, Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that having friends who were in violent relationships was one important predictor of dating violence. Overall, when focusing on social aspects of youth IPV, the role of friends seems to be highly important and many prevention programs involve an active response from friends and peers (Weisz & Black, 2008). However, as Barter (2014) points out, peer networks can also be involved in violence perpetration, as a means to extend control and surveillance.

Digital social aspects

The digital revolution plays an important role regarding youths’ everyday lives and represents a new and significant aspect of youths’ social context. Regarding youths’ use of technology and digital media, a number of studies focus on violence perpetrated ‘online’ (e.g. Barter et al., 2017; Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, Walrave, & Temple, 2016; Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Stoddard, Bowen, Walker, & Price, 2015). For example, Hellevik and Överlien (2016) present how 29.1% of their sample of Norwegian teenagers had experienced ‘digital violence’. Overall, it is shown how new technology offers new ways of perpetrating violence, where controlling behaviours and surveillance are common features (Barter et al., 2017). The phenomenon of ‘sexting’ (sending and receiving sexual images and text messages) has also been linked to IPV among youth (Wood & Barter, 2015; Bianchi, Morelli, Nappa, Baiocco, & Chirumbolo, 2018; Kernsmith, Victor, & Smith-Darden, 2018). This offers an insight into the social conditions youth live in (Furlong et al., 2011), showing how the digital revolution needs to be acknowledged in relation to youth IPV.

In summary, these social aspects of youth IPV – the presence of parents, the role of friends, school as an arena, as well as the digital sphere – highlight youth-specific factors (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020) that need to be taken into consideration when addressing youth IPV. Thus, these aspects reflect the construction of youth IPV (Burr, 2015), as well as underline youths’ societal position as children (James et al., 1998; cf. Gottzén & Korkmaz, 2013).

Individual aspects

In this section, individual aspects of youth intimate partner violence (IPV) are presented, focusing on risk factors as well as gendered aspects, which will be discussed mainly when addressing impact and perpetration of IPV. Overall, some general individual aspects arguably are present by the time that youth might experience violence in their first intimate relationship. Further, individual aspects also refer to the vulnerability of particular groups of young people who are more at risk of being subjected to or perpetrating IPV.

Relationship inexperience

Firstly, it is relevant to highlight young people’s presumed relationship inexperience. Youth might be subjected to, or perpetrate, violence in their very first intimate romantic relationship,
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having no reference point regarding what it is like to have a healthy relationship. This inexperience may affect how they manage to navigate and detect what is an abusive relationship and what is not (Överlien et al., 2019; Gadd et al., 2013; Gadd et al., 2015; Toscano, 2014; Davies, 2019). For victims, the challenge to navigate and detect may be even more prominent if the abusive partner is older and the distribution of power thereby is uneven, making it easier for the older partner to control the younger (Barter, McCarry, Berridge, & Evans, 2009; Vézina & Hébert, 2007). Furthermore, Toscano (2014) describes in her study how college students with histories of high school dating violence felt popularity was gained by dating older, rebellious and popular boys as this type of partner meet their ideal image. This idea of the ‘perfect older partner’ arguably adds to the uneven power distribution and the challenge to navigate an abusive relationship.

Childhood risks

The question whether there is a cycle of violence has received considerable attention among researchers. If you experience violence as a child, will you be at greater risk experiencing violence in later life and possibly pass this risk on to future generations? Several studies have shown an association between experiencing parental IPV/domestic violence and being subjected to IPV in a romantic relationship as a teenager (e.g. Hellevik & Överlien, 2016; Ruel et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it is challenging to single out individual factors that predict youth IPV since they may be mediated by numerous unobserved variables. Drawing upon prospective and retrospective longitudinal data on a community sample, Maas, Fleming, Herrenkohl and Catalano (2010) show how childhood risks (e.g. experiencing parental IPV/domestic violence) and protective factors (e.g. bonding to parents) interplay with early teen externalising and internalising behaviours and provide a conceptual model of possible paths predicting TDV victimisation. Overall, this model shows complex and reciprocal links among different factors that inflict a child’s life and possible teen dating victimisation.

‘High-risk’ youth

It is possible to identify some individual aspects of youth intimate partner violence (IPV) that make youth ‘high risk’, or especially vulnerable. In several studies, high-risk behaviours, such as consuming alcohol at a relatively young age or use of addictive substances, are associated with dating violence victimisation (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017; Leen et al., 2013; Ihongbe & Masho, 2018). Low academic achievements have also been found to be associated with experiencing teenage IPV (Hellevik & Överlien, 2016); nevertheless conversely, it has also been shown that low academic achievements do not seem to affect the risk of being subjected to IPV (Korkmaz, Överlien, & Lagerlöf, 2020). Moreover, pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers have been identified as especially vulnerable (Brown, Brady, & Letherby, 2011; Edirne et al., 2010; Wood & Barter, 2015). Further, it has been shown that LGB youth report significantly higher rates of all types of victimisation and perpetration experiences in comparison to heterosexual youth (Dank, Lachman, Zweig, & Yahner, 2014), suggesting that sexual minorities may be at a greater risk for teen dating violence than their heterosexual peers (Reuter, Sharp, & Temple, 2015).

Impact of victimisation

A body of evidence suggests that being subjected to intimate partner violence (IPV) may result in severe consequences for young people, as well as negatively affecting the transition from
adolescence to adulthood (Wiklund, Malmgren-Olsson, Bengs, & Öhman, 2010). Studies have shown that victimisation can predict increased alcohol and cigarette use, as well as increased internalising symptoms (e.g. feelings of depression or anxiety), and fewer close friends (Foshee, Reyes, Gottfredson, Chang, & Ennett, 2013). A link between reporting physical dating violence victimisation and perpetration, and suicidal ideation has also been found (Nahapetyan, Orpinas, Song, & Holland, 2014; cf. Unlu & Cakaloz, 2016).

Even though IPV victimisation may result in adverse consequences for youth irrespective of gender, an extensive body of research convincingly shows gender differences regarding impact. It has been shown that boys report fewer, less serious impacts compared to girls, which is especially the case in relation to sexual violence (Barter et al., 2009; Barter & Stanley, 2016; Barter et al., 2017). Adolescent girls exposed to IPV report more severe impacts, such as depression, panic attacks, eating problems and suicidal ideation compared to boys (Romito, Beltramini, & Escribà-Agüir, 2013). This does not suggest that boys’ experiences of IPV are not worthy of attention, but rather, it emphasises how important it is to acknowledge that impact may vary by gender (Barter et al., 2017; Barter & Lombard 2019).

Young perpetrators of IPV

As presented, some studies on dating violence suggest that youth are involved in violent acts reciprocally, that they are simultaneously perpetrators and victims. However, it is also shown that young women’s violence tends to be in reaction to male violence and, consistently, that men tend to initiate violence leading to violent responses from their partners (Allen, Swan, & Raghavan, 2009). Overall, this contributes to the complex discussion on perpetrators of violence, also implicating gendered patterns in terms of motives behind perpetration.

Concerning boys’ perpetration of IPV, gendered scripts seem to play an important role. It has been shown that violent boys more often seek to justify male dominance and IPV against women, as well as receiving more dominant and violent messages from adults in their family, compared to non-violent boys (Diaz-Aguado & Martinez, 2015). Further, drawing upon data from focus groups with 23 Latino male adolescents, Haglund et al. (2019) present how the participants argued that the pressure to display masculinity might lead some young men to perpetrate teen dating violence. Nevertheless, Gadd et al. (2015) point out how the problem is not only about boys and their masculinities, but also a relational one that exists between boys and girls, showing how societal and social aspects are intertwined.

Besides findings that show how young women’s violence tends to be in response to male violence (Allen et al., 2009), a number of studies show some additional aspects of female youth perpetration. For example, Joly and Connolly (2016) showed in their meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on dating violence among high-risk young women, how these women report perpetrating dating violence to gain power and respect. Further, it has been suggested that adolescent females who are identified as non-white, belonging to an ethnic minority, have an increased risk of perpetrating physical dating violence, compared to adolescent females who are identified as white (Moultrie King, Smith Hatcher, & Bride, 2017). Overall, female youth IPV perpetration seems to be a complex phenomenon that needs to be investigated further (King, Hatcher, & Bride, 2015; Shaffer, Adjei, Viljoen, Douglas, & Saewyc, 2018).

Conclusion: youth IPV – through an intersectional lens

Even though youth IPV surpasses socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, etc., it is possible to argue that some youth are especially vulnerable and more likely to experience or
perpetrate IPV. By taking an intersectional lens, it is possible to highlight that youth is not a homogenous group, showing how youths’ vulnerability is impacted by the interaction of different social positions (Donovan & Hester, 2015). For example, as presented earlier, adolescent females who belong to an ethnic minority are at increased risk of perpetrating physical dating violence, compared to adolescent females who belong to the majority ethnic group. Further, it is shown that victimised girls seem to experience more negative consequences compared to victimised boys. Additionally, LGB youth report significantly higher rates of all types of victimisation and perpetration experiences, in comparison to heterosexual youth. Thus, the social position of ‘youth’ interact with other positions, influencing their vulnerability. A young person is, for example, not solely a girl, but belongs to other social categories too. Moreover, these social categories are constructed within a societal and social context (cf. Staunæs, 2003), meaning that a holistic approach to a young person’s experience of IPV is necessary. In other words, a young girl lives within a specific society that may or may not show societal awareness of youth IPV, has a specific social network that may respond in different ways (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020), which thus will affect her experience of IPV. This needs to be taken into consideration in preventive work (Fox, Hale, & Gadd, 2014; Gadd, Fox, & Hale, 2014; cf. Ravi, Black, Mitschke, & Pearson, 2019), as different vulnerabilities may need to be specifically targeted. As this chapter has proposed, youth IPV need to be examined on a societal, social as well as an individual level. Furthermore, this holistic approach also arguably stands true for how this social problem should be tackled; by involving youth, parents, practitioners, researchers and policy-makers, representing all levels. It seems important that we all work together, by sharing information and influencing each other’s work, to fully understand and prevent youth IPV.

Critical findings

• Gender seems to be a significant factor in relation to understanding youth IPV.
• By taking a holistic approach to youth IPV, we can harvest important knowledge to inform practical work, as well as policy-making.
• An intersectional lens is needed to fully unpack the phenomenon of youth IPV.

Implications for policy, practice and research

• The contextual aspects of youth IPV need to be taken into consideration in policy and practical work.
• Preventative work, including a focus on youth IPV warning signs and characteristics of healthy relationships, should be a priority in societal and political agendas.
• Future research studies should benefit from using youths’ own voices as empirical data, as well as looking at contextual aspects of IPV to fully unpack how, for example, gender may impact the experience of being subjected to IPV.

Notes

1 The concept ‘youth intimate partner violence’ will primarily be used in this chapter. However, when citing a study, the authors’ choice of violence concept will be used (e.g. teen dating violence), as well as their description of their sample (e.g. ‘adolescents’, ‘teenagers’, etc.) When not citing a study, ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ will be used interchangeably.

2 It is acknowledged the cultural and societal context vary greatly and that the following discussion is from a ‘Western society’ perspective.
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