

**ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS: SEXUAL COERCION
AND HIGH RISK SEXUAL PRACTICES**

by

LU-ANNE SWART

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF MJ TERRE BLANCHE

NOVEMBER 2005

SUMMARY

This study investigated coercive and high risk sexual practices in South African adolescent dating relationships. Quantitative and qualitative information was collected from secondary school learners in a community near Johannesburg. Of 928 learners surveyed, 23.5% of females and 53.7% of males ever had sex. Of these, 57.8% of females and 44.2% of males reported sexual victimisation, and 46.8% of females and 50% of males reported perpetrating sexual coercion in a relationship. Significantly more males engaged in risky sex than females. Among females, sexual coercion was significantly linked to risky sexual behaviour. Among males, alcohol and perpetration of sexual coercion were significantly associated with risky sexual behaviour. Focus group data reveal how dominant constructions of gender normalise male coercion and contribute to risky sexual practices. Recommendations for sexual health initiatives include introducing alternative discourses of female sexual desire and male sexual responsibility as a means for building healthier adolescent dating relationships.

KEY TERMS: Adolescents; Sexual coercion; Dating relationships; Gender; High risk sexual behaviour; Alcohol use; Masculinity; Femininity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank:

- The learners who participated in this study for sharing their views and experiences, making this project possible.
- Izabel Ricardo for the invitation to work on this international project, and for her direction during the South African study.
- Mohamed Seedat for giving me the opportunity to work on this project, and for his continued support and encouragement through this degree.
- My supervisor, Martin Terre Blanche, for his guidance in putting this dissertation together.
- My family for their support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION	1

1.1	The aims, scope and rationale of the study	4
1.1.1	The quantitative component of the study	4
1.1.2	The qualitative component of the study	6
1.2	Overview of the study	6
 Chapter 2: ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS: SEXUAL COERCION AND HIGH RISK SEXUAL PRACTICES		 8
2.1	Definition of dating relationships	8
2.2	The development and characteristics of adolescent dating relationships	9
2.3	Dating and sexual experience among South African adolescents	1
		2
2.3.1	Characteristics of sexual behaviour	13
2.3.2	Sexual coercion in adolescent dating relationships	14
2.3.2.1	Gender considerations	1
		6
2.4	The relationship between sexual coercion and high risk sexual behaviour	17
2.4.1	Female sexual victimisation and high risk sexual behaviour	1
		7
2.4.2	Male sexual victimisation and high risk sexual behaviour	1
		8
2.5	Conclusion	19
 Chapter 3: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SEXUAL COERCION IN ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS		 21
3.1	Individual factors	21
3.1.1	Attitudes about gender roles and sexual relationships	22
3.1.2	Exposure to sexual assault and violence in early childhood	23
3.2	Situational factors	23

3.2.1	Nature of the relationship	24
3.2.2	Sexual (mis)communication in dating relationships	25
3.2.3	The involvement of alcohol	26
3.3	Community factors	27
3.3.1	Peer environment and norms	28
3.3.2	Poverty and low socioeconomic factors	29
3.4	Sociocultural factors	29
3.4.1	Sociocultural constructions of gender and sexuality	30
3.4.2	High levels of interpersonal violence in society	34
3.5	Female perpetration and male victimisation	35
3.6	Conclusion	35
 Chapter 4: METHOD		 37
4.1	Study site	37
4.2	School survey	38
4.2.1	The survey questionnaire	39
4.2.2	The survey procedure and sample	42
4.2.3	Data analysis	43
4.3	Focus group discussions	44
4.3.1	Focus group procedures and participants	44
4.3.2	Data analysis	45
4.4	Conclusion	46
 Chapter 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION		 47
5.1	Survey findings	47
5.1.1	Description of the survey sample	47
5.1.1.1	Sociodemographic characteristics	47
5.1.1.2	Sociodemographic characteristics of the sexually experienced learners	48
5.1.1.3	Dating relationships and characteristics of partner	52
5.1.2	Prevalence of sexual coercion and high risk behaviours	53
5.1.2.1	Sexual victimisation by gender	53

5.1.2.2	Perpetration of sexual coercion by gender	54
5.1.2.3	Victim/perpetrator status by gender	56
5.1.2.4	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion in dating	
		rela tion shi ps by gen der
		5
		8
5.1.2.5	Alcohol use by gender	58
5.1.2.6	High risk sexual behaviour by gender	59
5.1.3	Victim/perpetrator status differences	60
5.1.3.1	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion in dating	
	relationships by victim/perpetrator status for females	60
5.1.3.2	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for females	
		6
		2
5.1.3.3	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status	
	for females	62
5.1.3.4	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion in dating	
		rela tion shi ps by vict

	im/
	per
	petr
	ator
	stat
	us
	for
	mal
	es
	6
	4
5.1.3.5	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for males 65
5.1.3.6	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status for males 66
5.1.4	CHAID results for learners' high risk sexual behaviour 68
5.1.5	Summary of survey findings 71
5.2	Focus group findings and discussion 74
5.2.1	Constructions of male and female sexuality 74
5.2.1.1	Sex is important for boys, but not for 'decent' girls 74
5.2.1.2	Most of the girls do it just to please the boy 77
5.2.1.3	Condom use 79
5.2.2	Sex, love and relationships 81
5.2.2.1	If you love a boy ... 81
5.2.2.2	The guys just say 'I love you' to get sex 83
5.2.2.3	Boys using girls 84
5.2.3	Sex and alcohol 85
5.2.4	Summary of focus group findings 88
Chapter 6:	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 89
6.1	Gender, sexual coercion and high risk behaviours 89
6.2	Differences within gender according to victim/perpetrator status 92
6.3	The association between sexual coercion and high risk sexual behaviours 93

6.4	Social constructions of male and female sexuality	94
6.5	Limitations of the study	96
6.6	Implications for the improvement of adolescent sexual health	97
6.7	Conclusion	99
REFERENCES		100
APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE		120

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1	Sociodemographic characteristics by sexual experience for female and male learners	51
Table 5.2	Dating behaviour and characteristics of partner in the year prior to the survey for sexually experienced learners	52
Table 5.3	Sexual victimisation by gender	54
Table 5.4	Perpetration of sexual coercion by gender	55
Table 5.5	Victim/perpetrator status by gender	57
Table 5.6	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion by gender	58
Table 5.7	Alcohol use by gender	59
Table 5.8	High risk sexual behaviour by gender	60
Table 5.9	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion by victim/perpetrator status for females	61
Table 5.10	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for females	62
Table 5.11	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status for females	63
Table 5.12	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion by victim/perpetrator status for males	65
Table 5.13	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for males	66
Table 5.14	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status for males	67
Table 5.15	Characteristics of the sample for the CHAID analysis	68

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1	Victim/perpetrator status for females (n=116)	56
Figure 5.2	Victim/perpetrator status for males (n=233)	57
Figure 5.3	Alcohol use by gender	59
Figure 5.4	High risk sexual behaviour by gender	60
Figure 5.5	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion by victim/perpetrator status for females	61
Figure 5.6	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for females	62
Figure 5.7	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status for females	63
Figure 5.8	Beliefs about the acceptability of sexual coercion by victim/perpetrator status for males	65
Figure 5.9	Alcohol use by victim/perpetrator status for males	66
Figure 5.10	High risk sexual behaviour by victim/perpetrator status for males	67
Figure 5.11	CHAID tree diagram for high risk sexual behaviour	70