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COHABITATION AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD:
HIGH CONSTRAINTS AND LOW COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a majority of young adults experience cohabitation. Nevertheless, cohabitation is a risk factor for intimate partner violence (IPV). Drawing on exchange and commitment theory we analyzed young adults' IPV experiences using the recently collected (2011-2012) Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study data (n = 926). We found that sociodemographic characteristics, relationship commitment and constraints (e.g., sexual exclusivity, dedication, financial enmeshment), and prior experience with violence (in prior relationships and family of origin) were associated with IPV, but did not explain the association between cohabitation and IPV. We examined variation among individuals in cohabiting relationships to determine who faces the greatest risk of intimate partner violence. Serial cohabitators and cohabitators who experienced both low commitment and high relational constraints faced the greatest risk of IPV. These findings provided insights into the implications of cohabitation for the well-being of young adults.

Key words: cohabitation, young adulthood, intimate partner violence

Increasingly in the U.S., cohabitation has become ubiquitous, as evidenced by over half of young adults reporting that they had cohabited (Manning, 2013). Although many cohabiting relationships are short-term, lasting on average less than two years (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2011), researchers have documented that young adults in cohabiting, compared with dating or marital, relationships reported higher levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Kenney & McLanahan, 2006; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998; Rhoades, Stanley, Kelmer, & Markman, 2012; Stets & Straus, 1990). Although previous work has examined differences in intimate partner violence across types of relationships, studies have not considered variation in reports of IPV among individuals in cohabiting relationships.

Drawing on the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), we used recently collected data from young men and women to examine factors associated with intimate partner violence in married, cohabiting and dating relationships, with an eye toward understanding the greater levels of violence reported by individuals in cohabiting relationships. As such, this study moves beyond prior work in four key ways. First, we used recently collected data, which is important given the current prevalence of and continual increases in rates of cohabitation. The growth in cohabitation requires the use of recent data to reflect the contemporary context in which young adults make decisions about union formation. Second, we incorporated a wide range of theoretically relevant indicators of commitment and constraints as well as socioeconomic background to explore potential factors associated with intimate partner violence. Third, we examined variation among individuals in cohabiting relationships to determine who faces the greatest risk of intimate partner violence. As cohabitation has become a majority

experience, it is important to assess the implications of cohabitation for young adults' well-being including experiences with intimate partner violence.

BACKGROUND

A key developmental task following adolescence is learning to interact in healthy ways with intimate partners (Arnett, 2004; Clydesdale, 2007; Simon & Barrett, 2010). Yet compared with other stages in the life course, young adults have the highest risk for intimate partner violence (Halpern, Spriggs, Martin, & Kupper, 2009; Johnson, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, in press; Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove, Schelar, & Cui, 2011). Nearly half (47%) of young men and women in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) reported intimate partner violence by young adulthood (Renner & Whitney, 2012). Research on intimate partner violence in adulthood often has focused on the experiences of married women with less attention to those relationships that exist outside the marital context (dating and cohabitation). Although virtually all young adults have nonmarital intimate relationships, we know surprisingly little about how these relationships are associated with IPV experiences. In recent decades, the levels of cohabitation have grown tremendously; in the late 1980s, 40% of women in their early thirties had cohabited, and in the late 2000s three-quarters had done so (Manning, 2013). Thus, an analysis of intimate partner violence during young adult years requires attention to cohabiting, in addition to marital and dating relationships. Further, given the increased levels of cohabitation, research must be based on contemporary cohorts of young adults.

Much prior research on cohabitation and intimate partner violence contrasts the experiences of married and cohabiting women. Researchers have consistently found higher rates of violence in cohabiting compared with marital relationships (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008;

Brownridge, 2008; Herrera, Wiersma, & Cleveland, 2008; Jackson, 1996; Magdol et al., 1998; Stets, 1991; Stets & Straus, 1989; 1990). Some of these studies, however, are based on cohabitation experiences that occurred over two decades ago (e.g., Jackson 1996; Magdol et al. 1998; Stets & Straus 1989; 1990; Stets 1991), and do not reflect the current context in which the majority of young adults have cohabited. Similarly, much recent research that has relied on the third wave (2001-2002) of the Add Health, has found that cohabitation is associated with higher rates of IPV (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Herrera et al., 2008; Renner & Whitney, 2012). To the extent that cohabitation is a more common experience in 2012 compared with 2001, and necessarily less selective, raises questions about whether individuals in current cohabiting unions continue to report higher odds of IPV. Brownridge (2008), in an analysis of Canadian couples argued that as cohabitation becomes more popular, fewer union status differentials should exist between cohabitation and marriage. Indeed, he reported a decline in the differentials in intimate partner violence experienced by Canadian cohabiting and married women.

By extension, as more young adults experience cohabitation in the U.S., it is important to assess whether cohabitation is related to intimate partner violence in contrast to married young adults as well as individuals in dating relationships. Some prior studies have relied on college students, which represent a select sample of young adults who are most advantaged (Daly & Noland, 2001; Orcutt, Garcia, & Pickett, 2005; Smith, Thompson, Tomaka, & Buchanan, 2005; Stets & Straus, 1990). Researchers analyzing nationally representative data have found that cohabitators more often than daters report partner violence and that these differentials exist when considering either perpetration or victimization (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Melander, Noel, & Tyler, 2010; Renner & Whitney, 2012; Rhoades et al. 2012; Scott et al., 2011). Some researchers explain the differential in IPV among dating and cohabiting couples with the

inclusion of sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., Rhoades et al. 2012), while others cannot explain the gap in partner violence by union status (dating, cohabiting, marital) with extensive sets of control variables for family background, socioeconomic status, presence of children, and relationship characteristics (love, satisfaction, and duration) (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Melander et al., 2010). Thus, there is consensus that initial differences in IPV experiences exist with higher levels among cohabitators compared with daters, and some debate exists regarding explanatory variables.

Why do cohabitators have greater IPV?

Researchers have documented differentials in IPV according to union status, but have not directly explored why cohabiting, compared with dating and married, couples have higher incidences of IPV. One explanation is that the social rules governing cohabitation are not institutionalized (Nock 1995), and because cohabitation is not a legally recognized union, individuals have to discover, define, and navigate their relationship roles without the benefit of social norms and institutionalized role expectations (such as those associated with the role of husband and wife) .

A second reason that cohabitators experience higher risks of IPV is that their relationships more often contain relational precursors to IPV. Drawing on social exchange as well as relationship commitment perspectives, it may be that cohabiting couples face the highest risk of IPV because, often, these unions reflect a risky combination of low commitment and high dissolution constraints. In contrast, marital unions typically are characterized by, both, high dissolution constraints and high commitment while dating couples experience both low dissolution constraints and low commitment.

One of the fundamental ways that cohabitation and dating relationships differ is that cohabiting young adults are sharing a residence indicating greater potential for interaction (both positive and negative) as well as greater opportunity for violence. Stets and Straus (1990) argued that daters, compared with cohabitators, have fewer conflicts and issues of control because their lives are not as intertwined. Additionally, dating, compared with cohabiting, couples have fewer instrumental, social, and emotional investments so the constraints to end a relationship are weaker among dating and greater among cohabiting couples (Rhoades et al., 2010). Cohabiting, compared with dating couples, for example, more often have children (Martinez, Daniels & Chandra, 2012), report lower levels of instrumental support (Giordano, Manning, Longmore, & Flanigan, 2012), and report greater financial interdependence (Kenney, 2004). These factors represent relationship specific investments that serve as reasons to avoid ending relationships. Thus, cohabitators, compared with daters, may be less likely to end relationships that involve precursors to IPV; as such, they may experience higher rates of IPV.

In contrast, married couples typically have high levels of commitment and high constraints to ending their relationships. Marriages, on average, are of longer duration compared with cohabitation, and provide greater opportunities or exposure to potentially negative interactions. The greater commitment (defined as dedication, sexual exclusivity, love, and intimate disclosure) experienced by married compared with cohabiting couples (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Giordano et al., 2012; Joyner et al., 2013; Maddox Shaw, Rhoades, Allen, Stanley, & Markman, 2013; Treas & Giesen, 2000) may explain, in part, why married couples report lower odds of relationship violence. Cohabitators often have less social support for their relationships resulting in higher levels of social isolation, which is associated with partner violence (Herrera et al., 2008; Stets, 1991; Van Wyk, Benson, Fox, & DeMaris, 2003).

Cohabitors may feel less obligation to maintain the relationship (fewer children, no legal ties, lower levels of social support) and have more opportunities to end unsatisfactory unions than married couples (Joyner et al., 2013; Kenney, 2004).

A third explanation for higher rates of IPV among cohabitators is that selection or risk factors might explain differences in married and cohabiting couples' violence. To the extent that individuals who are in cohabiting compared with dating or marital unions more often possess histories of violence and socioeconomic disadvantage, these selection factors may be important because a family history of violence along with socioeconomic disadvantage are associated with IPV (Cui, Ueno, Gordon, & Fincham, 2013; Giordano, Johnson, Manning, & Longmore, 2014). Cherlin et al. (2004) reported that in a low-income sample of women, cohabiting, compared with married, individuals more often experienced sexual abuse in childhood. Further, cohabitators, on average, compared with their married counterparts, have lower levels of education and more economically disadvantaged family backgrounds (Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra, 2010; Joyner et al., 2013), background factors that closely align with other socioeconomic predictors of IPV. Thus, cohabitators more often than married individuals are characterized by factors that may translate into higher odds of experiencing violence in their own relationships. In the current study, we accounted for these selection factors including prior family of origin and relational experiences with violence as well as socioeconomic factors.

CURRENT INVESTIGATION

Drawing on exchange and commitment theory and employing longitudinal data, the Toledo Relationships Study (TARS) we examined partner violence across union types (cohabitation, dating, marital) and within cohabiting relationships. The TARS is well suited to our goals because of the in-depth measurement about relationship functioning and quality. The

first research question assessed whether the known differences in self-reported intimate partner violence among cohabiting, married and dating young adults can be explained with a rich set of covariates including relationship duration, prior IPV, relationship constraints and commitment, social support, and selection factors (socioeconomic characteristics and family history). We considered whether low commitment and high constraint relationships were most prone to IPV and whether they were more characteristics of cohabiting than married or dating relationships. The second goal was to examine the heterogeneity within cohabitation by considering the types of cohabiting relationships associated with higher levels of self-reported relationship violence. We expected that cohabiting young adults who experienced high relationship constraints and low commitment would face the greatest risk of intimate partner violence.

DATA AND METHOD

Data

We relied on the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), a longitudinal study of 1,321 Toledo-area adolescents who were in 7th, 9th, and 11th grade in the fall of 2000 (first interview) and in their late twenties in 2011-2012 (fifth interview). The stratified random sample, drawn from school enrollment records of seven Toledo-area school districts, totaling 62 schools, in Lucas County, Ohio, over-sampled Black and Hispanic students. Unlike other data sets that required students to be in school for inclusion in the sample, TARS only required students to be registered, allowing truant or otherwise absent students to participate. Respondents participated in structured in-home interviews through the computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) technique using pre-loaded computer questionnaires. We interviewed respondents one, three, five, and 10 years after the first interview for a total of five interviews. Seventy-seven percent of the original sample participated in the fifth interview, the focus of the current study. Most variables were drawn from the fifth interview except family structure (first

interview), coercive parenting (first interview), and prior IPV experience (all interviews). These data offer an excellent lens on intimate partner violence as reported by young adults in dating, cohabiting, and marital unions, as well as a rich set of predictors found in previous studies to be associated with relationship violence.

The analytic sample consisted of 926 respondents who reported on a current or most recent different sex intimate partner relationship at the time of the fifth interview (2011-2012). We next limited the sample to only Black, White, and Hispanic respondents, and excluding excluded 22 who reported “other” as their race because there were too few cases to analyze. These restrictions resulted in a final analytic sample of 904 respondents, ages 22-29, with a mean age of 25 years. The TARS data were from a stratified, random sample; thus, each respondent had a unique probability of inclusion.

Intimate partner violence referred to the frequency of *any* physical victimization or perpetration in the current or most recent relationship, based on twelve items from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The prompt stated, “During this relationship, how often has/did [partner]:” “throw/n something at you”; “push/ed, shove/d, or grab/bed you”; “twist/ed your arm or hair”; “use/d a knife or gun on you”; “punch/ed or hit you with something that could hurt”; “choke/d you”; “slam/med you against a wall”; “beat you up”; “burn/ed or scald/ed you on purpose”; “kick/ed you”; “slap/ped you in the face or head with an open hand”; or “hit you.” These questions were asked at the time of the fifth interview in relation to experiences with the current/most recent partner and referenced both victimization and perpetration experiences. The responses to each measure are quite skewed because the majority of respondents report never experiencing these events. Respondents were coded 1 if they reported having experienced any of these acts and 0 otherwise, resulting in a

binary response variable. Similar results are obtained when we rely on a logged frequency indicator. The literature we reviewed and our community-based sample suggest that the self-reported violence that we assessed often reflected violence that emerged from more general patterns of conflict and negative communications or “situational couple violence” rather than the more serious and gendered form known as “intimate terrorist violence” (Johnson & Leone, 2005). Situational couple violence occurs at substantially higher rates and is most often mutual (both members of the couple are perpetrators and victims). At the time of interview over half (55%) of the violence was classified as mutual so limiting to just perpetration or victimization provided a more limited lens on IPV experiences.

Union status, based on relationship histories included dating (35.81%), cohabiting (32.36%), and married (23.30%). *Current relationship* indicated that the respondent reported on the current (79.94%) or the most recent (20.06%) relationship. *Relationship duration* ranged from 0.5 (half a month or less) to 14 years. The duration was based on the current or most relationship state (dating, cohabiting, or married); however, similar results were obtained when estimating duration as the total length of the relationship. The mean relationship duration was approximately 2.5 years with 1.5 years for daters, 2.6 years for cohabitators, and 4.4 years for married individuals.

Prior IPV was measured by assessing whether the respondent had reported experience with IPV (as measured above) in a prior relationship to the fifth interview. The assessment of IPV was measured the same at each wave of data collection.

Coercive parenting was measured using a single item from the first interview when respondents were adolescents. We asked, “When you and your parents disagree about things, how often do they push, slap, or hit you?” Responses ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (two or more

times a week). Due to the highly skewed nature of responses, we dichotomized this variable to indicate any reports of parental coercion (1 = yes).

Relationship history included measures of prior marriage and prior cohabitation based on the dates of marriage and cohabitation. Given the young age of the sample relatively few respondents were previously married, but nearly half had been in a prior cohabiting relationship.

Commitment included indicators of sexual exclusivity, love, intimate disclosure, and dedication. *Sexual exclusivity* was assessed by an affirmative answer to the question, “Are you and [name] sexually exclusive (not having sex with other people)?” and the response, “never” to the question, “How often have you gotten physically involved (“had sex”) with other guys [girls]?” *Love* was measured using the following three items: (1) “How much do you love [name]?”; (2) “I would rather be with [name] than anyone else”; and (3) “I am very attracted to [name].” The alpha was .77. *Intimate disclosure* was measured from with following three statements: (1) “Sometimes I don’t know quite what to say to [name];” (2) “I would be uncomfortable having intimate conversations with [name]”; and (3) “Sometimes I find it hard to talk about my feelings with [name].” The alpha was .73. *Dedication* was assessed with the following four items: (1) “I would be devastated if we broke up”; (2) “I may not want to be with him [her] a few years from now”; (3) “I feel uncertain about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime;” and (4) “How often have you seriously considered ending your relationship with [name]?” The alpha was .85.

Constraints were assessed with four indicators: children, pooling income, instrumental support, and lack of relationship alternatives. *Children* indicated whether the respondent had reported having any children (41%). *Pooling income* was based on questions about pooling of money or a shared bank account. *Instrumental support* was based on items about frequency of

receiving or providing help with paying for groceries, clothes, activities, rent and bills, and gifts as well as count on each other financially if the need arises. *Lack of relationship alternatives* was based on a single item asking extent of agreement with the item, “Sometimes I think I stay with [name] because I might not be able to get another boyfriend [girlfriend].”

Measures were generated to summarize constraints and commitment were coded as 1, indicating high levels, if two of the four measures were above the median level and otherwise coded as 0 indicating low levels. These measures were combined into a *summary* four category variable used in supplemental analyses: high commitment and high constraints, low commitment and high constraints, high commitment and low constraints, and low commitment and low constraints. The advantage of this measure was that it characterized the relationship rather than focusing on individual measures.

Social support included closeness to parents and friends. The parental closeness measure was based on a single item indicating level of agreement with the statement, “I feel close to my parents.” Closeness to friends was based on three items asking about how often the respondent spoke to friends about “something really great that happened,” “something really bad that happened,” and “private thoughts or feelings.” The alpha was .78.

Gender, a dichotomous variable, indicated whether the respondent was female. *Age* was the difference between date of birth and the fifth interview date, with a mean of 25.

Race/ethnicity consisted of three categories: non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic. *Family structure*, from the respondent’s first interview asked, “During the past 12 months, who were you living with most of the time?” Respondents selected one of 25 categories, which we collapsed into four categories: two biological parents, single parent, stepparents, or ‘other family’ including living with other family members or foster care. *Education* was

measured at the fifth interview and included less than high school, high school graduate, some college and college or more. *Employment* at the fifth interview included three categories: part-time, and full-time.

Method

We first presented descriptive analyses showing the distribution of respondents across the dependent and independent variables. Logistic regression models were then estimated that predicted the odds of experiencing IPV. A series of four models were tested that first included the zero-order association, the relationship duration and prior violence (family and relational) measures, the commitment and constraints indicators, and the sociodemographic measures. These sets of models were tested for the entire sample and for cohabiting respondents. Additional models were estimated, but not shown, that substituted the specific constraints and commitment measures for the four category summary indicator.

RESULTS

Similar to prior studies, we found, at the bivariate level, that young adults in cohabiting, compared with dating or marital, relationships more often reported any intimate partner violence (Table 1). About one-third (31%) of young adults in cohabiting relationships, 23% in marriages, and 18% in dating relationships experienced any violence in their current or most recent relationship. These prevalence rates were similar to prevalence rates based on nationally representative samples such as the Add Health (Cui et al. 2013). Young adults in dating and marital relationships experienced statistically similar rates of IPV. The higher prevalence of partner violence in cohabiting unions was observed for both male and female respondents.

[Table 1 About Here]

Table 1 also showed the distribution of the covariates separately for young adults in married, cohabiting, and dating unions. Consistent with prior literature, marital unions, compared with dating and cohabiting unions, were of longer duration. Nearly all marriages were current or ongoing relationships as were two-thirds of dating relationships. Relatively few respondents were previously married (3.5%) while half had cohabited previously. Nearly three-quarters of married young adults had cohabited prior to marriage, most often with their spouse. About 40% lived with a different partner before this most recent or current cohabiting relationship (serial cohabitation), and 44.5% of daters reported some prior experience with cohabitation. Regarding coercive parenting while growing up, prevalence rates did not differ for married, cohabiting, and dating respondents. Similarly, about half of respondents, regardless of union status, had experienced any IPV in a prior relationship.

The measures of commitment were, on average, higher among married than cohabiting or dating respondents. A significantly higher share of married respondents (80%) reported that they were sexually exclusive, compared with 68% of cohabitators and 65% of daters. The levels of dedication, on average, were higher for married than cohabiting or dating respondents. The levels of love and intimate disclosure were, on average, slightly higher for married than cohabiting or dating respondents. Constraint indicators followed a similar pattern in which married, compared with cohabiting and dating, respondents more often had children, received instrumental support, and pooled their incomes. Lack of relationship alternatives were quite similar by union status with slightly higher levels reported by dating compared with married respondents. The summary measure of constraints and commitment showed that 68.5% of the married respondents, 41% of cohabitators, and 12% of daters reported high commitment and high constraints. The category that was hypothesized to be most highly associated with IPV, low

commitment and high constraints, was experienced by 19% of married, 29% of cohabiting, and 19% of dating respondents. The high commitment and low constraints pattern existed for 9% of married, 21% of cohabiting, and 34% of dater respondents. Low commitment and low constraints were reported by 3% of married, 9% of cohabiting, and 35% of dating respondents.

The indicators of parental and friend closeness were similar across union status. Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics, there were union status differences by race/ethnicity, family background, and employment. Married respondents were more often non-Hispanic white (79%) compared with cohabitators (66%) and daters (63%). Cohabiting, compared with married or dating, respondents were more likely to have lived in single mother or stepfamilies while growing up. Full-time employment was more common among married than cohabiting or dating respondents.

Table 2 presented three logistic regression models, with cohabitation as the referent union status category, predicting the odds of any IPV. The first model presented the zero-order results. The second model added relationship duration, relationship history, prior violence experience (family and relational), and sociodemographic measures. The third model included the indicators of constraints, commitment, and social support.

[Table 2 about Here]

At the bivariate level dating and married, compared with cohabiting, respondents reported significantly lower odds of experiencing any IPV. Married individuals had 35% lower odds of experiencing IPV compared with cohabitators, and daters had 52% lower odds of experiencing IPV compared with cohabitators. The difference in the odds of IPV for daters and married individuals was not statistically significant (results not shown).

The second model showed that daters and married individuals, compared with cohabitators, continued to experience significantly lower odds of IPV controlling for relationship duration, current status of relationship, relationship history, prior family or relational violence, and sociodemographic characteristics. The significance of the marital indicator decreased to marginal significance ($p=.08$) due in part to the inclusion of family history and race/ethnicity in the model. The dating coefficients remained significantly associated with lower odds of IPV. Consistent with prior work, relationship duration was associated with higher odds of IPV. Respondents who reported on a recent, compared with current, relationship reported lower odds of IPV, demonstrating the importance of including current and most recent relationships. Prior marital and cohabitation experience were not associated with IPV. As expected, respondents with a history of IPV in a prior relationship had twice the odds of experiencing IPV in their current or most recent relationship. Reports of coercive parenting during adolescence were positively associated with the odds of IPV. The next set of variables included socioeconomic status and family background. The demographic characteristics showed no association with IPV in the full model, but in zero-order models, Hispanic and Black young adults reported higher odds of IPV (results not shown). Young adults who were raised in single parent, compared with two biological, families had higher odds of IPV. Education was not associated with IPV in the multivariate model, but at the zero-order college graduates reported lower odds of IPV (results not shown). Respondents who reported either part-time or full-time employment had lower odds of IPV.

The third column of Table 2 included constraints, commitment, and social support measures. Based on contrasts of the log likelihood ratios the constraints and commitment indicators contributed to the fit of the model ($p < .01$). Both dating and married respondents had

lower odds of experiencing IPV with the inclusion of constraints (children, lack of alternatives, and instrumental support) and commitment (sexual exclusivity, love, intimate disclosure, and dedication) measures. The odds of experiencing IPV were 38% lower for married and about 50% lower for dating respondents compared to their cohabiting counterparts. Thus, these indicators did not fully explain the differences in IPV by union status. In terms of commitment measures, sexual exclusivity, dedication, and intimate disclosure were associated with lower odds of IPV. The constraint indicator that was associated positively with IPV is financial enmeshment. Although positively associated with IPV in zero-order models (results not shown), in multivariate models, children, instrumental support, and relationship alternatives were not significantly associated with IPV. When the summary measure was substituted for the indicators of commitment and constraints, low commitment and high constraints were associated with higher odds of IPV relative to any other combination of constraints and commitment (results not shown). The social support indicators showed that closeness to family and friends was associated with significantly lower odds of IPV. Overall, constraints were associated with higher and commitment indicators were associated with lower odds of IPV.

Although IPV rates were higher in young adult cohabiting relationships, not all individuals in cohabiting experience IPV. Table 1 indicated that the majority, 69%, of cohabiting individuals did not experience any IPV. Table 3 examined the correlates of IPV among cohabiting couples. In the first model, longer duration cohabiting unions were associated with higher odds of IPV. Prior experience with cohabitation (or serial cohabitation) was associated with two times higher odds of IPV compared with cohabitators who were in their first cohabiting union. A history of relationship violence was associated with higher odds of IPV in the current or most recent cohabiting union. In the multivariate model, coercive parenting during

adolescence was not associated with IPV among cohabitators, but was associated with IPV at the zero-order (results not shown). In the bivariate models, but not multivariate models, cohabiting Black and Hispanic, compared with White, respondents reported higher odds of IPV. There were no gender or age differences in rates of IPV among this sample of cohabiting young adults. Higher education was associated with lower odds of IPV, specifically attaining some post-high school education. Among cohabiting young adults full-time employment was associated with lower odds of IPV.

[Table 3 about Here]

The second model included the commitment, constraints, and social support measures. These indicators contributed to the fit of the model ($p < .01$). Generally, commitment indicators were negatively associated with IPV. In the zero-order model, respondents in sexually exclusive relationships were less likely to experience IPV, but in the multivariate model sexual exclusivity was not associated with IPV. Higher levels of dedication and intimate self-disclosure were associated with lower odds of IPV. In terms of constraints, children were associated with lower odds of IPV. Thus, children did not operating as a traditional relationship constraint and appeared to operate as a form of commitment. Financial enmeshment, instrumental support and lack of relationship alternatives were not associated with IPV, but were in zero-order models. Social support from friends was associated with marginally ($p = .055$) lower odds of IPV, but in the multivariate model parental support was not related to IPV.

The substitution of the summary measure commitment and constraints for the individual indicators showed that cohabiting respondents in relationships consisting of low commitment and high constraints experienced significantly higher odds of IPV (results not shown) net of the sociodemographic measures. Specifically, about half of cohabiting young adults who faced low

commitment and high constraints experienced IPV and only 26% with high commitment and high constraints experienced IPV. Given that cohabiting individuals more often experienced relationships characterized by low commitment and high constraints (29%) compared with dating or married individuals, this finding offered insights into potential explanations for why cohabitators may experience higher odds of IPV.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior studies, in our contemporary sample of young adults cohabitation was associated with higher odds of IPV. We found that cohabiting men and women experienced higher rates of IPV compared with dating or married young adults. Although constraints and commitment were associated with IPV, the inclusion of the constraints and commitment indicators did not fully explain the higher levels of IPV experienced by cohabiting couples.

We found that although prior experience with cohabitation was associated with higher prevalence of any IPV, it did not explain the union status differentials in IPV. Prior studies have not accounted for cohabitation history in their assessments of IPV, and it maybe a potential avenue for future research to help assess differentials among married, cohabiting, and dating men and women. Similarly, coercive parenting during adolescence and a history of IPV in prior relationships were associated with IPV, but did not explain why cohabitators have higher rates of IPV. These findings are consistent with prior studies and demonstrate the long term consequences of early negative parenting. The sociodemographic indicators that select individuals into certain types of unions accounted for some of the cohabitation differential in IPV. Specifically, race and family background accounted for some of the IPV differential between married and cohabiting young adults.

Although cohabitation was associated with higher odds of IPV, not all cohabiting young adults experienced IPV. We initially showed that about one-third of cohabitators had some IPV experience in their current or most recent relationship. We found that among cohabitators, some of the significant correlates of IPV were relationship duration, relationship and IPV history along with constraints and commitment. While growing shares of young adults have entered more than one cohabiting union (serial cohabitation), little attention has been paid to the implications of serial cohabitation for well-being. Our finding that serial cohabitators were more prone to IPV provides new evidence about the potential negative implications of serial cohabitation. An unexpected finding was that cohabitators with children experienced lower odds of IPV than those without, suggesting that in cohabiting unions children may operate as indicators of commitment rather than relational constraints. The summary indicator of high constraints and low commitment, representing 29% of cohabitators, was significantly associated with higher odds of IPV. IPV levels were about twice as high among cohabiting young adults who faced low commitment and high constraints experienced IPV compared with those with high commitment and high constraints. These findings illustrated the importance of considering the variation in the experiences of cohabiting individuals. In short, this is a constellation of relationship dynamics that matter for understanding variability across union types as well as observed differences within the subgroup of cohabitators.

Although this study has contributed to our understanding of cohabitation and IPV, there were a few limitations. The analyses were based on a regional sample of young adults who grew up in Toledo, Ohio. Although the sample was similar in terms of sociodemographic characteristics of young adults across the United States, these analyses should be replicated with representative samples. Second, this study relied on a static measure of union status and did not

address transitions, such as movement from singlehood into cohabitation or from cohabitation into marriage. Further attention to how transitions into and out of cohabitation are associated with IPV is warranted. Third, this study focused on IPV at one point in the relationship and did not analyze how or why individuals started or stopped IPV with a particular partner and did not assess transitions into and out of cohabiting unions. Additionally, the study relied on the responses from one partner and a couple-based study may advance our understanding of relationship quality. Finally, this work was limited to only one measure of negative relationship dynamics, IPV, and further important measures that should be assessed in future studies include psychological abuse, sexual coercion, as well as threats of violence.

The diffusion of cohabitation implied that selection into cohabitation would be less dramatic and result in fewer differences between cohabiting, married, and dating individuals. In Canada the marriage and cohabitation gap in relationship violence has diminished as the prevalence of cohabitation has risen (Brownridge, 2008). We expected to observe a similar pattern in the United States as cohabitation continues to be a typical young adult experience and a precursor into marriage. Yet cohabitators continue to face greater risk of IPV than their dating or married counterparts. A subset of cohabitators at greatest risk of IPV were those who have had a prior cohabiting partner (serial cohabitators) and were in relationships with low levels of commitment and high constraints. Our work moved forward assessments of cohabitation and IPV by acknowledging the variation in experiences of cohabiting couples, but further work on the specific mechanisms explaining differentials in IPV is warranted.

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Table 1. Distribution of Dependent and Independent Variables

	Total	Married	Cohabiting	Dating
Intimate Partner Violence	23.34%	22.69%	31.25%	18.00%
<i>Union Status</i>				
Cohabiting	32.00%			
Married	23.89%			
Dating	44.25%			
Duration	2.54	4.43	2.61	1.47
Current/Most Recent	80.09%	98.61%	87.15%	65.00%
Prior Marriage	3.54%	2.78%	4.51%	3.25%
Prior Cohabitation	50.33%	72.69%	41.67%	44.50%
Prior IPV	52.32%	50.46%	53.82%	52.25%
Coercive Parenting	22.12%	20.83%	19.44%	24.75%
<i>Commitment</i>				
Sexual Exclusivity	69.91%	80.09%	68.40%	65.50%
Dedication	14.68	16.70	14.93	13.40
Love	12.57	13.51	12.90	11.83
Intimate Disclosure	11.70	12.05	11.69	11.51
<i>Constraints</i>				
Children	41.59%	61.11%	46.88%	27.25%
Instrumental Support	38.90	45.01	42.03	33.36
Financial Enmeshment	39.05%	76.39%	45.49%	14.25%
Lack of Alternatives	1.69	1.51	1.63	1.83
<i>Summary Commitment & Constraints</i>				
High Commitment and High Constraints	34.96%	68.52%	41.32%	12.25%
Low Commitment and High Constraints	22.23%	18.98%	28.82%	19.25%
High Commitment and Low Constraints	23.78%	9.26%	20.83%	33.75%

Low Commitment and Low Constraints	19.03%	3.24%	9.03%	34.75%
<i>Social Support</i>				
Parent Closeness	4.15	4.07	4.19	4.17
Friend Closeness	3.60	3.58	3.60	3.60
<i>Sociodemographic</i>				
Female	54.31%	62.96%	51.04%	52.00%
Age	25.43	26.19	25.43	25.02
Race/Ethnicity				
White	67.81%	78.70%	65.63%	63.50%
Black	20.91%	11.11%	20.14%	26.75%
Hispanic	11.28%	10.19%	14.24%	9.75%
Family Structure				
Two Biological Parent	53.54%	62.50%	42.71%	56.50%
Single Parent	20.91%	14.81%	24.31%	21.75%
Step Parent	13.50%	11.57%	17.36%	11.75%
'Other' Family	12.06%	11.11%	15.63%	10.00%
Education				
Less than High School	10.73%	12.04%	10.07%	10.50%
High School	32.74%	31.48%	37.15%	30.25%
Some College	33.08%	33.33%	35.76%	31.00%
College Degree	23.45%	23.15%	17.01%	28.25%
Employment				
Not Working	24.78%	23.15%	23.26%	26.75%
Part-time	19.03%	12.96%	16.32%	24.25%
Full-time	56.19%	63.89%	60.42%	49.00%
N	904	216	288	400

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study

Table 2. Logistic Regression Odds Ratio of IPV (n = 904)

Covariates	Bivariate	Model 1	Model 3
<i>Union Status (Cohabiting)</i>			
Married	0.65*	0.648+	0.623+
Dating	0.48****	0.442**	0.494**
Duration		1.108****	1.087*
Current/Most Recent		0.661+	0.927
Prior Marriage		0.876	0.985
Prior Cohabitation		1.206	1.195
Prior IPV		2.107****	1.878**
Coercive Parenting		1.352	1.533*
<i>Sociodemographic</i>			
Female (Male)		0.844	0.892
Age		0.934	0.926
Race/Ethnicity (White)			
Black		1.340	0.948
Hispanic		1.517	1.379
<i>Family Background (Two Biological)</i>			
Single		1.953**	1.703*
Stepparent		1.044	0.962
Other		1.564+	1.754*
<i>Education (12 years)</i>			
< 12 years		0.877	0.805
Some College		0.868	0.737
College Graduate		0.658	0.701
<i>Employment</i>			
Part-time		0.608*	0.490**
Full-time		0.433****	0.439****
<i>Commitment</i>			

Cohabitation and IPV			33
Sexually Exclusive			0.540**
Dedication			0.891***
Love			1.085
Intimate Disclosure			0.852***
<i>Constraints</i>			
Children			0.803
Instrumental Support			1.021
Financial Enmeshment			1.796**
Lack of Alternatives			1.131
<i>Social Support</i>			
Parental			0.829+
Friends			0.809+
-2 Log Likelihood	966.17	860.55	768.48

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study

+ p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Reference category in parentheses

Table 3. Logistic Regression Odds Ratio of IPV Among Cohabitators (n = 288)

Covariates	Model 1	Model 3
Duration	1.167*	1.171*
Current/Most Recent	0.537	0.810
Prior Marriage	0.895	1.116
Prior Cohabitation	2.005*	2.597*
Prior IPV	2.096*	1.743
Coercive Parenting	1.481	1.368
<i>Sociodemographic</i>		
Female (Male)	1.034	1.147
Age	0.981	0.977
Race/Ethnicity (White)		
Black	1.482	1.223
Hispanic	1.627	1.800
Family Background (Two Biological)		
Single	1.604	1.356
Stepparent	0.451+	0.497
Other	0.709	1.018
Education (12 years)		
< 12 years	0.721	0.619
Some College	0.599	0.377*
College Graduate	0.649	0.585
Employment		
Part-time	1.012	0.920
Full-time	0.541+	0.622
<i>Commitment</i>		
Sexually Exclusive		0.544

Dedication		0.871*
Love		1.059
Intimate Disclosure		0.788**
<i>Constraints</i>		
Children		0.443*
Instrumental Support		0.989
Financial Enmeshment		1.806
Lack of Alternatives		1.274
<i>Social Support</i>		
Parental		0.954
Friends		0.695+
-2 Log Likelihood	305.63	249.57

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Reference category in parentheses