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Couple-Level Economic and Career Concerns and Intimate Partner Violence in Young Adulthood

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Abstract

Family scholars have demonstrated that economic conditions influence marital quality and relationship instability. Similarly, researchers have identified low income and poverty as important risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV). Yet limited work has examined how economic factors influence the use of violence in the romantic context, particularly during young adulthood. Using the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study ($n = 928$), we examine the influence of economic and career concerns as specific sources of conflict on IPV among a sample of young adults. Findings suggest that these areas of disagreement within romantic relationships are associated with IPV risk, net of traditional predictors. We discuss the implications of our findings for intervention and prevention efforts.

Keywords

Economic well-being; family stress; intimate partner violence; young adulthood

Although the economic recession and ongoing economic crisis have affected millions of Americans, it has been particularly devastating for young adults. As businesses began to close their doors, the young adult population was among the last hired and first fired. According to a recent report, only about 41% of 18- to 29-year-olds were employed full-time, and of those employed, less than a third were satisfied with their current income (Pew Research Center, 2010). In the family literature, there is a long line of research underscoring the influence of economic conditions (e.g., poverty, unemployment, economic hardship) on marital quality and relationship instability (see Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010, for a review), providing evidence of a link between socioeconomic status and the stability of both marital and cohabiting relationships (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). Moreover,

economic conditions may play an especially important role in the development and maintenance of healthy romantic relationships in young adulthood (Hardie & Lucas, 2010).

A key and consequential indicator of poor relationship quality is intimate partner violence (IPV), which constitutes physical, psychological, and sexual harm toward one's partner in the context of an intimate relationship (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015). Our use of IPV in the current investigation, however, refers specifically to the use of physical force. Researchers consistently found IPV to be more prevalent among lower-income individuals and those experiencing employment instability (e.g., Fox & Benson, 2006; Golden, Perreira, & Durrance, 2013; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). IPV is also particularly common during the young adult period; approximately 30% of individuals report exposure to partner violence during young adulthood (Cui, Ueno, Gordon, & Fincham, 2013). Yet with few exceptions, research most often has examined the association between objective indicators of socioeconomic status and IPV, and this work is often limited to samples of older adults. DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, and Van Wyk (2003) found that relationship strains, including financial considerations, were associated with verbal conflict, which in turn heightened IPV risk. Others have drawn on a strain perspective to understand the influence of economic disadvantage on IPV (e.g., Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2003). Thus, there is some direct evidence, and more often an underlying assumption, of a link between financial strain and couple-level interaction, but how the content of that interaction or the specific concerns that couples confront regarding economic issues influences IPV is less well understood.

Using data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), this study extends previous work by linking research on family processes and IPV to examine the influence of economic sources of conflict on IPV among a sample of young adults. Most research linking economic hardship or financial strains to relationship processes conceptualizes such concerns in terms of relatively objective considerations, including the income-to-needs ratio or a roster of negative financial life events (e.g., job loss, experiencing foreclosure, going on public assistance). Such considerations, however, do not capture the full range of financial- or career-related sources of conflict in intimate relationships. Particularly in young adult relationships in which partners may be on separate timetables when it comes to finding a long-term career or establishing a family, it is important to consider more nuanced measures of financial strain, including the extent to which individuals resent providing financial assistance to their partners and whether differences regarding drive or ambition are a common source of arguments.

In this study, we have used recently collected data to examine the association between economically related conflicts and IPV among young adults. Because the study employs data from a community-based sample, the violence reported more often reflects "situational couple violence," or violence that emerges from more general patterns of conflict and negative communications, rather than more serious forms such as the "intimate terrorist" dynamic that Johnson and other researchers have described (e.g., M. Johnson & Leone, 2005). This more severe form of partner violence is highly gendered and characterized by the use of controlling behaviors rooted in a broader desire to exert dominance (M. Johnson, 2008). Because of the serious consequences stemming from intimate terrorism, considerable

research has focused on the dynamics associated with this type of violence (e.g., male jealousy, use of coercive control, isolation of the partner from family and friends). Consequently, although situational couple violence occurs at substantially higher rates in general, we know relatively little about the dynamics linked to this form of IPV. In this investigation, we direct attention to economic and career concerns, a common source of stress and conflict in relationships, to further elucidate risk factors and relationship dynamics associated with IPV experiences in a large, heterogeneous sample of young adults. Prior research has shown that even in the context of community samples, IPV is associated with relationship instability (Halpern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013), declines in mental health (W. Johnson, Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2014), and physical injury (Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007), which suggests the need to address these more frequently occurring experiences that have implications for family and relationship functioning and individual well-being.

Background

Socioeconomic Status and Relationship Conflict

Economic problems are a primary source of stress in families (Edin & Kissane, 2010) and have important implications for family processes (McLoyd, 1998). Conger, Rueter, and Elder (1999) suggested that economic problems “may be an even more important source of stress for a couple than are difficulties in their marriage” (p. 68). Consistent with the family stress model, Kinnunen and Pulkkinen (1998) found that objective measures of economic conditions (e.g., employment status) influenced feelings of financial strain, which in turn led to hostile interaction between partners. In response to the consistent finding that the influence of economic hardship on relationship discord is greater among men (e.g., Conger, Elder, Lorenz, & Conger, 1990), a more recent study suggested that this association may be related to women’s perception of their partners during periods of financial strain (Williams, Cheadle, & Goosby, 2013). Thus, the current study includes attention to respondents’ subjective interpretations of their partner’s economic circumstances, including the extent to which disagreements center on a partner’s lack of drive or ambition.

Several scholars have considered economic conditions in relation to IPV, most frequently citing low income and poverty as important risk factors (e.g., Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, Wu, & Kim, 2012; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Men’s employment and work-related stress have also been linked to male-to-female partner violence (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Jasinski, Asdigian, & Kantor, 1997), as has residence in a high-poverty neighborhood (Cunradi, Caetano, Clark, & Schafer, 2000). Given the relevancy of economic factors for IPV documented across several studies, researchers have begun to examine the broader social context as it relates to the experience of IPV. Results of that research indicate that community-level economic factors, including tract-level unemployment, economic disadvantage, and poverty, increase community rates of IPV (e.g., DeJong, Pizarro, & McGarrell, 2011; Diem & Pizarro, 2010; Miles-Doan, 1998). Most of these studies, however, focus on objective measures of financial conditions and draw primarily on samples of adults.

The family literature makes an important contribution to this area of scholarship by moving beyond examination of the general link between poverty and relationship conflict. Berkowitz's (1989) reformulation of the frustration–aggression hypothesis, the foundation of the family stress model, posits that aversive experiences foster feelings of negative affect, which may produce “aggressive inclinations” (p. 71). Consistent with this theorizing, scholars have suggested that economic stress influences marital conflict (Conger et al., 1999). Beyond marital conflict (e.g., criticism, defensiveness, insensitivity), it seems likely that aggressive inclinations may quickly escalate to violence. This notion has been examined in relation to partner violence (e.g., Winstok, 2013), and partner violence is most often conceptualized as reactive in nature—as an angry or hostile reaction to an experienced stressor. Few scholars, however, have extended this line of inquiry to the study of economic conditions and partner violence. An exception is the work of Fox, Benson, DeMaris, and Van Wyk (2002), who emphasize that resources are related to partner violence; using data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to test the family stress model, the authors found that factors including the nature of one's employment and objective measures of financial adequacy increase the risk of IPV.

Research on partner violence has suggested that marital conflict (Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008) and the frequency of arguments (DeMaris et al., 2003) are both related to IPV. These findings imply an association between economic hardship and IPV via interactional patterns at the couple level. Drawing on the family stress model, scholars have identified a number of forms of couple interaction that increase (e.g., externalizing behaviors, hostility, disagreements) or buffer (e.g., marital support, effective couple problem solving, quality time) relationship distress (Conger et al., 1999; Conger et al., 2002; Gudmunson, Beutler, Israelsen, McCoy, & Hill, 2007). Furthermore, the forms of couple interaction, including both positive and negative styles of interaction, are more salient mediators of the association between financial strain and marital instability than is distress at the individual level (Gudmunson et al., 2007). Thus, researchers have focused considerable attention on the form of couple conflict, narrowing in on how couples interact, often to the neglect of the content of the interaction (see Giordano, Copp, Longmore, & Manning, 2015, for an exception). Such a rationale suggests that hostile patterns of interaction fuel conflict and promote violent escalation. It is important to consider, however, the extent to which the content of the disagreements themselves, including conflict due to financial and/or career concerns, influences IPV risk.

Young Adult Romantic Relationships

Most empirical investigations have focused on the associations between economic problems and marital functioning (e.g., Amato et al., 2007; Conger et al., 2002; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006). Thus, an important question is whether the link between socioeconomic status and relationship quality persists across different types of relationships, including cohabiting and dating relationships that predominate during the young adult period. Comingling of resources across these relationship types varies, thereby influencing the degree to which relationship strains center on economic issues (Kenney, 2004).

Prior research has identified a link between joint banking and relationship quality, indicating that merged finances represent a joint investment that enhances relationship stability and commitment (Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977; Brines & Joyner, 1999; Kenney, 2004; Treas, 1993), and thus most of the work on issues of economic dependency or resource allocation is limited to samples of married and cohabiting adults. Theoretically, merging finances in intimate relationships may enhance relationship quality by increasing commitment (Steuber & Paik, 2013); however, this does not include the potential for other motivations to pool resources. For some couples, resource pooling may be a survival strategy to overcome dire financial situations (Addo, 2014). That is, rather than marking commitment, pooled resources may be a marker of codependence. Although these types of material investments may contribute to relationship stability over time (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010; Stanley & Markman, 1992), they may also foster feelings of being unable to leave a relationship or of being “trapped” (Knopp, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2015; Rhoades, Stanley, Kelmer, & Markman, 2010). This contrasts with the view that resource sharing necessarily reflects positively on the quality of the relationship (i.e., as an index of commitment). Accordingly, this study includes an indicator of income pooling as a characterization of the couple’s financial relationship in addition to traditional measures of socioeconomic status and economic hardship.

Even when merged finances do represent greater commitment, they may increase the potential for conflict. For example, young adult relationships are often uncertain, and relational asymmetries may further influence the extent of financially motivated relationship strain; the economic contributions (real or perceived) of one member of the couple may supersede the other’s, thus fueling feelings of resentment. Given the instability of early relationships and the economic vulnerability of the young adult population, feelings of resentment about financial assistance—or resource sharing in general—may represent a common source of friction among young adult couples. Whereas prior work has focused on objective indicators of socioeconomic status, we argue that subjective considerations may be particularly salient during the young adult years as individuals work toward obtaining education, skills, and training to establish themselves in jobs and careers. Finally, given that men have historically taken on the role of financial provider, and that husbands have generally governed household financial decisions (Dew & Dakin, 2011), the weight of financial strain may fall more heavily on their shoulders. These findings suggest that economic and/or career considerations may be more strongly associated with IPV for men than women.

A Life Course Lens on the Family Stress Model

This investigation is guided by a life course framework and draws on elements of the family stress model of economic hardship (see Conger et al., 2010) to further disentangle the associations between economic strains and IPV. According to the concept of linked lives, individuals are influenced by the experiences of the individuals with whom they maintain social relationships throughout the life course (Elder, 1994; Elder, George, & Shanahan, 1996), including lifelong links with family, as well as connections developed with friends, romantic partners, coworkers, and others. Strains experienced in these contexts are distressing for the individual exposed to them, but given the degree of enmeshment of

individuals occupying these roles, “adversities befalling one person within the contexts of such roles are likely to reverberate through the role set” (Pearlin, 2010, p. 212). Yet economic strains have the potential to be directly passed from one partner to the other—particularly in relationships with an expectation of shared financial responsibility. That is, when financial problems arise and financial commitments are unmet, both members of the couple likely feel the repercussions.

Prior research has shown that financial disagreements tend to be more intense than other sources of conflict (Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009) and may provoke more negative conflict tactics (Dew & Dakin, 2011). According to the family stress model, economic pressure influences marital distress directly, as well as through a number of family processes, including parental emotional distress and behavioral problems, marital conflict, and relationship quality (Conger et al., 2010; Conger & Elder, 1994). Consequently, couples experiencing economic pressures are at increased risk for emotional distress, exhibit fewer supportive behaviors, and show increases in negative interactions and conflict (Conger et al., 2010). There is widespread support for the family stress model, which suggests that it provides a sound explanation of the stress processes linking economic strains to relationship functioning. A limitation of this model, however, is that it does not directly acknowledge the source of the marital conflict but rather suggests that those who experience economic strain use—or adopt—more negative styles of interaction. Yet among couples experiencing financial strain, there is a very concrete source of contention in the relationship—money.

In summary, the family stress model provides an important framework for understanding the processes through which financial strain influences couple-level interaction. Yet, despite its focus on the interactional patterns of couples, the model falls short of providing a truly dyadic understanding of relationship discord. Certainly, the experience of economic hardship is likely to result in a number of negative consequences, including feelings of emotional distress. Nevertheless, these individual responses to financial strain do not inherently affect patterns of interaction. There are likely specific areas of discord in the relationship (e.g., allocation of scarce resources, perceptions of a lack of drive or ambition, how to pool resources), however, that become the site of conflict. In the absence of a mismatch on these potential sites of conflict, economically strained couples may not experience heightened levels of discord. Thus, to fully understand the circumstances under which relationship conflict develops as a result of financial strains, an important next step entails a more localized approach focused on the content of these interactions (Giordano et al., 2015; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002).

Current Investigation

In the current investigation, we used data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS) to examine the association between economic strains and IPV, controlling for a number of well-documented risk factors, including measures of socioeconomic status and material hardship. Much of what we know about the association between stress and IPV comes from early work on social stress and family violence (see Straus, 1980). The focus on economic strains moves in a more fundamental way from a traditional stress model. Although communication practices and conflict more generally are important

considerations, it is also critical to consider the content of the disagreements themselves. The current study examines the influence of conflict due to finances on IPV, including the extent to which feeling resentment about financial assistance to a partner increases the odds of violence. This approach attempts to tap the degree to which the couple is characterized by stressors, in contrast to much of the early literature, which more directly modeled the influence of general discord on IPV.

In addition, most studies examining the influence of economic strain on relationship functioning focus on samples of married couples. Yet across relationship types (married, cohabiting, and dating), there is variation in the extent to which individuals pool resources or provide instrumental support. Further, many of the studies of income pooling and relationship quality focus on joint banking (e.g., Addo & Sassler, 2010; Steuber & Paik, 2013; Treas, 1993). Particularly among more disadvantaged couples, bank accounts are less common (Addo & Sassler, 2010). Thus, to provide a more comprehensive portrait of the factors contributing to IPV risk among a sample of young adults, we included income pooling in predictive models.

In multivariate models, we included a number of factors identified as correlates of economic strains and relationship violence in previous research. These include traditional social learning factors, as well as a broad range of sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics. Experiencing coercive parenting in the family of origin is a risk factor for partner violence (e.g., Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Smith, Ireland, Park, Elwyn, & Thornberry, 2011). Additionally, research has highlighted the extent to which violence in adolescent romantic relationships is associated with IPV in young adulthood (Cui et al., 2013). Relationship characteristics, including relationship status and relationship duration, are associated with partner violence (Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Kenney & McLanahan, 2006). Parenthood increases IPV risk (Vest, Catlin, Chen, & Brownson, 2002). Finally, socioeconomic factors including income, neighborhood poverty, material hardship, education, and employment status influence the experience of partner violence (see Capaldi et al., 2012). Thus, we have included these variables as controls in our models estimating the odds of IPV. On the basis of recent research and theorizing, we propose the following hypotheses:

H₁: Couple-level economic and/or career concerns will be positively associated with the odds of relationship violence net of socioeconomic factors (i.e., employment status, education, and material hardship), as well as prior victimization and a range of sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics.

H₂: The observed associations between couple-level economic and/or career concerns and IPV will differ for men and women. Specifically, given differences in traditional gender role expectations regarding the provision of support, we expect the associations between such concerns and IPV to be stronger for men.

Data and Methods

This research draws on data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), which is based on a stratified random sample of 1,321 adolescents and their parents or guardians.

The TARS data were collected in the years 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2011. The proposed analyses rely on structured interviews conducted at Waves 1–5. The sampling frame of the TARS study encompassed 62 schools across seven school districts. The initial sample was drawn from enrollment records for Grades 7, 9, and 11, but school attendance was not a requirement for inclusion in the study. The stratified, random sample was devised by the National Opinion Research Center and includes oversamples of Black and Hispanic adolescents. The initial sample included 1,321 respondents, and Wave 5 retained 1,021 valid respondents, or 77% of Wave 1. Respondents' ages ranged from 12 to 19 years at Wave 1 to 22 to 29 years at Wave 5. The analytic sample ($n = 928$) consisted of all respondents from the fifth interview, with a few exclusions, including of respondents who did not report on a current or most recent relationship ($n = 70$) and those reporting their race as "other" ($n = 23$).

Dependent Variable

Relationship violence (Wave 5) is based on responses to 12 items from the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), including whether the respondent had "thrown something at," "twisted arm or hair," "used a knife or gun," "punched or hit with something that could hurt," "choked," "slammed against a wall," "beat up," "burned or scalded on purpose," "kicked," "pushed, shoved, or grabbed," "slapped in the face or head with an open hand," or "hit" in reference to experiences with the current or most recent partner ($\alpha = .91$). These questions were asked at the time of the fifth interview in relation to experiences with the current or most recent partner and referenced both victimization and perpetration experiences. We used a dichotomous measure of relationship violence, distinguishing between those who reported any violent behaviors (perpetration, victimization, and mutual) and those who reported no violence (1 = IPV, 0 = no IPV).

Independent Variables

Couple-level economic and/or career concerns—Conflict due to finances (Wave 5) was a four-item scale ($\alpha = .68$) based on responses to a series of questions regarding the frequency of fights about the following issues: "money issues," "I'm not doing anything with my life," "He/she's not doing anything with his/her life," and the respondent's level of agreement that his or her partner "should have more ambition." Financial resentment (Wave 5) was taken from eight items ($\alpha = .83$), including "I make him/her feel bad when I help him/her financially," "He/she expects me to help him/her out financially," "I never let him/her forget when I have to help him/her financially," and "I resent having to help him/her out financially." An identical set of questions tapped the partner's level of resentment. Pooling income (Wave 5) was based on responses to the following question: "How do the two of you organize the income that one or both of you receive?" Responses included the following categories: (1) "I manage all the money and give him/her his/her share," (2) "He/she manages all the money and gives me my share," (3) "We pool all the money and each take out what we need," (4) "We pool some of the money and keep the rest separate," and (5) "We each keep our own money separate." We dichotomized responses, with 1 indicating some degree of comingling of resources (Categories 1–4) and 0 denoting entirely separate finances (Category 5).

Prior victimization—We measured coercive parenting using a single item from the Wave 1 adolescent report: “When you and your parents disagree about things, how often do they push, slap, or hit you?” We dichotomized responses to indicate any coercive parenting. IPV victimization was taken from prior reports of IPV exposure at Waves 1–4 and was based on the physical victimization items of the CTS, including whether a previous partner had “thrown something at you,” “pushed, shoved, or grabbed you,” “slapped you in the face or head with an open hand,” and/or “hit you.” Responses were dichotomized to indicate any prior IPV victimization (1 = yes).

Sociodemographic, Adult Status, and Relationship Variables

We included a series of sociodemographic indicators: gender and age, measured in years using a continuous variable reported from respondent’s age at Wave 5, as well as three dummy variables to measure race/ethnicity, including non-Hispanic White (contrast category), non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic. Family structure (Wave 1) includes the following categories: two biological parents (contrast category), stepfamily, single-parent family, and any “other” family type. To control for socioeconomic status, we use the family income reported in the Wave 1 parent questionnaire (ranges from 1 = “less than \$10,000” to 9 = “\$75,000 and over”). Neighborhood poverty was from US census data at the time of the first interview and indicated the “percent[age] of population living below the poverty level” in the respondent’s census tract while growing up. We logged neighborhood poverty in the multivariate analyses to correct for skewness.

Material hardship (Wave 5) is an index that assesses the extent to which respondents struggle to meet their basic needs. Respondents were asked if at any point during the previous two years either the respondent or his or her household (1) “didn’t pay the full amount of rent or mortgage because you didn’t have enough money?” (2) “were evicted from your house or apartment for not paying the rent or mortgage?” (3) “went hungry because there wasn’t enough money to buy food?” (4) “needed to see a doctor or go to the hospital but didn’t because you didn’t have enough money?” (5) “were unable to pay the full gas, electric, or other utility bill because there wasn’t enough money?” and (6) “were unable to make the minimum payment on your credit card because there wasn’t enough money?” Affirmative responses are coded as 1, and negative responses are coded as 0; the resulting index is created as the sum across the items. The following indicators represent the respondent’s level of education (Wave 5): less than high school, high school (contrast category), some college, and college or more. We assessed additional adult status characteristics, including employment at Wave 5 (full-time, part-time, and unemployed [contrast category]), and parental status by a question asking whether the respondent has any biological children.

We included a series of basic relationship variables in the models. Three dummy indicators distinguish whether the relationship of interest is dating (contrast category), cohabiting, or married (Wave 5). Additionally, we included a dichotomous variable to denote whether respondents reference a current relationship or their most recent romantic relationship (1 = current). Respondents identified the length of their relationship with their focal partner in years, and durations range from .08 (about one month) to 14 years (Wave 5).

Analytic Strategy

Preliminary analyses focused empirical attention to the issue of scaling intimate partner violence. Although it is potentially useful to make distinctions as to the level or seriousness of the violence, in prior investigations researchers have concluded that a key distinction is whether or not the violence is present (Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003). However, supplemental analyses included estimation of a series of models to determine the extent to which the results differed as a function of the measurement of the dependent variable, including a variety score, mean scale, and dichotomized versions of relationship violence. Comparison across models indicated substantively similar findings regardless of the specification of the dependent variable.

A separate empirical question from how to scale measures of relationship violence is whether it is more appropriate to use a measure tapping “any” reports of relationship violence versus measures of perpetration or victimization. Findings have broadly indicated that mutual violence is more common than one-sided violence across all types of samples (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). However, supplemental analyses include estimation of models focusing only on perpetration or victimization scores. Results of the models predicting mutual violence and victimization were substantively similar, but the model fit for the model predicting mutual violence was slightly better, which suggests that it provides a more appropriate specification of the model. Further, a majority of respondents in our sample report violence involving a level of mutuality (55%), and thus do not permit a nuanced analysis of the form of violence. Similar to other community surveys, the second most common pattern reported is one-sided female perpetration or male victimization, which leaves a relatively small percentage of the total sample reporting the one-sided male perpetration pattern that is a relatively less common but consequential dynamic, as many scholars have noted (see, e.g., M. Johnson, 2008). Thus, we focused on any reports of physical violence in the context of an intimate relationship (capturing reports of perpetration, victimization, and mutual violence). Next, we examined the extent to which couple-level economic and/or career concerns were linked to IPV in multivariate models, net of a range of traditional risk factors, including objective measures of economic strain such as material hardship and employment.

First, we examined the bivariate associations between the study variables and IPV using logistic regression. Next, we examined the influence of couple-level economic and/or career concerns in nested models. Model 1 included prior victimization, sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics. Model 2 examined the association between couple-level economic and/or career concerns and IPV net of controls for sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics. Subsequent analyses examined whether gender conditioned the influence of economic strains on IPV.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the means and percentages as well as standard deviations of all variables used in the analysis, and the range of each variable. Nearly a quarter (23.28%) of the sample self-

reported relationship violence at Wave 5. Average levels of conflict due to finances and financial resentments were 1.93 and 1.97, respectively. Individuals who reported IPV at Wave 5 scored significantly higher on both types of these couple-level financial concerns ($p < .001$). Additionally, roughly two-fifths of respondents reported pooled income, with a larger portion of those reporting IPV experience at Wave 5 indicating some degree of pooled income than the nonviolent subgroup. We also compared means and percentages by relationship violence across the remaining covariates (see Table 1).

Multivariate Analysis

In the zero-order models (Table 2) focused on the dyadic implications of economic and/or career concerns, conflicts due to finances, financial resentments, and income pooling were associated with significantly greater odds of experiencing violence. Additionally, coercive parenting and IPV victimization were related to greater odds of IPV at the bivariate level. Racial minorities (Black, Hispanic) were more likely to experience IPV than their White counterparts. Those who reported living in a single-parent or “other” family structure during adolescence, compared with those living with two biological parents, were more likely to report IPV. Family income was negatively associated with the odds of IPV, and neighborhood poverty was positively associated with IPV. Of the adult status characteristics, material hardship was positively associated with IPV. Respondents with a college education or greater exhibited lower odds of IPV, as did those who participated in either part- or full-time employment. Respondents in cohabiting relationships, as compared to daters, and those in relationships of longer duration were at greater risk of IPV. Finally, respondents with children were significantly more likely to report some IPV exposure at Wave 5.

Model 1 examined the influence of prior victimization, sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics on the odds of IPV. IPV victimization was associated with heightened IPV risk. Growing up in a single-parent home or “other” family structure, as compared to with two biological parents, was positively associated with IPV. As compared to high school graduates, those with less than a high school degree reported lower odds of IPV. Respondent employment decreased the odds of IPV such that those participating in either part- or full-time employment were less likely to report IPV. Finally, those in relationships of longer duration were at higher risk of IPV.

Model 2 examined couple-level economic and/or career concerns net of sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics. Net of these factors, couple-level career and/or economic concerns—conflict due to finances, financial resentment, and income pooling—increased the odds of IPV. Further, net of material hardship and current socioeconomic status (respondent education and employment), each of the indicators of couple-level career and/or economic concerns independently influenced the odds of IPV such that those experiencing higher levels of conflict due to finances and financial resentments, and those reportedly pooling income, were more likely to report IPV. Of the sociodemographic, adult status, and relationship characteristics, residing in a single parent home during adolescence was associated with higher odds of IPV. Similarly, reports of material hardship were associated with increased odds of IPV. Finally, respondents reporting either part- or full-time employment were less likely to report IPV net of other factors.

Finally, we estimated interactions between couple-level economic and/or career concerns and gender to determine whether the effect of conflict due to finances, financial resentment, or income pooling differ for men and women. None of these interactions was significant, which indicates that the effects of these particular couple-level economic and/or career concerns on violence are similar for men and women.

Discussion

Although numerous studies have examined the general link between socioeconomic conditions and IPV, the current study moves the lens forward to consider dynamics in the relationship itself and the role of economic and career considerations as specific sources of conflict, and in turn, the role of these stressors on the odds of IPV. In this way, stress is not an abstraction or assumed by the researcher but is captured empirically as the subject of partner interactions and views (couple-level economic and/or career concerns). Using data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, this investigation has built on the growing body of literature on intimate partner violence. The TARS data are particularly well-suited for these analyses, as they include detailed information about the family backgrounds and sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. Additionally, the TARS data provide information about the broader relationship contexts in which IPV occurs. Given the particularly high rate of IPV among young adults, it is important to provide a more comprehensive view of its key predictors. This involves examination of structural and couple-level factors as influences on partner violence, including attention to traditional correlates and sources of strain specific to the life course.

Most studies on economic hardship and relationship functioning focus on samples of married adults. In the marital context, well-accepted norms regarding financial contributions exist. Across relationship types, however, there is much greater variation in these features of the relationship. Couple-level economic and/or career concerns were significant predictors of IPV, both at the bivariate level and in models including a roster of control variables—including objective measures of financial strain. In models examining the association between couple-level economic and/or career concerns and IPV net of a full roster of controls, several significant predictors emerged. Specifically, prior victimization was associated with greater odds of IPV, such that respondents indicating previous exposure to IPV reported greater odds of partner violence at Wave 5. Additionally, growing up in a single-parent home and experiencing material hardship as a young adult was associated with increased odds of IPV, and engagement in part- or full-time employment was associated with lower odds of IPV. These findings have important implications for future IPV research. Consistent with the family stress model, couple-level conflict does appear to stem from negative patterns of interaction; however, beyond measures tapping negative communication styles, the results of the current investigation suggest that it is important to consider the specific content of couples' disagreements. This contributes beyond prior work and suggests the need for future research that looks beyond general discord or verbal conflict to a more complex understanding of the couple as characterized by specific stressors. Further, the findings of the current investigation suggest the need to reframe the way we think about resource pooling, particularly when examining a range of relationship types. That is, rather than conceptualizing pooled finances and the general provision of instrumental support

strictly as markers of a committed relationship, it is important to consider the extent to which such financial decisions are reflective of economic hardship.

While this study offers new contributions, there are some limitations. First, similar to other studies based on survey data, the measure of relationship violence used in the current investigation is taken from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2). Despite our attention to the issue of IPV measurement, the current study nevertheless suffers from the weaknesses inherent in the CTS, including a lack of attention to the context and motives for the abuse, as well as a focus on physical violence to the neglect of other nonphysical forms of abuse (see Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Kimmel, 2002). Second, we include controls for prior victimization, yet because the majority of IPV is bidirectional, our measure of IPV victimization likely includes a history of perpetration. Third, the current investigation focused on a regional sample of young adults in Lucas County, OH. Despite the regional nature of the sample, individuals selected for inclusion in the study were reflective of the US population in terms of their sociodemographic profiles. Fourth, TARS does not include partnered data, and thus the items assessing couple-level economic and/or career concerns relied on respondents' reports about the partner. Although recent research has highlighted the utility of one's perception of his or her partner in understanding relationship discord (Williams et al., 2013), future research may still benefit from couple-level data to provide a more dyadic account of potential sources of strain. Furthermore, economic and/or career concerns were measured contemporaneously with IPV. This was done to ensure that reports regarding such concerns referenced the same partner who is the focus of the IPV reports; however, this makes it impossible to establish a precise causal order. Additionally, our measure of income pooling is highly correlated with relationship status. However, whereas the majority of cohabiting and married respondents report pooling resources, nearly two-fifths of dating couples do so. This highlights the extent to which young couples across a range of relationship types rely on each other not only for socioemotional support but also for direct financial assistance. Finally, this study focuses exclusively on strains associated with the economic realm among a sample of young adults. Future work should examine the influence of other sources of strain during the young adult period (e.g., work–family conflict) on relationship violence.

Taken together, these findings provide support for a relational or dyadic approach to partner violence, which suggests the need to focus additional research attention on the specific content of partner disputes. More specifically, whereas individualized treatment models often include an anger management component, curricula directed at young people may benefit from attention to their specific life course circumstances that contribute to feelings of strain, in contrast to a focus on anger as a source of individual difference. Programmatic efforts that realize the dyadic nature of IPV move the field forward in this regard, yet the current findings suggest that attention to communication styles or patterns of interaction may not be sufficient for those at the margins. Instead, programming that targets the source of relationship stressors and provides information for couples as to how they may more effectively deal with these particular areas of discord (e.g., financial management training, information on how to pool resources) may be more successful. Although the current investigation focused on a sample of young adults, this more targeted approach to intervention and prevention efforts may fit the needs of a broader range of individuals. Yet

whereas most research on economic hardship focuses on samples of older adults, the findings of the current investigation suggest that during economic hard times, it may be especially important to focus attention on the young adult population and how they are faring.

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Table 1

Means/Percentages and Standard Deviations for Relationship Violence, Couple-Level Economic/Career Concerns, Prior Victimization, Sociodemographic, Adult Status, and Relationship Characteristics for Full Sample and by IPV Experience ($n = 928$)

Dependent Variable	Full Sample ($n = 928$)	IPV ($n = 216$)	No IPV ($n = 712$)			
Relationship Violence	23.28%					
Independent Variables	Mean/Percentage	SD	Range			
			M			
			M			
<i>Couple-Level Economic and/or Career Concerns</i>						
Conflict due to finances	1.93	0.76	1-5	2.45	***	1.77
Financial resentments	1.97	0.70	1-5	2.41	***	1.83
Income pooling	42.98%			56.02%	***	38.90%
<i>Prior Victimization</i>						
Coercive parenting	22.41%			30.09%	**	20.08%
IPV victimization	47.63%			64.35%	***	42.56%
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>						
Female	54.53%			53.24%		54.92%
Age	25.42	1.83	22-29	25.38		25.44
Race						
White	67.35%			53.24%	***	71.63%
Black	21.34%			30.09%	***	18.68%
Hispanic	11.31%			16.67%	**	9.69%
Family structure						
Two biological parents	53.45%			37.50%	***	58.29%
Single parent	21.01%			31.48%	***	17.84%
Step-parent	13.58%			13.43%		13.62%
Other	11.96%			17.59%	**	10.25%
Family income	3.80	1.80	1-9	3.40	***	3.93
Neighborhood poverty	14.07	14.34	0-70.13	18.10	***	12.85
<i>Adult Status Characteristics</i>						
Material hardship	0.65	1.06	0-5	1.03	***	0.54
Respondent's education						

Dependent Variable	Full Sample (n = 928)	IPV (n = 216)	No IPV (n = 712)
Less than HS	8.19%	11.57%	7.16%
High school	21.99%	30.56%	19.38%
Some college	41.16%	44.91%	40.03%
College or more	28.66%	12.96%	33.43%
Respondent's employment			
Unemployed	24.89%	38.89%	20.65%
Part-time	19.18%	18.52%	19.38%
Full-time	55.93%	42.59%	59.97%
Parent	25.65%	38.89%	21.63%
<i>Relationship Characteristics</i>			
Union status			
Dating	44.39%	34.72%	47.33%
Cohabiting	32.33%	42.59%	29.21%
Married	23.28%	22.69%	23.46%
Current relationship	79.96%	78.24%	80.48%
Duration	3.42	2.88	3.25
		.08–14	**

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Odds Ratios for the Association between Couple-Level Economic/Career Concerns, Prior Victimization, Sociodemographic, Adult Status, and Relationship Characteristics and Relationship Violence ($n = 928$)

	ZeroOrder	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Couple-Level Economic and/or Career Concerns</i>			
Conflict due to finances	3.106 ^{***}		2.192 ^{***}
Financial resentments	3.438 ^{***}		2.139 ^{***}
Income pooling	2.000 ^{***}		1.590 [*]
<i>Prior Victimization</i>			
Coercive parenting	1.713 ^{**}	1.346	1.259
IPV victimization	2.437 ^{***}	2.106 ^{***}	2.063 ^{***}
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>			
Gender (female)	0.935	0.951	0.895
Age	0.983	0.953	0.954
Race (White)			
Black	2.167 ^{***}	1.089	0.942
Hispanic	2.314 ^{***}	1.406	1.496
Family structure (biological parents)			
Single parent	2.743 ^{***}	1.989 ^{**}	1.912 ^{**}
Stepparent	1.532	0.972	0.877
Other	2.667 ^{***}	1.571	1.625
Family income	0.840 ^{***}	1.016	1.063
Neighborhood poverty	1.452 ^{***}	1.089	1.079
<i>Adult Status Characteristics</i>			
Material hardship	1.471 ^{***}	1.333 ^{***}	1.192 [*]
Respondent's education (high school)			
Less than high school	1.025	0.683	0.564
Some college	0.712	0.834	0.767
College or more	0.246 ^{***}	0.613	0.821
Respondent's employment (unemployed)			
Part-time	0.507 ^{**}	0.621	0.518 [*]
Full-time	0.377 ^{***}	0.490 ^{***}	0.501 ^{**}
Parent	2.306 ^{***}	1.241	1.162
<i>Relationship Characteristics</i>			
Union status (dating)			
Cohabiting	1.987 ^{***}	1.826 ^{**}	1.326
Married	1.318	1.264	0.815
Current relationship (most recent)	0.872	0.712	1.073
Duration	1.272 ^{***}	1.112 ^{**}	1.069

	ZeroOrder	Model 1	Model 2
Model χ^2		143.98***	248.54***

Source. Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study.

*
 $p < .05$.

**
 $p < .01$.

 $p < .001$.

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