

Sex Differences in Victimization from and Attitudes Towards  
Dating Aggression Among University Students in Hanoi, Vietnam

Master's Thesis in  
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Spring 2020

## Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to investigate sex differences in victimization from dating aggression and attitudes towards it among university students in Hanoi, Vietnam.

**Method:** A questionnaire was completed by 109 female and 117 male university students in Hanoi, Vietnam. It included the following scales: (a) acceptance of dating aggression perpetrated by a man towards his female partner, (b) acceptance of dating aggression perpetrated by a woman towards her male partner, (c) frequency of victimization from physical dating aggression, and (d) frequency of victimization from verbal dating aggression.

**Results:** Males had been significantly more victimised from physical dating aggression by their partner than females. A tendency was also found for males to be more victimised from verbal dating aggression. Males accepted other males as perpetrators of dating aggression significantly more often than did females. Females on the other hand accepted females as aggressors significantly more often than did males. Positive correlations were found between victimization from dating aggression and accepting attitudes towards both males and females as perpetrators of dating aggression.

**Conclusions:** Sex differences were found regarding victimization from dating aggression and accepting attitudes towards it.

*Key words:* physical and verbal dating aggression, acceptance of dating aggression, Vietnam

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate dating aggression among university students in Vietnam. Sex differences and associations with attitudes toward dating aggression were also investigated. By investigating dating aggression and attitudes toward it among university students in Hanoi, Vietnam, the study seeks to contribute to the current literature and enhance a greater understanding of dating aggression in Vietnam.

## 1.2 Intimate Partner Aggression and Dating Aggression

Interpersonal aggression and violence have long been areas of exploration for social scientists and researchers (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001), especially domestic violence, sibling violence, child abuse and elder abuse (Alhabib, Nur & Jones, 2010; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Frye & Karney, 2006; Straus & Gelles, 1986). While all violence in all types of interpersonal relationships are worth studying and exploring, intimate partner aggression is prevalent in many societies and has been increasingly recognized as a pressing issue. According to the World Health Organization (2012), intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to harmful behaviors, including physical injury, sexual and psychological abuse, that are perpetrated by a former or current partner (i.e. spouse, dating partner or sexual partner) in intimate relationships such as marriages, cohabitation and dating, and often causes lasting physical and emotional damages to people who are subject to it. Due to the growing rate of perpetration, progress has been made substantially in the study of abuse towards romantic partners, extending knowledge and understanding of the topic. However, despite the variety of romantic relationships in which aggression can take place, the investigation of intimate partner violence has primarily focused on married couples and little has been shown about less committed relationships, which creates a widespread perception that marriage is the more frequent context for intimate partner violence. Nevertheless, there appears to be a complete contrast, indicating that premarital abuse is more prevailing (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher & Lloyd, 1982; Makepeace, 1981). In every three men and women who date, one uses or experiences physical aggression, and the prevalence rate of violence is estimated to be three times higher in dating contexts compared to that in married couples (Straus, 2008). Although the level of commitment in dating relationships is lower than in established marriages, the consequences of dating violence is no less severe in the physical, sexual and mental health of the victims (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). However, the study

of this type of intimate partner violence remained understudied and has only proliferated since the research of Makepeace (1981) in which one among five dating couples reported courtship violence, mostly due to alcoholism, sexual denial and jealousy. Furthermore, research on dating violence has shown evidence of severe consequences on individuals' health, particularly reduced self-esteem, depression, difficulties in controlling anger, and physical injuries (Hines & Straus, 2007; Jackson, Cram & Seymour, 2000; Shorey, Stuart & Cornelius, 2011; Straight, Harper & Arias, 2003). This indicates the need to direct the attention and put more emphasis on the dating context in the investigation of intimate partner violence in dating relationships.

While there exist definitions for intimate partner violence and domestic violence, a universally accepted definition for dating violence is still absent in the contemporary research literature, and existing definitions offered by researchers are varied depending on the forms of violence. Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) defined dating violence as the perpetration or threat of physical violence of one dating partner towards the other one in an unmarried dyad. Although this conception clearly emphasized the dating context in which two people are romantically involved such as dating, cohabitating and engaging, Sugarman and Hotaling only mentioned physical abuse and excluded other forms of violence. In this regard, recent studies have adopted more inclusive definitions in which dating violence is not only manifested by physical aggression, but also by sexual and mental abuse (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996; Anderson & Danis, 2007). Despite the variability in definitions, a great body of literature has revealed the alarming rate of dating aggression in different types of violence. For example, the review of Shorey, Cornelius and Bell (2008) showed that acts of psychological aggression (e.g. yelling, swearing or saying spiteful words) were perpetrated among 70-90% of dating couples, followed by physical acts (such as hitting, slapping or kicking) in almost one third of surveyed couples, and 3-20% of dating couples experienced sexual abuse. Given the prevalence rate and the cultural factors of the context where this current research takes place, the author will focus on physical and psychological violence and exclude sexual abuse from the scope of the study.

Furthermore, as the present study seeks to examine gender differences in dating aggressions, the distinctions between the two terms high intensity and low intensity aggressions should be addressed. While violence is generally used to describe acts that aim to cause severe physical harm and injuries to another person (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), aggressions are behaviors that harm others, ranging from physical injury, emotional and social relation damages (DeWall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2012). Within aggressions, researchers categorized behaviors in two types, particularly high intensity aggression and

low intensity aggression (Anderson, & Bushman, 2002). Accordingly, high intensity aggression is mostly physical assault whereas low intensity aggression refers to other forms of intimate partner aggression which aim to harm another person psychologically and socially. However, it should be noted that not all physical aggressions are categorized as high intensity aggression. Behaviors such as slapping, spitting, locking in, locking out or throwing objects, which belong to the subscale of physical aggression, are considered low intensity aggression (Österman & Björkqvist, 2009). Moreover, although verbal aggression has generally been underestimated by the public and people experiencing this form of aggression tend to not regard it as intimate partner aggression, it is in fact a considerably strong precursor of and can escalate into physical aggression (Jones & Gardner, 2002). Given this distinction and categorization, the present study uses the term dating aggression instead of dating violence and was constructed with the instrument scales measuring low intensity physical and verbal aggression within dating relationships.

### 1.3 Dating Aggression among College Students

Dating aggression is not only a problem that needs to be in the focus of research, but also a detrimental health and criminal phenomenon for people of all age, especially young college adults worldwide (Straus, 2008). Rates of physical violence among dating college couples have been reported to range from 19% to 46% (Makepeace, 1981; Straus, 2004). The seriousness of this phenomenon is also demonstrated by the prevalence of sexual and psychological components of aggression as approximately 30% of female students and 10% of male students were found to experience sexual abuse, and around 80% of American college students were perpetrators or victims of psychological aggression in the dating context (White & Koss, 1991). Findings from previous studies have strengthened the need of addressing aggressive behaviors among college students by revealing the consequences of this type of violence in future relationships. First of all, as students are in the formative period of their development of social relations, it became evident that behavioral patterns demonstrated in these years are likely to predict their behaviors in relationships later on in their lives (O'Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone, & Tyree, 1989; O'leary, Malone & Tyree, 1994; Straus, 2004). Not only do aggressive behaviors in this early phase of adulthood precede marital violence, but they also play a contributing role to the intergenerational transmission of aggression and violence (Moore & Elmore, 1991).

## 1.4 Gender Difference in Dating Aggression

Regarding dating aggression, several components have been extensively researched, and one of the most raging debates is the gender difference in violence perpetration and victimization. On the one hand, the conventional tenet in the literature of domestic violence and intimate partner violence has been primarily focused on the high rate of violence against women, and the number of research and statistics available about the victimization rate of intimate partner aggression among men is modest compared to those on women. For example, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) conducted an extensive survey with 16,000 American men and women and concluded that women were more likely to be victims of mental, sexual and physical assaults by their intimate male partners. According to these researchers, the victimization also lasted much longer with more severe consequences on women's health. In terms of physical injuries, female victims account for 62% (Archer, 2000) and it is widely supported that women possess a higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse (Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt, & Paige, 2002). Globally, one third of women aged at least 15 years are victims of physical and/or sexual violence caused by their intimate partners during their lifetime (Devries et al., 2013). This prevalence rate is also close to the rate of intimate partner violence against women in Vietnam. According to the National Research conducted by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2010), among surveyed women in the age of 18-60, 58% experienced all types of abuse or at least one type, either physically, sexually, mentally.

However, mixed evidence is present in a significant amount of studies on this issue, suggesting different patterns of gender in violence victimization and perpetration. The first group of researchers conducted studies which made it clear that men and women were likely to share an equal rate of perpetrating aggressive acts towards their intimate partners (Reed, Raj, Miller & Silverman, 2010; White, & Koss, 1991). Unlike the other scientists who viewed dating violence as an asymmetric phenomenon in which men were the primary perpetrator of violence, Cate et al. (1982) pointed out the reciprocal nature of abuse in dating relationships in their research on premarital aggression among 355 college students. This is substantiated by the finding that among 68% of abusive couples, each partner was both the perpetrator and victim of violence. The study conducted by Harned (2001) also supported this idea by surveying undergraduate and graduate students, revealing the statistics of 22% of women and 21% of men being victims of physical abuse. Consistent with these findings, the notable cross-national study of Straus (2008) provided the support to the notion that dating violence is symmetric in terms of gender because bidirectionality was the most reported pattern of violence. Particularly, out of a sample of 13,601

university students, almost 30% of male and female students self-reported violent behaviors against their dating partners.

While a considerable amount of studies consistently addressed the equal prevalence of violence perpetration by genders, it is evident in several researches that dating violence perpetration rate is even higher among women (Arias, Doroszewicz & Forbes, 2008; Cate et al., 1982; Samios & O'Leary, 1987; Straus & Ramirez, 2007). Specifically, Archer (2000), using act-based measures, found that physical violence rate was higher among female partners than among their male counterparts, in both perpetration and frequency. As one of the researchers who put forward the study on dating violence among college-aged population, Cate et al. (1982) revealed that men were the sole violence perpetrator in only 10% among the studied abusive relationships while the data for women was 22%. This contention was also supported by the findings of Straus and Ramirez (2007) on the gender symmetry in physical violence as female partners were twice as likely to be the only abusive one in the relationship. Concluded from a study on college students, Cercone, Beach and Arias (2005) reported higher victimization rates among males with 30% for psychological violence and 18% for severe physical aggression, while the figures for the female counterparts were 24% and 13% respectively. This was consistent with previous works of Simonelli & Ingram (1998) and Katz et al. (2002). This pattern of gender asymmetry in dating aggressions was not only found in Western and developed countries, but researches also concluded the same trend in developing countries such as Ghana and South Sudan in Africa, where men were victims of physical, indirect and cyber aggression more often than women (Darko, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2019; Ndoromo, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2018). Yet, it requires careful consideration to draw the conclusion when it comes to sexual abuse as there exist consistent proofs of males being the dominant offenders instead of females (Bergman, 1992; Sears, Byers & Price, 2007).

### 1.5 Attitudes towards Dating Aggression

A plethora of studies conducted over the past decades has shed light on the awareness of dating aggression, and among the focuses of research, individual attitudes have received much attention as risk factors of the perpetration of dating aggression (Rouse, 1988). Kalmuss (1984), for example, stated that traditional attitudes toward women due to patriarchal systems had a significant correlation with dating violence by men. However, a considerable number of researches, including the study of Alexander (1988), highlighted the positive relationship between attitude toward women of women and the prevalence of courtship violence. Other than attitudes toward the other sex, beliefs about acceptable



extent of violent behaviors in dating relationship have been suggested to have significant influences on perpetration and victimization of dating aggression (Christine & Kardatzke, 2007). Perpetrators of violent acts in dating context are likely to hold attitudes validating their aggression. Similarly, attitudinal acceptance of an individual has a positive correlation with their acts of courtship violence (Slep, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf & O'Leary, 2001) in not only their past and present relationship, but also later in life (O'Keefe, 1997). In this regard, the groundbreaking study of Straus (2004) on university students in 16 countries showed a correlation of attitude toward aggression and dating violence among college students as the higher the number of students showing approval to intimate partner violence, the greater the rate of dating aggression prevalence. In addition, it is evident that both male and female college students demonstrated more favourable attitudes toward physical and psychological violence perpetrated by females than by male (Price et al., 1999). Based on these initial findings, several programs have been made to address accepting attitudes toward dating violence among college students to prevent dating aggression perpetration (Anderson et al., 2001).

## 1.6 Dating Aggression and Attitudes Toward Dating Aggression in Vietnam

While dating violence has been recognized as a serious and detrimental problem in many countries with evidence offered and fortified in international studies (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Straus, 2004; Straus, 2008), empirical literature on intimate partner violence in Vietnam has focused mostly on violence in the marriage context and shed lights on the male-to-female aggression. Few, if any, researches have been conducted on femal-perpetrated violence (Schuler, Lenzi, Hoang, Vu, Yount & Quach, 2016; Yount, Higgins, VanderEnde, Krause, Tran, Schuler & Hoang, 2016). In addition, there primarily exists descriptive information about aggressive behaviors in dating relationship among Vietnamese young adults. The first and most notable quantitative attempt to measure the prevalence of courtship violence is the study carried out by YChange – a community organization advocating for gender equality endorsed by UN Women in Vietnam in 2016. Data gathered from over 350 men and women provided a descriptive picture of dating violence in Vietnam with approximately 64% of young adults experiencing at least one form of dating violence (YChange, 2016). Contrary to common perception of intimate partner violence in Vietnam, the research found that while the perpetration rate of severe violent acts, such as choking and using weapons, was higher among men than women, 3.7% compared to 1.7% and 0.5% compared to 0.3% respectively, women demonstrated significantly higher rates of physical assaults, mental abusive and technological control. As it has become evident that attitudes toward dating aggression is a strong

predictor of the actual aggressive acts, the attitudinal component has been explored. However, the research topic is limited to attitudes toward marital violence and violence against women by men (Yount, VanderEnde, Zureick-Brown, Hoang, Schuler & Tran, 2014). Despite the promulgation of the law on domestic violence in 2007, almost 95% of married female participants in the first National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010) showed acceptance for physically abusive treatment of men to women in certain situations where women disobeyed, refused to have sex, were suspected of being unfaithful and so on. The study also revealed a substantial gender gap in violence-accepting attitudes as women showed greater favorable attitudes toward intimate partner violence than men. The study of YChange (2016) gave more focus to attitudes toward dating violence and indicated that 44% of the surveyed people objected male-to-female abuse but accepted female-to-male violence.

### 1.7 Predictors of Dating Aggression and Attitudes Toward Dating Aggression in Vietnam

The social and cultural norms and beliefs that permit or encourage intrafamily violence against women are manifestations of a long-standing hierarchical and patriarchal social model in many parts of the world, including Vietnam. For thousands of years, the country has been strongly influenced by the ancient Chinese Confucianism and Taoism. Of all the religious beliefs that have been introduced and practiced in Vietnam, Confucianism and Taoism exerted the greatest influences in the construction of the society (Bui & Morash, 2008). Social philosophy of Confucianism views the family as the most fundamental unit of society and sets rules that governs the stability of social relationships. These rules include collectivism over individualism, face saving, and social harmony at the expense of individual rights and needs (Chia, 2012). With the tradition of patrilineal ancestor worshipping in which men are the ones to carry on the family's lineage, Vietnamese people highly value male progeny over females. Thus, men are superior, and women hold the inferior position in both familial and societal contexts. In the marriage relationship, women are expected to comply with the principle of three submissive relationships, to their fathers when unmarried, to their husbands in marriage, and to their sons if widowed. They must obey their husbands, show respect to everyone else and adjust themselves to maintain the household harmony (Rydstrom, 2003). Literature on domestic violence has shed a light on various factors regarded as threats to masculinity that contribute to the use of violence by men toward their partners, including economic dependency and social status among others (Bui & Morash, 2008). For men, working is not solely a mean of income generator, but also a mechanism of masculinity, self confidence and manhood identity

construction (Gecas, 1989). The survey conducted by MacMillan and Gartner (1999) with over 8000 Canadian women revealed the correlation of employment and wife battering. They found that the rate of experiencing physical violence, jealousy and denial to financial access was highest when the women were employed and their spouses were jobless. The same pattern was found in Vietnam through the research of Luke, Schuler, Bui, Pham & Tran (2007) where husbands who perpetrated abusive behaviors possessed lower economic and social statuses than their female partners. Men's lack of economic resources, together with sexual jealousy as a result of the construction of femininity that highly values female virginity and loyalty, is also an attribute to the aggressive and violent behaviors of Vietnamese men. These aggressive behaviors are often displayed when men perceive or doubt that their partner cheat on them, which threatens their ability to control their partners and challenges their masculine authority.

### 1.8 Hypothesis and Research Questions

The above-mentioned studies motivate one hypothesis and three research questions regarding victimization from aggressive behaviors in dating relationships and attitudes toward it among university students in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The following hypothesis was made:

1. Males were expected to have been significantly more victimised from low intensity physical and verbal dating aggression by their partner than females (Darko, Björkqvist, & Österman, 2019; Ndoromo, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2017)

The following research questions were made:

1. Sex differences in acceptance of females and males as perpetrators of dating aggression were studied.
2. The relationship between victimization from low intensity dating aggression and accepting attitudes towards it among both males and females was investigated.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Sample

A questionnaire was completed by 226 university students in Hanoi, 117 males and 109 females. All respondents were unmarried. Of the participants 53% were currently in a dating relationship, and 47% had been in one before.

### 2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire included the following scales: (a) acceptance of dating aggression perpetrated by a man towards his female partner (10 items,  $\alpha = .96$ ), (b) acceptance of dating aggression perpetrated by a woman towards her male partner (10 items,  $\alpha = .96$ ), (c) frequency of victimization from physical dating aggression (10 items,  $\alpha = .84$ ), and (d) frequency of victimization from verbal dating aggression (8 items,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

The response alternatives were all on five-point scales. For both scales measuring the acceptance, the alternatives were 0 = strongly disagree; 1 = disagree; 2 = neutral; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree. For frequency of victimization, the alternatives were 0 = never; 1 = almost never; 2 = seldom; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often. Single items of the scales are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

### 2.3 Procedure

The collection of data was done with an online questionnaire. An email with details of the study was sent to the training coordinators at two universities in Hanoi seeking approval for the data collection. Upon approval of the universities, a link to the questionnaire was distributed to the students who agreed to participate. The link was also distributed online by social media channels, like Facebook and Twitter, and by university email. The questionnaire was available for responding from November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Table 1  
*Single Items Measuring Acceptance of Dating Aggression Perpetrated by a Man towards his Female Partner and Perpetrated by a Woman towards her Male Partner (N = 226).*

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Is it acceptable for a man/woman to do the following things to his/her partner when he/she is angry with her/him?

---

Hit her/him

Lock her/him in

Lock her/him out

Shove her/him

Bite her/him

Scratch her/him

Spit at her/him

Throw objects at her/him

Damage something that is hers/his

Threaten to hurt her/him

---

Table 2

*Single Items Measuring Frequency of Dating Aggression (N = 226).*

---

When my partner has been angry with me, he/she has:

---

*Physical Aggression*

- Hit me
- Locked me in
- Locked me out
- Shoved me
- Bitten me
- Scratched me
- Spit at me
- Thrown objects
- Damaged something that was mine
- Threatened to hurt me

*Verbal Aggression*

- Yelled at me
  - Quarreled with me
  - Purposely said nasty or hurting things to me
  - Called me bad names
  - Interrupted me when I was talking
  - Angrily nagged at me
  - Threatened to leave me
  - Purposely provoked a quarrel with me
- 

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants remain anonymous and the study was carried out in accordance with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), and guidelines for the responsible conduct of research (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Correlations

All four scales correlated significantly with each other (Table 3). The highest correlations were found between victimization from physical and verbal dating aggression ( $r = .67$ ), and between victimization from physical dating aggression and accepting attitudes towards males as perpetrators of dating aggression ( $r = .56$ ).

Table 3  
*Correlations between the Scales in the Study (N = 226)*

	1.	2.	3.
<i>Acceptance of Dating Aggression</i>			
1. Males as Perpetrators			
2. Females as Perpetrators	.26 ***		
<i>Victimization from Dating Aggression</i>			
3. Physical	.56 ***	.27 ***	
4. Verbal	.42 ***	.22 ***	.67 ***

$p \leq .001$  \*\*\*

#### 3.2 Sex Differences in Victimization from Dating Aggression

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out with sex as independent variable and victimization from two types of dating aggression as dependent variables (Table 4, Fig. 1). The multivariate analysis was significant. The univariate analyses showed that males compared to females had been significantly more victimised from physical dating aggression by their partner. A tendency was also found for males to be more victimised from verbal dating aggression.

Table 4

Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Sex as Independent Variable and Victimization from Two Types of Dating Aggression as Dependent Variables (N = 226)

	F	df	p <	$\eta_p^2$	Group differences
<i>Effect of Sex</i>	13.36	2, 223	.001	.107	
Multivariate analysis					
Univariate analyses					
Victimization from Physical Dating Aggression	23.45	1, 224	.001	.095	Males > Females
Victimization from Verbal Dating Aggression	3.47	“	.064	.015	(Males > Females)

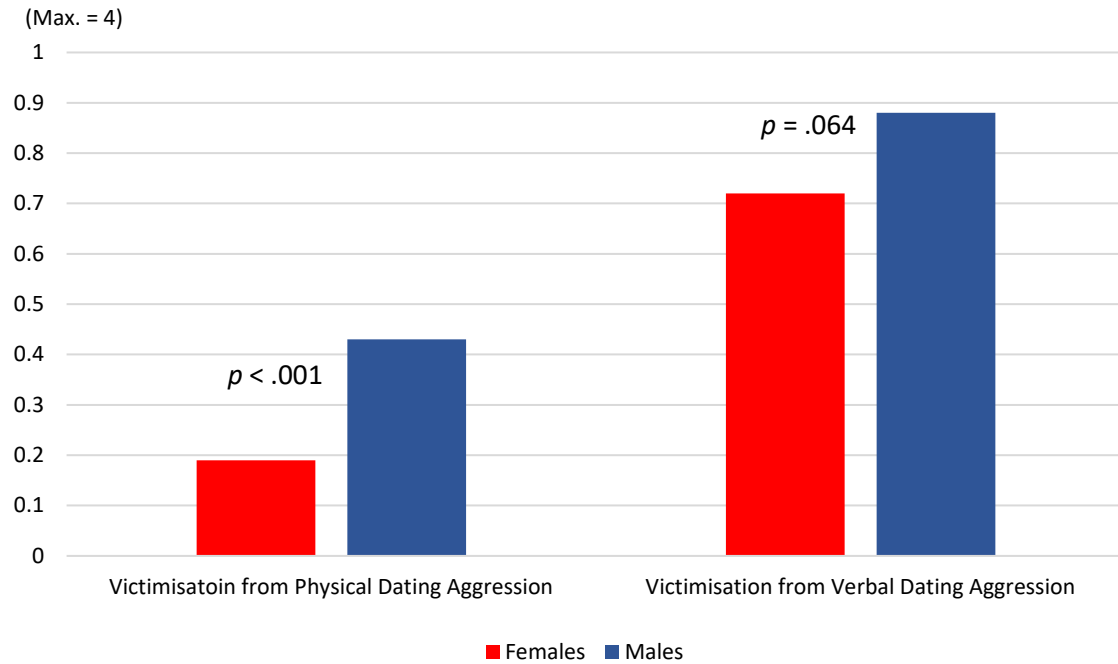


Figure 1. Mean values for victimization from physical and verbal dating aggression for females and males (N = 226).



### 3.3 Sex Differences in Acceptance of Dating Aggression

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out with sex as independent variable and acceptance of males and females as perpetrators of dating aggression as dependent variables (Table 5, Fig. 2). The multivariate analysis was significant. The univariate analyses showed that males accepted males as perpetrators of aggression significantly more often than did females. Females on the other hand accepted females as aggressors significantly more often than did males.

Table 5

*Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Sex as Independent Variable and Acceptance of Males and Females as Perpetrators of Dating Aggression as Dependent Variables (N = 226)*

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> <	$\eta_p^2$	Group differences
<i>Effect of Sex</i>					
Multivariate analysis	52.78	2, 223	.001	.321	
Univariate analyses					
Acceptance of Males as Perpetrators	23.08	1, 224	.001	.093	Males > Females
Acceptance of Females as Perpetrators	38.51	“	.001	.147	Females > Males

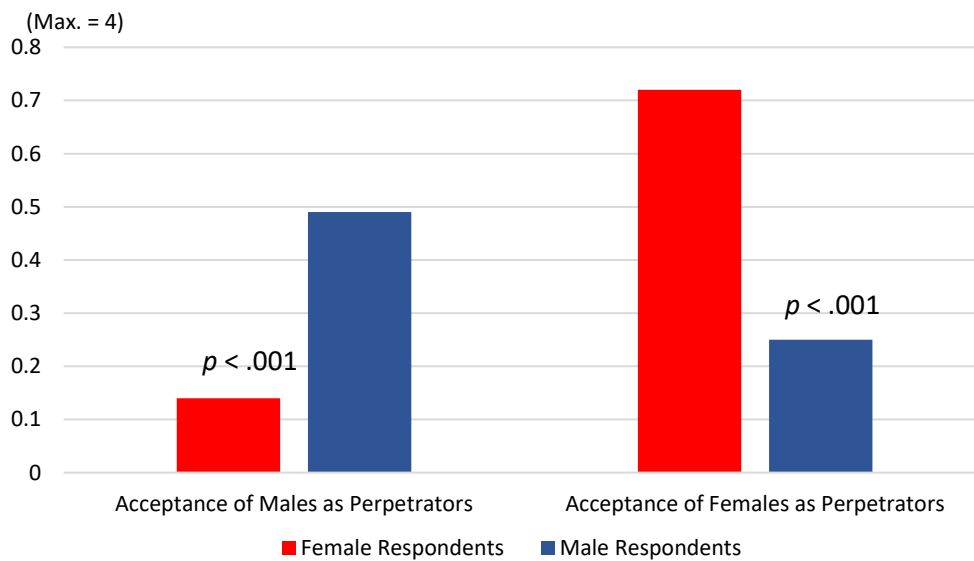


Figure 2. Mean values for females and males on acceptance of females and males as perpetrators of dating aggression (N = 226).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Summary of the Findings

The present study was carried out to extend the body of research on dating aggressions by investigating the gender differences in the victimization rate of dating aggressions and attitudes toward such behaviors in dating relationships of both men and women. It provided quantitative data on dating aggression among university students in Hanoi with approximately one third of the respondents reported victimization of physical aggressions while the prevalence rate of verbal aggression victimization was 80%. These data suggest that dating aggressions among the population of Hanoian college students is a serious problem.

Based on previous studies on low intensity intimate partner aggression (Darko, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2019; Ndoromo, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2017), it was expected that male university students in Hanoi would report higher victimization rates of dating aggression than female students. The results from the present study gave clear evidence for this statement and further highlighted that same pattern in both physical and verbal aggressions. This finding is also consistent with previous international studies (Cercone et al., 2005; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998; Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002) and the study of YChange (2016) in Vietnam. As discussed earlier, while women tend to be victims of severe physical violence (Hamby & Jackson, 2010), they have been reported to perpetrate more minor physical and psychological aggressions than men do. This pattern in the dating context of university students may be attributed to the nature of the relationships. Particularly, compared to marriage, dating relationships lack an official commitment between the two partners, which heightens the degree of insecurity, jealousy and controlling acts of women. Higher incidence of female-on-male verbal aggressions in this study can also be understood through the common perception of verbal aggression in the field of dating aggression. The aggressive verbal acts analysed in this study such as initiating a quarrel, talking in provocative languages, calling partners with bad names, nagging and interrupting while partner is talking are not violence (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Given the fact that in such a patriarchal society as in Vietnam, violence in marriage or dating relationships is normally stigmatized, male respondents may hesitate to report physical violence and feel more comfortable to report their experience of verbal aggressions perpetrated by their female partners. This is another possible explanation for the higher victimization rate of minor physical and verbal aggressions among men.

In terms of attitudes towards aggressions, contradict to the expectation that both male and female students would show more acceptance to aggressions perpetrated by female than male partners, female

university students endorsed more accepting attitudes toward female aggression whereas males demonstrated more acceptance of dating aggression committed by men.

A theory that could be used to explain this tendency of accepting female-on-male aggressions among females is the changing gender roles (Jackson, 1999). Gender have been conceptualized along two continuums of masculinity and femininity (Bern, 1974). It was Connell (1987) who introduced the definition of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity to explain the widely accepted and deeply embedded gender roles in a many parts of the world. Along this concept, controlling masculinity refers to the characteristics such as being strong physically, aggressive and rational in order to control themselves and others under various circumstances whereas emphasized femininity includes culturally scripted traits such as being caring, dependent, emotional and subordinate to males (Kersten, 1996). Sex role stereotypes of how men should be dominant, superior and aggressive while women are expected to be passive, submissive and dependent are a factor supporting and affirming the legitimation of men's higher power over women (Finn, 1986). Traditionally, women were dependent on men emotionally and economically in both social and relationship context. It has traditionally been depicted that men are perpetrators and women are victims of intimate partner aggressions and other forms of violence. With the increasing independence and empowerment of women as a result of feminism and advocacy on changing patriarchal discrimination and gender inequality in Vietnam, the use of indirect physical and verbal aggressions by women on men could be a demonstration of retaliation against the social norms on gender biases and a symbol of women obtaining power and control in the relationship dyad (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991).

Furthermore, female-on-male aggressions could be the results of self-defense. As in the study of Molidor & Tolman (1998), self-defense was the reason for over a third of the cases where girls acted as the perpetrators of dating aggression, while the percentage of boys using self-defense to justify their behaviors was only 6%. It may well be that as women do not possess as much physical strength as men, they deploy verbal aggression as a conflict tactic to gain the superiority over their partners. With the traditional view of men being the primary perpetrator of aggression toward women, female students may feel fewer sanctions and less negativity against female perpetrated aggression, this possibly contributes to the favorable attitudes of women to the use of aggressions upon male counterparts.

Toward male-on-female aggressions, men were more accepting than women. While the egalitarian shift in attitudes toward gender roles has been documented in recent research (Dao, 2018; Huang, 2017), Vietnam is still a highly patriarchal society with principles of Confucianism and Taoism embedded in

the society for thousands of years. With the tradition of patrilineal ancestor worshipping which means men, not women, are the ones to carry on the family's lineage, Vietnamese people highly value male progeny over females and thus, men are superior and women hold the inferior position in both familial and societal contexts. With this ideology, the use of aggression and violence against women to maintain the power relation in intimate relationships is justifiable and acceptable to many people, especially men (Bui & Morash, 2008). Thus, the adherence to traditional characterizations of gender roles remains strong and persistent, especially among men, which partly explain the disparity in attitudes of males towards dating aggressions with male perpetrators and female perpetrators, particularly a higher acceptance for male-on-female aggressions in dating compared to female-on-male aggressions.

For the third research question, compared to the expectation of the study that a positive association was expected to be found between victimization from dating aggression and accepting attitudes towards both males and females as perpetrators of dating aggression, there was a slight difference. There was a positive correlation between victimization of dating aggressions and accepting attitudes toward these aggressive behaviors perpetrated by males in dating relationships. Students who endorsed accepting attitudes toward low intensity verbal and physical aggression perpetrated by males were likely to be victimised by those aggressive acts. This finding was consistent with results from previous studies (O'Keefe, 1997; Price et al., 1999; Slep, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf & O'Leary, 2001; Straus, 2004) and highlighted the correlation of accepting attitudes and victimization of dating aggression among young Vietnamese males and females. However, the same correlation was not found with accepting attitudes toward aggression perpetrated by females.

## 4.2 Limitations of the Study

The study presents results that add to the current literature on dating violence in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the findings possess some limitations which need to be critically addressed. The primary limitation of the study was that the sample was composed of students enrolled in only two universities. Although this group of respondents was chosen randomly, it represented a small proportion of undergraduate students in the city of Hanoi. Thus, sampling a bigger and more diverse group of university students would create a more comprehensive understanding of dating violence among young adults in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The second limitation was the exclusion of sexual aggression from the scope of the study. While acknowledging that recent studies have adopted more inclusive definitions in which dating aggression is not only manifested physically but also sexually and mentally (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Riggs &

O'Leary, 1996; Anderson & Danis, 2007), the scope of this current study only included the physical and mental aspects of dating aggression due to the cultural characteristics of the sampling population.

Finally, as participants were chosen randomly and assessments of victimization from dating aggressions were concluded from self-reports only. This creates the need to study both members of the relationship in future research.

### 4.3 Implications of the Study

Results from the study highlighted the sex differences in victimization and attitudes toward dating aggression among young adults in Hanoi, Vietnam. Given the high victimization rate of low intensity physical and verbal aggression among male students, further research and prevention programs shall attempt to target both males and females as victims of intimate partner aggressions instead of focusing on women. Similarly, the findings also suggest that programs aimed to prevent dating aggressions among university students in Vietnam should not deploy the sex-biased approaches such as the typical victim-related programs for only women or the perpetrator-related programs only for men.

Findings on gender differences in victimization of dating aggression may be helpful for future prevention programs aimed at reducing physically and verbally aggressive behaviors in dating relationships. These programs may, for example, incorporate education about the inappropriateness of using low intensity aggressions in both men and women. With the inclusion of verbal aggression in the research scope, the study shed lights on the prevalence and seriousness of verbal aggression, which has been generally out of attention and underestimated within the scale of intimate partner aggression. The considerably high rate of both male and female undergraduate students being victims of verbal aggression implies that more focus should be put on this subscale of aggression in dating relationships as it has been linked with escalated physical assaults and potential detrimental impacts on physical and mental health of the victims (Jones, & Gardner, 2002).

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