

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Motivational Interviewing as a Targeted Prevention Approach for Physically Aggressive
Dating Couples

By

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Motivational interviewing is a brief non-confrontational intervention designed to enhance motivation to reduce harmful behavior. The purpose of this study was to conduct the first trial of motivational interviewing as a targeted prevention for partner aggression. Participants were 50 college dating couples between 18 and 25 years-old who reported at least one act of male-to-female mild physical aggression in the last three months. All couples completed a two-hour assessment session. Half of all couples were then randomly assigned to receive a two-hour individualized motivational feedback session, and the remaining couples received brief, generalized, non-motivational feedback. Compared to couples in the control condition, couples who received the motivational feedback reported less physical aggression by both partners, less risky drinking behaviors, and were less accepting of verbal and coercive tactics by both males and females up to nine months following the intervention. Reductions in physical aggression were predicted by reductions in beliefs regarding the normativeness of psychological and physical aggression, reduced acceptability of male physical aggression, and reduced levels of reported psychological aggression by both partners. Finally, therapist behaviors consistent with the philosophy of motivational interviewing, such as empathy and reflective listening, predicted greater reductions in physical aggression following the motivational intervention. The results of the current study suggest that motivational interviewing is a promising targeted prevention approach for young couples experiencing physical aggression in their current relationships.

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Time: 1:30pm

Place: Psychology B Building, Room B218

Program: Clinical Psychology

Dissertation Advisor: K. D. O'Leary, PhD