EXAMINING THE PERCEIVED HARM OF DIGITAL DATING ABUSE:

A UNIVERSITY SAMPLE

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Background: Digital dating abuse (DDA) is a form of intimate partner violence facilitated through technology that has high prevalence rates, especially among young adults. Purpose: The current study sought to examine: (1) how harmful university students perceive different DDA behaviors to be; (2) how perceived levels of harm differ across demographic variables; and (3) if the data can increase the consensus on which behaviors should be considered DDA. Method: 354 university student participants took a survey that asked: (1) how harmful they believed 16 different DDA behaviours to be, from 0 (not at all harmful) to 4 (extremely harmful); and (2) if they had ever perpetrated or been victimized by each of the behaviours. Results: On average, participants rated DDA behaviours as very or extremely harmful, $M = 3.27$. Women and gender diverse individuals rated three of the behaviours as significantly more harmful than men, and were victimized by those behaviours more than men. The majority of participants rated a monitoring behaviour as somewhat harmful or lower. Discussion: This study suggests a general awareness of the harms of DDA among university students. The data also provides evidence that gender may impact both victimization and perception of harm, and that certain monitoring behaviours may not constitute DDA. While characteristics of the sample and setting might limit generalizability, this study advances understanding of perceptions of DDA among Canadian university students.

Keywords: digital dating abuse, technology, dating violence
Examining the Perceived Harm of Digital Dating Abuse: A University Sample

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and the use of technology for communication is pervasive throughout the world; together they contribute to the growing phenomenon of digital dating abuse (DDA). The World Health Organization (2010) defines intimate partner violence (IPV) as any behaviour that occurs within an intimate relationship, current or former, that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm through the use of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, or controlling behaviours. According to police reports, IPV is the most common form of violence experienced by women in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019) and accounts for one in every four violent crimes reported to the police (Government of Canada, 2015). The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) within relationships is often viewed by users as being both beneficial (e.g., increased ability to communicate) and detrimental (e.g., social media can exacerbate feelings of jealousy). Stonard (2020) listed ICT as including phone calls, text messages, instant messaging, social networking sites, picture messages, video chats, email, chat rooms, and websites/blogs. Burke (2011) found that ICT is consistently used by dating partners for monitoring and intrusive purposes. In addition, ICT use in relationships has been found to exacerbate feelings of jealousy among adolescents (Baker & Carreño, 2016). This, however, has not stopped it’s prolific use (Fox et al., 2014). ICT is often used during every stage of relationships, from beginning to end, especially among young people (Baker & Carreño, 2016). Unsurprisingly, the growing reliance on technology in finding and maintaining romantic relationships has resulted in technology facilitated IPV, a phenomenon known as digital dating abuse (DDA).
Dating Violence

Anderson and Danis (2007) defined dating violence as the act of threatening or actually using physical, sexual, or verbal abuse on one’s dating partner. It is separate from IPV as it includes only dating relationships—not marital relationships or relationships with similar levels of commitment (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Straus (2004) found that 29% of university students, worldwide, reported physically assaulting a dating partner in the last 12 months. Furthermore, 10% of the university students surveyed reported perpetrating the most severe form of physical assault (i.e., with weapons, choking, and punching). In a similar study examining undergraduate students’ experiences of aggression, Wolford-Clevenger (2016), found that 47% of participants had experienced some level of psychological aggression during the past year.

Physical dating violence occurs in male and female students at similar rates (Kaukinen, Grover, & Hartman; Straus, 2004; Cercone et al., 2005). In fact, both males and females are at risk of perpetrating and being victims of any form of dating violence (Kaukinen, 2014). While perpetration levels may be similar, studies have found that the consequences (e.g., rate of injury) are more severe when perpetrated by males than by females (Straus, 2004; Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Sexual minority (e.g., bisexual, gay, lesbian) individuals report higher levels of dating violence victimization and/or perpetration and are at greater risk of all types of dating violence than heterosexual individuals (Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2017; Kaukinen, 2014).

Digital Dating Abuse

Dating violence that occurs through socially interactive technologies goes by many different names and, like traditional forms of dating violence, is experienced by many college students. Cyber aggression (Marganski & Melander, 2018), cyberstalking (Marcum et al., 2017), cyber dating abuse (Borrajo et al., 2016) digital dating abuse (Brown & Hegarty, 2018), dating
violence (Reed et al., 2016), cyber dating violence (Stonard, 2020), and intimate partner cyber harassment (Melander, 2010) are some of the names used to describe this phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, dating violence perpetrated using ICT will be referred to as digital dating abuse (DDA). As defined by Brown and Hegarty (2018), DDA is a form of intimate partner abuse that is facilitated by technology. This abuse takes many different forms such as hostility, intrusiveness, humiliation (Bennet et al., 2011), threats, control, monitoring (Reed et al., 2017), and sexual coercion (Ross et al., 2019). While the research on DDA is growing, there are inconsistencies not only across what it is called, but also what behaviours are considered DDA (Brown & Hegarty, 2018).

There are several commonalities between dating violence and DDA. Like dating violence, there are no gender differences in levels of victimization (Reed et al., 2016). Studies have found a significant association between relational aggression through ICT and in-person psychological, physical, and sexual aggression (Marganski & Melander, 2018; Lara, 2020; Morelli et al., 2018). This relationship is present in both perpetration and victimization, and remains over time (Temple et al., 2016). In response to this relationship, Temple et al. (2016) suggests that those experiencing DDA may also be experiencing dating violence such as physical dating abuse. Borrajo et al. (2015) concluded that prevention of general dating violence should focus on DDA prevention.

**Prevalence and Impact of DDA**

While rates of prevalence of DDA differ across studies, the research suggests that there are high levels of perpetration and victimization related to DDA among university or college students. In fact, Marganski and Melander (2018) suggest that because DDA occurs through such an unregulated environment that it is the most commonly experienced form of IPV. Kaukinen
Barrajo et al. (2015) found that direct aggression behaviours, such as threats or insults, have prevalence rates of 10% - 14%, while control and monitoring behaviours, such as surveillance or invasion of privacy, have a prevalence of 70% and 80%. A study on youth and young adults in Chile found similar results, suggesting that control behaviours are more common than direct aggression behaviours (Lara, 2020). High prevalence rates are further supported by the results of Marganski and Melander (2018) who found that 73% of students experience some form of DDA.

Behaviours related to DDA do not occur in isolation. Borrajo et al. (2016) found that among participants who had experienced DDA, an average of 23 instances of victimization were reported over the past six months. Duerksen and Woodin (2019) found that a majority of their university sample were victimized by both DDA and in-person dating abuse. DDA is not only prevalent, it has also been found to be mutual within relationships, with dating partners often being both perpetrators and victims (Lara, 2020). This form of intimate partner violence is pervasive and is also likely to continue to grow as society becomes increasingly reliant on technology for starting and maintaining relationships.

Continued study of digital dating abuse is pertinent due to its prevalence and negative consequences. Sexting coercion, a particular digital dating abuse behaviour, places unique stresses upon those who may have complied, since the sexually explicit messages or images could be released without their consent at any time (Droulin et al., 2015). Droulin et al. (2015) found that women associate sexting coercion with feelings of depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms, similar to those who experience traditional forms of partner aggression. Furthermore, Reed et al. (2016) found that women anticipated more distress than men over sexting concerns.
More broadly speaking, dating violence can lead to an increase in depressive symptomatology, suicidal ideation, and antisocial behaviour (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013). Furthermore, Ouytsel et al. (2016) found an association between victimization and binge drinking among adolescent males and females. Alcohol use has also been found to be associated with DDA victimization among men and women university students (Duerksen & Woodin, 2019). Further, exposure to DDA in women predicted fear of their partner. DDA has also been significantly linked to in-person psychological aggression and broader patterns of abuse within relationships (Borrajo et al., 2016; Duerksen & Woodin, 2019). As such, it is evident that DDA is not only highly prevalent but is also a cause for concern.

**Responding to DDA**

In response to the harmful effects of DDA, Weathers and Hopson (2015) proclaimed a need for increased awareness of said effects through additional studies and information campaigns. Increased awareness is of importance for multiple reasons. Lopez and Heffer (1998) found that parental support was an important mediator of abusive experiences and negative psychological outcomes. With higher levels of awareness, parents will be increasingly aware of the harms of DDA enabling them to provide greater support if their child becomes a victim. A lack of understanding of the harms of DDA can lead to friends or family shying away from condemning the abuse, or minimizing victims’ experiences, which can lead to frustration, confusion, magnification of stress, and uncertainty about culpability for victims (Weathers et al., 2019). In addition, the negative impact of DDA victimization can be reduced through social support from family, friends, and academic institutions (Kaukinen, 2014). More specifically, Kamimura et al. (2013) found that when victims of IPV have solid social support they report better physical and mental health, and lower levels of depression and psychological distress.
Thus, ensuring that people are aware of the impact of DDA could in turn help ameliorate its impacts.

In response to the need for increased awareness of DDA, researchers have called for colleges and universities to increase awareness of DDA among their student populations (Marcum et al., 2017). Further, they have suggested that universities should amplify resources for victims of digital dating abuse (Marganski & Melander, 2018) and develop interventions based on the most recent research (Kaukien, 2014). The purpose of the present study is to increase university student awareness of the impact of DDA by investigating DDA and levels of perceived harm among a university population.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study investigates three main research questions. First: how harmful do university students perceive different DDA behaviours to be (i.e., are some seen to be more harmful than others)? Research suggests that participants will perceive lower levels of harm for controlling and intrusive behaviors and higher levels of harm for behaviours such as sharing sexually suggestive or nude images and sexual coercion (Reed et al., 2016). Second: how do perceived levels of harm differ across gender, age, education level, relationship experience, perpetration, and victimization? We hypothesize that women will report higher levels of harm than men, despite similar levels of victimization (Reed et al., 2016). There is a lack of research on perceived harm specific to gender diverse individuals, therefore we are unaware of the levels of harm they will perceive. Third: can the present data help increase the consensus on which behaviours should be considered DDA? We hypothesize that some behaviours will not be rated as harmful as others. Previous research suggests that controlling and intrusive behaviours will be rated lower than the other behaviours (Reed et al., 2016). If several behaviours are rated
significantly lower than others then further research should be conducted to determine whether or not they constitute DDA. On the other hand, behaviours believed to be harmful should likely become the focus for prevention and victim support campaigns.

**METHODS**

**Participants and Procedures**

For this study, participants were all undergraduate students at the University of Regina who were enrolled in a 100 or 200 level psychology course. Ethical approval from the research ethics board for this study was received on August 24th, 2020. The study was accessible through the University of Regina’s psychology participant pool. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and anonymous. Consent was gathered from participants at the beginning of the survey and each participant received one credit towards their 100 or 200 level psychology course upon completion of the survey. There was no specific inclusion criteria for this study.

Tests conducted for power revealed that the largest number of participants needed for any statistical test with a medium effect size, .05 alpha score, and power of .95 was 216. In total 359 students signed up and participated in the survey, however, 5 participants' data was removed from analysis as they chose to skip through the survey without answering any questions. In the end data was analyzed from 354 participants, ensuring our ability to maintain power at 95%. Of the participants, 285 identified themselves as women, 65 as men, 2 as non-binary, 1 as other, and 1 as a transgender man. The number of participants who did not identify as either men or women was low, therefore, women, non-binary, other, and the transgender man were grouped together for the gender comparison analyses. The average age of the participants was 21.89. The data was collected from September 2, 2020 till October 12, 2020. All of the data is stored on remote and secure Qualtrics servers.
Measures

The participants were asked to complete a short survey, approximately 17 minutes long. The survey begins with consent, followed by demographic questions on age, gender identity, ethnic origin (White, Indigenous, Black, South Asian, Filipino, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, and Latin American), sexual orientation (heterosexual, or not heterosexual), immigration and citizenship status (Canadian citizen, permanent resident, immigrated, non-permanent resident, or non-immigrated), population setting (urban, rural, or First Nations Band), and years of university education completed (0 - 4+). In addition to general demographic questions we also asked relationship demographic questions such as relationship status (single, dating non-exclusively, dating exclusively, engaged, or married), whether they live with their partner or not, number of relationships in the last year, whether relationships started online, and whether or not COVID-19 has had an impact on dating experience.

Outside of demographics people were asked to give information on three separate sections. The first of the three sections asked participants how harmful they believe each of 16 different DDA behaviours to be when conducted by a dating partner through ICT; Stonard’s (2020) list of ICT was used with the addition of apps, due to their popularity. Participants were able to respond using a 5-point likert scale: not at all harmful (0), somewhat harmful (2), extremely harmful (4), which was adapted from Bennet et al. (2011). After the behaviours were listed participants were asked what effect they believe repeated exposure to such behaviours would have on an individual. Participants were able to respond on the same 5-point likert scale as on the harmfulness measure.

The second and third sections focused on participants' real experience with DDA. The first section asked participants if they have ever used ICT to do any of the behaviours to a dating
partner. For each behaviour participants were to answer yes or no. The third section focused on victimization. Participants were asked if a dating partner has ever used ICT to do any of the listed behaviours to them, and were able to respond yes or no to each of the behaviours.

This study listed 16 different DDA behaviours, which can be found in Table 1. Fifteen of the behaviours were based off of the 12 behaviours used in Stonard’s (2020) study. Stonard conducted a quantitative study looking at the perceptions and impact of DDA among adolescents. An example of one such behaviour is making insulting, mean, or hurtful personal comments to you personally. Several of Stonard’s behaviours were changed to make them more specific. For example Stonard’s (2020) behaviour “Asked or pressured you to engage in sexual acts or to send messages/pictures that you did not want” (p. 12) was broken down into two separate behaviours: (1) pressuring you to engage in sexual acts and (2) pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures. An additional behaviour was adapted from Marganski & Melander’s (2018) list of DDA behaviours; threatened to harm himself or herself if you broke up by making a threatening statement through a technological device.

ANALYSES

Descriptive statistics were used to find the frequencies for how harmful participants rated each behaviour. In addition to descriptive statistics, we have also used mixed model ANOVA and independent samples t-tests. The mixed model ANOVA has been used to show if there are any significant demographic differences in harm perception across participants. Independent samples t-tests have been used to identify which behaviours account for any significant differences found in the mixed model ANOVA tests. One such way these tests have been used is to determine any differences between men and women in perceived level of harm for behaviours overall and for each distinct behaviour.
RESULTS

Differences of Perceived Harm

The within-subjects effect in a mixed model ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived harm $F(15, 5295) = 87.625, p < .001$, such that there were significant differences in how some of the DDA behaviours were perceived by participants.

The first question this study attempted to answer was how harmful university students perceived different DDA behaviours to be. Descriptive statistics indicated that a majority of university students rated each behaviour as 3 or 4 (extremely harmful) on the harm rating scale. Behaviour 7, “contacting you to check on you and ask you where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with” was rated as extremely harmful by only 7.6%. Outside of that exception, each behaviour listed was perceived as extremely harmful by at least 45.5% of participants and up to 85.6% of participants, which can be seen in Table 1. Pairwise comparisons indicated that some behaviours were rated as more harmful than others. The behaviours with the largest percentage of participants giving ratings of “extremely harmful” were: “Threatened to harm himself or herself if you broke up by making a threatening statement through a technological device” (85.6%), “Showing or distributing private or personal information/images/video/messages without your permission” (80.2%), “Making comments or acts that were intended to embarrass, humiliate, or shame you publicly” (79.7%), and “Making threatening comments or behaviours that were intended to threaten harm, intimidate, or bully you” (78.2%).

Gender

The between-subjects effect in a mixed model ANOVA revealed a trend toward a significant gender difference in perceived harm $F(1, 352) = 3.286, p < .071$, such that on
average, women ($M = 3.31$) rated behaviours as more harmful than men ($M = 3.14$). The interaction from this analysis was significant, $F(15, 5280) = 3.298, p < .001$. Independent samples t-tests found that significant gender differences were present for behaviour 8 $t(352) = 4.467, p < .001$, such that men ($M = 3.02$) rated, “pressuring you to engage in sexual acts” as significantly less harmful than women and gender diverse participants ($M = 3.61$). Significant gender differences for behaviour 9 were also found $t(352) = 3.788, p < .001$, such that men ($M = 3.02$) rated “pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures” as significantly less harmful than did women and gender diverse participants ($M = 3.51$). Lastly, significant gender differences were found for behaviour 15 $t(352) = 2.501, p < .013$, such that men ($M = 2.62$) rated, “being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures” as significantly less harmful than women and gender diverse participants ($M = 3.03$). These results indicate that there is a discernible gender difference in regards to pressuring partners into sexual acts, pressuring partners to send sexual material, and receiving unsolicited sexual material.

**Age**

Age was split into two categories for mixed model ANOVA analysis; the two categories were based on traditional student age (25 and under) and non-traditional student age (26 and above). The between-subjects effect was not significant $F(1, 352) = .380, p < .380$, such that on average students, under 25 years of age ($M = 3.27$) rated behaviours similarly to students over the age of 26 ($M = 3.33$). The interaction from this analysis was significant, $F(15, 5280) = 2.625, p < .001$. Independent samples t-tests found significant age differences for behaviour 7 $t(352) = 2.553, p < .011$, such that traditional aged students ($M = 1.59$) rated, “contacting you to check on you and ask you where you are, what you are doing and who you are with” as significantly less harmful than non-traditional aged students ($M = 2.04$). Behaviour 10 also had significant age differences $t(352) = 2.290, p < .023$, such that traditional aged students ($M = 2.98$) rated,
“checking your messages, contact histories, or friend lists without consent” as significantly less harmful than non-traditional students \((M = 3.37)\). While most behaviours were perceived similarly across age groupings, monitoring behaviours appear to be perceived as less harmful by younger students.

*Education level*

Education level was split into three groups for analysis; 0-1 years, 2-3 years and 4 or more years of university level education for the mixed model ANOVA analysis. The between-subjects effect test was not significant \(F(2, 303) = .076, p < .927\), such that on average those with 0-1 years of experience \((M = 3.30)\), 2-3 years of experience \((M = 3.30)\), and 4 or more years of experience \((M = 3.33)\) in university rated behaviours similarly. The interaction was not significant \(F(30, 4545) = 1.139, p < .276\), indicating that participants did not rate behaviours differently based on their education level.

*Relationship Experience in the Past Year*

Relationship experience was grouped into three categories: 0 relationships in the past year \((M = 3.30)\), 1-3 relationships in the past year \((M = 3.27)\), and 4 or more relationships in the past year \((M = 3.24)\) for the mixed model ANOVA analysis. The between-subjects effect test was not significant \(F(2, 351) = .198, p < .821\), such that on average, ratings of harm were similar across relationship experience groupings. Furthermore, there was no significant interaction \(F(30, 5265) = 1.156, p < .255\). Therefore, relationship experience did not have a significant impact on perceptions of harm of DDA behaviours.

*Sexual Orientation*

Sexual orientation was grouped into heterosexual and non-heterosexual for data collection and analysis. No significance was found for the between-subject effect test \(F(1, 352)\)
Perceived Harm of Digital Dating Abuse

= 1.306, \( p < .254 \), such that on average, heterosexual participants \((M = 3.30)\) rated behaviours similarly to non-heterosexual participants \((M = 3.18)\). There was a significant interaction \( F (15, 5280) = 1.134, \ p < .018 \). Independent samples t-test found significant sexual orientation differences for behaviour 4 \( t(352) = 2.142, \ p < .001 \), such that heterosexual participants \((M = 3.72)\) rated, “making comments or acts that were intended to embarrass, humiliate, or shame you publicly,” as significantly more harmful than non-heterosexual participants \((M = 3.48)\). Significance was also found for behaviour 6 \( t(352) = 3.211, \ p < .001 \), such that heterosexual participants \((M = 3.71)\) rated, “making threatening comments or behaviours that were intended to threaten harm, intimidate, or bully you” as significantly more harmful than non-heterosexual participants \((M = 3.33)\). Lastly, behaviour 16 was significant \( t(352) = 1.957, \ p < .051 \), such that heterosexual participants \((M = 3.77)\) rated, “threatened to harm himself or herself if you broke up by making a threatening statement through a technological device” as significantly more harmful than non-heterosexual participants \((M = 3.55)\).

Perpetration

In order to analyze perceived harm across rates of perpetration and victimization two new median split variables were created. If a participant stated they had perpetrated 0-1 types of DDA they were considered to be low in rates of perpetration, more than that was considered high. The between-subjects effect was significant \( F (1, 352) = 3.917, \ p < .049 \), such that on average those with low levels of perpetration \((M = 3.34)\) rated behaviours as less harmful than those with high levels of perpetration \((M = 3.20)\). A significant interaction was also found \( F (15, 5280) = 3.714, \ p < .001 \). Independent samples t-tests found behaviour 7 to have significant perpetration rate differences \( t(352) = 2.002, \ p < .046 \), such that those with low levels of perpetration \((M = 1.77)\) rated, “contacting you to check on you and ask you where you are, what you are doing, and who
you are with,” as significantly more harmful than those with high levels of perpetration ($M = 1.52$). Behaviour 8 was also found to be significant $t(352) = 3.636, p < .001$, such that those with low levels of perpetration ($M = 3.67$) rated, “pressuring you to engage in sexual acts,” as significantly more harmful than those with high levels of perpetration ($M = 3.29$). Behaviour 9 was significant $t(352) = 3.563, p < .001$, such that those with low levels of perpetration ($M = 3.58$) rated, “pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures,” as significantly more harmful than those with high levels of perpetration ($M = 3.22$). Behaviour 10 was significant $t(352) = 2.664, p < .008$, such that those with low levels of perpetration ($M = 3.18$) rated, “checking your messages, contact histories, or friend lists without consent,” as significantly more harmful than those with high levels of perpetration ($M = 2.86$). Lastly, behaviour 15 was significant $t(352) = 2.633, p < .009$, such that those with low levels of perpetration ($M = 3.11$) rated, “being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures” as significantly more harmful than those with high levels of perpetration ($M = 2.77$).

Victimization

A median split variable was also created for victimization. If a participant had experienced 0-4 types of victimization, they were considered low on victimization, and more than that was considered high. The between-subjects effect was not significant $F (1, 352) = .476, p < .491$, such that on average participants with low victimization ($M = 3.30$) rated behaviours similarly to participants with high victimization ($M = 3.25$). There was a significant interaction $F (15, 5280) = 2.998, p < .001$. Independent samples t-tests found significant victimization differences for behaviour 9 $t(352) = 3.348, p < .016$, such that participants with low victimization ($M = 3.54$) rated, “pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures” as significantly more harmful than those with high victimization ($M = 3.29$). A significant
victimization difference was also found for behaviour 15 $t(352) = 4.877, p < .028$, such that participants with low victimization ($M = 3.09$) rated, “being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures” as significantly more harmful than participants with high victimization ($M = 2.80$).

**Gender Differences in Rates of Victimization**

The between-subjects effect in a mixed model ANOVA revealed a trend toward a significant gender difference in victimization $F (1, 351) = 3.327, p < .069$, such that on average, women ($M = 0.33$) rated behaviours as more harmful than men ($M = 0.26$). The interaction from this analysis was significant, $F (15, 5265) = 3.906, p < .001$. Independent samples t-tests found significant gender differences in victimization were present for behaviour 7 $t(351) = 2.882, p < .004$, such that men ($M = 0.57$) reported being victimized by the behaviour, “contacting you to check on you and ask you where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with” significantly less than female and gender diverse ($M = 0.75$) participants. Significant differences were also found for behaviour 8 $t(351) = 2.320, p < .021$, such that men ($M = 0.25$) reported being victimized by the behaviour, “pressuring you to engage in sexual acts” significantly less than women and gender diverse participants ($M = 0.40$). Significant gender differences for behaviour 9 were also found $t(351) = 4.097, p < .001$, such that men ($M = 0.20$) reported being victimized by the behaviour, “pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures” significantly less than women and gender diverse participants ($M = 0.47$). Lastly, significant gender differences in victimization were found for behaviour 15 $t(351) = 3.236, p < .001$, such that men ($M = 0.14$) reported being victimized by the behaviour, “being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures” significantly less than women and gender diverse participants ($M = 0.34$).
DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that participants would perceive low levels of harm for controlling and intrusive behaviours and higher levels of harm for the other behaviours, such as behaviours involving sexual coercion. All behaviours but one were rated by the majority of participants as a 3 or 4 on the harm rating scale. Behaviours such as “checking your messages, contact histories, or friends lists without consent,” and “demanding your passwords to check messages, contact histories, and friends lists,” while controlling, were not perceived as constituting low levels of harm. This suggests that university students have a general awareness of the harms of DDA, however, this does not tell the full story.

Women and gender diverse individuals rated “pressuring you to engage in sexual acts,” “pressuring you to send sexually suggestive messages/pictures,” and “being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures” as significantly more harmful than did men. This finding is consistent with research by Reed et al.’s (2016) study that found female participants reported more hypothetical negative reactions to similar behaviours than male participants. Furthermore, women and gender diverse participants reported being victimized by these particular behaviours significantly more than men. This is especially alarming considering that sexting coercion can result in unique stressors for those who have complied and is associated with feelings of depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms among women (Droulin et al., 2015).

The lower levels of perceived harm for behaviour 4, “making comments or acts that were intended to embarrass, humiliate, or shame you publicly,” behaviour 6, “making threatening comments or behaviours hat were intended to threaten harm, intimidate, or bully you,” and behaviour 16, “threatened to harm themselves if you broke up by making a threatening statement through a technological device” reported by non-heterosexual participants could be the result of
normalization. Bennett et al. (2011) found that the more an individual experiences electronic victimization the lower their levels of anticipated distress. Therefore, the findings of this study align with current theories, as sexual minority individuals report higher levels of dating violence victimization and are at a greater risk of all types of dating violence in comparison to heterosexual individuals (Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2017; Kaukinen, 2014).

The last research question for this study was whether or not this research can increase the consensus on which behaviours are considered DDA. This is important because a review of studies on DDA found inconsistencies in which behaviours were considered DDA (Brown & Hegarty, 2018). Based on the data an increased consensus can be reached on which behaviours constitute DDA. One behaviour, in particular, should be removed as a DDA behaviour or adapted slightly. The majority of participants, 33.6%, believe that behaviour 7, “contacting you to check on you and ask you where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with” is only somewhat harmful, with only 7.6% of participants rating it as extremely harmful, making it the behaviour perceived as being least harmful. This behaviour also had the highest rates of perpetration at 61.9% and highest rates of victimization at 71.4%. Furthermore, while most behaviours were perceived similarly across age groups, monitoring behaviours in general appeared to be perceived as less harmful by younger students. Such a distinction could be due to the increased use of ICT among younger populations and, with that, the normalization of monitoring behaviours among that age group. Therefore, while this behaviour may be pervasive among university students, the majority do not see it as harmful. It is possible that monitoring one’s dating partner through ICT should only be considered a DDA behaviour when accompanied by other possessive, controlling, or abusive behaviours (Bennett et al., 2011; Reed et al., 2016).
Future studies on DDA should consider removing this behaviour or add the condition of, “occurring with other abusive behaviors” to it.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study that ought to be taken into consideration. Only a small sample of students from only one university were included in the data analysis. Furthermore, data was collected from only a small number of men participants in comparison to woman participants. Further research should be conducted in different universities and should aim to collect extensive data from participants who identify as men.

**CONCLUSION**

Results of the current study suggest that there is an encouraging level of awareness of the harms of DDA behaviours among the sample of University of Regina students. Further, results suggest continued efforts in raising awareness of DDA could be beneficial. Specifically, additional awareness directed towards men concerning the harms of sexual pressure both in terms of physical acts and messaging/pictures and sending unsolicited sexual messages/pictures should be considered. Finally, this study provides support for creating a consensus on which behaviours should be considered DDA, such that behaviour 7, “contacting you to check on you and ask where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with” should be removed or adapted in order to account for its normalization within the current dating culture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>0 - Not at all Harmful</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2 - Somewhat Harmful</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 - Extremely Harmful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Making insulting, mean, or hurtful comments to you personally</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
<td>45.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making insulting, mean, or hurtful comments to you publicly</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>19.20%</td>
<td>70.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making comments or acts that were intended to embarrass, humiliate,</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>27.70%</td>
<td>60.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or shame you personally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Making comments or acts that were intended to embarrass, humiliate,</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
<td>79.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or shame you publicly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sharing or distributing private or personal information/images/video/</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>80.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messages without your permission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Making threatening comments or behaviours that were intended to</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
<td>78.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threaten harm, intimidate, or bully you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Contacting you to check in on you and ask you where you are, what</td>
<td>18.90%</td>
<td>25.70%</td>
<td>33.60%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you are doing and who you are with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pressuring you to engage in sexual acts</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
<td>71.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pressuring you to send sexual suggestive messages/pictures</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>21.20%</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Checking your messages, contact histories, or friends lists without</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
<td>25.10%</td>
<td>46.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Demanding your passwords to check messages, contact histories, and</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
<td>58.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends lists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Deleting or removing contacts or friends or ex-partners</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>22.30%</td>
<td>49.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Made you feel afraid not to respond to a call, text, message, etc.</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
<td>59.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Prevented you from using ICT or from talking to others</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>19.50%</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Being sent unwanted sexual messages/sexually suggestive/nude pictures</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
<td>22.30%</td>
<td>48.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Threatened to harm themselves if you broke up by making a threatening statement through a technological device</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>85.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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