

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS OF VIOLENCE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN: SAMPLES FROM KUWAIT AND THE USA

Pearl Berman¹, Adam Clarke², and Juliet Dinkha³

^{1,2}Department of Psychology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

³American University of Kuwait

Abstract

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The World Health Organization (WHO) labeled interpersonal violence a world-wide public health crisis. In the United States alone, 1.5 million women, and 800,000 men reported being abused by a partner while an estimated three million children witnessed it; these acts might involve physical as well as sexual assaults. An assaultive parent might force a child to participate in the assaults and there was a 30%-60% co-occurrence with child abuse. In 2006, 3.3 million reports of child maltreatment were investigated and as elder abuse hotlines expanded, so did statistics on elder abuse and neglect. Comprehensive violence education could serve as a valuable form of primary prevention but its empirical validity would need to be established. The Warning Signs Survey was developed as an outcome instrument and measured the effectiveness of violence education efforts at two universities. Its three major sections contained phrases indicating distractor items as well as warning signs of: violence, suicide, a maltreated child, an abusive parent, and a neglectful parent. *Objectives:* Assessed the internal consistency of the Warning Signs Survey scales. Assessed the perceptions students had about warning signs of destructive behavior. Assessed the utility of the survey for informing instructors about the strengths and weaknesses of their violence education efforts. *Design:* Students completed the survey at the beginning and end of their academic terms. *Methods:* Subjects included 156 students from Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and 136 students at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) who were taking psychology courses. *Findings:* Internal consistency varied by scale and country with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .5-1.0. Item analysis indicated that AUK and IUP students showed some divergent perceptions of the warning signs of destructive behavior. MANOVA indicated that students learned more about violence, suicide, and acceptable parenting strategies over the course of the term. However, IUP students knew more about most warning signs than AUK students; however, this may have been a result of taking a survey in their non-native language. *Conclusions:* Survey showed some potential as an effective outcome instrument but was in need of revision to reduce ceiling effects, and increase clarity, of some scales. The second version of the survey has currently been evaluated on approximately 700 IUP students. Ceiling effects have been significantly reduced and Cronbach's alphas now range from .7-1.0 on all its scales; which have been expanded to include intimate partner violence and elder abuse and neglect. It is currently being translated into Arabic for use at AUK.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) labeled interpersonal violence a world-wide public health crisis. In the United States alone, 1.5 million women, and 800,000 men report being abused by a partner while an estimated three million children witness it; these acts may involve physical as well as sexual assaults (Center for Disease Control, 1998). An assaultive parent may force a child to participate in the assaults and there is a 30%-60% co-occurrence with child abuse (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). The Administration for Children and Families (2006) indicated that 3.3 million reports of child maltreatment were investigated and as elder abuse hotlines expand, so do statistics on elder abuse and neglect (Acierno et. al, 2010). Veith (2007), the director of the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC), developed a plan to eradicate interpersonal violence through integrating comprehensive violence education into undergraduate curriculums. With effective educational efforts, future mandated reporters would know how to make accurate reports of interpersonal violence, future investigators of violent incidents would know how to effectively interview potential victims and perpetrators,

future prosecutors would know how to gain convictions in violent cases where adjudication was needed, future psychologists and social workers would understand the dynamics of violence and provide better treatment; future parents would understand child development and use nonviolent, child rearing strategies; and, enough community members would understand the dynamics of abuse to provide a political tipping point in favor of legislation that would support nonviolence. Veith's plan has been endorsed by the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence (NPEIV) and the Institute on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma (IVAT) and many universities across the United States are developing interdisciplinary, violence education curriculums that are affiliated with these organizations. While violence education could serve as a valuable form of primary prevention, empirical validation of its effectiveness would be needed.

The Warning Signs Survey, is an outcome instrument, under development for use in validating violence education at the university level. It contains ten scales including the: warning signs of violence, warning signs of suicide, items not reflecting violence or suicide, the warning signs of a maltreated child, signs of typical childhood, the warning signs of a sexually or physically abusive parent, the warning signs of a neglectful parent, and signs of acceptable parenting. Students at AUK and IUP completed the English version of the survey at the beginning and end of their academic terms. The Warning Signs Survey was available on the internet. Each student was sent a link to the survey. The project assessed the internal consistency of the Warning Signs Survey scales, assessed the perceptions of students about the warning signs of destructive behavior, and the utility of the survey for informing instructors about the strengths and weaknesses of their violence education efforts.