



**DATING/ INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG
COLLEGE STUDENTS**

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INTRODUCTION:

Dating/ intimate partner violence is a significant problem that can affect the well-being and safety of college students. However, there has not been a great extent of research conducted to see how dating/ intimate partner violence (D/IPV) is perceived in social media. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to evaluate D/IPV and social media use among college students to help bridge this research gap. This study aimed to gather data on how undergraduate students here at the University of Utah tolerate, perceive, and respond to D/IPV scenarios on social media.

METHODS:

This research was conducted in two phases. In the fall of 2020, phase one consisted of collecting online surveys from undergraduate students at the University of Utah. A total of 591 students participated in the online survey. In the survey, participants were asked demographic characteristics, social media use, and perceptions of D/IPV on social media based on ten given scenarios.

The ten scenarios asked in the survey were:

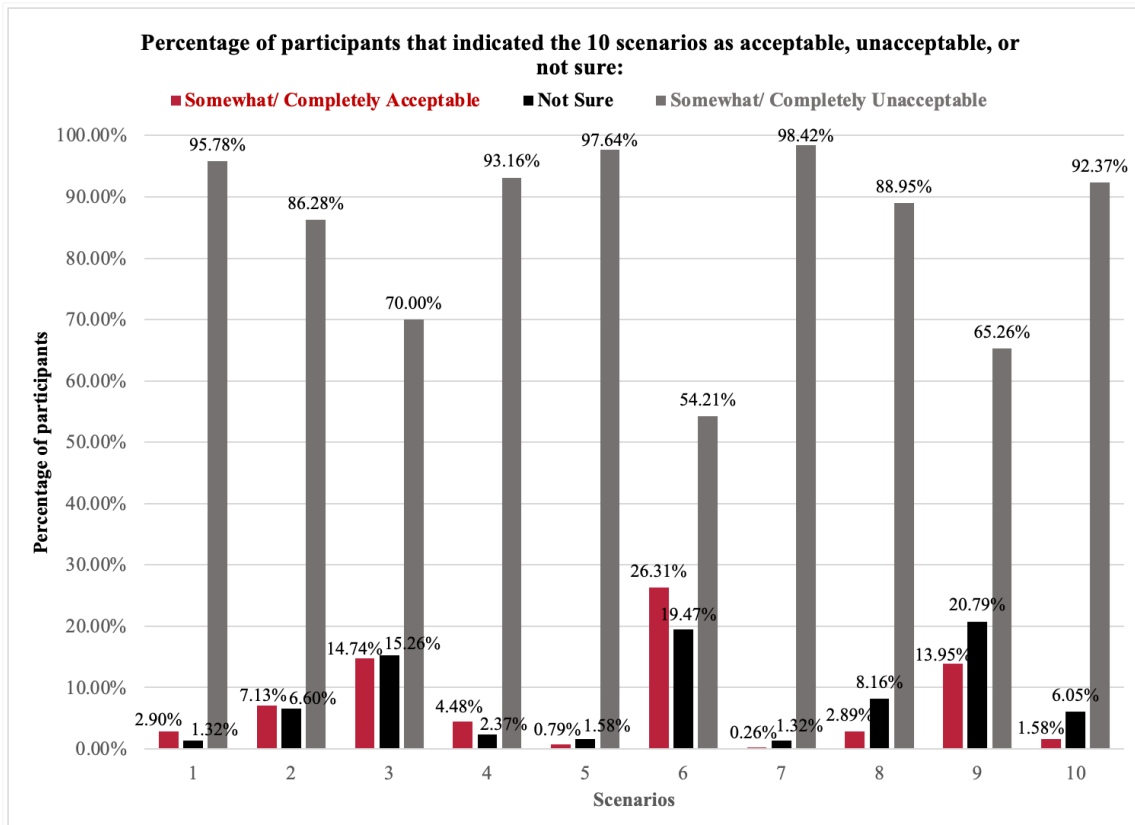
- 1) Someone uses social media to monitor the location of their partner and tells the partner, "If you aren't where you tell me you're going to be, I will know"
- 2) One partner keeps asking the other to share their passwords on social media, saying, "Most couples share their passwords; don't you trust me?"
- 3) Someone posts a picture of themselves on their partner's social media with #girlfriendhacking or #boyfriendhacking and says, "I'm the only girl/boy my partner needs!"
- 4) One partner tells the other that they have the right to review the partner's messages and social media activity without necessarily asking for permission since they are paying for the service.
- 5) One partner searches the other's social media account for all of their recent "likes" and comments, then sends messages to those contacts informing them the partner is in a relationship.
- 6) Someone puts pressure on their partner to change their relationship status on social media, saying, "I just think everyone should know we are together."
- 7) One partner asks the other to send intimate photos of themselves, saying, "If you don't, then you don't love me."
- 8) Someone posts a picture of themselves in a new outfit with the hashtag #ootd and their partner comments, "Looks like I'll have to cut back on your allowance even more."

- 9) One partner posted about the challenges of being in a relationship with someone struggling with mental illness using the hashtag #supportivepartner.
- 10) Someone posts a picture of their dog with the caption, “Too bad my partner spends all of our money. Now we can’t afford to pay for our dog’s shots.”

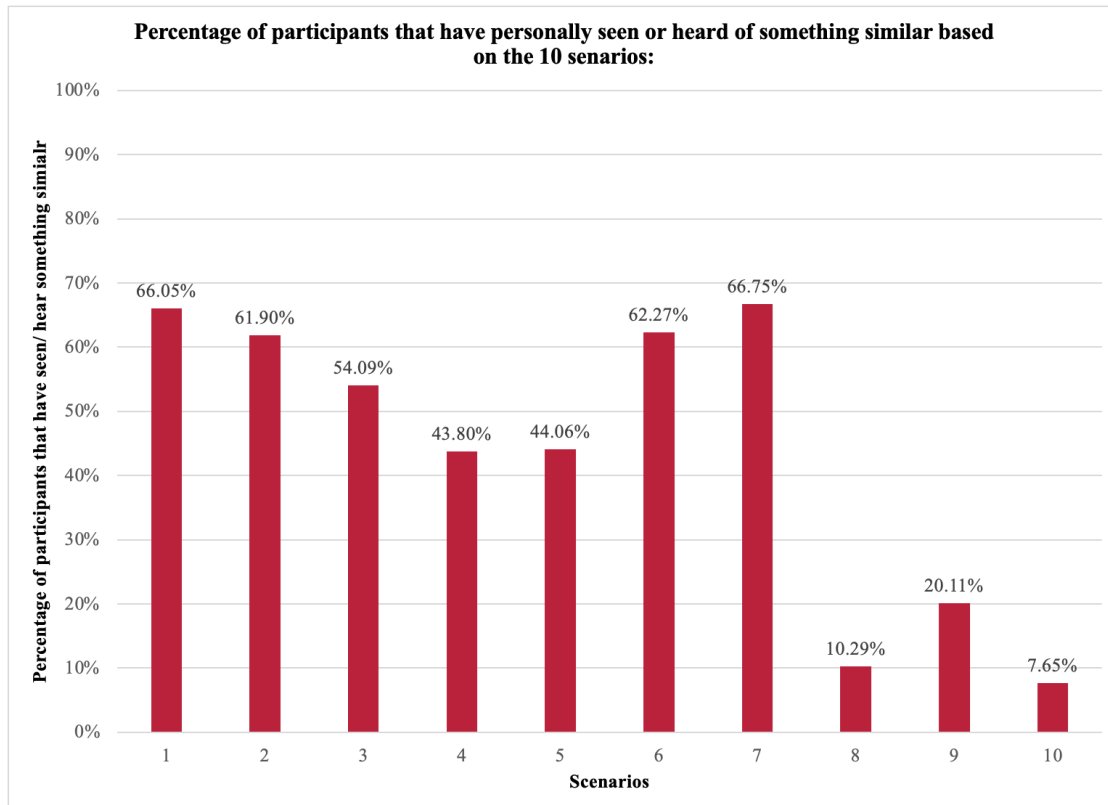
Based on the findings in phase one, the second phase of the research was conducted in the spring of 2021. This phase consisted of ten small focus group sessions with a total of 90 undergraduate students participating. In these focus groups, students discussed how they describe D/IPV and discussed why some scenarios might not be viewed as D/IPV. The focus groups also discussed why it is important to learn about dating/ intimate partner violence and what resources there are available for them.

RESULTS:

- Around half of the participants reported that they use social media five times a day and on average spend over 2.56 hours a day using it.
- Based on the ten scenarios that illustrated D/IPV on social media, four scenarios were viewed more than others as somewhat or completely acceptable scenarios 2 (7.13%), 3 (14.74%), 6 (26.31%), and 9 (13.95%). Scenarios that cover monitoring/physical control, sexual violence, and financial/economic situations tended to be viewed as completely unacceptable. However, scenarios that cover monitoring a dating or intimate partner and hacking a partner’s social media account are more likely to be viewed as somewhat unacceptable rather than completely unacceptable. The results indicate that there are scenarios of D/IPV on social media that are not always considered as D/IPV.



- When it came to asking students if they would intervene on social media posts that contained D/IPV 10.9 % said they would not do anything, 38.5% said they would interact with the post, and 43.8% said they would report the post to the social media platform.
- Out of the ten scenarios that illustrate D/IPV on social media, most participants indicated that they had seen or heard of the scenarios or similar situations related to D/IPV on social media before.



CONCLUSION:

Overall, participants are willing to intervene (e.g., reporting the post to the social media platform and interacting with the post) if they see D/IPV on social media. However, many may not recognize what constitutes D/IPV even though many have encountered scenarios that are similar to D/IPV on social media. The results indicate that while most students use multiple social media platforms and recognize several scenarios as D/IPV, not all scenarios were perceived as “completely unacceptable” dating behavior. Additionally, some respondents indicated that their knowledge surrounding D/IPV is greater than their peers, whereas several respondents believed their peers would see certain scenarios as somewhat or completely acceptable (situations 2, 3, 6, 9). Though these percentages are the minority, they are still higher than expected. These findings suggest that certain scenarios may not be perceived as D/IPV by respondents or their peers, despite respondents’ desire to intervene. Based on the findings of this study, educational programs that focus on how to recognize D/IPV on social media would be beneficial to promote accurate understandings of D/IPV.