

# **DOES ADOLESCENT DEPRESSION/SUICIDALITY PREDICT UNHEALTHY YOUNG ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES?**

Tawana Bandy, B.S.,  
Mary Terzian, MSW, Ph.D.  
Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D.

Presented at the 2012 Add Health Users Conference  
Bethesda, MD  
July 27, 2012



# Background

- Depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence have been linked to sexual and domestic violence, as well as difficulty establishing long-term, fulfilling romantic relationships

# Gap

- Lack of longitudinal data analysis
- Lack of research exploring unhealthy relationship outcome patterns for varying levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms

# Goal of the Study

- Explore whether depressive and suicidal symptoms increase the likelihood of unhealthy relationship outcomes
- Explore whether more chronic levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms increase the likelihood of unhealthy relationship outcomes

# Sample

- 6,763 young adults, who were ages 12 to 17 when data on depressive and suicidal symptoms were collected at Wave 1 (between 1994 and 1995)

# Measures: Depressive Symptoms

- An 18-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)
- Used threshold established in prior research using the CES-D scale with adolescents (20 or more for males and 22 or more for females)

# Measures: Suicidal Symptoms

- Items assessing suicidal ideation and/or suicide attempt were used to create a variable with three categories:
  - No suicidal symptoms at Wave I or II
  - Suicidal symptoms at either wave
  - Suicidal symptoms at both waves

# Measures: Depression/Suicidality Symptomatology

- Moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms in the previous week and/or suicidal tendencies in the past year.
- A three-level ordinal variable was created, assessing whether depressive/suicidal symptoms were:
  - *Isolated* (reported at Wave I or Wave II),
  - *Recurring* (reported at both Waves I and II), or
  - *Mild or non-existent*



# Unhealthy Relationship Outcomes

- Relationships were characterized as unhealthy if:
  - Committing or experiencing violence in their relationship, or
  - Either person in the relationship had been unfaithful

# Relationship Violence

- Being violent was defined as doing any of the following once or more in the past year:
  - Hitting
  - Kicking
  - Shoving
  - Threatening
  - Insisting a partner have sexual intercourse

# Sexual Infidelity

- Being unfaithful was defined as:
  - Either the respondent or the partner having sex or a relationship with someone outside of the identified partner

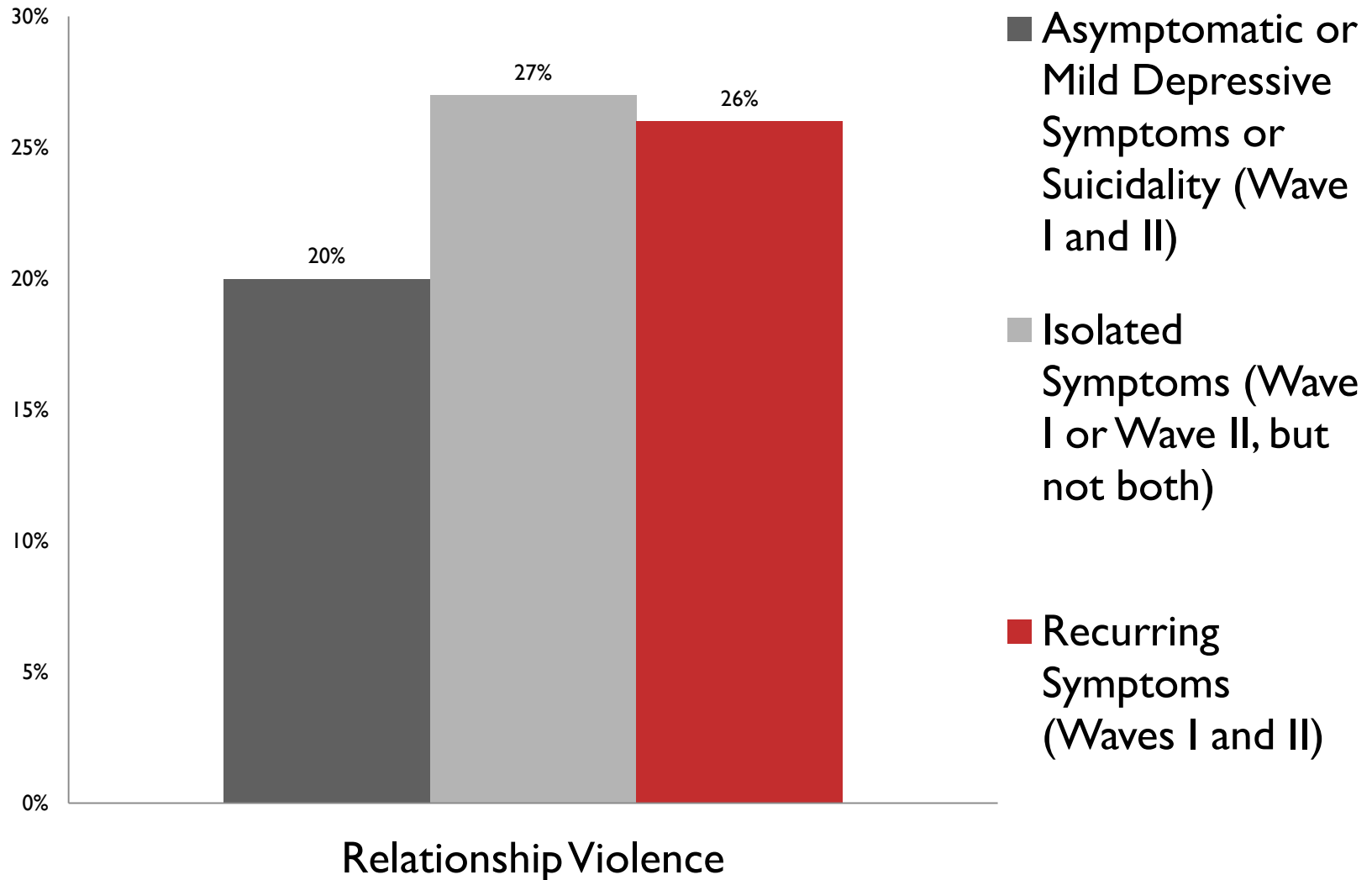
# Descriptive Findings

- 25% reported depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence (21% isolated and 4% recurring)
- 20% reported committing or experiencing violence in their relationships
- 21% reported sexual infidelity in their relationships

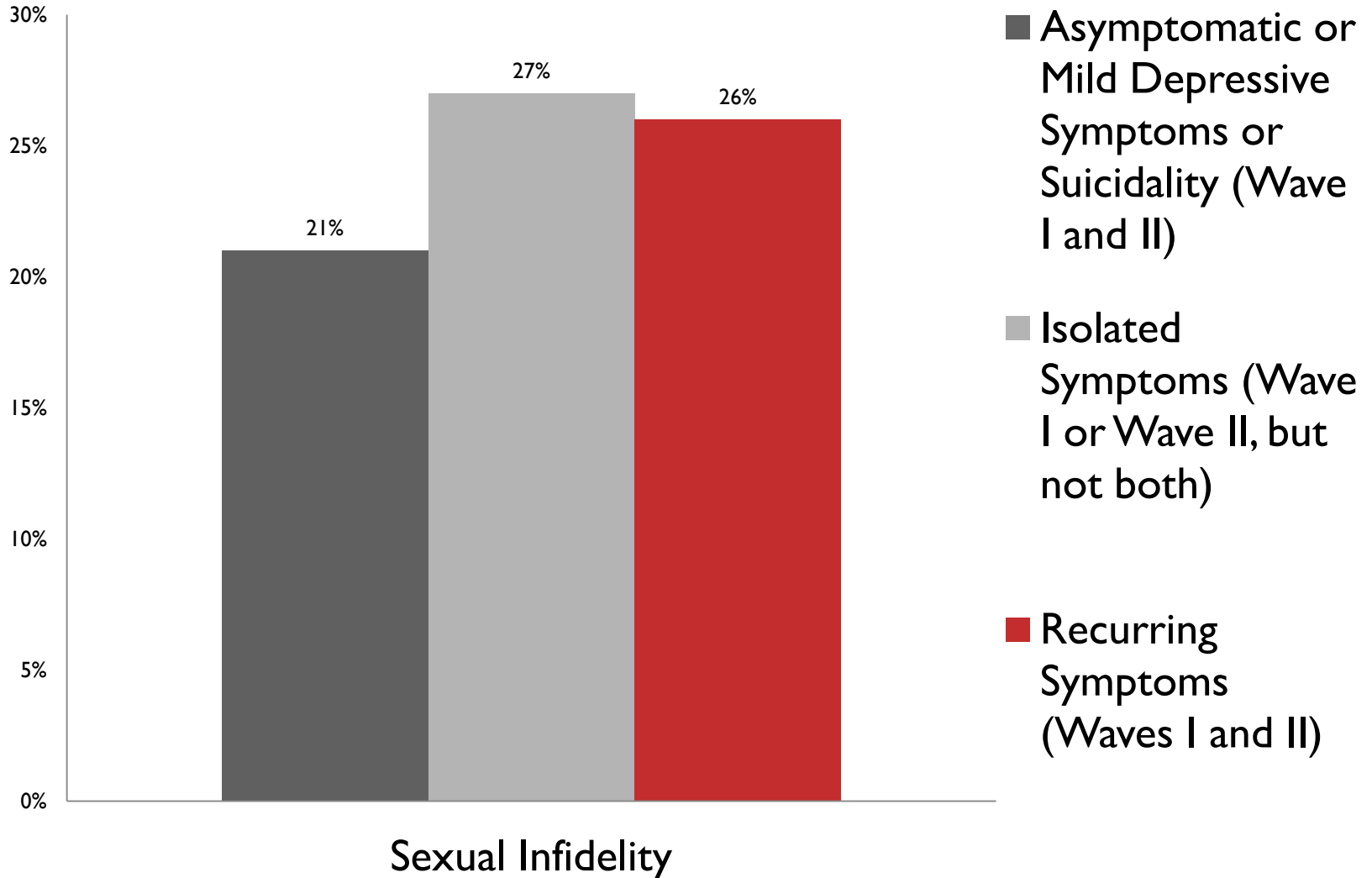
# Bivariate Analyses

- Cross-tabulations were used to explore the relationship between adolescent depressive/suicidal symptoms and relationship violence and sexual infidelity

# Depressive/Suicidal Symptoms & Relationship Violence



# Depressive/Suicidal Symptoms & Sexual Infidelity



# Multivariate Analyses

- Results of multivariate analyses conducted validated the associations, after controlling for age, gender, parental educational status, family structure, income, and race/ethnicity.



# Conclusions

- Depressive/suicidal symptoms in adolescence are associated with relationship violence and sexual infidelity in young adulthood.
- However, more chronic levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms did not increase likelihood of relationship violence or sexual infidelity.

# Discussion

- Examine the developmental pathways connecting depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence with poor relationship outcomes in young adulthood
- It is important to identify and intervene with teens who have mental health problems, so that they are able to develop healthy romantic relationships at multiple stages of development

# Limitations of the Study

- The scale used to measure depressive symptoms (CES-D) is not a diagnostic tool
- Depressive symptoms are only measured over a two-week period
- Underlying reasons for the association are unknown.



**Questions/Comments?**



**Thank you!**