

A Review of Research on Women's Use of Violence With Male Intimate Partners

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This article provides a review of research literature on women who use violence with intimate partners. The central purpose is to inform service providers in the military and civilian communities who work with domestically violent women. The major points of this review are as follows: (a) women's violence usually occurs in the context of violence against them by their male partners; (b) in general, women and men perpetrate equivalent levels of physical and psychological aggression, but evidence suggests that men perpetrate sexual abuse, coercive control, and stalking more frequently than women and that women also are much more frequently injured during domestic violence incidents; (c) women and men are equally likely to initiate physical violence in relationships involving less serious "situational couple violence," and in relationships in which serious and very violent "intimate terrorism" occurs, men are much more likely to be perpetrators and women victims; (d) women's physical violence is more likely than men's violence to be motivated by self-defense and fear, whereas men's physical violence is more likely than women's to be driven by control motives; (e) studies of couples in mutually violent relationships find more negative effects for women than for men; and (f) because of the many differences in behaviors and motivations between women's and men's violence, interventions based on male models of partner violence are likely not effective for many women.

Keywords: women's violence; women's aggression; partner abuse; domestic violence

How you gonna love me, hurt me, and abuse me at the same time? You can't love me and abuse me.¹

A sizable minority of individuals arrested for domestic violence each year in the United States is female (Miller, 2005). For example, a study conducted in Tennessee found that 16% of those arrested for intimate partner violence were female (Feder & Henning, 2005); in Concord, New Hampshire, women comprised 35%

of those arrested (Miller, 2005). Many of these women are court-mandated to receive services, such as a batterer intervention program or anger management program (Miller, 2005). The military also provides services for a large number of women identified as committing physical abuse against a spouse. One study of 2,991 Air Force personnel who committed physical abuse against a spouse found that 23% of the offenders were female (Brewster, Milner, Mollerstrom, Saha, & Harris, 2002). Another study of reports of spouse abuse in the Army Central Registry from 1989 to 1997 found that 33% of persons identified as domestic violence offenders were women (McCarroll *et al.*, 1999).

To aid those involved in the provision of services to women and their families involved in domestic violence, the following sections provide a review of key findings from research on women's use of violence against male intimate partners. The review includes a discussion of the prevalence of women's commission of different types of aggressive behaviors and how that compares to the prevalence of men's commission of such behaviors; the prevalence of intimate partner violence among military personnel; ways in which women's violence often differs from men's violence; gender differences in the physical and psychological impact of domestic violence; gender differences in motivations for using violence; and characteristics of women who use violence against male intimate partners.

PREVALENCE OF WOMEN'S PERPETRATION OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS

How prevalent is women's intimate partner violence in the United States, and how does it compare to the prevalence of men's intimate partner violence? The answer to this question varies depending on the type of aggression examined. The sections that follow describe gender similarities and differences that have been found in women's and men's physical aggression, sexual coercion, stalking, psychological aggression, and coercive control, as well as injury as a result of intimate partner violence.

Physical Aggression

When physical aggression is the subject of inquiry, studies consistently find that as many women self-report perpetrating this behavior as do men; some studies find a higher prevalence of physical aggression committed by women (for a review see Archer, 2000). For example, the National Family Violence Survey (Straus & Gelles, 1990), a nationally representative study of 6,002 men and women, found that in the year before the survey, 12.4% of wives self-reported that they used violence against their husbands compared to 11.6% of husbands who self-reported using violence against their wives. Furthermore, 4.8% of wives reported using severe violence against their husbands, whereas 3.4% of husbands reported using severe violence (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Studies with college samples also find that men and women commit similar rates of physical aggression (Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005) or that a higher prevalence of women commit physical aggression (Straus, 2004).

Sexual Coercion

Sexual coercion has been defined as "any situation in which one person uses verbal or physical means to obtain sexual activity against consent (including the administration of drugs or alcohol, with or without the other person's consent)" (Adams-Curtis & Forbes,

2004, p. 91). Most studies comparing the prevalence of men's and women's sexually coercive behavior with intimate partners have been conducted with college student populations (Katz, Carino, & Hilton, 2002; Ménard, Hall, Phung, Ghebrial, & Martin, 2003; O'Sullivan, Byers, & Finkelmann, 1998; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, & Anderson, 2003), with a few exceptions (Feder & Henning, 2005; West & Rose, 2000). Regardless of the population investigated, every study found that a higher percentage of men commit sexually coercive behaviors against partners than do women (Archer, 2000; Feder & Henning, 2005; Katz, Carino, et al., 2002; Ménard et al., 2003; O'Sullivan et al., 1998; Straus et al., 1996; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003; West & Rose, 2000).

Stalking

He want to know what I'm doing, where I'm going, what friend I'm with, what time I'm coming back . . . if he can't get in touch with me, he'll call a hundred times use different names, sit outside the house . . . wait to see what kind of car I'm coming in, and see if I'm coming with a guy or . . . you know, a woman.

The National Violence Against Women Survey, a nationally representative survey of 8,000 men and 8,000 women in the United States, assessed participants' experiences of intimate partner violence and stalking. Stalking was defined by the survey as "a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear" (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, p. 2). Stalking behaviors may include following or spying on someone, standing outside their home or workplace, making unwanted phone calls, or vandalizing their property (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The National Violence Against Women Survey found that the lifetime prevalence of having experienced stalking was 14.2% for women and 4.3% for men (Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002). Among those stalked, 41% of women and 28% of men were stalked by an intimate partner. Furthermore, women were 13 times as likely as men to report being very afraid of the stalker (Davis et al., 2002), and the majority of both female and male stalking victims indicated that the perpetrators of the stalking were male (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

The National Violence Against Women study assessed experiences of stalking victimization, not stalking perpetration. In a study with 412 women who had committed physically violent behavior against a male partner (Swan, Snow, Sullivan, Gambone, & Fields, 2005), women's experiences of stalking victimization from their male intimate partners was assessed, as were women's stalking behaviors toward their partners. All data were obtained from the women's reports of their own and their partners' behaviors. Consistent with the National Violence Against Women data, women were victims of stalking significantly more often than they perpetrated stalking behaviors.

Psychological Aggression

My experience wasn't physical abuse, it was mental abuse and mine was feelings being hurt, and I feel like when my feelings are hurt, your feelings are going to be hurt, too.

Psychological aggression has been defined as "a communication, either verbal or non-verbal, intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or perceived as having

that intent” (Straus & Sweet, 1992, p. 347) and as behavior that is demeaning, belittling, or that undermines the self-worth of one’s partner (Tolman, 1989). Women used about as much psychological aggression as men in the National Family Violence Survey (Straus & Sweet, 1992). Seventy-four percent of men and 75% of women in this survey reported that they committed at least one psychologically aggressive behavior against their partners in the past year (Straus & Sweet, 1992). Men’s and women’s equivalent levels of psychological aggression have also been found in college samples. Cercone et al. (2005) found no significant differences between college men and women on the perpetration of minor (86% versus 89%, respectively) or more serious (30% versus 27%, respectively) forms of psychological aggression.

Coercive Control

[My friend] comes over . . . oh this man will get mad and go in the kitchen and just start slamming pots and pans and making a whole bunch of noise. And told me . . . “I don’t want nobody else in this house, cause if I do I’m gonna call the cops,” excuse me? Did you pay the rent this month? Oh no . . . I come from a family of 12 honey, I was controlled enough when I was growing up. No man, no, I am a stubborn person, no.

Coercive control is conceptualized as distinct from psychological aggression, and has been defined as “a pattern of coercion characterized by the use of threats, intimidation, isolation, and emotional abuse, as well as a pattern of control over sexuality and social life, including . . . relationships with family and friends; material resources (such as money, food, or transportation); and various facets of everyday life (such as coming and going, shopping, cleaning, and so forth)” (Stark & Flitcraft, 1996, pp. 166–167). The central features of coercive control include isolating the victim from her social network and the micromanagement of daily activities through the use of credible threats of negative consequences for noncompliance (Dutton, Goodman, & Schmidt, 2006; Stark, 2006). From this perspective, physical and sexual violence are tools used by batterers to achieve coercive control of victims. Coercive control mirrors, in an exaggerated manner, cultural gender stereotypes that stipulate male dominance and female submissiveness. Stark (2006) also argues that it is coercive control, more than physical violence, that contributes to the devastating psychological effects of domestic violence on many of its victims, such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. One study found that, even after controlling for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, coercive control was related to posttraumatic stress disorder (Dutton et al., 2006).

Johnson (1995, 2006) contends that coercive control is a critical factor that distinguishes different types of relationships in which intimate partner violence occurs. Relationships that are characterized by a pattern of coercive control and severe violence have been referred to as “intimate terrorism”; Johnson (2006) has found that the victims in these relationships are almost always female, and the perpetrators are almost always male. “Situational couple violence,” in contrast, is defined as “an intermittent response to the occasional conflicts of everyday life, motivated by a need to control in the specific situation but not a more general need to be in charge of the relationship” (Johnson, 1995, p. 286). In these relationships, violence usually does not escalate and is typically confined to a particular conflictual incident. It seems to be equally initiated by men and women (Johnson, 2006; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996).

In one study of 412 women who had committed partner violence, women reported being victims of coercive control 1.5 times more often than they perpetrated these

behaviors (Swan et al., 2005). However, other authors propose that some forms of controlling behaviors are equally likely to be used by women and men (Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Graham-Kevan, 2007). Clearly, more research is needed on this issue.

Injury

While survey studies find that women and men report the perpetration of physical aggression at similar rates, women are much more likely to be injured in domestic violence situations (Archer, 2000; Feder & Henning, 2005; Hamberger, 2005; Temple, Weston, & Marshall, 2005; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007). For example, in the National Survey of Families and Households, of those who reported being injured by an intimate partner, 73% were female (Zlotnick, Kohn, Peterson, & Pearlstein, 1998). In their study of men and women seeking emergency room care, Phelan et al. (2005) found that all of the women had received an injury from a partner, as compared to 39% of the men. Because men are usually larger and stronger than their female partners, men are more likely to injure their partners through relatively low-level violence, such as slapping or pushing (Frieze, 2005). Women who have experienced violence from partners also are more likely than male victims to require medical attention for their injuries (Hamberger, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), and one study found that the average cost per person of injuries caused by partner violence was twice as high for women as for men (Arias & Corso, 2005).

How do prevalence rates of intimate partner violence compare across individuals in military and civilian settings? The next section addresses this question.

Prevalence Rates From Studies of Military Personnel

Studies of intimate partner violence conducted with military populations suggest that the prevalence of partner abuse may be somewhat higher than in civilian populations. Heyman and Neidig (1999) conducted a careful comparison of prevalence rates between a sample of 33,762 active-duty army personnel and the 6,002 participants in the National Family Violence Survey, correcting for demographic differences between the samples. They found no differences in male perpetration of *moderate* violence between the samples—10.8% of the male Army sample reported that they committed moderate spousal violence compared to 9.9% of the male civilian sample. However, rates of *severe* violence were significantly higher in the military sample: 2.5% of the male Army sample reported that they committed severe spousal violence compared to 0.7% of the male civilian sample. Regarding women's perpetration of abusive behavior, the prevalence of moderate and severe spousal violence was significantly higher in the military sample—13.1% of women in the Army reported that they committed moderate violence compared to 10% of the civilian women, and 4.4% of women in the Army reported that they committed severe violence compared to 2% of civilian women.

In a large study of Navy recruits (1,307 men and 1,477 women), 32% of men and 47% of women reported using some form of physical aggression against an intimate partner in the past year (White, Merrill, & Koss, 2001). The high prevalence rates among the Navy recruits are likely due in part to the young age of the sample; the average age of recruits was 20. The Navy prevalence rates are comparable to those of college populations and other young samples. For example, Straus's (2004) international study of dating violence found that the percentage of college students who reported committing at least one act of physical aggression against a dating partner ranged from 12% to 42% for males and from

17% to 48% for females. Similarly, in a cohort study of 941 21-year-olds in New Zealand, physical aggression against an intimate partner was reported by 37% of women and 22% of men (Magdol et al., 1997).

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT WOMEN'S VIOLENCE?

I've been beaten in my head with hammers, I had my ear drum busted, I had my nose busted, I been hit in the ribs with a bat, I've been thrown down cement stairs, I've got so many stitches in my face . . . when I started fighting back he know what happens now, [they] got these laws where you both fight you go to jail. So I got a jail record for assault—get this—I'm saying to myself God what is the justice in this.

Women's Violence Usually Occurs in the Context of Violence Against Them by Their Male Partners

Studies have consistently found that the majority of domestically violent women also have experienced violence from their male partners. Two studies of ethnically diverse, low-income community women found a high prevalence of victimization among women who used violence. In Temple et al.'s (2005) study of Black, Mexican American, and White women, 86% of those who used violence were also victims; in Swan et al.'s (2005) study of Black, Latina, and White women, this figure was 92%. Similar results have been found with college women (Cercone et al., 2005; Orcutt, Garcia, & Pickett, 2005). Among the women who reported using violence in the National Family Violence Survey, 64% also experienced violence from their male partners (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Furthermore, several studies with women who have been arrested for domestic violence (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Stuart et al., 2006; Swan & Snow, 2002) found that the number of women reporting violence from their male partners was greater than 90%.

Thus, many domestically violent women—especially those who are involved with the criminal justice system—are not the sole perpetrators of violence. The victimization they have experienced from their male partners is an important contextual factor in understanding their motivations for violence. Some women who have been adjudicated for a domestic violence offense are, in fact, battered women who fought back (Kernsmith, 2005; Miller, 2005). They may well be at the same level of risk of serious injury or death as battered women who are seeking shelter. Service providers working with domestically violent women may need to develop safety plans similar to those they would develop for battered women.

The Types of Violence Women Commit Differ From Men's Violence

Women's commission of different types of violence, and their experiences of violence from their male partners, were examined in two studies (Swan & Snow, 2002; Swan et al., 2005). Participants in both studies were women who used violence against an intimate male partner. The studies found consistent results: Women and their partners used equivalent levels of psychological aggression. Women used higher levels of moderate physical violence than their partners used against them, and about the same level of severe physical violence. However, women were about 1.5 times more likely to experience coercive control as they were to be coercively controlling. Similarly, women were 2.5 times more likely to be sexually coerced than they were to use sexual coercion against their partners. And women were 1.5 times more likely to be injured than they were to injure their partners. Similar results were found in Stuart et al.'s (2006) study of 87 women participating in a

court-mandated domestic violence intervention program. Swan et al. (2005) also found that women experienced stalking from their partners significantly more often than they committed stalking behaviors themselves.

While Swan et al. (2005) found that women reported using equivalent levels of severe violence compared to what their partners used against them, Temple et al. (2005) found that women's violence was less severe than their partners' violence against them, even in relationships in which the women were the primary aggressors. Taken together, these studies suggest that the types of violence women and men commit differ, even in relationships in which both partners use violence.

Domestic Violence May Affect Men and Women Differently

A mutually violent relationship, as defined in the intimate partner violence literature, is a relationship in which both partners use physical violence (e.g., Straus & Gelles, 1990). The extent to which one partner may be much more violent than the other, or to which one partner's violence may be in self-defense, or to which one partner may be using more severe forms of violence than the other (e.g., sexual assault) is not taken into account in this definition.

The evidence presented above suggests that in many relationships that can be classified as mutually violent, women are more likely than men to experience severe and coercive forms of partner violence, such as sexual coercion and coercive control, and women are injured more often and more severely. It is not surprising, then, that relationships that are mutually violent have a more detrimental impact on women's psychological and physical well-being, as compared to men (Frieze, 2005; Hamberger, 2005). Utilizing information from the National Comorbidity Survey, Williams and Frieze (2005) found that female participants who experienced partner aggression reported significantly higher distress and lower marital satisfaction when compared to male participants who experienced partner aggression. Similarly, college women experienced lower relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence, but men did not (Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002). And, in an examination of predictors of breakups in a national sample of couples, male violence, but not female violence, predicted relationship dissatisfaction and breaking up (DeMaris, 2000).

Studies also find more negative psychiatric effects for women in mutually violent relationships when compared to men. Anderson (2002) examined 474 couples reporting mutual violence drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households and found that being in a mutually violent relationship predicted greater depression among both men and women, but the effect was approximately twice as great for women. A similar pattern was observed for drug and alcohol problems. In a longitudinal study, Ehrensaft, Moffitt, and Caspi (2006) found that women, compared to men, who were victims of intimate partner violence were more likely to develop psychiatric disorders. Studies with nationally representative samples have found that, compared to male victims of intimate partner violence, female victims are more likely to take time off from work (Stets & Straus, 1990; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and to make greater use of mental health and criminal justice system services (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS FOR VIOLENCE

He hit you one time, you give him that authority to hit you once, that's it. He feel like he in control now, he can bust you upside the head anytime he want now. That's why he hit you one time, you bust him right back . . . Bust him and run.

In addition to finding differences in the types of abusive behaviors men and women commit, as well as differences in outcomes of partner violence for men and women, studies also indicate that women's motivations for using violent behavior in intimate relationships are often quite different from those of men.

Self-Defense

Women who engage in intimate partner violence commonly report using violence to defend themselves from their partners (Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003), and several studies have found that women cite self-defense as a motivation for violence more frequently than men do (e.g., Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Hamberger, 2005; Makepeace, 1986; but for an exception see Kernsmith, 2005). In an analysis of women's motivations for violence (Swan & Snow, 2003), self-defense was the most frequently endorsed motive, with 75% of participants stating that they had used violence to defend themselves. In Stuart et al.'s (2006) sample of women who were arrested for intimate partner violence, women's violence was motivated by self-defense 39% of the time.

Fear

Like me, I'm the type that I'm violent with a man because before you getting me I'm getting you because I'm so scared now. My past relationship that I've seen with violence . . . I'm not gonna allow anyone to talk to me or hurt me any type of way.

Women are more likely to report fear in domestic violence situations (Cercone et al., 2005; Foa, Cascardi, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2000; Hamberger, 2005; Jacobson et al., 1994; Kernsmith, 2005; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995; Morse, 1995; Phelan et al., 2005). Even among studies of male and female domestic violence defendants who were court-ordered to a domestic violence treatment program, women reported greater fear of their partner's violence than did men (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Kernsmith, 2005).

Defense of Children

It has been estimated that 30% to 60% of children whose mothers are battered are themselves victims of abuse (National Research Council, 1993; see also Edleson, 1999). Children living with an abused mother have been found to be 12 to 14 times more likely to be sexually abused than children whose mothers were not abused (McCloskey, Figuerdo, & Koss, 1995). The effects of family violence on children, both in terms of actual physical abuse of children and the abuse that children witness, affect how women behave in violent relationships (Dasgupta, 2002; Foa et al., 2000). Some women behave violently toward their partners to protect their children as well as themselves (Browne, 1987; Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000).

Control

Some . . . guys that's controlling like that . . . you gotta watch out for that . . . because one of them times they could just snap and they could seriously hurt you. I been through that . . . it's real dangerous to be with somebody that's real controlling and real jealous.

A number of studies show that men are more likely than women to use violence to regain or maintain control of the relationship or a partner who is challenging their authority (Barnett et al., 1997; Cazenave & Zahn, 1992; Ehrensaft, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Heyman, O'Leary, & Lawrence, 1999; Jacobson, 1994; Makepeace, 1986; Renzetti, 1999).

Findings from the Hamberger and Guse (2002) study of men and women court-ordered to a domestic violence treatment program indicated that men were more likely to initiate and control violent interactions, whereas women used violence but were not in control of the violent interactions with their partners. However, this does not mean that control motives are absent from women's violence (Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, & Tolin, 1997). Swan and Snow (2003) found that 38% of women stated that they had threatened to use violence at least sometimes to make their partner do the things they wanted him to do; of those, 53% stated that the threats were effective at least some of the time. Similarly, Stuart et al.'s (2006) sample of women arrested for intimate partner violence indicated that the percentage of time they used violence "to get control over your partner" was 22%, "to get your partner to do something or stop doing something" was 22%, and "to make your partner agree with you" was 17% (p. 615).

Retribution

I got a very jealous violent streak . . . if I'm in love with [somebody] and they do something like . . . bring another girl around me or he tell me to pick up his cell phone knowing it's a girl, I'm gonna react. I might just throw something at him, you know, I don't know what I might do.

Several studies suggest that retribution for real or perceived wrongdoing is a common motivator of women's violent behavior. Forty-five percent of the women in the Swan and Snow (2003) study stated that they had used violence to get even with their partners for something they had done. In Stuart et al.'s (2006) sample of women arrested for intimate partner violence, women indicated that 35% of the time they used violence to retaliate for being emotionally hurt by their partners, while 20% of the time the motive was to retaliate for being hit first. The reasons for men's and women's desires for retribution may differ, with women more frequently using violence in retaliation for being emotionally hurt (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Hamberger et al., 1997). For example, among individuals in batterer intervention counseling, 42% of women (compared to 22% of men) stated they used violence to get back at a partner for hurting them emotionally (Kernsmith, 2005). Women in this study also were more likely than men to state that they used physical aggression against their partners to retaliate for previous abuse and to punish them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN WHO USE VIOLENCE

This next section examines risk factors and mental health– and substance abuse–related problems that are common among women who use violence.

Childhood Trauma

Evidence from several studies indicates that rates of childhood trauma and abuse are very high among women who use violence. Among Swan et al.'s (2005) sample of women who used intimate partner violence, 60% experienced emotional abuse and neglect, 58% were sexually abused, 52% were physically abused, and 41% were physically neglected (see also Swan & Snow, 2003). High rates of childhood abuse have also been found in studies of women in court-mandated treatment for domestic violence (Dowd, Leisring, & Rosenbaum, 2005; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Kernsmith, 2006; Leisring, Dowd, & Rosenbaum, 2003).

Experiences of childhood abuse have been found in several studies to be a risk factor for women's violent and abusive behavior toward others (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Straus, 1990; Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, & Snow, 2005; White & Humphrey, 1994). A longitudinal study of 136 women who were treated at a hospital for sexual abuse as children examined the impact of childhood abuse on the women's adult relationships (Siegel, 2000). The study found that childhood experiences of sexual abuse predicted both women's use of violence against intimate partners and the partners' use of violence against them. Experiences of being hit or beaten by a parent also predicted women's violence against their partners.

Psychological Functioning

Four psychological conditions have been associated with traumatic experiences in general and domestic violence victimization in particular: depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Axelrod, Myers, Durvasula, Wyatt, & Chang, 1999; Foa et al., 2000). The prevalence of all of these conditions is very high among women who use intimate partner violence. For example, Swan et al.'s (2005) study of women who used violence against male partners found that 69% met criteria for depression on a screening measure. Almost one in three met criteria on a posttraumatic stress disorder screen. Nearly one in five were suffering from alcohol or drug problems, and 24% of the participants took psychiatric medication. Similarly, in their study of women participating in an anger management program for intimate partner violence, Dowd et al. (2005) found a high prevalence of depression (67%), bipolar disorder (18%), anxiety issues (9%), and substance use problems (67%). In addition, 30% reported suicide attempts, 20% had been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons, and 25% had been detoxified.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

The literature review and the data presented here provide important information for individuals providing services and interventions to women who are violent toward intimate partners. To a great extent, women who are violent are also victims of violence from their male partners. In addition, women are more likely than men to be injured during domestic violence incidents and to suffer more severe injuries. Thus, safety issues are paramount for women who are domestically violent.

In some cases, women may be perpetrating as much or more physical violence as their partners, but their partners may be committing other types of abuse that are not always assessed, such as sexual abuse or coercive control. We recommend that service providers assess not just physical violence but all types of abuse that the woman has perpetrated and that her partner may have perpetrated against her. Such an assessment may reveal, for example, that a woman's physical violence is in response to her partner's attempts to coercively control her. In this case, interventions to promote behavioral change in both partners would be necessary for the abuse to stop.

Because of the many differences in behaviors and motivations between men's and women's violence, as discussed here, interventions based on models of male violence against women may not be effective for many women (Feder & Henning, 2005; Hamberger, 2005; Kernsmith, 2005). Gender-specific interventions tailored to the needs of women who are violent are more likely to be successful in creating behavior change.

NOTE

1. Quotations throughout the paper are from participants of focus groups with women who used violence in their relationships with intimate male partners (Swan, Snow, Sullivan, Gambone, & Fields, 2005).

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