

Running Head: A REVIEW OF WOMEN'S VIOLENCE

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

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A sizable minority of individuals arrested for domestic violence each year in the United States are female. Evidence suggests that the military's Family Advocacy Program serves a large minority of women identified as spouse abusers. Studies of women who use violence with intimate partners comprise a small but growing research area. The goal of this paper is to provide a review of the most significant findings from this literature to inform service providers in the military and civilian communities who work with domestically violent women. The major points of the paper are as follows:

- 1) Women's violence usually occurs in the context of violence against them by their male partners.
- 2) In general, women and men perpetrate equivalent levels of physical and psychological aggression, but men perpetrate sexual abuse, coercive control, and stalking more frequently than women; women are also much more frequently injured during domestic violence incidents.
- 3) Women and men are equally likely to initiate violence in less serious "situational couple violence" relationships; in the serious and very violent "intimate terrorism" relationships, men are much more likely to be perpetrators, and women victims.
- 4) Women's violence is more likely than men's violence to be motivated by self-defense and fear; men's violence is more likely than women's to be driven by control motives.
- 5) Studies of couples in mutually violent relationships find more negative effects for women in these relationships than for men.
- 6) 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 probably not effective for many women.

“How you gonna love me, hurt me, and abuse me at the same time? You can't love me and abuse me.”<sup>1</sup>

Women who are violent towards intimate partners are being referred in large numbers to the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program (Brewster, Milner, Mollerstrom, Saha, & Harris, 2002; McCarroll, Newby, Thayer, Norwood, Fullerton, & Ursano, 1999). The purpose of the Family Advocacy Program is to provide treatment to family members affected by abuse (both victims and perpetrators), to ensure the assessment and investigation of abuse cases, and to prevent abuse (McCarroll, Ursano, Fan, & Newby, 2004). Most women referred to the Family Advocacy Program as perpetrators are involved in mutually violent relationships, but some are identified as the sole perpetrators of abuse (McCarroll, Ursano, Fan, & Newby, 2004). Although there is an increasing research focus on women's use of violence, only a small body of literature currently exists. 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 points from research on women's use of violence against intimate partners. The review includes a discussion of the prevalence of women's commission of different types of abusive behaviors, and how that compares to the prevalence of men's commission of such behaviors; the prevalence of intimate partner violence among military personnel; women's violence and the criminal justice system; 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. Whenever possible, the prevalence rates indicated below are from well designed studies with large sample sizes.

*Physical aggression.* When physical aggression is the subject of inquiry, studies consistently find as many women self-report perpetrating this behavior as do men. 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). A meta-analysis (Archer, 2000) of gender differences in rates of physical aggression with intimate partners also found equivalent rates of aggression by men and women.

*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)" (p. 91, Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004). Studies comparing the prevalence of men's and women's sexually coercive behavior with intimate partners have all (to our knowledge)

been conducted with college student populations, with one exception (low income African American youth in a vocational training program; West & Rose, 2000). Thus, the generalizability of these findings to adult and military populations is unknown. However, every study found that a higher percentage of men commit sexually coercive behaviors against partners than do women (Archer, 2000; Katz, Carino, & Hilton, 2002; Menard, Hall, Phung, Ghebrial, & Martin, 2003; O'Sullivan, Byers, & Finkelstein, 1998; Russell & Oswald, 2001; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, & Anderson, 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" (p. 2, Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). 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, Coker, & Sanderson, 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 recently completed with 412 women who had committed at least one physically violent behavior against a male partner in the previous six months (Swan, Snow, Sullivan, Gambone, & Fields, 2004), women's experiences of stalking victimization from their male intimate partners was assessed, as well as women's stalking behaviors towards 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 nonverbal, intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or perceived as having that intent" (p. 347, Straus & Sweet, 1992) 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). Psychological aggression is also very common; 74% of men and 75% of women in the National Family Violence Survey reported that they committed at least one

psychologically aggressive behavior against their partners in the past year (Straus & Sweet, 1992).

*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, cuz 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 a relatively recent concept in the field of intimate partner violence; it is thought to be qualitatively distinct from psychological aggression. Definitionally, psychological aggression encompasses some behaviors that are so common to relationships that they are almost universal; a few isolated instances of insulting or swearing at one's partner probably would not constitute an "abusive relationship". Coercive control, on the other hand, is not defined based on single behavioral events, but rather 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)" (pp. 166-167, Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). The central features of coercive control include isolating the victim from her social network and the micromanagement of daily activities, through the use of fear and intimidation (Stark, in press). From this perspective, physical and sexual violence are tools used by batterers to achieve coercive control of victims. Coercive control is a particularly insidious form of abuse because it mirrors, in an exaggerated manner, cultural gender stereotypes that stipulate male dominance and female submissiveness.

Stark (in press) 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.

Little research on coercive control yet exists. Evidence thus far finds that not all relationships in which partners use violence are characterized by a pattern of coercive control. Johnson (1995; in press) and Straus (1999a) contend that there are 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”; the victims in these relationships are almost always female, and the perpetrators are almost always male (Johnson, 1995). “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, in press; 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 (Davis, Swan, & Gambone, 2005).

*Injury.* While survey studies find that women and men reporting perpetrating physical aggression at similar rates, women are much more likely to be injured in domestic violence situations (Archer, 2000; Sorenson, Upchurch, & Shen, 1996). For example, in the National Survey of Families and Households (a nationally representative sample of 6,451 people), of those who reported being injured by an intimate partner, 73%

were female (Zlotnick, Kohn, Peterson, & Pearlstein, 1998). 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 (Brush, 1990; Frieze, 2005). Women who have experienced violence from partners also are more likely than male victims to require medical attention for their injuries (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

*Differing prevalence rates found in family violence surveys versus crime surveys.*

The very different prevalence rates of intimate partner violence found by different surveys is a puzzling feature of the family violence literature. Family violence surveys, such as the National Family Violence Survey (Straus & Gelles, 1990) described above, find approximately equal rates of physical aggression committed by male and female respondents. In fact, this finding has been replicated in over 100 studies (Straus, 1999a). In contrast, crime surveys, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey (Greenfeld et al., 1998) and the National Violence Against Women Survey<sup>2</sup> (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), show a large gender difference in the perpetration of aggression against intimate partners. Specifically, as compared to the family violence surveys, crime surveys find 1) much lower rates of intimate partner violence in general, and 2) many more males than females identified as perpetrators of intimate partner violence. How does one make sense of the difference between the two sets of findings?

These disparities largely stem from differing methodologies in how the surveys are administered, which yields data about what likely are qualitatively different types of relationships in which interpersonal aggression occurs (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999b). Family violence surveys are presented to participants as studies of how couples resolve conflict. The instructions state, “no matter how well a couple gets along, there are times

when they disagree...or have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood...Couples have many...ways of trying to settle their differences” (Straus, Hamby, & Warren, 2003). Respondents then are asked if they or their partners have engaged in a list of behaviors to settle their differences. The word “violence” is not used. The survey instructions attempt to provide a neutral, non-judgmental tone with respect to aggressive behaviors towards one’s partner. Another important methodological feature of the family violence surveys is that respondents are asked both about their own aggressive behavior, and the aggressive behavior of their partner towards them.

Crime survey methodology is markedly different. Crime surveys assess criminal victimizations the respondent has experienced. For example, the National Violence Against Women Survey is presented to respondents as a survey of personal safety. A list of assaultive behaviors is presented, ranging from physical and sexual assault to stalking, and respondents are asked if each of the behaviors ever occurred to them. If the respondent says ‘yes’, s/he is then asked who perpetrated the act (intimate partner, stranger, acquaintance, etc.). Respondents are not asked about their own commission of assaultive behaviors.

The variations in methodology between the family violence and crime surveys result in the capturing of different types of data. The family violence surveys identify a comparatively large number of relationships in which primarily “less serious” or situational couple violence (Johnson, in press) occurs. Crime studies, in contrast, capture primarily serious and injurious violence. Respondents of crime studies likely do not identify situational couple violence as criminal or as a threat to personal safety. Respondents experiencing situational couple violence probably are in the data, but they

do not identify these behaviors because they do not fit the criteria of what the surveyor is asking them about: threats to safety and criminal victimization. The fact that respondents are asked only about their own victimization, and not their perpetration of these types of behaviors, further reinforces the sense that the survey is about criminal victimization<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, crime studies overwhelmingly identify “intimate terrorism” types of violence, and find much lower prevalence rates of intimate partner violence (around 1%, as contrasted with the 16% identified by family violence surveys).

The gender differences in perpetration found in the two studies, then, stem from the different types of data that they capture. In situational couple violence, which is the most common type of violence reported in family violence surveys, women are about as likely as men to be the perpetrators. In intimate terrorism, which is the type of violence most commonly captured in crime surveys, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators (Straus, 1999a). For example, Johnson (in press) categorized violent relationships either as situational couple violence or intimate terrorism. Among the relationships identified as intimate terrorism, 97% of the perpetrators were male. Among the relationships identified as situational couple violence, 56% of the perpetrators were male.

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. On the other hand, a study of 616 active duty military women living in Washington, D.C. showed no difference in the lifetime prevalence of spouse abuse victimization as compared to a demographically comparable civilian sample from the same geographic area (Campbell et al., 2003).

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 are likely due in part to the young age of the sample; the average age of the Navy recruits was 20. These prevalence rates are comparable to those of college populations and other young samples. For example, Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996) surveyed a college population and found that 47% of the men and 35% of the women reported using physical aggression against an intimate partner in the past year. White and Humphrey's (1994) survey of

college women found that 51.5% had used some form of physical aggression at least once during adolescence in a romantic relationship.

The higher rates of physical violence committed by women relative to men in the study of Navy recruits also replicates prevalence rates found in young civilian samples. Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan (1992) found that 58% of the college women in their sample used physical aggression against a male partner in the past year, as compared to 55% of college men. And in a cohort study of 941 twenty-one 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).

#### Women's violence and the criminal justice system

In the civilian and military arenas, dramatic changes to domestic violence legislation and policies began to occur in the 1980's. In the civilian world, new domestic violence legislation, such as mandatory arrest and restraining orders, grew out of the battered women's movement. These laws were instated to protect women from men's violence and to force the criminal justice system to hold violent men accountable for their actions. However, in the 1990's, data began to show that the unintended consequence of the new legislation was that many women were being arrested. In Concord, New Hampshire, 35% of domestic violence arrests in 1999 were of women, compared to 23% in 1993. In Vermont, 23% of arrests in 1999 were of women, compared with 16% in 1997 (Goldberg, 1999). And in Connecticut, 20% of persons classified as domestic violence offenders were female in 1999 (Connecticut Department of Public Safety, 1999). Similar or higher numbers of female offenders may be coming to the attention of domestic violence service providers in the military. In one study of 2,991 Air Force

personnel who committed physical abuse against a spouse and received Family Advocacy Program services, 23% of the offenders were female (Brewster, Milner, Mollerstrom, Saha, & Harris, 2002). A study of reports of spouse abuse in the Army Central Registry from 1989-1997 found that 33% of persons identified as domestic violence offenders were women (McCarroll, Newby, Thayer, Norwood, Fullerton, & Ursano, 1999).

In the civilian and military arenas, many women are assigned to treatment programs designed for male offenders (Malloy, McCloskey, Grigsby, & Gardner, 2003; Department of Defense, 2005). Interventions based on male models of partner violence are unlikely to be helpful for most women (Dowd, 2001; Martin, 1997; Miller, 2001). Evidence from studies of women's violence with intimate partners suggests that women's motivations for violence, and the contexts in which the violence takes place, are qualitatively different from men's violence (Dowd, 2001; Malloy et al., 2003; Miller, 2001; Renzetti, 1999; Swan & Snow, 2002, 2003).

#### What is different about women's violence against male intimate partners?

"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 have also experienced violence from their male partners. Among the women who used violence in the nationally representative National Family Violence Survey, 64% also experienced violence from their male partners (Straus & Gelles, 1990). In a sample of female college students who used violence against partners, 72% were also victims of

violence (Orcutt, Garcia, & Pickett, 2005). Two studies of ethnically diverse, low income community women found a higher prevalence of victimization among women who used violence. In Temple, Weston, & Marshall's (2005) study of African American, Mexican American, and White women, 86% of those who used violence were also victims; in Swan, Snow, Sullivan, Gambone, & Fields' (2004) study of African American, Latina, and White women, this figure was 92%. Several studies with women who have been arrested for domestic violence (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Stuart, Moore, Gordon, Hellmuth, Ramsey, & Kahler, in press; 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. 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 women who are victims as well as perpetrators may need to develop safety plans, similar to plans 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, was examined in two studies (Swan, Snow, Sullivan, Gambone, & Fields, 2004; Davis, et al., 2005; Swan & Snow, 2002). Participants in both studies were women who met the screening criteria of having used violence against an intimate male partner in

the prior six months. Both 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 injured their partners. Similar results were found in Stuart et al.'s (in press) study of 87 women participating in a court-mandated domestic violence intervention program. Davis, et al. (2005) also found that women experienced stalking from their partners 1.2 times more often than they committed stalking behaviors themselves.

*Domestic violence may affect men and women differently.* A mutually violent relationship, as it is operationally 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 that one partner's violence is only in self defense; or that one partner may be using much 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. Thus, one would predict that relationships that are mutually violent would, in general, have a more detrimental impact on women's psychological and physical wellbeing, as compared to men.

The studies that have examined mutually violent couples do indeed find that, on average, women suffer more ill effects than men in such relationships (Frieze, 2005). Anderson (2002) examined 474 couples reporting mutual violence drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households, a nationally representative sample of the United States. This study 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. While being in a relationship involving mutual violence predicted greater drug and alcohol problems among both men and women, the effect was greater for women. In a study of mutually violent couples receiving marital therapy, women reported feeling more sad, angry, frustrated, anxious, and afraid in response to their marital conflicts as compared to their husbands (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995). Rates of the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of being a victim of partner violence also have been found to differ for women and men. One study examined PTSD using partner violence as the focal traumatic event, and found that women were significantly more likely than men to develop PTSD (Dansky, Byrne, & Brady, 1999). And a study with a college sample found that women experienced lower relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence, but men did not (Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002). Similarly, in an examination of predictors of breakups in a national sample of couples, male violence predicted relationship dissatisfaction and breaking up; female violence was not associated with relationship dissatisfaction or breaking up (DeMaris, 2000). Studies of 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 use 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.* Several studies have found that women cite self-defense as a motivation for violence more frequently than men (e.g., Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997). For example, one study comparing the motivations of college students for their violence towards their partners found that 36% of women listed self-defense as a motivation, as compared to 18% of men (Makepeace, 1986). 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.

### *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 (Foa, Cascardi, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2000; Jacobson et al., 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995; Morse, 1995). In a study that compared men and women court-ordered to a domestic violence treatment program and women residing in a domestic violence

shelter, both samples of women reported greater fear of their partner's violence than the male sample (Hamberger & Guse, 2002). This fear is well founded: as discussed earlier, women are much more likely than men to be injured in domestic violence situations.

*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 what children witness, impact how women behave in violent relationships (Dasgupta, 2002; Foa et al., 2000). Some women behave violently towards 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 the dynamics of violence, whereas women used violence but did not control those dynamics. However, this does not mean that control motives are completely 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.

*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 both women's and men'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. However, the reasons for men's and women's desires for retribution may differ. In a study of 66 women and 215 men court referred to a domestic violence program, Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin (1997) coded participants' open-ended responses to the question, "What is the function, purpose, or payoff of your violence?" While both men and women reported using violence for purposes of retribution, the reasons for retribution differed by gender. Both women and men stated they used violence in retribution for their partners' attacks against them. However, men also reported using violence in retribution for their partners' unwanted behavior, such as infidelity or lying, while no women reported this motivation. In contrast, women stated they used violence in retribution for the partners' emotionally abusive behavior (e.g., "punishment for his insults"), while men did not. Similarly, Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, and Sebastian's (1991) study of dating violence among

college students found that 56% of women who used violence did so in retaliation for being emotionally hurt, as compared to 25% of men.

#### Characteristics of women who use violence

This next section examines characteristics of domestically violent women, with a particular emphasis on mental health-related issues that are common among women who use violence.

*Childhood Trauma.* Evidence from several different studies indicates that rates of childhood trauma and abuse are very high among women who use violence. Swan and Snow (2003) assessed childhood traumatic events by asking participants about their experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse while growing up. Examining only events that were rated as having a major or extreme impact on the participant's life, 35% of the women experienced physical abuse, 37% experienced emotional abuse, and 35% were sexually abused. High rates of childhood abuse have also been found in studies of women in court-mandated treatment for domestic violence (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; 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 towards others (Straus, 1990; Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, & Snow, 2005; Wofford Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; 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). Swan and Snow (2003) found that 60% of the women who had used violence against an intimate partner in their sample met criteria on a depression screen. In a meta-analysis of intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders, the weighted mean prevalence of depression among battered women was approximately 50% (Golding, 1999). Battered women have a higher prevalence of anxiety disorders compared to the general female population (Foa et al., 2000). Battered women are also at risk for substance abuse (Watson et al., 1997). In the Swan and Snow (2003) study, 24% of the women met criteria for problem drinking. The rate of diagnostic posttraumatic stress disorder among women who experience intimate partner violence is estimated to be 40% (Dansky, Byrne, & Brady, 1999; Kocot & Goodman, 2003). Swan et al.'s (2005) study of women who used violence against male partners also found that many of the participants suffered from psychological difficulties. Twenty-four percent of the participants took psychiatric medication, and 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.

#### 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 towards intimate partners. Much of the time, women who are violent are also victims of violence from their male partners. Almost all (92%) of the women in Swan et al.'s (2005) study of women who used violence against male partners experienced physical or sexual 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, not just for women who are victims of partner violence.

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, it is likely that both partners will have to change their behavior 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 are not likely to be effective for most women. Gender-specific interventions tailored to the needs of women who are violent are more likely to be successful in creating behavior change.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>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, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>There has been debate as to whether or not the National Violence Against Women survey should be labeled a crime survey (Nicholls & Dutton, 2001). It was presented to participants as a survey on personal safety. Unlike the family violence surveys, it used the terms “fear of violence” and “violent crime” (Straus, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>A recent study with domestically violent men found that respondents were more likely to report their perpetration of abuse when they were asked both about their own aggression and their partners' aggression towards them, as compared to when they were asked only about their own perpetration (Mankowski, Morgan, & Maruyama, 2005).