DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TODAY

PART 3: RISK FACTORS

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SUMMARY OF ETIOLOGY AND RISK FACTORS IN PARTNER VIOLENCE

<table>
<tr><th>Distal Correlates</th><th>Proximal Correlates</th></tr>
<tr><td>
1. <u>Genetic/Organic</u>

temporal lobe epilepsy
head injury
aggressive temperament
ADHD

2. <u>Socialization in Family of Origin</u>

having witnessed interparental violence, or having suffered child abuse

3. <u>Socialization Outside Family</u>

American “culture of violence”
violent peer relations

4. <u>Violence in Past Intimate Relationships</u>
</td><td>
1. <u>External Stress</u>

unemployment
other life events

2. <u>Personality/Behavior</u>

borderline, anti-social and narcissistic personality disorders
depression
attachment disturbance
impulsivity (including anger)
poor social skills
negative attitudes about other sex
positive attitudes about violence
alcohol/drug abuse
violence against children
violence outside the home

3. <u>Dynamics in the Relationship</u>

low overall satisfaction
high conflict
resistance to change
drive to maintain homeostasis
mutual dependency
verbal and emotional abuse
highly controlling behaviors
negative reciprocity
approach-avoidance patterns
retributional behaviors

4. <u>Other</u>

under age 25
not married
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SIX COMMON RISK FACTORS

Low Socioeconomic Status

Hotaling and Sugarman's (1986) meta-analysis of risk factors for partner violence found a positive correlation between low socioeconomic status and domestic assaults. The NFVS found a 500% greater rate of assaults in families below the $20,000 per year income level, compared to those above that line, as well as a 70% higher rate of abuse by blue collar workers over white collar workers, even after controlling for drinking patterns and beliefs that support violence.

Although low-status occupations and low income were related to violence by husbands, education was not. Rates of domestic violence among college students and a national probability sample (Stets and Straus, 1989) found no significant main effects for education. Sommer (1994) conducted a major study on domestic violence in Winnipeg, Canada, in two phases between 1989 and 1992. This study, unique in the breadth and depth of its interviews, and the subsequent wealth of data it extracted, found no correlation between education and assaults for men, but it did find a high level of assaults by women who dropped out of high school.

In addition, the NFVS found that higher rates of violence by husbands are related to *differences* in income between partners, both where the man makes significantly more income and when he makes significantly less income than the wife. Studies of battered women (Walker,1983) support these findings.

Unmarried Status

Higher rates of assaults are perpetrated by cohabitating or dating couples, in comparison to married couples, according to nearly every published study and literature review available, including the work of Sommer and the NFVS.

Youth

Clinical samples, including interviews with battered women, as well as surveys of military personnel (Pan, et al., 1994) and general surveys such as the NFVS, show a clear association between younger age groups and domestic violence assaults. In Sommer's study, women between the ages of 18-34 perpetrated significantly higher rates of violence than women in older age groups. For men, the highest rates of violence occurred within the age groups 50 and under. The National Youth Survey (Morse, 1995), a longitudinal study with an initial sample of 1,725

respondents, found the highest rates of abuse when the subjects were 18 - 24 years old: 36.7% of the men reported having been violent during the previous year, and 48.0% of the women. Nine years later, the rates had dropped to: 20.2% for the men, and 27.9% for the women - still high compared to most general surveys. Age appears to be a significantly greater factor for women than for men.

Stress

The insular, private nature of the family, which shields it from outside influences, is one reason why it has been called "the most violent institution...a typical citizen is likely to encounter" (Straus, 1990, p.181). Another is the high level of stress generated by the numerous tasks a family must perform, and the conflicting needs of its various members. Maintaining a family is, in itself, inherently stressful, and a potential cause of violence.

The NFVS indicates a strong relationship between stress, particularly economic and occupation-related, and rates of assaults by both sexes; however, Hotaling and Sugarman's literature review (1986) found no relationship between the specific factor of employment status and partner violence. The NFVS shows that men are more likely to be violent under minimal stress conditions than women. The effects of stress on men have been well documented, but the literature is mixed on whether stress is a significant factor for women's violence (O'Leary, 1988). Sommer found stress to be a significant factor for men, but not for women. She speculates that this may have been due to the preponderance of male-oriented stressors in her study, having to do with economic and employment issues, as opposed to the stresses of, for instance, caring for one's children or carrying out domestic tasks.

Stress is a complex phenomenon, with a large subjective element, and researchers differ on definitions of stress. The NFVS and Sommer both used the Holmes-Rahe Life Events Scale, but each study focused on different subscales. Both her own study and the NFVS found stress to be a much more salient factor when co-existing with other factors, including beliefs about violence, previous abuse in one's childhood and alcohol use.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Nearly all studies on domestic violence and alcohol consumption have looked at male violence. High correlations exist between alcohol use and partner assaults by men (e.g., Leonard & Blane, 1992). A literature review by Roberts (1988),

examining research on clinical populations, including battered women, revealed that alcohol is involved in 70% - 80% of these cases. The NFVS tells us that men who are heavy daily alcohol users, or else binge drinkers, are three times more likely to assault their wives than men who abstain. Sommer, too, found associations between chronic alcohol use and perpetrated violence, but only among the first sample of subjects interviewed, and only among the men. Although few studies have been conducted on the relationship between female alcoholism and violence, Sommer (1992) cites research that finds only 3.8% of women diagnosed with alcoholism to be violent, compared to 22% of male alcoholics.

The NFVS indicates that in 24% of all partner assaults, someone had been drinking just prior, or during, the incident. It was the man by himself 14% of the time, the woman by herself 2% the time, and both the remaining 8%. Heavy or binge drinkers are twice as likely to be drinking at the time of the assault, compared to abstainers or light drinkers. In both the first and the second sample of Sommer's Winnepeg study, a positive relationship was found between men's use of alcohol at the time of an incident and assault levels. 16% of men - twice as many as women - had drank prior to perpetrating an assault. For women, there was no main effect for alcohol use. One explanation for these findings may be that women perceive the effects of alcohol differently than men. Another has to do with the use of alcohol as an excuse for violence. Men, in other words, believe that society will hold them less accountable if they were drunk at the time of the incident; whereas women, perhaps because they are already given more *societal* permission to hit their partners, don't need this excuse.

The NFVS found an interaction effect between alcohol use, attitudes condoning violence and low SES. For example, white collar men who disapprove of violence rarely hit their wives, even when they are heavy drinkers. In Sommer's study, alcohol use by women emerged as a factor in the presence of the following three risk markers: neurotic personality, past partner abuse and having witnessed mother hit father as a child.

Correlations between partner violence and the use of other drugs are less clear than that for alcohol. A literature review by Taylor and Chermack (1993) found that violence is associated with drugs that have a depressing effect. However, others (e.g., Fagan, 1990) have also found evidence of a link between domestic violence and use of stimulants such as cocaine and methamphetamines.

Data from Wave 1 of the National Survey of Families and Households (Anderson, 2002), from a sample of 7,395 married and cohabitating couples in the United

States, indicates that substance abuse, like depression, is significantly associated with domestic violence *victimization*. The author writes,

> The positive association between drug and alcohol problems and violence perpetration is an artifact of the high correlation between violence perpetration and victimization…Only the mutual and partner-only violence variables are significantly and positively associated with drug and alcohol problems. This finding suggests that substance abuse is linked to violence victimization, rather than perpetration (p. 859)

Organic/Physiological Factors

Temporal lobe epilepsy, head injuries and minimal brain dysfunction have all been found to be associated with increased partner violence, at least in men (e.g., Elliot, 1988). Attention-Deficit Disorder has also been postulated to affect aggression, as well as hypoglycemia (McKenry et al., 1995). Gottman (1995) found differences in heart rate reactivity to marital conflict among violent men, with the most aggressive and anti-social types actually experiencing a reduction in heart rate during a conflict. Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) suggest that a biologically-based aggressive temperament may also be relevant, and propose that further research be conducted in this area.

RISK FACTORS FOR FEMALE-PERPETRATED ABUSE

The overwhelming preponderance of research on risk factors has focused on male-perpetrated violence. Risk factors for female-perpetrated violence are remarkably similar. They include:

- Stress of low income and unemployment (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Fagan & Silva, 1997)

- Being in a dating or cohabitating relationship or being under 30 years of age (Morse, 1995; Sommer, 1994; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980)
- Childhood abuse (Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Conradi, 2004)

- Pro-violent attitudes (Follingstad, et al., 1991; Simmons, Lehman & Cobb, 2004).

- Certain personality features, among them dependency and jealousy, common among both heterosexual and lesbian offenders (Coleman, 1994; Shupe, Stacey & Hazlewood, 1987), as well as those that either meet the criterion

for a personality disorder, such as Borderline, Anti-Social or Narcissistic (Henning, Jones & Holdford, 2003; Johnston & Campbell, 1993; Kalichman, 1988; Simmons, et al., 2004), or generally characterized by what has been called "angry temperament" (Felson, 2002; Follingstad, Bradley, Helff & Laughlin, 2002; O'Leary, 1988; Sommer, 1994).

PERSONALITY

Violent Men: A Complex Picture

From extensive interviews with a sample of 400 battered women, Walker (1983), identified a personality profile for male batterers that includes low SES compared to their partners, chauvinistic attitudes, propensity towards alcohol abuse, insecurity, emotional dependence, possessiveness and extreme jealousy. Scheurger and Reigle (1988) interviewed 250 men in a batterer's program. Using the 16PF and Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test, they found that high levels of violence were associated with anxiety, depression, alcoholism and poor self-esteem, as well as schizoid tendencies and social nonconformity, including poor impulse control. Dutton & Starzonski (1993) found evidence of borderline traits in men who batter their spouses. Jacobsen and Gottman (1998) found borderline features among one subgroup, the "Pit Bulls," and sociopathic and anti-social traits among another, which they called "Cobras."

Much of the data on personalities of violent men has come from either victim reports, or from impressions by clinicians directly involved in treatment, many without the benefit of control groups. Neidig, et al (1986) tried to correct this shortcoming. Their study was based on interviews, plus a battery of psychological tests, with 119 military men who had committed at least one act of serious violence towards their partner in the previous year, and with a nonviolent control group matched for demographic variables. Results showed that, contrary to what would have been predicted by other findings, the assaultive men did not use isolation tactics against their partners, exhibit a significantly higher degree of chauvinistic attitudes or lack empathy. The only significant difference between abusive and nonabusive men was that the former recorded lower scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The authors concluded that personality and attitudinal factors are not as important as stress and marital discord in predicting violence.

To account for these findings, they speculate that the men in their study were probably not batterers at all, in the classic sense, but rather "hitters," whose violence was of the "expressive" type, largely influenced by stress and relationship

dynamics, as opposed to the "instrumental" violence exhibited by the more controlling types. A later study by Prince & Arias (1994) lends support to this theory. In their view, abusive men assault for two reasons. Those with high self-esteem but who feel powerless in relationships seek to establish control through the use of violence. Other men, who suffer from low self-esteem, use violence in a perhaps more reflexive manner, to cope with frustration.

Browning and Dutton (1986) suggest that male batterers use violence in two ways. One is in an attempt to reduce tension; the other is to create an emotional distance from their partner, out of a fear of emotional intimacy or of losing control. After comparing a group of violent men with a comparison group of non-violent men, Dutton and Strachan (1987) found that the violent group demonstrated a greater need for power, due to low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness. Dutton (1994) offers this insightful analysis:

> ...Anger and anxiety provide the psychological substratum for control. Males try to control the things they fear, and intimate relationships are a source of great fear...Hence, a complete understanding of anger does not only reflect on outbursts of anger but also on chronic resentments and control of another. It also renders the "case" against "anger control" treatment for assaultive males artificial. It is not an issue of "anger versus control"; ...anger and control stem from the same origin: terror of intimacy...(p. 177).

Hamberger and Hastings (1986) conducted an intensive study of 105 violent men in a court-ordered treatment program. It was found that 88% had some kind of DSM III psychopathology, based on several instruments, including the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Novaco Anger Inventory. A factor analysis indicated the existence of three personality categories: schizoidal/ borderline, narcissistic/ antisocial and passive-dependent /compulsive personality disorders.

A few years later, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) undertook a comprehensive review of the literature on the characteristics of male batterers. Previous research had identified a number of sometimes conflicting and overlapping subtypes, according to the dimensions of severity of abuse, generality (whether or not the violence is restricted to the home), and extent of psychopathology. The authors reclassified the subtypes into three groups: "family only," "dysphoric/borderline" and "generally violent/antisocial." Men in the first group, corresponding to Hamberger and Hastings' normal and dependent/compulsive types, are the least violent and pathological. Estimated by the authors to represent about 50% of male batterers, they are undoubtedly more representative in the general population, given the clinical nature of the sample

studied. Those in the third group, similar to the narcissistic/antisocial type, perpetrate the most severe violence and exhibit the most serious levels of pathology. "Dysphoric/borderline" men, akin to the schizoid/borderline type, fall somewhere in the middle.

Violent Women: Less Research, More Complexity

Kalichman (1988) used the MMPI to examine the personalities of spousal murderers. Both men and women shared in common high scores on the Pd scale, which is correlated with sociopathic traits. The women also scored high on the Pa scale, a measure of paranoia. Sommer (1994) found a high correlation between domestic violence assaults and high scores on both the EPQ-P (psychoticism) scale and the neuroticism scale.

According to Sommer, violent women share in common many of the same characteristics as aggressive men, including impulsiveness, tough-mindedness, and anti-social traits. O'Leary (1988) found that violent heterosexual women have an aggressive personality style, as measured by the Jackson Personality Research Form. Johnston and Campbell (1993), examining high-conflict couples involved in custody disputes in San Francisco, determined that the most violent women exhibited characteristics of borderline, histrionic and narcissistic personality disorders. Coleman (1994) has identified borderline and narcissistic traits among battering lesbians. And Renzetti (1994) found dependency and jealousy to be two of the more significant traits among lesbian women, identical to traits found by Dutton and Painter (1993) in abusive men.

Shupe et al. (1987) examined rates of partner assaults in Austin and Tyler, Texas, drawing on both police records and a sample of 45 couples in a domestic violence counseling diversion program. Based on interview questionnaires and observations by counselors involved in the case, it was determined that violent women fit a similar profile as violent men. For instance, these women had endured prior abuse in their families of origin, were characterized by low self-esteem, dependency traits, insecurity and jealousy. They also exhibited a high degree of possessiveness and controlling behaviors.

Interaction Effects

Sommer used a stress-diathesis model to investigate the combined effects of stress and pre-existing conditions in domestic violence. For violent women, the strongest interaction effect was between the diathesis of high neuroticism, having

experienced past partner abuse and witnessing mother hit father as a child, and the stress of current alcohol consumption. For violent men, the strongest interaction was between the diathesis of youth, past partner abuse and the stress of current life events, primarily economic.

Recognizing that a merely descriptive typology of personality is limited in its usefulness for treatment, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart further explained their categories according to etiology. Wife assaults, in their view, have two general causes. Distal, historical correlates include genetic factors predisposing an individual to violence, as well as childhood socialization - the latter consisting of violence at home (between the parents and on the child), and within the peer group. Proximal correlates include impairment in attachment, impulsivity, lack of social skills, negative attitudes towards women, and positive attitudes towards violence. In this conception, the most serious battering is correlated with the highest degrees of impairment in both distal and proximal factors.

THREE SUBTYPES OF VIOLENT ADULTS

Like most of the research on the subject of personality and partner violence, Holtzworth-Munroe and Suart's (1994) typology is ostensibly a male one. However, research that *does* exist on female perpetrators suggests a similar constellation of traits and profiles.

Descriptive Dimensions and Variables According to Subtype:

Dimension	Family-only	Dysphoric/ Borderline	Generally-violent/ antisocial
Severity of marital violence	low	moderate-high	moderate-high
Psychological/sexual abuse	low	moderate-high	moderate-high
Extrafamilial violence	low	low-moderate	high
Criminal behavior	low	low-moderate	high
Personality disorder	none or passive-dependent	borderline or schizoidal	antisocial
Alcohol/drug abuse	low-moderate	moderate	high
Depression	low-moderate	high	low
Anger	moderate	high	moderate
Variable			
Genetic influences	low	moderate	high
Parental violence as a child	low-moderate	moderate	moderate-high
Child abuse/rejection	low-moderate	moderate-high	high
Deviant peer group	low	low-moderate	high
Attachment	secure or preoccupied	preoccupied	dismissing
Dependency	moderate	high	low
Empathy	moderate	low-moderate	low
Impulsivity	low-moderate	moderate	high
Marital social skills	low-moderate	low	low
Nonmarital social skills	moderate-high	moderate	low
Hostile attitudes toward women	no	moderate-high	high
Attitudes supporting violence	low	moderate	high

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