

## **The Role of Paternal Involvement in Male Violence Against Female Intimates**

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### Statement of the Research Problem

Violence against women is a serious social problem and a major health concern for women in the United States (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Despite the creation of laws prohibiting violence against women in intimate relationships, the proliferation of shelters to protect women from male violence, and the development of batterers treatment programs, violence against women persists as a distinct social structure (Ptacek, 1997).

The National Family Violence Surveys from 1975, 1985, and 1992 estimated that in the United States 1 in 6 couples had experienced one or more episodes of domestic violence in the previous year. It is estimated that between 28 to 30 percent of American women experience at least one episode of some form of domestic violence during the course of their marriage (Straus & Gelles, 1990). In examining rates of intimate partner violence in a sample of 1599 married or cohabitating couples from the National Alcohol Survey conducted in 1995, results suggested that more than 1 in 5 couples experienced at least 1 episode of partner-to-partner violence (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 1998). The 2000 National Violence Against Women Survey found that 22% of the women reported experiences with intimate partner violence (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In the United States, violence against women is primarily intimate partner violence. The FBI reports that of the 3.8 million assaults and 500,000 rapes that occurred in 1993, someone known to the victim committed more than 75 percent of these violent acts, and 29 percent were committed by a husband or a former intimate partner (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). The National Violence Against Women Survey conducted in 2000, reported that 64% of those women who reported being raped, physically assaulted or stalked since the age of 18 were victimized by a current or former intimate partner, or a date (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Estimates from the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that out of the 1 million violent crimes committed against an intimate partner, 876,340 were women victimized by a current or former spouse or boyfriend (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Although the rates of intimate partner violence against women dropped from 1993 to 1997 from 9.8 to 7.5 per 1,000 women, the 1998 rate was unchanged from that of 1997 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

The number of women murdered by an intimate partner was stable between 1976 and 1993 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). There were 4,869 women who were homicide victims in the United States in 1993; of these, their husbands, ex-husband or boyfriends killed 31 percent (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). The number of women killed by an intimate partner decreased 23% between 1993 and 1997, but increased 8% between 1997 and 1998

(Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Of the 1,830 intimate partner murders in 1998, women were nearly 3 out of 4 victims, compared to approximately 50% of the 3000 women who were victims of intimate murder in 1976. The number of men murdered by an intimate partner decreased 60% between the years 1976 and 1998 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

The cost of intimate partner violence is enormous and has long-term affects on women and the children who witness the violence. Intimate violence against a female partner is usually not a single event. On the contrary, about 65% of American women who are abused will experience repeated violence (Dutton & Golant, 1995). One of the concerns is that boys who witness the violence of their fathers towards their mothers are at an increased risk for perpetrating violence in their adult life.

In order to effectively understand this problem, and as a precursor to preventing it, it is important to understand the men who abuse their intimate partners. There are gaps in our knowledge about what we know about batterers. Not all batterers are the same, yet batterer interventions have been described as a "one size fits all" approach (Healey, Smith & O'Sullivan, 1998). This one-sided approach to batterer intervention fails to address the diversity of men who batter. Social workers need more knowledge about men who are violent so that they can conduct more comprehensive assessments. This will allow practitioners to target specific populations of batterers, and to develop interventions for specific types of abusers. Intimate violence is determined by multiple factors and requires a multi-component intervention program approach.

A missing link in research on family violence has been the relationship between the abuser and his father (Sternberg, 1997). Understanding the father's influence on the child's well being and the father's role in shaping the son's sense of self provides further knowledge about the development of intimate aggression. It was hypothesized that a fragile sense of self is a risk factor for violent behaviors in intimate relationships and that men who batter may suffer from paternal deprivation-a lack of an emotionally responsive and supportive father. The primary purpose of this study was to determine if the type of paternal involvement and emotional responsiveness between the abuser and his father is related to violence against female intimates.

Inadequate theory construction has been a consistent weakness in research on intimate violence. Most studies lack an explicit theoretical foundation, which makes it difficult to operationalize constructs, and define outcome measures that have practice implications. The research questions were based on self-psychological theory (Kohut, 1977), which postulates the importance of an emotionally supportive parental relationship as the child's emerging sense of self unfolds. It was theorized that the father could provide these important psychological functions and help the child develop a cohesive psychological self-structure.

Self-psychological theory was the foundation for the development of The Fatherhood Scale; a 75-item instrument that measures the subjective relationship abusers had with their fathers while growing up. The scale measures the quality of the relationship

and the frequency in which paternal behaviors occurred. In addition to the constructs of self-psychological theory, The Fatherhood Scale was based upon the historical roles of fathers, and research on paternal involvement, including engagement, accessibility and responsibility (Lamb, 1997). There are nine subscales, which measures various dimensions of paternal conduct. The internal consistency reliability of The Fatherhood Scale ranges from .7636 to .9617. The internal consistency reliability for the entire Fatherhood Scale is .9762. All of the constructs underlying the theoretical foundation of The Fatherhood Scale have application to direct social work practice.

#### Research Background Questions/Hypotheses

In order to understand men who batter the following research questions were developed:

Do men who use physical violence as a means to resolve interpersonal conflict have a different type of relationship with their fathers than non-physically violent men?

Do physically violent men have lower mean scores on positive paternal emotional engagement than non-physically violent men?

Did the violent group have a more negative relationship with their fathers than the non-violent group?

Is there a difference in terms of how accessible fathers were between the two groups?

Was there more divorce in one group over the other and did these men always live with their fathers while growing up?

Are men who had fathers who actively engaged in the role of religious leader of the family less violent than men whose fathers did not take on this role or who took it on to a lesser degree?

Is high self-esteem related to whether or not men have a high positive paternal emotional relationship with their fathers?

Will men who have fathers who were not as involved in a positive way have lower self-esteem?

Is there a relationship between the level of self-esteem and physical violence in intimate relationships?

Is the level of the respondents' education related to intimate violence?

## Hypotheses

Men who had fathers who were highly involved with them and emotionally available in a positive way will be non-violent in intimate relationships. The hypothesis is that positive paternal emotional engagement is a predictor of non-violence in an intimate relationship.

Men who had fathers who were positively engaged with their children and who were emotionally responsive to their children will have higher self-esteem than those men who did not have fathers as highly engaged in a positive way. The hypothesis is that positive paternal emotional engagement is positively related to self-esteem for abusive and non-abusive men.

Men with low self-esteem are more likely to be violent in intimate relationships than men with high self-esteem. The hypothesis is that self-esteem is a predictor of intimate violence.

Men who have fathers teaching them right from wrong and who provide spiritual leadership within the home will be non-violent. The hypothesis is that the moral father role is a predictor of intimate violence.

Children who observe their fathers abuse their mothers will most likely identify with their fathers and imitate their behaviors. Men who experienced negative paternal engagement such as witnessing marital violence will be violent in intimate relationships. The hypothesis is that witnessing marital violence is predictor of intimate violence.

Men who experienced negative paternal involvement such as child abuse will learn that aggression is a way to solve problems and that abuse is a normal part of family life. Men who were abused as children are at a higher risk for later intimate violence than non-abused men are. The hypothesis is that child abuse is a positive predictor of intimate violence.

Fathers who shame and humiliate their children will have an inadequate sense of self and may resort to violence when feeling threatened. The hypothesis is that shame is a predictor of intimate violence.

## Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine if the type of paternal relationship during childhood predicted male violence toward a female intimate. The independent variables were: positive paternal emotional engagement, shaming by the father, witnessing the father abuse the mother, experiencing child abuse by the father, the moral father role, and self-esteem. The dependent variable was violence or non-violence in an intimate

relationship. A retroflective design was used to examine the relationship between intimate violence and the independent variables.

This was an exploratory, descriptive study using a correlational research design. The subjects were a convenience sample of 145 males. The sample consisted of men who were court ordered to batterers' treatment, men who had children attending public Montessori School in Cincinnati, Ohio, and social workers in continuing education training. The study took place in Hamilton and Brown counties in southwestern Ohio. The major sites used were the Cincinnati YWCA's Amend Program, and Clark Montessori School in the Cincinnati Public School District.

Data was collected using four instruments: 1) A Demographic Data Form, 2) The Conflict Tactics Scale (II), 3) The Fatherhood Scale, and 4) Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. Data analysis consisted of a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics including nonparametric tests and logistic regression. Because the goal of the research was to predict the probability of violence occurring or not occurring in intimate relationships, logistic regression was used. In examining data from the two groups of men, violent and non-violent, it was found that the independent variables did not follow a normal distribution, providing further justification for the use of logistic regression.

### Summary of Results

The mean age for the violent group (N=95) was 34.5, whereas the mean age for the non-violent group (N=50) was 37.8. The racial composition of the sample consisted of 19% African American, 73% Caucasian (Chi-Square = 358.583, df = 5, p = .000). The mean income for the non-violent group was \$66,868, compared to \$47,025 for the violent group. Sixty-eight percent of the subjects in the non-violent group were married as compared to 48% of the violent group. Over one-quarter (27%) of the violent group were single and had never been married compared to 16% of the non-violent group. Ten percent of the violent group was divorced compared to the non-violent group (4%).

The results indicated that men who were violent had significantly greater occurrences of negative paternal engagement (such as shame, neglect, spanking, physical punishment and/or shouting) with their fathers than the non-violent group. A t-test found that the groups differed significantly,  $t(2.073) = .040$ ,  $p < .05$ . A positive relationship with the father was negatively associated to physical violence  $R = -.279$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). There was a significant negative correlation between positive paternal emotional responsiveness and physical violence  $R = -.247$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Forty-three percent of the violent groups (N=95) parents divorced, whereas, 28% of the non-violent groups (N=50) parents divorced. Of those men in the violent group whose parents divorced, 81% did not end up living with their fathers (Cramer's V = .696,  $p = .000$ ). Of those men whose parents divorced, 75% were violent in an intimate relationship (Cramer's V = .156,  $p = .000$ ).

While the men in the violent group had lower mean scores on the moral father role compared to the non-violent group, analysis did not find these differences statistically significant ( $t (.857) = .393, p > .05$ ). There was a statistically significant difference on self-esteem scores between the two groups ( $t (-2.845) = .005, p < .05$ ). Men who were violent had lower self-esteem than men who were non-violent. There was a negative correlation between self-esteem and physical violence ( $R = -.278, p = 0.01$ ). Statistically significant relationships were found between men with high scores on positive paternal emotional engagement and high scores on self-esteem, and between low paternal emotional engagement and low self-esteem ( $t (-2.134) = .035, p < .05$ ).

Two logistic regression models were developed and tested: one with the subjects' educational level and one without it. Both models were statistically significant in correctly predicting who would be violent and non-violent in an intimate relationship. While Model 1 was much more effective in predicting the men for the violent group (88%), it performed poorly in predicting the non-violent group (38%). Model 2 (with the addition of education) correctly predicted 86% of the men in the violent group, and correctly predicted 72% of the men in the non-violent group.

In Model 1, the logistic regression indicated three coefficients to be significant: self-esteem, witnessing parental abuse and experiencing child abuse by the father. In Model 2, there were four variables predicting violence: education, self-esteem, witnessing parental abuse and experiencing child abuse by the father. The R statistic in the logistic regression was used to describe the correlation between the independent variables. Results indicated that shaming by the father increased the likelihood of violence. The R statistic indicated that when education and self-esteem increased, and witnessing parental abuse and experiencing child abuse by the father decreased, violence would be less likely to occur.

### Utility for Social Work Practice

Social work has a long history of focusing on the mother as the unit of analysis and on her role in the attachment and bonding process. The term maternal deprivation has been coined to explain the condition of infants who have been emotionally abandoned by their mothers. For the most part, social work has ignored the importance of the father in making a contribution to child development and has relied on other professional disciplines to address how fathers influence child well-being (Lamb, 1997). Jackson (1999) recently examined inner city single mothers attitudes and perceptions about the fathers of their children and found that, if the mother had a positive relationship and a favorable perception of the child's father, this was negatively related to mothers' abusing their children.

Social work scholars need to conduct research on ways in which fathers contribute to positive family functioning. The findings from this research have implications for batterers intervention groups. The findings support more intensive evaluations of the abuser, specifically the abuser's prior relationship history with his father. Addressing how

men related to their fathers can be included into the format of batterers' groups. This will give men an opportunity to sort out their relationship issues with their fathers, and possibly learn how to be more available and emotionally responsive to their own children.

From a prevention perspective, the findings can be used to support fathers to expand their role to be more positively involved with their children. When child welfare workers assess families experiencing domestic violence, they make decisions about the level of risk to the child. The Fatherhood Scale has utility in assessing the father's level of involvement with his children, and the quality of that relationship.

Approximately two-thirds of the intimate violence against women occurs in the home, and between 1993 and 1998, children under the age of 12 resided in 43% of these households (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). In addition to the effect of witnessing marital violence and being abused, children also exhibit more subtle signs of trauma, which may go unnoticed (Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). Therefore, professionals should explore in more depth children's reactions, interpretations, and the meaning they attribute to the violence they witness.

Social work has relied on other professions for a knowledge base about the father's contribution to child development. It is hoped that this research will stimulate further interest in examining the relationship between fathers and their children, the relationship between the father's role and the child's developing sense of self, and how this relates to violence against women.

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