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Crime Victims' Institute
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Differences in Education/Employment Status and Intimate Partner Victimization

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Research has estimated that approximately one out of four women will experience abuse by an intimate partner. There has been considerable effort directed toward understanding the occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Franklin & Kercher, 2012; Franklin, Menaker, & Kercher, 2012). One approach to clarify why men perpetrate IPV has focused on power structures of male dominance and female submission that are maintained in society and reinforced in relationships. For example, in looking at persons with authority in various professional and industry positions, the leaders are typically male. These are the individuals with decision-making power who are responsible for delegating tasks and managing people. Support staff, including secretaries and assistants, are often female. Their job duties require them to submit to male leaders and support the achievements of male authority.

The gendered division of employment happens, in part, through an individual's access to resources, including their occupational and educational status and income-earning potential. These structures are replicated in the family and in marital, intimate, and courtship relationships (Johnson, 2005). Such a model suggests that familial control and decision-making power are associated with a family member's ability to accrue resources of value. In the family context, inconsistencies in status or power (e.g., educational achievement, income earned, employment status) can produce feelings of stress and inadequacy among those who lack these resources (Lenton, 1995). Couples involved in "status-reversal relationships," where women hold higher status than their male partners, may experience barriers to healthy interaction. Status-reversal relationships may generate feelings of stress, inadequacy, and fear among men (Lenton, 1995; Yick, 2001). In order to neutralize these feelings, men may rely on the use of physical strength and violence to dominate women (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; McCloskey, 1996; Teichman & Teichman, 1989). Recent empirical research has supported these claims (Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang,, 2005).

This research brief presents a summary of findings produced from a recent study that will soon be published in the journal *Violence Against Women*. The study tested the relationship between education and employment status differences in couples and experiences of Intimate Partner Violence victimization among 303 female Texas residents involved in heterosexual relationships.

Sample

Data for the study were derived from the Fourth Annual Texas Crime Victimization Survey (see Kercher, Johnson, & Yun, 2008). Data were collected in 2007 by the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University. Using a computer-assisted digitized dialing system, 700 Texas citizens, representing 119 of the 254 counties (53%), were randomly selected and contacted by telephone for interviews. Since the analysis focused on status differences within couples, female respondents who were either currently in a serious romantic relationship (defined as married, cohabiting, or dating) or had been in a serious romantic relationship in the previous twenty-four months were included. The final sample was 303 women between the ages of 18 and 81 (the average age was about 45). Most of the women in the sample were White, non-Hispanic (60.8%). Another 26.9% of the women were Hispanic, and 9.8% were African-American. A majority of the women were married (74.6%).

Measuring IPV Victimization

To measure IPV victimization, a modified version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) was administered during the telephone interview (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The women were asked if they had experienced different forms of psychological and physical victimization perpetrated by their male partner in the previous 24 months. The items included:

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- Threw something at you
- Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you
- Slapped, hit, kicked, or bit you
- Hit or tried to hit you with something
- Beat you up
- Choked you
- Threatened you with a gun or knife

If a woman reported experiencing any of the forms of victimization, she was classified as victimized. If she responded negatively to all forms of victimization, she was classified as not having been victimized. Approximately 67 percent of the women reported having experienced some form of physical or psychological victimization perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 24 months.

Accounting for Relationship Factors

Exposure to family-of-origin violence was characterized by questions asking if, during their childhood, they witnessed one parent "hit or throw something" at the other parent. They were also asked if they had ever been physically punished (e.g., "spanking, hitting, slapping") as a child by either parent. Eighty-four percent of respondents had experience with family-of-origin violence. In assessing family-of-origin violence differences across women who reported IPV and those who did not, significant differences emerged. Approximately 90 percent of adult IPV victims reported family-of-origin violence during childhood as compared to 73 percent of adult non-victims (See Figure 1).

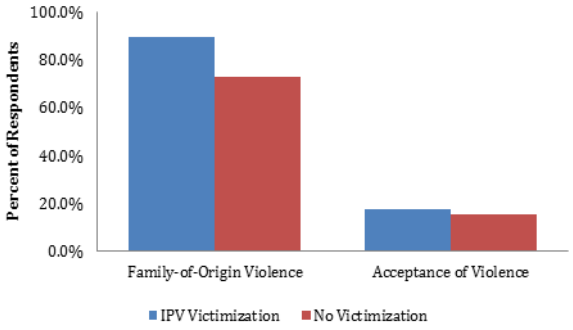

Figure 1: Family-of-Origin Violence and Attitudes

Acceptance of the use of violence in relationships was assessed with two questions. Subjects were asked, "Generally speaking, are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a man slapping his wife's/girlfriend's/partner's face?" Similarly, subjects were asked, "Generally speaking, are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a woman slapping her husband's/boyfriend's/partner's face?" Seventeen percent of subjects indicated some acceptance of the use of violence in relationships. When contrasting adult IPV victims with non-victims on acceptance of relationship violence, no significant differences emerged between the two groups (See Figure 1).

Patriarchal family ideology was derived from responses to four statements about male control in a relationship as it referred to household decision making. For example, the women indicated their support for a man's right to decide whether his wife/partner should work outside the home, whether his wife/partner should go out in the evening with friends, to have sex with his wife/partner even though she may not want to, and the importance of a man showing his wife/partner he is the head of the house. No significant differences emerged in patriarchal family ideology between adult victims and non-victims (See Figure 2).

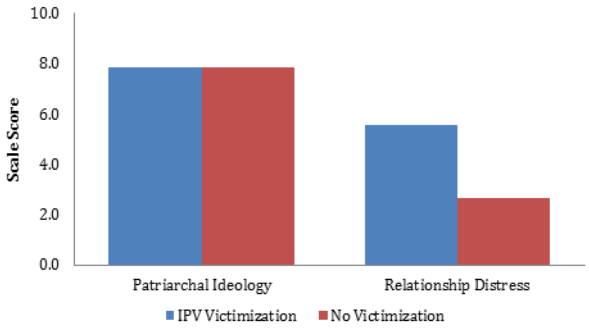

Figure 2: Patriarchal Ideology and Relationship Distress

Relationship distress was measured with four questions regarding agreement with their intimate partners on relationship-related issues. Subjects were asked to indicate how often they agreed about "managing the money," "cooking, cleaning, or house repair," "social activities and entertaining," and "affection and sexual relations" over a two year time period. Each question was captured on a five-point scale with responses ranging from "never" to "always." Items were summed to create a scale with higher numbers reflecting increased relationship distress. Women who reported adult IPV victimization also indicated significantly more relationship distress as compared to non-victims (See Figure 2).

IPV and Status Differences

A multivariate statistical model was estimated in order to determine the impact of education and employment status differences on IPV victimization, while also considering relationship context factors and demographic variables. Findings demonstrated that Hispanic women were significantly less likely than White women to report IPV, but Black women did not significantly differ from White women on reports of IPV. Additionally, older women appeared to be protected against IPV so that they faced decreased odds of victimization in heterosexual partnerships as compared to their younger counterparts. The presence of relationship distress and family-of-origin violence produced significant increases in the odds of IPV victimization.

Educational Status Differences

To assess differences in educational status, the women in the sample were asked to identify their highest level of formal schooling from nine ordered response categories rang-

ing from "no formal schooling" to "doctoral or professional degree." Next, they also identified their male partner's highest level of education from the same categories. The difference was calculated by subtracting the woman's education level from the man's education level, which produced positive, zero, and negative values. Any case with a positive value captured higher educational attainment among males as compared to their female partners. Cases with negative values captured higher educational attainment among females as compared to their male partners. Cases with values of zero demonstrated equal education levels between both male and female partners.

When considering status differences in education, there was no impact on IPV victimization (see Figure 3). This may be explained, in part, by the increased availability of post-secondary educational options, the increased expectation that both men and women will obtain post-secondary education, and an increasing number of men and women who are involved in higher education learning. Collectively, these factors may have diminished the potential that partners differed in educational level or perceived educational attainment as threats to power. Additionally, differences in education level, while indicative of potential disparity in professional status or earning potential between partners, may not directly predict access to power through tangible resources in the same way as employment outside the home. Indeed, an individual's education level is a proximate measure for other concrete status indicators, like professional prestige, whereas employment outside the home represents physical presence in a work environment as opposed to remaining inside the couple's dwelling. To be sure, factors like family background may have more to do with the decision to leave the home for wage-earned labor (e.g., Del Boca, Locatelli, & Pasqua, 2000) than educational status, which may be why education status discrepancies have little to do with IPV among heterosexual couples in this sample.

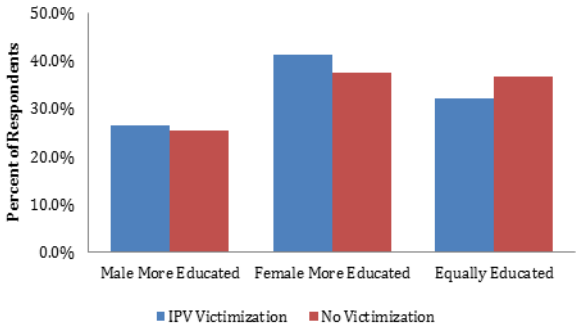

Figure 3: Education Differences and Victimization

Employment Status Differences

In terms of employment status differences, female respondents were also asked to report their employment status and the status of their male partner. From here, four categories were created capturing employment dyads: male only employed, female only employed, both male/female employed and neither male/female employed.

Looking at the relationship between employment status differences and IPV victimization, several significant outcomes were observed (see Figure 4). First, partnerships where only women held paid employment did not produce effects on IPV that significantly differed when compared to male-only employment households. Results demonstrated that when both males and females were employed, however, the odds of victimization were more than two times higher, lending credence to the notion that female employment may challenge male authority and power in a partnership, particularly as compared to those households where the male was the primary breadwinner. Indeed, when women are home-bound through their role as domestic workers, they lack connections to co-workers and the social capital that is produced through those connections, in addition to wages, job prestige, resources, and thus, power. In turn, they must rely solely on their male partner for financial sustenance and can benefit from the distinction that his employment brings the couple. Those women who work outside the home have access to these tangible and intangible assets, which may devalue or, in some cases, even undermine the contributions and provisions supplied by male-only employment

Figure 4: Employment Differences and Victimization

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a number of important relationship factors related to experiences of IPV victimization among female Texas residents, and these results may inform strategies employed in clinical practice as they relate to individual risk factors and sociocultural influences on IPV among heterosexual couples. Findings indicating that family-of-origin violence increased risk for IPV victimization among women further highlight the need for psychoeducational programming to target youth who have been exposed to inter-parental violence. Doing so may prevent or address attitudes endorsing the use of violence in relationships that have been socialized as acceptable mechanisms for conflict resolution. Results also demonstrated that relationship distress due to disagreement on relationship-related issues increased the odds of IPV, providing further support for interventions focused on the development of adaptive conflict resolution strategies among couples.

Perhaps most important, findings related to status differences highlight the need for clinical practitioners to consid-

er gender-specific cultural and contextual origins of individual symptomatology in treatment. Certainly, most men do not use physical violence as means to maintain power and control in an intimate relationship. Even so, research revealing risk factors for such behavior aids in the prevention of male-perpetrated IPV as well as interventions with men who victimize their partners. Individual and couples counseling for IPV should consider status differences as potential risk factors for future violence, and focus efforts on cognitive restructuring for male partners in terms of patriarchal value endorsement as it pertains to the male breadwinner role, approval of gender stereotyping, and gender-specific issues of self-perception and self-worth that are derived from wage-earned labor.

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Additional Resources for Intimate Partner Violence:

National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (www.ncdvs.org)

Texas Council on Family Violence (www.tcfv.org)

Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs – The Duluth Model (www.duluthmodel.org)

Power and Control Wheel (http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/PowerandControl.pdf)

2012 National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
(www.nrcdv.org)