Nano.News Fact Sheet

DRILLING DOWN ON Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA)

*The term “domestic violence” is slowly being replaced with the terms Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA). For the purposes of this fact sheet, IPA refers to a pattern of abusive behaviors between intimate partners that includes physical violence, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and the range of threatening, intimidating, and controlling behaviors that fall within or accompany those behaviors.*

Most people see the battered face of a woman when the term “domestic violence” is used, thus I am in favor of dropping the term so that room can be made in the community mind for the fact of reciprocity and parity between female and male intimate partner abuse in heterosexual couples.

Although approximate parity exists in most of the categories of abuse, research has identified distinctions in the abuse which appear to be gender-associated.

Nevertheless, as the research findings below suggest, adult attachment dysfunctions appear to be present in IPA. Avoidant and anxious styles of attachment often lead to negative patterns of communication and behavior. This personal, human aspect of abuse appears to be the functional cause of abuse, rather than the long-held paradigm of patriarchal terrorizing.

The patriarchal paradigm, and the 3-step Cycle of Violence identified by Lenore Walker in 1978, were developed exclusively from studies of battered women in emergency shelters. That sample represents a small percentage of a much larger and more diverse sample of men and women involved in Intimate Partner Abuse. Research suggests that in developed, industrialized countries such as the United States, Canada and Britain, this level of violence comprises approximately 15 – 30% of the IPA and family violence reported.

What has been a barrier to couples is that the “system” is resistant to the research findings about male spouses or boyfriends being abused by their wives and girlfriends. Thus, men seeking guidance and resources have real concerns about their own safety (often, restraining orders are not granted to men for the same reasons they are granted to women), and of their continued role as fathers in their children’s lives. Custody rulings continue to favor the mother, even when evidence of abusive behavior is presented.

This document is meant to be a quick reference. I have included a short bibliography at the end if you want to check these sources (as you should), or delve further into the topic. Please feel free to share this document.

Some Recent Research Findings

* Two large-scale studies found that a substantial proportion of both women and men reported using physical aggression when the partner did not. (Archer 664)
* Based on specific acts, women were significantly more likely than men to have used physical aggression toward their partners and to have used it more frequently, although the effect size was very small (d= -.05). Based on the physical consequences of aggression (visible injuries or injuries requiring medical treatment), men were more likely than women to have injured their partners, but again, effect sizes were relatively small (d= .15 and .08). (Archer 664)
* [Although] …. the majority of those injured were women, … the values of .62 and .65 indicated that a substantial minority of men were injured by a partner. It is therefore not the case (cf. Pagelow, 1984) that women’s violence toward men [that is] severe enough to cause physical injury is negligible or nonexistent. (Archer 665)
* When men are victims, there seems to be a pattern where family violence is underreported. The findings from a study of 6,291 physical and 1,787 sexual assaults based on the National Violence Against Women Survey demonstrates that men are less likely to report assault when the offender is a female. This also has an impact on the long term effects of abuse (Felson et al., 2005). The authors believe that the victims are less inclined to report assault if the perpetrator is a known individual rather than a complete stranger, both backed by fear of backlash and institutional inertness to their plight (Felson et al. in Chaudhuri 62-63)
* When men do report violence, the institutional and legal responses largely favor women and disadvantage men specifically with regards to custody battles (Cloer. 2009 in Chaudhuri 65)
* Due to men’s greater physical strength a level playing field does not exist between men and women in physical combat. However, a woman gains some advantage by using objects and by striking when her partner is in a vulnerable state (Archer, 2000; Mann, 1988 in Hamel, *Gender Inclusive*, 5)
* …a reanalysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey found that controlling behaviors predict physical assault equally for men and women (Felson Outlaw, 2007)—these findings suggesting that it is the need to dominate and control, not patriarchy or male sexist ideology that is at issue. (Hamel, *Intimate Partner*, 10)
* …the dynamics and communication styles of distressed, high-conflict couples are more similar to physically violent couples than they are to non-distressed, nonviolent ones, with low levels of self-esteem, poor communication and problem-solving skills, and high relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. (Hamel, *Intimate Partner,* 14)
* Unlike Walker, whose three-phase battering cycle was derived exclusively from interviews with victimized women, other researchers during the 1990’s found evidence of other cycles, some from self-report questionnaires and interviews with both the male and the female partner (e.g., Cascardi & Vivian, 1995) and others from observations of high-conflict and abusive couples in the laboratory. From this research we know, for example, that marital aggression typically reflects “an outgrowth of conflict between both partners” (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995, p. 265), and that couples engage in *negative reciprocity,* characterized by attack-defend cycles…or by demand-withdraw cycles…. (Hamel, *Intimate Partner*, p. 12-13).

Bibliography

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