Men Abused by Women

Information Sheet

Between 1999 and 2004, more than half a million men in Canada had a female partner who was violent toward them. The partner might have been a wife, an ex-wife or a common-law partner. This means about six per cent of men in intimate relationships have experienced abuse or violence from their partners.[1]

Get Help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.

For help in your community or more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca**.

Alberta Children and Youth Services is proud to lead Alberta's Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Initiative.

So what is abuse?

A pattern of controlling behaviour

- Abuse in intimate relationships is a pattern of behaviours where one partner dominates, belittles or humiliates the other.
- Abuse of men by their partners happens when the partner uses emotional, physical, sexual or intimidation tactics. She* does it to control the man, get her own way and prevent him from leaving the relationship. The abused man is always adapting his behaviour to do what his partner wants, in the hopes of preventing further abuse.
- The primary motive for abuse is to establish and maintain power and control over a partner. The abused partner resists the attempts to control him. In turn, the abusive woman takes additional steps to regain control over her partner.
- Abuse in intimate relationships is not typically an isolated incident. Abuse happens over time. If abuse is allowed to continue, it becomes more frequent and more severe.

Control tactics: four kinds of abuse

Often when people think about abuse, they think of emotional abuse, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. Abuse may also include intimidation tactics.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE TACTICS include:

- Putdowns
- Controlling finances
- Isolating her partner and restricting his freedoms
- Spiritual abuse (ridicules or insults religion or spiritual beliefs)

PHYSICAL ABUSE TACTICS include any activity that can cause physical pain or injury.

SEXUAL ABUSE TACTICS include:

- Uses force or pressure to get her partner to have sex in a way he does not want
- Ridicules or criticizes his performance
- Withholds affection or sex to punish him for violating her rules

INTIMIDATION TACTICS are any words or actions that the abusive partner uses to scare her partner. For example: destroying property, threatening, stalking or harassing.

* Abusers can be female or male. This publication deals with male victims, see "Women Abused in Intimate Relationships" information sheet or booklet available at **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca**.

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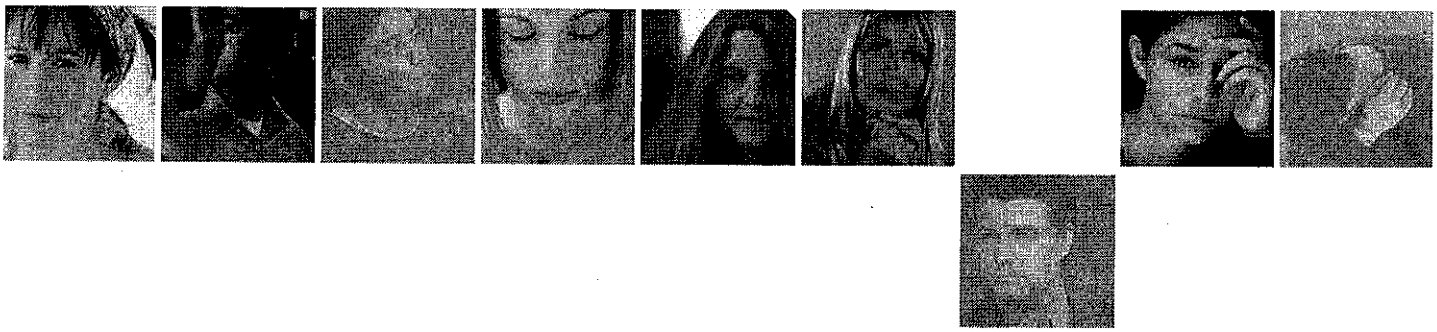
Alberta



Society's attitudes can make it harder

Our society is beginning to recognize and study the abuse of men by their partners. Society's inappropriate beliefs and attitudes about men have kept this kind of abuse hidden:

- Men are supposed to protect women
- Men don't get pushed around by women
- Men are not supposed to hit back even when a woman is hitting them
- Men should be able to "handle" their women

Because of these beliefs, men who are abused by female partners may be slow to admit it. They may not want to tell anyone. Sometimes police and other professionals may not take the abuse seriously.

As a result, a man in an abusive relationship may have some of these feelings:

- Afraid to tell anyone
- Depressed or humiliated
- Afraid he has failed as a lover
- Confused because sometimes she acts loving and kind
- Believes he deserved it

Ten things you can do if you are being abused

1. First, make sure you and any children are physically safe. **If you are in immediate danger, call 911.**
2. Make a safety plan. If your partner has ever been violent, the violence could happen again at any time. You will need a safety plan so that you can get to a safe place quickly if necessary. See "Safety Plan" suggestions in the "Men Abused by Women in Intimate Relationships" booklet, available at **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca**.
3. Know you are not responsible for the abuse. The abuse is the responsibility of the person who is abusive.
4. Understand that abuse and violence will likely continue without intervention.
5. Tell someone you trust about the abuse. Choose someone who will believe you. Secrecy gives abuse power. Do not give up.
6. Find out more about abuse in relationships. You are not alone. About six per cent of Canadian men report being abused by partners.[2]
7. Find out what help is available in or near your community. Call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit **www.familyviolence.alberta.ca** for more information.
8. Get professional help from a qualified counsellor.
9. Look after yourself. You are in a difficult situation that takes energy and strength. Make time to do some things that feel good.
10. Spend time with healthy people. Even if they cannot help you directly, being with healthy people will remind you that most people have kind and rewarding relationships. You can too.

[1] Statistics Canada (2006, October). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends 2006* (Catalogue No. 85-570-XIE). Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/85-570-XIE/85-570-XIE2006001.pdf

[2] Ibid.

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When Battered Women Use Violence: Husband-Abuse or Self-Defense?

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A controversy exists regarding the nature of violence committed by women against their intimate partners. When battered women are violent it is not known if the violence should be labeled "mutual combat," "husband abuse," or "self-defense." Following a review of studies comparing the extent of husbands' and wives' victimization and some conceptual issues regarding self-defense, data are presented from 52 battered women on their motives for using violence against their partners. The most frequent reason for violence reported by the women was for self-defense. Only one woman reported initiating an attack with severe violence in more than half of her violent acts. Only eight percent of the women reported that nonsevere violence was used to initiate an attack more than half of the time. The concepts of "self-defense" and "fighting back" were significantly and positively correlated; that is, many women saw them as being the same. The women's self-reports were not contaminated by social desirability response bias. The results are discussed in the context of the need to collect data on relevant explanatory variables in family violence research and the application of a feminist perspective to reduce bias in such research.

The topic of battered women's use of violence has been controversial but poorly understood. While a number of studies indicate that some battered women use violence (Fojtik, 1977–1978; Nisonoff & Bitman, 1979; Oswald, 1980; Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1984), very little research has focused on the motives and consequences of this violence. An understanding of battered women's reasons for using violence is crucial because of the divergent implications that exist for the social response to the problem of domestic violence. If battered women's violence is motivated by self-defense, and thus legally justifiable, the violence can be interpreted as another sign of battered women's entrapment in a violent relationship and their need for help. If, on the other hand, battered women's violence has consequences equally as severe as their partner's violence or is not in response to

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their attacks, then the violence might be labeled "mutual combat" or "husband abuse." Less sympathy and fewer services are likely to be offered in this case.

This article reviews what is known about the relative victimization of husbands and wives, clarifies some conceptual issues regarding self-defense, and presents some data on the motives held by a sample of battered women when they used violence. The results are discussed in the context of the need for including explanatory variables in family violence research and the application of a feminist perspective to reduce bias in such research.

The term "battered women" is used here in the broad sense to mean female recipients of any form of physical force that is intended to hurt. Thus, the full range of severity is included, from slaps to beatings to the use of weapons. This definition is more in line with legal definitions of "battery" than the more widely held definition of "battered women" (LaFave & Scott, 1972). "Minor violence," such as slapping and shoving, is included in the definition because of its high probability of escalating to severe violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1984) and because one episode of violence of any intensity may shift the power balance in the relationship by making the woman more passive (Walker, 1984). Unless otherwise noted, the term "marital violence" will be used for the sake of convenience to refer to both married and unmarried couples.

RATES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE VIOLENCE

Before reviewing what is known about the motives for and consequences of marital violence, evidence will be presented on the rates of violence by husbands and wives.

The initial studies of marital violence by Straus and his associates were meant to be incidence surveys and questions were not asked about the motives and consequences of the violence (Gelles, 1974; Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus, 1980). These researchers were surprised to find approximately equal rates of violence, both severe and nonsevere, committed by both husbands and wives. The findings were consistent between their nonrandom surveys and their survey of over 2,000 households representative of the U.S. population. The researchers did, however, point out a number of reasons why woman abuse should remain the focus of intervention: husbands had the higher rates of the most dangerous behaviors; husbands repeated their violence more often; husbands are likely to do more damage because of size differences; wives are economically trapped in marriage more often than husbands; and many wives may be using the violence to defend themselves. Other researchers have also found that men are responsible for the most severe forms of violence (Gaquin, 1977-78; Makepeace, 1983).

Despite the qualifications given by Straus and others to their studies, a considerable amount of controversy erupted in the late 1970s regarding the nature and scope of violence perpetrated by wives against their husbands. Reports of a "battered husband syndrome" (Langley & Levy, 1977; Steinmetz, 1977-78) of a magnitude equal to that of the problem of battered wives met with charges of a "battered data syndrome" (Pleck, Pleck, Grossman, & Bart, 1977-78). Some reasons

for this were that the claims about "battered husbands" appeared to be based on incomplete tables and on projections to the entire U.S. population made from only one or two nonsevere cases (Pagelow, 1984). Reports of "mutual combat" by couples were met with the charge that mutual combat was a "myth," since victims who sustained injuries and sought help were overwhelmingly female (Berk, Berk, Loseke, & Rauma, 1981).

The present study focuses on those cases that some authors might call "mutual combat" (cf. Steinmetz, 1980): cases in which both partners have been violent, although not necessarily at the same time. In the nationally representative survey of family violence (Straus et al., 1980), this type of relationship was the most common, accounting for 49% of the relationships that contained violence during the survey year (Straus, 1980). Relationships in which only the husband or wife was violent were less common among the relationships containing violence (28% and 23% respectively). Of all the wives who were subjected to violence during the survey year, 64% were also violent during that time.

Supporting the findings of the national study of family violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), it was discovered in several studies that from 23% to 71% of battered women used violence at least once against their abusers. These studies included a random survey of one New York county (Nisonoff & Bitman, 1979, $n=296$), battered women who sought help for attempted suicide (Oswald, 1980, $n=263$), a nonrandom survey of help-seeking and non-help-seeking battered women (Walker, 1984, $n=403$), and battered women seeking help from shelters (Fojtik, 1977–78, $n=100$; Pagelow, 1981, $n=267$).

EXTENT OF HUSBAND AND WIFE VICTIMIZATION

Reporting the rates of violence by each partner tells us nothing about the extent of victimization each suffers. Straus (1980) further analyzed the national study data and found that when both partners were violent ($n=159$), 44% of the husbands used a higher level of violence than their partners, compared with 23% of the wives who used a higher level of violence. Furthermore, the wives' increases in minor violence were associated with sharp increases in the number of severe assaults by their partners. The same pattern did not hold true for wives' use of severe violence; an increase in their use of severe violence occured when the "minor" violence they received totaled ten or more acts in the previous year.

An increased risk of victimization for women is likely to occur because of size differences and women's relative lack of fighting experience. Men who batter average 45 pounds heavier and 4 to 5 inches taller than their partners (Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1984). The male batterers' weights tend to be at the national norm but there is some evidence that battered women's weights are below the national norm for women (Pagelow, 1981). Wives' higher risks of sustaining injuries (and sustaining severe injuries) from domestic assaults are supported by surveys of three types of samples: a representative crime victimization survey (Gaquin, 1977–78), police reports (Berk et al., 1981; Saunders, 1980), and a nonrandom community sample (Irwin, 1981). Greenblat (1981) and Adler (1981) present interview data which illustrate the differences between male and female violence. In some cases both

partners knew that the woman's hardest punches did not hurt her partner, and, in fact, the man laughed in response to them. In a table of quantitative data, however, this would count as "husband abuse."

If battered women use violence, it is more likely to be against a violent partner than a nonviolent one. Walker (1984) compared the relationships a group of women ($n=203$) had with abusive mates to their relationships with nonabusive mates. Twenty-three percent of these women used physical force occasionally and 1% frequently with an abusive mate. With a nonabusive mate, only 4% used physical force occasionally and none used it frequently. This difference suggests that battered women's physical aggression is a function of the type of relationship and is not a general characteristic of the women.

SELF-DEFENSE BY BATTERED WOMEN

Very little is known about the extent to which the violence of battered women is motivated by self-defense. An analysis of spousal homicide in one city showed that wives were seven times more likely than husbands to have used violence in self-defense (Wolfgang, 1957). McCormick (1976) reported that 40% of the women jailed for spousal killing ($n=132$) in her study had been subjected to chronic physical abuse in their marriages and that this abuse was a dominant factor in the murders.

The factors associated with homicide by battered women have begun to be investigated and they appear to support the self-defense explanation for battered women's violence. Totman (1978) found that these women were likely to feel they had exhausted all their alternatives in seeking help. Browne (in press) compared battered women who had killed or nearly killed their partners with those who had not. Factors associated with homicide centered around the man's behavior, including the frequency of abuse, the severity of the woman's injuries, forced sex, the man's threats to kill, and his frequency of intoxication.

Indirect evidence for battered women's use of self-defense comes from the national family violence study (Straus et al., 1980). Husbands' threats to use weapons were highly associated with their actual use, whereas for wives, threats to use weapons were not nearly as highly associated with the actual use of weapons (81% vs. 13% shared variance; M. A. Straus, personal communication, March 8, 1983) and were even less highly associated with other forms of violence (Straus, 1979). The men's use of threats suggests premeditation and an attempt to control; the women's use of weapons with little associated violence and no threats suggests a self-defense motive.

Two surveys of battered women, both help-seeking samples, asked about self-defensive violence. Twenty-nine percent of the women in one survey (Pagelow, 1981, $n=267$) and 41% in another (Fojtik, 1977–1978; $n=123$) reported the use of self-defensive violence. Frieze and her associates (Frieze, Noble, Zomnar, & Washburn, 1980), unlike the Browne study of battered women who killed, found that battered women who fought back were the ones who were mildly abused rather than severely abused and that few women were as violent as their husbands. No study could be found that questioned the frequencies with which battered women used self-

defensive violence or that detailed the sequence of events when both partners were violent in a single episode.

SELF-DEFENSE: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Some reports of battered women's violence contain questionable assumptions such as the assumption that retaliation (Straus, 1980) or fighting back (Pagelow, 1981) and self-defense are mutually exclusive concepts, or that severe violence in response to minor violence cannot be called self-defense (Straus, 1980). Criminal law textbooks and recent court decisions help to clarify these issues. A widely used text defines self-defense as follows: "One who is not the aggressor in an encounter is justified in using a reasonable amount of force against his adversary when he reasonably believes (a) that he is in immediate danger of unlawful bodily harm from his adversary and (b) that the use of such force is necessary to avoid this danger" (Lafave & Scott, 1972, p. 391). Women's size and social conditioning have come to be recognized as important factors for juries to consider in determining self-defense. In rejecting the traditional jury instructions in the appeal of the Wanrow murder case, the court stated:

> In our society women suffer from a conspicuous lack of access to training in, and means of developing, those skills necessary to effectively repel a male assailant without resorting to the use of a deadly weapon. . . . The respondent was entitled to have the jury consider her actions in the light of her own perceptions of the situation, including those perceptions which were the product of our nation's "long and unfortunate history of sex discrimination". . . . (The challenged instructions) leaves the jury with the impression that the objective standard to be applied is that applicable to an altercation between two men. The impression created—that a 5'5" woman with a cast on her leg and using a crutch must, under the law, somehow repel an assault by a 6'2" intoxicated man without employing weapons in her defense . . . violates the respondents' right to equal protection under the law. (State of Washington vs. Wanrow, p. 559)

Therefore, battered women are justified in using enough force to stop an attack, which in most cases means using more severe violence than their attackers.

Likewise, self-defense pleas in homicide cases do not become nullified when extreme terror becomes mixed with extreme rage (Schneider & Jordan, 1978). It seems reasonable to expect victims of battery or sexual abuse who defend themselves from lethal or nonlethal attacks to combine anger with their fear. Walker's (1984) research on battered women's emotional responses after being assaulted supports this expectation. Thus, retaliation (angrily trying to hurt the other) while one is being attacked may be almost indistinguishable from self-defense (cf. Pagelow, 1984).

Other differences from traditional legal interpretations exist for battered spouses. Great force may be used by women who have come to know their partner's behavior patterns, have experienced many beatings, and fear that another one is imminent. In the words of one legal scholar: "After presenting evidence of prior beatings at the hands of her husband, the battered wife should be able to maintain a strong claim of self-defense based on the apprehension of an imminent danger caused by her husband's otherwise trivial or seemingly innocuous conduct" (Kieviet, 1978, p. 223). Self-defense pleas usually require the defendent to show that

it was impossible to safely withdraw from the threatened harm. When the victim and attacker live together, however, most jurisdictions recognize that one should not have to flee one's own home to seek safety (Fiora-Gormally, 1978).

The purpose of the present study was to seek a fuller understanding of the motives behind the violence used by battered women. The major question explored was: What is the proportion of times that battered women report their use of violence as "defensive," "retaliatory," or "first strike?" Based on the studies of spousal homicide cited earlier, it was hypothesized that most of the violence of battered women would be in self-defense. A second question was whether the women would distinguish self-defensive violence from violence labeled "fighting back," which some authors define as retaliation or "getting even" (Straus, 1980). From the studies showing a link between anger and fear in women's reactions to attacks on them, it was hypothesized that there would be a correlation between reports of self-defense and "fighting back."

METHOD

Sample

Fifty-two battered women seeking help from five shelters ($n=45$) and a counseling agency ($n=7$) in the Midwest were the subjects for the study. Twenty-three percent of the women were married, 56% were separated or divorced, and 19% were single. Their average number of years of education was 12.2 (SD=2.0), with 8% of the women holding college degrees. The average length of time the women were in the violent relationships was 7.7 years (SD=7.6). The women seeking help from the shelter differed somewhat from the women going to counseling; they were younger and had fewer children. They did not differ significantly in education, income, or marital status.

Procedures

The subjects were part of a larger study on the police response to battered women (Saunders & Size, 1980). Agency personnel asked 56 battered women, who were successively admitted to the shelters or counseling agency, to participate in the study. Four women refused to participate because some of the items asked caused them emotional upset or because the questionnaire was lengthy. The questionnaires were self-administered after the women became acclimated to shelter life and completed informed consent procedures. Anonymous self-administration was used to help reduce social desirability response bias.

Measures

The subjects completed modified Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales (Straus, 1979), reporting on the frequency of different levels of violence used by their partners and themselves over the course of the relationship. The CT Scales have good internal reliability and concurrent and construct validity (see Straus, 1979). The list began with verbal abuse followed by acts of physical abuse of increasing intensity, thus making the scale less threatening than if the physical abuse items were asked in

isolation. The instructions were framed in the context of a "dispute" and thus may not have uncovered violence originating from conflict outside of the relationship. The frequency categories used for this study were: never, once, occasionally, once a month or less, regularly (about once a month), and more than once a week.

Two identical sets of questions about motivation were placed in different sections in the CT Scales completed by each woman. One set followed three relatively nonsevere forms of violence ("threw something"; "pushed, grabbed, or shoved"; "slapped") and the other followed the items reflecting more serious forms of violence ("kicked, bit, or hit with a fist" through "used a knife or gun"). The division of violence severity into two levels followed the practice of Straus and other researchers (Straus et al., 1980). It seemed possible that the results would differ based on the level of severity.

Three questions about perceptions of the women's violence were placed after each level of severity of the CT Scales: (a) "What percentage of these times (above) do you estimate that you acted in self-defense, that is, protecting yourself from immediate physical harm?"; (b) "What percentage of these times were you trying to fight back?"; and (c) "What percentage of these times did you assault your partner before he actually attacked you, or threatened you with a weapon?" After each question there was a line with 0% and 100% at either end and marked at every 10 percentage points. Respondents were instructed to mark anywhere on the line. Note that respondents were not asked to divide 100% among the three motivation items, but to assign a percentage to each type of motivation. In other words, the forms of motivation were not stated in mutually exclusive terms. Note also that the definition of *self-defense* used here could be interpreted as based either on the victim's perceptions of being endangered or on an objective standard of danger. The initiation of an assault, question (c), could, when the respondent feared for her life, be self-defensive but was not clearly defined as such in this study.

TABLE 1. Percentage and Mean Frequency Scores of Women Who Used Violence

	Percentage who engaged in violent behavior	Frequency score[a] *M*	*SD*
Nonsevere violence			
Threw something at him	49.0	1.2	1.9
Pushed, grabbed or shoved	55.1	1.7	2.4
Slapped	44.9	1.4	2.3
Total: Nonsevere	75.0		
Severe violence			
Kicked, bit, or hit with fist	51.9	1.7	2.4
Hit or tried to hit with something	59.6	1.7	2.2
Beat him up	7.7	.3	.2
Threatened with knife or gun	11.8	.3	1.2
Used a knife or gun	7.8	.3	1.2
Total: Severe	73.1		
Total: All violence	82.7		

[a]Frequency scores were calculated as follows: never = 0; once = 1; occasionally = no. of times behavior occurred/no. of years of relationship, rounded off to a number between 2 and 5; once a month = 6; about once a week = 7; more than once a week = 8.

An 18-item version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crown & Marlowe, 1964) was used to detect possible bias from subjects' attempts to respond in a socially desirable manner. Social desirability response bias is a common source of invalidity in self-reported measures. The version used here correlated .95 with the original 33-item version. The scale's concurrent validity has been shown by its correlation in expected directions with the validity scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964).

Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of women who had ever engaged in any type of physical violence. Seventy-five percent engaged in some form of nonsevere violence, about one-half throwing something or slapping and slightly more than one-half reporting that they "pushed, grabbed, or shoved." Two of the categories labeled severe violence were engaged in by 50 to 60% of the women. These were: "kicked, bit or hit with fist" and "hit or tried to hit with something." About 8% of the women

TABLE 2. Percentage of Women Using Different Motives for Violence by Frequency of Violence

Motive	Frequency[a] 0%	5–40%	50–95%	100%
	Nonsevere violence			
Self-defense				
Total	21	23	33	23
Of those violent	—	31	44	31
n	(11)	(12)	(17)	(12)
Fighting back				
Total	35	15	33	17
Of those violent	—	21	44	23
n	(18)	(8)	(17)	(9)
Initiate attack				
Total	73	19	6	2
Of those violent	—	26	8	3
n	(38)	(10)	(3)	(1)
	Severe violence			
Self-defense				
Total	29	11	31	29
Of those violent	—	16	42	39
n	(15)	(6)	(16)	(15)
Fighting back				
Total	40	12	25	23
Of those violent	—	16	34	32
n	(21)	(6)	(13)	(12)
Initiating attack				
Total	88	10	2	0
Of those violent	—	13	3	0
n	(46)	(5)	(1)	(0)

[a]Frequencies are not shown between 40 and 50% because no violence was reported for those frequencies.

admitted "beating up" their partners or using a knife or a gun. These most severe forms of violence were not only used by the fewest number of women but, if used, were used least often. About 12% of the women admitted threatening their partners with a knife or gun. Only one of the eight CT Scale items was significantly correlated with the social desirability scale ("slapped you," $r = -.28$, $p = .024$). This correlation is not significant when the experimentwise error rate is used (.05 alpha divided by the number of correlations).

Table 2 shows the percentage of women who reported self-defensive violence, fighting back, or initiating an attack, broken down into four levels of frequency and two levels of severity. Only one of the six measures of reported motives was significantly correlated with the social desirability scale (fight back with severe violence, $r = .36$) and the correlation was in the opposite direction expected. The women reported that self-defense was the most common motive for both nonsevere and severe violence. About 40% of the women who used severe violence reported that all of this violence was in self-defense; another third of the women said that all of their severe violence was "fighting back." In contrast, only one woman (3%) reported that she initiated most of the violent encounters with severe violence. A similar pattern existed for the nonsevere violence: about 30% of the women who were violent said that all of their nonsevere violence was in self-defense; another 23% described all of their violence as "fighting back." Four women (11%) said that much of their nonsevere violence (50–100%) was initiated by them.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrices between different motivational items within each violence severity level. The patterns are identical. For each level of severity, self-defense and fighting back are positively and significantly correlated with each other; however, self-defense and initiating an attack are negatively correlated in this study, and there is no relationship shown between fighting back and initiating an attack. The positive relationship between self-defense and fighting back also holds across the levels of severity, as shown in Table 4. The results in Table 4 also show a high degree of consistency in reported behavior between the same motivations across the levels of violence and thus support the validity of the measures. When all of the above correlations were calculated after, controlling for social desirability response bias, the results were the same.

DISCUSSION

As in the surveys of battered women cited in the introduction, many of the women in this study reported using violence against their partners. Each type of violence

TABLE 3. Correlations between Different Perceptions of Violence Within Each Level of Violence

	Nonsevere		Severe	
	FB	IA	FB	IA
SD	.55***	−.23	.38**	−.15
FB		.04		.01

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. SD = self-defense; FB = fighting back; IA = initiating attack.

TABLE 4. Correlations of Different and Similar Perceptions of Violence Across the Two Levels of Violence

		Severe		
		SD	FB	IA
Nonsevere	SD	.82***	.25	.04
	FB	.35*	.48***	.12
	IA	−.27	−.04	.44***

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. SD = self-defense; FB = fighting back; IA = initiating attack.

they reported had rates above those for the total sample of wives in a nationally representative survey (Straus et al., 1980). The number of battered women who reported using violence in this study was somewhat higher than the number reported in the studies mentioned in the introduction. Relatively few women, however, reported using violence that was likely to cause serious injuries, for example, "beating up" or using a weapon.

A unique aspect of the present study was its focus on battered women's motives for violence. The most frequent motive for violence reported by these women was self-defense. Only a few women reported that they initiated an attack of severe violence. The concepts of self-defense and fighting back tended to be merged for these women.

Among those women who initiate violence, some authors speculate that the women sense impending violence from their partners and initiate the attack in order to stop the overwhelming build-up of tension (Gelles, 1974; Lewis, 1981; Walker, 1984). Under particular circumstances, when the women are convinced that they or their children are in imminent danger of death or great bodily harm, they are legally justified in using force even when danger does not exist in an objective sense and the man is not threatening or attacking. The methods of this study were not able to uncover such preemptive strikes as a possible motive; however, the results of this study show that neither self-defense nor fighting back were correlated with initiating an attack.

A self-defense motive is also not ruled out when abused women have strong anger mixed with their fear. Many women in this study did not distinguish between self-defense and fighting back, which is compatible with legal definitions of self-defense. For instance, one of the options women are taught to use in response to sexual assault is to inflict pain on their assailants. It is also possible that the women's primary motive was to injure and that a claim of self-defense was used to justify these actions. The results still indicate, however, that most episodes of violence for these women were initiated by the husbands.

The results of this study underscore Greenblat's (1981) contention that marital violence events need to be studied in their context and that caution is needed when applying particular labels to simple counts of events. The use of certain terms applied to both partners, such as "victim," "combatant," "aggressor," and "battered," may have unfortunate consequences. Such terms shape our perceptions of events, help to define social problems, and may eventually determine what

services are provided. To say that men and women reach equality when it comes to marital violence literally adds insult to injury for the group of women who often fear for their lives, who never initiate an attack, but who strike back in self-defense.

The consequences of violence also need to be studied. A shove by a woman may enrage her partner; a shove by a man can knock a woman down and cause a concussion. A woman's punch may only cause laughter, whereas a man's can cause a full range of injuries and can even be lethal. In a study of spousal homicide, beatings were the cause of death for a third of the wives; wives who killed, on the other hand, almost always used weapons (Chimbos, 1978).

An ethical dilemma is faced when family violence and other researchers collect data or report results which contain no explanatory variables. Should reports be withheld until analysis with explanatory variables is conducted? How much analysis is enough? What are the likely misinterpretations and misuses of reporting simple group differences? I believe there are times when researchers do greater harm by presenting results before a complete analysis has been done. An illustration from an unrelated area would be the negative consequences that occurred when race differences on measures of intelligence were reported without a analysis of the explanations for these differences.

An example of more complete analysis rendering different results exists in the area of domestic violence. Cazenave & Straus (1974) showed that although blacks reported higher rates of marital violence than whites, the difference could generally be explained by income differences. More complete analyses can prevent negative stereotypes from being enlarged and can suggest very different social remedies than might otherwise be proposed.

A more complete analysis of research methods and findings may occur with the application of a feminist perspective. A feminist analysis in family violence research is especially appropriate given the role of our patriarchal society in causing and maintaining the problem (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo, 1983a) and the criticism that family violence and other aggression research is sexist (Bleier, 1979; Wardell, Gillespie, & Leffler, 1983). A feminist perspective compels one to ask about differences of power when viewing male-female relationships. Applied to the research on marital violence, this perspective leads to some of the questions posed in this article: Do the physical and social differences of power between the sexes lead to different consequences when men and women are violent? Are the motives for violence different for men and women? This study is an example of how quantitative methods of inquiry can be integrated with a feminist theoretical analysis (Walker & Thompson, 1984; Yllo, 1983b). By applying a feminist perspective, the researcher who uses quantitative methods, rather than losing objectivity, has one more theoretical model to use when formulating questions, designing studies, and interpreting results (Walker, 1984, pp. 110–112).

Even though many battered women may aggressively defend themselves from attack and may be legally justified in doing so, it would be a mistake to assume that aggression works for victims. Available evidence indicates that such action will probably make things worse. In Fojtik's (1977-1978) survey of help-seeking battered women, 77% of those who tried to defend themselves reported that it escalated the violence. Bowker (1983) also found that an aggressive response escalated the man's violence. He found that the most successful strategies women used in stopping their

husbands' attacks were threats of divorce or threats to invoke criminal justice sanctions. Bowker concluded that this method worked because it improved the balance of power between the partners.

The limitations of the present study and its exploratory nature require that its findings be taken cautiously. A major problem in the methodology was that respondents were not asked about their behavior and possible motives one incident at a time. Since correlations were made between frequencies applied over the course of the entire relationship, one cannot know about the correlations using incidents as the unit of analysis.

Another limitation of the study is the nature of the sample. Most of the women were seeking help from a shelter and thus were more likely than other battered women to be from a low-income group and to have experienced severe abuse (Washburn & Frieze, 1981). Women seeking shelter, calling the police, or going to the emergency room are not likely to be found in relationships in which couples keep their violence at low levels (Schulman, 1979; Steinmetz, 1980).

A representative survey asking about the sequence of events, motives, and outcomes would provide much more conclusive findings than those of the present study. Reports from both partners would add to the validity of such a study, as well as questions about motives that have been corrected for social desirability response bias.

CONCLUSION

A small percentage of battered women in this study reported that they initiated violence against their partners. When violence was used, it was most often seen simultaneously as fighting back and self-defense. A study asking only about the incidence of violence might have labeled much of the violence reported by these women as "husband abuse" or "mutual combat."

As a report of an exploratory study, it is hoped that this article will encourage more rigorous research in this area. In the meantime, great care must be used in stating assumptions about retaliation, self-defense, and other motives for violent behavior and in assigning labels to rates of marital violence.

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