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## MEASURING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AN ALCOHOLIC POPULATION

Larry R. Livingston, MSW

### ABSTRACT

A survey of 107 adults receiving residential treatment for substance abuse was conducted, to determine characteristics of domestic violence in relationships. The survey incorporated instruments to measure the degree of substance abuse (the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test or MAST) as well as types and frequencies of domestic violence (the Conflict Tactics Scale or CTS-N). Findings are then compared to a national study of 2143 normals (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) to ascertain differences in domestic violence.

Findings indicate that 83% of alcoholic subjects behaved violently in past relationships, compared to 28% of the normal population. Fifty-five percent of the alcoholics had been violent in a relationship during the past year, compared to 16% of the normals who were violent during that time. The findings also indicate that violence in alcoholic relationships is far more frequent and severe than in nonalcoholic relationships. The implications of these findings for clinical practice are discussed.

Several researchers have noted a high correlation between alcohol abuse and domestic violence (Fojtik, 1977; Forrest, 1980; Gayford, 1975; Rosenbaum, 1981; Roy, 1977; Snell et. al, 1964; Walker, 1979). While the correlation has been estimated (Black, 1981; Kinney & Leaton, 1983), researchers have not quantified the violence exhibited in alcoholic

relationships. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to draw genuine conclusions when comparing the frequency and severity of domestic violence in alcoholic and nonalcoholic families.

To produce a comparison, three components must exist: an instrument to measure violent behavior; a sample of normal families; and a sample of alcoholic families. A major task in producing this comparison was accomplished in 1979, when Murray Straus published the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS). With the CTS, violence can be precisely measured in behavioral terms. Shortly after publication of the CTS, the first national study of domestic violence in America was published, based upon these scales (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). That study, based upon 2,143 interviews, established norms for each item on the CTS.

The goals of the present study were:

A) Gather data on domestic violence in alcoholic relationships; and B) Compare alcoholic violence to that found in normal families.

## METHOD

### Instruments

Two instruments were utilized in this study: the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) and the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), form "N". Both instruments are included in the appendix.

#### MAST

The MAST (Selzer, 1971) was chosen for this study due to its proven reliability in identifying alcoholism in clients (Gibbs, 1983; McAuley, Longabaugh, & Gross, 1978; Selzer, 1971; Skinner & Sheu, 1982). The MAST

was employed to verify that the subjects studied were actually alcoholic. The full length MAST was administered, due to its superior reliability over shortened MAST version (Zung, 1979).

Most practitioners using the MAST advocate a minimal score of either 5 or 7 points as the threshold for diagnosing alcoholism (Friedric & Loftsgard, 1978; McAuley, Longabaugh & Gross, 1978). The lowest score obtained from any subject in the present study was 14. As each subject had also completed a structured diagnostic interview and a written drinking history, this study sample can be classified as alcoholic with relative certainty, per DSM III criteria.

## CTS

The CTS-Form "N" (Straus, 1979) asks highly structured questions about behaviors perpetrated by the respondent and his/her partner during "conflicts" (spats, disputes, fights, etc.). These behaviors are then quantified for each partner, based upon the frequency of occurrence during the past year. If a person denied performing a particular behavior during the past year, they were asked if this behavior had ever occurred. In this way, the CTS measures conflict behaviors. Actual violence is measured by CTS questions K through R (see appendix). While the entire CTS was administered to each subject, for the purposes of this study only responses to questions K through R were considered in tabulating the data.

Upon inspection, the CTS appears to be a complicated instrument. Improperly supervised subjects would undoubtedly make many errors completing the form. To ensure accuracy, both the MAST and CTS were group administered, with careful instructions explaining steps in the completion of each instrument. A chalkboard

was employed for visual assistance with instructions. Any questions which arose were answered. As some subjects were unable to read well enough to complete the instruments, the researcher administered questions orally for these individuals. Using these techniques, consistently reliable results were obtained.

An added benefit of group administration was the anonymity afforded each subject. It had been anticipated that some subjects would be reluctant to admit past violence. To encourage participation, subjects were directed not to put their names on the survey. They were also advised that if they feared identification through questions about their sex or age, not to supply that information, but simply answer questions about past behaviors. Subjects were assured that no information gathered through this research would be placed in their client records.

In one final appeal for accuracy, subjects were directly asked only for honest responses. They were told that if they did not wish to answer these questions, simply to turn in their blank survey. The researcher made it clear that blank surveys were preferable to inaccurate "garbage". Only three subjects chose to turn in blank surveys. Responses gathered were judged to be accurate. Finally, the researcher (who was also a counselor at the facility) offered to discuss any personal issues or problems raised by the survey. Several subjects chose to accept this assistance.

### Subjects

The final subject pool consisted of 107 adults receiving residential treatment for alcoholism and substance abuse in Springfield, Illinois. Other data included:

### RACE

Caucasian	87%	(N= P3)
Negro	11%	(N= 12)
American Indian	2%	(N= 2)

#### SEX

Male	90%	(N= 96)
Female	10%	(N= 1)

#### AGE

Mean	31.7 years
Range	18 to 63 years

#### MAST RESULTS

Mean Score	36.7 points
Range	14 to 52 points

#### RESULTS

Upon analyzing the survey results, three distinct groups emerged. These were the Nonviolent group (N= 18), which reported no violence in past relationships; the Violence During Past Year Group (N= 59), reporting violence recently; and the Ever Only Group (N= 30), which denied recent violence but did admit to past violence.

#### Nonviolent Group

Only 18 of the 107 respondents (17%) reported never behaving violently during any relationship. Of these, 75% were male. With an average age of 31, and an average MAST score of 32.6, it would appear this group was indeed alcoholic. Despite the opportunity to behave violently in relationships, subjects in this group did not behave violently. That only 17% of the subjects in this study displayed no violence in relationships is a surprising statistic, when one considers that the

1980 study showed that 72% of normal subjects fall into the nonviolent category.

### Violence During Past Year Group

Fifty-nine (55%) of those surveyed reported being violent in a relationship during the past year. This group included 52 males (88%) and 7 females (12%). The average age of this group was 29.8 years, and their average MAST score was 3)78 points. These results are virtually identical to the age and MAST results from the Nonviolent Group. The Violence During Past Year Group reported:

CTS QUESTION	AVERAGE ACTS PER SUBJECT DURING THE PAST YEAR (N=59)
K. Threw something at the other one .....	6.5 acts (N=28)
L. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one .....	7.9 acts (N=54)
M. Slapped the other one .....	5.4 acts (N=38)
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist .....	5.1 acts (N=27)
O. Hit or tried to hit with something .....	5.7 acts (N=22)
P. Beat up the other one .....	4.1 acts (N=20)
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun .....	3.5 acts (N=18)

R. Used a knife or gun ..... 5.5 acts  
(N= 6)

Ever Only Group

Some of the subjects admitted to past violence, but had no relationships with anyone during the previous year. Reasons for this included advanced age, total preoccupation with alcohol, and incarceration. Subjects having no relationships during the past year were instructed to complete the "Ever Happened?" section of the CTS (see appendix). This section consists of yes/no responses, and therefore the number of past episodes of violence per subject cannot be quantified.

Thirty subjects (28%) fell into The Ever Only Group. Of these, 97% (29 of 30) were male. The average age for this group was 35.6 years, and their average MAST score was 38.6 points. The following represents responses from the Ever Only Group:

CTS QUESTION	PERCENTAGE OF EVER ONLY GROUP COMMITTING THIS VIOLENCE IN A RELATIONSHIP (N= 30)
K. Threw something at the other one .....	36.6% (N=11)
L. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one ...	83.3% (N=25)
M. Slapped the other one .....	70.0% (N=21)
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist .....	53.3% (N=16)
O. Hit or tried to hit with something .....	50.0% (N=15)
P. Beat up the other one ....	26.6% (N= 8)



- Q. Threatened with a knife  
or gun ..... 30.0% (N= 9)
- R. Used a knife or gun ..... 26.6% (N= 8)

### Spousal Violence

In addition to asking questions about the respondent's behavior, the CTS also seeks information about behaviors perpetrated by the significant other (boyfriend or girlfriend) or spouse. Forty-nine subjects indicated that their spouse had been violent during the previous year; this constitutes 62% of those who had a relationship during the past year. Data reported was divided into that reported by females (N= 8) and that reported by males (N= 41):

CTS Question	Females Average acts perpetrated by "husband" during previous year	Males Average acts perpetrated by "wife" during previous year
K. Threw something at the other one .....	8.8 (N= 5)	6.5 (N=22)
L. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one .....	8.8 (N= 8)	6.0 (N=33)
M. Slapped the other one....	6.6 (N= 8)	5.4 (N= 28)
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist .....	6.5 (N= 6)	5.8 (N=21)
O. Hit or tried to hit with something .....	7.0 (N= 6)	5.2 (N=23)

P. Beat up the other one .....	5.6 (N= 7)	3.3 (N=12)
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun .....	6.3 (N= 4)	2.2 (N=13)
R. Used a knife or gun .....	11.0 (N= 2)	2.3 (N= 6)

### Comparison

#### Percent Committing Specific Acts of Violence

CTS Question	National Survey Normals	Alcoholic Subjects
K. Threw something at the other one ....		
Last year	7%	26%
Ever	16%	34%
L. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one .....		
Last year	13%	50%
Ever	24%	74%
M. Slapped the other one .....		
Last year	7%	36%
Ever	18%	55%
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist .....		
Last year	5%	25%
Ever	9%	40%
O. Hit or tried to hit with something .....		
Last year	5%	25%
Ever	10%	40%

P. Beat up the other one .....		
	Last year 1.5%	19%
	Ever 5%	26%
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun .....		
	Last year 1%	17%
	Ever 4%	25%
R. Used a knife or gun .....		
	Last year .5%	6%
	Ever 3%	13%

### Comparison

#### Overall

Percent Engaging In At Least 1 Act of Violence...	During Previous Year	Ever
National Survey "Normals" (1980 Behind Closed Doors Study pages 32 to 33) N= 2143	16%	28%
Alcoholic Sample N= 107	55%	83%

### DISCUSSION

The results of this study strongly support the clinical observation that domestic violence is often present with substance abuse. When considering the data reported by this sample, one becomes amazed by the levels of violence. The major conclusion may be stated quite simply: Domestic violence in alcoholic relationships is far more prevalent, frequent, and severe than violence in nonalcoholic relationships. Interestingly, few clients ini-

tiate discussions about their violence. When asked direct questions, however, they respond with surprising honesty. While the amounts of violence surprised this researcher, these results were not totally unexpected; several counselors who are recovering alcoholics accurately predicted results of this magnitude.

A clinician should not underestimate the amount of guilt clients experience after a violent episode. This is a sensitive issue which needs to be addressed therapeutically during treatment for substance abuse. Likewise, any family reporting problems with domestic violence should be carefully assessed for substance abuse. Several excellent instruments are available to assist in this assessment, including the MAST and CTS-N.

Substance abusers need the support of significant others in order to remain abstinent; yet domestic violence forces many partners to flee the relationship. Children are also effected by these problems. Many clinicians now realize the continuing problems experienced by adult children of alcoholic parents (Ackerman, 1978; Black, 1981; Forrest, 1983; Kinney & Leaton, 1983; Woititz, 1983) In a similar manner, children witnessing domestic violence are far more likely to later imitate these violent behaviors as adolescents and adults (Livingston, 1984; Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

The basic inability to cope effectively with stress and frustration is a common dynamic in both substance abuse and domestic violence. In these cases, a therapeutic program which addresses both substance abuse and domestic violence appears highly logical. Sobriety and effective, nonviolent conflict resolution have been found to be mutually complimentary processes (Meskenas, 1983).

One must note that some people become violent after drinking, supposedly due to diminished judgement and impulse control. Others drink in order to give themselves an excuse for violent behavior. Thus, a reduction in alcohol consumption alone will not eliminate violent behaviors by these individuals (Meskenas, 1983). However, continued violence may lead to a renewal of substance abuse, to numb the ensuing guilt and confusion. To be truly effective, treatment for substance abuse and domestic violence must work in concert to break these mutually reinforcing, disasterous cycles.

### Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test

1. Do you feel you are a normal drinker? (By normal we mean you drink less than or as much as most other people).

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

2. Have you ever awakened the morning after some drinking the night before and found that you could not remember a part of the evening?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

3. Does your wife, husband, a parent, or other near relative ever worry or complain about your drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

4. Can you stop drinking without a struggle after one or two drinks?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

5. Do you feel guilty about your drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

6. Do friends or relatives think you are a normal drinker?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

7. Are you able to stop drinking when you want to?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

8. Have you ever attended a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

9. Have you gotten into physical fights when drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

10. Has your drinking ever created problems between you and your wife, husband, a parent, or other relative?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

11. Has your wife, husband (or other family member) ever gone to anyone for help about your drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

12. Have you ever lost friends because of your drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

13. Have you ever gotten into trouble at work or school because of drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

14. Have you ever lost a job because of drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

15. Have you ever neglected your obligations, your family, or your work for two or more days in a row because you were drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

16. Do you drink before noon fairly often?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

17. Have you ever been told you have liver trouble? Cirrhosis?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

18. After heavy drinking have you ever had Delirium Tremens (D.T.'s) or severe shaking, or heard voices or seen things that really weren't there?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

19. Have you ever gone to anyone for help about your drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

20. Have you ever been in a hospital because of drinking?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

21. Have you ever been a patient in a psychiatric hospital or on a psychiatric ward of a general hospital where drinking was part of the problem that resulted in hospitalization?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

22. Have you ever been seen at a psychiatric or mental health clinic or gone to any doctor, social worker or clergyman for help with any emotional problem, where drinking was part of the problem?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

23. Have you ever been arrested for drunk driving, driving while intoxicated, or driving under the influence of alcoholic beverages?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

(IF YES, How many times \_\_\_)

24. Have you ever been arrested, or taken into custody, even for a few hours, because of other drunken behavior?

yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

(IF YES, How many times \_\_\_)

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No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read a list of some things that you and your partner might have done when you had a dispute, and would first like you to tell me for each one how often you did it in the past year.

	Respondent - In Past Year						Husband/Partner In Past Year						Ever Happened						
	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 Times	6-10 Times	11-20 Times More than 20 Times	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 Times	6-10 Times	11-20 Times More than 20 Times	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know			
																	0	1	2
a. Discussed the issue calmly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
b. Got information to back up your side of things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
c. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
d. Insulted or swore at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
e. Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
f. Stomped out of the room or house (or yard)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
g. Cried	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
h. Did or said something to spite the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
i. Threatened to hit or throw some- thing at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
j. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
k. Threw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
l. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
m. Slapped the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
n. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
o. Hit or tried to hit with something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
p. Beat up the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
q. Threatened with a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
r. Used a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
s. Other (PROBE): _____	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X

And what about your (husband/partner)? Tell me how often he (ITEM) in the past year.

For each item, check either "Never" or "Don't Know" for BOTH respondent and partner.

Did you or your (husband/partner) ever (ITEM)?

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**FIGURE 1: LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT OF VOLUNTARY LEADERS AND MEMBERS BY PHASES AND ORGANIZING APPROACH**

PHASES	GRASSROOTS APPROACH		MOBILIZATION APPROACH	
	LEADERS	MEMBERS	LEADERS	MEMBERS
ISSUE SELECTION	HIGH	HIGH	LOW	LOW
STRATEGY & TACTIC SELECTION	HIGH	LOW	LOW	LOW
ACTION IMPLEMENTATION	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH

**FIGURE 2: INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF REASONS FOR PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT**

