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M. M. Brown
Texas A&M University

B. E. Aguirre
Texas A&M University

Carol Jorgensen
Phoenix House

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ABUSERS OF CLIENTS OF WOMEN'S SHELTER:
THEIR SOCIALIZATION AND RESOURCES

M. M. Brown, M.S.
Department of Sociology
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

B. E. Aguirre, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

Carol Jorgensen, M.S.W.
Phoenix House
Columbus, Ohio 43210

ABSTRACT

This is a study of men who abuse women. The respondents were residents of a shelter for battered wives during 1977-1978. The study assesses the effect of the abusers' social resources and socialization experiences on their use of violence against the respondents. Abusers with military experience and criminal records used a greater number of different types of violence against their victims than their counterparts without these socialization experiences, and the relationships are specified by the abusers' socioeconomic resources.

The number of shelters for battered women in the United States is growing. Marshal and his colleagues (1979: 14) estimate that while there were less than 10 shelters throughout the country by the end of 1974, by 1979 there were 79 shelters. Since 1979 this growth has continued, a result in part of the assistance now available to shelters from federal agencies concerned with various aspects of domestic violence (CETA, LEAA, Social Security Programs) (Kremen, 1979: 92), as well as from state and local governments and private and corporate gifts and contributions. Nevertheless, in spite of this large outlay of funds and heightened social concerns, we know very little about the abusers of battered women who come to shelters. It is the purpose of this short note to begin to study some of these men by assessing the effect of social resources and socialization experiences on their use of violence against their wives.

A number of scholars have observed that the recourse to violence in family relationships is more likely to occur when individuals are exposed to its use: socialized as to how and when violence is effective and indoctrinated with justifications for its exercise as well as sensitized to situations that are thought to demand it (Straus, 1978). Sprey, for instance, notes (1975: 66: see also

Brown, 1974: 265) that mere physical strength can be expected to be more of a resource in families in which its application to solve conflicts is not culturally prohibited than in their counterparts.

Goode (1971: see also Steinmetz and Straus, 1974) also suggests that domestic violence by men against women can be thought of as a resource whose probable use is conditioned by the extent to which other social resources—which can be conceived as "bases" for social power in families—are available. In his view, violence is least likely to occur when other resources such as occupational prestige, a steady job, education, or verbal ability are available (Goode, 1971: 26-32). From Goode's perspective we can expect greater amounts of violence when these types of resources are poorly developed or minimally present.

Some studies support Goode's ideas. Gelles (1972: 122-123) found couples where the husband was a high school dropout had the highest levels of conjugal violence compared to persons in other educational levels. Komarovsky (1967: 366) found the same group to use violence more often in situations of conjugal conflict. O'Brian (1971) concluded that husbands who were educational dropouts at any level of schooling used overt violence more often than other husbands in his sample of divorce applicants. Levinger (1966) found that almost twice as many working-class women as middle-class women indicated physical abuse as a reason for seeking a divorce.

It is the purpose of this paper to test whether or not the effect of these variables is interactive. The impact of the socialization towards violence experienced by these men—such as crime or military service—on their marital relations can be presumed to be mediated, among other things, by their social resources. Violence against their wives can be hypothesized to be more frequent as these other social resources—e.g., occupational prestige, education, work history—decline in the presence of abusers' earlier experiences with violence. Contrarywise, it may be that the effects of such socialization experiences can be neutralized at certain levels of socioeconomic wellbeing.

In view of the preceding remarks, and to test the presumed interactive effect, two hypotheses are examined in this research note: H_1 : Abusers' occupational prestige, education, and number of weeks worked during the prior year are inversely related to the number of different types of violence used by the abusers against the victims; H_2 : Abusers with military experiences and criminal records use a greater number of different types of violence against their victims than their counterparts without these experiences (and these relationships are specified by socioeconomic resources).

PROCEDURE

The respondents in this study are adult female victims of conjugal violence temporarily residing in Phoenix House, a shelter for battered women located in Columbus, Ohio. Facts about the abusers are examined with emphasis on their education (highest grade attended), occupational prestige, work experience

(number of weeks worked during the prior year) and criminal and military records. The nature of the violence between spouses during the year prior to the incident for which the women came to Phoenix House is assessed so as to study violence patterns during a relatively long period of time. The extent to which the women reportedly experienced different modes of violence—such as pushing, slapping, kicking, and choking—during this prior year form the "range of violence scale" employed in the analysis.¹

The sample is nonrandom. All residents of the shelter during late 1977 and early 1978 were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Forty-four cases filled the questionnaires in sufficient detail to be used in the analysis. Thus, tests of significance are inappropriate, and are not used in what follows. The emphasis is upon the direction and strength of association among variables as measured by Somers's D (asymmetric).

There are important similarities between the abusers in this study and the population of abusers of clients of women's shelters through the country. The respondents themselves are quite similar in important social and demographic characteristics to the national population of shelter clients (Back et al., 1979: 26-29). As is true for the country as a whole, more than half of the women and their abusers in the sample are under 30. Moreover, the majority are not well educated. Slightly less than half of the abusers do not have a high school education ($\bar{X} = 10.9$ years of school). Occupationally, as is the case nationwide for this population, the prestige score of abusers is low, with a mean prestige score of 29.2 (which corresponds, to precision machine operatives, salesmen, and wood finishers) (Harris, 1978).²

RESULTS

The first hypothesis is not supported by the results of this study. The relationships between different indicators of socioeconomic status, such as the abuser's occupational prestige, educational achievement, and the number of weeks worked the prior year and the range or variety of violence which the abusers employed against the women are so small as to be negligible (not shown). For instance, the Somers's D for the first of these zero-order relationships (with occupation) is .19—a coefficient which is, contrary to the prediction, both relatively small and positive. Similarly, the corresponding coefficients for education and number of weeks worked by the abusers the year prior to the stay of the women at the shelter are .26 and .02 respectively.

The second hypothesis, however, is partially supported by the results. Of the two zero-order relationships (of abusers's military experiences and criminal records with the variety of violence used by the abusers), the latter is sizeable (Somers's D = .43) and both are in the expected direction; those with criminal records, and to a lesser extent their counterparts with military experiences, tended to use a greater variety of violence.

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

The relationship of violence and military experience is much weaker (Somers's $D = .15$). This zero-order relationship is specified, however, by the extent of social resources available to the abusers. In support of the second hypothesis, Table 2 A, B, C, shows that abusers tended to use a greater range of violence against the women when they had, both, military experience and low levels of education, occupation and weeks worked.

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

A similar specification effect can be observed with the abusers who had a criminal record and low occupational prestige (Table 2D); they too tended to use more different types of violence against the women (Somers's $D = .64$). Contrary to the prediction, however, neither of the other two indicators of social resources (education, weeks worked the prior year) affected the zero-order relationship between the abusers's criminal records and their violence toward the women.

CONCLUSION

We need large representative random samples of the population of shelter users and their abusers to try to replicate the findings of this work that the domestic violence experienced by these women is increased by certain socialization experiences and social deprivations of their abusers. This needed research would also begin the study of a number of other issues such as family power, kin networks, and household structure which would permit the development of appropriate welfare public policies and techniques of therapeutic interventions aimed at the problems of families identified as affected by domestic violence in this segment of the population.

FOOTNOTES

¹The violence scale (CT) proposed by Murray Straus (1979) is ineffective with these data, since there are too many types of violence which are not on Straus's scale, and the ranks are disproportionately assigned. Straus's scale and the range of violence scale which is used in this report, however, are highly correlated (Somers's D = .815 for the previous year). In the range of violence scale, the number of different violent acts are ranked in five categories (0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and more than 8). The maximum number of different types of violence experienced by one of the respondents is 14. This scale measures the range of abuse, i.e. the number of different types of abuse experienced by the victim during the year prior to the final incident. A simpler frequency of violence scale is not used since it would necessitate a greater dependence on respondents' recall of their domestic violence during an extended period of time. To minimize this problem they were asked whether or not they experienced various acts of violence instead of how many times they experienced each of these acts.

²The majority of abusers who worked were employees of private businesses. Four had their own businesses and four were government employees. Eight did not work during the year preceding the incident. Indeed, eleven of the 44 abusers in this study had a disability limiting the type or amount of work they could do. A composite picture of the abuser reveals a rather poorly educated male working for a private company. He has married once, has served in the armed forces and professes a religion. 19 of the 44 abusers have a history of emotional or mental health problems; 21 have criminal records.

The battered women were asked information concerning the abusers parents but the most striking fact is the large number of women who did not know much about their abusers' past. Twenty-seven of the 44 victims did not know if the abusers' parents had been separated, 25 did not know the fathers's highest grade of education, and 24 victims were not aware of this information for the mothers of the abusers. Sixteen of the victims were not aware of their fathers-in-law's occupation. Likewise, 15 of the victims did not know their mothers-in-law's job. One woman in the sample did not know where her husband worked. A study of communication between these couples seems warranted.

Table 1. Military Experience, Criminal Records and Range of Violence

Different Types of Violence (previous year)	Military Experience		Criminal Record	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Low 0-1	1	1	2	0
2-3	2	3	0	5
4-5	3	2	1	4
6-8	7	7	5	8
High 9-14	11	6	12	4
Somers's D	.154		.429	

Cases with missing data excluded from table.

Table 2. Military Experience, Criminal Record, and Range of Violence Under Conditions of High and Low Resources

Different types of violence (previous year)	A. Education				B. Weeks Worked			
	LOW		HIGH		LOW		HIGH	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Low 0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
2-3	0	2	0	1	1	2	1	1
4-5	0	2	3	0	0	2	3	0
6-8	2	4	3	2	2	3	5	3
High 9-14	4	1	7	4	7	3	4	1
Somers's D	.73333		.03297		.48615		.04615	

Different types of violence (previous year)	C. Occupational Prestige				D. Occupational Prestige			
	LOW		HIGH		LOW		HIGH	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Low 0-1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
2-3	2	1	0	1	0	3	0	1
4-5	2	2	1	0	1	3	0	1
6-8	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	4
High 9-14	5	2	6	2	6	0	5	3
Somers's D	.21296		.1000		.63636		.26389	

Cases with missing data excluded from the table.

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