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# WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

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## NOTES ON A TYPOLOGY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: INTIMATE TERRORISM, VIOLENT RESISTENCE, AND SITUATIONAL COUPLE VIOLENCE, BY MICHAEL P. JOHNSON 2008)

Identifies three types of intimate partner violence:

1. Intimate terrorism: violence deployed in service of general control over partner
2. Situational couple violence: either or both partners may be violent in response to specific situations, but neither uses violence in attempt to exert general control.
3. Violent resistance: Resistor's violence arises in reaction to partner's violence and control.

### Intimate Terrorism

Focused on *coercive control*: "getting someone to do something they do not want to do by using or threatening negative consequences for noncompliance." "Effective coercive control requires a second element: the perpetrator must make it clear that he or she is willing and able to impose punishment 'if necessary'" through threats and intimidation. Intimidation often does not involve a direct threat, but rather "a display of the capacity to do damage."

Requires surveillance.

Undermining both will and ability to resist, by blaming, criticizing, demeaning, and also by reducing available resources such as money and social support.

"This powerful combination of violence with a general pattern of control is terrorizing because once a controlling partner has been violent, all of his other controlling actions take on the threat of violence."

Violence tends to escalate, becoming more frequent and severe over time, but there is significant variability in this group, ranging from rare physical violence to frequent.

### *Two types of intimate terrorists*

In general "they are men who are generally accepting of violence, impulsive, hostile toward women, and traditional in their sex role attitudes.

*Subtype I: Dependent intimate terrorists*: Emotionally dependent on partners, jealous, obsessed with partners, desperate to maintain relationship. Not particularly violent toward other people. Need to control partner arises out of their emotional obsession. *Pitbulls*.

*Subtype II: Antisocial intimate terrorists:* “These are men who control their partners not because they are emotionally obsessed, but simply because they will have their own way, by any means necessary, at home and elsewhere.” Likely to be violent toward others too. Inwardly calm and calculating, but may put on show of extreme emotion. *Cobras*.

### *Risk factors*

-Strong negative correlation with education.

-Positive correlation with number of children, perhaps because of association with traditional attitudes toward sex roles.

-No correlation with income or race.

### *Measuring coercive control*

The following 7 questions are widely used in research to assess coercive control:

*Thinking about your current [husband/wife/partner, etc.], would you say that s/he . . .*

- 1. tries to limit your contact with family and friends?*
- 2. is jealous or possessive?*
- 3. insists on knowing who you are with at all times?*
- 4. calls you names or puts you down in front of others?*
- 5. makes you feel inadequate?*
- 6. shouts or swears at you?*
- 7. prevents you from knowing about or having access to the family income even when you ask?*

### *Situational Couple Violence*

By far the most common type of intimate partner violence, involving approximately equal male and female offenders. But note: male offenders are more likely than female offenders to engage in more frequent violence and to inflict more serious injury, causing partners to experience more negative consequences of violence.

Violence is usually not central aspect of relationship. Reported satisfaction with relationship is often high. Common for there to have been few violent incidents over course of relationship, sometimes only one. But violence in this subtype is variable, with some couples engaging in frequent violence and/or violence causing serious injury or death. Special sub-group may be high-conflict but have no history of violence prior to separation.

These relationships are characterized by conflict, rather than coercive control.

More common in unmarried couples.

### *Risk factors*

- Strong correlation with income and unemployment.
- No correlation with number of children, but high correlation with frequency of conflict about children.
- Argumentative skill deficiency. (My paraphrase: they don't know how to fight.)

*"[T]he personality characteristics that distinguish intimate terrorists from other men (such as hostility toward women, impulsivity, antisociality, fear of abandonment, depression, and passive-aggressiveness) are not characteristic of men involved in situation couple violence. In fact, on a whole range of psychological measures they do not differ at all from nonviolent men."*

*Intimate terrorism is distinguishable from situational couple violence by the pattern of coercive control which is central to the former.*

### *Violent Resistance in Response to Intimate Terrorist*

Most violent resistance "takes place as an immediate reaction to an assault, and ... is intended primarily to protect oneself from injury." Generally short-lived and, according to one study, doubles risk of injury to woman.

*"This is violence in the context of what began as, and may still be, a loving and committed relationship. It is not surprising . . . that most women do not simply pack up and leave after the first violent incident. They turn first to any of a variety of strategies for eliminating the violence, including confronting the partner and reasoning with him or otherwise challenging him, trying to accommodate him by changing their own behavior to avoid situations that seem to set him off, enlisting friends and relatives to persuade him to change his ways, seeking help from clergy or other professionals, or involving the police and/or the courts."*

Four stages:

1. Ardor
2. Accommodation
3. Ambivalence
4. Terror

Most women involved in intimate terrorist relationship do eventually leave, but process is often slow, involving multiple attempts.

One study compared women who killed their abusive partner to abused women who did not and found *little about the women* distinguishing them from their non-lethal counterparts. "What distinguished the two groups was to be found in the behavior of the abuser. Women who killed their abusers were more likely to have experienced frequent attacks, severe injuries, sexual abuse, and death threats against themselves or others." These women were, however, more

likely to have considered or attempted suicide. Most of these homicides took place in midst of violent or threatening incident.

Good news: 71% decline between 1976 and 2004.

## NOTES ON PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

### Reabuse

"[A] hard core of a third of abusers will reabuse in the short run and more will reabuse in the longer run."  
Colorado study: 60% re-arrested within 5 years.

Of those who reabuse, most do so quickly. Substantial number re-offend prior to final disposition of pending charges. In study of batterers referred to batterers programs, 44% of those who reabused did so within 3 months, 66% within 6 months. Men in the 44% group "were more likely to repeatedly reassault their partners than men who reassaulted after more than 3 months.

Males are more likely than females to reabuse, and younger men are more likely than older defendants.

Just one prior arrest for any crime is significantly correlated with reabuse. One study found DV defendants with one prior arrest were 7 times more likely to be rearrested for subsequent DV offense.

Length of prior record is significant.

"Having a pending warrant at time of DV incident for a prior non-domestic offense was a better predictor of reabuse than a prior DV record alone."

Suspects who leave the scene prior to arrival of police twice as likely to reabuse as those who wait for police to arrive.

Substance abuse is well-established risk factor, and significant number of offenders are under the influence at time of incident.

Other risk factors: unemployed, firearms in household, children in household and defendant not the father.

Not associated with reabuse: Seriousness of presenting incident, whether personal injuries involved, specific victim characteristics.

Arrest, whether for violation of DVPO or other DV act is one of strongest deterrents to reabuse, as is other LEO involvement indicating report is taken seriously. In one study, highest reabuse rates were found when responding officer "left it to the victim to . . . swear out a complaint herself."

### Risk factors for lethality



Guns

"Other lethality markers that multiply the odds of homicide five times or more over non-fatal abuse have been found in a national study to include: a) threats to kills (14.9); b) prior attempts to strangle (9.9);

forced sex (7.6); escalating physical violence severity over time (5.2); and e) partner control over the victim's daily activities (5.1).

### Determining primary aggressor

A substantial number of female victims fight back at some point in the relationship, although that generally increases violent behavior by abuser, and victims often do not disclose their behavior. NC study found that 41% of males identified as DV victims who were involved in subsequent DV incidents over next two years were identified as abusers in those incidents. Significant number of male homicide DV victims were previously identified as abusers of their eventual killers.

### Are victims good predictors?

"Women who felt very safe were less likely to be repeatedly reassaulted than those that felt somewhat safe. But women who were uncertain or felt somewhat unsafe were more likely to be reassaulted repeatedly than those who felt in much danger. The reason for this apparent contradiction is that women who felt in greatest danger took effective counter measures during the study." My paraphrase: when they're wrong, they err by underestimating risk.

But note: women's expressed preferences for disposition were not accurate predictors of reabuse.

Number 1 reason women oppose prosecution: fear. Research does not clearly demonstrate prosecution increases likelihood of reabuse, but it consistently indicates it doesn't necessarily deter it.

Victims who leave are at equal or greater risk of reabuse than those who stay.

### DVPO's

Population does not differ significantly from criminal defendants. (Maybe because citizens often learn of DVPO from LEOs responding to DV call.)

Very seldom sought after first DV incident, but rather after victims attempt other solutions: prior DV calls to law enforcement, counseling, hotline, shelter, leaving. Precipitating incident often not most severe, but does usually involve physical abuse. Many petitioners have been abused for number of years.

Whether DVPOs "work" appears to be a complicated question, with research indicating that it depends on a number of factors. That is, they work well for some types of offenders, and some restrictions seem more effective than others. For example, orders that bar all contact work better than those that bar only abusive contact. Research shows that victims largely express satisfaction with orders, even when they're violated. DVPOs do have the advantage of increasing LEO ability to respond to abusive behavior.