
Paper Session SP-1
Saturday, July 29, 2006



Common Couples Violence versus Gender-Specific Violence: Understanding Dyadic Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence in Early Marriage

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While several studies have examined the frequency of intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration by husbands and wives, some theory and very little research has focused on the dyadic interaction of IPV. This study attempted to classify the dyadic interaction patterns of IPV in an empirical, yet meaningful way, and to examine how these groups differ in regards to IPV and relationship satisfaction over time.

Couples (N=567) were assessed at the time of marriage, and again at their first and second anniversaries. Husbands and wives completed measures of IPV and relationship functioning. Based on the frequency of physical violence, 4 groups were created: no violence (NV), both equally violent (BV), husband more violent (HV), and wife more violent (WV). For one partner to be considered more violent, there had to be at least 2 more incidents of violence over the past 6 months by that partner than the other.

Fifty-five percent of the couples were classified as NV, 11% as BV, 10% as HV, and 24% as WV. These classifications were fairly stable over time, although there was a trend for some HV to shift toward a BV classification. Overall, the BV couples tended to use less IPV, maintain stable frequency over time, and inflict less injury than the HV and WV couples. Wives who were victims in HV couples experienced more violence and injury than husbands who were victims in WV couples. For HV and WV couples, IPV by the primary aggressor tended to decrease over time. Relationship satisfaction was significantly higher in NV couples than all others, and declined over the first year of marriage for all groups. These results suggest that gender-specific violence by either husbands or wives is associated with potentially injurious outcomes, but that the potential is somewhat higher for wives in husband violent couples.

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