The Truth About Domestic Violence: A Falsely Framed Issue

A S. McNEELY AND JONES noted in 1974, the prevalence of physical abuse of women by their male intimates has resulted in the classification of woman-battering as a severe social problem. Feminists have made efforts to heighten public awareness of violence against women and have successfully escalated media coverage of the subject and introduced psychotherapeutic abuse coverage of the subject and introduced and have successfully abusive men. Pizzey's seminal book raised accurately depict the phenomenon. The Feminists have made efforts to heighten numerous federal and state bills to provide women with increased legal protection from public awareness of violence against women questions men? men, exclusively or nearly exclusively, are acting on underlying perpetrate domestic assaults. Thus, the public, legislators, change agents, and other activists are acting on underlying assumptions that may be false or, at best, not fully reflective of domestic violence. Policies, then, are being built on an erroneous vision of physical abuse. Accounts of domestic violence reinforce the dominant view by excluding virtually any reference to the pervasiveness of violence in American families and, almost invariably, by ignoring male victimization. Steinmetz notes that "husband abuse is not uncommon, although many tend to ignore it, dismiss it or treat it with 'selective inattention.'" 1

This article surveys domestic violence investigations, compares those revealing high abuse for both sexes with contradicting investigations that yield findings more consistent with the popular view of domestic violence, and considers briefly some of the implications of the inaccurate view of the problem. The authors examine whether psychotherapeutic treatment of male assailants is a sound response to the social problem of domestic violence and whether some legal actions designed to protect the rights of women contribute to men's social and legal defenselessness.

R. L. McNeely
Gloria Robinson-Simpson

Domestic violence has received increasing attention during the past decade; attention that has framed the violence as essentially a masculine form of assaultive behavior. This article presents the results of empirical studies that contradict the popular conception. The authors suggest that the popular view has contributed to men's increasing legal and social defenselessness. The appropriateness of psychotherapeutic approaches to the problem is discussed briefly.

INVESTIGATIONS OF SPouse Abuse

In 1977, Steinmetz studied conflict tactics used in 57 families selected by a public opinion polling firm. The study group included families from a broad range of socioeconomic status categories and age groups. She found that 93 percent of the families used verbal aggression, and 60 percent had used physical aggression at least once to resolve marital conflicts. Thirty-nine percent of husbands and 37 percent of wives had thrown things. 20 percent of both husbands and wives had struck their spouses with their hands, and 10 percent of both husbands and wives had hit their spouses with a hard object. Steinmetz observed that there were few differences between husbands and wives in the type and frequency of physical aggression and that many families experienced reciprocal aggression. Steinmetz also noted that women were as likely as men to select and initiate physical violence to resolve marital conflicts and that men and women had similar intentions when using physical violence, although men were somewhat more likely to cause greater injury, perhaps because of their superior physical strength. Pointing out that an equal number of wives and husbands kill their spouses— a pattern that has been stable over time— Steinmetz observed that when weapons neutralize differences in physical strength, about as many men as women are victims of homicide. In supporting her assertion that women are equally likely to engage in violence, Steinmetz noted that women are more likely than men to physically abuse children, and that throughout history women have been the primary perpetrators of infanticide. 2 In fact Steinmetz found that mothers abused children 62 percent more often than fathers, and that male children were more than twice as likely to suffer physical injury. Men were underrepresented in the Steinmetz study because a greater percentage of husbands than wives chose not to participate in the oral interview (as opposed to the structured questionnaire) portion of the study. Apparently, men were less likely to discuss their victimization if required to do so in face-to-face interaction.

Nissoff and Bitman conducted a telephone survey in which subjects were asked to report on incidents of violence with current and former spouses. Of the former intimates. 3 Because divorced individuals would be surveyed, the researchers presumed that the investigation would reveal high marital violence rates. Whereas 15.5 percent of the men and 11.3 percent of the women reported having hit a spouse, 18.6 percent of the men and only 12.7 percent of the women reported having been struck by a spouse. Thus, although a higher percentage of men than women
reported having hit a spouse, a higher percentage of men reported having been hit by a spouse. The investigators found no differences between the sexes in the frequency or severity of spousal violence. The investigators concluded that "As predicted, wives reported hitting their husbands almost as frequently as husbands reported hitting wives, and a higher proportion of men reported having been hit by their wives than vice versa—men often are the victims of spousal violence."16

**Time Periods Compared**

Gelles’s 1974 study was the first to examine a group of families who had no known history of abuse, and thus it provided some data on the incidence of family violence in the general population. He found that 2.5 percent of the wives had been victimized between two and five times during the course of marriage, and 12.5 percent of the husbands had been so victimized. Five percent of both husbands and wives had been victimized as often as once every two months, and 7.5 percent of the wives and 2.5 percent of the husbands were victimized at least once per month; some were assaulted daily. Gelles concluded that "Although the wives were less violent than their husbands, they were far from passive."18

In 1986, Straus and Gelles published the findings of a nationally representative survey that replicated Straus’s earlier study. A primary research objective was to compare domestic violence rates for two time periods.9 The study revealed that the incidence of violence against females decreased between 1975 and 1985. About 12.1 percent of all women reported at least one violent incident in 1975, whereas 11.3 percent reported being victimized in 1985. Reports of severe violence dropped from 3.8 percent in 1975 to 3.0 percent in 1985.

The investigators noted that this represents a 26.6 percent decrease in the rate of severe violence men committed against women.10 Violence against men, however, increased: 11.6 percent reported victimizations in 1975, compared with 12.1 percent in 1985. The rate of severely violent incidents men reported dropped slightly from 4.6 percent to 4.4 percent.

Straus and Gelles’s data demonstrate that women are as violent, if not more violent than men.11 Women also appear to use weapons far more often than men, which the authors suggest is explained by the greater average size and strength of men. In 1975, 22.2 percent of the respondents reported men using objects to strike women, and 17.7 percent reported it in 1985. No change was reported for women.

3.0 percent used objects in both 1975 and 1985. Also, unlike 1975 when males were more likely actually to use a gun or a knife, no differences were observed in 1985. When 2.7 percent of both men and women used at least one of these weapons against their intimates, no changes were observed in the percentage of those threatening to use a gun or a knife: 4.0 percent of men made these threats in 1975 and 1985 and 6.0 percent of women threatened use of a gun or knife in 1975 and 1985.

Discussing the decrease in violence against women and the increase in violence against men, Straus and Gelles commented:

"Violence by wives has not been an object of public concern. There has been no publicity, and no funds have been invested in ameliorating this problem because it has not been defined as a problem. In fact, our 1975 study was criticized for presenting statistics on violence by wives. Our 1985 finding of little change in the rate of assaults by women on their male partners is consistent with the absence of ameliorative programs.12"

**Degrees of Violence**

Straus conducted the first study of domestic violence using a demographically representative national sample.13 Noting that "wife beating" is a political rather than a scientific term, Straus developed an ascending continuum (the Conflict Tactics Scale) of violent acts that included (1) throwing things at spouse; (2) pushing, shoving, or grabbing; (3) slapping; (4) kicking, biting, or hitting with the fist; (5) hitting or trying to hit with something; (6) beating up; (7) threatening with a knife or gun; and (8) using a knife or a gun. Items 1 through 8 were termed a "Violence Index."14 Items 4 through 8 constituted a "Severe Violence Index." Data were obtained to reflect the yearly incidence of violence perpetrated by men and women.

Findings indicated that in a given year men perpetrated a median of 2.5 assaults (items 1–8) a year and women perpetrated a median of 3.0 assaults (items 1–8) a year. Using means rather than medians to assess central tendencies reveals that men engaged in an average of 8.8 assaults a year and women engaged in 10.1 assaults a year. Because means are more sensitive than medians to extreme scores (scores of those who engaged in many violent acts per year), the latter figures reflect more accurately the total amount of violence occurring, and the medians reflect more accurately the normative rates of violence.

Women also engaged more often than men in severe violence as measured by items 4–8. Men perpetrated a median of 2.4 acts of severe violence per year, whereas women committed a median of 3.0 acts of severe violence against male intimates. The mean severity rate for men was 8.0 acts per year; however, women committed 8.9 acts of severe violence. Men and women also engaged in different types of severe violence: men more frequently kicked, bit, or hit male intimates with their fists, whereas women more often hit or tried to hit men with objects, and more women than men threatened to use knives or guns. However, men were slightly more likely actually to use a gun or a knife, and men beat up women more often than women beat up men. Men were found to beat up women an average (median) of 1.7 times a year, whereas women beat up men an average (median) of 1.4 times a year. When all severely violent acts were examined, the data indicated that women as a group were more violent to their male partners, and more men than women were victimized. Applying the results of the study to the total U.S. population, Straus posited that about 1.8 million females are victims of severe violence each year and about 2.1 million males are victimized. Although the data do not indicate what proportion of the violent acts by women were in response to violent acts by men, the fact that women had higher mean and median rates for severe violence suggests that female aggression is not merely a response to male aggression.

In fact, the study probably underestimates the true extent of domestic violence because divorced and separated couples, who are likely to have experienced violence, were not represented. Straus noted that women are no more likely than men to reject physical force on moral grounds and stated that "The old cartoons of the wife chasing the husband with a rolling pin or throwing pots and pans are closer to reality than most—and especially those with feminist sympathies—realize."14

**National Crime Survey**

The National Crime Survey (NCS)15 defines spouse abuse as "Assault without theft in which the offender was the victim's spouse or ex-spouse." Consequently, cohabiting couples and incidents involving theft are excluded. NCS does not focus specifically on domestic violence, and no interviewing techniques sensitive to the difficulties of obtaining domestic violence data are used. In fact, spouses of victims may be present when NCS interviews are conducted. The result is estimates of domestic violence that are significantly lower than those found in other studies, and the
Bureau of Census notes that assaults by relatives are the most underreported of all types of victimization NCS investigators. According to NCS data, annualized for the years 1973, 1974, and 1975, Gaggin reports that fewer than 1 percent of both women (3.9 per 1,000 persons) and men (0.3 per 1,000 persons) are victimized by spouses or ex-spouses.

McLeod examined 6,200 cases of domestic assault that were reported to law enforcement authorities or to NCS interviewers to determine whether or not females sustained greater injuries than males when victimized. Men comprised 6 percent of all self-reported spousal assault victims in her study, a figure that is considerably higher than that reported by Gaggin, who also used NCS data in her analysis of domestic violence. McLeod's survey, unlike those of Steinmetz, Straus, and Nisonoff and Bitman, disproportionately sampled black people, who, when aggregated, were decidedly below the national average for income. Seventy-seven percent of all male victims in McLeod's study were black men, which introduces further questions about the extent to which her findings can be applied to the general population.

Whereas a weapon was used in about 25 percent of all cases in which women were victims, 82 percent of all victimizations of men involved weapons. McLeod suggests that the data underrepresent weaponless assaults, because victims are less likely to report these incidents to the police. Although 25 percent of all offenses against women were classified as aggravated assaults, about 80 percent of all offenses against men were classified as aggravated assaults. Twenty-two percent of the weapons used in the latter cases involved the use of weapons. In fact, none of the men reported a serious victimization in which no weapon was present.

In noting that 73 percent of male victims known to the police and 77 percent of those reported to the NCS sustained injuries, McLeod estimates that corresponding figures for female victims are between 52 percent and 57 percent.

McLeod concluded that clearly, violence against men is much more destructive than violence against women. Male victims are injured more often and more seriously than are female victims. The data do provide rather strong support for the view that violence against men and violence against women are independent events. Overall differences in weapon use, weapon choice, offense severity, and injury are evident.

RESEARCH FLAWS AND COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Data from the studies reviewed here present a view of domestic violence at odds with common assumptions about the nature of the problem. Surveys that show higher rates of men as aggressors invariably are based on NCS data or official law enforcement records, but the researchers point out that these studies are flawed methodologically because the samples are not representative and because men are less likely to lodge official victimization reports. Nonetheless, two of the three studies reviewed that used data from NCS and other official sources found that victimized men are abused more often, are more severely injured, or both.

Another problem with much of the domestic violence literature is that it is based on clinical populations, specifically battered women receiving shelter services or therapy. Data collected and conclusions drawn from those who seek shelter or therapy cannot be generalized to the broader population. Victims who seek services may differ significantly from the broader population, so the value of these studies lies primarily in spawning clinical prescriptions for treatment, not in describing or explaining domestic violence in general.

An unquestioned belief about human behavior is that men are more aggressive than women. Yet when Frodl, Robert, and Macaulay surveyed the empirical literature on aggression, they found that 61 percent of all studies reviewed did not show men to be more aggressive than women, and that "...women did not show consistently lower tendencies than men to be physically aggressive." In fact, Frodl and her colleagues reviewed studies examining nondomestic aggression, a sphere in which women are assumed commonly to be even more timid than in family, cohabitation, or dating relationships.

There are other common misconceptions. Most people accept the assumption that wives, particularly low-income wives, cannot escape abusive relationships because of financial dependence. Their entrapment is used to explain the desperation of those who resort to spousal killings. However, examinations of female spouse abuse victims reveal that low-income women are more likely than affluent women to leave romantic arrangements involving spouse abuse. Also, Steinmetz's study of battered males showed that men stay in violent homes for some of the same reasons women remain in abusive situations. In particular, men often become the targets of abuse when they step in to protect children being abused, and because women usually become the custodial parent upon divorce, many men are afraid to leave for fear of further violence directed at their children. Steinmetz adds:

It is always assumed that the husband's greater economic resources could allow him to more easily leave a disruptive marital situation. Not only do men tend to have jobs which provide them with an adequate income, but they have greater access to credit and are not tied to the home because of children. This perspective rests on erroneous sexist assumptions. Although males, as a group, have considerably more economic security, if the husband leaves the family, he is still responsible for a certain amount of economic support of the family in addition to the cost of a separate residence for himself. Thus, the loss in standard of living is certainly a consideration for any husband who is contemplating a separation... Interviews with abused men suggest that leaving the family home means leaving...the comfortable and familiar, that which is not likely to be reconstructed in a small apartment.

Another common misconception is that black men treat women more violently than do white men. Even Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, whose survey is the most comprehensive and methodologically sound of all domestic violence investigations, contributed to this misconception. Reporting in 1980 that wife abuse was 400 percent greater among black couples than white couples, they failed, as have the investigators of nearly every other domestic violence survey, to take into account that social class differences between the races, rather than race itself, may explain discrepant rates. However, in the one study published thus far that was designed specifically to examine the convergence of race and class in explaining domestic violence rates, Lockhart found virtually no difference between the races. Although a higher percentage of black women reported at least one victimization event, the median rate of violent episodes experienced by middle-class white women was somewhat higher than that experienced by middle-class black women.

CONSEQUENCES OF MISCONCEPTIONS

The danger of these misconceptions is that social policy, legislation, and the attitudes of officials and the public are being shaped by erroneous information. For example, the
Notes and References


8. Ibid., p. 52.


10. Ibid., p. 470.


16. NCS surveys 60,000 households every six months for three and one-half years. The data include all victimizations that subjects have reported to the police as well as those not reported: consequently, the data reflect some victimizations not recorded in official police statistics.


22. Ibid., p. 647.

23. Ibid., p. 649.

24. Ibid., p. 641.

25. Ibid., p. 347.


27. Ibid.


30. The California penal code contains an example of legislators' misunderstanding of domestic violence. Although California's domestic abuse legislation includes both male and female victims of spousal assault, the pertinent section is titled "Woman Beating,273.5.P.C.," thus ignoring the fact that men, too, may be victimized.

Further, a recent survey of spouse abuse in 14 southern California cities defined spousal assault as "... situations in which women were battered/beaten/assaulted/abused..." thus ignoring men and contributing to the


35. One study found that 83 percent of 502 subjects participating in a telephone survey believed that males who engage in domestic violence must be psychologically or emotionally disturbed (Pennell et al., Evaluation of Domestic Violence in the San Diego Region, p. 12).


33. Steinmetz, "The Battered Husband Syndrome." Also, these remarks do not deny the fact that spousal violence has been present in the histories of some women convicted of killing husbands. Indeed, McCormick found in her study group of 132 women incarcerated for spouse killings that 40 percent reported being subjected to chronic physical abuse (C. McCormick, Battered Women, the Last Resort [Monograph] [Chicago, Ill.: Cook County Department of Corrections, 1976]). The issue is whether or not being the victim of past batterings, even if there is anticipation of future abuse, justifies a plea of self-defense when there is no imminent danger. The most recent data, annualized for 1979-84, indicate that husbands constitute 3.7 percent, and wives constitute 4.9 percent, of all victims of murder or nonnegligent manslaughter; boyfriends constitute 1.4 percent and girlfriends constitute 2.0 percent. When the actual number of victims is computed and annualized, about 14 percent more females than males were slain by their intimates during this period (U.S. Department of Justice, Uniform Crime Reports: Crime in the United States [1980-1985, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office]).


46. Pennell et al., Evaluation of Domestic Violence in the San Diego Region.


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Other "Truths" about Domestic Violence: A Reply to McNeely and Robinson-Simpson

Daniel G. Saunders

Whenever I read in a professional journal that someone has found the Truth about a problem I wonder if more heat than light is being generated. An example is "The Truth about Domestic Violence: A Falsely Framed Issue." 1 The authors, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, claim that the problem of domestic violence has been presented falsely as a problem of men's violence against women. They believe that male victimization has been ignored, that the public, legislators, and change agents are acting on a faulty assumption, and that legal action to protect the rights of women may lead to men's "social and legal defenselessness." 2

As with most social problems, the truth about domestic violence is far more elusive than McNeely and Robinson-Simpson would like us to think. In fact, they may have led social workers further from the truth by failing to mention important limitations of the research they cite, ignoring evidence that counters the research, and relying heavily on conjecture, opinion, and anecdotal evidence. Existing evidence shows that women are abused to a greater extent than men and thus our priorities for services and legislation have been placed properly. Especially disturbing is the conclusions made by McNeely and Robinson-Simpson may be used to block services for battered women, deny them their rights, and suggest types of intervention that may increase their risk of victimization. The question of whether husband abuse is a significant problem is profoundly important to the social work profession because social workers have been involved in developing services and policies aimed at halting domestic violence.

Women's Right to Defense

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson cite several representatives, community, and national surveys and one crime victimization survey to show that rates of violence by husbands and wives are about equal; more selective surveys of help-seeking battered women show similar results. 3 However, to call the violence by women "abusive" is to miss the mark. The authors fail to cite evidence that most of the wives' violence is in self-defense and that size and strength differences mean the women will be the most victimized. 4

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson make the same mistake as Steinmetz in citing statistics on the equal rates of spousal homicides by husbands and wives without reporting the rates at which the homicides were in response to violence. Wolfgang's study, which showed equal rates of homicide for husbands and wives, also showed that in 50 percent of the cases in which wives killed husbands, the women were responding to violence. In only 9 percent of the cases in which husbands killed wives were the men reacting to the wives' violence. Although a justifiable self-defense motive was not established firmly in the study, Wolfgang concludes that "we are left with the undeniable fact that husbands more often than wives are major precipitating factors in their own homicide deaths." 5 Indirect evidence for self-defense comes from a study of women who had been in both a violent and a nonviolent relationship: 23 percent used violence occasionally when in a relationship with a violent man whereas only 4 percent did so in a nonviolent relationship. 6

A study by this author of battered women at five shelters and a family service agency showed that most of the women had used violence, but largely for self-defense. 7 Of the women who used severe violence, 71 percent used it exclusively to defend themselves against their partner's aggression, which they often defined as "fighting back." The women's reports on their motives for violence were not correlated with a measure of social desirability response bias. 8

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson rely heavily on the early work of Steinmetz but do not reveal the flaws in her data presentation and conclusions. Some researchers have called her work on battered husbands "the battered data syndrome." 9 For example, Steinmetz left out the most serious forms of violence from her initial report; a subsequent report revealed that four wives and none of the husbands in 54 marriages suffered severe and repetitive beatings. 10

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson also were selective in the data they presented. They left out the category of Steinmetz's original study—"pushing, shoving, grabbing"—that showed much higher rates for husbands. Contrary to the claims of McNeely and Robinson-Simpson and of Steinmetz herself, nowhere does Steinmetz measure who initiated physical aggression or what their motives were for being aggressive. All of the studies cited in the article suffer from the same inadequacy, yet McNeely and Robinson-Simpson apply the term "victim" to men unequivocally and use the phrase "reciprocal violence," which implies that the violence is equal in purpose and effect.

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson also report selectively from other studies. For example, two of the frequency categories in the Gelles study, both of which showed higher frequencies for husbands, were not reported. 9 The authors do not mention that the increases and decreases in marital violence rates between the 1975 and 1985 national family violence studies are not statistically significant. 10 The false conclusion is that violence against husbands is increasing and violence against wives is decreasing. The authors quote Straus and Gelles to explain that continued violence against husbands is probably from a lack of public concern and ameliorative programs for the problem of women's violence. Yet something is being done: If current findings on women's self-defense are generalizable, then efforts to stop men's violence and to offer women alternatives to a violent home will decrease violence against men.

Consequences of Physical Differences

The generally greater size and strength of men means that women are likely to suffer greater injuries and, if they are to repel an attack, to be required to use a more severe form of violence. McNeely and Robinson-Simpson play down Steinmetz's statements that physical differences lead to greater injury to women by saying that "men were somewhat more likely to cause greater injury." 11 Steinmetz actually makes stronger statements about the greater harm to women:

When the wife slaps her husband, her lack of physical strength, plus his ability to restrain her, reduces the physical damage to a minimum. When the husband slaps his wife, however, his strength, plus her...
having all cases are more likely to or knife or gun was higher in rates the ratio of men to women having a knife percent com time for hospitalization rates of serious assault were most similar to produces very different The same assumption applied to the gang's homicide cases, then only a small percentage of the men were seriously injured unless a weapon (gun or knife) had been used against them. In reporting on the Straus and Gelles study, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson claim that women used "weapons" more often but place "hitting, or trying to hit with something" in the same category as the "use of a knife or gun." Given size and strength differences, hitting with an object constitutes different "weapons" for men and women. Therefore, the Conflict Tactics (CT) scale and other measures of marital violence are not balanced for gender differences. Simply reporting men's and women's rates for each item or assigning categories of "severe" and "nonsevere" can be highly misleading.

Applying the theory of defensive violence to the National Crime Survey (NCS) data produces very different conclusions. If the cases of serious assault were most similar to Wolf gang's homicide cases, then only a small percentage of the men used violence defensively compared with the majority of women. The same assumption applied to the NCS data shows an estimated 74 percent of the serious assaults by women to be in response to attacks by their partners. McLeod's finding that men were more likely to be injured was the result of the use of weapons, and such cases are more likely to be reported in the type of crime study she conducted. Although the proportion of incidents of women using a knife or gun was higher in the NCS study (34 percent compared with 22 percent), given the one to 13 ratio of male to female victimization rates the ratio of men to women having a knife or gun used against them still is skewed (one man to eight women). McNeely and Rob inson-Simpson do not reveal that 88 percent of the men's injuries were minor; 17 percent of the men needed some medical attention compared with 24 percent of the women (an overall male–female ratio of one to 18). The ratio for hospitalization rates is even more lopsided—one man was hospitalized for every 46 women. Thus, although the proportion of men having injuries is higher, the representative

NCS study indicates that women suffer more serious injuries.

McLeod's conclusion that the profiles of weapon use and injury are different for men and women is consistent with the theory of defensive violence. Her statement that violence against men and violence against women are independent events does not mean that the violence of one person is not in reaction to the violence of another, only that women used weapons more often than men and that as a result men were more likely to be injured.

Most studies of domestic violence fail to ask about the motives for and consequences of violence. The issue is not whether women have the capacity to be aggressive but whether they are abusive in their aggression, using it for coercion, domination, or the expression of anger and not for self-protection or the protection of others.

Research Flaws and Misconceptions

In trying to correct what they see as an imbalance in the domestic violence literature, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson describe what they perceive as a number of "research flaws and common misconceptions." They also draw on literature from outside the realm of domestic violence.

Who Is More Aggressive?

To show that women are as aggressive as men, they cite a review by Frodi, Macaulay, and Thorne. However, the review also contains some important qualifying statements. First, none of the studies was of people who were given the option of truly violent, hurtful behavior. Second, although women in the experiments did not differ from men in their overall rates of applying the experimental aggression (shock or annoying noise), in many situations the women avoided acting aggressively because of anxiety or guilt about being aggressive. Third, one factor that brought women's aggression up to the rate of male aggression was situations in which the justification for aggression was socially approved.

Child Abuse

To bolster the point that women are as aggressive or more aggressive than men, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson cite Steinmetz, who says that women are more likely to abuse children. However, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson do not add that Steinmetz also points out that women spend more time with children and are usually the parent in single-parent homes, which are prone to increased levels of stress. When official reports of abuse were analyzed in a study by the American Humane Society and the study contained controls for "time at risk," 76 percent of the abusers were fathers. In the first national study of family violence by Gelles, the difference between fathers and mothers was not very great and fathers used more serious forms of violence.

Underreported Victimization

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson also follow Steinmetz in claiming that the problem of husband abuse has been ignored because men are less likely to admit to their victimization. However, the evidence contradicts this claim. In the NCS data, the differences are not substantial, with 54 percent of the women and 45 percent of the men stating that they reported their victimization to the police. One reason that some men may be reluctant to report all but the most severe violence against them is that they fear being arrested for just having attacked their partners. McNeely and Robinson-Simpson speculate that only a few men in the Steinmetz study participated in the face-to-face interview because they were reluctant to discuss their victimization, but Steinmetz gives other reasons—the time did not seem convenient for the husbands or they saw the research on families as the wives' obligation.

The first national study of family violence by Straus and the community survey by Nisonoff and Bitman suggest that men are more willing than women to admit being subject to violence. In both of these random surveys, the proportion of men who admitted being subject to violence was higher than the proportion of women who admitted being aggressive toward their partners. Underreporting by women appeared to occur in the community survey but not in the national study. Gelles speculated that "There are a number of possible reasons for these discrepancies, but one is that men, being in a superior position in the family and society, are perhaps less humiliated by being hit and are more likely to admit it than their wives."

Battered Women's Reasons for Staying

Most researchers, including Straus, list women's economic entrapment in intimate relationships as one of the reasons to aid battered women more than abused men. McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, in contrast, state that "examinations of female spouse abuse victims reveal that low-income women are more likely than affluent women to leave." This statement is based on Steinmetz's distortions...