

RESEARCH INTO VIOLENT BEHAVIOR:  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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OVERLOOKED ASPECTS OF FAMILY  
VIOLENCE: BATTERED HUSBANDS,  
BATTERED SIBLINGS AND BATTERED  
ELDERLY

Suzanne K. Steinmetz, Ph.D.  
Individual & Family Studies  
University of Delaware  
Newark, DE 19711

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Technology  
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On October 3, 1977, NASA launched another satellite. The announcer, looking at the computer readout reported that the launch was successful. Those of us watching the launch on T.V. saw the rocket burst into flame immediately after take-off. The announcer seeing the burst of flames responded "oops". Thus 5 million dollars went down the tube with a simple "oops" being the only comment.

The comparison between the above incident and the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, which occurred about the same time and also had a \$5 million dollar price tag, is interesting. "Oops" for a \$5 million dollar rocket which failed, and a national controversy, with a verbal segment of both men, and women outraged that our tax dollars should be used for such foolishness when women meet to discuss issues such as displaced homemakers, abortion for poor women, education and careers for women, child abuse, rape, battered women, the end to discrimination in the schools, workplace, financial world. Issues which effect over half our population.

This apparent devaluing women's and family interest relative to those of Technology and Business is also apparent in the overbounding joy expressed by researchers and concerned citizens alike when \$3 million dollars were finally set aside for child abuse in the early 70's, and the more recent announcement that LEAA had set aside several million to be used for domestic violence.

Thus, while I am pleased that several sets of hearings are being held on domestic violence, I find myself faced with a feeling of pessimism. A fear that long term commitment with the

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opportunity to reevaluate and redesign program, similar to the procedure commonly followed in the physical or hard science, will not materialize. Although child and wife abuse are widely recognized phenomena, and numerous studies have been conducted, I would like to explore with you some ignored or overlooked aspects of family violence: battered husbands; battered siblings and battered elderly. The public's conscience has been stirred over the well publicized tragedy of children abused by their parents and the horror faced by beaten wives. As awful as these statistics are, they represent only the proverbial tip of the iceberg of total family violence. Perhaps with some information on the extensiveness in both form and frequency of domestic violence, the seriousness of the problem will be recognized and a long term commitment to the need for eliminating this tragic aspect of society will be made.

#### The Battered Husband

Is husband battering really an unknown phenomena, or is it simply another example of selective inattention? Steinmetz (1978) suggests that some insights into a possible answer can be gained by an examination of humor which exaggerates and brings into public view many aspects of life too personal to be discussed in a non-joking context.

The subject matter of comic strips, specifically those revolving around a domestic theme is revealing. A common theme is a caricature of husbands and wives in which the husband deviates from the ideal image of strong, self-assertiveness, and intelligent, and assumes the character traits which have been culturally ascribed to be feminine. The wife, in these comics, is justified in playing

the dominant role, and in chastising her erring husband, since he has not fulfilled his culturally prescribed roles. Movies also portray the right of a woman to slap her man. Hardly a film existed in the 50's with its "girl next door" heroine or the beach blanket films of the 60's that did have at least one scene where the insulted heroine hauled off and slapped the offending male, full force, in the face. His reaction was to hold his face, lower his head, and walk away. Both our heroine and the audience felt justice had prevailed. While this is not battering it shows that society feels that women have the right to slap their men when they are mad. Just as child abuse is <sup>often</sup> discipline carried too far, a women who thinks that slapping is the correct way to interact with her husband is more likely to let this behavior get out of control than a women who considers slapping to be inappropriate.

Although there has been little focus on battered husbands, data from small exploratory studies provides some insights on the extensiveness of this aspect of family violence.

We know that over three percent of 600 husbands in mandatory conciliation interviews listed physical abuse by their wife as a reason for the divorce action (Levinger, 1966).

A comparison of physical violence used by husbands and wives in 5 different studies (Steinmetz, 1978) found that wives often exceed their husband in the use of physical violence during a marital conflict (See table I). Steinmetz found only small random differences in two U.S. samples: a broad-based, non representative sample (1977a) and random sample of New Castle Delaware (1977c); and a Canadian sample of college students (1977b) in the percentage of husbands and

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wives who resorted to throwing things, pushing or shoving, hitting with the hand, or hitting with an object. In fact, the total violence scores for <sup>husbands and wives in</sup> these three studies were very similar.

The data from the nationally representative sample (Straus et al, 1977), based on reports of violence that occurred during 1975, found wives to be slightly higher in almost all categories, the notable exception being pushing and shoving. The <sup>total</sup> violence scores, however were identical.

Only one study (Gelles, 1974) found husbands exceeding wives in the use of all types of violence except "hitting with something," a mode which de-emphasized physical strength. In this study, 47 percent of husbands had used physical violence on their wives, while only 33 percent of the wives had used violence on their husbands.

While this data represents the percentage of husbands and wives who have used physical violence against a spouse, it does not tell us the frequency with which these acts occur. Surprisingly, the data suggests that while the percentage of wives having used physical violence often exceeds that of the husbands, wives also exceed husbands in the frequency with which these acts occur. The average violence score of wives as compared with husbands were all higher in the Steinmetz studies: 4.04 vs. 3.52 (Steinmetz, 1977a); 7.82 vs. 6.00 (Steinmetz, 1977a); and 7.00 vs. 6.60 (Steinmetz, 1977c). The Straus, et al study found that wives committed an average of 10.3 acts of violence against their husbands during 1975, while husbands averaged only 8.8 acts against their wives. Only Gelles (1974) found husbands to exceed their wives in use of physically violent modes. He found that 11 percent of the husbands and five percent of

the wives engaged in marital violence between two and six times a year, and 14 percent of the husbands and 6 percent of the wives used violence between once a month and daily. Wives exceeded husbands in one category, however. Eleven percent of the husbands, but 14 percent of the wives noted that they "seldom" (defined as between two and five times during the marriage) used physical violence against their spouse.

In another study which was based on police records and a random sample of families, it was estimated that 7 percent of the wives and .6 percent of the husbands would be victims of severe physical abuse, that which we might label as a battering by their spouse in a single year (Steinmetz, 1977).

Data on homicides suggest that husband-wife homicide make up the largest single category of homicide. Almost an identical percentage wives and husbands were victims. Furthermore, these findings appear to be consistent over time (Wolfgang, 1958; Vital Statistics Reports, 1976). It should be noted however that wife committed homicide often occurs after provocation and abuse from the husband.

#### Sibling Violence

Probably the form of family violence considered to be most normal is violence that occurs between siblings. Yet on examination, the amount and degree of severity suggest that we tolerate a considerable amount of extremely violent acts between brothers and sisters. These same acts if they occurred between husband and wife or parent and child would result in public outrage and social service intervention, and possibly criminal charges. These findings are summarized on Table II.

Straus (1974) in a study based on college freshmen, found that 62 percent reported using physical violence during the past year. In a broad based non-random sample of 78 adults (Steinmetz, 1977a), 72 percent reported using physical violence on a sibling. Steinmetz (1977a), examined sibling violence in 57 randomly selected families with two or more children between 3-17 years old. Among sibling pairs 8 years or younger 78 percent used physical violence. Sixty-eight percent of sibling pairs 9-14 years old and 63 percent of sibling pairs 15 or older used physical violence to resolve sibling conflicts.

Perhaps the best estimate of the degree of sibling violence is that provided by a nationally representative sample of 733 families with two or more children between 3-17 years (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1977). During the past year 75 percent of families reported sibling violence. There was an average of 21 acts per year. Thirty-eight percent kicked, or hit, and 14 percent "beat up" a sibling. This study also found that .08 percent threatened to use a gun or knife and .03 actually used a gun or knife. An astounding finding is that the highest levels of violence were perpetrated by young children (3-4 years of age). The levels of violence showed a continued decrease with the lowest levels being perpetrated by older teens (15-17 years). Furthermore, this pattern of greater violence among younger children held for all categories of violence from pushing and shoving to beating up. The only exception was use of gun or knife.

Violence between siblings probably reflects the child's first attempt to experiment with the type of behavior he or she witnessed the parents engaging in as well as the type of behavior the child

experienced in the form of discipline. Furthermore the behavior used between siblings are then used on a spouse when these children later marry (Steinmetz, 1977a). Thus it appears that one mechanism for interrupting the cycle of violence in the family may be to reduce the levels of violence between brothers and sisters.

#### Battered Elderly Parent

Our knowledge about the battered elderly parent mirrors our knowledge of the extent of child abuse in the early 60's or the extent of our knowledge about wife abuse in the early 70's. If we were to label the 60's as the decade of interest on child abuse, and the 70's as decade of wife abuse studies, then I predict, given the generally increasing concern for the elderly and more specifically concern of abuse of elderly in public institutions, that the 80's will be the decade of the Battered Parent.

There are several parallels between the battered child and battered parent. First, both are in a dependent position - relying on their caretaker for basic survival needs. Second, both are assumed to be protected by virtue of the love, gentleness, and caring which we assumed that the family provides. A third point is both the dependent child and the dependent elderly adult can be a source of emotional, physical and financial stress to the caretaker. While the costs of caring for one's children are at least a recognized burden, the emotional and economical responsibility for the care of one's elderly parents over a prolonged period (a problem not likely to be faced by most families in the past) has not been acknowledged.

Some of this battering takes the form of benign neglect-inadequate knowledge about caring for the elderly which results in harm. Tying

an elderly kin, who needs constant watching, into bed or a chair in order to complete housekeeping or shopping; or the excessive use of sleeping medication or alcohol to "ease" their discomfort or make them more manageable are common forms of this abuse. Other documented abuse, is however, lacking in benign intent. The reported battering of parents with fists and objects to "make them mind" or to change their mind about wills, financial management, or signing of other papers, is, unfortunately, a growing phenomenon. One local medical society reported receiving three calls from nursing homes in a single week, wanting to know what they could do to prevent family members from physically abusing the parent during visiting hours.

Authorities in Philadelphia have attempted to get an 89 year old father to file charges against an alcoholic son who forces him to turn over his monthly social security check. When the father refuses, he is tied to a chair so he can't leave the house. Examples from the Delaware Public Guardian's office are also indicative of the brutality which elderly kin endure:

Mrs. A., aged 78 who has a 37 year old retarded daughter who is the mother of a 13 year old daughter. The 13 year old physically abuses the grandmother.

Mrs. C., an invalid with an amputated foot, has a son that has been involved in a lot of trouble, and had violent episodes. She has called the State Police and signed a warrant but could not show up in court because of her condition. The son now has a gun and is threatening her.

The English with their typical dry humor first labeled the problem "granny hashing", but have begun to refer to this growing problem as "gram-slaming". However, England, recognizing the stress placed on the caretaking children, does provide periodic respite care. Unfortunately, in the U.S. the care of over 22 million individuals over 65 (of which only about 5 percent are institutionalized) is left to chance. Based on population and economic trends one can predict the following:

- 1 - more elderly people, a higher cost of living and a greater demand for alternative housing for elderly.
- 2 - higher cost of living requiring that a greater percentage of income be allocated to basic necessities with a smaller amount being available for 2 cars, vacations, single family homes and college for their children.
- 3 - more women working and/or looking forward to resuming work when children are launched to meet these expended cost.

With increasing conflict between the needs of parents and the goals of their children we can predict an increase in the amount of violence children use to control their elderly parents unless adequate support systems are available.

#### Remedies for Reducing Violence

When reflecting on the problem of the battered husband, battered siblings, and battered elderly, it is important to remember that these are the overlooked or ignored aspects of family violence. They are difficult aspect to record. First our macho ideology provides an almost insurmountable obstacle for husbands to overcome and publicly acknowledge they've been abused by "the little woman". Secondly, elderly parents are reluctant to report because their security is often tied to their abusing child. Furthermore they are ashamed of

having to admit they reared such a child. Finally, because violence between siblings is considered normal, little importance is attached to this problem and it has been rarely studied. Therefore, data in these areas has been slow in coming. Data in these areas are important not only because they provide estimates of the all encompassing and wide range of family violence, but also because it focus our attention on the broader aspect of violence. When we focus on child abuse or wife beating the remedies suggested tend to be emergency measure such as crisis centers, emergency foster care and shelters. While these measures are certainly needed they are not a panacea. In fact, their track record has been rather poor in providing positive alternative environment or changing violent family interaction. This is not to suggest that we should abandon these measures, rather we must place these measures in their proper perspective; one remedy within a context of total support systems-- system which encompass adult education as well as K-12 educational programs; Community based, readily available family counseling centers; well trained police legal/judicial, officers; legislation mandating provisions to insure the emotional and physical security of abused victims; long-term basic research and evaluative research for monitoring the problem of family violence as well as the success of existing programs. Somewhere in our funding efforts aimed at eliminating domestic violence, we must make the same type of commitment that is made in our building of rocket -- when something doesn't work properly - back to the drawing board, reevaluate, redesign, and replenish the funds. Surely people are as valuable as rockets and satellites.

TABLE I.

STUDY	N	COMPARISON OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE USED BY HUSBANDS AND WIVES IN PERCENT															
		THROWING THINGS		PUSHING SHOIVING		HITTING SLAPPING		KICKING		HIT WITH SOMETHING		THREATENED KNIFE OR GUN		USRP KNIFE OR GUN		USE OF ANY VIOLENCE	
		H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W
Gelles* (1974)	80	22	11	18	1	32	20	25	9	3	5	5	0	-----	47	33	
Steinmetz* (1977a)	54	39	37	31	32	20	20	-----	10	10	-----	2	0	-----	47	43	
Steinmetz* (1977b) Canada	52	21	21	17	13	13	13	-----	10	12	-----	-----	-----	-----	23	21	
Steinmetz* (1977c)	94	31	25	22	18	17	12	-----	12	14	-----	-----	-----	-----	32	28	
Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz**	2,143	3	5	11	8	5	5	2	3	2	3	.4	.6	.3	.2	12	12

\*Incidents occurring throughout the duration of the marriage

\*\*Incidents occurring during 1975

STUDY	MEAN FREQUENCY OF ABUSE	
	HUSBANDS	WIVES
Steinmetz (1977a)	3.52	4.04
Steinmetz (1977b)	6.00	7.82
Steinmetz (1977c)	6.60	7.00
Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz	8.80	10.30

TABLE II SIBLING VIOLENCE

<u>Sample</u>	<u>Degree of Violence</u>
57 randomly selected families (Steinmetz, 1977a)	78 percent of sibling pairs 8 or younger used physical violence.
College Freshman (Straus, 1974)	68 percent of sibling pairs 9-14 use physical violence.
Broad-based, non-random sample of 78 adults (Steinmetz, 1977b)	63 percent of sibling pairs 15 or older used physical violence.
National Representative Sample of 733 families with children between 3-17 years. (Straus, et al, 1977)	62 percent reported using physical violence during past year.
	72 percent reported having used physical violence on siblings.
	During the past year 75 percent reported using physical violence.
	Average of 21 acts per year.
	38 percent kicked, or hit.
	14 percent "beat up."
	0.8 percent threatened to use gun or knife.
	0.03 used gun or knife.

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