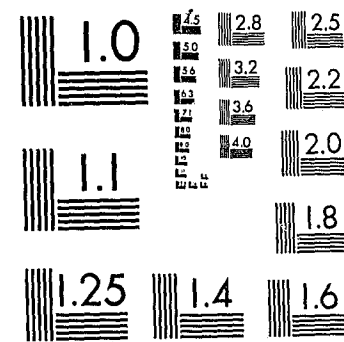


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X
SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE BATTERING RELATIONSHIP

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Using a 200 page questionnaire, 403 self-identified battered women were interviewed at the Battered Women Research Center. One section of the interview asked about the sexual relationship of the battering couple. The set of questions were also asked if the woman reported she had had a nonbattering relationship. Approximately one-half of our subjects had a nonbattering relationship. It was predicted that: 1) battered women would report high frequencies of sexual abuse in a battering relationship, 2) a higher response would be obtained by asking indirect rather than direct questions regarding the sexual abuse, and 3) the sexual abuse would be both violent (actual force and/or physical harm) and non-violent (jealousy, unpleasant sex). Over one-half said they had been sexually abused and approximately two-thirds said sex with the batterer was unpleasant. More women responded to the direct rather than the indirect question. Violent and non-violent assaults were reported. It was concluded that sexual abuse frequently occurs in battering relationships. Suggestions for future research were offered.

The discussions of violence against women have dealt primarily with the problems of rape and domestic violence as two separate issues. While the rape incident is perceived as a one time occurrence (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Kanin, 1975; Kilpatrick, Veronen, & Resick, 1979a, 1979b; Schultz & DeSavage, 1975), domestic violence usually consists of repeated assault (Langley & Levy, 1977; Martin, 1976; Walker, 1979). The following two statements point out how the issues have been divided. An attorney on the board of directors of the Women's Legal Defense Fund recognized battering as a form of rape, with one difference:

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ACQUISITIONS

You don't ask a rape victim to go back and fraternize with the rapist. Rape is a completed act, over and done with, while wife beating is an ongoing situation for many women trying to hold their families together. (Gladys Kessler in Langley & Levy, 1977, p. 173).

Weis and Borgess (1975) wrote:

The social meaning of rape is very different from assault. While both assault and rape are basically acts of aggression and hostility, sexual assault or rape is a total attack against the whole person, affecting the victim's physical, psychological, and social identity. Hardly any other crime can be committed against a woman with a comparable traumatic impact (p. 92).

The Feminist Movement has given women the support needed to come forward and talk about their experiences. As more and more women speak out, it has been well documented that, for women, rape is not a one time occurrence that is over and done with, because the rape occurs in an ongoing intimate relationship (Gelles, 1977; Kanin, 1975; Russell, 1975; Schultz & DeSavage, 1975). The rapist is also the woman's boyfriend, lover, or husband.

Walker (1979) discussed three areas involved in sexual abuse in a battering relationship. One problem was that sex is not always unpleasant between the couple. The difficulty is in knowing whether sex will be pleasurable or painful. Sexual jealousy was also found to be a major problem for most of the women interviewed. A third area involved the types of sexual behaviors that some women were asked to engage in. The women often reported incidents that involved oral and anal sex, group sex, and the use of objects and animals.

Researchers studying rape within an intimate relationship have encountered two major problems. One problem arises when attempting to establish an operational definition of marital rape. Gelles (1977) pointed out the need to decide whether the rape must involve physical force and violence or whether the act itself was violent. Walker (1979) stated that sex is often a part of the loving-contrition phase of battering. However, Davidson (1978) reported that although the men may want to "kiss and makeup" or say "I'm sorry, I love you," the women were more likely to consider the sex following an assault as rape. We would expect that the women in our sample would respond in a similar manner.

Related to this is the problem of getting the women to state that they have been raped (Gelles, 1977; Washburn & Frieze, 1980). Washburn and Frieze (1980) found a greater number of women responded positively to an "unthreatening approach" rather than a "direct question". The unthreatening approach involved asking the woman if sex was ever unpleasant with the batterer and then giving her several answers to select from, such as "Yes, because he forces me to have sex". A direct question would ask "Has he ever forced you to have sex?" In anticipation of this problem, women in our sample were asked both types of questions.

Some research has been done in an attempt to link sex and violence (Feshbach & Carlsmith, 1978). Gelles (1977) suggested that sex and violence may be linked because they are both ways in which husbands can intimidate and dominate their wives without fear of outside intervention. Brownmiller (1975) wrote:

All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievances. (p. 283).

She cited as examples the rape which occurs in slavery and during wartime. A third example could be the rape that occurs within the institution of marriage, since few states allow a woman to prosecute for marital rape. We would predict that women in our sample would also perceive the sex and violence as a method of power and intimidation.

Women in our study were living with the batterer both in and out of the context of marriage. Therefore, in this paper, the term marital rape will be used to refer to women who are living with a man in an intimate relationship rather than only those women who are legally married to the man.

If the dynamics of a battering relationship are to be completely understood, it is necessary to begin looking at what constitutes sexual abuse, what is the role of sexual abuse in a battering relationship, and what is the effect on the woman.

In summary, this paper will focus upon the following areas:

1. The frequency of sexual abuse in the battering relationship.
2. The problem of defining and measuring the sexual abuse.
3. The link between sex and violence.

METHOD

Several questions were included in the questionnaire that was administered following standard procedures at the Battered Women Research Center to determine the frequency and kinds of sexual abuse that took place in the battering relationships. While many of the questions demanded a forced-choice response, some of the questions allowed the women to respond with open-ended answers. Since we were interested in learning about the lives of battered women, this method of responding allowed a woman to relate what had happened to her. For some of our women, this was the first time they had talked about the physical batterings or sexual assault. Later, these responses were grouped together based upon similarities.

The questions regarding sex were dispersed throughout the interview. One set of questions dealt with the sexual relationship between the woman and the batterer. This same set of questions was later asked if the woman had a relationship with a man she identified as a nonbatterer. The following questions were asked:

1. Who generally initiates sex?
2. Is sex ever unpleasant for the man and/or the woman? If yes, then the woman was given nine responses to choose from. The responses included statements about forced sex, physical problems, being insensitive to sexual needs, and making unfavorable comparisons with other sexual partners.
3. Does the woman or man ever feel guilt or shame about sex?
4. Has the man ever forced her to have sex?
5. Has he ever asked her to perform an unusual sex act? If yes, what was the act?
6. Three questions were asked about jealousy in the relationship.
7. The woman was asked if she, the batterer, and the nonbatterer ever stopped having sex as a way to get the partner to do what he or she wanted from the other.
8. For each of the four specific battering episodes, the woman was asked if she was asked or forced to perform a sexual act she didn't want to. She was then asked to describe the act.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By allowing a woman to discuss, in detail, her life with the batterer and four specific battering episodes, we were able to collect information about the frequency of rape in a violent relationship.

Insert Tables 1, 2, & 3 about here

Of our sample, 59% said they were forced to have sex. When asked if sex was unpleasant with the batterer, 85% of the women said "Yes". Of these women, 175 indicated that it was because he forced her to have sex when she did not want it. This represents 43% of the total sample.

Based upon these findings, our sample responded more frequently to the "direct question" than they did to the "unthreatening approach" discussed by Washburn and Frieze (1980). The direct question, "Has he ever forced you to have intercourse (sex)?" was placed at the end of the set of questions concerning the couple's sexual relationship. Therefore, by the time that question was asked, the woman may have felt more comfortable in responding.

Some women were hesitant about discussing their sexual life until they could ascertain whether or not the interviewer was married or had children. Interviewers needed to establish an atmosphere where the woman could feel comfortable disclosing about situations that were not only painful for her, but also embarrassing. Valuable information can be lost if a woman senses the interviewer is shocked, offended, or uncomfortable.

Sex and Violence

The specific incidents told by the women seem to support the contention that sex and violence are used to dominate them. One woman reported that sex was "brutal, used as a punishment", while another stated that he (the batterer) "used it (sex) abusively". One woman's own story can best illustrate how sex and violence were used to dominate her.

He told me that I was going to give him a "blow job". He threatened me with a gun and slapped me. Holding the gun against my head, he made me have oral sex and then intercourse. He said this was the only thing I was good at. "Women are only good for fucking."

Insert Tables 2 & 4 about here

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the women reported that it was the batterer who generally initiated sex, while only 34% said the nonbatterer generally initiated sex. Only 29% answered that both parties in a battering relationship initiated sex, but over half, 53%, said both parties initiated sex in a nonbattering relationship.

While 84% of the women reported that sex was unpleasant with the batterer, 46% thought that sex with her was unpleasant for him. Sex with the nonbatterer was unpleasant for 29% of the women, and 12% said that sex with her was unpleasant for him.

Insert Tables 5 & 6 about here

Another way of gaining power over the woman is to force her to perform unusual sex acts. A total of 41% of the women said they were asked to perform unusual sex acts and 28% reported they were forced to do things they didn't want to do. Women were forced to insert objects into their vaginas, to engage in group sex, to have sex with animals, and to partake in bondage and other sado-masochistic activities.

Insert Table 7 about here

Fifty-six percent (56%) of the women reported that they felt guilt or shame about sex with the batterer, while only 26% said they felt guilt or shame with the nonbatterer. The women thought that 39% of the batterers and 14% of the nonbatterers felt guilt or shame about sex. These results indicate that the women perceived the batterers to be in control of the sexual relationships.

No specific questions were asked to determine how many women perceived the nonviolent sex as rape. However, open-ended responses to the question of why sex was unpleasant indicated that nonviolent sex is not always a positive experience for the women. As one woman said:

We were first married. I had a sense of being a captive. He kept saying the problems would disappear when we got married. They escalated instead. There were a few days of peace during the honeymoon and then things started. Two weeks after moving into an apartment he asked me if I talked to any men during the day. It was building up, turning into psychological abuse. I was in a trap of being too honest--of answering his questions. I worked days and he worked evenings. He'd get home at ten o'clock. He'd hate what I had fixed for dinner and would throw it out. I'd then have to start all over. There was a sense of having to serve him. After an hour or so of psychological abuse, he'd start slapping me around. Afterwards, he'd feel that the air had been cleared and we'd have sex. I'd be totally submissive. I was quiet and withdrawn. My whole life was arranged around trying to keep things from happening. It was like trying to be a puppet, pulling your own strings to do the right thing and keep cool. I'd invariably slip somehow and then get a derogatory comment about my physical appearance. Then there would be a sexual encounter. No holding or touching, just sex and sleep. I was supposed to be instantly ready.

Of the women who reported that sex was unpleasant with the batterer, some reasons given included: The woman would "initiate sex to prevent a beating"; the sex would occur "after a beating"; she would remember how he had treated her; or the woman thought that she must have sex with him after a beating to calm him down. One woman stated that, after the batterer had beaten her baby, she had sex out of fear. For some women, refusing sex meant they didn't get money for groceries or bills. As one woman said, "I felt like a prostitute".

Insert Tables 8 & 9 about here

Couples in an abusing relationship also withhold sex from one another as a means of getting what they want. Forty-six percent (46%) of the women said that they had stopped having sex with their partner at sometime in order to get what they wanted from him. Forty-five percent (45%) said that the man had done the same. In contrast, 16% of the women said they had stopped having sex with the man in a nonbattering relationship to get what they wanted and 11% said he had done the same.

Some of the women did report that sex and romance were a part of the loving-contrition phase of a battering. After the first battering, 9% of the 267 women reporting loving-contrition said that sex and romance were a part of that phase. Only 5% of the 153 women reporting loving-contrition after the last battering said that sex and romance were involved.

Any future research needs to ask specific questions as to how the woman perceives the violent and nonviolent sex. Availability of that data would provide a basis for defining rape, not only as occurring in a violent sexual assault, but also when sex takes place in a context which makes that sex, regardless of how loving it appears to be, a violent act.

Sexual Jealousy

Insert Tables 10, 11, & 12 about here

Sexual jealousy is commonly reported by battered women and several opportunities were given to our subjects to discuss the jealousy. When asked if the batterer was ever jealous about the possibility of her having an affair with another man, 93% said "yes", with over one-half (53%) saying that it occurred "always". Of those women who also reported about their nonbattering relationships, 25% said the men were jealous at sometime, and only 6% reported they were jealous all of the time. Almost one-quarter (23%) of the women

reported that the batterer was also jealous of her having an affair with another woman, while 3% of the women indicated that the nonbatterer was jealous of an affair with a woman.

Jealousy resulted in women being kept prisoners in their own homes, not even being able to go to church or visit with relatives. One woman told of how her husband would keep a lock on the gate when he went to work. If the curtains had been moved, he would want to know why she had opened them. If the bedspread had a wrinkle, he would want to know who she had in the house. He would get upset when she had to go to the grocery store because she might meet someone, even though she would have some of her five children with her. One month, the electrical bill was lower than expected, so he accused her of sleeping with the meter reader. Following years of physical and sexual abuse, and shortly after finding out that he was also sexually abusing their teenage daughter, she shot and killed him.

For some women, the jealousy did not stop with accusations, it led to a battering.

We were at a club. A schoolmate of mine was in town and he had wanted to see me, so the girl at the desk paged me. My husband answered the page and brought the guy over. We talked about old times. My husband left the table for about one hour. While he was gone, I danced with my friend. When my husband returned he didn't say anything. When we went home, in the car, he started slapping me because I danced with this guy. I tried to defend myself, but he won. I was mostly emotionally hurt. We went to bed and he wanted sex. I refused, but he said I had no right to refuse him. He forced sex on me by twisting my arms and holding them while I wrestled and twisted.

When asked if they were ever jealous about the possibility of the batterer having an affair with another woman, 67% said "yes", with 15% saying they were always jealous. About one-half of the women, 52% said he had had an affair at least once, and another 14% suspected he had, but were not sure. Thus, these data support our prediction that jealousy is a part of the majority of battering relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

Our data indicate that marital rape frequently occurs in a battering relationship. By allowing our women to respond to many open and closed-ended questions asked by sensitive and well-trained interviewers, we have been able to gain a clearer understanding of the interaction between sex and violence in battered women's lives. Our data show that the batterer controls the sexual relationship. To do so, he uses jealousy, as well as other violent acts.

This research has generated new questions for future study. We need to look specifically at the longterm effects repeated sexual assaults within an intimate relationship have on the woman. We also need to gather more details about sexual assault which repeatedly occur in what our subjects considered a nonbattering relationship. Finally, comparisons need to be made with the reports of nonbattered women.

Presently few states legally recognize that a woman's husband can rape her. More extensive research into the area of marital rape will no longer allow people to deny the fact that it does occur, just as they can no longer deny that "nice girls don't get raped" or that "none of my friends are batterers or battered women".

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TABLE 1

Has He Ever Forced You To Have Intercourse?

	Batterer	Nonbatterer
No, never	41%	93%
Once	10%	2%
Two or three times	13%	1%
More than 2-3 times, but not often	19%	2%
Often	17%	2%

TABLE 2

Is Sex Ever Unpleasant?

	Battering Relationship			Nonbattering Relationship	
	For Woman	For Man		For Woman	For Man
No, never	15%	53%		71%	87%
Rarely	12%	11%		9%	5%
Occasionally	34%	21%		11%	5%
Frequently	18%	7%		4%	2%
Most of the time	20%	6%		5%	2%

TABLE 3

If Sex Is Unpleasant, Why?

1. S/he wants sex too often
2. S/he forces me to have sex when I don't want it.
3. S/he refuses to have sex when I want it.
4. S/he compares me unfavorably to other women/men.
5. S/he makes me do things I don't want to do.
6. S/he is insensitive to my sexual needs (not enough foreplay, doesn't last long enough).
7. S/he has physical problems.
8. I have physical problems

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	For Woman n=342	For Man n=174	For Woman n=59	For Man n=25
1.	25%	10%	17%	28%
2.	51%	4%	12%	0%
3.	33%	45%	9%	12%
4.	25%	6%	5%	0%
5.	29%	9%	5%	4%
6.	54%	26%	41%	12%
7.	9%	12%	5%	12%
8.	11%	6%	10%	12%

*More than one response allowed

TABLE 4

Who Initiates Sex?

	Battering	Nonbattering
Neither	0%	1%
Man	64%	34%
Both	29%	53%
Woman	7%	12%

TABLE 5

Asked To Perform Unusual Sex Acts

	Battering	Nonbattering
No	59%	95%
Yes, occasionally	29%	4%
Yes, frequently	12%	1%

TABLE 6

Asked or Forced to Perform Sex Act During Incident

Battering Incidents				
	1	2	3	4
No	88%	84%	87%	84%
Asked or Suggested	6%	5%	4%	7%
Forced	6%	11%	9%	8%

TABLE 7

Feelings of Guilt or Shame About Sex

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Never	61%	45%	78%	74%
Rarely	11%	13%	6%	12%
Sometimes	17%	29%	4%	12%
Usually	7%	11%	2%	1%
Always	4%	3%	2%	1%

TABLE 8

If There Was Loving-Contrition,
Did It Involve Sex and Romance?

Battering Incident				
	1	2	3	4
	n=267	n=231	n=202	n=153
Yes Yes	25%	20%	8%	7%
No No	75%	80%	91%	93%

TABLE 9

Stop Having Sex To Get What You Want

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
Never	54%	55%	82%	88%
Rarely	17%	12%	8%	5%
Sometimes	19%	18%	8%	5%
Usually	8%	9%	1%	1%
Always	3%	6%	0%	0%

TABLE 10

During Your Relationship, Partner Had a Sexual Relationship
With Another Woman or Man

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	With Woman	With Man	With Woman	With Man
No, never	35%	85%	66%	99%
Suspect so, but not sure	14%	4%	7%	0%
Once	7%	1%	13%	0%
Yes, unsure how often	12%	1%	8%	0%
Two or three times	10%	1%	3%	1%
Often	23%	1%	4%	0%

TABLE 11

Man Ever Jealous About the Possibility of Woman
Having An Affair With Another Man or Woman

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	With Man	With Woman	With Man	With Woman
Never	6%	77%	41%	97%
Rarely	6%	7%	20%	2%
Sometimes	19%	6%	25%	1%
Usually	15%	3%	7%	0%
Always	53%	7%	6%	0%

TABLE 12

Woman Jealous About the Possibility of Man
Having An Affair With Another Woman or Man

	Battering Relationship		Nonbattering Relationship	
	With Woman	With Man	With Woman	With Man
Never	32%	91%	50%	99%
Rarely	16%	4%	17%	1%
Sometimes	24%	3%	17%	0%
Usually	12%	1%	6%	0%
Always	15%	1%	9%	0%