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Men's Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Deviant Behavior

Executive Summary

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Men's Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Deviant Behavior

Physical violence against women by their male intimate partners (referred to in this report as domestic violence) is a significant social problem, and identifying and understanding the precursors of such violence are worthy goals. One potentially important precursor to domestic violence is engagement in other forms of deviance. There is evidence that a substantial proportion of clinic- and court-referred domestically violent men engage in other forms of deviance, such as substance abuse and violence toward non-family members. There is also evidence for continuity between early deviance (e.g., deviant activity in adolescence) and later domestic violence. However, very few investigators have used data from samples representative of the general population to evaluate associations between domestic violence and other forms of deviance. In addition, very few investigators have used longitudinal data to document links between deviance during adolescence and later domestic violence. The primary goal of the present research is to build upon our understanding of the link between general deviance and domestic violence. We attempt to do this by: (1) assessing the co-occurrence of domestic violence and a wide variety of other forms of contemporaneous deviant behavior in a large community sample, (2) examining links between deviance during adolescence/young adulthood and later domestic violence, considering the roles of violent deviance in particular and the persistence of deviant activity, and (3) evaluating specific pathways by which early deviance may be linked to men's domestic violence.

The National Youth Survey (NYS) data set was used for this research. The NYS sample is a national probability sample of households in the continental United States in 1976. All youths between the ages of 11 and 17 (inclusive) on December 31, 1976 were eligible for the

NYS. The initial survey sample consisted of 1,725 youths (918 males) interviewed in 1976, with follow-up interviews conducted in 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1983 and 1986. Data for the present research were obtained from 175 male participants who reported being married or cohabiting with a female partner at Wave VI (1983). Men's violence toward their female partners was measured at Wave VI with eight items from the physical violence sub-scale of the Conflict Tactics Scales. Men's general deviance (that is, deviance as indicated by acts other than domestic violence) was measured at Wave VI and at earlier waves with items describing illegal or socially proscribed behavior. Deviance was operationalized in several different ways in this research, so that the persistence and frequency/seriousness of different forms of deviance (violent and nonviolent deviant acts) could be considered. To evaluate specific pathways by which early deviance may be linked to domestic violence, measures of marital dissatisfaction, peer deviant behaviors, and peer approval of deviance were created.

Co-occurrence of Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Contemporaneous Deviant Behavior

Of the 175 married or cohabiting men in our sample, 38% reported having engaged in domestic violence in the year prior to the Wave VI assessment. This one-year prevalence rate is comparable to rates obtained from other large samples of *young* couples. With regard to the prevalence of deviant behavior, 64% of the sample reported engaging in one or more deviant acts during the year prior to the Wave VI assessment. As hypothesized by general theories of crime and deviance, we found a large proportion of domestically violent men (74%) had engaged in other deviant behaviors, and a greater proportion of domestically violent men engaged in other forms of contemporaneous deviant behavior than men who were not domestically violent.

Deviance During Adolescence and Young Adulthood

We first evaluated how different operationalizations of deviance during adolescence and

young adulthood (i.e., the persistence and frequency/seriousness of deviant activity, broadly conceived, at Waves I, III, IV, and V) predicted domestic violence at Wave VI. As expected, both the persistence of deviant activity and the frequency/seriousness of deviant activity predicted later domestic violence. However, in logistic regression analyses, neither of these two measures of deviance contributed uniquely in the prediction of domestic violence after accounting for the other. Thus, the information contained in these two measures of deviance appeared to be redundant with respect to the prediction of domestic violence.

We next examined violent and nonviolent deviance separately, evaluating relations between different forms of deviance (persistence of violence, frequency/seriousness of violence, persistence of nonviolent deviance, frequency/seriousness of nonviolent deviance) and domestic violence. As expected, the persistence and the frequency/seriousness of violent and nonviolent deviance predicted later domestic violence. In logistic regression analyses, the persistence of violence contributed in the prediction of domestic violence after accounting for the frequency/seriousness of violence, but not the converse. Similarly, the persistence of nonviolent deviance contributed in the prediction of domestic violence after accounting for the frequency/seriousness of nonviolent deviance.

We then evaluated the independent contributions of violent and nonviolent deviance in the prediction of domestic violence. In logistic regression analyses, the persistence of violence contributed in the prediction of domestic violence after accounting for the persistence of nonviolent deviance, but the persistence of nonviolent deviance did not contribute in the prediction of domestic violence after accounting for the persistence of violence. In sum, the persistence of violence emerged as an important aspect of youth deviance in the prediction of domestic violence in this community sample.

Pathways Linking Youth Deviance to Domestic Violence

We evaluated two models linking the persistence of violence during adolescence and young adulthood to later domestic violence. One model links youth violence to men's relationship dissatisfaction, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of domestic violence. That is, youth violence is hypothesized to be linked directly to domestic violence (i.e., the domestic violence is simply a continuation of earlier violence) and linked indirectly to domestic violence, through relationship dissatisfaction. This model is based, in part, on the notion that the domestic violence documented in most community samples is a product of relationship dissatisfaction. This model is also based on the results of longitudinal research indicating that adolescent deviance predicts adult relationship dissatisfaction. Our findings were consistent this model. Specifically, in a multivariate model, the persistence of violence during adolescence/young adulthood was linked directly to domestic violence, and the association between these two variables was partially mediated by relationship dissatisfaction.

A second model hypothesized that deviant peer affiliation and peer approval of deviance would partially mediate the link between violent behavior in adolescence/young adulthood and domestic violence. This model is based on theory and research indicating that adolescents who engage in deviant behavior tend to affiliate with deviant peers who, in turn, are thought to reinforce and perpetuate the performance of deviant behavior. Consistent with prior research findings, our results suggest that youth violence increases the likelihood of affiliation with deviant peers as well as peers who approve of deviance. However, our findings suggest that deviant peer affiliation and peer approval of deviance do not mediate the link between earlier violence and domestic violence.

Policy Implications

Knowledge of the overlap between domestic violence and other types of deviant behavior can have important implications for policy and practice. If domestic violence is etiologically and phenomenologically distinct from other types of deviant or violent behavior, specialized programs may be necessary to prevent domestic violence. On the other hand, if domestic violence is part of a more general pattern of deviance or violence, then programs that successfully prevent deviance in general should similarly prevent domestic violence. Our findings suggest that, in comparison to men who are not domestically violent, domestically violent men are more likely to be deviant, and more specifically to be violent. This suggests that programs designed to prevent or reduce adolescent antisocial behavior, and perhaps especially adolescent violent behavior, may be useful in disrupting the processes by which domestic violence emerges.

Although it is clear from our research that the persistence of violence during adolescence/young adulthood is associated with later domestic violence, violence alone – especially violence during middle and late adolescence – is likely to be insufficient to identify future perpetrators of domestic violence. Most of the participants in the present research engaged in violent behavior at one time or another, and many who engaged in violence did not go on to perpetrate domestic violence. Similarly, many who did not engage in persistent violence went on to engage in domestic violence. It is possible that additional efforts directed at conceptualizing and measuring violence during adolescence and young adulthood may increase the specificity and utility of early violence as a predictor of domestic violence, but the high base rates of violent behavior that typify adolescent samples are likely to yield a high rate of false negatives when violence is used as a sole predictor of domestic violence.

In sum, the results of this research contribute to our knowledge about the association

between domestic violence and other types of deviant behavior and have potentially important implications for theory, policy and practice. It is clear from our results that a large number of domestically violent men engage in other forms of deviant behavior, and that past deviance, especially the persistence of past violence, contributes in the prediction of domestic violence. The ability to predict domestic violence, even – perhaps especially – at the levels at which it is most commonly manifest, offers opportunities for early identification and prevention. We believe that continued research in the application of general theories of deviance and aggression to domestic violence will likely contribute to our understanding of the development of such behavior, and to our ability to prevent it.

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