ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF SURVEY DATA ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A Feminist Approach

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A major methodological problem in victimization surveys on physical and sexual violence against women is the underreporting of violence. The first part of this article makes a case for 6 feminist strategies for improving the accuracy of self-report data on victimization within a mainstream survey research framework. The second part of the article is a presentation of data from a survey of Toronto women that is designed to show the efficacy of these feminist strategies.

A major methodological problem in victimization surveys on the physical and sexual abuse of women is the underreporting of abuse. An abused woman may not reveal her victimization to an interviewer for a variety of reasons. She may feel that the subject is too personal to discuss, she may be embarrassed or ashamed, she may fear reprisal by her abuser should he find out about the interview, she may misunderstand the question, or she may think the abuse was too minor to mention. She may even have forgotten about it, particularly if it was minor and happened long ago. If the abuse was especially traumatic, she may not want, or be able, to recall it. If she *does* disclose that she has been abused, she may not respond fully and honestly to follow-up questions about the experience. No one knows the exact extent to which survey respondents understate their victimization, but feminist and mainstream researchers agree that the problem is significant especially when

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the abuser is a male intimate (Brush 1990; Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Koss 1992; Sessar 1990; Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Straus 1990b; Weis 1989).[1]

The consequences of massive underreporting are serious. Indeed, without a reasonably accurate measure of victimization, an entire survey is put in jeopardy, for one cannot know if those women who disclosed having been abused are representative of all victims in the sample. Underreporting also has negative implications for social policy: the greater the degree of underreporting, the lower the estimates of abuse, and the lower the probability of mobilizing resources to combat the problem. Policymakers pay attention to large numbers. As Bart et al. (1989) write, "The principal questions that organize policy efforts [with respect to violence against women] are ultimately quantitative—how many are there, who are they, where are they, how bad are the consequences, and how much will it cost?" (p. 433). This is not to suggest that policy aims should shape methodological decisions, it is only to point out that obtaining more accurate data on victimization bears significantly on social policy.

Feminist research points to a number of methodological strategies for improving the accuracy of survey data on this delicate subject. I tried to implement these strategies in a survey of Toronto women conducted in 1987 (Smith 1987). My goal was to draw out data that did some justice to the sensitivity and complexity of the subject matter and at the same time attend to the chief concerns of established survey research—getting a representative sample and generating valid and reliable data.

In the first part of this article, I make a case for six approaches to data gathering that were designed to accomplish this goal. These approaches were derived in large part from feminist research, but they share some ground with conventional survey methods. The second part of the article is a presentation of data from the Toronto survey on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women. This presentation is intended mainly to illustrate the effectiveness of the approaches earlier outlined in eliciting candid reports of victimization within a mainstream survey research framework.

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO DATA GATHERING

Broad Definitions

Not surprisingly, the broader the definition of violence, the higher the reported level of victimization, all else being equal. Thus, most national crime surveys, which define violence in narrow legalistic terms, uncover very

low levels of violence against women, particularly by male intimates. There are other reasons for these low levels. One is that many women may not think of such violence as "criminal" and thus may not report it in a "crime" survey. Feminist surveys, on the other hand, that define violence on the basis of women's subjective experiences of violence, including noncriminal and marginally criminal acts, uncover very high levels of violence (e.g., Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Radford 1987; Russell 1982). Other surveys usually obtain results that fall in between these two extremes.

To illustrate the point, the 1982 British Crime Survey (BCS) found that less than 2 percent of all women in the sample were victims of an actual or threatened crime of violence (robbery, wounding, assault, indecent assault, rape) during the survey year (Hough and Mayhew 1983). One year later, feminist researcher Radford (1987) found that almost *all* women in the London borough of Wandsworth had experienced some sort of male violence during the preceding 12 months. In the Wandsworth survey, violence included racial and sexual assault and harassment, threatened or actual attacks in public places, threatened or actual attacks by a stranger in the respondent's home, threatened or actual attacks by a man the respondent was living with, obscene phone calls, sexual harassment at work, seeing another woman threatened or attacked, and knowing well another woman who was attacked. Of the respondents, 44 percent actually suffered a personal victimization. Of course, this comparison ignores the fact that the risk of victimization *is* much higher in inner-city Wandsworth than in the country as a whole, but it seems unlikely that this could account for the huge discrepancy in reported rates.[2]

As Radford (1987) points out, the BCS investigated "crime"; the Wandsworth survey explored "violence against women." What the law defines as serious, and thus as criminal, does not necessarily coincide with women's real-life experiences; for example, in Britain a husband still cannot be found guilty of raping his wife.[3] It seems appropriate that a survey on violence against women take women's subjective experiences seriously. A compromise is to take into account respondents' subjective experiences and legal (or other) categories of violence. Whereas feminist research takes seriously the perceptions and interpretations of women, some degree of standardization is also important if one wishes to compare the results of different studies. Accordingly, definitions can be developed from women's accounts of their own victimization and then organized as much as possible on the basis of legal or other criteria. It is important to emphasize, however, that such definitions should encompass experiences, such as routine street harassment, that are only marginally illegal but that nevertheless sometimes provoke fear, even terror, in the recipient (McNeil 1987).

Lifetime Prevalence

The majority of representative sample surveys dealing wholly or partly with physical or sexual violence against women have produced estimates of annual victimization rates. A smaller number of such surveys have reported data on lifetime or "ever" rates: the proportion of women in the sample who have ever been victimized, if not in their entire lifetime, in their adult lifetime, or within marriage or some other unbounded period of time. Annual rates have their uses, of course, including monitoring trends over time, but data on lifetime prevalence are equally if not more important.[4]

Focusing only on annual rates can lead to a false sense of security by obscuring the real scope of the violence. For example, the U.S. National Crime Survey (NCS) annual statistics indicate that the likelihood of a woman suffering a rape in any given year is roughly 16 per 10,000 women. Yet, Koppel (1987) calculates, on the basis of NCS annual statistics averaged over a 10-year period (1975-84) and life tables published by the National Center for Health Statistics, that a woman's lifetime (a "lifetime" begins at age 12) chances of suffering a rape are in the neighborhood of 8 out of 100! Using the same data sources, Koppel estimates that about 3 of every 4 females currently 12 years of age will be victims of a violent crime (completed or attempted assault, robbery, or rape) at some time in their lives. Koppel computed these lifetime likelihoods of personal victimization from the probabilities of victimization at the various ages that constitute a lifetime. Even these figures are underestimates, of course, because they are derived from NCS annual data, which greatly underestimate the real amount of violence against women, especially wife abuse and sexual abuse (Koss 1992; Stark and Flitcraft 1988).

From the researcher's point of view, obtaining estimates of lifetime or "ever" rates (as opposed solely to annual rates), usually increases the size of the sample of reported victims, sometimes dramatically. In a German survey, 86 percent of the rapes reported took place *before* the 12 months leading up to the study (Sessar 1990). A larger sample of victims allows for more meaningful and statistically reliable comparisons among victim and abuser subgroups. It also provides a surer footing for investigating the causes and consequences of victimization because it avoids the biasing effects of turning victims into nonvictims simply because they were victimized prior to the traditional 12-month reference period (Sessar 1990).

To be sure, there are problems associated with measuring the prevalence of violence within a long recall period, including forgetting by victims, particularly of minor incidents that took place long ago (Skogan 1986; Van Dijk, Mayhew, and Killias 1990; Weis 1989). On the other hand, Killias

(1990) found, on the basis of interviews with 95 victims of serious crime and a matched sample of nonvictims in the Swiss Crime Survey, that inaccuracies in the categorization of respondents as victims or nonvictims, with no time limit on the recall period, were minimal; inaccuracies in the frequency and kinds of victimizations were more problematic. Russell (1982) argues that an abused woman may disclose incidents that occurred in the distant past more readily than recent incidents because the former are less emotionally painful to recall. Whatever the case, we should not forget that women's experiences of male violence accumulate over a lifetime and that the psychological effects of a single episode may remain for years (Stanko 1990; Koss, Gidycz, and Widniewski 1987). It makes little sense to exclude a woman as a victim of violence simply because she did not report having been assaulted during the 12 months immediately prior to the survey.

Multiple Measures

Methodologists have long advocated the use of multiple measures as a way of enhancing the reliability and validity of social variables (e.g., Bohrnstedt 1983). But, most mainstream survey researchers seem to have paid scant attention to this advice when it comes to estimating the extent of violence against women. Indeed, some have computed such estimates on the basis of a single question (e.g., Bland and Orn 1986; Fergusson et al. 1986).

Feminist studies underline the importance of asking respondents about their possible involvement in violence more than once, in different ways, and at different points in the survey. Hanmer and Saunders (1984), in a community survey of violence to women in inner-city Leeds, Yorkshire, found that some women mentioned having been victimized, not when the interviewer first broached the subject, but only toward the end of the interview, usually while answering another, related question. In an earlier analysis of data from the Toronto survey (Smith 1987), a significant number of respondents who initially denied having been abused by their husbands or partners revealed that they had indeed been victimized when asked again in different words later in the interview (see also Junger 1987, 1990; Kelly 1988; Roberts 1989).

Presumably, as an interview progresses, such respondents either remember a previously forgotten incident or have second thoughts about their initial decision not to disclose. In the latter case, those who are ambivalent about divulging such personal information probably engage in a quick mental calculus of the costs (e.g., shame or embarrassment) and benefits (e.g., the therapeutic value of sharing a painful memory with a sympathetic listener) of doing so. Some may decide at the outset not to disclose but have mixed feelings about the decision. Given time to think about their initial negative

response as the interview goes on and a second or third opportunity to disclose, some of these respondents then reveal having been victimized. It is also possible, of course, that the prior question may not describe some women's particular experiences, at least as the women define those experiences. It goes without saying that any supplementary question on victimization must be phrased in such a way that avoids suggesting the respondent was less than candid at the beginning.

Multidimensional Measures

By far the most widely used standardized measure of the physical abuse of women, and one of the instruments employed in the Toronto study, is the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS). The CTS has been used and refined over the years in dozens of studies on violence against women by a male intimate (see Straus 1990a; Straus and Gelles 1990). The CTS is composed of 19 items describing tactics for handling interpersonal conflict between intimates. The respondent indicates how often each tactic was used in the past year or ever in the marriage or relationship. The first 10 items have to do with reasoning and verbal aggression. The last nine items describe acts of physical aggression, ranging in severity from throwing something at the other person to using a gun or knife. The CTS is internally reliable, and there is some evidence of concurrent and construct validity (Straus 1990a, 1990b).

The CTS also has serious limitations. One of these, according to some critics, is that it is one-dimensional; that is, it focuses solely on violent *behavior*, while ignoring the consequences of the behavior, the social context in which the behavior took place, and other aspects of the violence that give it much of its meaning. Feminist critics, in particular, point out that by abstracting an act of violence from the circumstances surrounding it, the CTS completely misses the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions that often characterize such episodes (Bograd 1988; Breines and Gordon 1983; Dekeseredy and MacLean 1992; Dobash and Dobash 1992; Dobash et al. 1992).

This criticism is apt but also misplaced. The CTS is not flawed simply because it is unidimensional; rather, studies employing the CTS are flawed if they use the CTS as the sole measure of violence, without any attempt to explore the multidimensionality of the violence through other measures. The weakness of such studies is that they *conceptualized* the violence as one-dimensional. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) did this in their first national family violence survey and suffered much censure as a result. Straus (1990b) subsequently agreed that investigating context, consequences, and the like is vitally important for an adequate understanding of woman abuse,

but he argued that it is best to measure these dimensions separately from violent behavior using follow-up and supplementary questions. Straus and Gelles (1990) did this in their second national family violence survey (albeit in a limited way). As a methodological strategy, this is perfectly acceptable and was the approach taken in the Toronto study. The point is, a unidimensional measure of violence is not inadequate just because it is unidimensional; it is inadequate when it is used insensitively to provide reports of violent acts as if they took place in a social void. Woman abuse is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Measures of woman abuse should reflect this complexity. Only feminist surveys have consistently adhered to this rule.

Open Questions

Most conventional surveys on violence against women have used closed questions almost exclusively to ask about violent experiences. It seems that mainstream researchers have either assumed that this type of question elicits the most valid and reliable responses, or decided that open questions are too difficult, too time consuming, and ultimately too costly to process.

Time and money aside, a case can be made for both formats (Sheatsley 1983). Open questions, however, appear to be superior in one vital area: building interviewer-respondent rapport. For one thing, an open format may reduce the threat of a question on violence, because it allows the respondent to qualify her response, to express exact shades of meaning, rather than forcing her to choose from a number of possibly threatening alternatives. For another, open questions may reduce the power imbalance inherent in the interview situation (the relationship between researcher and researched parallels the hierarchical nature of traditional male-female relationships) because open questions encourage interaction and collaboration between interviewer and respondent (Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Hoff 1990). The less threatening the question and the more equal the power relationship, the greater the probability of rapport and, in turn, of eliciting an honest answer to a sensitive question on violence. In any event, feminist scholars reject as exploitive the treatment of respondents merely as "subjects" to be analyzed by an "objective" interviewer (Hoff 1990). Not surprisingly, feminist surveys have made extensive use of open questions to ask whether or not respondents have been victimized and, if so, about the details of the experience (Gordon and Riger 1989; Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Radford 1987; Russell 1982).

Given a disclosure of abuse, no matter how elicited, when the interviewer asks the respondent to describe the event and its aftermath in her own words, preconceived distinctions between private and public places, strangers and nonstrangers, minor and severe violence, and the like tend to blur. This is

especially apparent when trying to determine the severity of the violence. As several studies have found, some women, especially those with a long history of victimization by an intimate, initially play down the severity of even the most horrific violence; they may dismiss whatever injuries they have suffered, for instance, as trifling. Only in the course of providing an in-depth account of the abuse in their own words do these women reveal, typically in an offhand remark, the true nature of the violence (Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Junger 1987; Kelly 1988; Stanko 1990). Hanmer and Saunders speculate that such minimizing serves to shore up the victim's crumbling sense of security about her relationship with the abuser. It may also be a way of coping with the popular notion that there must be something wrong with her, the victim. The point is, open questions are best able to elicit the sort of detail that results in a rendition of the violent event that at least approximates the lived experience of the victim. As we shall see, these renditions lead to a considerable reorganization and recoding of victimizations originally categorized on the basis of quantitative measures.

Effective Interviewers

Brush (1990) argues that the most important factor in producing accurate data on woman abuse through surveys is the quality of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, in particular, the ability of the interviewer to infuse a sense of "trust, safety, and intimacy" into the interviewing relationship (p. 65). But, there are few systematic analyses of the characteristics of effective interviewers in the survey literature on violence against women. In fact, research on interviewers generally is in short supply (Fowler and Mangione 1990). In most of the handful of feminist surveys on woman abuse, however, the investigators have gone to great pains to identify and select the best interviewers available and to train them with particular care. Apparently on the assumption that only a woman can get "inside the culture" of another woman (Oakley 1981), the interviewers invariably have been female.[5]

Take Russell's (1982) survey on wife rape. Russell chose the 33 interviewers employed in this study on the basis of their interviewing skills and "empathetic attitudes" to rape victims. The interviewers received more than 65 hours of paid training (much more than is usual). The training included "consciousness raising" about rape and incest and the "defining and desensitizing" of sexual words so as to make the interviewers as comfortable as possible with whatever vocabulary respondents might employ. In the Leeds study, Hanmer and Saunders (1984) recruited "feminist interviewers" who would behave in a "sensitive manner" and convey a "feeling of warmth and

unflappability" in interviews. The interviewers also had to be familiar with local women's organizations that offered support to victims of violence and to be motivated to work on the survey because they wanted to know more about woman abuse in general. Gordon and Riger (1989), in their survey on rape, brought in specialists from rape crisis intervention teams at local hospitals and police departments to instruct interviewers on how to recognize the "less obvious signs of emotional upset and postrape trauma" (p. 198). The generally illuminating results of these studies suggest that the majority of the interviewers were adept at establishing rapport and evoking candid responses to threatening questions about physical and sexual victimization.

THE TORONTO SURVEY: METHOD

Sample and Interviews

The data on which this analysis is based are from a telephone survey of Toronto women conducted in 1987.[6] Using a method of random digit dialing that maximizes the probability of selecting a working residential number and at the same time a simple random sample (Tremblay 1981), a sample of telephone numbers was generated from a list of all telephone exchanges in the Census Metropolitan Area of Toronto. Over 99 percent of Toronto households have at least one phone (Statistics Canada 1986).

Female interviewers working for the Institute for Social Research, located at York University, then conducted telephone interviews, averaging 23 minutes, with 604 currently or formerly married or cohabiting women between the ages of 18 and 50. The formerly married or cohabiting respondents had to have ended their marriage or relationship within the last 2 years to be eligible for the survey. The interviews took place in January and February, 1987.

The survey response rate, defined as the number of completed interviews divided by the number of estimated eligible respondents, was 56.4 percent. Details regarding the calculation of this rate, sampling decisions, and other technical aspects of the study have been reported at length elsewhere (Smith 1987, 1989).

Definitions

I defined violence as any threatened, attempted, or completed assault or sexual assault on a woman by a male stranger or nonstranger. Assaults range from the threat of bodily harm to an actual physical attack resulting in injury.

Sexual assaults range from indecent exposure (flashing) to rape and include any unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature. (In this article, I use the terms violence, assault, and abuse more or less synonymously.) These definitions emerged out of women's accounts of their own experiences, which were then organized as much as possible on the basis of legal criteria in the Canadian Criminal Code (Verdun-Jones 1989).

As for victim-offender relationships,[7] I classified an incident as stranger violence if the woman did not see or recognize the offender, knew him only by sight, or knew him only by hearsay. If the victim and offender were intimates, related to, well known to, or casually acquainted with one another, the incident was classified as nonstranger violence. These definitions are similar to those used in the NCS (U.S. Department of Justice 1990).

In this study, lifetime prevalence of violence refers to either the number or percentage of women in the sample who disclosed having been assaulted or sexually assaulted one or more times since the age of approximately 16.

Measures

A wide range of closed and open questions was used to ask about possible experiences as a victim of violence. The first question was about stranger abuse in public places:

> For this survey, abuse means being pushed, grabbed, slapped, punched, kicked, beaten up, attacked with a weapon, or physically attacked in any other way. Since you were 16 years of age, has any male stranger abused you, or tried to abuse you, in public?

A second set of victimization questions and the principal measure of abuse by a present or former husband or male partner was a somewhat reworded rendition of the Conflict Tactics Scales. The last 9 CTS items describe acts of violence. If the respondent indicated that she had ever been the recipient of any of these acts of violence "in the whole time you've been (were) together," she was counted as a victim.

Three supplementary questions followed. These questions broadened the scope of the inquiry to include other men besides the respondent's current husband or partner. The first supplementary question was as follows:

> Have you had *any* (any *other*) experiences as a victim of abuse by a husband or partner, a boyfriend or date, or any man you are, or were, having a relationship with that I have not asked about?

The second supplementary question was on sexual abuse:

> Have you ever been sexually assaulted? By that I mean forced to have sex against your will by a husband, partner, boyfriend, or date?

The third supplementary question was the last question of the interview:

> We realize that this topic is very sensitive and that many women are reluctant to talk about their own experiences. But we're also a bit worried that we haven't asked the right questions. So now that you have had a chance to think about the topic, can you tell me anything (anything more) from your own experience that may help us understand this problem?

The interviewer followed up a positive response to any of these questions by asking how many times the abuse occurred. She then asked the respondent to describe the experience, or if more than one, the "worst" experience, in her own words, probing as necessary for details about motives, social context, physical and psychological consequences, and the like. In the case of a revelation of sexual abuse, the interviewer was instructed to determine if the sexual abuse was part of an episode that the respondent had already described in answer to an earlier question. Only previously unreported sexual assaults are included in this analysis; no incident or victim was counted twice. The interviewer recorded the victim's responses verbatim as much as possible. The resulting qualitative data were then transcribed, content analyzed, and coded according to the definitions earlier set forth.

RESULTS

The following results are intended more as an illustration of the value of a feminist approach to data collection in surveys on violence against women than as estimates of the prevalence of such violence. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the woman-centered approach employed in the Toronto survey produced much higher rates of victimization than have most conventional surveys (Smith 1987). It also revealed more about the range and complexity of such experiences, though these dimensions receive only limited attention here. For ease of presentation, I shall deal first with stranger violence and second with nonstranger violence.

Stranger Violence

Twenty-one percent of the respondents initially reported that a male stranger had physically abused, or tried to abuse, them in public since the age of 16. Five other women answered the question on male strangers negatively

TABLE 1: The Prevalence of Physical and Sexual Violence

Violence	*Number of Women*	*% of Victims*	*% of Sample*	*% Victims Sexually Abused*
By strangers				
Threatened	35	28.7	5.8	
Attempted/completed	87	71.3	14.4	
Total	122	100.0	20.2	42.6
By nonstrangers				
Husband/partner	180	74.4	29.8	
Boyfriend/date	40	16.5	6.6	
Other relative/acquaintance	22	9.1	3.6	
Total	242	100.0	40.1	29.3
Grand total	299*	100.0	49.5	38.5

*The grand total is less than the sum of the column totals because some women reported violence by a stranger *and* a nonstranger.

but subsequently revealed, in response to the question on sexual abuse, that a male stranger had sexually molested them in a manner that fell within the definition of violence used in this article. The addition of these women brought the proportion of victims of stranger violence to 22 percent. By the same token, 8 women who responded affirmatively to the question on stranger abuse subsequently indicated when asked to describe the event that their attackers were more like casual acquaintances than strangers, specifically, her friend's brother, her brother's friend, a carpenter working in the house, a man she met in a bar, a man she met at a party, her husband's business acquaintance, and 2 unspecified male acquaintances. Subtracting these cases reduced the proportion of victims of stranger violence to 20 percent of the sample of 604 women, as shown in Table 1. Of these victims, 42 percent were either sexually or physically and sexually abused.

When asked to describe the incident, or the worst incident, approximately 29 percent of the victims described a threatened assault (i.e., one with no actual physical contact). Most of these were flashings:

- I was walking down the street and a man stopped his car and did filthy things.
- A man called me over to his car for directions and he had his pants open.

A few women described being followed or chased (e.g., "When I got off the bus, a strange man followed me. When I ran, he ran"). Three women described threats that were purely verbal (e.g., "I was mistaken as a prostitute. A man propositioned me. I was scared").

Most victims (71.3 percent) described an attempted or completed assault, that is, an assault involving some degree of physical contact. The majority of these incidents were unwanted touchings, often, but not always, of a sexual nature. The following accounts are illustrative:

- I was standing in front of a bus stop and a man came up behind me and started touching my bottom.
- I was going into an elevator in an apartment building and a man grabbed my face and held my cheeks and tried to kiss me. Fortunately the elevator doors closed and I was safe.
- I was going home on the subway, and this guy would push up against me and make it extremely uncomfortable for me. I couldn't move or do anything.

The other attempted or completed assaults involved physical force of varying levels of severity. For example:

- I was leaving a bar with my girlfriend. We were walking towards the car. A drunk man was leaning against the wall. He tried to kiss me. He kept walking behind me, then he punched me, and knocked me down. His friends ran up to me and helped me up. They said he'd been drinking.
- A neighbor called me at 6 a.m. to say that her husband was going to beat her up. So I went over to her place. He hit me with his fists, punched me black and blue.

It should be emphasized that although the original question referred to strangers and public places, not all respondents interpreted these terms in the same way. As already noted, some strangers were not total strangers but rather casual acquaintances of the victim. Also, some women related incidents that occurred not in public but in semipublic locations (e.g., at work) and even (in 2 cases) the victim's home. (As long as the woman did not know the offender, such incidents remained coded as stranger violence.) These inconsistencies underline the importance of asking questions that allow for the possibility that responses may not fall neatly into the survey researcher's preestablished categories.

Nonstranger Violence

Table 1 shows that 40 percent of all women in the study revealed that they had ever suffered physical violence as an adult (i.e., since the age of 16) at the hands of a husband, partner, boyfriend, date, other male family member, or male acquaintance. I derived this result from the 8 recoded cases noted in the previous section plus the responses to 4 measures of nonstranger violence: (1) the 9-item CTS violence index; (2) the question regarding any, or

any other, abuse by a male intimate; (3) the question on sexual assault, and (4) the final question of the survey inviting the respondent to discuss anything from her own experience that might shed light on the problem. Each of the last 3 items, besides eliciting additional accounts of nonstranger violence from women who had already disclosed having been victimized by an intimate or known man, produced a substantial number of "new" victims. These were women who denied having been abused when asked earlier, either because they did not remember, were unwilling to disclose, misinterpreted the question, thought that their experience was outside the scope of the prior question, or denied having been abused for some other reason.

I have presented estimates of the incidence and prevalence of violence by a husband, partner, boyfriend, or date in detail in an earlier article (Smith 1987). Table 1, therefore, merely summarizes these earlier findings, but adds 22 previously unreported cases. Eight of these involved another family member: an uncle, a father, a son, a stepbrother, and 4 other relatives the respondent declined to identify. The remaining 14 cases involved acquaintances: 4 authority figures (2 employers, a landlord, and a medical doctor); 8 casual acquaintances already noted; and 2 unspecified male acquaintances.

All of the nonstranger assaults in Table 1 involved physical contact; no woman described a solely visual or verbal episode (i.e., a threat).[8] Slightly over 29 percent of the assaults also involved sexual abuse, although this figure may be low. Unlike most of the stranger-abuse victims, some women who suffered an assault by a known male made it clear that they did not wish to provide a detailed account of the episode, an episode that may or may not have had a sexual element to it; in fact, a handful of women declined to provide any details whatsoever. Still other physical attacks were sex-related but not described explicitly as sexual abuse and thus not coded as such (e.g., "My ex-boyfriend wanted me to get into the car and have sex with him. I wouldn't, so he beat me up"). In short, Table 1 probably underestimates the proportion of women who were physically and sexually abused by a male nonstranger.

Table 1 also shows that 1 out of every 2 women in the sample experienced violence at least once as an adult at the hands of either an unknown or known male. Roughly 39 percent of these incidents were sexual attacks, in whole or in part. In deriving these figures, no respondent was counted as a victim more than once; although many women suffered abuse by a stranger and a nonstranger, the table shows only one of those victimizations.

It must be emphasized that the data in the subtotals rows of Table 1 resulted in part from descriptions of the "worst" incident provided by women who reported more than one victimization. Had the interviewers asked these women about the most recent incident, the results may have been somewhat

different. In any case, the importance of the findings lies more in how the information was elicited than in the numbers themselves.

CONCLUSION

As feminist scholarship has become less "celebratory" and more "self-critical" (McCormack 1990), some feminist social scientists have argued for a rapprochement between feminist and mainstream approaches to research (Bart et al. 1989; Hoff 1990; McCormack 1990; Saunders 1988; Yllo 1988). This includes an acknowledgement by feminists of the value of adhering to the canons of established social science in addressing feminist concerns. By the same token, feminist scholarship has had an impact on mainstream research. As a case in point, the NCS is redesigning its questions on rape and sexual assault, at least in part as a result of biting feminist criticism of the original questions, which elicited few reports of victimization. The new questions will be fully phased into the NCS by 1993 (Koss 1992).

I have presented six strategies associated mainly, although certainly not exclusively, with a feminist approach to survey research on violence against women. With the exception of carefully selecting and training interviewers, where, in hindsight, much more could have been done, these strategies were adopted in a survey of Toronto women conducted in 1987. I integrated feminist with mainstream survey methods in an attempt to elicit reports of victimization that at least approximated the subjective experiences of the women involved, that revealed the true scope and nature of the violence, and that resulted in estimates at least roughly generalizable to women in the population at large, based on the tenets of established social science.

The results indicate that 20 percent of the 604 women interviewed suffered an assault by a male stranger and 40 percent suffered an assault by a male nonstranger (usually a husband or partner) one or more times during adulthood. One out of every two women experienced at least one attack by either an unknown or a known man at some point in her adult life. When asked to describe the incident, or the worst incident, 39 percent of the women described a sexual assault, in whole or in part.

Even these figures are underestimates. No respondent reported having been the recipient of a threatening, harassing, or obscene phone call, for example, presumably because none of the survey questions referred specifically to such calls. This is a limitation of the study. Although an attempt was made to capture a wide range of victimization experiences, putting any question in a particular way inevitably shapes and constrains the answer

received. (On the other hand, some of the questions unexpectedly produced revelations of abuses that were outside the scope of the study, for example, child sexual abuse.) It is also a virtual certainty that some women simply refused to disclose their experiences of male violence. Nevertheless, the generally good quality of the data elicited demonstrates the value of adopting a feminist approach to data gathering within a conventional survey research framework in surveys on this sensitive subject.

NOTES

1. To my knowledge, there is no systematic empirical evidence that women survey respondents overreport their victimization, and I cannot think of a convincing theoretical reason for why they would do so.

2. Asking specific as opposed to general questions also tends to produce higher rates of victimization. The British Crime Survey figure resulted from responses to three broad questions: one about physical violence, one about threats, and one about sexual assault. Radford (1987) asked eight questions about specific forms of personal victimization and six additional questions about seeing or knowing another woman who had been victimized. The section on Multiple Measures in the present article addresses this issue in part.

3. In 1991, the October 22 edition of the *Toronto Star* stated that the House of Lords upheld the abolition of a 255-year-old ruling that a man cannot be found guilty of raping his wife, but formal legislative ratification had not taken place at the time of this writing.

4. The probability of reporting ever having been victimized tends to decrease, not increase, with the respondent's age (e.g., Brush 1990; Russell 1982). In the present survey, the bivariate relationship between ever abused and age was negative but not statistically significant. This relationship disappeared altogether in a logistic multiple regression analysis with several socioeconomic variables (Smith 1990). In short, the likelihood of ever having been victimized does not seem to increase with age simply as a function of time at risk.

5. In a survey of over 3,000 Los Angeles residents, Sorenson et al. (1987) found that women respondents were 1.27 times more likely to report having been sexually assaulted to women than to men interviewers. These apparently are the only data on this question.

6. A review of the literature indicates that the survey by telephone is equal and possibly superior to the face-to-face method when it comes to eliciting complete and accurate responses to delicate questions about physical and sexual abuse. Whatever edge the telephone survey may have in this regard is probably due to the anonymity, confidentiality, and control of interviewer effects that this method provides (Smith 1989).

7. Some argue that the term "victim" suggests passivity and helplessness and has the power to turn an abused woman into an object of pity or even contempt. The preferred word is "survivor." This point is well taken. On the other hand, "survivor" seems too strong a word to describe a woman who reports having been the recipient of a relatively minor act of violence on a single occasion; such women are the majority of "victims" in many surveys of the general population. I use the term "victim" advisedly.

8. This was probably a result of question wording. The question on stranger violence, which did elicit reports of threats, contains the phrase "tried to abuse you"; the questions on nonstranger violence do not. One Conflict Tactics Scales item does read "threatened to hit or throw something

at you," but this item, which is not part of the CTS "violence index," was asked only in reference to the past year, not ever in the marriage. The responses to this item are thus not included in the present analysis.

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