

Antecedents of Abusive Personality and Abusive Behavior in Wife Assailters

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One hundred and forty men referred for wife assault and 45 demographically matched controls were assessed for psychological variables associated with abusive personality (anger; cyclical (borderline) personality organization (BPO) and chronic experience of trauma symptoms) and abusive behaviors (both physical and emotional) as reported by their female partners. Predictor variables for these abuse measures included the EMBU which assesses recollections of parental warmth and rejection and the Conflict Tactics Scale which assesses physical abuse in the family of origin. A composite of BPO, anger, trauma symptoms and fearful attachment called Abusive Personality (ABP) correlated .42 with wives reports of emotionally abusive behaviors. ABP was positively and significantly correlated with recollections of negative parental treatment by the abuse perpetrator. A composite of parental rejection and verbal and physical abuse by parents correlated .41 with ABP. A discriminant function of high and low ABP found that ABP was predicted by paternal rejection, physical abuse, and absence of maternal warmth. Physical abuse by either parent correlated significantly with all subscales and total scores on the ABP measure. When combined with data showing ABP to correlate significantly with frequency of use of violence by wife assailters (Dutton, 1995b, Dutton and Starzomski, 1993), the current study suggests a personality syndrome of assaultive males that has antecedents in the early experiences of these men. The present data suggest that family of origin experiences may have effects beyond modeling of abusive behaviors. These effects include development of a specific personality form associated with abusiveness.

KEY WORDS: wife abuse; wife assault; psychopathology; personality.

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INTRODUCTION

In a review of the literature on wife assault causation, Dutton (1988) found *prima facie* evidence for a subgroup of wife assailters having both a past history of childhood trauma and a current personality profile similar to Borderline Personality Organization (BPO; Gunderson, 1984). That evidence was theoretical, relying on similarities in the clinical profiles of wife assailters and Borderlines.

BPO AND WIFE ASSAULT: THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP

As Gunderson (1984) describes the Borderline Personality (BP), the essential characteristics are: (1) a proclivity for intense, unstable interpersonal relationships characterized by intermittent undermining of the significant other, manipulation, and masked dependency; (2) an unstable sense of self with intolerance of being alone and abandonment anxiety; and (3) intense anger, demandingness, and impulsivity, usually tied to substance abuse or promiscuity.

Studies of assaultive males based on wives' reports (e.g., Gondolf, 1987; Rosenbaum and O'Leary, 1981; Rounsville, 1978; Walker, 1979) offer a picture of individuals with a constellation of problems, including substance abuse, jealousy, a history of intense, unstable intimate relationships, anger, and abusive, traumatic childhoods. In a study of assaultive men's partners, Rounsville (1978) found that 39% of the men was reported to have been beaten in childhood and 45% had been permanently separated from their parents. Walker's (1984) study of 281 female partners of batterers found that 81% of the partners had knowledge of battering in their husband's family of origin (compared to 24% of a sample of 41 nonviolent males). These descriptions of wife assailters relationship histories, anger, violence, and substance abuse closely fit the clinical classification of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), or its less extreme counterpart, BPO (Gunderson, 1984).

Dutton (1994) viewed BPO as a continuum of personality problems characterized by identity issues, which become salient in intimate relationships, and which vary on three defining features of BPO: identity diffusion, primitive defenses and reality testing. This variation may relate systematically to both adult affect and to early experience factors. This continuum is reflected by scores on a self report scale for BPO.

Gunderson (1984) described a three-level defense structure of Borderline Personality that produces sudden shifts in phenomenology, affect, and behavior. This defense structure is consistent with, and could produce, the kinds of behavior depicted by Walker's (1979) "abuse cycle" description of

some wife assaulters. Gunderson describes the BPO as existing in a "dysphoric stalemate" in relationships, where intimacy needs are unmet but where the requisite motivation and skills to assert the needs are non-existent. This first stage resembles the "tension building" phase of the abuse cycle, during which frustrations increase. Stage Two, according to Gunderson, occurs when the BP perceives a relationship as possibly lost. The defense structure at this stage expresses itself as anger, devaluation of the significant other, or open rage. This would correspond to Walker's "battering" stage of the abuse cycle. Stage Three occurs when the significant other is lost. At this point, the BP engages in behaviors designed to ward off the subjective experience of aloneness. Impulsive substance use and promiscuity are examples. Another example would be the exaggerated appeasement behaviors that assaultive husbands engage in after their wife has temporarily left the relationship, and which Walker describes in detail. These behaviors persist until the woman has emotionally returned, then the cycle repeats itself. Hence, both wife assaulters and the borderlines evinced phasic personalities, with "dysphoric stalemates" and cyclical anger (Gunderson, 1984; Walker, 1979).

BPO AND WIFE ASSAULT: EMPIRICAL CONNECTIONS

Borderline Personality Organization could be a central organizing feature in understanding the personality of men who assault their wives. It may be prominent in men whose violence is specific to their intimate relationship and who, by their wives' reports become intermittently angry and irritable in an absence of external stressors (Walker, 1979). To test this notion, Dutton (1994) found strong relationships between self-reports of BPO in assaultive men and their reports of abusive behaviors. Both physical and emotional abusiveness were significantly related to scores on a self report measure of BPO (Oldham *et al.*, 1985). Dutton and Starzomski (1993) corroborated this finding by using the wives' reports of the man abusive behavior as the criterion measure using the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (Tolman, 1989). A composite personality score for men comprised of subscales of the BPO scale and the Multidimensional Anger Inventory accounted for 50% of the women's reports of their partners' domination and 35% of his emotional abuse. The result of these studies has been to profile an "abusive personality" constellation comprised of high scores on BPO, anger measures and the experience of trauma symptoms. Using a composite predictor comprised of these measures Dutton (1994) was able to classify 95.5% of men into high and low abuse groups, based on their wives' reports.

BPO AND EARLY TRAUMA

Evidence is accumulating for a history of childhood trauma as the central etiological feature in development of BPO and its more serious form, Borderline Personality Disorder (Dutton, 1995b; Herman *et al.*, 1989; van der Kolk, 1987; Zanarini *et al.*, 1989); and it also may be a risk factor for wife assault (Dutton, 1995b; Straus *et al.*, 1980; Kalmuss, 1984). Links *et al.* (1988) reported that both physical and sexual abuse were more common in families of BPDs than in inpatient control groups. Herman *et al.* (1989), using in-depth interviews with female and male Borderlines, found that 81% (17/21) of a BPD group reported experiencing trauma before the age of 18. For the majority of those experiencing trauma (12/17), it started before the age of 7. Three types of trauma were reported: physical abuse, sexual abuse, and witnessing physical abuse. Most of these subjects (17/21) were women. However, in a "Borderline trait" group of men (perhaps more similar to BPO), 73% (8/11) experienced trauma before age eighteen. The investigators concluded that there was "a strong association between Borderline Personality Disorder and child abuse" (p. 493).

Zanarini *et al.* (1989) compared 50 BPD patients with Dysthymic and Antisocial controls. Borderlines were significantly more likely than either control group to report a history of abuse, particularly verbal and sexual abuse. Unfortunately, the Borderline vs. Antisocial personality comparison was confounded with sex: 66% of the Borderlines was female, 72.4% of the Antisocial Personality group was male.

Note that these studies focused generally on the more extreme form of Borderline Personality Disorder and that the majority of subjects were female. Only the male "Borderline trait" group of the Herman *et al.* study examined backgrounds of a group similar to BPO. The present study will report associations between BPO and recollections of parental treatment.

WIFE ASSAULT AND EARLY TRAUMA

In a review of empirical studies, Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) found that husband-to-wife violence was associated with childhood witnessing of interparental assault in 88% of studies, and with direct childhood experience with violence in 69% of studies. Straus *et al.* (1980) and Kalmuss (1984) found rates of having been physically abused and witnessing interparental abuse that were three times the population average in groups of men who used physical violence against their wives. Dutton (1995b) found that wife assaulters had profiles on the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory, Version II (Millon, 1981) that were similar to victims of PTSD. Both exhibited an "82C profile"

(avoidant-negativistic-borderline). However, wife assaulters were higher on antisocial personality and lower on anxiety than the PTSD group. Dutton (1995b) speculated that the repeated use of violence might have tension reducing and anxiety dissipating functions for the assaultive sample. Frequency and severity of childhoods was significantly associated with levels of chronic trauma symptoms. He speculated that early experiences in the family of origin may have been the trauma source for this group.

Clinical and research descriptions of wife assaulters clearly share many of the characteristics attributed to trauma victims. Wife assaulters have been described as poor monitors of affect (Ganley, 1981; Gondolf, 1987) and as suffering from problems of impulse control and exaggerated dependency (Dutton and Browning, 1988; Ganley, 1981). Trauma victims have exaggerated separation anxiety, problems with regulation of affect and impulse control, an intense dependency on primary interpersonal relationships, and an inability to tolerate being alone. All of these clinical characteristics are similar to those of persons diagnosed as having BPO.

The literature we have reviewed suggests that there is a similar clinical profile for males who were victims of childhood abuse and males who assault their wives, and males exhibiting BPO. While van der Kolk (1987) reports evidence linking trauma to BPO, this connection has never before been studied in a population of wife assaulters. The purpose of the present study is to explore associations among these various aspects of abusive personality, their relationship to abusive behavior and the relationship of both to measures of early experiences in the family of origin.

METHOD

Testing and clinical assessment was carried out on 140 court-referred and self-referred males interviewed by the Vancouver Assaulative Husbands Project and the Victoria Family Violence Institute and their intimate female partners. Only men with female partners willing to complete the abuse measures described below were included in this study. Since measures were presented as part of a mandatory assessment, completion rates were close to 100%. All men had prior histories of wife assault. Self-referred men usually request treatment for their assaultiveness because of an ultimatum from their wives. In order to minimize effects from treatment on test results, all men were assessed during the first three weeks of a sixteen week treatment program. Only North American-born men were included in the current sample to avoid interpretative problems arising from language difficulties or from different culture norms. The demographic profile of this group is as follows: average age = 35 (range 17-65), average level of edu-

cation = grade 12, average income was \$34,285 (63% self-identified as blue collar, 37% as white collar), average assaultiveness in prior year = 11.5 ($SD = 9.2$) acts of physical violence against their wife [self-reported on the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979)]; 56% were still living with the assault victim. In addition, to comparing incidence of BPO in the assaultive group with nonassaultive men, a demographic comparison group of 45 men was assessed. These men, who worked for the local university employees union, had an average age of 35 (range 19-45), average of 12 years of schooling. They were demographically similar to the assaultive males on age, average salary, and education. They were recruited by posting notices in their work buildings after clearing the procedure with their union.

Testing and assessment included:

Personality Measures

Borderline Personality Organization

The Self-Report Instrument for Borderline Personality Organization (Oldham et al., 1985) is a 30-item instrument derived through factor analysis of a 130 item questionnaire designed by the authors. The 30-item scale retains items with the strongest factor loadings for each of the three subscales of identity diffusion, primitive defenses, and reality testing.

The first subscale, identity diffusion, measures a poorly integrated sense of self or of significant others. Identity diffusion is assessed by ascertaining difficulties in describing one's own personality or the personalities of others, uncertainty about career or goals, contradictory behaviors, and instability in intimate relationships.

The second subscale measures primitive defenses. Items were written to cover defenses of splitting, idealization, devaluation, omnipotence, denial, projection, and projective identification.

Reality testing items were written to cover external versus internal origins of perceptions, evaluation of own behavior in terms of social criteria of reality, differentiation of self from non-self, internal reality testing, and the cognitive process of reality testing.

Oldham et al. (1985) report on the scale's intrascale consistency, interscale relationships and relationship to BPD differential diagnosis, and application of the scale to differing theories of Borderline Personality Organization and its DSM-IIIR Axis 2 definition. Cronbach's alpha for the BPO subscales are Identity Diffusion .92, Primitive Defenses .87, and Reality Testing .84. The BPO self-report instrument does not assess abusive-

ness or aggression. Hence, any associations with other scales reported below are not attributable to item overlap.

Chronic Trauma Symptoms

The Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-33) (Briere and Runtz, 1989) is a brief (33-item) reliable instrument showing predictive and construct validity. It has been shown to discriminate female victims of childhood sexual abuse from non-victimized women. The TSC-33 contains five subscales: dissociation, anxiety, depression, postsexual abuse trauma-hypothesized, and sleep disturbance. The PSAT-hypothesized includes those symptoms thought to be most characteristic of sexual abuse experiences but which may also occur as a result of other types of trauma. Analysis of the internal consistency of the five subscales indicated reasonable reliability with an average subscale alpha of .71 and a total alpha for the TSC-33 of .89 (Briere and Runtz, 1989).

Anger

The Multidimensional Anger Inventory (MAI; Siegel, 1986) is a 38-item self-report scale assessing the following dimensions of anger response: frequency, duration, magnitude, mode of expression, hostile outlook, and range of anger-eliciting situations. Siegel reports the results of a factor analysis of this scale and the reliability of its subscales (alphas = .51 to .83) and the scale as a whole (alpha equal to .84 and .89 for two separate samples). The scale was validated by correlation with other, conceptually similar anger inventories.

Attachment

Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ). The RSQ (Griffin and Bartholomew, 1995) is a 30-item self-report measure with items drawn from Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment measure, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, as well as items from Collins and Read's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Measures of each of the four attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) identified by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) were created by summing four or five items from the corresponding prototypic descriptions. The RSQ attachment scores show convergent validity with interview ratings of the four attachment patterns (Griffin and Bartholomew, 1994). Dutton et al. (1993) found

an attachment pattern called Fearful attachment to be strongly and significantly associated with abusiveness.

These scales (BPO, TSC, MAI, Fearful attachment) form the basis of what Dutton (1994, 1995b) has termed the "abusive personality."

Psychological Abuse

The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI; Tolman 1989) contains 58 items (rated from 1 "never" to 5 "very frequently") which comprise forms of emotional/verbal abuse and dominance/isolation. Dominance/isolation includes items related to rigid observance of traditional sex roles, demands for subservience, and isolation from resources. In contrast, emotional/verbal abuse includes withholding emotional resources, verbal attacks, and behavior that degrades women. Factor analyses support the inclusion of the two factors. In the sample considered in this study, Cronbach's alpha's for the dominance/isolation subscale was .82, and for the emotional/verbal subscale .93.

Physical Abuse

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) is a standardized scale designed to measure the frequency and intensity of 19 tactics used in dyads to resolve conflict. The scale includes rational tactics, withdrawal, and a variety of verbally, emotionally and physically abusive strategies. Respondents report both their own use of these tactics and their use by an interactant on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (over 20 times). This allows independent assessment of both use of, and being a recipient of, various conflict tactics on affective reactions to stimulus materials. Straus *et al.* (1980) have published population norms for usage of each tactic in a variety of intimate relationships.

All assessments of abusive behavior were supplied by intimate female partners of the men in the sample.

Early Experience Variables

Conflict in the Family of Origin (CTS:FOO)

The Conflict Tactics Scale can also be used to assess conflict in the family of origin. Dyadic pairs are presented such as father-mother, father-you, and mother-you and scores established for each relationship. Straus

et al. (1980) have published population norms for usage of each tactic in a variety of intimate relationships.

Recollections of Early Childrearing

In addition, the *Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (EMBU)* (Perris *et al.*, 1980) scale was used to provide a quantitative measure of the respondents' memories of their upbringing. The EMBU was originally developed in Sweden and has been translated and widely used with English speaking subjects (Gerslma *et al.*, 1990). It is an 80-item scale that assesses memories of parental rearing behavior. The psychometric properties of the English version were developed by Ross *et al.* (1982). The English version has 14 subscales, scored separately for mother and father. For purposes of the present study, only subscales assessing recollections of maternal warmth and rejection and paternal warmth and rejection were assessed, comprising 43 items.

RESULTS

Assaultive versus Non-assaultive Males

Comparisons of assaultive and non-assaultive groups are shown in Table I. Assaultive men scored significantly higher on all scales used in the study. Table I shows *t* scores and *p* levels for individual linear comparisons. By way of comparison to our BPO scores for assaultive and control males, Oldham *et al.* (1985) reported mean scores on the BPO scale for normals as 61.3 and for a diagnosed borderline group as 74.8. Hence, the current assaultive group is significantly different from demographically matched controls and has a mean BPO score similar to a diagnosed Borderline group. Similarly, the assaultive group differed significantly from the control on anger (MAI), and experienced trauma symptoms (TSC) and fearful attachment. Not surprisingly, the assaultive group also differed significantly from the control on all measures of abuse, physical and emotional.

The Abusive Personality

In order to assess whether a composite or cluster of abusive personality variables existed, all potential measures of abusive personality were inter-correlated in Table II. We decided against a factor analysis because we did not want to lose the richness of the original scales through this data reduction technique. Also, since the metric for the various predictor scales

Table I. Assaultive and Control Groups on Relevant Variables

| | Assaultive | Control | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|----------------------------|------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Personality variables | | | | |
| BPO total | 71.0 | 59.9 | 3.31 | .001 |
| Anger (MAI) | 82.6 | 74.8 | 2.4 | .05 |
| Trauma symptoms (TSC) | 26.7 | 16.1 | 4.5 | .00001 |
| Fearful attachment | 15.6 | 12.1 | 2.3 | .05 |
| Abusive behaviors: | | | | |
| Psychological abuse | | | | |
| Domination\isolation | 89.5 | 62.3 | 5.2 | .00001 |
| Emotional abuse | 44.8 | 28.0 | 5.4 | .00001 |
| CTS (Man's report) | 5.9 | 1.0 | 4.3 | .00001 |
| (Woman's report) | 7.7 | .9 | 3.5 | .001 |
| Early experience variables | | | | |
| EMBU | | | | |
| Rejection by father | 46.5 | 35.9 | 4.21 | .0001 |
| Rejection by mother | 41.7 | 34.7 | 2.8 | .001 |
| CTS: Father (verbal) | 15.3 | 10.1 | 1.99 | .05 |
| Mother (verbal) | 13.9 | 9.6 | 2.1 | .04 |
| Father (physical) | 11.4 | 3.8 | 3.2 | .002 |
| Mother (physical) | 6.6 | 2.9 | 2.4 | .017 |

Table II. Intercorrelations of Abusive Personality Factors^a

| | TSC | MAI | Fearful Attachment |
|-----|-----|-----|--------------------|
| BPO | .66 | .61 | .54 |
| TSC | .54 | | .51 |
| MAI | | | .50 |

All correlations are *p* < .00001. TSC—Trauma Symptom Checklist. MAI—Multidimensional Anger Inventory.

was relatively homogeneous (30 to 38 items) we decided against *z* score conversions and use linear additive combinations instead. All measures were highly and significantly correlated. On this basis, a composite measure called Abusive Personality comprised of all interrelated scales in Table II (BPO + MAI + TSC + Fearful) was composed.

Abusive Behaviors

In order to assess the interdependence of abusive behaviors, all CTS and PMWI measures were intercorrelated. Results are shown in Table III.

Table III. Intercorrelations of Abusive Behaviors in Current Relationship^a

| | CTS:Verbal | Physical | PMWI: 1 2 |
|----------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Verbal (CTS) | .60 | .71 | .54 |
| Physical (CTS) | .80 | .69 | |

^aAll correlations are $p < .00001$. PMWI—Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory. CTS—Conflict Tactics Scale

Table IV. Correlations of Early Experience Factors^a

| | VAFY | VAMY | PAFY | PAMY | RejF | RejM |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Verbal Abuse FY | | .45 | .70 | .45 | .60 | .30 |
| Verbal Abuse MY | .45 | | .27 | .66 | .29 | .49 |
| Physical Ab. FY | .70 | .27 | | .46 | .74 | .39 |
| Physical Ab. MY | .45 | .66 | .46 | | .47 | .61 |
| Rejection F | .60 | .29 | .74 | .47 | | .48 |
| Rejection M | .30 | .49 | .39 | .61 | .48 | |

^afy = father to you my = mother to you. $p < .05 = r > .24$. $p < .01 = r > .30$. $p < .001 = r > .36$.

All measures were strongly and significantly correlated. On this basis, a composite measure called Abusive Behaviors was composed (CTS: Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse and Tolman PMWI: Dominance and Emotional Abuse).

Early Experience Measures

In order to assess interdependence of CTS and EMBU measures of early experience, a set of Pearson correlations is presented in Table IV. All measures of early experience were significantly correlated with all other measures. On this basis, a composite measure called Family of Origin was comprised of all interrelated CTS and EMBU subscales presented in Table IV.

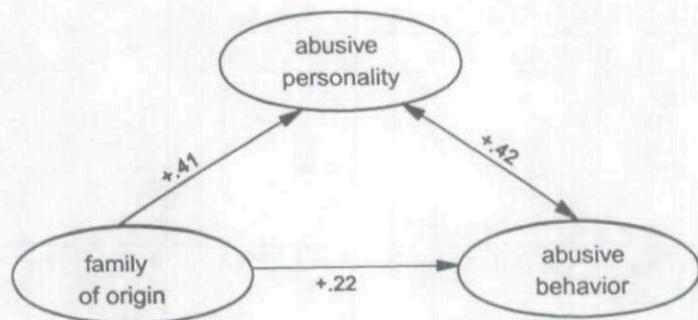
The Relationship Among Composite Factors

Table V presents intercorrelations among these composite measures. The reader is cautioned that Family Of Origin measures are based on respondents' recollections and may not be veridical. Dutton and Starzomski

Table V. Intercorrelations Among Composite Variables for Early Experiences, Abusive Personality and Abusive Behaviors

| | Abusive Personality | Abusive Behavior |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Family of Origin | .41 ^a | .22 ^a |
| Abusive Personality | | .42 ^a |

^a $p < .0001$.



* all correlations $p < .01$

Fig. 1. Model of Family of Origin Effects on Abusive Personality and Behavior Corrected for Social Desirability.

(1994) have shown that court-referred wife assaulters, in particular, tend to idealize early treatment. To allow for such idealization Dutton and Starzomski (1994) used a correction procedure developed by Saunders (1991) to remove social desirability from self-reports. Figure 1 demonstrates a hypothetical model corrected for social desirability.

Association of Early Trauma Variables with Adult Abusiveness

Given the overall significance of these composite scores, we examined specific correlations of early experience variables with adult variables. These are presented in Table VI. Both use of violence in the family of origin (CTS) and the EMBU measure of rejection were significantly correlated with abusive personality measures: BPO, MAI, TSC and fearful at-

Table VI. Pearson Correlations of Violence Predictor and Adult Criterion Variable (Early Experience)

| | EMBU: Rejection | CTS:FOO ^d |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Abusive Personality | | |
| BPO | .33 ^a | .21 ^b |
| MAI | .32 ^a | .41 ^c |
| TSC | .19 ^b | .23 ^b |
| Fearful | .27 ^c | .20 ^b |
| Abusive Behavior | | |
| PMWI1 | .36 ^a | .50 ^a |
| PMWI2 | .33 ^c | .42 ^a |
| CTS: Physical | .29 ^b | .37 ^a |
| Violence | | |

Note. PMWI—Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory.
 CTS—Conflict Tactics Scale.

^a*p* < .001.

^b*p* < .05.

^c*p* < .01.

^dFOO—Family of Origin

Table VII. Correlations of Early Experience Factors with Discriminant Function for Abusive Personality

| | Discriminant Function |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| EMBU | |
| Paternal Rejection | .87 |
| Paternal Warmth | -.63 |
| Maternal Rejection | .39 |
| Maternal Warmth | -.39 |
| Conflict Tactics (CTS:FOO) | |
| Physical Abuse (Father to you) | .64 |
| Verbal Abuse (Father to you) | .41 |
| Physical Abuse (Mother to You) | .34 |
| Verbal Abuse (Mother to You) | .34 |
| Physical Abuse (Father to Mother) | .24 |
| Verbal Abuse (Father to Mother) | .36 |
| Physical Abuse (Mother to Father) | .27 |
| Verbal Abuse (Mother to Father) | .38 |

tachment. They were also significantly correlated with abusive behaviors; both physical (CTS) and emotional (PMWI).

Combined Contributors to ABP

Paternal rejection was the strongest predictor of abusive personality, correlating .87 with the discriminant function (see Table VII). Overall, 85% of subjects were correctly classified into high and low ABP groups using the six parenting variables CTS:M&F; EMBU:M&F; Warmth and Rejection.

To assess the relative weights of early experience measures to abusive personality, a stepwise multiple regression was performed on early experience measures regressed onto composite abusive personality (ABP) scores (BPO+MAI+TSC+RSQ:Fearful). The main contributor was EMBU rejection by the father, with a multiple R of .62 and a R square of .38. Essentially, 38% of the variance of ABP scores was accounted for by paternal rejection. Adding (absence of) maternal warmth to the multiple regression (multiple R = .67) increased the R square to .45. With these two variables entered, no other early experience variables attained significant increases in variance of ABP. Other variables entered were physical abuse, verbal abuse, paternal warmth, and maternal rejection. The rejection subsection of the EMBU has questions on abuse, hence the contribution of physical abuse does not show as an independent contributor to ABP. A "forced entry" of physical abuse prior to the EMBU variables indicated that it accounted for 10% of the variance of ABP scores.

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates a significant relationship between abusive personality (ABP), abusive behavior and early experience recollections as measured by the family of origin Conflict Tactics Scale scores and recollections of parental treatment on the EMBU. Consistent with studies of both personality disorder in non-assaultive populations (Herman *et al.*, 1989; Links *et al.*, 1988; Zanarini *et al.*, 1989) and abusive behavior in non-clinical populations (Kalmuss, 1984; Straus *et al.*, 1980), the current study found associations between recollections of prior abuse and rejection and adult abusiveness whether the latter was assessed by a personality or a behavioral measure. Reports of physical abuse by either parent correlated significantly with measures of BPO, MAI, TSC and RSQ:Fearful. All of these measures had been previously found to be significantly associated with abusiveness (Dutton, 1994; Dutton and Starzomski, 1993, 1994; Dutton *et al.*, 1994).

Both a multiple regression analysis and a canonical discriminant function analysis revealed recollections of paternal rejection (as measured by

the EMBU) to account for the most variance in ABP scores. Using family of origin variables alone, 85% of subjects were correctly classified as high ABP in this sample. The paternal rejection subscale of the EMBU contains items which directly assess recollections of physical abuse as well as rejection. For this reason, Conflict Tactics Scale scores measuring physical abuse by the father do not account for independent variance. The men in this study recalled witnessing, on the average, 15.3 acts of physical abuse by their father to their mother when they were growing up.

The reader is cautioned that all reports of parental treatment are the subjects' retrospective reports. Hence, they may not reflect actual parental treatment (see Dutton, 1995a). The interpretive problems with retrospective accounts have been detailed elsewhere (e.g., Widom, 1989) and the possibility exists that such reports are self-serving in a perpetrator population. It may be that high ABP scorers have different recall, higher needs as a child, or some other individual factor that colors their recollections of parental treatment. However, Dutton and Starzomski (1994) found that men court-referred for wife assault tended to idealize their treatment by parents and underreport parental abuse. High social desirability had the effect of suppressing, in court-referred men, reports of parental maltreatment and own anger. In self-referred men, high social desirability was associated with suppressed scores on trauma symptoms, verbal abuse, anger and BPO. Social desirability had no effect on reports of own physical abuse. Dutton and Starzomski (1994) showed how by correcting scores for social desirability, the strength of associations were generally increased. For example, a canonical discriminant analysis using uncorrected and corrected scores improved its correct prediction rates from 67.2% to 87.7%. Figure 1, demonstrates that significant relationships between composite variables persevere when corrections for social desirability are made to the data.

Brewin, Andrews and Gotlib (1993) reviewed a variety of studies using retrospective reports and concluded that "the evidence reviewed suggests that claims concerning the general unreliability of retrospective reports are exaggerated" (p. 82). Furthermore, psychopathology in the client population did not produce less reliable or valid recall of early experiences.

Trauma has been associated with an increased risk for violence (Dutton and Hart, 1992; Dutton, 1995b) and with BPO (Herman *et al.*, 1989; van der Kolk, 1987). Clearly, much more needs to be known about the roles of early insecure attachment and trauma experiences in the etiology of abuse. While evidence exists for modeling of abusive behaviors (Kalmuss, 1984; Straus *et al.*, 1980), little is known about the long term effects of attachment disruption or family trauma experiences in generating violence in adult males. Dutton (1995b) found that a population of wife assaulters had MCMI-II profiles that were similar to diagnosed PTSD groups on 28

of 31 scales (Fig. 2). Frequency and severity of physical abuse varied significantly with the man's chronic experience of trauma symptoms. One possibility is that early experiences as abuse victims has a greater impact on males than they tend to verbalize. Recollections of early family treatment are idealized (Dutton and Starzomski, 1994), but frequency of trauma symptoms is high.

A problem with prior explanations for wife assault has been their inability to explain the specificity of assaultiveness. Social learning theory has posited that violence is modeled in the family of origin (Kalmuss, 1984) and leads more to a portrait of a man who uses violence to "resolve" any conflict with his wife. The specific nature of the conflict issue that generates violence is not explained. For example, social learning theory has difficulty

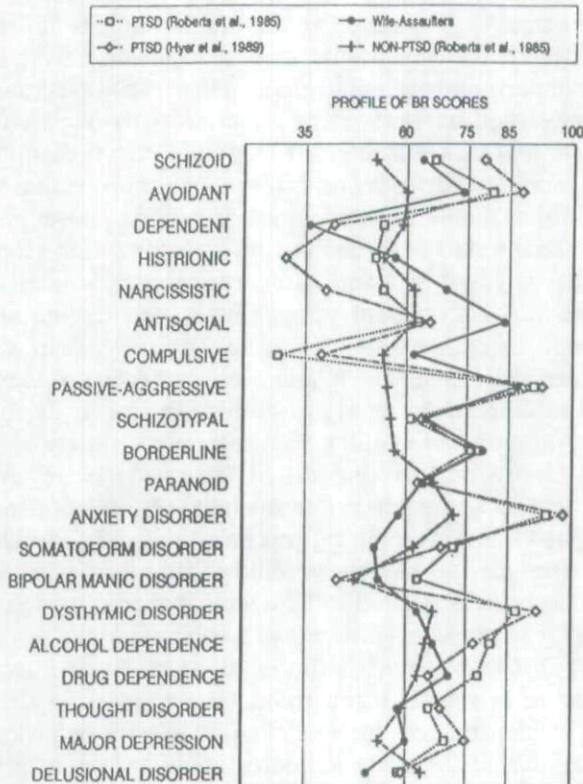


Fig. 2. MCMI Profiles of PTSD, Wife Assailers, and Control Groups.

explaining why "abandonment scenarios" lead to greater anger and violence. Yet, evidence exists to suggest that the conflict issues which generate the greatest extremes of violence are those which symbolize abandonment by the female (Dutton and Browning, 1988). The general picture presented by these data is that male violence does not occur equiprobably for all issues that generate conflict. Also, many women report male rage as being generated internally rather than a response to "stimuli" in the environment (Dutton, 1995a; Walker, 1979), as social learning theory models would suggest. Abuse appears to be generated by mood driven phases. It is to this problem that the current findings on abusive personality speak. The personality consequences of family of origin experiences create not only a behavioral repertoire but phasic dysphoric moods that generate abusive behaviors.

In the current study we see some of the origins of a type of personality organization that could make this population particularly susceptible to self-generated arousal and rage and factitious perceptions of abandonment. To the extent that reports of childhood abuse and rejection are veridical, assaults on the identity of the child occurred during vulnerable developmental stages in this population. They learned not merely to model violence, but that intimate relationships were painful and unrewarding. Also, given the necessity of nonabusive, nonrejecting relationships for healthy ego development, they were presented with a dilemma: the very relationships they needed to keep their ego-identity intact were the very ones they found difficult. They experience acute sensitivity to abandonment and react to object loss with extreme rage at the object. They need that attachment object to maintain effective ego function. For these reasons, wife assault occurs disproportionately in response to issues signaling abandonment to these perpetrators. What is being lost is the integrity of one's identity. That identity is often confounded with what the sociobiologists call "kinship," in that one's identity is often sustained by intimate and kin relationships (Daly and Wilson, 1988).

The finding that ABP correlates significantly with physical abuse and parental coldness and rejection suggests another possible mechanism to link being a victim of abuse in the family of origin with being a perpetrator in the adult family. Although only composite correlations were reported above, the specific correlation between the "identity diffusion" subscale of the BPO measure and reports of paternal rejection was $.50$ ($p < .001$). A consequence of a cold and rejecting father is an unstable self that experiences emptiness, relies on others for fulfillment, and which may need extreme intimacy in order to feel fulfilled. At the same time, this self is terrified of intimacy, cannot express intimacy needs and appears to repeatedly accumulate tension (cf. the "catathymic" phases described by Revitch

and Schlesinger, 1981), inevitably ending up in a "dysphoric stalemate" in intimate relationships. Dysphoria increases the likelihood of abuse if the ability to verbalize the distress is low [as it is with assaultive men, see Dutton and Strachan (1987)]. Independence behaviors by the partner are viewed as possible object loss and generate rage. Extremity of this rage is an expression of terror of identity dissolution. In this respect, the current study seeks to develop an explanation for the connection between perceived intimacy change and consequent rage. Also, the role of fathers, so long overlooked in this area of inquiry (except in the narrow sense of whether they provided abusive modeling experiences (Kalmuss, 1984), is beginning to emerge as it has in other areas of psychopathology. Phares and Compas (1992), for example, found that there was substantial association between paternal characteristics and child and adolescent psychopathology, including boys' externalizing behaviors (acting out of aggression). In their review, Phares and Compas relied on studies of physical abuse by fathers. The present study suggests that general paternal rejection may also be an important determinant of abusive personality.

Associations between composite clusters reported above obscures the probable subgroups of wife assailers that reside within the abusive categories. Dutton (1988) and Saunders (1992) have described a typology of wife assailers that seems to include generally violent men with psychopathic characteristics, undercontrolled men whose violence is relationship specific and overcontrolled men. We are focusing here on the second category and are presently developing ways to focus more precisely on the relationship of the variables described above within abuse subtypes.

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