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THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC FACTORS AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT IN PREVENTING AND ESCAPING FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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WHAT DOES RESEARCH SUGGEST ARE THE PRIMARY RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) AND WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC FACTORS?

Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner (Saltzman et al., 2002). An ecological framework (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002) is often used to organize risk factors for IPV at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Individual risk factors include basic demographic factors such as younger age, low income, unemployment, and low academic achievement; a history of childhood aggressive behavior and violence in the family of origin; cognitive factors, such as attitudes condoning violence and traditional sex role beliefs; psychosocial and emotional factors, such as anger and hostility, poor impulse control, low self-esteem, career and life stress, emotional dependence, depressive symptoms, and evidence of personality disorders; and other risk behaviors such as alcohol and drug use. Relationship factors include relationship conflict and discord and social isolation. Community and society risk factors include poverty, the absence of legal or social sanctions against IPV, and social norms supportive of IPV (Valle et al., 2008).

As noted above, economic factors, such as low income, unemployment, career stress, and poverty are associated with IPV. Rates of IPV are higher among couples who subjectively report high (9.5 percent) versus low (2.7 percent) financial strain (Benson & Fox, 2004). Unemployment is a risk factor for perpetration (Stith et al., 2004), and victims report health

difficulties from IPV resulting in employment difficulties (Logan et al., 2007; Meisel, Chandler, & Rienzi, 2003). Poverty and lack of affordable housing options may make it even more difficult to escape violent relationships.

There is substantial variability in the strength of the relationship between different risk factors and IPV perpetration and victimization, however. It is possible that risk factors contribute differentially to different forms or typologies of IPV. Johnson (2008, 2011) describes three central IPV typologies: intimate terrorism (IT), violent resistance (VR), and situational couple violence (SCV). Each type is qualitatively different; the distinguishing factor between the three types is the extent to which the violence is characterized by control (Johnson, 2011). IT involves a pattern of violent coercive control in which one partner, usually male, uses violence as a means to control the other. Although accurate prevalence estimates are lacking, IT likely makes up a relatively small proportion of IPV incidents (Johnson, 2008). In terms of risk factors, studies suggest intimate terrorists are more likely to have a history of violence in their families of origin compared to nonviolent men (Johnson, 2008). IT is also associated with lower levels of education, but not with income or race (Johnson, 2008). Economic control, typically complete control over the couple's finances resulting in financial dependency, is one tactic intimate terrorists use against their partners. Intimate terrorists may also sabotage their partners' credit and employment prospects in order to make it difficult to escape violent relationships (Johnson, 2006). Therefore, economic factors are relevant for victimization of IT, but it is less likely that unemployment or financial stress contribute substantially to perpetration, as the chronic pattern of perpetration of intimidation and violence may be less susceptible to situational influences for IT.

Johnson (2008) describes VR as the IPV type occurring when victims of IT retaliate with violence. Because IT is believed to encompass a small proportion of all IPV incidents, even less is known about the prevalence of VR, which has been described as primarily a female phenomenon in response to IT perpetrated predominantly by men (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). As VR represents a form of retaliation against IT, it is likely that economic influences are similar for these types of violence.

The third type, SCV, is hypothesized to be the most common (Johnson, 2008, 2011). SCV does not involve the dominance and control associated with IT, but results when conflicts between intimate partners escalate and become aggressive and violent. Johnson (2011) estimates that 40 percent of the IPV cases identified in surveys involve less injurious or isolated incidents of IPV perpetrated by both men and women. Risk factors for SCV include poor problem-solving skills and difficulties in managing anger (Johnson, 2006). African Americans, low-income couples, and relationships in which one or both partners are unemployed are more likely to report SCV compared to nonminority, high-income, and employed couples (Johnson, 2008). Situation-specific stress is believed to exacerbate SCV among some couples (Johnson, 2008), which suggests that unemployment and other financial stress would be associated with SCV perpetration. Essentially, these typologies are a useful framework in understanding the relationship between economic factors and IPV. As noted, it is likely that economic factors play a different role depending on the type of IPV in question.

HOW DOES ECONOMIC SUPPORT ASSIST IN THE PREVENTION OF IPV AND HOW DOES ECONOMIC SUPPORT ASSIST IN THE ESCAPE FROM VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS?

Economic support can be defined as assistance in helping families provide for their basic needs of food, shelter, health, and clothing, and alleviating stressors associated with living in poverty. Support can take the form of financial assistance (e.g., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] payments), housing assistance (e.g., vouchers), Medicaid, and financial education that can help individuals better manage their finances to meet their needs. Economic support may decrease the relationship stress and conflict associated with SCV. For example, Sanders (2007) describes a conflict over finances:

My father always tried to make my mom feel like she didn't know how to balance the checkbook and like she didn't know how to manage the money. But he was just out blowing things right and left. So she couldn't really balance the checkbook. And we all knew that, he wasn't fooling anybody. They had a joint account, but when they couldn't balance the checkbook because he was out blowing money like crazy, it was because she couldn't manage their money. (p. 9)

The couple's joint bank account suggests both individuals have access and some control over the finances, but conflict occurs because of different views and abilities about balancing the checkbook. Problem-solving and conflict-resolution skill deficits or difficulties in anger management, combined with financial stress, may increase the likelihood of SCV (Johnson, 2008). Economic support may thus reduce the likelihood SCV will occur.

For relationships in which one partner is controlling, economic distress and poverty may limit one's ability to leave a violent and controlling relationship. In addition, economic abuse—including limiting access to credit and money, controlling one's employment opportunities, and exclusion from financial decision making—may be used by intimate terrorists to keep their partners in the relationship. Sanders (2007) illustrates how economic dependency may keep IPV victims in violent relationships:

I think that's why she kept going back, because she had five kids and she really couldn't make it with five kids without him. And so it was like she needed him ... not being able to keep up the lifestyle that we were living and her trying to do it by herself with five kids, was frustrating. She would have to leave us at home by ourselves while she worked. (p. 16)

Economic support may be vital to individuals escaping relationships characterized by IT by providing resources necessary to support themselves and their children. However, women's increased financial resources may undermine the intimate terrorist's perceived control and result in increased IPV (Johnson, 2008). Programs providing economic support should provide safety planning to help protect individuals during and after leaving violent relationships (Johnson, 2008). In addition, the need for long-term economic support is paramount as the cumulative experiences associated with IT continue to influence victims' employment for years after leaving a violent relationship (Lindhorst, Oxford, & Gillmore, 2007).

WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED FROM PRIOR INTERVENTIONS ABOUT THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF IPV AND WHAT OTHER APPROACHES DESERVE EXPLORATION?

The Prevention Relationship and Enhancement Program (PREP) has demonstrated effects on the primary prevention of IPV among adults (Markman et al., 1993). The PREP program teaches couples better communication and conflict management skills that may reduce the risk for SCV. Behavioral Couples Therapy, which addresses substance abuse and dyadic interactions, also targets factors associated with SCV and has been demonstrated to improve dyadic adjustment and, when substance use is reduced, to reduce IPV (Ruff et al., 2010).

Interventions for female victims of IPV include screening in primary health care settings that attempt to link women with services and resources that will help them address health problems related to victimization and leave violent relationships. Research suggests that referrals alone are not sufficient to impact outcomes (U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, 2004). However, studies that provide more intensive interventions following screening may be promising (e.g., Kiely et al., 2010). Mandated interventions for male perpetrators, which confront patriarchal gender beliefs and occasionally include skill building, have generally shown modest to no effects on IPV recidivism (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005).

Given the limited number of effective programs for preventing or reducing perpetration, economic strategies hold promise for preventing SCV and helping individuals escape from violent relationships. As stated, the role of economic factors is likely to differ by IPV type, and many policy evaluations do not parse out the policy's impact by IPV typologies. Furthermore, assessing a policy's impact on IPV—and especially on different types—is challenging. There are no reliable administrative indicators of IPV prevalence and incidence and most IPV goes undetected by public sector systems (e.g., health systems, criminal justice systems), making it difficult to investigate policy impacts using available administrative data. This problem is compounded when trying to account for IPV types, which may not be discernible with the little amount of available data. Due to the controlling nature of IT, perpetrators and victims can be more difficult to include in survey samples (Johnson, 2008). With these caveats, we describe economic approaches in more detail and the existing evidence base related to IPV.

Microfinance interventions provide access to small amounts of capital in the form of credit, savings, microinsurance, or financial incentives. The approach has garnered widespread attention as a promising poverty alleviation tool in developing countries (Shamar & Buchenrieder, 2002). Theoretically, microfinance can improve family income through the provision of financial services and economic opportunities to people who cannot access traditional financial resources (Stratford et al., 2008). Microfinance has also been used to address the intersection of health and poverty by examining its relationship in reducing IPV and HIV transmission. For example, the IMAGE Study in South Africa demonstrated that when microfinance programs were integrated with a curriculum that addressed gender and sexual risk issues, IPV rates decreased by 55 percent (Pronyk et al., 2006). It remains to be

seen if such an approach can prevent IPV among low-income populations within the United States.

A number of economic policies have been or could be examined for their impact on IPV. Research on TANF sanctions and time limits has documented that victims of IPV may be more likely than nonvictims to stay on welfare for extended time periods or be more likely to have difficulty finding employment within TANF time limits. For example, over half the TANF recipients in a California study needed IPV services over a three-year period (Meisel, Chandler, & Rienzi, 2003). As a result, many states implemented a Family Violence Option (FVO) that requires IPV screening, referrals to community services for those in need, and waivers for those who would be harmed by time limit enforcement (Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005).

Unfortunately, Lindhorst and Padgett (2005) found FVO implementation was not consistent with the legislation, and those reporting IPV did not receive the designated services and exemptions, making it unlikely the legislation can impact IPV rates for those attempting to escape IT relationships. With respect to SCV, some have suggested that TANF benefits levels are based on outdated formulations and are not enough to meet the families' basic needs (Schott & Finch, 2010). Therefore, benefit levels may not be high enough to ward off financial stress that may trigger IPV. Research is needed to examine the impact of TANF time limits and sanctions and whether they further exacerbate stress, which may lead to higher IPV rates.

Unemployment benefit policies may also impact rates of IPV. Administered under strict rules and requirements, unemployment insurance (UI) provides a portion of wages to unemployed workers to increase economic support to the individual (Smith, McHugh, & Runge, 2002). Like TANF, several states have passed UI legislation in order to address the needs of IPV victims and survivors. Some escaping IT relationships rely on UI benefits in order to support themselves when they cannot work (Smith, McHugh, & Runge, 2002). Furthermore, to the extent that UI reduces financial stress that contributes to IPV, it might have an indirect preventive effect on SCV, but UI needs to be rigorously evaluated for effects on IPV.

Third, housing assistance aims to provide assistance to victims escaping abusive relationships through the Violence against Women Act (VAWA) and other policies. IPV is cited as one of the leading causes of homelessness for women in the United States (U.S. Conference of Mayors—Sodexo, 2005). Emergency shelters can provide immediate, short-term housing solutions, but often do not provide sufficient time for women to secure safe, permanent housing (Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009). VAWA and housing policies, such as Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Section 8 program, recognize the specific needs of victims of IPV and provide economic assistance through temporary housing (i.e., one or two years) or permanent housing (usually in the form of full or partial rent assistance toward a permanent home). Although research is beginning to examine the effect of these policies on outcomes for victims (Baker et al., 2010), more work is needed to understand the effects of housing assistance on IPV outcomes for different perpetration types.

Other economic policies that may impact IPV, and require empirical evaluation on IPV outcomes for different types, include legislated workforce development programs (e.g., the Job Training Partnership Act), living wage ordinances that increase the minimum wage, and national food assistance programs. Assuming these policies have their intended effects on employability and income, the reduction of financial strain on the family may be expected to reduce the perpetration of SCV. Such policies also may assist victims of IPV in leaving relationships characterized by IT. For instance, workforce development programs may facilitate the transition to independence for victims whose partners restricted their access to employment and education that is often necessary to secure employment after leaving the relationship.

In sum, we suggest that interventions and programs that increase economic independence and reduce economic hardship and stress that leads to conflict and potentially to violence have the potential to prevent SCV. Although economic policies may be less related to the perpetration of IT, they are likely very relevant if they assist victims of IT in escaping violent relationships. Future research on economic intervention policies should explicitly consider whether their results are generalizable to all or only certain typologies of IPV so that we can better tailor interventions to address the specific economic needs of those in different types of intimate relationships.

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