Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence

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Part I: Myths and Realities Concerning Intimate Partner Violence

1. According to the FBI, A Woman is Beaten Every (fill in the blank) SECONDS

- First, the FBI does not calculate, tabulate, or track data on domestic violence. The FBI once did estimate that a women is beaten every 15 seconds, but they derived this estimate from Murray Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz's book, Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family.
- Various other fact sheets list various other number of seconds. The number of seconds depends on the study (if there actually was one) and how violence was defined. For example, some versions of this factoid state that a women is beaten every 9 seconds and cite a study done by the Commonwealth Fund in July, 1993. The Commonwealth Fund study used the same measure as was used by Straus and his colleagues. Unlike Straus and his colleagues who defined "abuse" as acts of violence that were likely to cause and injury, the Commonwealth Fund defined "abuse" as every thing from pushing, shoving, and slapping to using a gun or knife.

2. There Are Four Million Women Beaten and Abused Each Year

- Same problems as before. The Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz survey estimated that 2 million women were abused each year by their husbands. Straus and his colleagues speculated that if all the respondents told the truth and if ex-husbands and boyfriends were included, the number could be as high as 4 million. However, no study to date using a representative sample and measuring severe violence, has found more than 2 million abused women each year.

3. Domestic Violence is the Leading Cause of Injury to Women Between the Ages of 15 and 44 in the United States - More Than Car Accidents, Muggings, and Rapes Combined

- This factoid has been attributed to both Surgeon General Antonia Novello and the Centers for Disease Control. The actual primary source of this "fact" is research by Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft. It was probably Stark and Flitcraft who supplied the fact to CDC, who then included it in material supplied to the Surgeon General. Unfortunately, as good a sound bite as this is, it is simply not true. The original source of this statement goes back to two papers by Stark and Flitcraft. First, the actual research the "fact" is based on is a rather small survey of one emergency room. Second, in the original articles, they said that domestic violence may (emphasis added) be a more common cause of emergency room visits than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.
- The late Linda Saltzman from the Centers for Disease Control told all journalists who call to check this fact that the CDC does not recognize this as either their fact or a reputable fact.

4. The March of Dimes Reports that Battering During Pregnancy is the Leading Cause of Birth Defects and Infant Mortality

- The March of Dimes actually reports that they know of no such study.

5. Sixty-three Percent of Young Men Between the Ages of 11 and 20 Who Are Serving Time for Homicide Have Killed Their Mother's Abuser

- This factoid is often used by Sarah Buel in her speeches. It appears to be yet another fact from nowhere. The FBI has published no data that supports this claim. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports has no tables that report on prison populations, let alone a table or figure that breaks down prison populations by age of offender and relationship to victim. There are no Department of Justice reports that report on what number or percentage of young men kill their mother's batterer.

6. Women Who Leave Their Batterers Are at a 75% Greater Risk of Being Killed by the Batterer than Those Who Stay

- Women are more likely to be victims of homicide when they are estranged from their husbands than when they live with their husbands--BUT NOT A 75 % GREATER RISK. The risk of homicide is higher in the first two months after separation.
- SOURCE: Wilson, Margo and Martin Daly. (1993) "Spousal homicide risk and estrangement." Violence and Victims, 8, 3-16.

7. Women Who Kill Their Batterers Receive Longer Prison Sentences than Men Who Kill Their Partners

- This factoid is often attributed to someone from Pace University. There is no actual published source for this. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Violence Between Intimates (November, 1994), the average prison sentence for men who killed their wives was 17.5 years; the average sentence for women convicted of killing their husbands was 6.2 years.

Other Facts From Nowhere

- **4,000 Women Each Year are Killed by Their Husbands, Ex-husbands, or Boyfriends**
- The FBI reports that approximately 1,500 women are killed each year by husbands or boyfriends. Even if one factors in the number of women killed by unidentified or undetermined assailants, the number could not be 4,000.
- **Women of All Cultures, Races, Occupations, Income Levels, and Ages are Battered - by Husbands, Boyfriends, Lovers, and Partners**
- While this fact is technically true, it is also true that domestic violence is more likely to occur in homes below the poverty line, in minority households (even controlling for income), and among men and women 18 to 30 years of age.
- **Nationally, 50% of All Homeless Women and Children are on the Streets Because of Violence in the Home**
- An interesting factoid stated by Senator Biden, but one without any actual published scientific research to support it.
- **There are Nearly Three Times as Many Animal Shelters in the United States as There are Shelters for Battered Women and Their Children**
- Another great sound bite, but one not actually based on a verified count of either type of shelter.

Part II Other Assumptions That Impact Intervention

- IPV always escalates
- If treatment does not work, increase the dose (e.g. weeks, # sessions, intensity)
- Change for victims is a two-step process
- Battered men do not desist on their own
- Arrest is an effective intervention

Part III: Advocacy and Social Science

- Advocacy and social science may share the same goals
- They rarely share the same means or rules

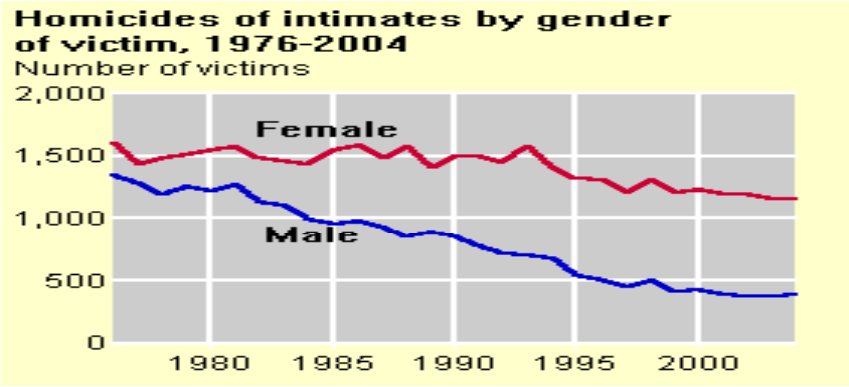
Advocacy Goals

- Transform a private trouble to a social issue and social problem
- Mobilize efforts to identify, address, and change the structures causing the problem
- Focus on the victims—they have been doubly victimized—the abuse and selective inattention

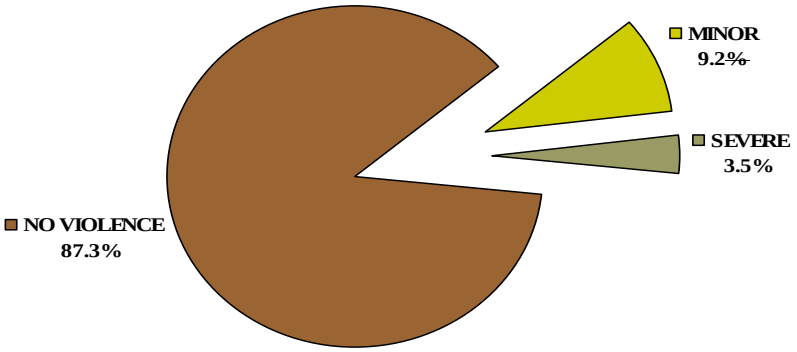
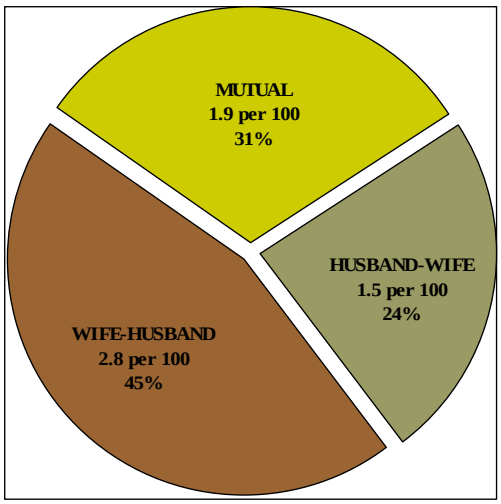
Social Science Goals

- Explain, predict, and understand human social behavior
- Attend to the rules of evidence
- Replicate
- Explanations require theory

Part IV: The Controversy over Mutual Violence and the Victimization of Men



Distribution of Husband to Wife Violence



Direction of Domestic Violence