

## **Domestic Violence: New Paradigms in Understanding & Assisting Victims & Perpetrators**

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## **Background: 1976 - Mid 1990's**

- *Worked with male and female perpetrators of domestic violence in both private practice setting as well as community agencies, governmental (military, city of SF) and university.*
- *Treated victims and perpetrators from all areas in our society*
- *Testified as an expert witness in cases where battered women have killed in self-defense*
- *Evaluated both men and women on death row and in death penalty cases regarding their childhood abuse histories as mitigation against the death penalty*

## **Background: 1990's - Present**

- *Transitioned to more psychodynamic-oriented clinical practice*
- *Developed interest in neurobiology*
- *Developed interest in attachment theory*
- *Change Focus has contributed to new ideas*
- *It's like traveling internationally – it gives one a new perspective on their country*

## **Overview of Talk**

- *Prevention*
- *Victim Psychology*
- *Perpetrator Dynamics*
- *Weave into discussion*
  - *Attachment and domestic violence*
  - *Neurobiology and domestic violence*

## **Prevention**

- *Primary Prevention*
  - *Measures taken to prevent the onset of a specific condition*
- *Secondary prevention*
  - *Measures treat asymptomatic persons who have already developed risk factors but in whom the condition is not clinically apparent*
- *Tertiary prevention*
  - *Activities involved in the care of an established condition, with attempts to restore the individual to highest function, minimize the negative effects of disease, and prevent disease-related complications*
- *Most of us are involved in some combination of tertiary and secondary prevention*

## **Preventing Domestic Violence**

- *If there is one truism in this field, it's that early childhood experiences are the most robust predictor of adult victimization and perpetration of violence. From a primary prevention perspective, this society must continue to focus its efforts on providing all prospective parents with the best sensitivity skills so that they can in turn provide the best caretaking environment as possible for children from the moment they are conceived.*

## Easier said than done!

- Because we live in a complex world, solving problems in one domain requires solving problems in other areas.
- So in order to really prevent domestic violence, we need to address other important social issues, such as poverty, education, and healthcare, to just name a few.
- Likewise, with any individual you need to not only address the above social issues, but also intervene on multiple levels (physiological, psychological, couple/family and extended family/community)
- This is called the ecological view of prevention
- Tolerance for Complexity

## Domestic violence is an extremely complex social, family, psychological and biological problem

- *Anyone who reduces it to one or two factors doesn't have an appreciation for complexity.*
- *So I would be extreme skeptical of reductionistic explanations. This is what has bugged me most about the politics of domestic violence.*
- *One group says it's this, and another group says it's that. Nobody wants to admit that it's both and probably more.*

## The domestic violence field doesn't have all the answers!

- *Child development*
- *Neurobiology*
- *Social psychology*
- *Eastern and alternative medical practices*
- *Other fields of study can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this problem as well as ways to intervene.*

## Victim Psychology

- *Early childhood victimization increases risk for victimization as adult.*
- *We haven't really fully understood the exact pathways because most child victims actually grow up to live positive and productive lives.*
- *So what separates the ones who do and the ones that don't?*

## Protective Factors

- *These are things that can change a particular trajectory in development or mitigate the impact of abuse*
  - Intelligence
  - Gender
  - Positive adult role model
  - Positive family environment
  - Number of children in family and age spread

## Aggravating or Exacerbating Factors

- *Factors that increase the risk for problems later down the road.*
  - Children who are both physically and sexually abused
  - Adolescent victimization
  - Genetics
  - Substance abuse
  - Psychiatric disorders

## Neurobiology of Child Abuse

- *Advent of scanning technology*
- *The first 3 years of life the brain is going through a radical development*
- *A time of vulnerability as well as opportunity*
- *Children who experience abuse have different brains than those who didn't have those experiences.*
  - *Corpus callosum – bilateral functioning*
  - *Cortisol damage of memory systems – impairment of memory*
  - *Prefrontal cortex – impairment of emotion regulation and empathy systems*

## Behavioral Change and Neurobiology

- *Having an understanding of the effects of child maltreatment on brain development will give you an appreciation for how difficult it is for some people struggling with changes in therapy*
- *Persistence is critical to change*
- *Like cognitive rehabilitation for people with brain injuries or tumors*
- *The brain is incredibly plastic and will respond to repetitive intervention.*

## Culture and Religion

- *Culture doesn't really affect rates of abuse, but more the response by help systems, such a medical, criminal justice and social services*
- *Religion is not going to be a strong variable in contributing to the risk for violence because of the wide range of different types of religions, but also the extreme variance in practice within religions.*
- *Although there is a chance and gender factor when looking at victimization as an adolescent or adult by strangers, victimization in an intimate relationship is another story*

## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- *The diagnosis PTSD is found with about 25% victims of both child abuse as well as domestic violence.*
- *Recent studies in trauma actually suggest that most trauma victims don't develop PTSD*
- *Doesn't mean they are not affected by the trauma, but they just don't develop those classic symptoms of PTSD (the memory problems, the detachment and estrangement, the flashbacks, nightmares, and sleep problems)*
- *So who is likely to develop those symptoms?*

## Trauma and Dissociation

- *People who have a history of dissociation (acute mental state in which thoughts, emotions, sensations, and/or memories are compartmentalized) patterns are more likely to develop PTSD in response to a trauma PTSD occurs as a result of a turning away from the trauma so as to manage the intense emotions associated with it.*
- *If you have a history of turning away from unpleasant memories or emotions then one is likely to use this strategy in processing traumatic events*

## Attachment Theory and Trauma

- *Classification of infant-caregiver attachment called Disorganized, who have experienced a caregiver that has generated feelings of fear in them*
- *When infants need caretaking, they will naturally turn toward their caregiver for protection and soothing*
- *Disorganized infants are also afraid of the caregiver that they are seeking protection from so they freeze and collapse when needing protection and soothing*
- *They are experiencing fear without solution.*
- *The very person they turn to for protection is also the source of fear*
- *These infants are found to have high rates of dissociation*
- *Long term studies indicate higher probability of developing PTSD as a result of trauma*

## Why do many victims stay in abusive relationships?

- **Legal and economic factors**
- **Attachment theory explanations**
  - High rate of women with preoccupied attachment
  - Use proximity maintenance to manage anxiety
- **Prior Trauma Explanation**
  - Impaired danger radar

## Unpublished Study

- *Women who were sexually abused as children compared to women who were not sexually abused as children*
- *Were asked to watch a video of a man and woman having a discussion, that escalated into a disagreement, to an loud argument, to verbal abuse, to physical abuse.*
- *The women watching the video were asked to push a button when they thought it was getting dangerous.*
- *The sexually abused women consistently pushed the button later. In other words, it took them longer to recognize cues of dangerousness than the women who were not abused.*

## Unpublished Study

- *Hypothesis: sexually abused women were dissociating or turning away from their inner radar or emotions that detect danger.*
- *Because they were cut off from that important internal information, they didn't recognize the external danger that was mounting.*
- *Is it possible that woman who were victimized, as children are more vulnerable to hooking up with dangerous guys because they don't recognize the cues of danger and therefore may get in over their head before they realize what is going on.*

## What does this mean clinically?

- ***This means that we need to help adult victims resolve childhood abuse so that they can be fully aware of their emotional cues so they can in turn read danger cues from others more accurately.***
- ***Fixing radar = More adaptive emotion regulation strategies***

## Perpetrators

- ***One of the most controversial issues facing the perpetrator treatment community is the notion of female perpetrators***
- ***Since the institute of mandatory arrest laws, greater and greater numbers of women have been arrested for domestic violence.***
- ***The traditional thinking has been that women only use violence in self-defense and generally don't initiate aggression***

## Women Perpetrators

- ***Crime studies (National Violence Against Women in America Institute study co-sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control): Women more likely to be victims than perpetrators***
- ***Family Conflict/Dating Violence studies (Straus, Archer, etc.) more or less equal rates of violence***
- ***Led to controversy, particularly between researchers and advocates.***

## Women Perpetrators

- *Studies by Murray Straus and his colleagues at UNH Family Research Lab*
- *One of the first researchers of domestic violence*
- *Started in the last 1960's and has continued to conduct research until today*
- *Has one of the largest databases of studies with women and men using the scale he developed called the Conflict Tactics Scales (over 60,000 sample size)*
- *Has data stemming from the early 1970 suggesting that women are more violent than we would like to think.*

## A Recent Straus Study

- *Interviewed 13,601 university students in 32 nations who participated in the International Dating Violence Study*
- *Almost one-third of the female as well as male students physically assaulted a dating partner in the previous 12 months*
- *The most frequent pattern was bidirectional*
- *Female-only violence second most frequent*
- *Violence by only the male partner was the least frequent pattern*
- *Overall they found about a 16% rate of violence*

## NVAW Study

- *Co-sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control*
- *Framed their study as a personal safety study, but generally asked their questions in terms of crime*
- *Interviewed 8000 women and 8000 men, representing 16,000 households*
- *Found that, over a lifetime, women were three times more likely to be the victim of domestic violence, than men (1.1% for women, .3% for men)*
- *Uncovered about a 1.4% rate of partner violence overall.*

## What are the main differences between these studies?

- *Use of crime victimization filters*
  - *Many people still don't see DV as a crime*
- *Rate of violence – past year versus lifetime*
  - *When data is analyzed in the past year, NVAW found 39% of women as perpetrators*
  - *Some people feel that lifetime rates is a more valid measure of crime*

## What are the main differences between these studies?

- *Framing the Study: family problems/conflicts versus crime*
  - *The scales are based on the premise that conflict is an inevitable and valuable aspect of all human association.*
  - *The measure the use of coercion, including force and violence as a tactic for resolving conflicts.*
  - *The CTS are criticized because critics claim raw-numbers of instances of violence do not provide information about the context in which they occur (including the initiation, intention, history, or pattern of violence).*
  - *They have also been criticized for not measuring economic abuse, manipulation involving children, isolation, or intimidation - all important measures of violence from a victim-advocacy perspective.*

## So what is the truth here?

- *The philosopher, Karl Popper wrote that perfect truth in society and in science is unattainable, but in an open society we can get closer to understanding "reality" through reflection and critical thinking.*
- *By respectful dialogue both perspectives can be argued and individuals can make up their own minds.*
- *Many other areas where differing findings have been found - such as medical and legal fields. Look at all the differing opinions being proffered on what will help the economy.*

## But why are these data important for you to know?

- *Because most treatment programs base their approach on certain assumptions about the prevalence and dynamics of violence in relationships, we may need to rethink our approaches to treatment as well as prevention.*
- *Of course many funding decisions and laws are written based on ideology. If that ideology is off, then so will the social policy.*
- *Most relevant to the helper in the audience, you need to ask about violence on both sides so that you can effectively intervene with both victims and perpetrators and child witnesses to violence*

## Like meets Like

- *If the symmetry argument is real, how do these couples, where bilateral violence occurs, end up each other?*
- *One hypothesis: both primary and secondary aggressors have histories of aggression.*
- *The longitudinal studies on aggression in school-aged children (e.g., Serbin, Moffitt, Capaldi or Ehrensaft) all found early predictors of domestic violence.*

## Like meets Like

- *In one study, (Serbin), as early as first grade teachers ratings of aggressiveness in the schoolyard found a pattern of "assortative mating"- that aggressive people find each other.*
- *Assortative mating (also called assortative pairing) takes place when organisms tend to mate with individuals that are like themselves in some respect (positive assortative mating) or dissimilar (negative assortative mating)*

## Etiology of Violence

- *Witnessing domestic violence is one of the most robust predictors of perpetrating domestic violence later in life.*
- *It is even a stronger variable than being a victim of physical or sexual abuse.*
- *So with just about every abuser, we are dealing with a victim of unresolved trauma.*

## Changing Violent Reactions

- *Many perpetrators can't just change their behavior with a decision. Something that people who do "re-education" might have you think. It is not about attitudes.*
- *I believe it is about changing the brain, particularly the way it responds to emotions, how it perceives danger and how it processes memories.*
- *There is some evidence that some violence for some individuals may actually be a type of memory called implicit memory - similar to flashbacks.*

## What is memory?

- *Memory is the way the brain learns and anticipates the future.*
- *It makes for efficient processing of information.*
- *Without memory every act would be a novel experience.*
- *On a biological level, memory consists of ingrained patterns of neural activation called neural net profiles.*



## Two Types of Memory

- There are two types of memory: implicit and explicit
- Explicit Memory
  - Semantic or factual memory
  - Episodic or autobiographical memory
- Implicit consists of emotional, behavioral, perceptual and mental models (also called procedural memory)

## Implicit Memory

- During the first two years of life, while the brain is still developing, the only type of memory is implicit memory, which is processed through circuits different from explicit memory.
- This type of memory is often referred to a procedural memory - how things are done, rather than what happened.
- Two important characteristics of this type of memory:
  - focused attention not necessary for implicit memory to occur and,
  - there is not a sense of remembering, but experiencing, when implicit memory is recalled.

## Implicit Memory

- Violent reactions to conflict and emotional vulnerability may be these implicit memories.
- This explains why some perpetrators talk about their violence as if it just happened - there was no intention, they just became violent.
- Implicit memory occurs throughout our life, whether it is driving your car or bike, typing at your computer, swimming or playing a music instrument. Once these skills are developed, they become automatic. When we are experiencing these implicit memory, we are not aware that we are experiencing a form of memory. We are just doing.
- Early attachment experiences are referred to as procedural because we are not learning the "what" of relationships, but the "how."

## Some acts of violence may be understood as implicit memories

- Implicit memory can be:
  - Thoughts (I can't trust this person or they're unsafe)
  - Emotions (intense rage or fear)
  - Behaviors (aggression and violence)
- Because that as many as two thirds of male batterers witnessed violence as children, and these individuals may have witnessed violence during the first years of life.
- The it is possible, that for some perpetrators, these acts of violence are a form of memory. Therefore, deciding to stop is not necessarily going to help.
- It's like telling a war veteran to just get over it.

## Transforming Implicit Memories

- Like the treatment of any trauma victim, an important part of the treatment process is revisiting the past, feeling and tolerating the emotion associated with those experiences, and learning new and adaptive ways of processing the memory.
- There is some evidence, that treatment that addresses childhood abuse of perpetrators early in the treatment process, can be more effective, than focusing exclusively on behavioral techniques aimed at managing the violence.

## Outcome Studies

- **Overall, batterer treatment as it is currently conceptualized only has about a .35 effect**
- **Individual programs may have a higher or lower success rate**
- **When we talk about 35% effectiveness rate, we are looking studies of multiple programs, rather than just one program in particular.**
- **Pure Duluth/Educational Programs a negligible effect**

## What can we do?

- *We need to expand our paradigms of treatment*
  - *Attachment*
  - *Neurobiology*
  - *Meditation and mindfulness practices*
  - *Psychoanalysis and other modalities of psychology*
  - *Social psychology*
  - *Focus on therapeutic relationship*

## What can we do?

- *Perhaps lengthen treatment*
- *Include couples and family therapy as some point in the treatment process*
- *Acknowledge that victims and perpetrators come in all cultures, genders and sexual orientations.*

## Integrating Findings From Cognitive Neurosciences

- Mirror neurons
- Emotions
  - Feelings versus emotion
  - Emotion/Body - Feelings/Brain
  - Emotion should lead to state of wellbeing
  - Primary, background and social emotions
- Asymmetry in the prefrontal cortex
- Role of implicit memory on attitudes, emotion & behavior
- Secure base priming can change the way the brain responds to threatening situations
- Understand and respond to typologies, rather than using cookie-cutter approaches