WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Many writers have used different expressions to describe violence between intimates. For some, it is a problem of women in marital relationships being assaulted, and the terms *wife abuse* or *wife battering* are most appropriate. Others note that the real problem is the tacit societal acceptance of violence against women. After all, the act of battering occurs just as frequently among couples who are dating or living together but are not married. From this perspective, the term *violence against women* captures the essence of the problem. Others, including the authors of this book, note that although injuries due to violence occur disproportionately against women and that men commit more serious violent acts, both genders engage in violence. For this reason, proponents of this perspective favor the gender-neutral terms *domestic violence*, *domestic assault*, *intimate partner violence*, or *intimate partner assault* because they are intrinsically less limiting.

For purposes of this monograph, *domestic violence* is operationally defined as *violence between intimates living together or who have previously cohabited*. When directly relevant, we also study the closely related phenomenon of “dating violence,” in which serious injuries often occur among intimates in the absence of cohabitation. The terms are broadly defined, and we acknowledge that definitions are largely dependent on descriptions by the police, assailants, and victims. Hence, the definition of family violence is societally based. Our adopted definition is gender neutral in that we see violence as a problem of both genders.

In taking this position, we note a dilemma with our definition: It minimizes the disproportionate injuries attendant to male violence against women—that is, although both men and women initiate violence, in most cases violence initiated by women is far less severe. For example, Straus and Gelles, using the National Family Violence Survey (NFVS), found that the injury rate for women was 6 times higher than that for men (3% and .5%, respectively; Straus & Gelles, 1990; see also Gordon, 2000; Morse, 1995; Straus, 1999).

Another data source, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), reported that in 1998, 85% of the approximately 1 million reported cases of victimization by intimate partners were against women. In the NCVS, approximately half of female domestic violence victims reported physical
injury compared with 32% of male victims. Although the rates of serious injury were similar (4% for men and 5% for women), women are significantly more likely to incur minor injuries (more than 4 in 10 women compared with fewer than 3 in 10 men; Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

Male domination is also a component of many acts of female violence, much of which is in the context of self-defense or in anticipation of a male partner’s violence. Finally, by virtually all accounts, women experience much greater fear and injury in situations of domestic violence (Bograd, 1988; Kurz, 1992; Yllö, 1993). Despite these facts, we nonetheless consider it appropriate to emphasize that any domestic violence is inappropriate, regardless of gender. As we explore later in this chapter, recent research has challenged the core concept of the predominance of male violence. (In particular, see the discussion of the recent cohort analysis done by Moffit, Robins, & Caspi, 2001. If replicated, this will seriously erode the existing consensus on the relative prevalence of female vs. male violence.)

Although some authors may consider “stalking” a separate phenomenon, we consider it to be closely related and often a precursor to domestic violence—and hence properly covered in this book. We define stalking as the act of deliberately and repeatedly following or harassing another to create fear in the victim or to coerce him or her to accede to the wishes of the stalker. Unless experienced, this behavior might be assumed to constitute a nuisance, a mere inconvenience to the recipient. Unfortunately, the reality of stalking, especially in the context of domestic violence, is far different—and considerably more dangerous. In this book, we study stalking only as an adjunct to a domestic relationship because it is the heart of our work and addresses the vast majority of stalking incidents.

HOW DEFINITIONS AFFECT MEASUREMENT

Although perhaps considered an arcane subject, we believe an analysis of how domestic violence is measured is critical to the overall study of the criminal justice response to domestic violence. We note this because various studies show extraordinarily different results as to the frequency of abuse and even in terms of basic data regarding whether domestic violence rates are increasing or decreasing over time as reforms are carried out. Hence, it is difficult to measure the impact of such reforms overall or, even more speculatively, on particular types of relationships or subgroups within the population.

Our analysis begins with the understanding that there are seemingly shocking differences in the rates of domestic violence as reported by the various states, the federal government, and the numerous studies and surveys that seek to determine the scope of the problem. To a large extent, this is because unlike “classic” felonies such as murder, robbery, or, to a lesser extent, rape, as we discussed in the first section of this chapter, a consensus has never been reached as to the definition of domestic violence. We believe that this is largely due to widespread continuing differences in how such problems are defined, categorized, and reported. A brief review of these factors demonstrates the problem. It also illustrates the difficulty we have in interpreting the prevalence of domestic violence and establishing empirically if the problem is increasing in magnitude or is being successfully addressed.

Relationships

Although we use domestic violence and domestic assault in the context of violence between past or present intimates, most state domestic violence statutes typically have far
broader definitions of relationships, often including anyone residing in the house or any type of family relationship. Thus, such statutes not only cover our adopted definition of violence committed between two adult, married or unmarried, partners or ex-partners; by their terms such statutes may cover violence between parent(s) or caretakers(s) and dependent children and violence committed by siblings and in other family relationships. Such intrafamiliy violence may be severe, but its character, causes, and treatment differ markedly from the type of violence discussed in this book.

Nonetheless, although we fully understand that violence among nonintimate relationships requires study, we believe that for purposes of this book it is important to address how intervention for these other relationships differs from that related to intimate violence. It has been an all-too-common practice for all domestic violence data to be aggregated within a state and conclusions drawn about intimate partner violence on many critical variables such as injury, criminal justice decision making, and revictimization. In addition, comparisons are made between states despite differences in the types of relationships and acts that are compared or differences in the scope of legislation.

As we discuss throughout this book, there is significant variation in how cases are processed, providing differences not only in how responses to male-against-female adult intimate partner violence differ, but how legislation and political pressure may have influenced these responses.

It also should be recognized, however, that not all states define an adult intimate partner in the same way. When examining National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data from nine states, Greenfeld et al. (1998) found that 53.1% of domestic violence cases involved spouses, 4.9% involved ex-spouses, and 42% involved “other intimates.” In this case, other intimates is defined as current or past boyfriend or girlfriend relationships (dating violence), common-law spouses, or homosexual relationships. Of the 42% of intimate partner cases falling under the category of other intimate, there is great room for interpretation. What type of relationship between a man and woman constitutes a boyfriend or girlfriend? When classifying a call, do police routinely ask such couples if they have ever resided together or if they have been sexually intimate?

Age

Although counterintuitive, the definition of victims’ ages also seems to affect the incidence and reports of domestic violence. There is some overlap in the studies between domestic violence and “child abuse” typically committed in families. The National Crime Survey (NCS) addresses all women 12 and older, many of whom are not likely to be at risk of violence by an “intimate.” In contrast, the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) published by the Department of Justice, addresses adults aged 18 and over, as does the National Family Violence Survey. To further confuse the issue, the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and consisting of a survey of 8,000 women and 8,000 men, addressed violence committed against women ages 16 and over (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Because parental violence against teens in this country is at least as prevalent, many of the studies mentioned may be capturing and reporting this phenomenon as domestic violence. Similarly, the more age-restricted studies largely fail to report violence committed between teen partners, relationships that can be quite violent according to statistics.
Behaviors and Acts

Domestic violence, more than any other criminal act, includes a wide range of behaviors, making it difficult to measure. The lack of consensus on what behaviors fall under the rubric of domestic violence results in vastly different figures of its prevalence in the United States. Most state domestic violence legislation has defined violence as an individual act, usually a physical assault or threat of physical harm intended to cause physical harm. In reality, most researchers now more accurately conceptualize domestic violence as a range of behaviors—some obviously criminal in nature, others more manipulative—which in total are intended to exercise coercive control including physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal behaviors used to control a partner. This perspective focuses on the pattern of violent and abusive behavior within the relationship rather than on individual acts of perpetrators. For example, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control has urged that measures of assault behavior include separate measures of physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, and repeated acts of emotional and psychological abuse even in the absence of a direct threat (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 1999). There are several reasons many researchers only consider physical aggression or sexual assault (defined as forced penetration) when measuring violence. First, there is concern that combining serious physical violence with less tangible measures of verbal aggression or controlling and intimidating behavior might cause people to trivialize violence overall (DeKeseredy, 2000). For example, there is less agreement as to whether controlling behavior, such as pressuring a person into unwanted sex, threatening to terminate employment, making demeaning comments, or other acts of psychological aggression, are as serious or threatening as physical violence. Certainly much of the publicity oriented to educating teens about dating violence and risks of abuse would define such behaviors as risk factors or warning signs of future abuse rather than as actual abusive behavior.

Second, researchers may find it more difficult to measure empirically behaviors other than actual physical acts (Gordon, 2000). In addition, they may believe that these are different behaviors and that failing to distinguish them would preclude the ability to determine causation (DeKeseredy, 2000). Some researchers have attempted to measure both physical violence and abusive or controlling behavior by providing separate measures of their components (e.g., physical or sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, stalking, and emotional or psychological abuse; Buzawa et al., 1999; Buzawa & Hotaling, 2000; Hotaling & Buzawa, 2001). Even within these components there are definitional issues; for example, what constitutes stalking behavior, threatening behavior, and psychological abuse?

One of the primary difficulties is confusion between violent acts and injuries. Many people incorrectly believe that the sole legal criterion for measuring a violent act is injury, but physical contact is not required as an element of the crime in most statutes. Although criminal law acknowledges differences in assault severity only by a dichotomy distinguishing between simple assault, aggravated assault, and sexual assault, researchers often use the umbrella term assault to measure the wide range of behavior on a continuum ranging from minor threats to serious violent behavior.

The UCR states in its discussion of the tabulation of aggravated assault, that attempts are included because it is not necessary that an injury result (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 1992). Similarly, in 1998, the U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey
(NCVS) published by the U.S. Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (for estimation purposes) adopted a quite inclusive definition acknowledging that an “assault” may range from minor threats to incidents that are nearly fatal. State statutes regularly redefine what constitutes legal criteria for “attempts” as well as “acts.” Certainly, most surveys take a much broader view of assault than simply measuring injuries. The Canadian Urban Victimization Survey includes in its definition of assault the presence of a weapon, an attack, or a threat. Assault incidents may therefore range from face-to-face verbal threats to an attack resulting in extensive injuries (Fattah, 1991). Some favor an even wider net in defining assault by arguing for the inclusion of verbal aggression, harassment, or behaviors that are emotionally distressing. This can, of course, be carried to the farcical. For example apparently one Canadian town, Brunswick, Nova Scotia, even considered an ordinance that would make exuding the odor of aftershave lotion or mouthwash in public eating establishments a criminal assault (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2000).

HOW WIDESPREAD IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE? THE PROBLEM OF CONFLICTING STUDIES

As described above, determining the scope of the problem of domestic violence differs widely based on the definition used to measure incidence and prevalence. Given the different definitions of domestic violence and the different measurements used to quantify it, it is not surprising that estimates of violence vary widely.2

The general assumption is that both official reports and self-reports understate the problem for a variety of reasons. For example, even a direct question to past victims or perpetrators of violence may not elicit a positive response. After all, people may not always remember, let alone be willing to acknowledge, illegal or inappropriate behavior. Therefore, inaccurate recall due to conscious or unconscious distortion and interpretation of questions may occur. Unfortunately, there is a lack of empirical data verifying the veracity and impact of such bias.

Prevalence rates for domestic violence are usually determined by asking if an individual has experienced an act of physical (or other types of violence) within the prior year or in his or her lifetime. Typically, this information is presented as a percentage for the past year, lifetime prevalence, or both. Prevalence rates are highly dependent not only on the definition, but on the type of population examined. Many studies are done in health care settings, shelters, mental health units, or at colleges or universities, and these populations would likely report strikingly different prevalence rates.

The context for a study, as well as how it is administered, and the format and wording of questions have an impact on findings regarding assaults. Straus (1999) distinguished between “family conflict” and “crime studies” as a source for discrepancies. Minor acts of aggression are more likely to be reported in family conflict surveys in which there are specific instructions given for a wide range of behaviors. Crime studies require the respondent to perceive the aggression as a “crime”; however, many respondents do not perceive minor aggression as constituting criminal “assault.”

Although the crime of assault does not require the intent to harm or actual physical injury, many individuals do not perceive such aggression as a crime and fail to report it to researchers (Gordon, 2000; Straus, 1999). The NCVS data do suggest an increased willingness to report to police, however, with 59% reporting in 1998 compared with 48%
in 1993. This contrasts with the NVAWS, which found that only 25% of all physical assaults against females by intimates were reported to the police.

Therefore, crime studies report much lower rates of assault by both men and women. This is supported by Straus’s observation that in only 3% or less of conflict studies is an injury reported, compared with 75% (NCS), 52% (NCVS), and 76% (NVAWS) crime studies (Straus, 1999). Furthermore, the NFVS, the National Youth Survey (NYS), and the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study report equal acts of minor aggression by men and women, whereas the NCVS, as noted previously, reported that 85% of the approximately 1 million reported victimizations by intimate partners in 1998 were against women.

The two major national data sources are the UCR (based on police reports), and the NCVS (both published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics), which rely on self-reports of criminal victimization. These are two very different conceptions of crime, which have resulted in very different reported rates. Among incidents of assaults known to police, there are more victims as shown in the NCVS than reflected by the offense rate reported in the UCR. This is partially because a single assaultive offense known to police often involves two or more victims.3

Although at a minimum the UCR requires a police report and a “finding” of a crime to count, victimizations under the NCVS are based solely on victim accounts with no corroborating evidence, which is generally not sufficient for police to establish a criminal offense. These differences create large discrepancies between “official” UCR and NCVS and NFVS data. The UCR bases its data on crimes police report to the FBI; however, in 1985, the NFVS reported that as much as 90% of intimate violence was not reported to the police (Straus & Gelles, 1990). In stating this, we note that in 1998, the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the authors of the UCR implicitly rejected this assertion, finding that 53% of women who were assaulted reported these events (Rennison, 2001).

In addition, police record only varying percentages of what is actually reported (we discuss this further in Chapters 5 and 6). In addition, the UCR uses its own definitions and classifications of offenses and requires reporting agencies to conform to these standards. This is exacerbated by the fact that many departments do not submit any data to the FBI, even when doing so is state mandated. Furthermore, the quality of data that police provide is often questionable, and considerable information may be lacking (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2000; Hotaling & Buzawa, 2001). As a result, statistics on domestic violence may either reflect the department’s record keeping or the experience of its service population (Pierce & Deutsch, 1990).

There are several additional problems with the UCR. Its data are offender based with no information provided on victims. Although the UCR now requires assaults to be categorized as domestic or nondomestic, it does not include relationship status. Many police departments do not even record this information on incident reports, resulting in the inability to correctly categorize incidents. Of even greater significance, as described earlier, the term domestic has varying differences based on state legislation and thus becomes meaningless in an aggregate because relationships and acts encompassed vary among states.

More recently, new format approaches appear to ease at least some of the problems of using official statistics, leading us to hope that this problem will lessen in magnitude. One key improvement to the FBI’s UCR is the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which has been implemented in
several jurisdictions. The NIBRS collects data on 57 types of crimes and includes detailed information on offender–victim demographics, victim–offender relationship, time and place of occurrence, weapon use, and victim injury. The UCR has provided information on homicides since 1961 in their Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR) and is estimated to have data for 92% of homicides (Greenfeld et al., 1998). These data are far more complete than those in the UCR and include detailed information similar to the NIBRS. As with all UCR data, the accuracy and reliability of police reports limit this data source. Again, domestic homicides are likely to be undercounted for several reasons. First, incidents reported as assaults may result in the victim’s death, yet reports are not appropriately modified. Second, relationships are often not clearly defined or are unknown if an offender is not arrested. Even if an offender is subsequently arrested, if this does not occur during the year of the incident, this new information is rarely reported to the FBI. Finally, as with the UCR, many jurisdictions fail to file the SHR or file only for portions of the year. There have also been cases in which entire states have failed to file a report for a given year (Gelles, 2000; Greenfeld et al., 1998). Pierce, Spaar, and Briggs (1988) noted a second problem with existing data. These researchers observed use of police services by two distinct populations of domestic violence victims. The first group typically contacts police on only one occasion. The second are repeatedly victimized and are frequent users of police resources, the “regulars” in police parlance. For example, Pease and Laycock (1996) reported that 43% of domestic violence incidents involved only 7% of households.

Furthermore, victims of domestic violence may seek help from a variety of service agencies, making each agency’s database incomplete and sometimes misleading. For example, many victims of intentionally caused injuries seek medical services without filing formal police reports (Barancik, Chatterjee, Greene, Michenzi, & Fife, 1983; Pierce & Deutsch, 1990). In fact, Pierce and Deutsch (1990) suggested that police departments may be the primary service provider for less serious domestic violence injuries, whereas physicians, especially emergency medical personnel, become relatively more important as service providers when the injuries become more serious. Further supporting this finding is a recent study reporting that almost half of all women entering a battered women’s shelter, which typically disproportionately handles the more serious cases of domestic violence, had not contacted the police (Coulter, Kuehnle, Byers, & Alfonso, 1999).

The lack of continuity in services or in record keeping also makes official estimates suspect. Despite widespread adoption of laws mandating the reporting of domestic violence incidents, there is no effective mechanism to consistently collect data from all public health, welfare, and law enforcement agencies in most jurisdictions. Finally, classification of calls by police has also been problematic. Assaults frequently receive ambiguous typologies such as “persons investigated” or “services rendered.” Police categorized approximately 50% of the 3.2 million service calls Boston received between 1977 and 1982 in such a manner. Alternately, an aggravated assault report may fail to indicate that the assailant was a spouse (Pierce et al., 1988).

Pierce et al. (1988) also found a decrease in specific classification by officers compared with 911 operators that may be attributed to officer “downgrading” the various problem calls received. This lack of consistent reporting is more likely if an assault or burglary involves a domestic problem or if there have been previous requests for police assistance.
Currently, the most sophisticated attempts to identify patterns of repeat service calls to a particular household, conducted by Pierce et al., may be subject to challenge. Such analysis tends to rely on street addresses rather than individual names. One could argue that, due to neighborhood characteristics, specific areas will always comprise families at high risk and heavy occupant turnover as opposed to recidivism of a particular familial unit. This may partially account for repeat calls.

WHAT IS THE INCIDENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

With all of the preceding caveats as to the accuracy of the data, the following is the most accurate practice on the incidence of domestic violence now available.

The NCVS reported that in 1998, women were victims in about 900,000 violent offenses, a decrease from the 1.1 million reported in 1993. Men were the victims of about 160,000 assaults by a violent partner. Intimate partner violence declined 21% in the 5-year period from 1993 to 1998, or 9.8% per 1,000 to 7.5% per 1,000. At the same time, there was a 34% overall decrease in violent crime, so, in reality, intimate partner violence decreased less than other violent offenses.

The NCVS data also revealed that between 1993 and 1998, intimate partner violence was responsible for 22% of violent crime against women compared with 3% of violence against men. Women annually experienced more than 5 times as many violent incidents by an intimate than did men. On average, each year women were the victims of more than 572,000 violent victimizations committed by an intimate compared with approximately 49,000 incidents committed against men. Approximately half of female victims reported a physical injury, and 40% obtained medical treatment (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

As a result of problems with NCVS and UCR data, large-scale independent research projects provide good supplemental estimates of levels of domestic violence in America. The key nongovernmental survey is the NFVS, first administered by Straus and Gelles in 1975. They used the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) as a mechanism to measure incidence, prevalence, chronicity, and severity of physical assaults as well as how reasoning and verbal aggression is used to resolve conflicts. They completed three national surveys involving personal interviews of 2,143 respondents in 1976 and telephone interviews with 6,002 respondents in 1985 (Gelles & Straus, 1988) and 1,970 respondents in 1992 (Straus, 1990).5

Straus reported that about 16% of all households surveyed and approximately 10% of both women and men reported some victimization in the past year with slightly over 3% in any given year suffering severe abuse, e.g. involving punching with a fist, kicking, biting, beatings, and attacks with knives and guns (Straus & Gelles, 1990). They also reported that 39% of all incidents of violence toward wives involved serious violence (Gelles & Straus, 1988). The rate of minor violence in their 1992 survey was 91 per 1,000 (compared with 80 per 1,000 in 1985 and 100 per 1,000 in 1975). Serious assaults were reported at 38 per 1,000 in 1975 and declined to 19 per 1,000 in 1992.

Women’s Use of Violence

One controversial difference in the NFVS from NCVS and official data is the very high rates of violence by women. Currently, more than 100 studies have used the CTS and have found rates of violence by women to be as high as men (Straus, 1999). Straus believes this reflects the critical differences between crime
studies and conflict studies. Research by Straus and his colleagues suggests that only about 2% of incidents of domestic assault are reported to police (compared with 53% according to the NCVS, as discussed earlier) and that those reported are likely to be the more serious assaults or those for which there is greatest fear of serious injury—most likely by a male perpetrator (Straus & Gelles, 1986, 1990).

This contrasts with the NCVS survey and the NVAWS, which both report considerably higher rates of female compared with male intimate partner victimization (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The NVAWS, based on survey information with 8,000 representative men and women, reported that nearly 25% of surveyed women and approximately 8% of surveyed men said that they were raped or physically assaulted (or both) by a current or former spouse, a cohabitating partner, or a date at some point in their lifetime. From this, they extrapolated that approximately 4.8 million intimate partner rapes and physical assaults were perpetrated against U.S. women annually, and approximately 2.9 million intimate partner assaults were committed against men annually (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In addition to controversy over which data source more accurately reflects women's use of violence, many researchers argue that the number of acts alone should not be the basis of judging female violence but that the outcome and the context of the violence are also critical factors. First, as Stets and Straus (1990) emphasized, the rate of injury-inflicted assaults was 3.5 per 1,000 for men against women, compared with 0.6 per 1,000 for women against men—6 times the rate of injury.

The NVAWS found that gender differences became even more pronounced when the severity of the outcome was measured. Of the 4.8 million rapes and physical assaults perpetrated against women annually, approximately 2 million resulted in an injury to the victim, and more than 550,000 required some type of medical treatment for female victims. In contrast, of the approximately 2.9 million intimate partner physical assaults perpetrated against men annually, approximately 580,000 resulted in injuries and only 125,000 required medical treatment. Therefore, although the overall number of injuries—4.8 million compared with 2.9 million—may not be remarkably dissimilar, the difference between the 550,000 women requiring medical care compared with the 125,000 men reveals considerably higher risk to women. In addition, because the NVAWS study included same-sex violence, where a far higher percentage of men were far more likely to be abused by a male partner, the difference in injuries sustained by each sex at the hands of the other is even greater.

As we noted earlier, it has long been suggested that there are major differences in the use of violence between men and women in relationships. Since the early 1980s, some researchers have suggested that women may initiate violence more often than men as a tactical strategy to avoid an imminent violent act against them (Bowker, 1983; Feld & Straus, 1989). In addition, many women may be acting in self-defense or simply fighting back (Hamner & Saunders, 1984; Renzetti, 1999; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). This argument is further substantiated by empirical data from a national study of dating violence in Canada, which reported that the majority of women who used violence were acting in self-defense or fighting back (DeKeseredy, Saunders, Schwartz, & Alvi, 1997). Another recent study by Swan and Snow (2002) studied women who had used physical violence with a male partner. They reported that “almost all of the women committed moderate physical violence, 57% committed severe violence, 54% injured their partner, 28% used sexual coercion, and 86% used some form of coercive control”
Almost all these women also experienced physical violence from their male partners. They found that only 12% of women were aggressors; the remaining women reported that the men committed significantly more acts of violence against them with less than 6% experiencing no physical violence by their partner.

Although women committed significantly more acts of moderate physical violence against male partners than their partners committed against them, their partners committed almost 1.5 times the number of severe physical acts against them (although only moderately significant), committed 2.5 times the rate of sexual coercion, and caused 1.5 times as much injury. Also of interest, is that although there were many relationships in which women were more physically aggressive, their male partner was more controlling (50% of relationships). The researchers suggested that this indicates these women were not necessarily in control of their partner’s behavior despite the fact that they used more severe violence (Swan & Snow, 2002).

This conclusion may be questionable. The assumption that if one partner uses verbal coercion and the other uses physical violence, the former is really the person in control of the relationship is not really all that clear; the line between physical and psychological abuse may at the least blur. Furthermore, the terms emotional abuse and coercion were intermingled and include behaviors such as insulting or swearing at a partner. This does not appear to be a commonly accepted measure of coercion.

Moffit et al. (2001) examined a representative sample of 360 couples. These couples were interviewed as young adults, when the incidence of partner violence is greatest. In addition, partners corroborated each others’ reports of abuse, and all reports were examined for reliability. Moffit et al.’s research did not support a male aggressor model of violence. Instead, these researchers found that the range and distribution of abusive acts did not significantly differ by gender. In addition, their findings did not support the belief that women’s use of violence is usually motivated by self-defense. The researchers reported that a substantial number of women committed one-sided violent acts during the study period that exceeded the number of male acts. Furthermore, 18% of women initiated assaults despite the fact that both parties agreed that the male partner had committed no acts of abuse, a fact true for only 6% of the male respondents. Finally, the researchers reported that women in the study who were abusive toward their partners were 4 times more likely to have been violent toward someone other than an intimate partner in the same year.

What is interesting is that longitudinal studies have suggested that there are relationships in which women are the initially aggressive partner, but that at a later point in time, men become physically abusive—“men do abuse women who abuse them” (Moffit et al., 2001, p. 23).

The preceding recent studies collectively suggest that female-on-male violence is a widely underreported phenomenon, perhaps because the impact in the form of actual injuries and death is demonstrably less than the converse. It also simply does not fit into the image that many authors, activists, and politicians have of a crime that is almost exclusively within the province of men.

**Intimate Violence in Specific Population Subsets**

National-level aggregate data often tend to mask major differences among specific groups within the population. For example, data on same-sex relationships suggest that rates of abuse in that subset of the population may actually be higher than in heterosexual relationships. Until recently, we
lacked empirical data on the extent of partner violence in same-sex relationships. Initial domestic violence legislation focused on heterosexual partner violence, and service providers including hotlines and shelters typically excluded women victimized by same-sex intimate partners. Therefore, police reports and other sources of official data did not provide data on the extent of these incidents reaching police attention (Hart, 1986). To the extent that many states still do not include same-sex relationships under domestic violence statutes, these victims are unlikely to receive the same access to the criminal justice system that is provided to other domestic violence victims.

Early research was limited to small, unrepresentative samples of same-sex partner violence. Not only did this make it difficult to generalize from their findings, but the estimates of prevalence varied tremendously, ranging from 17% (Loulan, 1987) to 74% (Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991) depending on the measures used and the time period measured.

The NVAWS was the first study to include same-sex violence as part of a large-scale national survey. It reported that approximately 11% of women in a lesbian relationship reported being raped, physically assaulted, or stalked by their partner. Although a significant percentage, this number was less than the 30% of women who reported such violence when living with a man in a heterosexual relationship. In contrast, in male same-sex couples, the rate of violence was approximately 15% against a partner, whereas men in heterosexual relationships were physically abused by women at a rate slightly less than 8%. Hence, although same-sex violence is clearly an under-addressed issue, this research suggests that men perpetrate more violence in both same-sex or heterosexual relationships, but the highest rates of male violence are in a heterosexual relationship (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In addition, there were differences reported on the basis of ethnicity. Although the NVAWS reported little difference in intimate partner physical violence and stalking between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women, they found significant differences in rape reported by a current or former partner in these populations. The researchers highlighted the significance of this finding because Hispanic women are less likely than other women to be sexually assaulted by a nonintimate or former nonintimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Significant differences have also been reported among different racial groups. The NVAWS found that American Indian/Alaska Native women report significantly higher rates of intimate partner violence than did women of other racial backgrounds, and Asian/Pacific Islander women and men report significantly lower rates. The authors noted that American Indian/Alaska Native women may be more willing to report victimization to interviewers than are other victims (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Data on intimate partner violence among African Americans vary considerably. Straus and Gelles (1986) reported that African Americans had 4 times the rate of partner violence compared with Whites; however, NCVS data suggest that rates of domestic violence between Black and White women appear to be similar for every age group except between the ages of 20 and 24, when the rates were 29 per 1,000 for Black women compared with 20 per 1,000 for White women (Rennison, 2001). The NVAWS reported higher rates of victimization rates for Black women but found that when other sociodemographic and relationship variables were controlled, these differences disappeared. We discuss these factors in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Finally, overall rates of intimate partner violence among immigrant groups as a defined population subset are extremely
difficult to determine. A national survey of criminal justice officials and leaders of six ethnic communities suggest that many recent immigrants fail to report crimes (R. C. Davis & Erez, 1998). In fact, 67% of the officials in the national survey believed that they were less likely to report crimes compared with other victims, and only 12% thought they were as or more likely to report offenses to the police. In addition, domestic violence victims were less likely to report their victimizations, making an overall appraisal of the rates of domestic violence in this group especially problematic.

Data on homicides are the most complete, likely attributable to the severity of the crime and the resulting importance of a thorough police report. Clearly, domestic violence plays a major role in homicide, although in recent years there has been a substantial decrease in the proportion of homicides committed by intimate partners. In 1998, women comprised nearly 53% of homicides; 1,830 female homicides occurred in a relationship known to involve intimate partners. This is a decrease from the 1976 figure of 3,000 intimate partner homicides, which represented 75% of all homicides against female intimate partners (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). It is important to note that White women are the one category of victims for which intimate partner homicide has not shown a substantial decline since 1976 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). In contrast, there was a 45% decrease in homicides against Black women.

Stalking is also quite prevalent. The most detailed data are from the NVAWS, which estimates that women are approximately 4 times more likely as men to be stalked during their lifetime (8.1% vs. 2.2%). In addition, women are more likely than men to be stalked by current or former intimates. Stalking by a current or former intimate occurs before and during the relationship for 36% of female victims and after termination of the relationship for 43% of female victims (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Victims stalked by a current or former intimate partner are more likely to be threatened (Moy & Gothard, 1995) and injured (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998; Wright et al., 1996). The NVAWS reported that 82% were physically assaulted, and 31% were raped (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Injuries and Deaths

It has been estimated that women were injured in approximately half of the domestic assaults committed in 1998 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). In addition, during the period from 1992 to 1998, domestic assaults were found to be 37% more likely to result in injuries for women than were other types of assault (Simon & Perkins, 2001). Incidents of domestic violence are not merely a problem of one particular social class. Although most criminal justice involvement has been with the lower socioeconomic groups, numerous researchers have noted that although the stress of being indigent, the relative lack of adaptive nonviolence skills, and increased rates of substance abuse may result in higher levels of domestic violence in lower socioeconomic groups, acts of familial violence are by no means restricted to this group (Bassett, 1980; Coates & Leong, 1980; Ferraro, 1989a; U.S. Attorney General’s Task Force on Family Violence, 1984). In fact, even the American Medical Association (1992), in a special report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, noted that doctors simply did not recognize widespread signs of abuse in middle-class patients. The article noted that because many of the doctors were White, middle- or upper-class men, they were
particularly subject to denying abuse from men with whom they could identify (“Doctors Falter,” 1992).

**Psychological and Quality-of-Life Effects on Victims**

The impact of domestic violence is far higher than the individual acts. Severe physical abuse is more likely to result in greater psychological impact (Follingstad, Brenan, Hause, Polek, & Rurledge, 1991). The degree of psychological impact may not be totally a result of measures of violence such as the amount of force used or injuries sustained but rather based in part on individual subjective factors (Weaver & Clum, 1995).

Victims become emotionally traumatized. The battering syndrome has been found to result in high rates of medical complaints (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988); depression and low self-esteem (Campbell, Kub, Belknap, & Templin, 1997; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Zlotnick, Kohn, Peterson, & Pearlstein, 1998); psychosocial problems, and later disproportionate risks of rape, miscarriage, abortion, alcohol and drug abuse, attempted suicide (Stets & Straus, 1990); and general emotional well-being including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from severe stress (Campbell & Soeken, 1999). The impact of these problems is profound. The rates of suicide of battered women are almost 5 times as high as in nonbattered populations (Stark, 1984). Furthermore, it appears that many of these problems begin after the abuse, not as a cluster of which abuse is merely one factor (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Sandin, 1997; Stark, 1984; Woods, 1999). The emotional toll of domestic violence may also be greatly increased if a psychological assault is part of the pattern of abuse. Some researchers have reported that many women find psychological, verbal, and emotional abuse more

**The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children and Adolescents**

Children in abusive families appear to be the most susceptible to the impact of domestic violence. First, it is significant that large numbers of this especially vulnerable group regularly witness violence in the family. One estimate (using data derived from total instances of domestic violence and “adjusted” for the number of children in the household) is that approximately 3.3 million children witness acts of domestic violence each year (Carlson, 1984). Straus and Gelles (1990), using the 1985 national victim survey, suggested an even higher figure. They stated that
10 million teenagers every year witnessed violence between parents and that collectively, “at least 1/3 of American children have witnessed violence between their parents, and most have endured repeated instances” (Straus & Gelles, 1990).

More recent studies confirm the prevalence of children witnessing violence. Edelson et al. (2000) reported that in a group of 114 battered women, 45% stated that their children entered situations in which abuse was occurring at least “occasionally,” 18% responded that this occurred “frequently”; only 23% said that this “never” occurred. Even these data may underestimate the extent of child witnessing of adult violence because another study found that 77% of children whose parents said their children did not witness violence did, in fact, do so (O’Brien, John, Margolin, & Erel, 1994). Despite the victim’s or even the offender’s trying to hide acts of violence from the children, their witnessing of such acts clearly puts them at risk for becoming the “hidden victims” of domestic abuse.

What impact does witnessing violence have on children? Could such an impact manifest itself in the context of general behavioral problems or in a tendency to be a victim or a victimizer? These questions are important in the context of theories of the generation of long-term social and behavioral problems and the possible intergenerational transfer of violence. Edleson (2001) in a recently published research article, noted that there was now an extensive body of literature of more than 100 studies trying to determine the impact of family violence on children, with about one third dealing solely with children witnessing violence as opposed to being battered themselves (Edleson, 2001). Edelson reported that several studies found that “externalized” behaviors such as aggression and antisocial behavior were more common in children, especially boys, exposed to domestic violence; “internalized” behaviors such as unusual fears and inhibitions were also common, especially among girls (Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lamberg, Martino, Anderson, & Sutton, 1991; see also Carlson, 1991; Hughes, 1988; Hughes, Parkinson, & Vargo, 1989; Stagg, Wills, & Howell, 1989). Other studies have reported a variety of adverse effects with children who have witnessed domestic violence, including that, in general, they score lower on tests of social competency and higher on depression, anxiety, aggression, shyness, and school-related problems (Adamson & Thompson, 1998; Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Silvern et al., 1995; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985). Another study indicates that children score lower on tests of cognitive functioning (Rossman, 1998).

These attitudes can potentially result in a series of behavioral problems. One study of violent teenage boys reported that exposure to family violence apparently was associated with the development of positive feelings toward using violence to “solve” problems and hence indirectly to violent offending (Spaccerelli, Coatworth, & Bowden, 1995). In addition—and perhaps this is the most chilling prospect—witnessing parental violence is highly correlated with subsequent suicide attempts of children. One study found that 65% of children who had attempted suicide had previously witnessed family violence (Kosky, 1983). Although Edleson (2001) correctly noted that solely using this factor to predict individual attitudes or behavior would be wrong, he also noted that within the highly variable individual experiences and reactions, most studies show group trends in which adverse impact may be seen.

Can such exposure also be related to the well-known trend of intergenerational transmission of violence? This might be based on “social learning theory,” the proponents of which hypothesize that witnessing violence, especially repetitively and in the emotionally laden context of the family, would predispose
children to learn to use violence. There is evidence for this effect both outside and within the family. Short-term effects were recently found in one study in which recent exposure to violence in the home was significant in predicting children’s and adolescents’ violent behavior outside the home (Adamson & Thompson, 1998).

Some children and teens are more affected by exposure to violence than others. Resilience may be due to several factors. First, a child’s relationship with a caring adult, usually a parent, may reduce the negative impact of exposure. Second, characteristics of the victim have been found to be of significance. Children with average or above average intelligence and strong interpersonal skills are more likely to have increased resilience. Additional factors include self-esteem and other personality traits, socioeconomic background, religion, and contact with supportive people (Osofsky, 1999).

It is somewhat more difficult to design reliable longitudinal studies measuring the long-term effects of witnessing violence. What evidence there is suggests that, based on retrospective analysis, there is at least some impact on future patterns of behavior—either as an enactor or, more paradoxically, as a victim of future violence. For example, battered women were found to be 6 times as likely to have been subjected to violence as a child than other women. Similarly, adult batterers have been found to originate largely in abusive homes (Kalmuss, 1984; Star, 1978). One national study graphically demonstrated how a tendency toward violence might be expressed against a variety of targets. Abused women were 150 times more likely to abuse their children, and sons who witnessed battering were 10 times as likely to become abusive to their domestic partners (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

There are problems with research examining the impact of witnessing or experiencing family violence on children and adolescents, however. Children and teens exposed to this violence are also at greater risk for exposure to other types of violence. Often, they reside in communities with high rates of community violence. Youth growing up in such neighborhoods are regularly exposed to the use of drugs, guns and other weapons, and random acts of violence. One report states that children in urban schools who have not received such exposure are the exception, not the norm (Osofsky, 1999).

Although research regarding the impact of childhood and adolescent exposure to violence is now emerging, findings still need further development. We still lack an understanding of what the link is between witnessing violence and subsequent victimization and offending. Many witnesses of early violence do not become either victims or offenders as adults. Others become offenders, and still others become victims. There are also children who become both victims and offenders. A better understanding of how these behaviors evolve is needed. We also need an increased understanding of how to successfully intervene with children and adolescents to decrease the likelihood of negative consequences. At this point in time, we simply know we need to intervene, but we lack an empirical understanding of how best to provide assistance.

The Impact of Stalking

There are significant difficulties in determining the rates of stalking. The percentage of stalking incidents reported to police is even lower than is the case when an actual assault or an assault involving an injury has occurred. As a result, recent survey research that is not dependent on police reports has revealed prevalence rates for stalking that are far higher than previously considered. The NVAWS reported that almost 5% of surveyed women and .6% of surveyed men
reported being stalked by a current or former spouse, cohabitating partner, or date during their lifetime. In addition, .5% of the women and .2% of the men were stalked within the last 12 months. They extrapolated these figures to result in approximately 504,000 women and 185,000 men being stalked annually by intimate partners in the United States (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, stalking is part of the definition of domestic violence, either in the context of being part of an ongoing pattern of a variety of types of abuse, of becoming an alternative to earlier physical abuse, or as the only type of behavior the offender displays. In the case of its becoming an alternative form of abuse, the methods chosen continue at long range the control tactics that had been finely honed previously. Stalking has been concisely described as “psychological war” (Geberth, 1992), and it instills tremendous terror in victims. Tactics vary enormously. Some stalkers simply trail their victims continuously. Others destroy or vandalize property; send packages or deliveries (often of inappropriate or bizarre items); poison or kill pets; use phone threats; and contact employers, neighbors, and relatives, making normal life impossible.

Danger in stalking is an ever-present threat. In this context, the behavior of O. J. Simpson in stalking his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson is a typical pattern, even if the outcome was extreme. Although research in this field is in its infancy, we know that stalking by itself is a strong predictor of subsequent, often uncontrolled, violence against the victim, her (or his) family, bystanders, and even the offender. Mass murder and suicidal rage are not uncommon although difficult to predict. The public is familiar with headlines in which both celebrities and others have been stalked and sometimes killed. Others have been attacked and permanently injured or disfigured. In the context of the psychopathological stalker, this is explainable; he seeks to retain control. Such violence may be used as either a tactic (to keep control) or a spasmodic response to the realization that he has utterly “lost it,” perhaps when the victim finally rebuffs him (or her) or becomes involved with another. The best evidence of this is the often-expressed stalker statement, “If I can’t have her, no one else will.”

In addition, stalking affects the mental health of victims. The NVAWS reported that one third of female stalking victims sought psychological counseling. More than a quarter of the victims reported losing time from their current employment because of stalking, and 7% gave up their job altogether (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

**IS STALKING THE PROTOTYPICAL OFFENSE IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS?**

Although the rate of domestic violence in marital settings has basically reached a plateau for a number of years, domestic violence in the context of dating relationships appears to have escalated sharply since 1976 (“Studies Find,” 1992). This may represent a real increase in the number of cases or simply be related to the growing unwillingness of women to tolerate physical aggression in dating. Also, by personal preference, many women now merely stay at an “open” relationship level, dating numerous people and refusing to accede to demands to “go steady.” This type of dating relationship is highly threatening to many men (“Studies Find,” 1992). Men with psychopathological control tendencies are faced with intolerable feelings of rejection. As such, even after being arrested for stalking or even assaulting or murdering a former lover, they perceive themselves as victims, not victimizers. The “crime
of choice” for these offenders is stalking, because they simply are not live-in intimates.

Stalking on college campuses has also become a source of concern. Not surprisingly, research has suggested that college women may be at increased risk for victimization compared with the general population (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2002; Schwartz, Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Fisher et al. (2002) conducted a national telephone survey of 4,446 women attending 2- and 4-year colleges and universities in 1997. They reported that 13.1% of women were stalked during a 7-month period, a figure considerably higher than the national average. Of those women, 12.7% experienced two incidents, and 2.3% experienced three or more incidents. Victims were threatened or an assault was attempted in 15.3% of the cases.

It has been suggested that routine activities theory may be relevant for explaining why college women might be at increased risk of being stalked; for example, the lifestyle of female college students is likely to put them in situations in which they are more likely to come in contact with potential stalkers (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999). Potential stalkers are more likely to be in regular contact with students because of living arrangements as well as regular contact in classes and social activities. This helps them familiarize themselves with the behavior patterns of a potential victim (Fisher et al., 2002).

When is stalking likely to escalate into violence? Empirical research on the causes and patterns of the escalation of stalking is now becoming available. One relatively early research project by Dietz et al. (1991) reported on the incidence of threatening and inappropriate letters to celebrities. The authors attempted to correlate features of such letters with subsequent physical encounters with the targets of the letters—a vast escalation and somewhat similar to the escalation to violence of a domestic violence stalker.

The pattern showed some surprising correlations that underscore the difficulty in predicting future behavior of stalkers. Specifically, whether the writer made explicit threats to the recipient was not at all correlated with the likelihood of subsequent violence.

The authors did find, however, that the number of letters written, the duration of such attention-seeking behavior, expressions of desire for face-to-face contact, and use of multiple avenues of conduct (telephone, mailboxes, fax) were highly predictive of a subsequent physical attack. Dietz and colleagues concisely summarized their findings from their and other studies as follows:

We have disproved the myth that only threats count. Nearly everyone makes the mistake of assuming that unless there is a threat, you can safely ignore “nut mail,” “kook calls,” and weird visitors. This false assumption is the source of more misguided policy and decision-making than any other error in this field. (p. 208)

This finding may be of direct relevance to domestic violence stalking in that these factors are all present in the typical highly intensive stalking campaign launched by former physical abusers. As a result, the police, the courts, and probation officers should consider domestic violence stalkers as presenting a profile highly predictive of future assaults.

The real danger is, of course, that we simply lack sufficient knowledge regarding stalking and its relationship to future violence. Although the behavior may well lead to violence, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if or when violence will break out in any particular case. At that point, the knowledge is too late because stalkers appear to realize that they may have only “one shot” at their victim and act accordingly. Consequently, it is incumbent on police, courts, and social welfare agencies to treat all stalking incidents as representing a serious threat of injury or death.
We believe this chapter highlights the considerable operational difficulties in terms of defining and measuring the crime of domestic violence and the closely related crime of stalking. The unassailable fact remains, however, that these crimes collectively present a major challenge to society and warrant full, aggressive involvement of the criminal justice system.

NOTES

1. We do not include violence among same-sex partners in this book. Although such violence clearly exists and is significant, there are unique features—regarding victims, offenders, their interaction, and criminal justice interventions—that cannot be adequately addressed here. For those interested in the subject, we particularly suggest the research of Claire Renzetti (1999).

2. Incidence refers to the count of new incidents (usually expressed per 100,000 or some appropriate unit of the population). Incidence rates are most appropriate for one-time occurrences, but not for ongoing acts, which are often typical in domestic violence relationships. Therefore, it is difficult to collect data because it is unclear if a victim is a new case of violence (e.g., not counted by other sources such as victim services, social service agencies, or health systems). Furthermore, it is unknown whether the same person was reported as a victim of a previous domestic assault.

3. According to the Reiss and Roth (1993), for example, on average, 100 persons are victimized in every 80 aggravated assault events and in every 90 simple assault events.

4. Nonetheless, currently only 7% of the U.S. population resides in jurisdictions certified by the FBI as capable of reporting incident-based data. Many more departments are “NIBRS compliant,” meaning that their internal reporting procedure follows NIBRS format but that data are not collected by the FBI and are available only on a jurisdictional basis.

5. The CTS appears to be an appropriate strategy for determining the frequency of physical and psychological violence in the general population. Although the instrument has been criticized for failing to measure all abusive behaviors, the amount of serious violence in the general population is relatively low. Its value would lie in its ability to monitor abusive acts, changes in the number of couples engaging in such acts, or changes in the severity of violence (Gordon, 2000).