# FAMILY VIOLENCE LEVELS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD ABUSE POTENTIAL

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# FAMILY VIOLENCE LEVELS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD ABUSE POTENTIAL

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## ABSTRACT

This study primarily explored the relationship between family violence levels and the mothers' child abuse potential. A total of 33 mothers were examined in the study, all of whom were biological mothers of a child between the ages of 3 and 5. The measures included the Child Abuse Potential Inventory and the Conflict Tactics Scales – Couple Form R. In families with higher overall violence levels, the results indicated that these mothers had significantly higher potentials to abuse their children. No significant relationship was found between overall family violence levels and mothers' problems with child and self or with mothers' problems with family. Participants reporting frequent use of verbal aggression were found to be significantly likely to abuse their children, have problems with their child and self, and experience problems from others. Women describing high levels of minor and severe violence in their family were found to have significantly high potentials to abuse. This study also examined how closely related the mothers' reports of their own violent acts were to their report of their partners' corresponding violent acts. Results indicated that participants' reports of their reasoning and verbal aggression conflict-resolving behaviors were significantly correlated with their reports of their partners' same acts. No significant relationships were found between mothers' reports of their own minor, severe, and overall violent behaviors and their reports of corresponding behaviors of their intimate partners.

# INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an unavoidable product of all relationships. Most conflicts are resolved through discussion and compromising on behalf of the individuals involved. However, some individuals use the normativity of conflict to justify acting violently with their partners and in their families. What should be understood is that violence is not a necessary stage in the progression of conflict or an acceptable method of conflict resolution.

The term violent behaviors describes many actions, specifically verbal aggression, minor physical violence, and severe physical violence. However, perceptions of the severity of these behaviors vary based on which partner is engaging in the violent acts. Men are less likely to treat women's violence as threatening or report the acts of physical violence, even if the situation becomes serious (Landhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005). Perhaps a result of this underreporting bias, men are arrested more often than women (Dutton, 2008). This reinforces the prevailing, but inaccurate, assumption that women are always the victims and their male partners the batterers. One reason why women in particular turn to violence is as a method of control. When their partner is not willing to agree to or complete their requests, abusers turn to violence to control the other's behavior (Winstok, 2008).

Violence of all types has been shown to transfer across relationships, especially from intimate relationships to parent-child relationships. Parents rely on the conflict resolution skills they have found effective in other relationships to resolve problems with their children. For parents involved in intimate partner violence, this means a transfer of violent reactions and controlling behaviors from their romantic life to their children (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995).

Growing up in violent homes has both immediate and long term negative effects on children. For young children especially, parents are the members of their limited social group with which they interact most, so if parents engage in violence frequently, it is possible that the child will only experience dysfunctional interactions (Mash & Wolfe, 2008), and thus have only violent behaviors to model from.

More attention should be brought to patterns of abuse within families so that children can be removed from violent family atmospheres before abusive patterns are transferred to the child. The present study examined the relationship between family violence levels between partners as reported by mothers and the mothers' potential to abuse their child. Relationships between women's reports of their own and their partners' violent acts were also examined. An overview of the topics of intimate partner violence and violent family environments must be explored before any association between violent caregivers and child abuse potential can be fully understood.

*Partner Conflict*

*Conflict is normative.* Each member of any social group has their own priorities, which will surely differ from others in the group on some points, especially within a family. Straus (1979) explains that conflict is a normal part of all relationships and without conflict, there would be no reason for change, leaving the family system weak. Failure to adapt to new circumstances and resolve problems as they arise can lead to group member detachment, as well as a hostile environment.

Straus (1979) explains further that despite the normativity of conflict, most individuals try to avoid it, perhaps due to the association individuals make between conflict and violence. This connection, while true in some cases, is not necessary for all conflict. Instead of focusing

on techniques to avoid conflict, family energy should be devoted instead to learning ways to experience conflict without violence (Straus, 1979). Violence is not constructive and results from flawed models of interaction and underlying family dysfunction (McCloskey, et al., 1995). However, violence is present in families, and thus we are forced to deal with it and its effects on the lives of its members.

Conflict between partners can be resolved constructively through discussion and reasoning. However, Winstok (2008) observed that individuals who try force their opinions or rules onto others resort to violence as a way to resolve conflict. These abusers typically escalate the severity of their aggression until they have total control over their partner's behavior. Also, control of a partner would be more difficult to obtain than control of a child in most circumstances.

Tjaden (2000) reported that over 1.3 million women and 835,000 men are victims of assault from an intimate partner yearly in the United States alone. Considering the high prevalence of this problem and the possible short and long term consequences, violence between romantic partners has been given considerable attention. Paterson, Feehan, Butler, Williams, and Cowley-Malcolm (2007) define intimate partner violence as "a pattern of violent and coercive behaviors whereby one person seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of an intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting their control." This definition is particularly useful because it encompasses violence between couples regardless of their living arrangements or marital status.

*Women: abusers and abused.* The misconception that men are the sole perpetrators of violence has been disproved by research time and time again, but the perception still stands. In order to properly address instances of partner abuse, society needs to accept that women can be

violent and/or abusive toward their partners. A study by Paterson et al. (2007) revealed that the women in their study expressed an equal amount of violent behaviors as did the men, while Landhinrichsen-Rohling (2005) discovered that women in their sample engaged in violent behaviors more frequently than men. However, when women batter their partners, their actions may be perceived as less serious than men's or laughable, even in instances of severe violence.

Perpetuating the notion of men as the more violent partner are studies that find men responsible for more severely violent acts (Paterson, et al., 2007) and women more likely to be injured by violent acts (Landhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005). Paterson et al. (2007) found that when asked about incidents in the past year, 11.3% of women reported being physically assaulted, while only 2.7% of men reported assault. For these physically abused women, Winstok (2008) found that assault intensifies in severity over time, and abuse that occurs more than once usually persists until the relationship is ended, most commonly by separation or death.

*Discrepancies in reporting abuse.* The inconsistencies between women's abusive actions and men's reputation as batterers may be partially due to reporting discrepancies. Schafer, Caetano, and Clark (2002) found that agreement between partners about the occurrence of physical violence is generally poor, and Archer (1999) reported that individuals' self-reports of violence are typically lower than their reports of their partner's violence for both sexes. Winstok (2008) found that partner reports vary, with women typically reporting more violence than men overall, no matter if they are the perpetrator or victim of the abuse. Though partners do not agree on the instances of conflict in their relationships when it involves physical aggression, they do tend to agree when verbal aggression or psychological abuse are being reported (Winstok, 2008).

These finding suggest that reports of partner violence from one member cannot be considered a reliable, unbiased source of information about their partner's violent behaviors.

Schafer et al. (2002) recommended that data gathered at the individual level should not be extrapolated to represent violence at the relationship level unless no other data is available. Collecting data from each partner separately is necessary for accurate results, though this may not always be possible.

*Conflict in Families*

When examining the relationship between intimate partners, the place that the parent-child relationship has within the family also needs consideration. Miller, Smyth, and Mudar (1999) found that women with lifelong experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse have been shown to be more inconsistent with their punishments, give harsher punishments, and be more punitive toward their children. With hostility so prevalent in their lives, these women may perceive violence as a normal way of dealing with family problems. These mothers turn harsh discipline onto their children, forgetting how devastating their actions are, because violence has become such a commonplace communication tool in their relationships. McCloskey, et al. (1995) found that children of battered women experienced more types of abuse more frequently than children in comparison groups, and from both parents.

*Children witnessing violence.* Of specific interest is violence in families with children, because the family is still the predominant social influence, especially in the case of young children (Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007). For a child, witnessing physical violence and threats of violence between parents is highly traumatic (McCloskey, et al., 1995). Hazen, Connelly, Kelleher, Barth, and Landsverk (2006) found that violent environments lead to children exhibiting internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression, and externalizing problems such as aggression, oppositional behaviors, and conduct problems. Parents' reports suggest that as many as 30-43% of children in the United States have witnessed some form of physical

violence between their caregivers (Ybarra, Wilkens, & Lieberman, 2007), but actual rates are likely much higher.

*Involving Children.* McCloskey et al. (1995) have found that abuse can be transferred across relationships, making us wary of families with partner violence present and their greater risk of directing abuse at their children. Their study also found that children who try to disrupt an argument or protect a parent during fights that get physical may be particularly at risk for violence. The factors that lead to child maltreatment and their importance have not all been identified (Rodriguez & Green, 1997), but armed with the knowledge that different forms of family violence coincide, society can be more alert for signs of child abuse in families where heightened levels of parental conflict exist (McCloskey, et al., 1995).

*Discipline.* In as many as 85 to 94% of families, parents report using aggression to discipline their children (Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007; Haskett, Scott, & Fann, 1995). In most cases, these punishments were limited to threats, other verbal aggression, or minor physical violence, such as spanking, grabbing, or shaking (Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007). Of greatest concern are harsh punishments for children, especially in the form of severe physical abuse, and the negative effects that follow. As discussed by Straus (1979), cruel treatment affects these individuals later in life; as adults they may experience depression, suicidal ideations, alienation, and exhibit violent behaviors.

In regards to individuals who experienced severe discipline within their family as children, Haapasalo and Aaltonen (1999) found that one third of this group had reproduced the abusive tendencies within their own families as adults. For children experiencing abuse, early intervention and therapy may help them deal with their experiences, as well as reduce their risk for later intergenerational abuse (Rodriguez & Green, 1997). Regardless, an effective method is

needed to identify caregivers at risk to abuse children in order to break this cycle of abuse and prevent manifestation onto the next generation.

*The Current Study*

It is evident that much research has been conducted on violent family environments and the effects on children. The current study was most interested in the transfer of abuse, specifically the relationship between violence levels in the family and the mother's child abuse potential. The current study also investigated in what way participants' reports of their violent behaviors were related to their reports of the same acts performed by their partners.

## METHOD

*Hypotheses*

Based on the aforementioned research, several hypotheses have been developed for the present study:

Topic: Family Violence Levels and Child Abuse Potential

1. Mothers reporting high overall violence levels will have high child abuse potential.
2. Mothers reporting high overall violence levels will have more problems with their family.
3. Mothers reporting high overall violence levels will have more problems with their child and themselves.
4. Mothers reporting high verbal aggression levels will have high child abuse potential.
5. Mothers reporting high verbal aggression levels will have more problems with their family.
6. Mothers reporting high verbal aggression levels will have more problems with their child and themselves.

7. Mothers reporting high verbal aggression levels will have more problems from others.
8. Mothers reporting high minor violence levels will have high child abuse potential.
9. Mothers reporting high severe violence levels will have high child abuse potential.

Topic: Aggression between Partners

10. Women will report similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using reasoning to resolve conflict.
11. Women will report similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using verbal aggression to resolve conflict.
12. Women will not report similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using minor violence to resolve conflict.
13. Women will not report similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using severe violence to resolve conflict.
14. Women will not report similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using violence to resolve conflict.

*Participants*

Participants for the study consisted of mothers over 18 years of age who were the biological parent of a child between 3 and 5 years old. After excluding participants with unreliable responses as indicated by validity indices, a total of 33 women remained of the original 65 participants. When mothers had multiple children in the age bracket of interest, the mother was asked to choose the child she was most comfortable discussing.

Participants were drawn from local Family Intervention Crisis Services (FICS), Children and Youth Services (CYS), and from a previously established control database. Using participants referred from the FICS and CYS databases allowed certainty that the population of

interest was being studied – families with destructive environments or with possible child maltreatment. Mother-child pairs from the CYS and FICS databases were matched with mother-child pairs from the control database on key demographic variables.

*The FaMILY Study*

The measures concerned in the current study were part of a larger investigation by Dr. Elizabeth Skowron at the Family Systems lab at Pennsylvania State University. The primary purpose of the FaMILY study was to investigate parent-child processes, specifically focusing on negative self-regulatory and behavioral outcomes. Though the children participated in the FaMILY study, they were not directly involved in the present study.

*Measures*

*Family conflict.* The Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) were designed by Straus (1979) to measure physical aggression between partners and directed at children. Since their development, the CTS have been the primary measurement for assessing physical aggression between couples (Archer, 1999). For the purposes of the current study, Form R, the Couple Form, was administered to the participants. The participants responded to 19 questions concerning the number of times in the previous year that violent events had occurred, with responses ranging from never to more than 20. If the participant reported that a specific behavior hadn't occurred in the past year, then they were asked to report if it had ever occurred. The participants were asked to respond about their own behavior toward their partner and their partner's behaviors toward them during situations of conflict (Straus, 1979). See Appendix A for the version of the CTS administered to participants in the current study.

Straus (1979) presented four subscales of the CTS: the reasoning, verbal aggression, minor violence, and severe violence scales. The reasoning scale measures the use of rational

discussion and argument to resolve conflict. The verbal aggression scale focuses primarily on verbal acts and threats to hurt the partner. Less severe physical force used against a partner, such as slapping or pushing, is measured by the minor violence scale, whereas the severe violence scale measures elevated physical force, such as the use of weapons and beating.

It may seem that the CTS would be not very effective in motivating participants to report violent behaviors due to the questions being about highly sensitive material and inquiring about deviant behaviors. However, when Straus (1979) compared the results obtained from his study, they were almost identical to the incidence rates for spousal violence reported nationally, reflecting concurrent validity. Reliability was reported ranging from .79 to .95 (Mollerstrom, Milner, & Patchner, 1992; Straus, 1979), initial evidence of construct validity was obtained, and the internal validity of the CTS was found to be as high as .87 for Form R (Straus, 1979).

To help participants feel more comfortable reporting their violent behaviors, the questions on the CTS begin with the least severe acts and gradually work up the severity spectrum. Participants tend to identify with the first questions as normal aspects of all relationships, reporting things such as, “How many times in the past year have you insulted or swore at your partner?” More serious and aggressive behaviors are slowly introduced, ending with, “How many times have you used a knife or fired a gun when you had an argument with your partner?”(Straus, 1979; see Appendix A). Also encouraging the participants to report behaviors is the unique opportunity to report abuse without facing legal consequences.

*Child abuse potential.* The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAPI) was developed by Milner (1986) as an instrument to identify individuals at risk to physically abuse children. The measurement compares parents’ answers to core constructs linked to abusive parenting, including poor ego-strength, misperceptions of appropriate childhood behavior, and poor

parenting skills. The participant is presented with 160 questions in a forced choice, agree-disagree format. Three validity scales are included to attempt to measure lying, inconsistent, or random patterns of responding: the Faking-Good, Faking-Bad, Random Response distortion indices. See Appendix B for the version of the CAPI administered to the participants.

Physical and psychological abuse both have to be considered when assessing child abuse. Physical abuse of a child is defined by Milner (1989, p. 220) as the "creation, development, and/or active promotion of behaviors, events, and/or situations under the parents' control that result in the intentional physical injury of a child", while Smith Slep and O'Leary (2007) also included acts that even have the potential to result in injuries or negative health impacts. When assessing a caregiver's qualification for child abuse, punishments (spanking, slapping their hand, etc) and more serious physical violence (kicking hard, burning) are taken into consideration. Like physical violence, psychological aggression against children varies, including parental "verbal and symbolic acts intended to cause psychological pain or fear in the child" (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, as cited in Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007, p. 739).

The CAPI is a very useful tool for assessing child abuse potential because it does not ask questions directly about abuse incidents in the home. It instead screens for responses that have been correlated with those of violent abusers. Participants do not suspect that they are being assessed for child abuse when asked questions such as, "I never listen to gossip" or "I often think about what I have to do" (Milner, 1986; see Appendix B), and are therefore less likely to distort their responses.

With a tool such as the CAPI that can assess risk for child abuse, health care providers will have to rely less on costly, time consuming interviews and in-home observations (Haskett, et al., 1995). A study by Chaffin and Valle (2003) focused on examining whether pre- and post-

intervention scores on the CAPI actually reflected changes in reports of maltreatment. In both this and other studies, CAPI scores reflected changes in abuse potential after interventions, such as abuse prevention services. In this instance, the CAPI could be used by health care providers to detect when positive changes in the family system have been made, and therefore whether termination of services is appropriate (Chaffin & Valle, 2003; Haskett, et al., 1995).

Haskett et al. (1995, p.1483) found CAPI results "relevant to decisions with respect to (a) recommendations for family reunification following separation due to maltreatment, (b) referrals for child abuse prevention programs and establishing priority for these services, (c) disputed child custody issues and (d) protection of possible victims of abuse."

It's clear that the accuracy with which determinations of risk are made is based on the validity of the tools available. The CAPI is a highly validated tool, with correct classification rates found ranging from 85.4% to an astonishing 100% in some populations (Milner, Gold, Ayoub, & Jacewitz, 1984; Milner, Gold, & Wimberley, 1986). Many studies have found the CAPI high in validity: predictive validity of .34 (Milner, et al., 1984); internal validity ranging from .89 to .98 (Haapasalo & Aaltonen, 1999; Milner, et. al, 1986); construct validity of .55 (Haskett, et. al, 1995). In cases where individuals were incorrectly classified by the CAPI, more false negatives than false positives were reported (McNary & Black, 2003). These results suggest that the CAPI is very effective at assessing risk of child abuse.

*Procedure*

Each participant scheduled three appointments, two home visits and one visit to the Family Systems laboratory. For the measurements of interest of the current study, interviews were conducted at the participant's home in most cases. Families were told that the study was interested in learning how families cope with conflict and what methods they use to handle

problems. The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Milner, 1986) was administered during the first home visit and the Conflict Tactics Scales, Form R (Straus, 1979) was administered during the second, after which the mothers were paid $25 and $40 for their participation, respectively. For the current study, an interviewer verbally administered the questions on both measurements to the mother, allowing her to refer to a response scale while answering. The interviewer then recorded the mother's responses in an SPSS spreadsheet. Administration of the CTS and the CAPI took approximately 20 minutes each to complete.

Data for the study was collected anonymously, with numbers identifying the families and linking the mothers and children. Anonymity was required for the current study to ensure collection of reliable self-reports of family violence. If abuse was observed in the families during the visits or information about abuse was verbally volunteered to the research staff, the information was not considered anonymous but confidential, and the families were reported to local CYS agencies.

All procedures were reviewed and approved by Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board. Anonymity and confidentiality procedures were explained to the mothers both verbally and in the written consent form before data collection began.

## RESULTS

### *Analysis of Family Violence Levels and Child Abuse Potential*

Correlations were calculated for all hypotheses using Pearson's correlation coefficient. As shown in Table 1, the first hypothesis predicted a significant positive relationship between overall violence levels and mothers' child abuse potentials. It was discovered that family violence levels and child abuse potential were significantly positively related, $r = .527$, $p < .01$.

Table 1

Family Violence Levels and Child Abuse Potential

| | CTS | CAPI | Correlation (*r*) | Significance (p) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Overall Violence | Child abuse potential | .527** | .002 |
| 2. | Overall Violence | Problems with family | .217 | .225 |
| 3. | Overall Violence | Problems with child and self | .312 | .077 |
| 4. | Verbal aggression | Child abuse potential | .626** | .000 |
| 5. | Verbal aggression | Problems with family | .225 | .209 |
| 6. | Verbal aggression | Problems with child and self | .438* | .011 |
| 7. | Verbal aggression | Problems from others | .641** | .000 |
| 8. | Minor violence | Child abuse potential | .474** | .005 |
| 9. | Severe violence | Child abuse potential | .564** | .001 |

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The fourth hypothesis anticipated a positive association between verbal aggression and mothers' child abuse potential. Results indicated that verbal aggression and child abuse potential were significantly positively related, $r = .626$, $p < .01$.

Use of verbal aggression was predicted to be positively related to mothers' problems with their child and self (sixth hypothesis) and to problems from others (seventh hypothesis). Participants reporting frequent use of verbal aggression were found to be significantly likely have problems with their child and self, $r = .438$, $p < .05$, as well as experience problems from others $r = .641$, $p < .01$.

Hypotheses eight and nine suspected that minor violence and severe violence, respectively, were positively related to child abuse potential. Results suggested that participants

engaging in minor violence were significantly likely to abuse their child, $r = .474$, $p < .01$, as were participants engaging in severe violence, $r = .564$, $p < .01$. See Table 1 also for nonsignificant results.

*Analysis of Aggression between Partners*

The current study also examined how closely related participants' reports of their own violent acts were to their reports of their partners' corresponding acts. The tenth hypothesis proposed a positive significant relationship between participants' reports of their reasoning conflict-resolving behaviors and their reports of their partners' same behaviors. As shown in Table 2, results indicated that women reported significantly similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of using reasoning to resolve conflict, $r = .638$, $p < .01$.

Table 2

Aggression between Partners

| Variables | Correlation (*r*) | Significance (p) |
|---|---|---|
| 10. Reasoning between partners | .638** | .000 |
| 11. Verbal aggression between partners | .763** | .000 |
| 12. Minor violence between partners | .277 | .118 |
| 13. Severe violence between partners | .202 | .259 |
| 14. Overall violence between partners | .272 | .126 |

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The eleventh hypothesis predicted that participants' reports of their own verbal aggression and their reports of their partners' verbal aggression would be significantly positively related. Results indicated that women reported significantly similar frequencies for their and their partners' instances of verbal aggression, $r = .763$, $p < .01$.

No significant relationships were found between mothers' reports of their own minor (hypothesis twelve), severe (hypothesis thirteen), and overall violent behaviors (hypothesis fourteen) and their reports of corresponding behaviors of their intimate partners as suggested by the respective hypotheses. Nonsignificant correlations are reported in Table 2.

## DISCUSSION

Results from hypothesis one speak to the main focus of the current study, indicating that greater overall violence in families is associated with child abuse potential, reinforcing previous research suggesting that abuse transfers across relationships. Examining the separate categories included in the calculation of the overall violence total suggest similar results. Significant positive results for hypothesis four, eight, and nine suggest that the presence of verbal aggression, minor, and severe violence in families are also related to child abuse potential.

While the Child Abuse Potential Inventory only measures the possibility of child abuse, its perfect to near perfect correct classification rates indicate that its findings can be used to reliably address child abuse. Thus, parents who experience violence in their intimate partner relationships are significantly more likely to transfer these abusive tendencies onto their children than parents experiencing low levels of violence.

These findings have implications in situations of intimate partner violence reports. With empirical research available, decisions to remove children from violent homes where they may be at risk for or already experiencing child abuse can now be made with more certainty. Also, child abuse reports can be followed up by agencies like CYS or FICS with recommendations for counseling for the parents because of the likely chance that they are experiencing abuse in their relationship also.

Hypothesis two proposed that participants who indicated high violence levels in their family would score high on the CAPI subscale measuring problems with family. The results of the study did not support either this hypothesis or the third hypothesis that violent family environments were associated with participant personal problems and problems with their child. These results are unusual, because violent family environments characteristically include individuals having problems with their family and having problems interacting with their family. These nonsignificant results reflect negatively on the construct validity of the problems with family and problems with child and self CAPI subscales.

Results from hypothesis five indicated no significant relationship between the presence of verbal aggression in the family environment and problems with family. This suggests that verbal aggression is not related significantly to family problems. However, the study did find verbal aggression significantly related to problems with child and self (hypothesis six) and problems from others (hypothesis seven). These results are confusing, suggesting that mothers use verbal aggression to express their problems with their child and themselves as well as their problems with others, but not when having problems with their family. A possible cause of this confusing pattern is an intervening variable that the current study did not measure.

Concerning the hypotheses assessing agreement on aggression between partners, results from hypothesis ten indicated that participants' reports of their reasoning skills used for conflict-resolving behaviors were significantly correlated with their reports of their partners' same acts. Also significantly correlated were participants' reports of their own use of verbal aggression and their reports of their partners' use of verbal aggression (hypothesis eleven). It is likely that responses were highly correlated for these two variables because of the normativity of the

behaviors being reported on. Participants would find practically no reason to distort their responses when being asked about non-deviant conflict resolution activities.

As predicted in hypotheses twelve, thirteen and fourteen, no significant relationships were found between participants' reports of their own minor, severe, and overall violent behaviors (respectively) and their reports of corresponding behaviors with their intimate partner. This reflects the research that reports on verbal aggression tend to agree, whereas reports of physical aggression between partners vary (Winstok, 2008). These effects could be due to the deviant nature of the questions being asked, resulting in the participants underreporting their violent acts in order to be found socially desirable.

*Limitations and Future Research*

One of the major limitations of this study lies in the inherent nature of self-report measurements to be subject to bias. Relying on a single perspective always carries the risk of data being misrepresented. Underreporting is common for the CTS on all levels because the nature of the acts being inquired about are not approved of by society, especially concerning physical aggression, specifically considering physical aggression with children.

Another instance of misrepresentation may have occurred because the participants used in the study were all women. A phenomenon of underreporting of women's violence has been found in other studies, influenced by society's perception of women as dainty, fragile, and not aggressive. Because women's aggression is socially undesirable behavior, women may have underrepresented their violent behaviors across all types of aggression.

Smith Slep and O'Leary (2007) commented that most of the research done on child abuse and its relation to parental aggression has focused on mothers only. This represents an imbalance in the literature on child abuse potential, which could be investigated in future studies

by examining fathers. The data on fathers' child abuse potential in relation to family violence levels then be compared to mothers' potential, revealing which caregivers is affected by violent family atmospheres more.

Intervening factors that could have affected the amount of conflict in the family could be taken into consideration in future studies. Specifically, the number of children and the ages of these children in each family may affect the conflict level. Relationship status may also have an affect on conflict levels in the family, as Rodriguez and Green (1997) found that single parents without support scored significantly higher on the CAPI than parents with partners.

Another variable affecting the results may have originated in the participant population. Participants recruited from CYS and FICS agencies had by definition been reported for family or child abuse at some time, reports which were later either ruled confirmed or suspected. The difference between these two labels and the prevalence of the violence levels that separates the two groups may have had an effect on the mother's openness about family violence. Mothers who had a confirmed case of child abuse in the last year may have faced and accepted the abuse, and therefore responded more honestly concerning family violence incidences. Mothers whose cases were ruled suspected abuse, however, may still be cautious from investigation and hold back the truth when reporting.

Even if both caregivers were asked to report on their perceptions of family violence, and then the two reports were compared, actual violence within the home would still not be directly measured. Because of the reliance on self-reports, the true family atmosphere will more than likely not be represented. The only method to truly examine family violence is observational research, which is not practical because of the ethical and logistical problems it poses.

In summary, violence in families is significantly related to the child abuse potential of caregivers. Understanding how and why abuse transfers across relationships is still relatively unknown, but is very important to continue to research this area, with the possibility of identifying risk factors and implementing interventions. Research continues to investigate this phenomenon to help society understand the associations between child abuse and family violence. In the mean time, society will have to watch for and identify patterns of violence as a method of preventing and identifying different forms of family abuse.

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# Appendix A: The Conflict Tactics Scales

THE CONFLICT TACTICS SCALES, COUPLE FORM R*

ASK IN SEQUENCE Q35a Q36a AND (IF NEVER ON BOTH Q35a AND Q36a) ASK Q37a. THEN ASK Q35b, Q36B AND (IF NEVER ON BOTH Q35b AND Q36b) ASK Q37B, ETC. Q35. No matter how well a couple get along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read some things that you and your (spouse/partner) might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times (Once, Twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, or more than 20 times) in the past 12 months you (READ ITEM)

Obsolete

| | Q35. Respondent In Past Year<br>1 = Once<br>2 = Twice<br>3 = 3-5 Times<br>4 = 6-10 Times<br>5 = 11-20 Times<br>6 = More than 20<br>0 = Never(don't read) | Q36. Spouse In Past Year<br>1 = Once<br>2 = Twice<br>3 = 3-5 Times<br>4 = 6-10 Times<br>5 = 11-20 Times<br>6 = More than 20<br>0 = Never(don't read) | Q37. For items marked "Never" on both Q35 and Q36 Has it **Ever happened?**<br>1 = Yes<br>0 = No |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. Discussed an issue calmly | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| B. Got information to back up your/his/her side of things..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| C. Brought in, or tried to bring in, someone to help settle things..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| D. Insulted or swore at him/her/you..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| E. Sulked or refused to talk about an issue..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| F. Stomped out of the room or house or yard..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| G. Cried..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| H. Did or said something to spite him/her/you..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| I. Threatened to hit or throw something at him/her/you.. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| J. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| K. Threw something at him /her/you ..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| L. Pushed, Grabbed, or shoved him/her/you ..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| M. Slapped him/her/you ..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| N. Kicked, bit, or hit him/her /you with a fist..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| O. Hit or tried to hit him/her /you with something..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| P. Beat him/her/you up..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| Q. Choked him/her/you ..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| R. Threatened him/her/you with a knife or gun..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |
| S. Used a knife or fired a gun..... | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 0 | 1 0 |

* See Straus 1989 for versions to measure other family role relationships, e.g. parent-child.

Appendix B: The Child Abuse Potential Inventory

# CAP INVENTORY FORM VI

Joel S. Milner, Ph.D.
Copyright, 1977, 1982, 1984; Revised Edition 1986
Printed in the United States of America

Name: _____ Date: _____ ID#: _____

Age: _____ Gender: Male ____ Female ____ Marital Status: Sin ____ Mar ____ Sep ____ Div ____ Wid ____

Race: Black ____ White ____ Latino ____ Am. Indian ____ Number of children in home _____

Asian Am. ____ Other (specify) _____ Highest grade completed _____

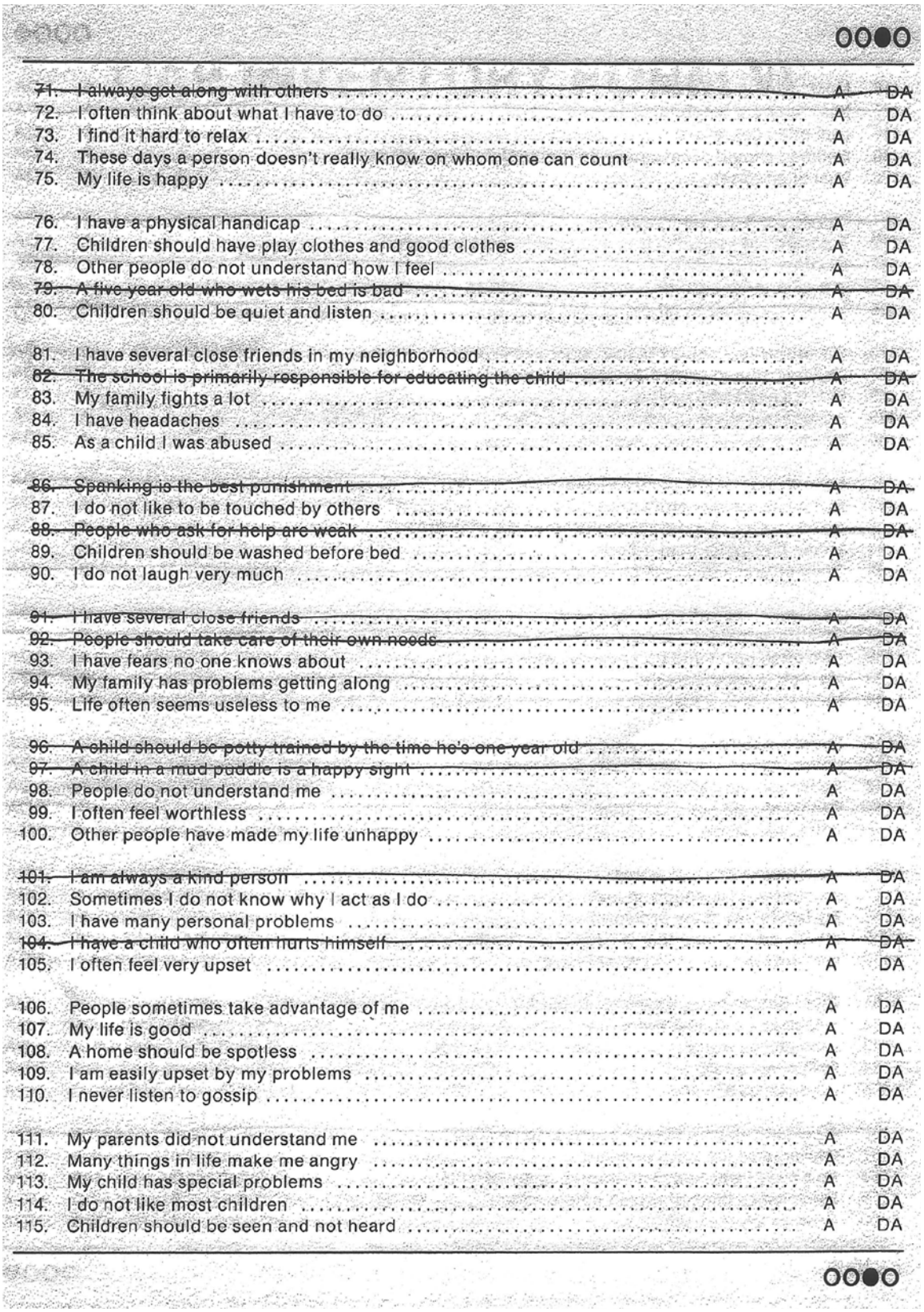
**INSTRUCTIONS:** The following questionnaire includes a series of statements which may be applied to yourself. Read each of the statements and determine if you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with the statement. If you agree with a statement, circle **A** for agree. If you disagree with a statement, circle **DA** for disagree. Be honest when giving your answers. Remember to read each statement; it is important not to skip any statement.

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I never feel sorry for others | A | DA |
| 2. | I enjoy having pets | A | DA |
| 3. | I have always been strong and healthy | A | DA |
| 4. | I like most people | A | DA |
| 5. | I am a confused person | A | DA |
| 6. | I do not trust most people | A | DA |
| 7. | People expect too much from me | A | DA |
| 8. | Children should never be bad | A | DA |
| 9. | I am often mixed up | A | DA |
| 10. | Spanking that only bruises a child is okay | A | DA |
| 11. | I always try to check on my child when it's crying | A | DA |
| 12. | I sometimes act without thinking | A | DA |
| 13. | You cannot depend on others | A | DA |
| 14. | I am a happy person | A | DA |
| 15. | I like to do things with my family | A | DA |
| 16. | Teenage girls need to be protected | A | DA |
| 17. | I am often angry inside | A | DA |
| 18. | Sometimes I feel all alone in the world | A | DA |
| 19. | Everything in a home should always be in its place | A | DA |
| 20. | I sometimes worry that I cannot meet the needs of a child | A | DA |
| 21. | Knives are dangerous for children | A | DA |
| 22. | I often feel rejected | A | DA |
| 23. | I am often lonely inside | A | DA |
| 24. | Little boys should never learn sissy games | A | DA |
| 25. | I often feel very frustrated | A | DA |

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Appendix B: The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (continued)



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 71. | I always get along with others | A | DA |
| 72. | I often think about what I have to do | A | DA |
| 73. | I find it hard to relax | A | DA |
| 74. | These days a person doesn't really know on whom one can count | A | DA |
| 75. | My life is happy | A | DA |
| 76. | I have a physical handicap | A | DA |
| 77. | Children should have play clothes and good clothes | A | DA |
| 78. | Other people do not understand how I feel | A | DA |
| 79. | A five year old who wets his bed is bad | A | DA |
| 80. | Children should be quiet and listen | A | DA |
| 81. | I have several close friends in my neighborhood | A | DA |
| 82. | The school is primarily responsible for educating the child | A | DA |
| 83. | My family fights a lot | A | DA |
| 84. | I have headaches | A | DA |
| 85. | As a child I was abused | A | DA |
| 86. | Spanking is the best punishment | A | DA |
| 87. | I do not like to be touched by others | A | DA |
| 88. | People who ask for help are weak | A | DA |
| 89. | Children should be washed before bed | A | DA |
| 90. | I do not laugh very much | A | DA |
| 91. | I have several close friends | A | DA |
| 92. | People should take care of their own needs | A | DA |
| 93. | I have fears no one knows about | A | DA |
| 94. | My family has problems getting along | A | DA |
| 95. | Life often seems useless to me | A | DA |
| 96. | A child should be potty trained by the time he's one year old | A | DA |
| 97. | A child in a mud puddle is a happy sight | A | DA |
| 98. | People do not understand me | A | DA |
| 99. | I often feel worthless | A | DA |
| 100. | Other people have made my life unhappy | A | DA |
| 101. | I am always a kind person | A | DA |
| 102. | Sometimes I do not know why I act as I do | A | DA |
| 103. | I have many personal problems | A | DA |
| 104. | I have a child who often hurts himself | A | DA |
| 105. | I often feel very upset | A | DA |
| 106. | People sometimes take advantage of me | A | DA |
| 107. | My life is good | A | DA |
| 108. | A home should be spotless | A | DA |
| 109. | I am easily upset by my problems | A | DA |
| 110. | I never listen to gossip | A | DA |
| 111. | My parents did not understand me | A | DA |
| 112. | Many things in life make me angry | A | DA |
| 113. | My child has special problems | A | DA |
| 114. | I do not like most children | A | DA |
| 115. | Children should be seen and not heard | A | DA |

Appendix B: The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (continued)

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 116. | Most children are alike | A | DA |
| ~~117.~~ | ~~It is important for children to read~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 118. | I am often depressed | A | DA |
| 119. | Children should occasionally be thoughtful of their parents | A | DA |
| 120. | I am often upset | A | DA |
| ~~121.~~ | ~~People don't get along with me~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 122. | A good child keeps his toys and clothes neat and orderly | A | DA |
| ~~123.~~ | ~~Children should always make their parents happy~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 124. | It is natural for a child to sometimes talk back | A | DA |
| ~~125.~~ | ~~I am never unfair to others~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 126. | Occasionally, I enjoy not having to take care of my child | A | DA |
| 127. | Children should always be neat | A | DA |
| 128. | I have a child who is slow | A | DA |
| 129. | A parent must use punishment if he wants to control a child's behavior | A | DA |
| 130. | Children should never cause trouble | A | DA |
| ~~131.~~ | ~~I usually punish my child when it is crying~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 132. | A child needs very strict rules | A | DA |
| 133. | Children should never go against their parents' orders | A | DA |
| 134. | I often feel better than others | A | DA |
| ~~135.~~ | ~~Children sometimes get on my nerves~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| ~~136.~~ | ~~As a child I was often afraid~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| ~~137.~~ | ~~Children should always be quiet and polite~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 138. | I am often upset and do not know why | A | DA |
| ~~139.~~ | ~~My daily work upsets me~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| ~~140.~~ | ~~I sometimes fear that my children will not love me~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 141. | I have a good sex life | A | DA |
| ~~142.~~ | ~~I have read articles and books on child rearing~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 143. | I often feel very alone | A | DA |
| ~~144.~~ | ~~People should not show anger~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 145. | I often feel alone | A | DA |
| 146. | I sometimes say bad words | A | DA |
| 147. | Right now, I am deeply in love | A | DA |
| 148. | My family has many problems | A | DA |
| 149. | I never do anything that is bad for my health | A | DA |
| 150. | I am always happy with what I have | A | DA |
| 151. | Other people have made my life hard | A | DA |
| 152. | I laugh some almost every day | A | DA |
| 153. | I sometimes worry that my needs will not be met | A | DA |
| 154. | I often feel afraid | A | DA |
| 155. | I sometimes act silly | A | DA |
| ~~156.~~ | ~~A person should keep his business to himself~~ | ~~A~~ | ~~DA~~ |
| 157. | I never raise my voice in anger | A | DA |
| 158. | As a child I was knocked around by my parents | A | DA |
| 159. | I sometimes think of myself before others | A | DA |
| 160. | I always tell the truth | A | DA |

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