



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FAMILY INTERDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT. *Domestic violence is of major concern to health professionals today. In order to intervene effectively, more scholarly inquiry needs to address the theoretical parameters of domestic violence. This article acknowledges the importance of the socio-political analysis while also suggesting that the concept of family interdependence can be helpful in not only understanding family violence, but in giving direction for intervention at the family level.*
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A PREVAILING THEORY ABOUT domestic violence is that this phenomenon is socio-political. It is argued that men abuse women because they are physically stronger, because society tolerates it, and because there is societal support for the machismo theme that men have the right to control women (Campbell & Humphreys, 1993).

Alexander, Moore, and Alexander (1991) investigated the intergenerational transmission of violence among dating partners. Men who were abused by their fathers were significantly more likely to abuse their partners. To the extent that attitudes of dating partners toward women's roles and rights in contemporary society were discrepant, the result was an increased likelihood of violence. These authors concluded that both social learning theory and feminist theory are important in explaining domestic violence. Edelson, Eisikovits, and Guttman (1985) report a wide range of factors related to woman battering, which include personality and sociocultural factors and factors from families of origin to present circumstances.

Certainly the community context is important in understanding violence rates. Campbell (1996) reported on a comparison of two contiguous developing countries in South America in which there were high rates of battering in one, and low rates in the other. The explanatory difference appeared to be that in the safe community, women would surround the house of the arguing family and call the woman's name demanding that she come out, thus preventing the escalation of violence and ensuring her safety.

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

In addition to these explanations for prevalence of domestic violence, this paper suggests that developmental theory, specifically the concept of family interdependence, also might be

important in understanding and dealing with domestic violence. In essence, violence may be a manifestation of incomplete developmental tasks.

Family interdependence is defined by Fu, Hinkle, and Hanna (1986), as the "reciprocal relationships among kin that enable total satisfaction of the family members' emotional needs" (p. 157). When children are born they are completely dependent on adults. They progress through developmental stages and become independent in late adolescence/early adulthood. As they become fully functioning adults, only then can they develop interdependent relationships with others. While there is an expected lifetime developmental progression from dependency to interdependency, some authors contend that dependent behavior may exist at all developmental stages, but is manifested and described differently at each stage of development. Thus, dependency refers to a lasting personality trait that manifests itself in emotional striving for the support and aid of others. Therefore, dependency was assumed to be a valued trait in adulthood that aids in the maintenance of close family ties (Fu et al., 1986).

Fu et al. (1986) developed a conceptual model to examine how personal dependency and family interdependence are related and transmitted to successive generations. One hundred fifty family units (grandmother, mother, and child) were interviewed on various social and psychodevelopmental variables. The grandmother's generation was the beginning point of the path analysis. The mother's generation was the second stage of the path model, which provided a link between the other two portions of the analysis. The child's generation was the last generation in the path and acted as the culminating point in the recursive model. Results indicated a relationship between individual dependency and family interdependence; dependency and family interdependence were transmitted to successive generations through social reinforcement and parental child-rearing attitudes. Dependency appears to be a mechanism that ensures development of family interdependence, which in turn reinforces dependent behavior (Fu et al., 1986). Therefore, dependency is perceived to be a necessary part of expanded family preservation.

So how do we understand a concept of interdependence that may be valued in some contexts (i.e., family feeling responsible and caring for each other), and problematic in others, such as men learning to abuse from their fathers and becoming more abusive when their dependency needs are threatened? It could be argued, however, that abusive families are developmentally challenged; that is, they may be mired in an immature dependent pattern of behaviors. The dependent behaviors are negative ones. Abusers have not developed interdependence in dyadic or family relationships.

In a study examining the intergenerational transmission of aggression across three generations in 181 community families, Doumas, Margolin, and John (1994) reported that for males, exposure to aggression was predictive of aggressive behavior across all three generations. The concept of family interdependence (Fu et al., 1986) needs to be reexamined so that abusive behaviors are explained also. Perhaps family interdependence is the reciprocal relationships among kin that enable satisfaction of family members' emotional needs or enable dissatisfaction because of violence. Despite their violent family histories, Lackey and Williams (1995) found that men who develop strong attachments to, and perceive negative sanction or threats from, significant others are more likely to be nonviolent with their female partners. Perhaps these strong attachments were possible because of the dependency trait.

BATTERING RELATIONSHIPS

The literature suggests a wide range of characteristics related to men who batter, but there is no consistent "profile" of abusers. In our work with court-referred men who batter, their

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