

CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSIVE MEN

Question: What sort of man assaults his partner?

Method: Detailed questionnaires were completed by 997 men (780 from a forensic outpatient clinic and 217 from an employment agency). Based on self-report, the men were considered to be nonabusive (n = 184), moderately abusive (n = 517) or severely abusive (n = 296). Moderately abusive men had shoved, slapped, kicked, bit or hit their partner. The severely abusive men had beaten up, threatened or used a weapon on their partner, or inflicted sufficient damage that their partner required hospital treatment.

Answer: Although potential batterers could not be identified with certainty, 46 of the 93 variables examined in this study were significantly related to abusive behaviour. The same characteristics correlated with both moderate and severe abuse, but the problems of severely abusive men were worse. The factors associated with abuse in the forensic sample were also associated with abuse in the community sample.

The portrait of the severely abusive man suggested by this research was one

with a lifestyle characterized by violence, anger and subjective distress. He was likely to have been raised in a violent home, in which his parents hit him as well as each other. His own aggressive, disobedient behaviour during his youth contributed to the development of an Antisocial Personality Disorder as an adult. He had a long history of impulsive behaviour including motor vehicle infractions, substance abuse, and impulsive violence. At the time of the assessment, he felt deeply dissatisfied with himself and his intimate relationships. His feelings of subjective distress were dominated by anger and hostility. He was worried about other men being interested in his partner, and, importantly, felt justified in using force to keep her under his control.

Policy Implications:

1. Not all men are equally likely to be abusive. Consequently, resources should target the higher risk cases to prevent abuse.
2. Aggressive youth from abusive homes are an important target for early intervention.

3. Settings that treat men with lifestyle instability problems (e.g., substance abuse programs, prisons) can expect many of their clients to be physically abusive towards their female partners. Consequently, such settings could contribute to the safety of women by routinely assessing the risk for spouse assault and responding accordingly (e.g., screening questions at intake, partner contact, safety plans).

change public attitudes may contribute to a reduction in abusive behaviour in the community.

Source:

Hanson, R., K., Cadsky, O., Harris, A., & Lalonde, C. (1997). Correlates of battering among 997 men: Family history, adjustment and attitudinal differences. Violence and Victims, 12(3), 191-208.

4. Since abusive men held attitudes tolerant of spouse assault, efforts to

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