Encyclopedia of

Domestic

Violence

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Editor

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relationships endure, why battered women suffer a range of medical, behavioral, and psychosocial problems seen among no other population of assault victims, and why arrest, batterer intervention programs, and a range of other interventions that are incident specific fail to stem either the level or the extent of woman abuse to any degree.

Coercive control deprives victims of the right to autonomously express their unique endowments in the world, thereby disabling a vast store of life-energy and creativity that is critical to the exercise of citizenship, women's personal development, and the well-being of families, communities, and society. For this reason, coercive control is more appropriately thought of as a "liberty crime" than as a crime of assault. Implicit in this understanding—and in the broadening of domestic violence laws required to encompass coercive control—is the right of its victims to a liberatory response.

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See also **Battered Woman Syndrome; Batterer Typology; Feminist Theory; Social Learning Theory and Family Violence; Stockholm Syndrome in Battered Women**

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COHABITING VIOLENCE

Cohabitation is when two partners integrate their residence, property, and daily lives without legally marrying. During the twentieth century, the courtship culture of European immigrants in the United States steadily diminished and cohabitation has become increasingly more acceptable in social circles. Regardless of one's ethical perspectives, the recent growth in cohabitation has serious implications for the institution of marriage as well as child rearing and domestic violence. This article will discuss the current trends in cohabitation, compare the differences between cohabitation and

marriage, remark on nonmarriageable men and domestic violence, and lastly discuss current policies pertaining to cohabitation.

Current Demographic Trends

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in the year 2000 there were 105.5 million households in the United States. Of those households, about 5 percent, or 5.5 million couples, lived together but were unmarried. This figure is up from the previous 3.2 million estimated unmarried couples in the prior 1990 census. Among the 5.5 million cohabiting couples, about one in nine were same-sex, predominantly male couples.

While the percentage of cohabiting couples at any point in time is not remarkably high, particularly when compared with other social phenomena like nonmarital births, Bumpass and Lu (2000) report that currently over half of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation. This reflects the tendency for Americans to live together and "test the waters" before tying the knot. This conclusion is reinforced by Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin (1991), who have shown that cohabiters are more likely to be young, childless couples. In their historical overview of cohabitation, they show that cohabiting couples were dominated by individuals with less than a high school education in the 1930s and 1940s but that the 1970s and beyond saw a growth in cohabitation among all educational groups. From this perspective, cohabitation is commonplace and far more socially accepted than it was just fifty years ago.

The majority of unmarried, cohabiting couples, nearly 80 percent, live in metropolitan areas. Among same-sex couples, this percentage is even higher (85.3 percent). These figures are slightly lower for married couples, with 78.5 percent living in metropolitan areas. Within metropolitan areas, however, unmarried couples are more likely than married couples to reside in the central city (35.7 versus 24.3 percent for married and unmarried couples, respectively). Among same-sex couples, 41.6 percent live in central cities.

A higher percentage of all households consist of unmarried couples in the western United States than in any other region of the country. In descending order, these percentages are 10.2 in the West, 9.6 in the Northeast, 8.9 in the Midwest, and 8.4 in the South. The same pattern exists when looking strictly at same-sex cohabiting couples.

In absolute terms, California has more cohabiting households than any other state, followed by New York, Florida, Texas, and Pennsylvania. As a percentage of all households, however, the districts/states with the highest percentages of cohabiting couples are the District of Columbia (20.8 percent), Nevada (12.6 percent), Alaska (12.5 percent), and Vermont (12.5 percent). There is considerable cross-state variation in these figures. In contrast, the states with the lowest percentages of cohabiting couples include Utah (5.2 percent), Alabama (6.1 percent), Arkansas (6.7 percent), Kansas (6.9 percent), and Oklahoma (6.9 percent). This state variability in household composition is even more pronounced when looking at same-sex couples, ranging from a low of 0.5 percent of all households in Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota to a high of 5.1 percent in the District of Columbia.

Using data from 1979 through 1987, Roberts (1987) shows that most cohabiters report higher rates of domestic violence than married couples. This is disturbing given the sheer volume of victimizations reported in the National Crime Victimization Survey (2003). During 2001 alone, it is estimated that there were 691,710 nonfatal violent victimizations committed by current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. The majority of victims were females. In 2000, a total of 1,247 women and 440 men were killed by an intimate partner. In decreasing order, other crimes committed by intimate partners include assault, aggravated assault, robbery, and rape/sexual assault.

Cohabitation Versus Marriage

For young adults, cohabitation seems attractive because it allows couples to receive many of the benefits of marriage, such as the sharing of expenses and household responsibilities. This is especially attractive for young couples in large metropolitan areas where the costs of living are constantly rising. Additional benefits of cohabitation include emotional support, a safe-sex partner, and the ability to spend time with a partner to confirm lifelong commitment. Cohabiting couples can learn about their partners without any legal or religious commitments.

There are some distinctive differences between younger and older cohabiting couples. King and Scott (2006) find that older cohabiters are less likely to make plans to eventually marry. Older cohabiters also report significantly higher levels of stability and quality in their relationships compared with younger cohabiters. These authors suggest that older unmarried couples view cohabitation as a substitute for marriage, while younger cohabiters view cohabitation as a preface to marriage.

Like marriage, however, cohabitation is not without risks and costs. Risks are assumed when debts and assets are combined (e.g., leases signed, property and household goods purchased). Psychological uncertainties are more pronounced: Studies show that cohabiting couples are more likely to feel that their relationship is not as steady as that of married couples. Furthermore, when children are involved, the potential risks and costs of cohabitation increase. Raley, Frisco, and Wildsmith (2005) show that children who lived with cohabiters did significantly worse in educational achievement and attainment than children raised with divorced or remarried mothers. Thompson, Hanson, and McLanahan (1994) found that children who lived with an unmarried mother and her partner were more likely to suffer behavioral problems and achieve lower academic success than children reared by married parents.

When queried about how life would change if they were to marry, cohabiters report that there would be few changes (Bumpass et al. 1991). There were two exceptions: When males were asked about their independence, one-third of the respondents felt that they would no longer be free to do what they wanted; additionally, a large proportion of all respondents felt that their economic and emotional security would be better if they were married.

To understand how cohabiters' behavior might differ from that of married or divorced couples, Deleire and Kalil (2005) used Consumer Expenditure data to examine the expenditure patterns of cohabiting partners. The authors suggest that cohabiting parents allocate a greater amount of their budget to adult goods such as alcohol and tobacco and a smaller amount to education. This evidence might suggest a relationship between cohabiting and substance abuse. Testa, Livingston, and Leonard (2003) investigated this phenomenon and found that in fact women who cohabited were more likely to be exposed to drug use and domestic violence.

Newcomb and Bentler (1980) examined sixty-eight marriages and looked specifically at whether or not the couples had lived together prior to marrying. They found no differences in marital satisfaction or divorce rates between the two groups. However, among those couples who eventually divorced, those who had lived together prior to marriage reported experiencing less marital distress.

In their study of the urban underclass in Chicago, Wilson, Aponte, and Neckerman (1985) argued that the increase of urban poverty was due to low marriage rates because of a shortage of "good"

eligible men. Using a Marriageable Pool Index (MPI), which is a ratio of employed black males per 100 black females, the authors showed that in fact there was a shortage of good, hardworking, eligible, employed, black men. Black urban men in the areas studied by these authors were disproportionately involved in drugs and violent crime, and experienced high incarceration rates. A complementary explanation of the low marriage rates in these areas is found in the work of Edin and Kefalas (2005), who examined why poor mothers in Philadelphia chose single motherhood or cohabitation over marriage. They found that many poor women revered marriage as a very special institution but feared that they would not live up to the expectations associated with it.

Finally, using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine the economic effects of cohabiting couples after dissolution, Avellar and Smock (2005) found that women's economic standing sharply declined after separation. Such an economic decline is also common among married couples who divorce and is responsible for pushing a large proportion of women and children into poverty.

Literature on Violence in Cohabiting Relationships

Numerous articles have been written on cohabiting and violence. Levinger (1965) proposed a model of marital cohesiveness and dissolution which predicted higher levels of violence in ongoing marriages than in cohabiting relationships. Yllo and Straus (1981) challenged Levinger and showed that with the exceptions of high-income and older (over age thirty) unmarried couples, cohabiters were more likely to commit acts of violence in comparison with their married counterparts. Higher rates of violence among cohabiting couples have been found by other researchers. For example, using Canadian homicide data, Wilson (1993, 1995) found that women in cohabiting relationships were at a greater risk of being killed by their partners than were women who were married. In fact, Shackelford (2001) found that women in cohabiting relationships were nine times more likely to be killed by their partners than were women who were in marital relationships.

Stets (1991) studied the role of isolation and aggression in cohabiting relationships and found that a lack of social control and some demographic characteristics help explain aggression among cohabiters. Literature on social control and intimate violence is not new (Brownmiller 1975; Carmody and Williams 1987; Pagelow 1981; Riger and Gordon 1981; Stanko

1985; Williams and Hawkins 1989). Social control can be derived through either formal or informal processes. Traditional formal control has relied on the use of legal sanctions as a deterrence to crime. Individuals internally evaluate the expected value (benefits and costs) associated with committing acts of domestic violence. Some researchers argue that formal controls, particularly the expected costs associated with legal sanctions, have little effect on the reduction of intimate violence (Paternoster 1987). These researchers argue that informal social controls play a more pivotal role in the reduction of violence. Such informal social control agents, or "eyes on the street," include family, peers, and subordinates.

Studies show that intimate partners use violence to influence or control their cohabiting partners. The social psychology literature (Goode 1971; Pruitt and Rubin 1986; Stets and Burke 1996; Tedeschi 1970; Tedeschi and Felson 1994) shows that coercion and conflict through verbal communication usually precede the actual act of violence.

Demographic characteristics that seem to be important correlates of violence in cohabiting relationships include not only age and income, but also education and race. For example, Sorenson (1996) found that people with less than a high school education were 40 percent more likely to report intimate partner violence than those with a high school education. Surprisingly, college graduates were only 30 percent less likely to report partner violence than those with a high school diploma. Cunradi, Caetano, and Schafer (2002) estimated that annual household income has the biggest influence on the probability of inflicting violence toward a cohabiting partner. Additionally, Caetano and Schafer (2002) found income to have the greatest influence on the probability of committing acts of violence among cohabiting relationships.

Race is a strong correlate of intimate partner violence in numerous studies (Gelles 1982; Gil 1970; Hampton, Gelles, and Harrop 1991; Newberger, Reed, Daniel, Hyde, and Kotelchuck 1977; Turbett and O'Toole 1980). Moreover, these studies not only suggest that race and socioeconomic class are strong predictors for domestic violence between married and cohabiting couples, but the reporting of such acts vary across racial groups. For example, minorities from patriarchal, male-dominated societies (Latinos) tend to underreport domestic violence incidences compared with Anglo-Americans.

Policy Response

Some states have laws prohibiting unmarried couples from cohabiting. In May 2005, newspapers around the United States released the news that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was to challenge a 200-year-old North Carolina law which prohibited unmarried couples from living together, although rarely enforced. North Carolina is one of seven states that still prohibit the practice. The other six states are Virginia, West Virginia, Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, and North Dakota.

Most states have instituted common law clauses or cohabitation contracts which try to establish the rights and obligations that cohabiting couples would gain if married. Only two states have visibly failed to recognize these cohabitation contracts: Illinois (*Hewitt v. Hewitt,* 394 N.E.2d 1204 [1979]) and Georgia (*Rehak v. Mathis,* 238 S.E.2d 81 [1977]).

In applying the laws related to domestic violence, the U.S. court system does not differentiate between cohabiters and married couples. The only real distinction comes when property, children, and debt are involved. In most state circuit courts, there are few protections for unmarried couples.

Since the 1990s there has been widespread advocacy for protecting all women in domestic relationships. The U.S. Department of Justice in 1995 established the Office of Violence against Women to help implement the 1994 Violence against Women Act, which was later updated in 2000. This office leads a nationwide effort to stop domestic violence in local communities and tribal territories through grant monies. The purpose of these grants is to encourage states to reorganize their criminal justice systems so that local communities can create partnerships and increase the reporting of domestic violence cases. Additionally, Congress has passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 to combat illegal trafficking of women and children. This legislation secures that women and children will not be coerced into underground sex markets.

Conclusion

Cohabitation is steadily increasing in the United States, and will continue to increase as society redefines the concept of marriage. Unfortunately, women in cohabiting relationships are at a higher risk of violent victimization by their partners. This is particularly true for younger couples, low-income couples, and couples with low educational attainment. For unmarried cohabiting couples with children, the impacts of violence spill over into the next generation and can result in maladaptive child behaviors, as well as fuel the intergenerational transmission of violence. While public

awareness and public policy have made great strides with legislative and community-level responses, the high rates of abuse in cohabiting and marital relationships continue to pose serious challenges for policymakers.

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See also **Battered Woman Syndrome; Date Rape; Dating Violence; Intimate Partner Violence, Forms of; Mutual Battering; Stalking**

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COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Importance of a Community Response

When one considers domestic violence, one too often assumes that violence within a family is a private problem, an issue to be resolved by the persons involved. Certainly, domestic violence has costs for the victim. Included in such costs are the serious physical injuries and the psychological damage that a victim suffers, as well as a victim's feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and fear. However, the negative impact of domestic violence extends far beyond the family and affects the entire community in which it occurs. For example, a community absorbs financial costs when police must intervene in domestic disputes or serve warrants to abusers. Also, communities absorb costs for the judicial prosecution of the abuser. Because domestic violence remains the number one reason women seek emergency medical care, a community also assumes some of the costs for a victim's medical treatment. Further, when children are socialized in a violent home environment, the social costs for a community increase exponentially.

Children who are exposed to domestic violence can experience both immediate and lifelong effects. First is the fact that children who grow up in violent homes are more likely to become abusive adults. Additionally, these same children are at greater risk for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. These children are often lonely and isolated from other children; they often struggle with behavioral problems, mental health problems, and school problems. Coupling the judicial and medical costs with the costs that children pay,

there is no doubt that domestic violence is a public issue and requires a response from the larger community.

Many communities across America have taken steps to respond to domestic violence. Within these communities law enforcement officers have been specially trained to respond to domestic violence situations and enforce laws that protect victims and children. In the same fashion, prosecutors and judges have committed themselves to taking a strong stand against perpetrators of domestic violence and have increased efforts to prosecute and punish abusers. Even medical personnel and community leaders have been trained to take action in situations where it is suspected that the victim's injuries are a result of domestic violence. Perhaps one of the most important steps in a community's response is the formation of an emergency shelter.

History of the Shelter Movement

Historians of the shelter movement recognize that work with battered women probably began in Bologna, Italy, ca. 1563. During that time women knew which convent in town would hide them from their batterers or which convent would send them to safe space in another town. However, more recent history recognizes the work of Erin Pizzey, who in 1971 organized a group of women to create a community center for homeless women and children in London, England. While not initially intended, this same center later offered refuge to battered women. Inspired by both Pizzey's work