



Documenting the Ongoing Effort to Understand and Prevent Violence Toward Intimate Partners

A Review of

Preventing Partner Violence: Research and Evidence-Based Intervention Strategies

by Daniel J. Whitaker and John R. Lutzker (Eds.)

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) persists, despite the widespread efforts to describe and understand it. This message pervades *Preventing Partner Violence: Research and Evidence-Based Intervention Strategies*, an informative survey of research targets and prevention efforts. In their edited volume, Whitaker and Lutzker have assembled a collection of prominent experts and innovators in the field to create a solid review relevant for researchers, scholars, policy makers, and clinicians.

The editors state their intention as promoting the understanding of factors involved in domestic violence to ultimately put an end to this problem. They clearly meet their aim of enhancing the reader's comprehension of IPV in this provocative and original work. They divide the book into three parts: Foundations, Prevention and Intervention, and Conclusion.

Their Foundations section addresses epidemiology, definitions, theory, risk factors, co-occurring behaviors, and impact. Despite the multiple authors, a coherent framework emerges. The section places the study of domestic violence in its historical context, citing its origins in the women's movement as a problem of patriarchy and documenting its transformation from this singular viewpoint to a view of IPV as a multiply-determined broad public health and criminal justice problem.

The section on Prevention and Intervention dutifully summarizes prevention programs researched to date (namely, dating violence prevention programs) as well as secondary and tertiary prevention programs (e.g., batterer intervention programs and criminal justice responses). But this section surpasses expectations with its inclusion of less-traditional writings on violence from a human rights perspective (Nancy Glass, Chiquita Rollins, and Tina Bloom), and on gender symmetry in partner violence (Murray Straus) and the implications of each for prevention. Whitaker and Lutzker do not avoid controversy; inclusion of both chapters highlights the dialectic of partner violence as a centrally gendered issue and as a gender-neutral issue.

In fact, Straus's chapter, "Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence," is one of the most incisive and practical in the book. He does an extraordinary job of reviewing the literature to date and nonjudgmentally places the suppression of years of gender-neutral evidence in the context of the field at large, emphasizing its needs, priorities, and central advocates. Moreover, he lists principles for improving prevention and treatment programs on the basis of a balanced review of the literature and underscoring gender symmetry, looking at

various forms of partner violence, and recognizing multiple risk factors. In doing so, he provides his own synthesis of the many years of debates on the gender issue, expands the lenses through which IPV has been previously viewed, and sets the stage for advancement of this area through science.

Finally, in the Conclusion, editors Whitaker and Lutzker suggest future directions for IPV prevention efforts. Despite the substantial progress in many of the areas documented within their volume, they appeal for improved partner violence surveillance, better understanding of causes and consequences of partner violence, continued development and evaluation of prevention and intervention programs, and, finally, implementation and dissemination of such programs. In this section they aptly distill the copious literature reviewed thus far with focused rationales for areas selected as worthy of future attention and resources.

This section may have benefited from discussion of more recent work suggesting the need for models of domestic violence focused at the level of the family. Such work has examined important links between partner violence and child maltreatment, as reviewed in the chapter by Capaldi, Kim, and Pears. As Slep and O'Leary (2005) argued:

All types of adult family violence are meaningfully related. . . . Explanatory models that could potentially account for different patterns of violence in families might prove especially useful in tailoring prevention and intervention efforts. . . . Furthermore, the focus should shift away from individual perpetrators and separate dyads, acknowledging that multiple forms of aggression in families predominate. Expanding the focus to include the whole family will open new avenues to achieve reductions in family violence. (p. 443)

In conclusion, the content of *Preventing Partner Violence* highlights the well-developed nature of the field with respect to definitions, epidemiology, risk factors and consequences, and types of violence and perpetrators. At this juncture, the field clearly needs more knowledge about effective treatment. It is vexing that, though awareness and policy have evolved considerably, partner violence treatment has changed little since the publication of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz's (1981) seminal work that brought family violence out from "behind closed doors."

Certainly, there have been many promising efforts in this regard (e.g., Dunford, 2000; Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005; O'Leary, Heyman, & Neidig, 1999). Yet, isolated efforts have obtained only modest effect sizes (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). And, it is puzzling that the field has not yet seen sustained or replicated efforts that have identified efficacious treatments or evidence-based treatment guidelines. This book sounds an alarm about the continuing urgency of preventing and treating this long-standing problem to achieve significant reductions in disrupted, damaged, and lost lives due to family violence. This current and thorough review takes an important step toward that end.

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