

Guest Editor's Introduction

Welfare benefits often provide a critical safety net for battered women seeking protection from their abusers. Recent changes in welfare laws in the form of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (1996) have transformed welfare from an entitlement program that could provide ongoing cash assistance to a temporary program that restricts the time women can get welfare benefits. This places greater emphasis on rapidly joining the labor force. The PRWORA established a maximum 60-month time limit for total lifetime receipt of welfare and also mandated that women receiving benefits be involved in work-related activities within 24 months. These changes create both risk and opportunity for domestic violence survivors. If women lose or are denied benefits, they may suffer substantial material deprivation if they leave abusive partners. Some women leaving abusive partners may have to leave behind possessions, lose access to resources such as savings accounts, and otherwise have greater legal complications from leaving than women not facing the threat of violence. If they cannot obtain welfare benefits to help support them and their children, battered women may be forced to remain with an abusive partner. Of course, many battered women do work or will want to seek employment if they can have reasonable assurances that it is safe to do so. Like other women, they also want to be confident that their children will be cared for in safe environments when they are at work. Current policies could benefit some battered women if the programs lead to services and assistance that help these women gain jobs and achieve sustained employment. As a result, some domestic violence victims will benefit by receiving assistance in gaining jobs.

Research on the relationship between welfare receipt and domestic violence is in its infancy. The first conference to discuss a

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research agenda for welfare and domestic violence was held in October 1995 under the auspices of the Taylor Institute of Chicago. Subsequently, another conference to address a research agenda for welfare and domestic violence was held in Utah in May 1996 (Brandwein, 1996). Most recently, a national conference bringing together researchers, advocates, policy makers, and others took place in Chicago in September 1997. The conference, titled "Trapped by Poverty/Trapped by Abuse," was sponsored by the Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence. (This project was a joint project of Taylor Institute and the University of Michigan, School of Social Work, Center on Poverty, Risk, and Mental Health.) This conference was hosted by the Joint Center for Poverty Research of Northwestern University/University of Chicago. The articles in this volume result in part from that conference.

The early work on the relationship between domestic violence and welfare furnished estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence experienced by women on welfare caseloads. In addition, the research examined correlates of domestic violence and the link between domestic violence and employment. This special issue presents several articles that represent the next wave of research in this area. We examine the contribution of each of the articles in the context of a brief review of the research on domestic violence and welfare in several key areas. We also raise some methodological concerns that can inform interpretation of existing data; we hope that these concerns will be considered in future research in this area.

PREVALENCE

Estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence among welfare recipients have been relatively consistent across studies to date, but some differences in estimates exist. Table 1 presents some comparative prevalence rates from published studies, as well as from several unpublished studies presented at the "Trapped by Poverty/Trapped by Abuse Conference: Developing A New Research Agenda on Domestic Violence and Welfare."

Measurement differences certainly account for some of the differences in prevalence rates. Typically, studies that use multiple behavior-specific items to measure violence result in higher

TABLE 1
Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women on Welfare

<i>Title and Author of Study</i>	<i>Sample/Data Collection</i>	<i>Definitions</i>	<i>Current/Recent (%)</i>	<i>Lifetime (%)</i>
Allard, Albelda, Colten, & Cosenza (1997)	Randomly selected from women receiving welfare statewide in Massachusetts In-person interviews in welfare offices	Three-Item index:	13.8 ^a	57.7
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hit, slapped, or kicked		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Thrown and shoved		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hurt badly enough to go to the doctor		
		Six-item index:		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hit, slapped, or kicked		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Thrown or shoved onto floor, against wall, or down stairs		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hurt badly enough to go to doctor		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Used a gun, knife, or other object		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Forced to have sex or engage in sexual activity against will		
<input type="checkbox"/> Made respondent think she might be hurt				
		Nine-item index:	26.0 ^a	70.3
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hit, slapped, or kicked		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Thrown or shoved		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hurt badly enough to go to doctor		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Used a gun, knife, or other object		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Forced to have sex		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Made respondent think she might be hurt		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Destroyed or taken possessions		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Tried to keep her from seeing friends or family		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently told her that she was worthless or was demeaning		

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

<i>Title and Author of Study</i>	<i>Sample/Data Collection</i>	<i>Definitions</i>	<i>Current/Recent (%)</i>	<i>Lifetime (%)</i>
Browne & Bassuk (1997)	Homeless sample: Randomly selected from emergency and transitional shelters in Worcester, Massachusetts. Housed sample: Randomly selected from welfare offices Multiple in-person interviews in shelters, home, or community-based agencies	<p>Severe violence:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Slapped six or more times <input type="checkbox"/> Kicked, bit, or hit with fist <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with object <input type="checkbox"/> Beaten up <input type="checkbox"/> Choked, strangled, or smothered <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened with a knife or gun <input type="checkbox"/> Assaulted with a knife or gun <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened life in some other manner	32.3 (homeless sample) ^b	63.1 (homeless sample)
Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk (1999)	Homeless sample: Randomly selected from emergency and transitional shelters in Worcester, Massachusetts. Housed sample: Randomly selected from welfare offices Multiple in person interviews in shelters, home, or community-based agencies	<p>Physical violence:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Slapped, kicked, or bit <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with a fist <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with an object <input type="checkbox"/> Beaten <input type="checkbox"/> Choked, strangled, or smothered <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened or assaulted with knife, gun, or automobile <input type="checkbox"/> Forced to have sex or perform sexual acts against one's will	20.0 ^a	29.5 ^b

Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk (1999)		Physical aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Same as above, but also includes being pushed, grabbed, or shoved	28.9 ^a 41.4 ^b
Curcio (1997)	Women participating in welfare-to-work program in Passaic, New Jersey	Physical domestic abuse: Past "Have you ever been the victim of physical domestic violence?" Current "Are you now experiencing a problem with physical domestic violence?"	14.6 57.3
Lloyd (1997)	Randomly selected from low-income neighborhood in Chicago; women self-identified as receiving AFDC In-person interviews in women's homes	Physical aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing objects <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing, grabbing <input type="checkbox"/> Slapping Current severe aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Beating <input type="checkbox"/> Injuring <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening with or using a weapon Lifetime severe aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Biting <input type="checkbox"/> Beating <input type="checkbox"/> Injuring <input type="checkbox"/> Raping	31.1 ^a 19.5 ^a 33.9

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

Title and Author of Study	Sample/Data Collection	Definitions	Current/Recent (%)	Lifetime (%)
Lloyd (1997)	Randomly selected from low-income neighborhood in Chicago; women self-identified as receiving AFDC	Verbal and symbolic aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Attempting to control <input type="checkbox"/> Harrassing, threatening children and friends Direct verbal and symbolic aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Attempting to control <input type="checkbox"/> Harassing <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening children and friends	57.9 ^a	48.0
Lloyd & Taluc (1999)	In-person interviews in women's homes	Physical aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing objects at respondent <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing, grabbing, and slapping Current severe aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Beating <input type="checkbox"/> Injuring <input type="checkbox"/> Raping <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening with or using a weapon Lifetime severe aggression: <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Biting <input type="checkbox"/> Beating <input type="checkbox"/> Injuring <input type="checkbox"/> Raping <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening with or using a weapon	49.7 ^a	40.3
			18.0 ^a	
			11.9 ^a	28.4

Pearson, Thoennes, & Griswold (1999)	Applicants for benefits in four welfare offices in Colorado	In-person interviews by caseworkers	<p>Abuse:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing <input type="checkbox"/> Slapping <input type="checkbox"/> Shoving and hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Being kept away from family and friends <input type="checkbox"/> Having phone calls and activities monitored at home or at work <input type="checkbox"/> Threats to you or your children <input type="checkbox"/> Threats to take your children from you <input type="checkbox"/> Stalking, following, or harassing you <input type="checkbox"/> Marital rape/sexual assault	26.0 ^c	40.0
Shook & Guthrie (1997)	Respondents who answered a mailed request to a representative sample of AFDC recipients in Cook County, Illinois	In-person interviews	<p>Domestic violence:</p> <p>"Many people have been in relationships in which they have been physically abused by a spouse, a partner, or someone they are dating. I know this is a personal question, but we are asking it because it is important to understand more about this kind of abuse. Have you ever been in a relationship with someone who has a habit of physically abusing or injuring you? This would include things like hitting, slapping, whipping, punching, shoving, shaking, and kicking." (Note: A habit means three or more times).</p>	8.5 ^b	28.9
Plichta (1996)	Nationally representative sample of women; self-identified receipt of public aid	Telephone interviews	<p>CTS:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Pushed, grabbed, or shoved <input type="checkbox"/> Slapped, kicked, or bit <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with a fist <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with an object <input type="checkbox"/> Beaten <input type="checkbox"/> Choked, strangled, or smothered <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened or assaulted with a weapon		24.0 ^a

NOTE: AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

- a. Within the last year.
- b. Within the past 2 years.
- c. Current partner.

prevalence rates (Finkelhor, 1994). Allard, Albelda, Colten, and Cosenza's (1997) study of a random sample of women in Massachusetts welfare department offices supports this hypothesis. They devised three indices: a three-item, six-item, and a nine-item index of abuse. They found the lowest prevalence rates in the three-item measure. This definition of violence was limited solely to physical harm. The six-item index, which closely paralleled the legal definition of abuse in Massachusetts, included questions regarding involuntary sex, fear of harm, and actual harm. In addition to the six items, the nine-item measure included questions about isolation ("tried to keep you from seeing your friends or family") and verbal abuse ("consistently told you that you were worthless or was demeaning"). The study illustrates that measures of abuse with multiple items are likely to obtain higher prevalence rates than shorter, more condensed measures. Nevertheless, even with just the three-item measure—the most conservative of their measures—the authors obtained relatively high prevalence rates of violence. Curcio's (1997a) measurement simply asked women if they had ever been or are currently victims of physical domestic violence; this yielded a somewhat lower prevalence rate. Women in the study were probably more likely to recognize and label their situations as abusive because they had already participated in 2 weeks of a life skills program that included discussions and definitions of abuse and violence. Moreover, because the researcher facilitated the group discussions, trust in him had been established (Curcio, 1997b).

Although cross-study comparisons of prevalence are useful, it is important not to reduce these measurement issues to a single dimension. Lloyd and Taluc (this issue) used an expanded measure of the CTS not only to obtain more reliable estimates of prevalence, but also to better reflect the full experience of the women they interviewed. Their study also included qualitative interviews to move beyond the limitations of measuring violence by behaviorally specific lists alone.

Other studies have designed abuse measures that tap specific dimensions. Pearson, Thoennes, and Griswold's (this issue) study examines women's experiences with domestic violence in relation to establishing paternity and collecting child support from the fathers of their children. Thus, the measure of domestic violence reflects this focus by questioning women about their fears

for themselves and/or their children. For example, some of the items on the questionnaire include whether respondents have ever called the police on their abusers or gotten a restraining order; whether abusers have threatened to harm, kill, or take the children; whether abusers have followed respondents when trying to leave; the use of threats and inducing fear by the abuser; and other items that would indicate whether respondents' safety or the safety of their child or children were compromised. Although Browne, Salomon, and Bassuk (this issue) base their definitions of physical abuse and physical aggression on the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979), they also included a number of other measures of forms of abuse and trauma in the lives of the women they interviewed, including measures of threat and post-separation assault (see Browne & Bassuk, 1997).

SAMPLE

Welfare caseloads are dynamic and, in this era of rapid change, a key consideration when examining research is the nature of the caseload in the particular time period and context from which the sample is drawn. Two of the articles in this issue (Lloyd & Taluc and Browne et al.) drew samples from welfare caseloads prior to the recent changes in welfare policy, and Pearson et al. (this issue) studied a post-PRWORA caseload. Recently, welfare caseloads have declined rapidly. Although much of the decline may be attributable to economic growth within states, some of the decline results from changes in state welfare policies (Ziliak et al., 1997). Therefore, caseload characteristics may differ both within and among states in a given time period. This means that welfare receipt as a variable is quite complex, and future domestic violence and welfare studies will be most useful if they contextualize the variable. In other words, it would be most helpful if the studies place the welfare policies in the time and location in which the study is conducted. One example of the implications of these changes is that as the caseloads decline, recipients who are experiencing more barriers to work may be more likely to remain on the caseload. This may result in a higher percentage of welfare caseloads that show women experiencing the most severe forms of work interference by abusive partners.

Studies have also varied in how they obtained their samples. Some studies draw from women participating in welfare programs (Curcio, 1997a). However, women participating in welfare-to-work programs are not representative of the total welfare population. Pearson et al. (this issue) gathered data from caseloads in four welfare offices from interviews by specially trained child support workers in those offices. A drawback to this method is that some women may have given socially desirable responses because they were interviewed in welfare offices by intake and child support workers who may at times be perceived to be untrustworthy and/or antagonistic (Davies, 1996). Despite this potential limitation, the study conducted by Pearson et al. (this issue) yielded a lifetime prevalence rate of violence of 40% abuse, a rate roughly comparable with findings of other studies. Browne et al. (this issue) obtained half their sample from welfare offices, randomly selecting women who were seeking recertification or who came to discuss issues with their caseworkers. However, they conducted interviews in the homes of the women or in community agencies. One reason for providing an alternative to in-home interviews is to increase safety and privacy for women responding to questions about domestic violence.

IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

To fully inform practice and policy and to ensure the quality of research, collaboration between researchers, domestic violence and welfare practitioners, and advocates is essential. In this issue, each of the studies—in some fashion—depended on collaboration with practitioners. Lloyd and Taluc (this issue) worked with the battered women's network in Chicago to modify and extend the Conflict Tactics Scales in important ways. Browne et al. (this issue) worked closely with domestic violence, family homeless shelters, and welfare programs in the Worcester area to safely, sensitively, and effectively contact and interview homeless and housed single mothers. In the Pearson et al. (this issue) study, child support workers received special training from domestic violence programs. Rather than depending only on state welfare officials, Raphael (this issue) contacted key domestic violence advocates in each state to gather information about implementation of the Family Violence Option (FVO). We encourage the con-

tinuation of collaborations in this area. Guidelines for enhancing such collaborations can be found in various sources (e.g., see *Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence*, 1998).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND WORK

The concern that a violent and threatening mate would interfere with a woman's ability to work has shaped the debate about domestic violence and welfare. Anecdotal data and studies of welfare to work programs by Raphael (1995, 1996) raised concerns about the degree to which women receiving welfare were subjected to work sabotage by abusive partners. Subsequent studies also provided support for direct work interference (Allard et al., 1997; Curcio, 1996) and for increased health and mental health problems that could interfere with work (Allard et al., 1997; Lloyd, 1997; Curcio, 1997a; Bassuk et al., 1996).

Two articles in this issue demonstrate that the relationship of domestic violence to work is complex. Lloyd and Taluc and Browne et al. present what, at first glance, are conflicting results. In an earlier analysis of her interviews with women randomly selected from a low-income community in Chicago, Lloyd (1997) found that battered women were more likely to have been unemployed and more likely to receive welfare. Subsequent multivariate analyses presented by Lloyd and Taluc did not support the hypothesis that domestic violence would exert a deterrent effect on workforce participation for women in the sample. Browne et al. also found in cross-sectional analysis that domestic violence was not related to current employment among the welfare recipients they studied. However, subsequent longitudinal analysis revealed that domestic violence was associated with the stability of women's workforce participation over time. The difference in the relationship of domestic violence and work across varying measures of employment in the Browne et al. study illustrates the need for careful conceptual and operational definition of employment variables in research. Their results show a complex pattern of relationship between domestic violence and work, varying by the number of hours worked per week and the duration of employment (ranging from 1 month to 12 months). They also find differences using two alternative definitions of violence (physical aggression versus physical abuse).

Taken together, these findings suggest that subsequent research should focus on employment over time. Longitudinal data and measures of employment that include job stability and multiple definitions will allow for more sophisticated and potentially revealing analyses of how domestic violence affects the employment of women and the role it plays as a barrier to economic autonomy of domestic violence survivors.

WELFARE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

The major policy guiding consideration of domestic violence and welfare is the Family Violence Option (FVO) of the PRWORA of 1996. The FVO gives the option to screen women receiving welfare for domestic violence and to provide services to help address the domestic violence. States adopting the FVO would not be penalized by loss of federal funds if they fail to meet work and time limit quotas because of exemptions granted to battered women.

In this issue, Raphael examines state-by-state implementation of the FVO. Her article demonstrates the complexity of the success or failure of this policy.

Implementation varies greatly among states. The initial debate about the FVO focused in part on the danger of too many recipients seeking and gaining waivers from work requirements and time limits. However, there is little evidence in the early experience with state implementation of the FVO to support this concern. For the most part, rates of identification have been low, and the number of waivers granted is also low. Raphael documents that a number of innovative approaches to serving domestic violence victims on welfare caseloads are being tested. Future research must focus on evaluations of these efforts and others to help determine the best practices and policies to bring safety to battered women and to ensure their economic well-being.

CHILD SUPPORT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Although debate about the welfare changes has centered mostly around work requirements and time limits, the child support enforcement provisions of the PRWORA are also controversial. The PRWORA specifies that welfare applicants establish paternity of their children so that the father can be pursued for

child support collection. Advocates fear that this may endanger domestic violence victims because abusive fathers may retaliate or gain visitation or custody rights as a result of paternity establishment. One of the provisions of the FVO is to allow states to exempt recipients from the requirement to establish paternity or from child support collection if applicants establish good cause for the exemption. Among the criteria for good cause is domestic violence.

Pearson et al. (this issue) report on the first study to systematically examine whether women seek these good-cause exemptions, the reasons they do or do not desire the exemptions, and whether they are successful in obtaining the exemptions when they do seek them. The study data provide evidence that even when informed about the good-cause exemption, many women with domestic violence experience will not seek it. Explanations for why they do not seek the exemption vary, but among the reasons given are a desire to get child support and a lack of fear of reprisal from the men identified as fathers. However, of the relatively small number of women who seek the exemptions, the Pearson et al. study reveals that many are unsuccessful at obtaining the exemption. Failure to provide supporting documentation appears to be one of the reasons for denial. Establishing procedures for establishing good cause due to domestic violence when documentation is not available appears to be a high priority for addressing child support needs of battered women.

CONCLUSION

Each of the articles that follow extend our knowledge of domestic violence and welfare in key ways. Although the high prevalence of domestic violence certainly warrants the concerns raised about the impact of domestic violence on women receiving welfare, the data are beginning to demonstrate the complexity of the issue. Lloyd and Taluc and Browne et al. suggest that the impact of domestic violence as a deterrent to work may prove to be less dramatic than initially feared. Similar to this, although some women do not get the waivers of paternity they desire or need, Pearson et al. provide data that imply that many battered women do not want exemptions and do not fear establishment of paternity.

Although most battered women apparently do try to work and many are able to maintain employment, we still must question at what price this work is accomplished. Domestic violence may be exacerbated for some women when they return to work, attempt to gain employment, or cooperate with training program requirements. Ultimately, policies must promote safety for battered women and their children. An exclusive focus on work participation rates as the criterion for the success of welfare policies and programs obscures the importance of safety.

The promise of not only the research in this issue but also the studies that will follow is that we will continue to explore the complexity of this issue. We believe they represent the beginning of a new wave of research that will help to shape the practice and policy response to domestic violence among women receiving welfare. We look forward to further research in this area.

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