

A Comparison of Women of Color and Non-Hispanic White Women on Factors Related to Leaving a Violent Relationship

Journal of Interpersonal Violence

26(5) 1036–1055

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DOI: 10.1177/0886260510376496

<http://jiv.sagepub.com>

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Abstract

This study compares women of color and non-Hispanic White women regarding the influence of socioeconomic status, family investment, and psychological abuse on leaving a violent relationship. It was found that most women who left stayed away for less than a month. Women of color and non-Hispanic White women did not differ in their length or rate of leaving, although women of color left more frequently when they did leave. Factors associated with leaving for both groups were threat with a weapon, psychological abuse, being single, and having fewer adults in the household. Women of color with higher socioeconomic status were less likely to leave, which was not the case for non-Hispanic White women. Non-Hispanic White women were more likely to leave if they had lived with their partners less than 5 years and had children at home.

Keywords

Battered Women, Domestic Violence, Leaving Abusive Relationships

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Studies have indicated that a majority of women eventually leave abusive relationships (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Anderson, M. A., Gillig, P. M., Sitaker, M., McCloskey, K., Malloy, K., & Grigsby, N., 2003; Barnett, 2000; Rhatigan, Street, & Axsom, 2006; Walker, Logan, Jordan, & Campbell, 2004). However, more research is needed to understand factors related to staying and leaving, in particular research with random, non-help-seeking samples. More research is also needed to further our understanding of the leaving process within different racial and ethnic groups (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003) as victim needs may differ within these particular groups. There is limited research on the influence of cultural factors and history on the way some women may respond to victimization (Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2007; Potter, 2008).

Studies show a variety of factors related to leaving and staying in a violent relationship. They range from external (e.g., economic) to internal (e.g., psychological) factors, as we briefly review below. For more extensive reviews, see Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Barnett, 2001; Rhodes & Mckenzie, 1998.

Factors Related to Leaving

Economic factors. Previous research has indicated that abused women remain in abusive relationships due to economic necessity (e.g., low income and unemployment; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Barnett, 2000; Bui, 2003; Kim & Gray, 2008; Walker et al., 2004; Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003). An abused woman's difficulty in leaving an abusive relationship is directly related to a lack of employment and/or lack of financial self-sufficiency.

Emotional/psychological influence. The extent of the emotional attachment or commitment to the relationship is also an important factor for women's decision to stay in or leave violent relationships (Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). For women who have been married to or lived with an abusive partner for a long time and maintained hope that the abuse would stop, the decision to leave is rarely easy. The more attached a victim is to her partner, the greater the likelihood that she may want to maintain the relationship. By contrast, increased anger toward an abusive partner increases the odds of the victim ending the relationship (Shurman & Rodriquez, 2006). Having children in the relationship further complicates matters. Women may stay because they do not have the means to support their children alone, may not believe they can raise them alone, or may fear losing custody to the abuser (Bui, 2003). On the other hand, they may leave out of fear that their children may be harmed directly or indirectly by the abuser (Gillum, 2008; Kim & Gray, 2008). Some evidence has indicated that in general women with children are more likely to

remain in abusive relationships (e.g., Acevedo, 2000; Strube & Barbour, 1984).

Nature of abuse. The nature of the violence is not consistently associated with leaving (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). It can affect different women in very different ways. For some women, severe violence is the impetus to leave. For others, it increases their fear of leaving, especially if the abuser threatens greater harm should they leave. Less is known about the impact of psychological abuse on leaving. Rhatigan and Street (2005) found that more frequent psychological victimization predicted that steps would be taken to leave abusive partners. Studies further indicate that women who reported greater levels of emotional/psychological abuse had greater resolve to leave or were more likely to have separated from their abusers (Arias & Pape, 1999; Hilbert, Kolia, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Wu Shortt, 1996; Koepsell, Kernic, & Holt, 2006; Raghavan, Swan, Snow, & Mazure, 2005).

Social and institutional support. Although research suggests that most women eventually leave their abuser for good, many other women return to their abuser because of limited resources available for support. While some women are able to find refuge with relatives and close friends, it does not guarantee protection from abuse (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Statistics Canada, 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Thus, the lack of alternatives leaves many women with no perceived choice but to remain in or return to an abusive relationship. Obtaining assistance from helping agencies may be especially difficult for women of color due to limited resources and mistrust of social systems (Grossman & Lundy, 2007; Potter, 2008).

Leaving as a Process

Our understanding of the process of leaving has grown more complex. For many abused women, leaving is not a one-time event but a lengthy process that requires careful planning (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2000; Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998). The process may involve leaving and returning multiple times (Koepsell et al., 2006). Lerner and Kennedy (2000) suggest that the 6-month period after leaving may be the most psychologically intense and vulnerable time for a woman. She may lack the confidence to leave and the temptation to return may remain high. Raghavan and colleagues (2005) found that the length of the termination process ranged from 3 days to 6 months. Cluss and colleagues (2006) described women's readiness to change on a continuum

that includes both internal (e.g., awareness, perceived support, self-efficacy/perceived power) and external factors (e.g., support from friends, getting a job). The perceived positive and negative valence of these factors affects a woman's degree of readiness. However, research with representative samples is lacking on the number of times women typically leave abusive relationships and how long they stay away.

Race/Ethnic Differences

Few studies have focused on racial/ethnic differences and the process of leaving an abusive relationship. Using a representative sample, one study found that Black women were more likely to remain in a violent relationship than White women (Schwartz, 1988). Another study found that battered Latino women returned to their abuser more often than non-Latino White women (Torres, 1991). These findings may be attributed to the greater duty women of color feel to keep the family intact and the heightened stigma associated with divorce/separation among women of color (Acevedo, 2000; Gillum, 2008; Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997; Potter, 2008). In addition to the value placed on family, racial and ethnic minorities tend to mistrust predominantly White institutions, particularly the criminal justice system. The belief that these institutions reinforce the social, political, and economic interest of the dominant community may serve to explain why battered minority women are especially reluctant to seek formal help (Bui & Morash, 1999; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004; Klevens, 2007; Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2007; Rasche, 1988; West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998). They may have been directly mistreated by particular institutions or know that their partners have been or could be mistreated. Their perception of potential sources of help may influence their decision to remain in an abusive relationship.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the frequency of leaving an abusive relationship and the length of time away from such a relationship. Furthermore, it investigated factors associated with leaving in two racial groups: women of color and non-Hispanic White women. We focused on the role of socioeconomic status (SES), family investment, and psychological abuse to explain leaving. In line with past studies, we expected that higher SES and lower signs of relationship commitment would be related to leaving, at least in the sample of non-Hispanic White women.

Method

Sample

The data for the study came from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS)(Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The NVAWS sampled women 18 years of age and older within households in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. A random digit dial (RDD) procedure was used to collect the data. Contributing to representativeness, the sample frame was stratified by U.S. Census region. Within the regional strata, a simple random sample of working residential phone numbers was selected. Specific unweighted characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity) were then compared with the general population as measured by the Census Bureau 1995 Current Population Survey. The NVAWS sample and the general population were found to be similar. Sample weighting was considered but was not used because it was determined that the overall unweighted rates of partner violence (e.g., rape, physical assault) were not different from their weighted rates (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The overall response rate was 72.1%. In total, 8,000 participants were included in the sample. The focus of our analysis was on those participants who reported violence (rape, physical assault, stalking, and general fear) in their current relationship by a current spouse or cohabiting partner as a reason for leaving. This section of the survey was administered to only those participants who experienced these events.

Outcome Measure

Three hundred and eighty-two participants responded to the question, "Did you ever leave your current husband/partner because he/she was violent toward you?" They were first asked to answer "yes" or "no." In this study, therefore, *staying* is defined as a response of "no" to the question. An answer of "yes" includes participants who had left the relationship at some point, but were currently in the relationship. In the NVAWS, many victims were not currently in a relationship. When we use the term *leave*, it is possible that the respondent may have left and returned multiple times. The sample does not include women who left and did not return to their abusive partners, nor does it include victims of dating violence. It is possible that some women left when violence was not the immediate reason for leaving but the accumulation of violence was a reason.

Predictors

The predictors for this study were SES, family investment, psychological abuse, and being threatened with weapons. Due to the small sample size, to

avoid too many tests simultaneously and to prevent oversaturation of the model by including all variables, three composite scales (namely SES, family investment, and psychological abuse) were created and used in the multivariate model.

SES. SES was measured by participants' income, level of education, and employment status. The final SES scale ranged from 0 to 3 with higher values indicating better SES status. A participant received one point for each of the following: if she was currently employed, had a college education, and had an annual income greater than US\$25,000.

Family investment. Family investment was measured by marital status, the presence of children under the age of 18 in the household, the presence of persons aged 18 and older in the household, and the length of time living with the abuser. The Family Investment Index ranged from 0 (*low investment*) to 4 (*high investment*). A respondent was assigned a value of 4 on this scale if she was married, lived with a partner for more than 6 years, had two or more additional persons aged 18 and above in the same household, and had children living in the household.

Psychological abuse. Psychological abuse included one's partner shouting or swearing at respondent, making respondent feel inadequate, and calling respondent names in front of others. A point of one was assigned for each behavior, and therefore the scale ranged from 0 to 3.

Threat with weapon. The threat item was a composite of two measures. Participants were asked, "After respondent became an adult did any other adult threaten her with a gun?" and "After respondent became an adult did any other adult threaten her with a knife or other weapons besides a gun?" A value of "1" was assigned if she had experienced threats of violence with a gun, knife, or other type of weapon and a 0 if she had not experienced any of these events.

Number of times participant left. The number of different times participants left was originally a continuous variable but was categorized to reduce its skewedness. The categories included none, once, two or three times, and four times or more.

Length of time away. Participants were also asked about the number of days they stayed away. Only respondents who had left their partner one or more times answered this question. Categories were constructed to reduce skewedness as follows: none, 1 to 3 days, 4 to 34 days, 35 to 75 days, and 76 or more days.

Racial/ethnic status. Racial/ethnic status was coded as either women of color or non-Hispanic White women. Women of color included those participants who self-identified as Hispanic (43.5%), Black/African American (41.7%), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.6%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (2.8%), and mixed race (7.4%). White women of non-Hispanic descent were

categorized as non-Hispanic Whites. We recognize that there is considerable diversity among women of color; however, we were limited by the small sample sizes of each group and needed to combine them for our analysis.

Analytic Procedure

The analyses included chi-square tests of independence to examine the relationships between the predictors and leaving/staying at the time of the survey. Hierarchical multivariate logistic regression models were used to assess the effects of each factor while controlling for other factors in the model. Logistic regression analysis was chosen because the outcome measure was a binary variable (1 = stay, 0 = leave). To evaluate the unique variance explained by sets of variables, they were added to the model in successive blocks and unique *R*-square values were calculated. The same multivariate model was fit for women of color and non-Hispanic White women separately to see whether the predictors were the same for each subgroup. An alpha significance level of .05 was set for all analyses.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents the sample characteristics. Non-Hispanic White women were significantly older ($M = 41$, $SD = 13$) than women of color participants ($M = 38$, $SD = 12$). In both samples, more than half of respondents were married or in common-law relationships. Non-Hispanic White respondents were more likely to be married and in common-law relationships compared to women of color (76% vs. 58%).

Within each group, participants were most often high school graduates. A significantly larger percentage of non-Hispanic White women had a college education as compared with women of color (52% vs. 46%).

A majority of participants within both groups were employed full-time. There was no significant difference between non-Hispanic White women and women of color on employment, whether full-time, part-time, or in the military (65% vs. 58%).

The personal annual income level of respondents varied, ranging from below US\$5,000 to as high as US\$100,000. More than half of women of color and non-Hispanic White women's incomes were less than US\$25,000 (74% vs. 65%). The income for the two groups was not significantly different.

A majority of women (67%) had not left their abuser at the time of the survey. Unlike the findings in other studies, the rates of leaving did not

Table 1. Characteristics of Women of Color and Non-Hispanic White Women Participants

Characteristics	Women of Color (N = 108)	Non-Hispanic White Women (N = 269)
Mean age (SD)	38 (12)	41 (13)
	$t(371) = 2.02, p = .044$	
Average number of children in household	1.63 (1.3)	1.20 (1.3)
	$t(376) = -2.83, p = .005$	
Number of adults in household	2.28 (1.12)	2.05 (0.66)
	$t(376) = -1.97, p = .049$	
Marital status (%)		
Married	56	75
Common-law relationship	2	1
Divorced	3	4
Separated	16	8
Widowed	7	5
Single and never married	18	8
	$\chi^2(5) = 17.85, p = .003$	
Education level (%)		
No schooling	0	0
1st-8th grade	9	1
Some high school	11	10
High school graduate	33	37
Some college	30	31
4-year college degree	12	14
Postgraduate	4	7
	$\chi^2(5) = 19.58, p = .001$	
Employment status of participants (%)		
Employed full-time	50	49
Employed part-time	7	15
In the military	1	1
Unemployed/looking for work	13	5
Retired/not working	4	5
Student	2	5
Homemaker	19	19
Something else	4	2
	$\chi^2(7) = 12.45, p = .087$	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Characteristics	Women of Color (N = 108)	Non-Hispanic White Women (N = 269)
Income respondents received before taxes (%)		
None	4	5
Less than US\$5,000	19	17
US\$5,000-US\$10,000	13	11
US\$10,000-US\$15,000	16	12
US\$15,000-US\$20,000	13	10
US\$20,000-US\$25,000	9	10
US\$25,000-US\$35,000	12	14
US\$35,000-US\$50,000	11	15
US\$50,000-US\$80,000	2	4
US\$80,000-US\$100,000	2	2
More than US\$100,000	0	0
$\chi^2(9) = 4.18, p = .899$		

Table 2. Number of Different Times Respondents Left

Characteristics	Overall (N = 374)		Women of Color (N = 105)		Non-Hispanic White Women (N = 264)	
	%	Percentage of Those Who Left	%	Percentage of Those Who Left	%	Percentage of Those Who Left
None	67	—	66	—	67	—
Once	12	35	7	19	14	41
Two or three times	12	35	15	44	10	31
Four times or more	10	31	12	36	9	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

differ significantly between women of color and non-Hispanic White women (66% vs. 67%). Among those who left, 35% left once, 35% left between two and three times, and approximately 31% left four or more times. Of non-Hispanic White women, 41% left their abuser once as compared with 19% of women of color who left once ($p = .06$; see Table 2).

Many women did not stay away very long from the relationship (see Table 3). Of those who left, 31% of abused women were separated from their abuser 1 to 3 days; 33% stayed away between 4 and 34 days; and 16% of victims stayed away between 35 and 75 days. Twenty percent of abused victims

Table 3. Number of Days Stayed Away

Characteristics	Overall (N = 368)		Women of Color (N = 103)		Non-Hispanic White Women (N = 260)	
	%	Percentage of Those Who Left	%	Percentage of Those Who Left	%	Percentage of Those Who Left
None	68	—	67	—	68	—
1 to 3 days	10	31	10	29	10	30
4 to 34 days	11	33	8	24	12	37
35 to 75 days	5	16	5	15	5	17
76 or more days	7	20	11	32	5	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

separated from their abuser longer than 75 days. The length of time that women separated from their abuser did not significantly differ between women of color and non-Hispanic White women.

Bivariate Analyses. Contrary to expectations, whether women were employed did not affect whether they left their partners (see Table 4). The findings held true for both women of color and non-Hispanic White women. Results approaching traditional significance ($p = .06$) showed that women of color with college educations and annual incomes more than US\$25,000 were less likely to leave their partners rather than more likely. There was no significant relationship between leaving and education or income for non-Hispanic White women.

Marital status was significantly associated with non-Hispanic White women's decisions to stay in a violent relationship, $\chi^2(1, N = 269) = 6.00$, $p = .020$ (see Table 4). Married and common law non-Hispanic White respondents were more likely to stay with their partners than single respondents (70% vs. 54%). This finding approached significance for women of color ($p = .07$; 71% vs. 54%).

The length of the relationship was a factor for non-Hispanic White women ($p = .06$) but not for women of color. Non-Hispanic White women were more likely to stay if they lived with their partners for 6 years or more (70% vs. 58%).

Having at least one child below the age of 18 living in the household versus no children below 18 was associated with leaving the violent relationship for non-Hispanic White women (42% vs. 24%), $\chi^2(1, N = 269) = 9.20$, $p = .002$. There was no association between having at least one child in the household and leaving for women of color.

Table 4. Socioeconomic Status, Family Investment, and Psychological Influences on Leave/Stay/Violent Relationships by Women of Color and Non-Hispanic White Female Respondents (N = 382)

Characteristics	Women of Color (N = 108)		p	Non-Hispanic White Women (N = 269)		p
	Leave (%)	Stay (%)		Leave (%)	Stay (%)	
Socioeconomic Factors						
Employed	30	70	.128	35	65	.823
Not employed	44	56		33	68	
High school or less	44	56	.064	39	61	.141
College	27	74		30	70	
Respondent income (25,000 or less)	41	59	.065	37	64	.385
Respondent income (25,000 or above)	20	80		31	69	
Family investment						
Married & common law	29	71	.075	30	70	.020
Single	46	54		46	54	
Lived with partner 6 years or beyond	33	67	.435	30	70	.062
Lived with partner 5 years or less	40	60		42	58	
Two or more persons > 18 years in household	29	71	.009	32	68	.075
One or less person > 18 years in household	58	42		46	54	
One or more children < 18 years in household	38	62	.418	42	58	.002
No children < 18 years in household	30	70		24	76	
Psychological abuse						
Shouts or swears at respondents (Yes)	41	59	.021	37	63	.037
Shouts or swears at respondents (No)	17	83		24	76	
Calls respondent names in front of others (Yes)	52	48	.006	43	57	.023
Calls respondent names in front of others (No)	20	80		27	74	
Makes respondent feel inadequate (Yes)	52	48	.001	35	66	.410
Makes respondent feel inadequate (No)	15	85		29	72	
Threaten with gun, knife, other weapon (Yes)	63	37	.002	70	30	.000
Threaten with gun, knife, other weapon (No)	29	71		27	73	

Having additional adults in the household significantly affected the actions of women of color, $\chi^2(1, N = 108) = 6.91, p = .009$. More than two thirds (71%) of women of color stayed with their partner at the time of the survey when two or more other adults were in the household, whereas only 42% of women of color stayed when no additional or one additional adult resided in the household. Among the non-Hispanic White women, the number of additional adults was not related to staying.

Participants were more apt to leave the relationship when they experienced most of the forms of psychological abuse. Both women of color and non-Hispanic White women were significantly more likely to leave the relationship at some point when they were called names in front of others and were shouted or sworn at by a partner. Only women of color were significantly more likely to leave when they were made to feel inadequate, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 11.52, p = .001$. In addition, both women of color and non-Hispanic White women were significantly more likely to leave the relationship if they were threatened with a knife, gun, or other weapon than if they were not threatened at all as an adult.

Multivariate Analyses. The relative impact of the major groups of variables was assessed with hierarchical logistic regression. These groups of variables were SES, family investment (e.g., marital status, relationship length, number of persons in household), psychological abuse and threats with weapon. Predictors were entered in blocks to examine change in Nagelkerke *R*-square contribution of the last added set of variables, controlling for all the variables entered in the previous blocks. In this way, unique variance could be determined for each major set of variables.

For women of color, the combination of the three sets of variables explained 43% of the variance (see Table 5). The unique *R*-square for psychological abuse was 32% and the unique *R*-square for SES was 11%. Family investment accounted for a negligible amount of variance (<0.1%). This provides evidence that psychological abuse is more strongly associated with leaving for women of color when controlling for other predictors. However, SES also contributes uniquely to the variance in leaving.

For non-Hispanic White women, the combined model explained only 14% of the variance. Nearly all of this variance was attributable to psychological abuse (13%). Only 1% was explained by the family variables and none by SES. The classification table indicated that 79% of women of color were correctly classified and 73% of non-Hispanic White cases were correctly classified. The goodness of fit of the logistic regression model was also evaluated within each race/ethnic group. In terms of predicting the dependent variable, both models had an acceptable prediction rate. Hosmer

Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Staying in Violent Relationships by Women of Color and Non-Hispanic White Women

Characteristics Variable	Women of color (<i>N</i> = 108)	<i>p</i> Value	Non- Hispanic White Women (<i>N</i> = 269)	<i>p</i> Value
	Unique <i>R</i> ²		Unique <i>R</i> ²	
Socioeconomic status	.11	.011	.00	.691
Family investment	.00	.874	.01	.130
Psychological abuse	.32	.001	.13	.183
Threat of violence with weapons		.015		.000
Total	.43		.14	

Note: Unique variance was determined by entering each variable last in hierarchical logistic regression analysis. The *R*-squared statistics for the women of color and non-Hispanic White women models were .43 and .14, respectively.

and Lemeshow model fit statistics for women of color was $\chi^2 = 6.29, p = .507$ and for non-Hispanic White women was $\chi^2 = 4.71, p = .788$.

Discussion

Overall, the findings revealed that most women had not left their abuser at the time of the interview, and most of those who had exited a relationship left multiple times. This latter finding is consistent with previous research with a nonrepresentative sample (Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991). In addition, women who left tended to be gone for a relatively short time. Brief absences may be a statement to their partners that they are able to use separation as an option (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000), they will not tolerate abuse (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Campbell et al., 1998), and they want their partner's behavior to change (Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997).

Both women of color and non-Hispanic White women tended to exit the relationship when they were psychologically abused, experienced threats with weapons as an adult, were single, or had fewer adults in the household. Frequent psychological abuse has a very negative impact on well-being and can increase fear, thereby giving women more incentive to leave (Arias & Pape, 1999; Barnett, 2001).

Although having some predictors in common, women of color and non-Hispanic White women differed on some factors associated with leaving.

One unexpected finding of the study was that women of color with relatively higher SES were more likely to stay. It is possible the women's partners had control over their money. It also seems possible that abused women of color with relatively high SES may be concerned about the potential loss of status within their communities and social networks if they decide to leave (Weitzman, 2000). Otherwise, the finding is difficult to explain. By contrast, SES was not associated with staying or leaving violent relationships for non-Hispanic White women.

The study's finding that having more adults in the household increases the likelihood of staying in the relationship among women of color might be explained by the buffering effects of additional adults in minority families. The presence of more adults in a minority household may provide unique sources of support, reduce a woman's likelihood of being isolated by her abuser, and thereby reduce the level of abuse (Cazenave & Straus, 1990; Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Michalski, 2004). As women of color often live in extended families (Kasturirangan et al., 2004), such protection and support may come from a grandparent or other elder at home. Often, individuals may subscribe to traditional beliefs and principles about a women's duty to maintain the family unit. Leaving for these individuals may mean not only a disruption of the family unit (Sorenson, 1996) but also a rejection of one's culture and community (Hampton, Oliver, & Magarian, 2003; Moss et al., 1997; Potter, 2008). As a result, the woman may risk losing the support of family members if she leaves (Potter, 2008; Yoshioka et al., 2003). Future studies should attempt to understand the influence of additional household members, particularly the elderly on women's decision to leave or stay in violent relationships.

A likely explanation for leaving by single non-Hispanic White women who have lived with their partner for fewer years is that they have less investment in the relationship, consistent with other studies (Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). These women may have less emotional attachment to their partner, thus making it easier to leave.

The study further highlights the response of abused women when children are in the household. Children's exposure to violence and the possibility of direct harm to them (e.g., psychological or physical) are major reasons that many survivors leave (Sorenson, 1996). In this study, non-Hispanic White women were more likely to leave if children were in the household. This result was not significant for women of color. These women may face additional institutional barriers that may limit their access to resources or support if they leave with their children.

There are several limitations of this study that need to be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, some relevant variables were not measured. For

example, it would have been worthwhile to examine the influences of subjective commitment (e.g., love and affection of partner) and community resources in women's decision to leave or not leave violent relationships. Second, a relatively small sample size may have limited the ability to detect significant findings, particularly among women of color. The sample also affected our ability to examine group variations within the women of color group. Third, the question about leaving the relationship was restricted to leaving due to violence among women currently in a relationship. Women not currently in a relationship are likely to have left their partners for longer periods or permanently. In addition, findings on the prediction of leaving may differ for these women. Furthermore, some abused women who left may have answered "no" if the violence was not the immediate reason for leaving. Fourth, the threat measure in the study was not limited to the threats made by an intimate partner. Fifth, our study used cross-sectional data which did not allow for analysis over time. This limited our understanding of abused women who left versus those who had not left the violent relationships. Some women may have left the relationship multiple times before leaving for good. Finally, no information was available on the age and relationship of additional adults in the household. As we discuss above, elderly household members could influence the response of abused women, especially among racial/ethnic minority groups.

In spite of these limitations, the findings indicate that the process of leaving is different for women of color and non-Hispanic White women. Even as this comparative analysis provides insights on the differences that exist between women of color and non-Hispanic White women, it should also be noted that the women of color in this study comprise of diverse groups. These groups might have unique cultural practices and experiences that shape the way they respond to certain life events. More research is necessary to understand these groups' unique responses to intimate partner violence and abuse.

The response among women of color within this study was largely accounted for by the Black and Hispanic subsamples because they comprised 85.2% of the sample. As stated earlier, these women are more likely to place a higher value on the family and on keeping it together (Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2007). The sample of women of color also comprises a small percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander and Indian/Native Americans who have similar family values. These groups also have experiences with discrimination that is likely to influence their decision on whether to seek formal assistance (Bui & Morash, 1999). Some women of color may be hesitant to seek formal assistance due to their belief that their concerns will be met with indifference (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). Another barrier to seeking formal assistance stems from their perception that helping agencies, such as police departments, are overly punitive toward men of color. Women may leave but then

return because of negative experiences with helping agencies. Some agencies may lack sensitivity and cultural competence in supporting women of color (Saunders, Holter, Pahl, Tolman, & Kenna, 2005). Some women of color who seek assistance from such agencies report having to prove their abuse and often cite the failure to meet their individual or cultural needs as a barrier to continued help-seeking (Gillum, 2008; Potter, 2008; Sorenson, 1996). Therefore, it is important to create culturally sensitive policies and training for service providers that address the challenges that women of color historically have faced in society, while also recognizing their resilience and ability to endure. A greater understanding of the values, heritage, and perspectives (Kasturirangan et al., 2004) of groups is also needed to effectively provide service to women of color without passing judgment or enforcing stereotypes. The decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship is likely to be influenced by cultural values, including the value placed on maintaining the family unit. However, cultural values need to be secondary to victim safety, including protection from the indifference or hostility of professionals.

In conclusion, consistent with other studies, we found that the decision to leave an abusive relationship involves a wide variety of factors. Our findings indicate that there are some factors shared by women of color and non-Hispanic White women in relation to staying or leaving; however, the groups also differ on several factors. The results of this study suggest additional research is needed to fully understand the leaving process and the variations that can exist between different groups. In addition, interventions and policies are needed that are culturally specific and sensitive to assist women who are seeking to escape violent relationships.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to Letha Chadiha, Deborah Anderson, and Cleopatra Caldwell for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The work of the first author on this manuscripts was funded in part by a Research Fellowship from the Program for Research on Black Americans, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

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