

Children Fathered by Previous Partners: A Risk Factor for Violence Against Women

Author(s): Martin Daly, Lisa S. Singh and Margo Wilson

Source: *Canadian Journal of Public Health / Revue Canadienne de Santé Publique*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (MAY / JUNE 1993), pp. 209-210

Published by: Canadian Public Health Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41991017>

Accessed: 01-08-2016 13:55 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/41991017?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Canadian Public Health Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Canadian Journal of Public Health / Revue Canadienne de Santé Publique*

Children Fathered by Previous Partners: A Risk Factor for Violence Against Women

Martin Daly, PhD, Lisa S. Singh, BA, Margo Wilson, PhD, MSL

Recognition of violence against women as a public health problem is still relatively new, and epidemiological investigation is in its infancy. There are several reasons to hypothesize that the presence of children fathered by former partners might be a significant risk factor for such violence. Sexual possessiveness and jealousy are prominent attributes of wife-abusers and wife-killers,¹⁻⁵ who may resent their predecessors' children as living violations of their monopoly over their wives. Stepchildren are themselves vastly over-represented as assault and homicide victims, in Canada^{6,7} and elsewhere.⁸ Moreover, certain samples of spousal homicides include remarkably high proportions of stepfamilies.⁵ Even in the absence of violence, stepchildren are apparently sources of marital conflict: stepfamilies are characterized by higher rates of divorce than two-genetic-parent families^{9,10} and by lower marital satisfaction.^{10,11}

Despite these considerations, a possible association between stepfatherhood and violence against wives has apparently never been assessed. A 1986 review¹² identified 97 proposed "risk markers" for violence against wives; parenthood of children was not among them. This neglect persists in subsequent research.¹³⁻¹⁵

METHODS

Women who sought refuge from abusive male partners at a shelter for abused women and their children in Hamilton,

Department of Psychology, McMaster University
Correspondence: Martin Daly, Department of Psychology, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON L8S 4K1, Tel. (416) 525-9140 Ext. 3018
Supported by grants from Health & Welfare Canada, the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council of Canada.

Ontario in 1986-1987 constitute the sample of victims. For each woman admitted, shelter staff recorded information on standard intake forms, including the ages of the woman and her partner; the type and duration of their relationship; the sex and age of each of her children and whether the present partner was their genetic father; and the nature and frequency of assaults and threats by the partner against the woman, her children and others.

Intake data were available for 223 women, of whom 170 reported having one or more children less than 18 years of age and a male partner co-residing at the time of shelter admission. These 170 mothers were classified into three groups, according to paternity of their children: present-partner's-only (N=122), previous-partners'-only (N=27), and both (N=21).

The area served by the shelter is the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth. Living arrangements of children in Hamilton-Wentworth were surveyed between August and November 1983.⁶ We contacted a random sample of 1,328 households, of which 97% provided details of household compositions and the residents' relationships to one another. The resultant sample provided a close fit to census information in all verifiable details (age and sex distributions; relative numbers of single-parent and two-parent households; distribution of family sizes), as well as providing information on steprelationships, which the census does not collect.⁶

RESULTS

Table I shows that women with children fathered by previous partners were greatly

over-represented among shelter clients. This was true both for women whose children were previous-partners'-only (Odds Ratio relative to present-partner's-only = 5.2) and women with children fathered by both (Odds Ratio relative to present-partner's-only = 4.7).

Table II shows that men were significantly more likely to have assaulted the children as well as their female partners if one or more of those children were fathered by predecessors.

DISCUSSION

The results support our hypothesis that stepfatherhood is a risk factor for violence against women. Comparing shelter data for 1986-1987 with survey data from 1983 may have exaggerated this association, but there is no evidence of substantial changes in household compositions over that time. Unfortunately, the census does not collect information on genetic versus stepparent-hood, necessitating reliance upon surveys.

Steprelationship could be an incidental correlate of other risk factors. We have shown, however, that it is not such a correlate of either socioeconomic status or the woman's age.^{6,16} Young wives are over-represented among shelter clients (Table I), as they are among homicide victims,⁷ but the over-representation of steprelationships is independent of this fact. Step-relationship, poverty and the woman's age are distinct, additive risk factors for child abuse,^{6,16} and they appear to be distinct, additive risk factors for woman abuse too.

Table I does not demonstrate conclusively that women who have children from previous unions are especially often assaulted. The data might instead reflect differential use of shelter services, espe-

TABLE I

Incidence of paternity by previous partners in households of women co-residing with a male partner and one or more own children less than 18 years of age, among the clients of a Hamilton shelter for abused women and their children, and in a survey of the Hamilton-Wentworth population-at-large. Data are presented for women of all ages, then divided into those below and above the median age of shelter clients.

Paternity of co-residing children	All Ages		Age < 30 Years		Age ≥ 30 Years	
	Shelter	Population Survey	Shelter	Population Survey	Shelter	Population Survey
Present-partner's-only	122	355	64	83	58	272
One or more stepchildren	48	28	22	8	26	20
(Previous-partners'-only	27	15	12	4	15	11)
(Both	21	13	10	4	11	9)
% with stepchildren	28.2	7.3	25.6	8.8	31.0	6.8
Present-partner's-only vs One or more stepchildren:						
Chi-Square (1 df)	43.5		8.9		35.3	
p	< .0001		.003		< .0001	
Odds Ratio ¹⁷	5.0		3.6		6.1	
95% Confidence Interval	3.0 - 8.3		1.5 - 8.5		3.2 - 11.7	

TABLE II

Prevalence of partners' assaults upon the children of clients of a Hamilton shelter for abused women and their children, in relation to paternity.

Paternity of co-residing children	Children Assaulted?		
	Yes	No	% Yes
Present-partner's-only	18	104	14.8
One or more stepchildren	15	33	31.3
(Previous-partners'-only	8	19	29.6)
(Both previous & present partners'	7	14	33.3)
One or more stepchildren vs Present-partner's-only:			
Chi-Square (1 df) = 5.99; one-tailed p = .008			
Odds Ratio = 2.6 (95% Confidence Interval = 1.2 - 5.8)			
Previous-partners'-only vs Present-partner's-only:			
p = .064 (Fisher's exact probability test)			
Both vs Present-partner's-only:			
p = .017 (Fisher's exact probability test)			

cially in view of the fact that such women have special cause to fear for their children. There is abundant evidence of excess risks to stepchildren,^{6,8,16}

including lethal risks.^{5,7} The present results suggest that such risk extends to wives, and that attention to this issue is urgently needed.

REFERENCES

1. Dobash RE, Dobash RP. *Violence against wives*. New York: Free Press, 1979.
2. Polk K, Ranson D. The role of gender in intimate violence. *Aust NZ J Criminol* 1991; 24: 15-24.
3. Showalter CR, Bonnie RJ, Roddy V. The spousal-homicide syndrome. *Int J Law Psychiat* 1980; 3: 117-41.
4. Wilson M, Daly M. The man who mistook his wife for a chattel. In: Barkow JH, Cosmides L, Tooby J, Eds., *The Adapted Mind*. New York: Oxford, 1992, pp. 289-322.
5. Daly M, Wilson M. *Homicide*. Hawthorne NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988b, p. 212.
6. Daly M, Wilson M. Child abuse and other risks of not living with both parents. *Ethol Sociobiol* 1985; 6: 197-210.
7. Daly M, Wilson M. Evolutionary social psychology and family homicide. *Science* 1988; 242: 519-24.
8. Daly M, Wilson M. A reply to Gelles: Stepchildren are disproportionately abused, and diverse forms of violence can share causal factors. *Human Nature* 1991; 2: 419-26.
9. Becker GS, Landes EM, Michael RT. An economic analysis of marital instability. *J Polit Econ* 1977; 85: 1141-87.
10. White LK, Booth A. The quality and stability of remarriages: the role of stepchildren. *Amer Sociol Rev* 1985; 50: 689-98.
11. Perkins TF, Kahan JP. An empirical comparison of natural-father and stepfather family systems. *Family Process* 1979; 18: 175-83.
12. Hotaling GT, Sugarman DB. An analysis of risk markers in husband to wife violence: the current state of knowledge. *Violence & Victims* 1986; 2: 101-24.
13. Smith MD. Sociodemographic risk factors in wife abuse: results from a survey of Toronto women. *Can J Sociol* 1990; 15: 39-58.
14. Berrios DC, Grady D. Domestic violence - risk factors and outcomes. *West J Med* 1991; 155: 133-5.
15. Follingstad DR, Laughlin JE, Polek DS, et al. Identification of patterns of wife abuse. *J Interpers Violence* 1991; 6:187-204.
16. Wilson M, Daly M. Risk of maltreatment of children living with stepparents. In: Gelles RJ, Lancaster JB, Eds., *Child Abuse and Neglect: Biosocial Dimensions*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987, pp. 215-32.
17. Gardner MJ, Altman DG. *Statistics with confidence*. London: British Medical Journal, 1989, pp. 53-4.

Received: August 31, 1992

Accepted: January 30, 1993