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Spousal Homicide Risk and Estrangement

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Frequencies of homicide victimization of wives and husbands, while cohabiting and when separated, are reported for all spousal homicides known to the police in Canada (1974-1990), in New South Wales, Australia (1968-1986), and in Chicago (1965-1990). In all three data sets, the degree to which spousal homicide victimization was female-biased was significantly greater when the couple were estranged than when they were coresiding. Victim counts and population-at-large estimates of coresiding and separated now-married spouses were combined to estimate differential homicide rates incurred by coresiding and estranged married persons. Wives in all three countries incurred substantially elevated risk when separated as compared to when coresiding.

"I was in love with Margaret, and she would not live with me anymore. I knew it was all finished so I bought the rifle to shoot her and then kill myself. If I can't have her, nobody can."
Statement by an Australian man who killed his wife, from whom he had been separated for one month (Wallace, 1986:120).

Women who attempt to terminate relationships with men are frequent homicide victims. The explanations offered by the killers and the circumstances surrounding these violent events suggest that the killer was typically impassioned by sexual jealousy and/or by his concern about losing his wife (e.g., Allen, 1990; Barnard, Vera, Vera, Newman, 1982; Chimbos, 1978; Daly, & Wilson, 1988a; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Guttmacher, 1955; Mahoney, 1991; Polk, & Ranson, 1991; Showalter, Bonnie, & Roddy, 1980; Wallace, 1986; Wilson, 1989). Declarations like "If I can't have her, nobody can" are recurring features of such cases, and the killer frequently intends to kill himself, too.

Investigation of such a case may reveal a history of sublethal violence, as well as explicit threats to kill. "I swear if you ever leave me, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth and kill you" declared one Illinois man 6 months before his wife divorced him and 7 months before he killed her in her home (People v. Wood, 391 N. E. 2d 206).

Both sublethal assaults and threats to kill can be interpreted as coercive tactics that terrorize wives and thus keep them under their husbands' control (e.g., Bernard et al., 1982; Campbell, 1992; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Dobash, & Dobash, 1979; Hilberman, & Munson, 1978; Mahoney, 1991; Polk, & Ranson, 1991; Rounsaville, 1978; Showalter

et al., 1980; Wilson, 1989; Wilson, & Daly, 1992a, 1992c). Nevertheless, violent possessiveness and sincere threat entail a risk of lethality, destroying the very object that the husband is concerned to retain. Furthermore, although violent coercion and threats may serve the proprietary husband's interests by intimidating his victim, they also raise her incentives to escape the relationship, which may in turn lead to escalated coercion.

If the above-described violence and threats are indeed effectively possessive, then men may be motivated to act in these ways specifically when they perceive their wives as manifesting likelihood or intention of desertion. It follows that resolving to leave one's husband may be associated with elevated risk of violence, including risk of being killed. Because the decision to leave is covert, however, it is difficult to compare the risks to women who intend to leave but have yet to do so with the risks to other coresiding women. One can, however, assess the magnitude of elevated risk in the aftermath of actual separations, at which time possessive husbands may continue their threats and violence to coerce the woman's return. (See Mahoney, 1991, who notes that the use of assaults and threats to get estranged wives back has scarcely been remarked in the domestic violence literature, since the residency status of the couple is rarely reported).

The fact that women who leave proprietary husbands may be pursued and murdered is known to police, to shelter workers, and to others with direct experience of domestic assaults (e.g. Crawford, & Gartner, 1992; Ellis, 1987; Gillespie, 1989; Jones, 1980; Mahoney, 1991; Moore, 1979). However, there has been no quantitative assessment of the magnitude of excess homicide risk incurred by wives upon separation.

The most thorough published analysis of this issue suggests that actual or imminent separation is highly relevant to risk. Wallace (1986) reported that 98 of 217 women slain by their husbands (45%) in New South Wales, Australia, had left their killers or were in the process of leaving. This is presumably a much higher percentage separated or separating than among unslain wives at any given moment, and presumably represents elevated risk, although Wallace did not attempt to convert these frequencies to rates. Older data tell the same story, with almost half of New South Wales uxoricide victims separated from their killers in the late 19th century, and an even higher proportion in the 1930's (Allen, 1990). Similarly, in a Florida study of homicide offenders assessed for fitness to stand trial, 13 of 23 wife-killings occurred when the couple were living apart (Bernard et al., 1982).

This high incidence of estrangement among wife-killings is apparently not mirrored in husband-killings. Whereas 98 of Wallace's 217 slain Australian wives were separated from their killers, the same was true for just 3 of 79 slain husbands. In the Bernard et al. (1982) study, 13 of 23 slain wives were separated as compared to just 1 of 11 slain husbands. Separation is therefore not merely a correlate of serious marital conflict in general, but evidently has a special relevance to violence against wives (see also Wilson, & Daly, 1992b). These homicide data suggest that estrangement is an important risk factor for uxoricide, but there has been no assessment of the relative rates of homicide incurred by coresiding versus separated wives.

There is some evidence that sublethal assaults also increase upon separation. Ellis (1987) found that separated women who had suffered abuse prior to separation were even more seriously abused afterwards. Moreover, in several victimization surveys, much greater proportions of separated wives than of cohabiting wives reported abusive acts by their husbands (Ellis, & DeKeseredy, 1989; Gaquin, 1977/78; Kennedy, & Dutton, 1989; Schwartz, 1988; Smith, 1990; Solicitor General of Canada, 1985:4; Statistics Canada, 1990); however, such evidence does not establish whether separation was a direct stimulus to assault, nor is it always clear whether the assaults in question preceded or

followed the separation. An additional problem in interpreting victimization survey responses is the opportunity for subjectivity: one cannot be sure that similar actions have been construed and reported identically by the groups being compared, such as separated versus coresiding wives.

Such problems of subjectivity and possible reporting biases can be largely circumvented when the focus is on homicide. Homicide is of course a relatively rare outcome of assaults and threats of violence, but it provides a relatively objective window on the sources of variable risk of violence, without the numerous reporting biases that bedevil analyses of lesser manifestations of interpersonal conflict.

In this paper, we report the frequencies of homicide victimization of wives and of husbands, while cohabiting and when estranged, in three large homicide samples. The data consist of victim-based homicide archives for Canada, for the state of New South Wales (Australia), and for the city of Chicago (U.S.A.), including every spouse-killing known to the police, regardless of whether the case was prosecuted. Victim counts in cohabiting and separated couples are presented for both registered marriages and de facto marital unions. We also estimate homicide rates and rate differentials for estranged versus cohabiting wives and husbands in registered marriages, using census-based estimates of the numbers of estranged and cohabiting couples in registered marriages in the populations-at-large. The three archives thus afford a replicative assessment of the association between marital estrangement and homicide risk in three countries with somewhat different census practices and vastly different overall homicide rates. Whereas our frequency analyses concern both registered and de facto marriages, our rate estimations are confined to registered unions only. Similar analysis for de facto unions would be of no less interest — indeed, rates of homicide in de facto unions are substantially higher than in registered marriages (Daly, & Wilson, 1988a) — but there is no available basis for estimating the numbers of estranged de facto couples in any of the relevant populations-at-large.

SPOUSAL HOMICIDE VICTIMS

The data for Canada are based on police submissions to a national homicide data base maintained by Statistics Canada, and represent 1,748 spousal homicides between 1974 and 1990. The data for New South Wales (NSW) were compiled from police reports by the NSW Bureau of Criminal Justice Statistics, and represent 398 spousal homicides between 1968 and 1986. The Chicago database was compiled from police records by the authors in collaboration with C.R. Block and R. Block, and includes 1,758 spousal homicides between 1965 and 1990. There were no conspicuous trends in the numbers of spousal homicide victims per year in any of the three homicide archives.

The 1,748 Canadian victims were 1333 wives and 415 husbands, a sex ratio of 3.11 female victims per male victim. The 398 NSW victims were 303 wives and 95 husbands, a sex ratio of 3.19. The 1,758 Chicago victims were 875 wives and 883 husbands, a sex ratio of 0.99, significantly different from the female-biased victimization in Canada (χ^2 1df = 263.7, $p < .001$) and in NSW (χ^2 1df = 91.0, $P < .001$). Chicago's near equality in the numbers of women and men killed by their spouses is characteristic of the United States as a whole (Maxfield, 1989; Mercy, & Saltzman, 1989), and is evidently peculiar to that country (Wilson, & Daly, 1992b); it does not bespeak similarity of women's and men's motives for killing, nor equity in the initiation of assaults leading to homicide, which remain male-dominated (Dobash et al., 1992; Wilson, & Daly, 1992b).

Table 1 presents the numbers of spousal homicide victims and sex ratios of victimization, distinguishing the cases by registered versus de facto marriage and according to whether the couple was coresiding or separated at the time of the homicide. In the Canadian archive, estranged de facto marriage was not a relationship category on the Statistics Canada reporting form filed by police, with the result that such cases may have been listed as "friends" or as "acquaintances". (Former de facto unions are likely to be undercounted in all archives, even though this relationship category was coded in Chicago and in NSW, because dissolved de facto unions may be given such labels as "exboyfriend/girlfriend" or "ex-lovers", even by the principals themselves.)

In registered unions, the degree to which spousal homicide victimization was female-biased was significantly greater in all three data sets when the couple was separated than when they were coresiding (see also Wilson, & Daly, 1992b). The same is apparently true of estranged versus coresiding de facto unions. Thus, any risk of lethal assault specifically associated with separation does not equally befall both parties, but is disproportionately incurred by estranged wives.

The data in Table 1 from New South Wales include the 296 spousal homicides reported by Wallace (1986) for the period 1968-1981. Wallace's ratio of wife victims to husband victims was 32.7 (98:3) for estranged couples, which is much higher than Table 1's ratio of 8.75 (70:8) for separated couples in the period 1968-1986. The discrepancy is due to the fact that Wallace (1986) included couples who were still coresiding but in the process of breaking up in her "estranged" category. The greater degree of female-biased victimization when these coresiding couples were included suggests that resolving to desert is an important risk factor in uxoricide.

WHAT DO THESE FREQUENCIES IMPLY ABOUT RISK?

The absolute numbers of coresiding and estranged victims in Table 1 do not speak directly to the question of excess risk associated with estrangement. To quantify homicide risk differentials associated with estrangement, we used the numbers of estranged and cohabiting couples in the relevant populations-at-large (Table 2). Ideal information would consist of counts of men and women presently coresiding versus separated versus divorced, with registered unions unequivocally distinguished from de facto unions, and with comparable information collected at regularly recurring censuses. Durations of extant unions and separations would also be valuable baseline information. Unfortunately, available census information falls short of these ideals.

Population-at-Large Estimates of Coresiding and Estranged Spouses

We have used census information for jurisdictions corresponding to each of our homicide archives to estimate the numbers of coresiding and estranged married persons in Canada, in New South Wales, and in Chicago (Table 2). By "married", we here refer only to registered marriages; no information exists on estranged de facto unions. According to Canadian, Australian, and U.S. census bureaus' procedures, the marital status "separated" refers, at least in principle, to those persons who have ceased to coreside with their registered-marriage spouses, regardless of whether there is a legal separation decree, and who have not (yet) divorced or established a new de facto marital union. The Canadian census of 1981 and the NSW census of 1986 were the first in their respective countries to distinguish registered from de facto marriages.

TABLE 1. Number of Spousal Homicides in Three Archives of all Homicides Known to Police, Cross-Tabulated by Victim's Sex, and by Whether Coresiding or Estranged

	Coresiding			Estranged*			Chi-Square	<i>p</i>
	Victims:		Ratio	Victims:		Ratio		
	Female	Male	F/M	Female	Male	F/M		
Registered Unions								
Canada 1974-1990	652	173	3.77	207	23	9.00	14.3	<i>p</i> <.001
NSW 1968-1986	137	47	2.91	46	3	15.33	8.7	<i>p</i> =.003
Chicago 1965-1990	384**	375	1.02	117	52	2.25	19.3	<i>p</i> <.001
De Facto Unions								
Canada 1974-1990	474	219	2.16	***	***			
NSW 1968-1986	96	40	2.40	24	5	4.80	1.8	<i>p</i> =.182
Chicago 1965-1990	324	435	0.74	50	21	2.38	20.2	<i>p</i> <.001

* Estrangement includes both separated and divorced couples.

** Four coresiding couples had been divorced.

*** Estranged de facto marital relationships were not coded in the Canadian homicide archive.

Spousal Homicide Rates for Coresiding versus Estranged Spouses

Victim counts (Table 1) and population-at-large estimates (Table 2) can be combined to produce estimates of differential homicide rates incurred by coresiding and estranged married persons. Census population estimates in Table 2 do not include the divorced, however, so persons killed by their divorced ex-spouses must be removed from the counts of estranged victims in Table 1: Such victims were 23 women and 4 men in Canada, 8 women and one man in New South Wales, and 19 women and 14 men in Chicago. (We did not exclude 4 female victims in Chicago who were divorced from their killers yet coresiding with them, since census practice, as described above, would have incorporated them into the married, coresiding population-at-large.)

The estimates of homicide rates for coresiding and separated spouses are presented in Figure 1. Two estimates of the homicide rate in separated couples are presented for each sample because of sex differences in the numbers of separated persons identified by the censuses. The census counted substantially more separated women than separated men in all three base populations. Several factors may contribute to this sex difference. First, men separated from their registered spouses may be more likely to or quicker to enter into de facto unions, thus removing more men from the separated marital status category; one reason to suspect this is that divorced men both remarry sooner than divorced women and are more likely to remarry at all (e.g., Chamie, & Nsuly, 1981). Secondly, the difference may reflect differential labelling of equivalent marital statuses; for example, separated men may be more likely than separated women to call themselves "single." The differences may also be affected by sex differential incarceration, sex differential survival, and other factors.

Regardless of whether victimization rates for estranged spouses are computed per million separated men or per million separated women, wives in all three countries incurred substantially elevated risk when separated as compared to when coresiding. For husbands, by contrast, the risk when separated was similar to that when coresiding in NSW and in Chicago, and was elevated by a much smaller factor in Canada than was the corresponding risk to wives. Hence, estrangement is especially associated with elevated risk to women, even in Chicago where the overall homicide rates are much higher and where the victimization in coresiding couples is not female-biased.

TABLE 2. Estimated Numbers of Coresiding Husband-Wife Couples in Registered Unions and of Separated Persons in the Populations-at-Large.

	Coresiding	Separated	
	Husband-Wife Couples	Women	Men
Canada 1981 ^a	5, 254, 360	262, 650	207, 805
NSW 1986 ^b	1, 127, 872	58, 621	48, 472
Chicago 1980 ^c	482, 450	67, 158	39, 546

Sources:

^a Now-married coresiding couples in registered unions: Table 3 (Statistics Canada, 1987a); separated persons: Table 2 (Statistics Canada, 1987b).

^b Now-married coresiding couples in registered unions: Table CX0073; separated persons: Table CSD008 from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (unpublished tabulations).

^c Now-married coresiding married couples: Tables 11 and 16; separated persons: Table 7, Summary Tape File 3 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983c).

SEPARATION DURATION

How risk changes over time after separation is an important question, which can be addressed on the basis of limited data in some of the homicide archives.

The New South Wales spousal homicide data-set includes the number of months that the couple had been separated when the homicide occurred. Separation duration was recorded for 32 of 38 slain wives: 15 (47%) were killed within 2 months and 29 (91%) within a year of separating. Separation duration was recorded for one of two slain husbands: he was killed 2 months after separation.

Separation duration was recorded for none of the Canadian cases and for only a few of the Chicago cases. Ten of 20 Chicago wife-killings for which separation duration is known occurred within 2 months of separating and 17 (85%) within a year; four (44%) of 9 husband-killings occurred within 2 months and 7 (78%) within a year.

Information was available for the interval since divorce for only 2 of the 9 killings of a divorced spouse in New South Wales: two ex-wives were killed after separation durations of one and three years. Information was available for divorce duration for 4 of the 36 Chicago killings of a divorced noncohabiting spouse: 2 ex-wives were divorced 1 and 8 years previously, and 2 ex-husbands were divorced 5 months and 4 years previously. Four divorced couples in Chicago (Table 1) were coresiding at the time; in one case for which information was available the divorce was decreed 13 years before the homicide but the couple had been coresiding again for the past 7 years; in another case, the divorce was decreed two days before the man killed his wife.

Thus, the data indicate that the period immediately after estrangement is particularly risky, but they also indicate that homicide can occur months and even years after separation and divorce.

DISCUSSION

The results of our analyses indicate that wives are much more likely to be slain by their husbands when separated from them than when coresiding. Coresidency status does not appear to have a similar bearing on the risk to husbands. One implication is that threats which begin "If you ever leave me..." must be taken seriously. Women who stay with abusive husbands because they are afraid to leave may correctly apprehend that departure

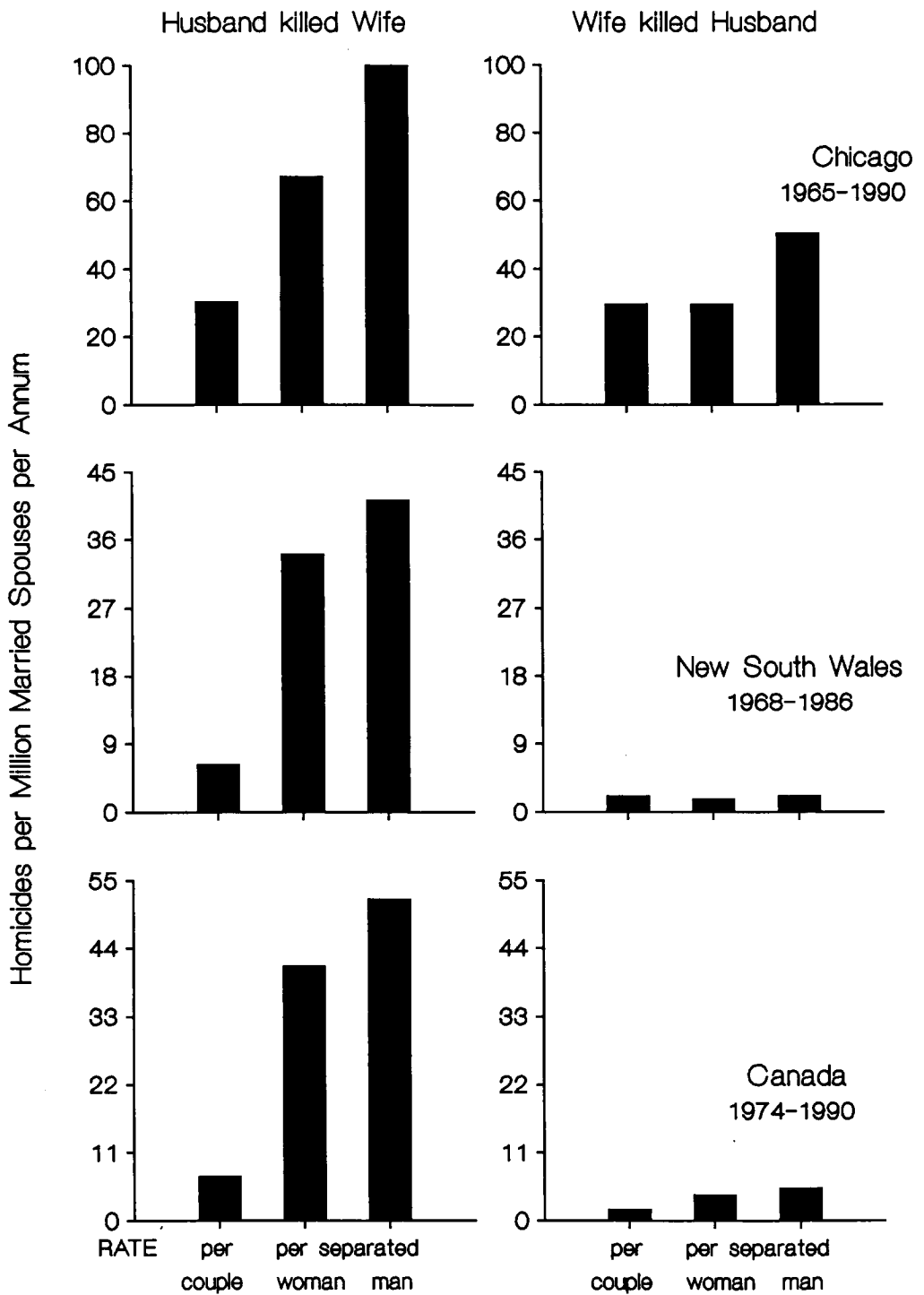


Figure 1. Homicides per million registered-marriage spouses per annum, according to whether the couple were coresiding or separated at the time of the homicide (rates for separated women and separated men).

would elevate or spread the risk of lethal assault. As one Chicago wife, a victim of numerous beatings by her husband, explained to a friend who asked why she didn't leave her husband, "I can't, because he'll kill us all, and he's going to kill me." He did. Fear must be added to the economic and other reasons (see, e.g., Gelles, 1976; Strube, & Barbour, 1983, 1984) why battered wives sometimes do not leave.

The data on time-since-separation further suggest that wives are particularly at risk within the first two months. It was not possible to convert the data on separation duration of the homicide incidents into rates per time since separation (i.e., time-at-risk), since information on separation duration for women in the population-at-large at a particular slice in time (e.g. census enumeration day) is lacking. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Figure 1's differentials, by aggregating all separated couples regardless of duration, must fail to adequately portray the real magnitude of excess risk incurred by women in the immediate aftermath of separation. Safe refuges and other means of protection such as anti-stalking laws and radio-telemetry of batterers' whereabouts are especially needed for women deserting assaultive husbands for at least two months, and perhaps for years in some cases. The usual legal construction of "imminent danger" as immediate is clearly inadequate with regard to women who have left abusive husbands (Mahoney, 1991).

Is Separation Itself an Impetus to Assault?

The fact that separation is temporally associated with increased lethal risk does not necessarily mean that the link between the two is directly causal. If women leave assaultive husbands when the frequency and severity of assaults become intolerably dangerous, then the immediate post-separation period might be a time of elevated uxoricide risk regardless of whether men respond violently to separation per se. Moreover, the simple fact that separated couples constitute a subset of marriages with a history of discord could explain their higher homicide rates. However, the case descriptions often make it clear that the link between separation and murder is more than incidental: Homicidal husbands are often noted to have threatened to do exactly what they did, should their wives ever leave them, and they often explain their homicides as responses to the intolerable stimulus of the wife's departure.

Still, the wife's desertion and the husband's assault may sometimes coincide not because one caused the other, but because both were precipitated by the same episode of marital conflict. To assess the causal impact of separation itself in such cases, one might attempt to compare men's assaultive behavior in the aftermath of apparently equivalent conflicts, contrasting cases where the wife did or did not leave (e.g., to stay with relatives or at a shelter). In an interview study of 109 battered women, the wives did not necessarily desert the abusive husband immediately after the most injurious incident (Dobash, & Dobash, 1985). In another interview study of separated women, 15 of 23 estranged wives who experienced abuse both before and after separation reported that the abuse was more serious after separation (Ellis, 1987; Ellis, & DeKeseredy, 1989).

Question of Motive

It might be hoped that police information on homicide "motives" would be able to resolve the question of whether the greater risk for an estranged wife merely reflects her departure at a time of intense conflict or instead indicates that the husband is inspired to escalated violence by the departure. Unfortunately, information on "motive" as recorded by the police is rarely detailed enough to establish the nature of any conflicts, grievances, or insults.

In their standardized homicide reporting, police in Canada and in Chicago identify one pertinent motive for each case from limited standardized lists, which treat as mutually exclusive alternatives such non-orthogonal categories as "argument/quarrel," "anger/hatred," "general domestic," "mentally incompetent," "robbery," and "sexual assault." In those Canadian cases in which the husband killed his coresiding or estranged wife, police recorded "argument/quarrel" in 43% of the 1333 wife-victim cases and "anger/hatred" in 11%, whereas Chicago police recorded "general domestic" argument in 69% of 875 wife-victim cases. Motive attributions were similar in cases in which the wife killed the husband: 68% of 415 cases in Canada were attributed to "argument/quarrel" and 10% to "anger/hatred," while 76% of 883 cases in Chicago were attributed to "general domestic" argument.

Interview studies of the surviving killer, of witnesses, and of friends and relatives would provide more insight into the marital history, present situation, and perceived grievances which presumably inspired the fatal incident. In any sample of well-described spousal homicide cases, regardless of the residency status of the couple, a large majority have evidently been precipitated by the husband's accusing the wife of sexual infidelity and/or by her decision to terminate the relationship (e.g., Chimbos, 1978; Crawford, & Gartner, 1992; Guttmacher, 1955; Showalter, Bonnie, & Roddy, 1980; Barnard, Vera, Vera, & Newman, 1982; Polk, & Ranson, 1991). As in homicide, so too in wife beating: the predominant substantive issues appear to be adultery, jealousy and male control (e.g., Brisson, 1983; Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1992; Dobash, & Dobash, 1979, 1984; Hilberman, & Munson, 1978; Rounsaville, 1978). Whether these issues are differentially associated with residency status and whether estrangement is an added risk factor have yet to be established. Furthermore, a history of separations and reconciliations is apparently not uncommon in spousal homicide cases (Barnard et al., 1982; Chimbos, 1978; Showalter et al., 1980), but whether such a history increases the risk of uxoricide has yet to be established.

A Wife's Decision to Desert

The present study provides the first estimates of uxoricide rates in relation to the coresidency status of married women, confirming prior indications that separation is associated with increased risk (Allen, 1990; Barnard et al., 1982; Browne, 1985, 1987; Chimbos, 1978; Daly, & Wilson, 1988a; Frieze, & Browne, 1989; Wallace, 1986). Information on motive and circumstance suggests that estranged wives may be especially vulnerable in the instance of the woman's unilateral decision to end the marriage. It is unfortunate that the homicide archives from Canada, New South Wales, and Chicago do not include a coding of which spouse was pursuing the separation, in order to assess in what proportion of the estranged couples the separation was contested and by whom. But even if that information were available, there is no equivalent information for the population-at-large, which we would need to assess the risk to estranged wives as a function of her vs. his decision to quit the relationship. A few studies of separation and divorce have concluded that the wife was more often the "initiator" (e.g., Pettit, & Bloom, 1984; Thompson, & Spanier, 1983), but such self-reports are ambiguous. Certainly, men have abandoned marital and family relationships far more often than the reverse, and yet women may nevertheless have left abusive husbands more often than have such husbands voluntarily withdrawn from the relationship.

Fuller information on some cases from the Chicago police files supports the suggestion that spousal homicide follows the wife's decision to terminate the relationship much more often than the husband's. We have information bearing on who wanted the separation for 37 separated wife-victim cases in Chicago; it was the wife who wished to terminate the

relationship in all 37. In half of these cases, it was clear that the husband was trying without success to get his wife to reconcile. Comparable information was available for just 6 separated husband-victim cases, and again, the wife terminated the marriage in 5 of these, including 3 cases where husbands unsuccessfully attempted reconciliation. In the only spousal homicide case known to have occurred after male initiated separation, an estranged wife killed her husband, who had established a relationship with another woman, during an argument about his refusal to "take her to her mother's".

The decision to end a marriage usually precedes the physical separation, and manifestations of intention of terminating the relationship may also increase the risk of homicide while the couple still cohabit (Wallace, 1986). For example, we have additional information on impending dissolution of the marriage for 28 Chicago spouse killings in which the couple were still coresiding at the time of the homicide. The victims were 20 wives and 8 husbands. The husband was evidently distressed about the wife's intention to terminate the relationship in 15 of the 20 wife-victim cases and in 4 of the 8 husband-victim cases, whereas the wife was upset about the husband's intention to terminate the relationship in the other 4 husband-victim cases. Divorce plans were a subject of conflict, but it was not clear who was instigating marital dissolution in 4 wife-victim cases, and in the remaining wife-victim case, she ended the relationship because he had a new girlfriend. Thus, within this small sample of cases in which it was clear which party wanted to quit the relationship, it seems that in coresiding couples, as in separated couples, the wife's decision to leave was a more potent source of violent conflict than a corresponding decision by the husband.

The Psychology of the Coercive Control of Wives

When a wife is pursued and killed by a husband she has left, the killer's motive is not merely to be rid of her. Yet if keeping her is his aim, killing is even more clearly counterproductive. We propose that such homicides are the dysfunctionally extreme manifestations of violent inclinations whose lesser manifestations are effective in coercion: although uxoricide may seldom serve the interests of the killer, it is far from clear that the same can be said of sublethal wife abuse. A credible threat of violent death can very effectively control people, and the above evidence on risks to estranged wives suggests that such threats by husbands are often sincere. The coercive power of such a threat lies in the credibility of the threatener. However, threats are often bluffs, and accurate assessment of the risks upon deserting such a husband can mean life or death. In general, threats are unlikely to be carried out if they are too costly to the threatener. In the case of husbands threatening wives with death "if you ever leave me", the costs to the threatener include both the loss of the wife and the penalties associated with killing someone. Even if the threat is credible, a wife may accept the risk in terminating her marriage if she perceives greater danger to her children in staying than in leaving and/or if compliance with the threat means intolerable loss of control over self.

Unlike assaults or threats directed at strangers, the coercive use of violence in marital relations has had a legitimacy that has undoubtedly served to enhance the coercive power of the threats. Until recently, husbands were legally entitled under Anglo-American law to confine wives against their will (Dobash, & Dobash, 1979, 1984; Edwards, 1985). Persons who gave sanctuary to a fleeing wife, including even her relatives, were legally obliged to give her up or be liable for the tort of "harboring," and Englishmen remained entitled to restrain wives intent on leaving them until a 1973 ruling made such acts kidnappings (Atkins, & Hoggett, 1984).

The functionality of a masculine coercive psychology in the context of heterosexual relations has only recently begun to be explored in terms of situational and demographic variables (e.g., Gregor, 1990; Smuts, 1992; Smuts, & Smuts, 1993; Thornhill, & Thornhill, 1992; Wilson, & Daly, 1992a). Whether sexual coercion psychologically entails anything more than the intersection of sexual and coercive motives has yet to be elucidated (Wilson, & Daly, 1992d).

We have argued that violence against wives can best be understood as one outcome of a sexually proprietary masculine psychology, which treats wives as valued sexual and reproductive commodities that might be usurped by rivals (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Daly, & Wilson, 1988a; Wilson, 1989; Wilson, & Daly, 1992a). Violence against wives functions to deter wives from pursuing alternative relationships or opportunities that are not in the interests of the husband (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Daly, & Wilson, 1988; Wilson, 1989; Wilson, & Daly, 1992a, 1992c), whereas violence against male rivals functions to "protect" wives from their attentions, both courtly and coercive (Daly, & Wilson, 1988a). A question worthy of research is what determines whether husbands' violence will be directed at wives, rivals, or both.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing that women incur risk of severe violence at separation necessitates action to guarantee their safety, but the coercive use of such violence and threats implies more. Husbands threaten and use violence to constrain women's options, and continued failure to attend to these utilitarian aspects of violence against wives constitutes a denial of women's entitlement to autonomy. The effects of violence on women's lives will not be fully understood and countered until the question of the extent to which coercive violence serves the interests of its perpetrators is addressed.

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