

# Walden University

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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2010

ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Adult Male Perpetrators of  
Intimate Partner Violence

by

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M.A., The University of Akron, 1992  
B.A., Bowling Green State University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a term used to describe physical abuse, sexual abuse, or psychological abuse of a spouse or partner. Past research has identified a number of factors associated with having an increased propensity toward IPV, including exposure to domestic violence as a child; history of drug and alcohol use; younger age at the time of arrest; and absence of specific stake-in-conformity variables such as employment, parenthood, and community involvement. There remains, however, a gap in the literature examining whether there is a link between specific socioemotional factors and a propensity toward IPV. This study employed an ex post facto causal-comparative research design to examine whether perpetrators of IPV differ from the norm with respect to emotional intelligence (EI). In addition, the impact of traumatic life histories was evaluated to examine the influence on EI. Two instruments, a demographic questionnaire and the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory, were used to collect data from 44 adult male IPV perpetrators who have been referred for IPV intervention programming. Hypotheses were tested using a combination of parametric procedures to test for significant differences in mean EI between subgroups, as defined by the categorical demographic variables, including trauma history. This study found that the EI of IPV perpetrators was significantly lower than that of nonperpetrators, particularly with respect to interpersonal EI. This researcher hypothesized that the batterers' abuse histories would significantly impact EI, but the data did not support this conclusion. The social change implications resulting from this study include suggestions on how to make improvements in the assessment and treatment planning of perpetrators of IPV resulting in a potential reduction in the incidence of domestic violence.

PREVIEW

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father-in-law, Don Motz. Although he passed away prior to the completion of this project, he provided me with never-ending support and encouragement. He will not be forgotten.

PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Stephen Lifrak, Dr. Maggie Martin, and Dr. Richard Waite. I would like to provide a special word of thanks to Dr. Stephen Lifrak for his guidance and support throughout this process. I also would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to my wife, Gay Welty, for her ongoing love, support, and understanding. She has had to take on additional family responsibilities throughout this process and I am indebted to her for these sacrifices. My son, Evan, was just a baby when I started this process, and he is now in elementary school. He has been understanding and supportive of his father over these last several years and has, at times, had to go without his father's desired attention. He has never once complained, and I am humbled and honored by this. Lastly, I must pay tribute to my wonderful parents, Chet and Mavis Welty, and my parents-in-law, Don and Yvonne Motz, all of whom have encouraged me and guided me throughout my life.



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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Introduction

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2006), there are nearly 5.3 million episodes of intimate partner violence (IPV) involving females each year in the United States. This number accounts for 35 of every 1,000 females who report being victims of rape or physical assault at the hands of their partners each year. A recent compilation of family violence statistics by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ, 2005) estimated that nearly 49% of all family violence involves crimes against female partners. This study compared homicides of intimates by gender from 1976 to 2005.

Although the trend for both groups has shown a reduction over the years, the reduction has been marginal for female homicides, whereas the homicide rate of males has dropped by 75%. The fact that 65% of intimate homicides over the past 30 years have resulted in female victims, coupled with the fact that the rate of male violence resulting in the death of an intimate partner has changed very little over the past 30 years, underscores the point that males are clearly more dangerous with respect to IPV (DoJ, 2005). In consideration of these statistics, it is important to know that individuals who are properly identified and who complete a batterer intervention treatment program are less likely to reoffend (Hanson & Wallace-Capretta, 2004).

There can be little disagreement about the negative effect of this problem on society. This problem puts female partners at risk, and the modeling of violent interactions between partners in front of children contributes to the transmission of family violence to the next generation (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Stith et al., 2000). The

researcher's interest in this topic was motivated by the hope that by improving batterer intervention programs, family violence can be reduced, and the transgenerational transmission of violence can be positively impacted. The implications for social change are tremendous: Because of the devastation that IPV and domestic violence has with respect to how families function and how these individuals function within society, this type of research is quite meaningful.

In addition to the negative impact on the quality of life of the couple, that is, the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, early exposure to domestic violence places children at risk for many other types of difficulties, including academic underachievement, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Jack, Dutton, Webb, & Ryan, 1995; Stith et al., 2000). This study was designed to assess the degree to which the male partner's emotional intelligence (EI) impacts his propensity toward IPV, as well as the degree to which early childhood exposure to traumatic experiences impacts EI. These discoveries may be used to increase current understanding of how batterers are psychologically different from the norm. The benefits of stopping batterers from continuing abusive behaviors multiply exponentially as one considers the impact upon future generations. Social change becomes possible when the problem is viewed through this lens.

### Background of the Problem

The study of domestic violence has been an area of academic interest affecting public policy and legislation since the 1970s. However, scholarly inquiry into the etiology of this problem has been insufficient (Sellers & Cochran, 2005). In 1975, there

were only half a dozen emergency shelters in the nation designed to serve battered women and their children. By 1995, there were 1,250 shelters, and with increased government funding, they now include professionals trained to work with this population (Roberts & Lewis, 2000). The past 20 years of research on domestic violence has helped to bring about better coordination of services and treatment programming. During the last decade, scientists have conducted well-controlled studies designed to examine what occurs within the relationships of couples in which the situation becomes violent (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999). The National Institute of Justice (2003) examined whether batterer intervention programs really work at reducing recidivism (as cited in Jackson et al., 2003). This study created as many questions as it did answers, but it also provided a good summary of the types of problems that batterer intervention programs must face.

For instance, Jackson et al. (2003) questioned the utility of applying a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment. The Duluth model assumes a power imbalance and implies that all batterers seek to control their partners. Although this is one of the more popular models for batterer intervention programs, Jackson et al. suggested that this orientation may not necessarily be applicable for all offenders. This feminist approach de-emphasizes the importance of unique psychological factors, such as EI, and the interaction that the batterers' own trauma histories may have with respect to their current functioning.

Jackson et al. (2003), as well as Levesque, Gelles, and Velicer (2000), acknowledged the importance of stake-in-conformity variables, such as having a desire to maintain positive relationships with children or preserving a particular type of lifestyle,

and they recommended that such variables be considered during assessment and treatment. A motivation to improve understanding in the areas of emotional-social intelligence and attachment with significant others may be fostered by the presence of certain stake-in-conformity variables. Jackson et al. suggested that “[y]ounger men with no stable residence were significantly more likely to report committing acts of severe physical violence against their partners than their older, more residentially stable counterparts” (p. 10). Other examples of having a stake in conformity would include maintaining a profession or career, being involved in civic duties, or having a commitment to a religion or a church. Feminist models of treatment tend not to consider the importance of stake-in-conformity variables and the relationship of these factors toward batterers’ motivation to change.

In addition to philosophical and theoretical differences among programs, the length of time in treatment and the level to which the legal system remains involved with batterers seem to be important factors relative to reductions in reoffending behavior (Jackson et al., 2003). There appears to be tremendous variability among jurisdictions and programs with respect to these variables. As Bennet and Williams (2001) pointed out, some of the variability that exists among programs is connected to the history of how batterer programs came into existence. Batterer programs began to emerge following the women’s movement in the 1970s. Three types of programs began to emerge as the result of the clinical orientations and worldviews of the individuals who were running the programs. The profeminist approach viewed domestic violence as an extension of men’s effort to establish social control over women, whereas marital and systemic therapists



were concerned about the interaction styles of the couples and endorsed a shared responsibility philosophy. The cognitive behavioralists operated under the assumption that batterers are responsible for their behavior and that the behavior is connected to a learning process in which aggression has been part of the batterers' life experience (Bevan & Higgins, 2002). The three treatment paradigms have approached the process differently, and each continues to have merit in its own right.

This researcher suggests that including the study of EI within this population may serve as a binding agent for the three major models of batterer treatment. EI considers the underlying dynamics that may be connected to the reasons batterers find it necessary to exert control over their partners. It also provides a mechanism by which one can understand from the batterers' perspective why they may possess a problematic interaction style. Lastly, this researcher is specifically concerned about how the life experience of batterers and early exposure to domestic violence and trauma within their own family units may influence EI and the propensity toward IPV.

In an effort to gain some control over the quality and effectiveness of batterer intervention programs, states have begun to pass legislation to help structure programs through an improved coordinated community response. This type of coordination involves law enforcement, the prosecutor's office, probation systems, and treatment providers (Uekert, 2003). Thirty states have passed legislation governing batterer intervention programs. Mohr-Carney and Buttell (2006) pointed out that as the legislation is being designed to establish best practice models for programs, research also is challenging the effectiveness of these same programs. This researcher contends that one

reason for the criticism about the effectiveness of these programs is that the variety of programs does not include the evaluation of the batterers' current EI. Expecting offenders to benefit from programs without this essential baseline information would be similar to expecting children with significant learning impairments to benefit from traditional reading programs without modifications. Despite the lack of consensus about the issues related to program design and effectiveness, there has been consensus that action needs to be taken with this group and that the response to this problem should include treatment for batterers.

Babcock and Steiner (1999) examined the impact of three approaches to working with men convicted of crimes of IPV: court-mandated domestic violence treatment, domestic violence treatment with a substance abuse background, and incarceration in lieu of treatment. This study was particularly important because it was the first of its kind to include an incarceration-without-treatment group. After controlling for the impact of demographics and criminal record, the results of this 2-year longitudinal study provided support for the need to intervene clinically with these individuals. Babcock and Steiner found that the batterers who received incarceration alone in lieu of treatment had the highest rates of recidivism.

Criminal statutes categorize crimes of IPV and domestic violence in ways that impose restrictions on how these problems are managed (Dugan, 2002). The legal system is designed to intervene when there is observable physical abuse, and because of this, it is uncommon for abusive behavior associated with the early stages of domestic violence to be recognized outside of the family. Episodes of physical aggression represent the violent

climax for male batterers, but these episodes do not sufficiently describe the suffering experienced by the female victims or the general quality of the relationship. Physical violence is one characteristic of these relationships, but the dynamics of power and control become manifested in other ways, such as through mental, emotional, and sexual forms of domination (Beeble, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2007; Tuerkheimer, 2004).

From the perspective of the arresting officer and the casual outside observer, one may be led to believe that an episode of domestic violence episode is an isolated incident. However, once a male batterer is in a treatment program, it is common to find that this episode represents a chronic and pervasive problem within the relationship. This researcher is curious to know whether the chronic nature of this problem is related to an EI deficit. Metaphorically, one may conceptualize this relationship as being similar to the situation of working with a student with a reading disability. Increasing the number of books that the individual is expected to read will have little impact on the individual's ability to actually read the books. Without assessment and intervention, the student's difficulty with reading may remain a chronic problem.

Understanding the backgrounds of the perpetrators of IPV is essential because it provides important clues why individuals respond differently within an intimate relationship. Mazerolle and Maahs (2003) summarized the relevance of understanding the backgrounds of the perpetrators and the problems of IPV from a developmental or lifespan perspective. The life histories of the perpetrators often contain traumatic experiences, including child abuse and exposure to interparental violence. These early life experiences often pose particular emotional and interpersonal challenges for the

perpetrators that can interfere with their ability to manage intimate partner relationships (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Hanson & Wallace-Capretta, 2004). Arsenio (2003) hypothesized that early problems within the parent-child relationship and family environment are critical to the formation of EI.

#### Statement of the Problem

Without adequate research into the etiology of the problem of spousal abuse, it is exceedingly difficult to differentiate effective treatment programs from ineffective treatment programs. Consequently, rates of repeat abuse tend to be high, and women and children continue to be at risk for reexposure to domestic violence. Meta-analyses of batterer intervention programs have found that the individuals involved in programs receive only a small benefit from treatment, and that for the most part, they remain at high risk for reoffending (Babcock & Steiner, 1999; Feder & Wilson, 2005).

Moreover, few studies in the field of domestic violence have effectively connected theory to practical interventions designed to ameliorate battering behavior by men. Sellers and Cochran (2005) recognized the applicability of intergenerational transmission theory and social learning theory when working with domestic violence. They failed to provide suggestions, however, regarding the ways in which practitioners can begin to connect theory with applied interventions for the purpose of treatment. In a recent study on the typologies of batterers, Chiffrieller, Hennessy, and Zappone (2006) concluded that there is a need for more empirical research designed to study the psychology of batterers with a focus on how to intervene with these individuals.

This researcher feels that there is a need to understand how the underlying dynamics of EI influence the personality and IPV in batterers. Specifically, this study was designed to determine whether there are deficiencies in the EI of batterers when compared to a normal sample. An extensive review of the literature on IPV and EI found only two published studies to date that have examined this conjectured relationship (Harmon, 2001; Winters, Clift, & Dutton, 2004).

#### Theoretical Basis

Attachment theory and social-cognitive theory are two schools of thought that provide a foundation for beginning to understand why some men are prone to become perpetrators of IPV, but others are not (Buttelli, Muldoon, & Carney, 2005; Sellers & Cochran, 2005). Each theory offers a contribution to describe how emotionally intelligent behavior emerges or fails to develop and the ways in which this outcome can be linked to emotional response patterns in intimate partner relationships (Kesner, Julian, & McKenry, 1997; Stith et al., 2000).

Male batterers often have impoverished emotional repertoires and are consequently perceived as inflexible and intolerant, and as having lower levels of moral reasoning (Buttelli, 2003). Bowlby's attachment theory provides a developmental perspective that describes how early parent-child relationships can begin to shape the way in which the male child regulates emotions and how he develops belief systems that will serve as templates to be used in the management of future intimate relationships (Bowlby & Salter Ainsworth, 1991; Kesner et al., 1997). Attachment theory distinguishes specific parent-child patterns of interacting that may be the precursor for some men to become

more prone to have difficulty in relationships, which includes resorting to violence with an intimate partner (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000).

A longitudinal study conducted by Simpson, Collins, Tran, and Haydon (2007) tested developmental hypotheses originating from attachment theory to derive some conclusions relative to intimacy and styles of emotional expression that could be observed later in life. According to attachment theory, patterns of emotional responding begin to become formed within the first year of life. Secure attachments between the child and caregiver are created through sensitive parental responding. This type of relationship fosters a sense of efficacy in the child, which gives him the ability and freedom to modulate his own feeling states. The sensitive and caring parent-child relationship allows positive and negative affective states to be managed with flexibility and a sense of openness.

Conversely, parents who reject their male child's needs and those who fail to respond sensitively create for the child a defensive response where the child finds it necessary to mask his negative affective states in an attempt to avoid rejection. This defensive strategy is employed out of feelings of insecurity with the hope to remain in close proximity to the caregiver. The avoidant attachment style that develops is a result of attempting to manage insecurity. The child who emerges out of this style of parenting ends up striving for interpersonal autonomy and having a need for control (Simpson et al., 2007).

Bowlby and Salter Ainsworth (1991) postulated that when a baby experiences prolonged separation or rejection, or when the mother directs the majority of her attention

to someone else, the infant can become frustrated, experience grief, and develop feelings of hostility toward the mother. Bowlby considered the infant's crying, smiling, and cuddling to be behaviors with evolutionary value. These behaviors were seen as attempts by the baby to keep his caregiver within close proximity for the purpose of safety and security. When the parent-child relationship does not provide safety and security, the child develops defense mechanisms to cope with the resulting anxiety and fear. This type of failure to respond adequately to the needs of the child creates cognitive schemas that serve to play a mediating role in how intimacy is managed in future relationships.

Brown (2004) suggested that insecure attachment patterns and the corresponding internal representations that are created may serve as triggers for violence in adult relationships with intimate partners. Violence becomes an expression of the perpetrator's attachment needs and represents an infantile attempt to keep his partner in close proximity. The aggressive response is a result of an activation of attachment behavior. This behavior is tainted by a cognitive model or internal representation created as the result of a childhood situation involving an unavailable attachment figure. The perpetrator may view his partner as insensitive to his desires and wishes, and he consequently may act out aggressively (Brown, 2004; Mayseless, 1991). Because research has suggested that early problems with maternal attachment has been linked with later aggressive patterns only in boys, the socialization and learning experiences seem to take on an important explanatory role in understanding the etiology of IPV (Worley, Walsh, & Lewis, 2004).

The social learning theorists have added to attachment theory by proving a developmental perspective that encompasses factors from both family and society. According to social learning theory, children learn through conditioning by modeling and imitating the behavior that they have witnessed or have observed being reinforced. According to this theoretical perspective, children who witness violence between their parents or caregivers as they grow up learn to be more tolerant of this behavior and are more inclined to engage in this style of interaction when they become involved in adult intimate relationships (Stith et al., 2000). Research on the intergenerational transmission of violence has suggested that there is a correlation between detrimental early life experiences, including neglect, abuse, and parenting style, and the perpetuation of domestic violence later in life (Bandura, 1969; Bevan & Higgins, 2002; Dixon, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Browne, 2005; Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

Unlike other learning theories that stress the significance of external reinforcement through rewards or punishment, Bandura (1963) introduced the idea that learning can occur vicariously in one's social environment through exposure to models. Bandura's more recent work emphasized the role of self-efficacy. He altered his social learning theory and renamed it the social-cognitive theory to more accurately capture the important role of self-determination (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Pajares, 2004).

Bandura (1974) also pointed out that the mind serves as a mediating force with respect to the way in which behavior is shaped. Although behavioral contingencies and the pairing of events may be important, it is the individual who creates a mental representation of any particular event to make meaning of the event. Bandura (1974)