

Domestic violence abstract analysis

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Executive Summary The question of why men or women abuse and why men and women are reluctant to end abusive relationships may seem abstract, but theories have important implications how to understand the problem (Sampson, 2006). “ An ecological perspective conceptualizes violence as a complex problem rooted in the interactions among various factors at the individual, family and community/societal levels of an individual’s environment (WHO, 2002).

Learned helplessness has been applied to domestic violence and battered women cases, due to the frame of mind that women are limited to, as well as to answer questions such as why women will not leave an abusive environment. According to Barnett (1993), sex-roles play a major part in the perceptions of women; for example in regards to socialization women are taught that the norm is to rely upon a male partner for their attachment and support. On the opposite end, men are taught to be aggressive; women are instructed to be soft, and nurturing.

Domestic violence policies are designed to either reduce subsequent violence after an incident, or to deter potential violence. A new proposed social work policy or program that stems from learned helplessness theory would ensure the reporting of possible domestic violence more prominently. Recommendations for further research, practice, and social work policy should focus more on the long term effects of domestic violence within families. A new proposed social work policy or program that stems from learned helplessness theory would ensure the reporting of possible domestic violence more prominently.

Abstract Domestic Violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that adults or adolescents use against their current or former intimate partners. The relationship may be one of marriage, cohabitation, or dating. There are several different aspects of domestic violence that include: physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, emotional, and economical. This paper will discuss theories related to domestic violence, social work policies or programs that logically stems from the theory and recommendations for further research, practice and social work policy.

Domestic Violence: A Social Analysis Domestic Violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that adults or adolescents use against their current or former intimate partners. The relationship may be one of marriage, cohabitation, or dating. There are several different aspects of domestic violence that includes: physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, emotional, and economical. An estimated twelve million people are abused in the United States alone every year. Every two minutes, someone in the US is sexually assaulted.

One in six women and one in thirty-three men have been victims of attempted or completed rapes in their lifetime. Fifteen percent of sexual assault and rape victims are under the age of 12. One in four women in the United States will be abused in her lifetime. These are not small numbers. This is more than seven times as many people as die of heart disease, cancer, car accidents, and firearms combined. Ecological Theory for Domestic Violence The ecological theory is useful in application to cases of domestic violence in that it incorporates the complexities of life to understand the multi-faceted nature of violence.

An ecological perspective conceptualizes violence as a complex problem rooted in the interactions among various factors at the individual, family and community/societal levels of an individual's environment (WHO, 2002). Four Levels of the WorldHealthOrganization Ecological Model On the individual level, biological and personal factors including personal history can increase the likelihood of being a victim or a perpetrator of violence. Other contributing factors include age, personality disorders, substance abuse, education and income.

This comprises what an individual brings with them to the relationship including values, attitudes, beliefs and subjective perceptions (WHO, 2002, Carlson, 1984). The relationship level includes family and friends which incorporates the dynamics between family members. This close inner circle and relationship patterns influences behavior and contributes to their life experiences. This level focuses on the nature of family life, the quality of the spousal relationship which often interrelates on the individual level (Carlson, 1984).

The community level refers to settings such as work environment, schools and neighborhoods. An important component on the opposite end of the spectrum is the lack of social networks, poverty and community involvement. The community level can refer to the economic realities including employment versus unemployment, crime level and law enforcement (Carlson, 1984). The societal level looks at broad factors that either encourages or discourages family violence.

This can include cultural norms regarding gender roles, parent-child relationships, educational and economic trends. This level comprises a wide

array of different variables that can impact all other levels including exposure to media, which can encourage or inhibit violence, and the general acceptance of violence, availability of firearms and response of law enforcement. Our belief system affects us in how we perceive others regarding sex-role stereotypes and sexism (Carlson, 1984). Basic Premise of the Ecological Theory

The basic premise of the ecological theory is that families interact with their environment to form an ecosystem. Families carry out biological, economic and psychosocial and nurturance functions for the good of itself as well as the good of society. All the peoples of the world are interdependent; there is a balance between cooperation and in the ecosystem and with the demands of the individual for autonomy and freedom (Bubloz & Sontag, 1993). Family ecological theory assumptions. Families and the environment are interdependent. * Families are a part of the total life system, so they are interdependent with other forms of life. * Adaptation is a continuing process in families. * All parts of the environment are interrelated and influence each other. * Families interact with multiple environments. * Interactions between families and environments are guided by two sets of rules which include physical and biological laws of nature and human-derived rules (social norms). Environments do not determine human behavior but pose limitations and constraints as well as possibilities and opportunities for families. * Decision making is the central control process in families that directs actions for attaining individual and family goals (Bubloz & Sontag, 1993). Application of Assumptions The question of why men or women abuse and why men and women are reluctant to end abusive relationships may seem abstract, but

theories have important implications how to understand the problem (Sampson, 2006). Sociologists became interested in examining the effects of the environment on the social organization and thus and it became an approach to the general study of social change” (Dale, Smith, Norlin & Chess, 2009). There are differing theories concerning abuse, but families have to adapt, respond and change their environment for survival following the assumption in the ecological theory. In the same manner that society does, families accept violence as a means to resolve conflict.

They suggest that abusive behavior is modeled for males in their family of origin (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). “ Family violence is shaped by the personal and marital history of the parents, children and others who comprise the family” (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 374). This follows the assumption of the interaction between families and environments are guided by human-derived rules and what is considered normal for a particular family. Violence is used by the most powerful family members to maintain their dominant position (Kurz, 1989).

Lower income levels will show higher rates of intimate abuse, and violence may be a more acceptable form of settling disputes (Sampson, 2006). This is relevant on all levels to the individual, their relationships, community and societal level in regard to the corresponding stress on an individual and their family. The assumption of families and their environment are interdependent, that all parts of the environment are interrelated and influence each other and also as to what is accepted as a part of our individual belief system (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

This follows along with the assumption that environments do not determine human behavior, but pose limitations, constraints as well as opportunities. Social support, the lack of social support, and negative life events can have an impact on how women respond and react psychologically whereas, strong social support can protect women's functioning in traumatic situation (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann, 2001). Strengths of the Ecological Theory Strengths of the ecological theory in consideration of domestic violence is that it takes into account each system level in its contextual ature in regard to the person's life and the diversity of the circumstances. Each family experiences stress in unique ways and families respond differently to different stressors. " Because family stressors are different, it is impossible to stereotype families in relation to their stress dynamics" (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 373). Limitations of the Ecological Theory One of the limitations of the theory is that while it allows for a broad spectrum of causal factors and assumptions, it doesn't specifically identify every factor that might contribute to couple violence.

Learned Helplessness Theory for Domestic Violence Learned helplessness has been applied to domestic violence and battered women cases, due to the frame of mind that women are limited to, as well as to answer questions such as why women will not leave an abusive environment. The principle of learned helplessness according to Seligman follows the assumptions that a person in certain situations will feel a lack of control, and symptoms that often times resembled depression (Dale et al, 2009, p. 31. Learned helplessness is a concept that is cognitive in nature, formed by role-observing, and strengthened through reward and punishment (Barnett &

LaViolette, 1993). Roles According to Barnett (1993), sex-roles play a major part in the perceptions of women; for example in regards to socialization women are taught that the norm is to rely upon a male partner for their attachment and support. On the opposite end, men are taught to be aggressive; women are instructed to be soft, and nurturing.

Even in work related environments, women will often decline employment options that will separate them from their partners, or take them away from their learned roles as mothers (Barnette & LaViolette, 1993). A quote from Louis Wyse sums up the sexual role in reference to domestic violence “ Men are taught to apologize for their weaknesses, women for their strengths” (p. 1). This powerlessness is evident in cases of domestic violence in which the woman stays in a violent situation even though there is outward support; it is also evident that women who do not receive family or community support will accept the idea hat the man holds the power (Walker, 2009). Learned helplessness is described as starting at a young age for women; typically as daughters we learn our roles through our mothers and their roles as a caretaker, wife, and mother. Young women learn about self-respectbased on how others perceive them in regards to being liked or not. Into adulthood, women continue their journey to self-identification through the relationships, therefore, the skills and “ norms” that were previously practiced in their family environments becomes a reflex (Barnett, & LaViolette, 1993).

A common misconception from the learning aspect of the theory is that women who are beat, were raised in a dysfunctional environment, and therefore do not have the capacity or knowledge to leave. In actuality the women stay are taught to “ stand by your man” by their mothers or female

models (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993, p. 12). No matter how severe the domestic violence was, some women stated “ With time I just got accustomed to the abuse” (Walker, 2009, p. 346). This is known as the chameleon effect, in which the women, due to their helplessness, adapt to their environment in order to cope.

Cycle of Violence A theory known as the Cycle of Violence was developed to explain the ups and downs of battering incidents, or rather the dilemma of staying or leaving. This is a three phase cycle that covers “(1) tension-building accompanied with rising sense of danger, (2) the acute battering incident, and (3) loving-contrition” (Walker, 2009, p. 91). The first phase refers to the acts that come before physical violence, such as confrontation, hitting objects, threats, and aggressive outbursts (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993).

According to Walker (2009) these aggressive actions are an attempt to display dissatisfaction, in which the woman will try to correct or improve his mood in anyway necessary. Reinforcement comes from the effectiveness in her efforts to keep the situation/violence in control; however, this only lasts for a short period of time. This thought process is unrealistic in nature because the woman generally thinks that she is controlling the man in keeping him calm and satisfied by performing tasks that the male figure typically wishes to be completed (i. e. ironing, cooking, cleaning) (2009).

Phase one continues until further escalation into the second phase of actual physical abuse. At this point the woman feels that she has lost her control over her spouse or partner due to the eruption of anger. Phase two, the acute battering incident, is characterized by feelings of fear and

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helplessness. The woman will take this situation as an “ accident” or make up excuses for the man as well as for her. Self-esteem is affected in many ways and further torments her into thinking “ I cannot live a good life without him; nobody would love me, or care about me, or want me but him.

I am worth nothing” (Walker, 2009 p 346). In terms of control, women in studies admitted to feeling powerless. “ I had no freedom, no money, occasionally he let me out to go to the grocery store down the road but if I didn’t return on time, he hit me badly” (1993, p. 345). Many women will stay in a dangerous living situation because of a concept known as learned helplessness. This is also known as the “ honeymoon phase” and phase three of the cycle of violence (love contrition) (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993, p. 16).

Within this phase more positive reinforcement takes place; the batterer will apologize, and attempt to mend their bruises with romance, gifts, and thoughtful acts (1993). The husband or abuser will often promise to never harm the woman again. In a study completed at a women’s shelter, 73% thought “ he will change” at this point; this is also the number one reason for women who stay in an abusive relationship; number two reason being the fear of revenge (1993, p. 17). **Learned Helplessness Assumptions** * A person’s concept of self will often be later displayed through behavior. The concept is cognitive in nature and is a frame of mind that leads a person to feel a loss of control. * Individuals with learned helplessness have a self-esteem problem in regards to taking things personally; they also feel that it is a permanent aspect, as well as pervasive (taking over their entire life) (Dale, et al. , 2009). * These examples assumptions are displayed in the cycle of violence. Past, Current, and Future Work Some of the very first case

studies on learned helplessness were developed to answer the question as to why battered women will not leave an abusive situation.

Seligman answered this question by using dogs in an experiment in which they were repeatedly shocked. The dogs were unable to escape from the physical pain, even when an apparent escape was available. Seligman discussed and labeled learned helplessness due to the fact that many factors are affected in regards to animals and humans, such as behavior, cognitive abilities, and motivation to find an escape (Barnett & La Violette, 1993). In regards to current work, experimental groups are being devised to inquire about neurological aspects.

Neuroscientists are looking at serotonin release in animals in reference to stress which is a major factor in learned helplessness. Many of the experiments are finding that the dogs in the studies are actually not in a state of learned helplessness, but simply in a frame of mind that is natural to them (Dingfelder, 2009). There are many problems and limitations with studies involving learned helplessness. Many surround the fact that there has been no research that confirms or denies that possibility that learned helplessness is a true factor in domestic violence.

The second is in regards to the sample type. The women who are in the studies for abuse are often in shelters and therefore found an escape from the violence. It is hard to determine the reasons for the women who don't leave the domestic violence due to their animosity (Miller, 1981). Future research should look at police investigation or in instances where a domestic dispute is called in, a social worker should be present to determine such factors and lend a more insightfulness.

Other limitations within the research of learned helplessness lie within the reason for the studies. There has been no research to determine how this theory and concepts will decrease domestic violence. The only way to end the helpless phase is to have a support system who will inform of ways to help such as self-talk and improving ones self-esteem. Domestic Violence Policy Domestic violence policies are designed to either reduce subsequent violence after an incident (e. g. , statues authorizing the courts to issue protection orders) or to deter potential violence (e. . , changing domestic violence offenses from misdemeanors to felonies) (Black, p. 1087, 1971.) The most common misconception about domestic violence offenders is that “ nothing will be done to them (the offenders.) They (the police) just talk to them and let them go. ” Bachman and Coker (1995) found that women are less likely to seek police help if the perpetrator had previously victimized them (p. 95.) They suggest this finding may be partially explained by “ learned helplessness” found in women who are battered over time (Walker, 1979, p. .) Another plausible explanation is that previously victimized women may have been disappointed by earlier criminal justice responses (ecological perspective). The ecological perspective is important in many fields as a way to understand why individuals take or do not take certain actions in society. This is important research for politicians developing policies that are aimed at changing a social problem such as domestic violence, poverty or environmental degradation. Domestic Violence Laws In 2010, at the request of Missouri’s Attorney General Chris Koster, a Task Force on Domestic Violence was established which is comprised of legislators, the coalition’s CEO and the Missouri Office of Prosecution Services

director; to hold state wide hearings, review 30 years of existing state domestic violence laws, inquire about statewide and local practices of intervention, and issue reports recommending legislative and public policy changes” (New Missouri Law: 2011 p. 1, 2011.) As a result of this task force, several domestic violence laws have been changed.

Some of the laws changed are expanding protections orders violations that trigger arrest. Before this change, respondents could only be arrested when they abused, stalked or violated conditions of the Order of Protection relating to child custody, communication with the petitioner of entry in to the petitioner’s home or dwelling unit. Since these changes; “ respondents can be arrested for entering a petitioner’s place of employment or school or are within a certain distance of the petitioner or a child of the petitioner” (Missouri Law 455. 085. 7-8 and 455. 538. 4(1) RSMo. Also reimbursement maximums were set for sexual assault forensics evidence exams. Before this change “ victims of domestic violence who were ordered to do a rape kit were charged exorbitant fees for the exam” (Missouri Law 595. 220. 1(2) RSMo.) Proposed Social Work Policy or Program A new proposed social work policy or program that stems from learned helplessness theory would ensure the reporting of possible domestic violence more prominently. This could include possible engaging of the media and public in creating new social and cultural norms that discourage violence against women.

Expand mandatory reporting of possible sexual abuse from mandated reported to any person who observes a person being subjected to sexual abuse. Currently there is a proposed bill in the Missouri House Senate regarding this idea as related to children. Senate Bill 457 would require

mandatory child abuser reporting to the children's Division when a sexual offense has been witnessed by any person who observes the child being subjected to sexual abuse (2012). This author feels this bill should be expanded to all persons who are being subjected to domestic violence and sexual abuse.

A new proposed social work policy or program that stems from learned helplessness theory would ensure the reporting of possible domestic violence more prominently. Early identification of those at risk for victimization can be significant in preventing future violence. Also to reduce re-victimization, increase prison time for perpetrators of domestic violence. Currently there is a Missouri Senate House Bill that is requesting that community level supervision be offered for non-violent offenders.

Senate Bill 1525 shifts from incarceration of certain offenders to community level supervision to reduce the state's rapidly growing prison costs (2012.) This means that sexual violence offenders will be put on probation and allowed to live in the same community as their victim. Currently the authorized dispositions for felony convictions of sexual abuse or domestic violence include a term of imprisonment, a fine if the offense is a Class C or D felony and a period of probation (Missouri sentencing laws: Section 560. 11, RSMo.) Currently, authorized dispositions for felony convictions include a term of imprisonment, a fine if the offense is a Class C or D felony (Missouri sentencing laws: Section 560. 111, RSMo) and a period of probation. In addition, the execution of the sentence may be suspended and the person placed on probation or the imposition of the sentence may be suspended,

with or without placing the person on probation (Missouri sentencing laws: Section 557. 011, RSMo). Future Policies

Recommendations for further research, practice, and social work policy should focus more on the long term effects of domestic violence within families. However, it has been noted that victims of domestic violence, mainly battered women, suffer physical and mental problems. Studying long-term effects of these injuries may give insight to PTSD and allow for better treatment. “ Battering is the single major cause of injury to women, more significant than auto accidents, rapes, or muggings” (Georgia Department of Human Resources Family Violence Manual, p. , 1992). Many of the physical injuries sustained by battered women seem to cause medical difficulties as women grow older. Arthritis, hyper-tension and heart disease have been identified by battered women as directly caused or aggravated by domestic violence suffered early in their adult lives. Data suggests that one-third of the children who witness domestic violence demonstrate significant behavioral and/or emotional problems, including psychosomatic disorders, stuttering, anxiety and fears, sleep disruption, excessive crying and school problems.

Data also suggests that boys who witness domestic violence are more likely to inflict severe violence as adults. Data involving girls suggest that girls who witness maternal abuse may tolerate abuse as adults more than girls who do not. These negative effects may be diminished if the families could benefit from intervention by the law and domestic violence programs. “ Domestic violence is not impulsive, but a purposeful behavior meant to confuse and

control the victim. It is not an isolated incident but rather a pattern of repeated behaviors.

It can be physical, verbal, emotional, or psychological and the relationship may be one of marriage, cohabitation, or dating. Domestic violence is a severe problem in our community that results in shattered homes and damages lives. Very few victims of domestic violence will tell anyone—not even a friend, a relative, a neighbor, or the police. Victims come from all walks of life. Domestic violence is a social work issue that needs to be dealt with. ” (Christos House, Sherry Fohey, 2012.)

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