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Criminal History and Assault of Dating Partners: The Role of Type of Prior Crime, Age of Onset, and Gender

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Some studies of assaults on intimate partners have found that most of the perpetrators are not violent outside the family, which suggests a specialized type of crime. However, other studies found domestic violence offenders tend to have extensive criminal histories. To further investigate the extent to which partner assaults are part of a more general pattern of criminal behavior or a specialized type of crime, we studied the dating relationships of 653 university students. Thirty-one percent reported assaulting a partner in the previous 12 months. The rate of assault on partners by females did not differ significantly for males (29%) and females (32%). We also found high rates of other self-reported crime, and much higher rates by males. For example, over one half of the male students and almost one third of the female students reported having stolen money. The male students reported an average of 3.4 crimes committed, and the female students an average of 1.4 crimes. These high crime rates and gender differences are consistent with many previous studies. Logistic regression analysis revealed that a history of prior criminal acts is associated with an increased probability of assaulting a partner. The relationship was greater when there was prior violent crime compared to property crime, when there was early onset of criminal behavior, and when the offender was female. The implications of the findings for understanding partner assaults, criminal careers, and gender differences in the etiology of violence against intimate partners are discussed.

Barely a generation ago, criminologists, criminal justice professionals, and lay persons tended to regard assaulting a spouse or other intimate partner as not a "real crime"; or at least as something quite different from other types of crime. This is illustrated by the training manual of the International Association of Chiefs of Police which, until pressure from the women's movement forced a change, advised police officers to avoid arrests in "domestic disturbance" cases (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1976). The image of domestic assaults as different from other crime was also illustrated by an element of the police culture in some jurisdictions known as the "stitch rule." This advised against arrests unless there was an injury that required stitches. The nationwide shift in the 1980s to a policy recommending or mandating arrest (Sherman,

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Schmidt, & Rogan, 1992) indicates the change. At the same time, the fact that such legislation was needed to enforce something that was already a criminal offense, indicates the persistence of the traditional view tolerating a certain level of assault within the family (Straus & Hotaling, 1980) and as somehow less criminal than stranger assault.

Although most states have now enacted legislation to make it explicit that domestic assaults are as criminal as other assaults, that does not resolve important theoretical and practical issues concerning this crime. Among the theoretical issues is whether partner assaults have the same etiology as nonintimate assaults, much less the same etiology as property crime. The issue is important for both a general understanding of crime, and also because, if the etiology of partner assault is different, it suggests that different policies and interventions may be needed to most adequately deal with partner assault. The research reported in this article was therefore undertaken to examine certain aspects of the etiology of partner assault.

VIOLENCE IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Although the prevalence and severity of crime by university students can be presumed to be relatively low compared to some other populations of equivalent age, there is at least one type of crime for which the data indicate a high prevalence rate among students: physically assaulting a partner in a dating or cohabiting relationship. More than a decade ago, Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) identified 11 studies that provided rates for physical assault of dating partners. The rates ranged from 20% to 59%. Since then, several times that number of studies have been conducted and found similarly high prevalence rates. Because of the high prevalence rates, and also because college students are about one third of the 18- to 22-year-old population, a student sample is highly appropriate for research on physical assault against a partner in a dating or cohabiting relationship.

In addition to the intrinsic importance of information on the etiology of partner assault among this section of the population, a study of partner assault among college students provides an opportunity to gain further understanding of three important and more generic aspects of the etiology of crime:

1. Gender differences in the prevalence of crime;
2. The extent to which criminal behavior is "specialized" on one type of crime or a general tendency; and
3. Whether early onset of crime is indicative of a more general criminal proclivity than is crime which begins later in life.

We investigated these three issues by examining the extent to which students who physically assault a dating partner have a history of different types of criminal behavior.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF CRIMINAL HISTORY AND PARTNER ASSAULT

One way of examining the question of whether partner assaults are a unique type of crime is to tabulate the percent of perpetrators of partner assault who have a history of previous crime. Table 1 summarizes 17 studies which provide data on this issue. The studies are arrayed in rank order according to the percent of partner assaulters with a criminal history. It reveals a tremendous range—from a high of 92% to only 6%.

TABLE 1. Previous Research on Criminal History and Partner Assault

Study	Sample	Antisocial Behavior	%
Browne, 1987	42 batterers who were killed by their wives	Previous arrests	92
Buzawa, Hotaling, Klein, & Byrne, 1999	353 men arrested for domestic violence	Assaultive behavior, property crimes, drugs and alcohol, major motor vehicle crimes	85
Stacey & Shupe, 1983	Partners of 542 women in shelters	Arrest record (one third of above for violent offenses)	76
DeLucia, Owens, Will, & McCoin, 1999	168 domestic violence offenders in treatment program	Arrest history	76
Walker, 1979	Partners of 403 battered women	Previous arrest (violent to nonfamily members)	71
Shields, McCall, & Hanneke, 1988	61 men referred by social service agencies	Violence outside the family Drugs	66 41
Gayford, 1975	100 women claiming assault by husband	Previously incarcerated (one third of above for violent offense)	50
Fagan, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983	Partners of 270 domestic violence victims	Previous arrests for other violence	46
Moffitt, Krueger, Caspi, & Fagan, 2000	815 individuals from a birth cohort in New Zealand	Other violent crime	44
Flynn, 1977	54 nonassaulters	Nonfamily criminal assault	33
Sherman et al., 1992	314 male domestic violence offenders	Alcohol Assault	31 29
Jacobson & Gottman, 1998	140 couples recruited for research through announcements	History of violence	27
Cervi, 1991	1985 National Family Violence Survey (1,251 men & 1,705 women)	Nonfamily physical assault	23
Rounsaville, 1978	Partners of 31 battered women	Arrest or incarceration for record nonfamily violence	20
Hotaling, Straus, & Lincoln, 1990	1092 male offenders in National Family Violence Survey	Assault Arrest	16 6
Englander, 1992	2,291 men, 1985 National Family Violence Survey	Fights outside the family	13
Faulk, 1974	23 men in custody for assaulting their wives	Previous criminal assault	12

One explanation for this tremendous range may be differences in the populations studied, and specifically whether the research studied persons apprehended for partner assault, or persons who reported partner assault in a community survey. All of the studies which found high rates of prior criminal behavior were studies of cases being dealt with by the criminal justice system, whereas the studies with low rates of prior crime were studies of community samples. We suggest that this is because the small percent of partner assault cases that come to the attention of the police tend to be cases involving extremely severe attacks, and often injury (Straus, 1999). By contrast, only 2% of the 600 domestic assaults uncovered in nationally representative sample of households were at a level of severity which involved an injury needing medical attention (Stets & Straus, 1990). This, in turn suggests that the discrepancy between the studies in Table 1 is a function of the severity and chronicity of the partner assaultive behavior. Specifically, it suggests that those whose assaults on a partner are frequent and severe, and which may involve injury requiring medical treatment, tend to be men with a history of crime, whereas the men whose assaultive behavior is not frequent or severe enough to involve the criminal justice system, rarely commit other crime. In short, the differences between studies probably results from investigating populations with different propensities to crime (Straus, 1990b, 1999). If so, it means that there can be no one statistic to represent the link between criminal history and partner assault. Moreover, another source of difference between studies is the age of population studied. Assaultive behavior is much more common among young people, as is other crime. Consequently, the link between partner assault and other crime may be stronger among a college student population than among the adult general population with an average age in the 40s rather than 18 to 22.

EARLY ONSET OF CRIME

Developmental theories of crime (Moffitt & Caspi, 1999; Tonry & Farrington, 1991) assume that age is a critical factor for understanding criminal behavior. They examine crime through a life-course perspective which assumes that the same event can have different consequences, depending on when in the life-course it occurs. Thus, differences in the age at which a crime is first committed may help explain why some people continue while others cease. A number of studies have found that early onset of crime is associated with greater persistence in criminal behavior.

The Gluecks' study of 500 career criminals (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; McCord, 1991) was one of the earliest to find evidence suggesting that early age of onset was associated with a greater risk of a lifelong pattern of crime. Since then a number of studies have found more definitive evidence. Wolfgang (1983) followed 9,945 boys born in Philadelphia in 1945. They found that those classified as chronic juvenile offenders had an 80% chance of becoming adult offenders, whereas those with no juvenile arrests had an 18% chance of being arrested as an adult. A study by West and Farrington (1977) of 411 youths born in London from 1951 to 1954 found that early antisocial behavior predicted the amount of adult criminal acts. Sampson and Laub (1993) found that juvenile offenders are four times more likely than nonoffenders to be adult offenders.

Although these studies provide strong evidence that early onset crime is more predictive of a continued pattern of crime, the crime of physically assaulting a partner may have different origins than other crime, and the early onset principle may not apply. For example, feminist scholars attribute partner assault to a patriarchic social order in which force

is used to maintain male dominance (Bograd, 1988). Family conflict scholars and psychologists have added evidence of a number of other etiological factors, such as poor conflict management skills and depression (Straus & Yodanis, 1996).

It is possible that partner assault has its origins in these types of social and psychological factors rather than in the criminogenic tendencies or the risk factors associated with other types of crime, such as criminal peers. Thus, there is a theoretical basis for questioning whether the results of previous studies of the effect of early onset crime apply to partner assault.

SPECIFICITY OF TYPES OF CRIME

Related to early onset is the extent to which offenders committing one type of crime also commit other types of crime, as compared to specializing in just one type of crime. The former can be called "generalists" and the later "specialists." Research on this issue by Farrington, Snyder, and Finnegan (1988) found a "small but significant degree of specialization" among 70,000 juvenile offenders (about 20%). Wolfgang's (1983) study of two Philadelphia cohort's (1972) found that juvenile delinquents did not tend to specialize in specific offenses. Lab (1984) and Shelden, Horvath, and Tracy (1989) also found no clear pattern of criminal specialization among deviant youths. Hamparian and associates (1978) studied 1,222 youth in Columbus Ohio and found that juvenile offenders tended to also engage in other types of crime than the one for which they had been arrested. Although the evidence from other crime clearly suggests that generalists predominate, that might not apply to the crime of partner assault. Indeed, as Moffitt and colleagues (2000) point out it is widely believed, but not empirically demonstrated, that partner assaulters specialize in victimizing women intimates. The conclusions from their own research emphasize the uniqueness of partner violence relative to other crime. However, the evidence they preset provides support for both the specialist and the generalist view of partner assaulters. Further research is needed to help clarify this issue because of the theoretical importance of understanding the genesis of intimate partner violence, and because the two theories have very different implications for steps to prevent intimate partner violence and to deal with offenders.

HYPOTHESES

The studies reviewed in the preceding sections led us to formulate the following hypotheses:

1. The more crimes committed, the higher the probability of physically assaulting a dating partner.
2. Prior violent crime is associated with a greater probability of partner assault than prior property crime.
3. Early onset of crime is associated with a greater probability of partner assault than later criminal behavior.
4. Criminal history is associated with severe assaults on a partner to a greater extent than with minor assaults.
5. Criminal history is associated with a greater increase in the probability of partner assault by males than by females.

METHODS

Sample

The sample consists of 653 undergraduate students (211 men and 442 women) from a small northeastern university who were enrolled in sociology courses or an introductory psychology course in 1997 and 1998. This is a convenience sample in the sense that the students from the psychology subject pool could choose to participate in this study or other studies and received two credits toward the fulfillment of their introductory psychology course research requirement. The sociology courses where the questionnaire was administered were those where the instructor was willing to allocate a class session to the research. We do not know the percent of enrolled students who were present. However, about 90% of those present completed the questionnaire. Of the completed questionnaires, only those for students who were or had been in a heterosexual romantic relationship of a month or longer in the previous 12 months were used for this study.

Table 2 gives the characteristics of the sample of their relationships. It also shows that there were only small or nonsignificant differences between male and female students in these characteristics.

Data Collection

The data were obtained by a questionnaire consisting of:

1. A cover sheet explaining the purpose of the study and the participant's rights, and providing the name of a contact person and telephone number for those who might have questions after the test session was over;
2. the demographic questions; and
3. the instruments described in the measures section.

Participants were tested in a classroom setting. The purpose of the study and right to decline to participate by anonymously turning in a blank question were explained orally as well as in printed form at the beginning of each test session. Participants were told that the questionnaire included questions concerning attitudes, beliefs, and experiences they may have had. They were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Most students completed the survey in 40 to 45 minutes. Students from the psychology subject pool were asked to sign written consent forms before completing their questionnaires. A debriefing form was given to participants as they left. It explained the study in more detail and provided names and telephone numbers of area mental health services and community resources such as services for battered women.

Measures

In addition to the demographic questions listed in Table 2, the questionnaire included the following measures.

Partner Assault. The measure of partner assault is from the revised Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The CTS has been used in over 200 studies in the past 25 years and there is extensive evidence of reliability and validity (Archer, 1999; Straus, 1990a). The Physical Assault scale includes subscales for "minor" and "severe" assaults. The difference between the minor and severe subscales is analogous to the difference between a simple assault and an aggravated assault.

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Respondents and Their Relationships, by Gender of Respondent

Characteristic	Total ($N = 653$)	Males ($n = 211$)	Females ($n = 442$)
Year in college*			
Freshman	29%	34%	26%
Sophomore	36%	29%	40%
Junior	17%	17%	17%
Senior	16%	19%	15%
Age in years			
Median	19	19	19
Ethnicity/race			
European American	96%	94%	97%
Other	3%	5%	3%
Father's education			
High school/less	27%	27%	27%
Some college	12%	15%	11%
College degree	35%	30%	38%
Graduate school	24%	26%	24%
Mother's education			
High school/less	25%	25%	25%
Some college	15%	10%	18%
College degree	41%	43%	40%
Graduate school	18%	21%	17%
Median family income	$60-69,999	$60-69,999	$60-69,999
Relationship status*			
Current	52%	46%	55%
Previous	48%	54%	45%
Relationship type			
Dating	96%	96%	96%
Engaged	4%	4%	4%
Relationship length			
1-11 months	52%	57%	50%
1yr.-1yr.,11 mos.	21%	20%	22%
2 yrs. or more	26%	21%	28%
Cohabiting	7%	6%	8%
Sexually active	76%	76%	76%

N's vary slightly from question to question due to variation in missing data.
*Significant chi-square or *t* at the .05 level.

Slapping a partner is an example of the items in the minor assault scale, and punching or hitting with an object are examples of severe assault assaults. The full text of all CTS2 items and data on validity and reliability is given in Straus and colleagues (1996).

Criminal History Scale. The data on criminal behavior were obtained by use of the Criminal History scale of the Personal and Relationships Profile (PRP). The PRP is a 22-scale instrument designed for research on partner assault. Data on reliability and validity of the PRP are given in Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1999), and Straus and Mouradian (1999). The scales were selected on the basis of an empirically established relationship to partner assault. The eight items in the Criminal History scale are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Items in the Criminal History Scale

	Property Crime	Violent Crime
Early-Onset Crime	Before age 15, I stole or tried to steal something worth more than $50.00	Before age 15, I physically attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them
	Before age 15, I stole money (from anyone, including family)	Before age 15, I carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife (when not necessary for my job)
Later Crime	Since age 15, I have stolen or tried to steal something worth more than $50.00	Since age 15, I physically attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them
	Since age 15, I have stolen money (from anyone, including family)	Since age 15, I have carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife (when not necessary for my job)

The instructions for the PRP ask the respondent to indicate whether they agree or disagree that the statement describes themselves, using the following response categories: Strongly = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, and Strongly Agree = 4. To create the Crimnal History Scale the items were first transformed into indicator variables by assigning a score of 1 to the item if the respondent did not strongly disagreed that it described their behavior and zero for all other responses. The eight items were then summed. Thus, the scores could range from 0 through 8. The alpha coefficient of reliability for the 8-item total scale is .90. We also computed subscale scores for Property Crime and Violent Crime, and for Early Onset and Later Crime, each of which had a theoretical range of 0 to 4.

It should be noted that the Early Onset subscale measures perpetration of crimes up through age 14. This is older than the age used in most studies to make the distinction between early and later onset. Age 14 versus age 15 and older was chosen for two reasons. First, the designers of the PRP wanted it to be consistent with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, which specifies before and after age 15 as a criterion for the diagnosis of Antisocial Personality. Second, the PRP is completed by adults. It was necessary to weigh the advantage of a younger demarcation of early onset against the advantage of lesser accuracy of data based on having to recall events earlier in life.

The subscales measuring type of crime (Violent Crime and Property Crime) are independent of each other in the sense that each is measured by different questions, and the same is true for the subscales measuring age of onset (Early Onset and Later Onset). However, the type of crime subscales and the age of onset subscales are not entirely independent of each other because, as shown in Table 3, a two-by-two design was used to construct these subscales. This design crosses the type of crime with the age of onset categories. For this reason, type of crime and age of onset were tested in separate models.

Social Desirability Scale. Criminological research that uses self-report data needs to take into account defensiveness or minimization of socially undesirable behavior. We did this by using the Social Desirability scale of the PRP. This is a 13-item scale adapted from

the widely used brief social desirability scale developed by Reynolds (1982). The items are given in another paper (Straus et al., 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999). The scale measures the degree to which respondents tend to avoid disclosing socially undesirable behavior. The need for such a control is indicated by the fact that the Criminal History scale has a correlation of -.35 with the Social Desirability scale, and the Partner Assault scale has a correlation of -.20 with the Social Desirability scale.

Socioeconomic Status Scale. This scale was created by summing the scores for the education of the respondent's father and mother (each with a possible score of 1 to 7) and family income (with possible scores of 1 to 9). The theoretical range of the resulting scale is 2 to 23 and this was also the observed range. The mean was 14.8, median 15, and standard deviation 4.6.

Data Analysis

Logistic regression was used as the main test of the hypothesized relationships between criminal history and assaulting a partner. Logistic regression is an appropriate technique when dependent variable is a dichotomy. The regression model was first estimated using the total Criminal History scale as the main independent variable and the overall Physical Assault scale as the dependent variable. The model also included 10 other variables, as listed in Tables 5 to 8.

The model described above was then reestimated using each of the subscales (Property Crime, Violent Crime, Early Onset, and Later Crime) as the main independent variable.

To investigate whether the results would differ depending on severity of the assault, the analyses of these five models were replicated using as the dependent variable the Severe and Minor Assault subscales as replacements for the Overall Assault scale as the dependent variable. These models were then replicated for male and female respondents.

Interpretation of Odds Ratios. The results of testing these models will be presented as odds ratios. An odds ratio greater than 1.00 indicate that the variable is associated with an increase in the odds of assaulting a partner, and odds ratios below 1.00 indicate that the variable is associated with a decrease in the odds of partner assault. For example, if the odds ratio for the Criminal History scale is 1.09, it would indicate that each increase of 1 point on the 8-point Criminal History scale is associated with an average increase of 9% in the odds of assaulting a partner. Similarly, an odds ratio of 0.92 would indicate that each increase of 1 point in the Criminal History scale is associated with an average decrease of 8% in the odds of assaulting a partner.

PREVALENCE OF PARTNER ASSAULT AND PRIOR CRIME

The prevalence rates for the main independent and dependent variables in this section are important descriptive results of the study, and are presented to give a background to aid in interpreting the results of testing the models described in the previous section.

Partner Assault

Taking the sample as a whole, 31% of the students reported physically assaulting a partner in the 12 months preceding completion of the questionnaire. Almost one third of these assaults (9.3%) were in the "severe assault" category. The high rate of assault is consistent

with many previous studies of both students and older persons, as noted in the beginning of this article. Also as in previous studies (Archer, 2000; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989), the rate for females (32%) and males (29%) were similar and not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.51$, $p = .48$). Although the assault rates were about the same, it is important to remember that equal perpetration of assault does not mean equal consequences. There is a great deal of evidence that male perpetrators inflict more injury (Stets, 1990; Straus, 2004).

Criminal History

Table 4 gives the specific criminal acts that were committed by students in this study. The first two entries in the total column of Table 4 show that over one third of the students stole money before and after the age of 15. Almost as prevalent was "Physically attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them" which 23.1% reported having occurred before age 15 and 29.7% reported having occurred at age 15 and over. Next comes stealing objects, which was reported by about one fifth of the students. Finally, one out of seven reported carrying a hidden weapon. Sixty percent reported committing one or more of the eight crimes. These are extremely high rates, but they are consistent with many other studies of self-reported crime in general populations. To take just two examples, Farrington (1989) found a 96% rate among 411 males in a working class area of London; and Robinson and Zaitzow's study of 522 criminologists found that 55% reported having committed a theft, and 22% committed a burglary (Robinson & Zaitzow, 1999). They do not report what percent committed one or more index crimes, but judging from the rates for specific crimes, overall rate is likely to be extremely high.

Gender Differences. In general the rank order of crimes is almost the same for males and females. However, there is a very large gender difference in prevalence. For example, almost twice as many male than female students stole money. Depending on the crime, from two to four times more male than female students engaged in each of the crimes in the Criminal History (CH) scale. This also applies to the average number of crimes committed by each student. The much higher rates of crime by male students, especially violent crime, is consistent with both police report data and the National Crime Victimization survey (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

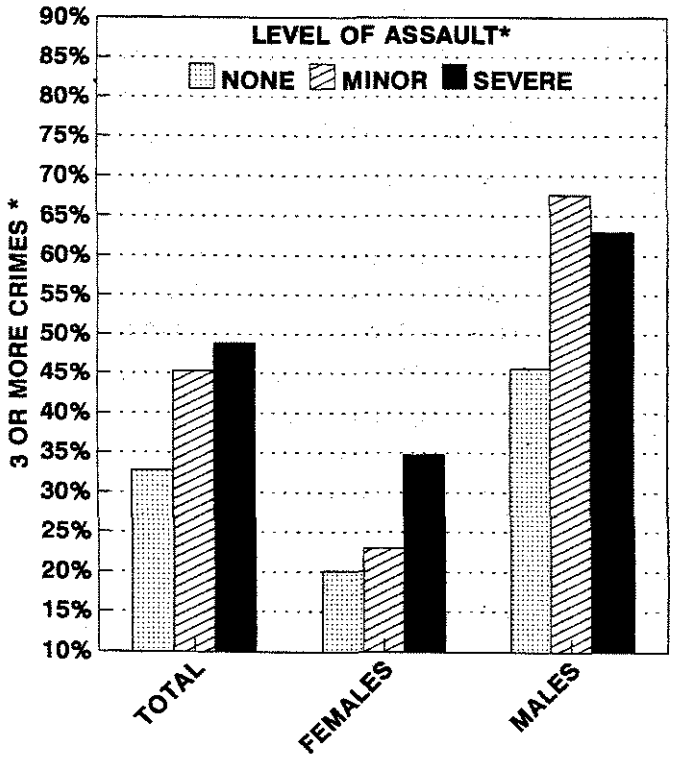
TABLE 4. Criminal Acts Committed by Male and Female Students

	%			Ratio
Crime	Total ($N = 653$)	Males ($n = 211$)	Females ($n = 442$)	of Males to Females
Stole money before 15	39.0	58.0	30.0	1.9
Stole money age 15+	37.0	53.0	29.3	1.8
Attacked someone to hurt them before 15	23.1	43.8	13.3	3.3
Attacked someone to hurt them age 15+	29.7	50.7	19.8	2.5
Stole something worth > $50 before 15	20.3	34.2	13.7	2.5
Stole something worth > $50 age 15+	22.9	37.9	15.7	2.4
Carried hidden weapon before 15	15.0	31.1	7.4	4.2
Carried hidden weapon age 15+	14.7	29.2	7.8	3.7
Mean number of crimes	2.0	3.4	1.4	2.4
Median number of crimes	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.0

PERCENT OF PARTNER ASSAULTERS REPORTING PRIOR CRIME

If the criterion for a criminal history is set at one or more of the eight crimes in the Criminal History scale, it results in finding that 68% of the assaulters had a criminal history. This is very high, but the percentage of nonassaulters who reported another crime was almost as high, 62%, and the difference was not statistically significant. This finding, and the similarly high prevalence rates from other self-report studies of crime by young people, suggests that at least some crime is so typical of youth that it washes out the difference between those who hit a partner and those who did not.

To deal with this problem, we repeated the analysis using as the criterion for a criminal history, reporting three or more of the crimes in the Criminal History scale. This analysis revealed significantly higher crime rates among those who assaulted a partner (see Figure 1). The solid black bar in the total section at the left of Figure 1 shows that almost one half of the students who severely assaulted a partner reported three or more crimes, and almost as high a percentage of those who engaged in a minor assault (45%). Those who did not assault a partner had a much lower, but still high rate of prior crime (33%).



The analysis of covariance for Figure 1 found significant differences in criminal history by partner assault level ($F = 6.95$, $p < .001$), and gender ($F = 49.65$, $p < .001$). The interaction of assault and gender was not significant ($F = 2.73$, $p. 07$). The analysis controlled for score on the socioeconomic status scale and the social desirability scale described in the Measures section.

Figure 1. Percent reporting three or more crimes by level of partner assault.

The sections of Figure 1 for females reveals similar differences between assault groups, except that the prior crime rate for women students who engaged in only minor assaults is closer to the crime rate of nonassaultive women than to the crime rate of women who severely assaulted a partner. In addition, and consistent with the previous section on crime rates, the rates for females are much lower than those for men, regardless of the level of assault.

The section of Figure 1 for males shows both the high crime rates noted previously and that assaulting a partner is associated with an even higher rate of other crimes. Moreover, the greater involvement in crime of men who assaulted their partner applies about equally to minor and severe assaults.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSES

Total Criminal History

The first row of Table 5 shows that, even after controlling for 10 other variables, there is a significant relation between the total CH scale score and partner assault level. The odds ratio of 1.13 indicates that for each increase of 1 point in the 8-point CH scale, the odds of an assault on a partner increased by an average of 13%. The significant odds ratios for minor and severe assaults indicate that the relation between the score on the CH scale and partner assault applies to minor as well as to severe assaults.

Figure 2 shows the increase in the predicted probability of assaulting for each increase of 1 point on the Overall Criminal History scale. The line for females is higher because of the higher prevalence of partner assault by women, but the relationship between prior crime and partner assault is nearly identical for males and female.

TABLE 5. Logistic Regression for Overall Criminal History

		Odds Ratio for Type of Partner Assault		
Independent Variable	Scoring	Overall	Minor	Severe
Criminal history	Range = 0-8	1.13**	1.14**	1.15*
Sex of respondent	Female = 1	1.43	1.49	1.81
Year in university	1-4	1.06	1.05	1.00
Age[a]	See "a" below	0.86	0.87	0.87
Relationship status	Current = 1, previous = 2	1.36	1.44	0.93
Cohabiting status	Yes =1, no = 0	1.46	1.38	1.48
Relationship type	Dating = 1, engaged = 2	1.03	1.14	0.46
Relationship length[b]	See "b" below	1.29**	1.28**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship	Yes = 1	1.21	1.13	1.45
Socioeconomic status	Range = 2-23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social desirability	Range = 19-50	0.92**	0.91**	0.93*

[a]The age categories are 18, 19, 20, 21, 22-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49.
[b]The relationship length categories are 1 = about 1 month; 2 = about 2 months; 3 = 3-5 months; 5 = 6-11 months; 5 = about 1 year; 6 = more than 1 year but less than 2 years; 7 = about 2 years; 8 = more than 2 years but less than 4; 9 = 4 years or more.
*$p = < .05$. **$p = < .01$.

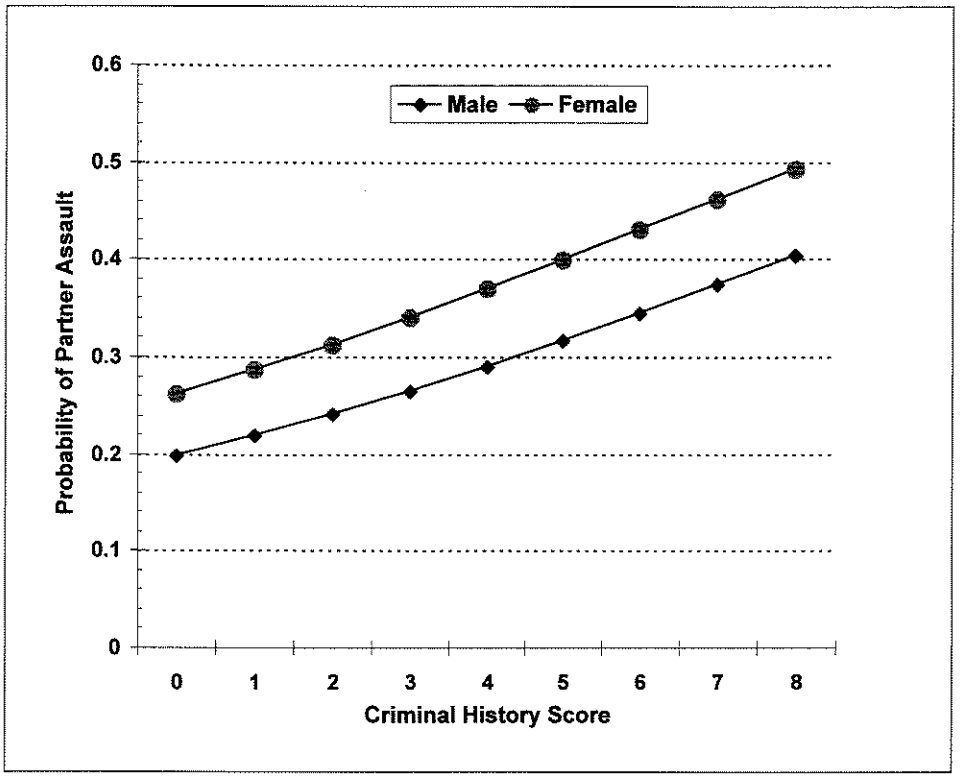


Figure 2. Probability of partner assault by criminal history scale score of female and male students.

In addition to criminal history, two other variables were found to be significantly related to assaulting a partner. First, the row labeled Relationship Length shows that for every 1-unit increase in the length of the relationship, the odds of an assault increased by 29%. It appears that the longer a relation lasts the more time individuals have to be violent with each other. Second, the last row of Table 5 shows that for each 1-point increase in the social desirability scale, there is an 8% decrease in the odds of that the respondent will report that he or she assaulted a partner. This underlines the importance of including a control for this type of bias. These two findings apply to minor as well as severe assaults.

Early and Later Crime

Table 6 provides the results of testing the hypothesis that the link between prior crime and partner assault is greater when the prior crime began early in life (before age 15) rather than later. Comparing the CH row in part A and part B of Table 6 shows that the odds ratios are much higher for early onset crime. For example, in the overall assault column, the odds ratio indicates that each increase of 1 point in the Early Onset CH scale is associated with a 32% increase in the odds of assaulting a partner, whereas each increase of 1 point on the Later Crime CH scale is associated with a 17% increase in the odds of partner assault. The findings for Minor Assaults are similar to those for the Overall Assault

TABLE 6. Logistic Regression for Early- and Late-Onset Criminal History

Independent Variable	Scoring	Odds Ratio for Type of Partner Assault		
		Overall	Minor	Severe
A. Early Onset				
Criminal history	Range = 0-8	1.32**	1.35**	1.29*
Year in university	1-4	1.05	1.04	0.99
Age	See Table 5, note A	0.86	0.88	0.88
Relationship status	Current = 1, previous = 2	1.39	1.47*	0.96
Cohabiting status	Yes =1, no = 0	1.47	1.39	1.48
Relationship type	Dating = 1, engaged = 2	1.02	1.13	0.46
Relationship length	See Table 5, note B	1.29**	1.29**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship	Yes = 1	1.20	1.13	1.45
Socioeconomic status	Range = 2-23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social desirability	Range = 19-50	0.92**	0.91**	0.93*
B. Later Crime				
Criminal history	Range = 0-8	1.17*	1.19*	1.28*
Sex of respondent	Female = 1	1.29	1.32	1.71
Year in university	1-4	1.07	1.06	1.02
Age	See Table 5, note A	0.85	0.87	0.86
Relationship status	Current = 1, previous = 2	1.36	1.43	0.92
Cohabitation status	Yes =1, no = 0	1.46	1.38	1.48
Relationship type	Dating = 1, engaged = 2	1.03	1.14	0.46
Relationship length	See Table 5, note B	1.29**	1.28**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship	Yes = 1	1.24	1.16	1.46
Socioeconomic status	Range = 2-23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social desirability	Range = 19-50	0.91**	0.90**	0.93*

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

scale in showing the early onset crime is more closely related to partner assault. However, when the Severe Assault subscale is used as the dependent variable, late onset criminal history has as close a link to partner assault as early onset crime.

Turning to the other variables that are significantly related to partner assault, Table 6 shows that the odds of assaulting a partner are greater (1) for women, but only for minor assaults, (2) for minor assaults in a previous relationship, and (3) for longer duration relationships. In addition, as the score on the Social Desirability scale goes up, the odds of an assault being reported decreases.

Property Crime Versus Violent Crime

Table 7 gives the results of testing the hypothesis that the link between prior crime and partner assault is greater for violent crime than for property crime. In general the hypothesis is supported but the difference is not great. Comparing the odds ratios in the row for CH in part A and B of Table 7 shows that in each case the odds ratios for violent crime are larger than for property crime, and one of the property crime odds ratios is not significant.

As for the other variables that are significantly related to partner assault, Table 7 shows that the odds of assaulting a partner are greater for longer duration relationships and less for respondents with high scores on the Social Desirability scale.

Gender Differences

Table 8 gives the results of testing the hypothesis that the link between prior crime and partner assault is greater for males than for females. Table 8 provides data on the Overall Assault scale. We omitted tables reporting the tests for gender differences using as Minor and Severe Assault scales as the dependent variables because we believe that the small differences between what is shown in those tables and in Table 8 are not important enough to justify two additional large tables. However, those tables are available on request to the first author.

Total Criminal History Scale Score. Contrary to our hypothesis, the columns for Total CH Scale in Table 8 show a statistically significant relation between the total CH scale and partner assault for females, but not for males. However, the odds ratios for males and females are almost identical. In view of the fact that the female sample is double the size of the male sample (442 versus 211), these results can be interpreted as showing that there is a similar link between the score on the CH scale and partner assault for both males and females, which is still contrary to the hypothesized greater relation for males.

TABLE 7. Logistic Regression for Property Crime and Violent Crime Criminal History

		Odds Ratio for Type of Partner Assault		
Independent Variable	Scoring	Overall	Minor	Severe
A. Property Crime				
Criminal history	Range = 0-8	1.16*	1.19*	1.22
Sex of respondent	Female = 1	1.27	1.31	1.60
Year in university	1-4	1.06	1.06	1.00
Age	See Table 5, note A	0.86	0.87	0.87
Relationship status	Current = 1, previous = 2	1.37	1.45	0.94
Cohabitation status	Yes =1, no = 0	1.46	1.38	1.47
Relationship type	Dating = 1 engaged = 2	1.06	1.18	0.50
Relationship length	See Table 5, note B	1.29**	1.28**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship	Yes = 1	1.23	1.15	1.45
Socioeconomic status	Range = 2-23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social desirability	Range = 19-50	0.91**	0.91**	0.93*
B. Violent Crime				
Criminal history	Range = 0-8	1.25**	1.27**	1.26*
Sex of respondent	Female = 1	1.42	1.46	1.73
Year in university	1-4	1.07	1.06	1.01
Age	See Table 5, note A	0.86	0.87	0.87
Relationship status	Current = 1, previous = 2	1.37	1.45	0.95
Cohabitation status	Yes =1, no = 0	1.46	1.39	1.49
Relationship type	Dating = 1, engaged = 2	0.98	1.07	0.44
Relationship length	See Table 5, note B	1.29**	1.28**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship	Yes = 1	1.24	1.17	1.48
Socioeconomic status	Range = 2-23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Social desirability	Range = 19-50	0.91**	0.91**	0.92*

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 8. Logistic Regression for Overall Criminal History (Odds Ratios)

	Total		Age of Onset				Type of Crime			
	CH Scale		Early		Later		Property		Violent	
Independent Variable	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Criminal history (range = 0-8 or 0-4***)	1.13	1.14*	1.28*	1.37**	1.19	1.15	1.17	1.18	1.22	1.26*
Year in university (1-4)	1.10	1.03	1.08	1.03	1.11	1.03	1.12	1.02	1.08	1.04
Age (see Table 5, note A)	0.77	0.92	0.78	0.92	0.76	0.92	0.75	0.93	0.79	0.91
Relationship status (current = 1, previous = 2)	0.85	1.66*	0.86	1.70*	0.86	1.65*	0.85	1.68*	0.88	1.65*
Cohabitation status (yes =1, no = 0)	1.26	1.39	1.27	1.40	1.23	1.43	1.23	1.40	1.23	1.43
Relationship type (dating = 1, engaged = 2)	0.50	1.44	0.46	1.50	0.54	1.40	0.55	1.46	0.47	1.38
Relationship length (see Table 5 note B)	1.25**	1.31**	1.25**	1.31**	1.25**	1.30**	1.24**	1.30**	1.25**	1.31**
Sex part of relationship (yes = 1)	1.35	1.11	1.36	1.10	1.43	1.11	1.43	1.10	1.45	1.11
Socioeconomic status (range = 2-23)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.00	0.99
Social desirability (range = 10-50)	0.94	0.91**	0.94	0.91**	0.93*	0.90**	0.94	0.91**	0.93	0.91**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***0-8 for the Total Criminal History scale, 0-4 for the age of onset and type of crime subscale.
CH = criminal history.

The Total CH scale columns of Table 8 also show that three other variables are significantly related to partner assault. First, for female respondents, if the respondent reported on a previous relationship, the odds of having assaulted the partner were 66% greater than the odds of assaulting a current partner. The Relationship Length row of Table 8 shows that for both males and females, the longer the relationship, the greater the odds of a physical assault. This probably reflects the fact that in longer relationships there is greater "time at risk" for such events to occur.

Gender Differences in the Relation of Early Onset and Later Crime to Partner Assault. The CH row in the Age of Onset columns of Table 8 shows that, for both males and females, a history of early onset crime is related to assaulting a partner; whereas a history of later crime is not significantly related to assaulting a partner.

For females but not for males, the odds of assaulting a partner were much greater for a previous relationship than for a current relationship. For both males and females, and for both early and late onset crime, longer relationships were more likely to have involved physically assaulting a partner, and respondents with high Social Desirability scale scores were less likely to indicate that they had assaulted a partner.

Property Crimes and Violent Crimes. The hypothesized closer link of criminal history to partner assault for males than females was not supported for property crime because the odds ratios in the columns headed Male and Female are nearly identical and neither is significant. For violent crime, the opposite of the hypothesis is shown because the odds ratio is significant for females but not for males.

Other Independent Variables. As was the case with the Total CH scale and the Early and Later Crime scales, the odds of a female assaulting a partner were much greater for previous relationships, whereas the reverse was true for males: the odds of a male assaulting a partner were slightly (and not significantly) less in a previously relationship. The longer the relationship, the greater the odds of an assault, and this applies about equally to males and females. The odds ratios for the Social Desirability scale are slightly higher for males than for females, but are not significant for the males because of the much smaller number of males in the study.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the extent to which, in a sample of 653 university students, those who physically assaulted a partner had a history of other crime, including other violent crime and property crime. The results revealed a high prevalence of partner assault (32%), which is consistent with many other studies of dating violence. A high prevalence of prior crime was also found, which is again consistent with other studies of self-reported crime in general populations samples.

Limitations

Before summarizing the tests of the main hypotheses, several reasons for treating the results with caution need to be indicated. First, although university students, like other young people, have a very high prevalence of partner assault, other characteristics of a student sample limit the generalizability of the findings. For example, the severity of the crimes and the severity of the assaults that occur in student dating relationships may be

different among students compared to other populations, and this could be responsible for the finding that criminal history is related to minor assaults to about the same extent as to severe assaults.

Other potential problems lie in the way criminal history was measured. The CH scale identified early-onset crime as that occurring at age 14 or earlier. Memory problems may undermine the validity of this measure. In addition, it can be argued that a younger demarcation would be preferable. The most general problem with the CH scale is that some respondents can be assumed to have not fully disclosed. Moreover, respondents who did not fully disclose crimes probably also failed to fully disclose partner assault, and this can create a spurious relationship. We dealt with this problem by controlling for score on a scale to measure social desirability response bias. But one cannot be certain that this fully corrected the problem. The brevity of the criminal history measure also means that it does not include many crimes. Despite this, the prevalence of prior crime was very high.

Results of Hypothesis Tests

The results are consistent with hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, but not with 4 and 5. We found that:

1. The more crimes committed, the higher the probability of physically assaulting a dating partner.
2. Prior violent crime is associated with a greater increase in the probability of partner assault than prior property crime.
3. Early onset of crime is associated with a greater increased the odds of partner assault than later criminal behavior.
4. Contrary to hypothesis 4, we found that criminal history is associated with severe assaults on a partner to about the same extent as it is with minor assaults.
5. Also contrary to the hypothesis, criminal history was found to be associated with a greater increase in the probability of partner assault by females than by males.

Other Findings

Length of Relationship. An important finding that was incidental to the focus on criminal history is that, in every one of the models in Tables 6 through 8, the variable that is most consistently and most strongly related to partner assault is the length of the relationship. The longer a couple is together, the greater the probability of an assault. Perhaps this is a reflection of greater time at risk, and can therefore be considered a manifestation of routine activities theory (Felson, 1997; Mannon, 1997). However, it may also occur because the longer a couple is together, the more "marriage-like" their relationship. To the extent that this is correct, cultural norms that make the marriage license an implicit hitting license by tolerating noninjury-producing assaults (Stets & Straus, 1989; Straus & Hotaling, 1980) could start to become applicable.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research contribute to an understanding of intimate partner assault, and also to more general issues in criminology. In respect to intimate partner assault, the links found between other crime and partner assault suggest that a general propensity to crime is an important part of the etiology of this type of assault. Thus, partner assault is not as

unique a category of crime as might be thought. This does not deny the importance of structural factors such as a patriarchic social order (Bograd, 1988; Straus, 1994) or family systems factors such as inadequate modes of dealing with conflict or communication patterns (Straus & Yodanis, 1996) because partner assault, like most other crime, has multiple causes.

The results of this research contribute to understanding of two aspects of criminal careers. The finding that early onset of criminal behavior is associated with a higher probability of partner assault than later crime adds to the evidence that early onset of criminal behavior is associated with an increased probability of a continued pattern of crime than is later crime. In addition, the finding that about two thirds of males who assaulted a partner also committed other crimes adds to the evidence that "generalists" (i.e., those who engage in two or more types of crime) are more common that "specialists" in one type of crime.

The results also show that, in addition to the well-established finding that women are just as likely as men to physically assault an intimate partner (Archer, 2000; Straus, 1999, 2004), the link between a history of other types of crime is as strong or stronger for women than men. This finding bears on the debate concerning whether the etiology of partner assaults by women is different than the etiology of the same crime by men. It adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that, although some etiological factors may be different, many are the same for women and men (Archer, 2000; Moffitt et al., 2000; Straus & Medeiros, 2002).

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Psychologists' Judgments of Psychologically Aggressive Actions When Perpetrated by a Husband Versus a Wife

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Research literature suggests that clinical judgments of men's versus women's behavior and symptoms typically rate the men as more pathological and dangerous. To determine whether this view would extend to assessments of psychologically aggressive actions, two separate versions of a survey listing potentially psychologically abusive behaviors perpetrated by either a wife toward her husband or the identical actions perpetrated by a husband toward his wife were sent to a nationwide sampling of practicing psychologists. Results indicated that psychologists, irrespective of demographics, rated the husband's behavior as more likely to be psychologically abusive and more severe in nature than the wife's use of the same actions. Psychologists did not differentially rely on any of the three contextual factors (i.e., frequency/duration, intent of the perpetrator, and perception of the recipient) to influence their determination that a behavior was "psychological abuse" dependent upon whether the initiator of the psychological actions was the husband or the wife. Future research could assess more directly the rationale for the psychologists' differing views of male versus female behavior. In addition, more normative information is needed to inform mental health professionals as to the prevalence and severity of psychologically aggressive actions in the general population.

The study of physical abuse, and more recently of psychological abuse, in intimate relationships has focused almost exclusively on women as the victims and men as the perpetrators (e.g., Migliaccio, 2001; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). The earliest books to be published were about battered women (e.g., Martin, 1976; Walker, 1979) and the bulk of the research literature has focused on the incidence and prevalence of physical abuse, impacts of abuse, and correlates of perpetration. While some sociological surveys (e.g., Straus, 1977-1978) or emergency room commitment rates (e.g., Coontz, Lidz, & Mulvey, 1994) have indicated similar rates of physical violence for men and women, and some authors have raised concerns regarding the plight of battered men as well (e.g., Steinmetz, 1977-1978), other authors (e.g., Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992) do not believe these data accurately reflect the reality of physical abuse in the "real world."

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