NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR BY PARENTS IN THE LIFE HISTORY
OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN 17 COUNTRIES AND ITS RELATION TO
VIOLENCE AGAINST DATING PARTNERS*

Murray A. Straus and Sarah A. Savage
Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH, 03824, USA. Email: Murray.Straus@unh.edu

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Abstract

This article reports the prevalence of neglectful behavior on the part of parents of university students in 17 nations (6 in Europe, 2 in North America, 2 in Latin America, 5 in Asia, and Australia and New Zealand) and tests the hypothesis that neglect is a risk factor for violence against a dating partner. The students responded to an 8-item short form of the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale. The percent at each university who experienced neglectful behavior (defined as three or more of the eight behaviors a) ranged from 3.2% to 36% (median 12%). The study also found very high rates of violence against dating partners. The percent who assaulted a dating partner ranged from 15% to 45% (median 28%). Severe assaults ranged from 4% to 22% (median 9.6%). The injury rate ranged from 1.5% to 19% (median 6.7%). Severe injury ranged from 0% to 13% (median 2.1%). The hypothesis that neglect is associated with an increased probability of assaulting and injuring a dating partner was supported. The paper discusses the theoretical implications, the implications for primary prevention of high rates of neglectful behavior, and the link between neglectful behavior and violence against a dating partner.

Keywords: neglect, partner violence, aggression, measure, cross-cultural

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Neglect of children is such a serious and prevalent phenomenon that the authors of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child treaty (UNICEF, 1997) singled out the right of a child to develop to the fullest as one of the four broad categories of rights to which children are entitled. One indication of the extent of neglect is that, of cases known to Child Protective Service agencies in the USA, more are classified as neglect than all other types of maltreatment put together. However, as has been noted frequently, research on neglect is only a small fraction of research on child maltreatment (National Research Council, 1993). Cross-cultural comparative studies of neglect are even more rare. This paper is intended to provide some of the needed cross-cultural data.

One objective is to estimate the prevalence of neglectful behavior experienced by university students at 33 universities in 17 countries. This will provide preliminary information on the extent to which neglectful behavior occurs in the diverse social settings represented by the 33 geographic sites in this study. A second objective is based on the theory that most widespread effects of neglect manifest themselves when the children are adults and are in the form of psychological damage and impaired social relationships (National Research Council, 1993). To examine this theory we tested the hypothesis that the more neglectful behavior the students in this study experienced as a child, the more likely the students were to engage in violence against a dating partner. A third objective is based on the idea that a society in which children are neglected creates a social context that is calloused and not caring. To test this hypothesis we carried out a “macro-level” analysis using the geographic sites in the study (N = 33) as cases. We used these 33 sites to test the hypothesis that the higher the rate of neglectful behavior characteristic of a site, the higher the rate of violence against dating partners at that site.
DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT OF NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR

Definition Of Neglect

There is little agreement on the definition and measurement of neglect (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996; National Research Council, 1993). One of the most important points of disagreement concerns whether neglect should be defined and measured in a way that includes injury or harm to a child, as compared to definition and measurement solely on the basis of the behavior of the caregiver (Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 2000). Another unresolved issue is whether the neglectful behavior must be intentional. These are difficult issues that cannot be resolved in this article. However, we can make clear the definition that guided this research. This definition and our operationalization if it is limited to the behavior of the caregiver, regardless of whether this behavior is intentional and regardless of whether there is an observable harm to the child. The specific definition is:

Neglectful behavior by a caretaker is behavior that constitutes a failure to act in ways that are presumed by the culture of a society to be necessary to meet the developmental needs of a child and which are the responsibility of a caregiver to provide (Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 2000).

Measurement Of Neglectful Behavior

Most research on neglect in the USA, and probably other countries, does not measure neglectful behavior directly. Instead, neglect is identified on the basis of cases reported to Child Protective Service (CPS) agencies of the US states. It is widely acknowledged that the cases reported to CPS are only a small fraction of neglected children. The National Center On Child Abuse and Neglect attempted to get a more complete assessment of neglect through the “National Incidence Studies Of Child Abuse and Neglect” (NIS-1, 2, and 3). The NIS studies are based on interviews with human service professionals who were asked about cases they knew, regardless of whether the case had been reported to child protective services. As will be shown in the section reviewing rates of neglect, human service professionals identified more than twice...
as many cases than were reported to child protective services. Even the NIS rate is probably only a fraction of the true prevalence of neglectful behavior. The present study uses an instrument that represents still another approach to measuring neglect. It focuses on the neglectful behavior of parents as recalled by young adults. As will be explained in the methods section, this method like other methods, has both advantages and limitations.

**RESEARCH ON PREVALENCE OF NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

Because one of the main objectives of this paper is to provide data on the prevalence of neglectful behavior, Table 1 was constructed to provide a background for the results to be presented on prevalence. It summarizes prevalence rates from seven studies. The rates range from less than half of one percent to 27%. This huge range suggests that the various studies are measuring different phenomena, or different aspects of the phenomenon.

Consistent with the previous discussion of techniques for measuring neglect, the lowest rate in Table 1 is for cases of neglect reported to child protective services (CPS) in the United States. This extremely low rate reflects the fact that CPS tends to receive and confirm only the most egregious cases of neglect, or cases confounded with other social and psychological problems such as violence between the parents or drug abuse. The National Incidence Study, (second row of Table 1), for example, found a rate more than double the rate reported by CPS. It is much higher because the human services professionals who were interviewed were asked to report all cases they knew about, not just those, which were officially reported. The importance of this is not just the underestimate inherent in CPS statistics, but also the fact that because CPS cases are “filtered” by willingness to report the case, they may not be typical of cases of neglectful behavior. A recent example we encountered was a pediatrician who diagnosed a child as “failure to thrive.” Although this is a serious condition requiring reporting, the pediatrician did not report the case to CPS because she felt it was better for her to try to work with the mother. Had it been a “hopeless case” it probably would have been reported, but
because it was a case that the pediatrician felt she could treat effectively does not change the fact that this child was neglected.

The three non-US studies in Table 1, which report neglect rates in regions of Australia, Denmark and the UK, all found rates much higher than those reported in the above mentioned domestic studies. The higher rates, which range from 3% to 6%, might be explained by the fact that the Australia and UK studies interviewed victims, who tend to report higher rates than perpetrators (caretakers) since the latter may not recall past and/or unintentional neglectful behaviors. The Denmark study includes reports from health and welfare workers. The significance of this method of data collection is that in Denmark, public health nurses visit the homes of all new parents, which means that the study refers to all parents in Denmark. Moreover, with the exception of pediatricians, these visiting nurses are likely to be more sensitive to the presence of neglectful behavior than are human service professionals in general. Nevertheless, the observations of public health nurses will inevitably underestimate neglectful behavior that does not cause a visible injury or behavior problem but still constitutes a danger to a child, such as leaving a child unsupervised; or fails to meet the developmental needs of a child, such as failing to show warmth and affection.

Data for the Straus et al. study in Table 1 are from interviews with a random sample of US parents with one or more children under 18 at home (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). A large portion of the 27% of neglectful behavior cases is attributable to a high percentage (19.5%) of respondents who "Had to leave your child home alone, even when you thought some adult should be with him/her." Another contribution to the high neglectful behavior rate is that 11% of respondents indicated there was at least one occasion when they "Were not able to make sure your child got the food he/she needed."

**Methodological Sources Of Variation In Measuring Neglect**

The fact that the last study in Table 1 has a rate of neglect that is 39 times higher than the study in the first row reflects differences in the following four aspects of the studies.
**Source of data**  Child, parent, human service professional, or official reports

**Criterion of neglect**  Behavior of the caretaker, or visible injury to the child

**Reference time period**  Previous year, or over life of the child

**Dimensions measured**  One dimension such as physical neglect versus multiple dimensions

**Effects On Children.** The long-term effects of neglect are less well established, but for example, Flowers concluded that neglected children tend to be more withdrawn and anti-social with their parents as well as with other children (Flowers, 2000). Flowers also found that neglected toddlers show signs similar to those associated with abused children such as learning delays, most notable in language skills. According to Flowers, the learning delays are manifest in lower grades and test scores, higher rates of learning problems, grade repeats, and school absences in elementary school years (Flowers, 2000).

**NEGLECT AND MISTREATMENT OF DATING PARTNER**

There are grounds for believing that neglect is as detrimental or more detrimental than physical or sexual abuse. Neglect, especially of the child's emotional needs for love and support, may be the form of maltreatment with the greatest risk of serious social and psychological problems to children (Bowlby, 1982; Robbins, 1966; Spitz, 1959). Consistent with this research, the theoretical objective of this study is to test the hypothesis that neglect as a child is associated with an increased risk of violence against a dating partner as an adult. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the socialization process of neglected children is incomplete. This approach is illustrated by the theoretical analysis and empirical research of Tremblay (Tremblay, 2003). Tremblay's review of research on age differences in aggression shows that acts of physical aggression peak at age two and decline thereafter. From this he argued that
Physical aggression appears during infancy as a natural way of expressing anger and as a
natural instrument to achieve goals - for example, taking an object from someone else.
During their development most children learn to use alternative strategies to express
anger and achieve their goals. Those who do not will become increasingly dangerous for
others as they grow older, because they become physically stronger and more cognitively
skilled (Tremblay, 2003).

Tremblay goes on to argue that one of the factors enabling a child to learn alternative
strategies is care by a responsive parent and consistent discipline. A neglected child, by
definition, does not have a responsive parent or consistent discipline. One can therefore
deduce the hypothesis that the experience of neglectful parenting will be associated with
physical aggression toward others, and specifically toward a dating partner. The results of
previous empirical studies are consistent with this theory, for example Widom (1989; Widom &
Maxfield, 2001).

The theory that neglect is associated with physical aggression as an adult is also
consistent with research showing that neglected children experience learning delays,
particularly with language skills. (Flowers, 2000, pg 121). Depending on the type and severity
of neglect, neglected children may have underdeveloped cognitive and social skills. Children
whose parents do not comfort them when upset may tend to lack compassion and empathy for
others. Inadequate cognitive and emotional abilities could result in a greater sense of
desensitization toward the mistreatment of others, including dating partners and, later in life,
criminally violent behavior, and physical and sexual abuse of their own children (Widom, 1992).

METHODS

The data for this research is from the International Dating Violence study. The study is
being conducted by a consortium that currently consists of researchers at 33 universities in 17
nations. The members of the consortium use a four-part questionnaire. Parts 1, 2, and 3 are the
same in all the 33 sites. Part 4 varies from site to site because it is reserved for measures that are of specific interest to each consortium member.

**Sample**

The data were obtained from students at the 33 sites listed in Table 4, using procedures reviewed by and approved by boards of administrators responsible for protection of human subjects at each of these universities. The purpose of the study and the right to not participate were explained orally and in printed form at the beginning of each session. Participants were told that the questionnaire asked about their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences they might have had, and that the questionnaire includes questions on sensitive issues, including sexual relationships. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. A debriefing form was given to each participant as they left. The form 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. Although 9,069 students completed the questionnaire, the N’s for the analyses in this paper are much lower because, to be included, the student needed to be in a current or recent dating relationship, and because, as in other surveys, not everyone answered every question. Indeed, to respect the privacy and the voluntary nature of participation, the instructions emphasized that respondents were free to omit any question they did not wish to answer. The N’s for specific analyses are given in the tables.

The completed questionnaires were scanned for aberrant response patterns such as marking the identical answer category for an entire series of questions, or an implausibly high frequency of rare events, such as 25 instances of attacking a partner with a knife or gun. Questionnaires with an aberrant response pattern were removed from the sample. This was typically about 5% of the questionnaires. Some of the characteristics of the cases used for this paper are presented below, and other characteristics are in another paper (Straus & Members of the International Dating Violence Research Consortium, 2004, In Press).

**Measure Of Neglectful Behavior**
Neglectful behavior was measured by the short form of the Adult-Recall version of the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale or MNBS (Straus, Kinard, & Williams, 1995). This version of the MNBS is based on asking young adults if their parents engaged in each of a specific set of neglectful behaviors. Consequently, it does not depend on the case coming to the attention of a human service professional, nor on a neglectful parent being willing to disclose his or her behavior. The data were gathered in a way that respondents could feel was completely anonymous. The indicators of neglectful behavior in the MNBS are not restricted to instances in which a harmful effect on the child was observable. Because most neglected children do not manifest an observable harm, this results in a more complete assessment of neglectful behavior. Another reason this version of the MNBS is likely to result in a high prevalence rate is because it measures neglectful behavior regardless of the intent of the caregiver. Finally, there is likely to be a more complete identification of neglectful behavior than with measures that focus on only physical neglect or some other single aspect of neglect because, as indicated by “Multidimensional” in the test name, the MNBS obtains information on four dimensions of neglectful behavior.

A limitation of the form of the MNBS used for this study is an eight-item short form. A brief instrument was needed because measures of many constructs had to be included in the International Dating Violence Study questionnaire. Consequently, the short form of the MNBS included in the Personal And Relationships Profile (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999) was used. The short form of the MNBS is a much less comprehensive measure than the full 20-item scale. It includes only two items to measure each of the four dimensions of neglectful behavior (cognitive, supervisory, emotional, and physical). The items and the dimension they are intended to measure are shown in Table 2.

**Response Categories And Dichotomization.** Because the short form version of the MNBS was administered as part of the Personal And Relationships Profile (Straus et al., 1999), the response categories used for all 22 of the scales in this instrument were used. These asked
the respondent to indicate how much they agreed with each of the eight neglectful behaviors using the following categories: 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, or 4. Strongly Agree. Students who chose Agree or Strongly Agree were classified as having experienced the neglectful behavior.

**Reliability of the MNBS.** The Alpha coefficient of internal consistency reliability using the 6,900 students as the cases was .72. For the macro-level version of the data, using the 33 sites as the cases, the alpha was .75. Taking into account that the short form of the MNBS has only eight items, these can be considered to be high coefficients of reliability.

**Cutting point for neglectful behavior.** One of the most ambiguous aspects of defining and measuring neglect concerns how pervasive the neglectful behavior must be for a parent to be classified as neglectful. This is in contrast with sexual abuse for which there is almost complete consensus that a parent who has sex with a child once is a sexually abusing parent. For neglectful behavior, however, if only a single instance occurs, there is a tendency to label that as a neglectful event, but not to label the parent as neglecting, unless there is observable injury. We accommodated to this practice by categorizing only students who reported three or more of the neglectful behaviors measured by the MNBS as having experienced neglectful behavior.

**Measures Of Violence Against a Dating Partner**

**The CTS2.** Physical assault and injury were measured by the revised Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The CTS has been used in more than 300 published papers over the past 25 years and has demonstrated reliability and validity (Archer, 1999; Straus, 1990). The alpha coefficients of reliability for male and female students at each site in the present study are available (Straus, 2004). This paper uses the CTS scales for physical assault and physical injury and also the subscales to identify students who severely assaulted or severely injured a partner. Examples of the items measuring minor physical assault include pushed or shoved, grabbed, slapped, and threw something at partner,
while examples of severe assault include punched or hit, kicked, and choked. Examples of items measuring minor injury include felt physical pain the day after a fight with partner and was sprain, bruise, cut after fight with partner, while examples of severe injury include broken bone from fight with partner and needed to see doctor because of fight with partner.

The CTS frequency of occurrence response categories were dichotomized to create a prevalence score, where 1 indicates that the student had perpetrated one or more of the acts in the scale. The macro-level data is the percent of students at each university with a score of 1, i.e., the percent physically attacked or injured by a dating partner in the past year.

There are separate subscales for minor and severe assault and minor and severe injury, and for the combination of these acts which will be referred to as the overall or total assault or injury scale. However, because most of the violent acts were in the minor violence category, the minor and the total scales overlap to such a great extent that the results parallel each other. To avoid this redundancy, we report only the total and the severe violence scales.

**Measures Of Respondent Characteristics**

**Gender.** Males were coded as 1 and females 2. For the macro-level analyses, the variable is the percent of female students at each university. About two out of three students in the sample were female (69%). The predominance of females occurred because most of the classes in which the questionnaire was administered were courses in psychology and sociology.

**Socioeconomic Status (SES).** A socioeconomic status scale was created for each site using three variables: years of education completed by the student’s father and mother and family income. The usual procedure of summing the scores for these three variables could not be used because the same score can have almost opposite meanings from one country to another. In the USA, a family income of $10,000 is below the official poverty line; in India that income indicates affluence. To deal with this problem we transformed each of the items to Z scores. This creates scores with the same meaning at all sites -- the number of standard deviations each student is above or below the average income for their site. The sum
of the three Z scored items was then transformed to a Z score. The resulting scale identifies students within each site who are above and below the mean of all students at their site.

**Social Desirability Scale.** Research that uses self-reported data needs to take into account the tendency of respondents to minimize socially undesirable behavior. In this study the procedure was to use the Social Desirability scale of the Personal And Relationships Profile (Straus et al., 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999). This is a 13-item scale adapted from Reynolds short form of the widely used Crowe Marlowe social desirability scale (Reynolds, 1982). The scale items are behaviors and emotions that are slightly undesirable but true of almost everyone, such as “I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget” and “There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.” The more of these items the respondent denies, the more likely a respondent is to avoid admitting the undesirable behaviors which are the focus of this study, such as having been neglected or assaulting or injuring a partner.

The theoretical range of the social desirability scale is from 13 to 52. For this sample, the scores ranged from 15 to 52, with a mean of 33.9 and a SD of 4.8. The site-to-site differences were not large, but because they are almost statistically significant, it was decided to control for score on the social desirability scale. For the macro-level analysis, the aggregate data consists of the mean social desirability scale score for the students at each site.

**Age.** The students ranged in age from 18 to 40. It is well established that the younger a couple, the more likely there is to be violence in the relationship (Stets & Straus, 1989). Because the sites varied significantly in age, this variable was controlled in the analysis of site-to-site differences in violence against a partner. The mean age of the students at each site was used as the indicator of age for the macro-level analyses.

**Relationship Length.** Although almost three percent of the students had been in the relationship they described in the questionnaire a month or less, many more (23%) had been together for over one year, but less than two. Thus, the median number of months was 8.5 and the mean almost 14. Because the longer a couple is together, the greater the opportunity for
violence to occur, it is important to control for the length of the relationship. In the macro-level
data file, this variable consists of the mean number of months together for each university.

**Mode Of Analysis**

*Individual Student And Site-Level Analyses.* The analyses were replicated at the
individual student level and at the macro or site level. The N for the individual-level analyses
ranges from 6,542 to 7,179. The N varies from analysis to analysis because “listwise deletion”
was used for each analysis and different combinations of variables resulted in different N’s.
The macro-level analyses use as the cases the geographic sites in which these students attend
a university (N = 33).

*Relationship between neglect and partner violence.* Both the individual and macro-
levels of analyses used partial correlation to examine the relationship between neglectful
behavior experienced and aspects of partner violence. The variables controlled were the length
of the relationship, the SES of the student’s family, and score on the social desirability scale.
Because gender is such an important variable in understanding violence between partners,
correlations were computed separately for males and females.

**THE PREVALENCE OF NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

**Neglectful Behaviors**

Table 2 gives the percent of the sample who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they had
experienced each of the eight neglectful behaviors in the scale. The most frequent neglectful
behavior was not helping with homework, which was reported by 29% of the students. The
column labeled "Sites" shows large variation between sites. The percentage of parents in the
33 sites who did not help with homework ranged from 10% to 73%. Although the reliability
analysis showed that this item was correlated with the overall Multidimensional Neglectful
Behavior Scale score, we suspect that the percentages may be as high as they are because
helping with homework may not be regarded as legitimate by some parents and may not be
possible for other parents, especially parents with little education.
The least frequently occurring of the eight neglectful behaviors was not caring if the child got into trouble in school. Although this was reported by five percent of the students in the overall sample, it was less then half of that (2%) at the lowest site and almost three times as many (19%) at the highest site.

**Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale Scores**

Table 3 gives the frequency distribution of scores on the MNBS. Using the criterion of three or more of the eight neglectful behaviors, 12.5% of the students were classified as having experienced neglectful behavior. The rate for male students (15.7%) was 39% higher than the rate for females (11.3%).

**Site-to-Site Differences In Neglectful Behavior.** We turn now to the question of cross-cultural differences in neglectful behavior. Table 4 presents the 33 sites in rank order of the percent of students who reported having experienced a high level of neglectful behaviors (3 or more of the eight behaviors). Table 4 also shows that, at the median university in this study, 12.2% students reported this level of neglectful behavior. Even at the university with the lowest rate, just over three percent of the students experienced this level of neglectful behavior.

**Gender Differences.** Comparison of the underlined numbers in the Male and Female columns of Table 4 shows that the median percent of students who reported three of more neglectful behaviors was 46% higher for males than for females (15.2 versus 10.4). However, although both Tables 3 and Table 4 show substantially higher rates of neglectful behavior experienced by male students, the last column of Table 4 shows that there are many exceptions. This column gives the percent that the female rate is of the male rate. Sites with rates over 100 indicate that more female than male students experienced three or more of the neglectful behaviors.

**NEGLECT AND MISTREATMENT OF DATING PARTNER**
Individual-Level Analysis

To test the hypothesis that neglectful behavior is associated with an increased tendency to mistreat a dating partner, we computed partial correlations between scores on the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale and physical assaulting and injuring a dating partner. The student rows of Table 5 show that, although the correlations are low, all of the correlations are statistically significant (largely because the sample size is more than 6,000) and all indicate, as hypothesized, that experiencing neglectful behavior by parents is associated with violence against a dating partner. The zero order correlations (i.e., without controls for SES, length of the relationship, and score on the social desirability scale, are all somewhat higher. The correlations are all larger for male students, indicating that there is a closer link between having experienced neglectful behavior and violence against a dating partner for male students.

University-Level Analysis

The rows for Sites in Table 5 repeat the analysis just presented, but using each university as a case (N = 33). For this “macro-level” analysis, neglectful behavior was measured by the percent of students at each of the 33 sites who had experienced three or more of the eight neglectful behaviors. Violence against a dating partner was measured by the percent who had physically assaulted or injured a partner in the previous 12 months. As was the case for the individual student-level analysis, all the correlations were consistent with the hypothesis that sites where neglectful behavior was prevalent tended to be sites with high rates of assault and injury of a dating partner. The main difference between the results at the macro-level and those at the individual-level is that the macro-level correlations are much higher.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study measured neglectful behavior experienced as a child by 6,900 students at 33 universities in 17 countries and found that: Half of the students experienced at least one of the eight neglectful behaviors as children, and about 12% experienced three or more of the eight
neglectful behaviors measured. The rate of neglectful behavior experienced by male students tended to be higher than by female students.

There were tremendous university-to-university differences in the prevalence of neglectful behavior. Using students who experienced three or more neglectful behaviors as a criterion, the rates ranged from a low of 3% to a high of 36%.

The more neglectful behavior the students in this study experienced as a child, the more likely they were to physically assault a dating partner. The results using the 33 sites as the units of study found parallel but much larger correlations. That is, the higher the percentage of students at a university who experienced neglectful behavior, the higher the rate of violence against a partner in a dating relationship. Higher correlations using macro-level data are often found (see for example Baron & Straus, 1989), perhaps because macro-level correlations combine the individual-level effects and the socio-cultural climate effect that arises from the presence of a large percent of persons with a certain characteristic, or from confounding with an underlying third variable.

The results on the relationship of neglectful behavior to violence against a dating partner are consistent with the developmental sequence posited by Tremblay, who argues that one of the factors enabling a child to learn alternative strategies to use of aggression to express anger, to remove noxious conditions, or to achieve goals such as possession of a toy, is care by a responsive parent and consistent discipline. The results showing that the more neglectful behavior experienced the higher the rate of violence against a dating partner probably reflects the fact that the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale used for this study includes indicators of absence of parental responsiveness to the emotional need and absence of consistent discipline, both of which are necessary for children to learn non-aggressive methods of achieving goals.

Limitations And Needed Research
There are a number of important limitations that must be kept in mind. The sample is a non-random convenience sample. The measure of neglectful behavior is very brief and therefore omits many important neglectful behaviors. Moreover, it depends on the ability of young adults to recall neglectful behavior. If neglect is more prevalent among pre-school children than older children, very few can recall behavior by parents when they were that young. There is no information on whether the students who experienced neglectful behavior as a child also manifested signs of physical or psychological harm as a result. Perhaps the most important limitation is that there is as yet only limited evidence of the validity of the MNBS across cultures (Straus, 2004). Consequently, the site-to-site differences may reflect measurement error rather than real differences in neglectful behavior.

Assuming, however, that the large differences between sites in neglectful behavior are, at least in part, real differences in neglectful behavior, leaves unanswered the question why the rate of neglectful behavior is so much higher at some sites. Many of the possible explanations are open to empirical research. A simple but important example is the number of children per family. This varies from society to society and a large number of children influence the probability of neglectful behavior because the attention of parents must be divided among several children. Another important issue is the perception of students who experienced neglectful behavior. To what extent did students who reported neglectful behavior by their parents perceive it as neglect? Perception of having been neglected could be a moderator variable that might help explain the link between having experienced neglectful behavior and violence against a dating partner.

**Conclusions**

Although there are many limitations to this study and many unanswered questions, the results suggest that neglectful behavior by parents is a more pervasive problem than it is usually believed. The results show that neglectful behavior occurs in both developed and underdeveloped countries, and among privileged as well unprivileged sectors of those
countries. This study has also shown that neglectful behavior is associated with a type of harmful effect that was predicted on theoretical grounds, even though it has not been previously investigated – physical violence toward a dating partner.

There are increasing efforts in many countries aimed at primary prevention of child abuse and of violence against partners in dating, cohabiting, and martial relationships. It is already known that this requires changing such traditional characteristics of society and of families as male-dominance in society and the family (Straus, 1994) and the violent socialization of children that goes under euphemisms such as “spanking” and “smacking” (Straus, 2001). The results of this study suggest that helping parents avoid neglectful behavior, even the relatively minor types of neglectful behavior that are probably represented by the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale, could make a further contribution to primary prevention of all types of family violence, including other forms of child maltreatment.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
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<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999</td>
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<td>(Christensen, 1996)</td>
<td>Health Nurses in Denmark</td>
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<td>(Cawson, Wattam, Brooker, &amp; Graham, 2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSPC) (Straus et al., 1998)</td>
<td>National random sample of parents with a child from birth through 17 at home</td>
<td>Interviews with parents</td>
<td>Neglect Total</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Percent Of Students Who Experienced Each Neglectful Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Neglectful Behavior</th>
<th>Students N= 7179</th>
<th>Sites N= 33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>My parents helped me with homework if I needed help</td>
<td>RX 29</td>
<td>10 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My parents did not comfort me when I was upset</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>My parents helped me when I had problems</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>15 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My parents made sure I went to school</td>
<td>RX 15</td>
<td>1 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>My parents did not help me to do my best</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>My parents gave me enough clothes to keep me warm</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>8 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My parents did not keep me clean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise</td>
<td>My parents did not care if I got into trouble in school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R indicates a reverse scored item. X indicates that the item has been replaced in the revised version of the scale (see Straus, 2004)
Table 3. Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale Scores By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Score</th>
<th>Total (N=7,875)</th>
<th>Males (N=2,325)</th>
<th>Females (N=5,550)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The scale scores indicate the number of neglectful behaviors reported. Chi-square = 67.86, df =8, p<.001
### Table 4. Prevalence Of Neglectful behavior By Site And Gender (Sites In Rank Order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Site</th>
<th>Total Score (% 3 or more)</th>
<th>Fem/Male</th>
<th>Fem/Male%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KOREA-PUSAN</td>
<td>36.4 (28.1 41.2)</td>
<td>146.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINA-HONGKONG</td>
<td>28.6 (25.3 30.8)</td>
<td>121.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA-LONDON</td>
<td>21.4 (22.7 20.3)</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGP-SINGAPORE</td>
<td>19.4 (23.0 .7)</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA-TORONTO</td>
<td>16.7 (15.2 17.6)</td>
<td>115.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-MISSISSIP</td>
<td>16.4 (17.9 16.3)</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMANH-FREIBURG</td>
<td>15.4 (11.1 18.6)</td>
<td>167.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-LOUISIAN</td>
<td>15.4 (17.6 13.9)</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO-JUAREZ</td>
<td>15.0 (21.3 13.5)</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-TEXAS-NON MEX</td>
<td>15.0 (24.3 9.5)</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISRAEL-EMEKZYRL</td>
<td>13.8 (17.4 12.9)</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-TEXAS-NAGADCDChes</td>
<td>13.6 (10.1 15.5)</td>
<td>153.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRASIL-SAO PAULO</td>
<td>13.4 (19.1 10.4)</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-TEXAS-MEX AMERICAN</td>
<td>13.2 (20.2 10.5)</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-CINCINNATTE</td>
<td>12.8 (17.5 7.7)</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA-WINNIPEG</td>
<td>12.7 (19.0 11.8)</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRALIA-ADELAIDE</td>
<td>12.2 (9.6 12.8)</td>
<td>133.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA-HAMILTON</td>
<td>12.0 (11.9 12.0)</td>
<td>100.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELGIUM-FLEMISH</td>
<td>11.5 (16.7 9.9)</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PORTUGAL-Braga</td>
<td>11.0 (12.2 9.1)</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-INDIANA</td>
<td>11.0 (14.6 9.4)</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-UTAH</td>
<td>11.0 (16.7 7.6)</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA-PUNE</td>
<td>10.5 (11.5 9.8)</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-WASHIN DC</td>
<td>10.5 (21.4 8.6)</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREAT BRITTN-SCOTLAND</td>
<td>10.4 (7.7 10.9)</td>
<td>141.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETHERLANDS-AMSTRDM</td>
<td>10.3 (12.2 9.6)</td>
<td>78.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA-MONTREAL</td>
<td>10.0 (12.3 9.4)</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ZEALAND-CHRSTCH</td>
<td>9.0 (10.0 8.7)</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWITZERLAND-FRENCH</td>
<td>8.7 (13.7 6.2)</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWITZERLAN-GERMAN</td>
<td>8.5 (6.3 9.5)</td>
<td>150.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-NEW HAMPSHIRE 2</td>
<td>6.7 (12.8 4.7)</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-PENNSLVNA</td>
<td>5.1 (6.2 4.8)</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-NEW HAMPSHIRE 1</td>
<td>3.2 (5.2 2.4)</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bold underlined indicates medians
Table 5. Partial Correlation Of The Relation Between Neglectful Behavior To Violence Against A Dating Partner, For Individual Students And For Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Assault Any</th>
<th>Assault Severe</th>
<th>Injury Any</th>
<th>Injury Severe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 6542)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 33)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All correlations in the Students rows are significant at the .01 level because of the large N. The correlations in the Sites rows are larger, but half are not significant because of the small N.
REFERENCES


