

Criminal History and Assaults on Intimate Partners by Mexican American and Non-Mexican White College Students

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This study analyzed a sample of 348 college students to examine the role that criminal history and Mexican ethnicity play in predicting intimate partner violence. Respondents who committed crimes in the past (before the age of 15) had a higher probability of severely physically assaulting a partner than those respondents who had committed crime later in life (after the age of 15). A history of property crime was found to be a better predictor of severe partner assault than a history of violent crime. The results support a generalist perspective on crime, which states that most individuals typically do not commit one type of crime solely but commit a variety of different crimes (property and violent). This study also found differences between Mexican American and non-Mexican White students in reference to minor assaults on a partner.

Keywords: *criminal history; ethnicity; intimate partner violence; Mexican American*

Research addressing ethnicity and intimate partner violence has produced mixed results for Mexican Americans. Additionally, a frequently utilized characteristic in distinguishing batterers is whether the batterer has a history of criminal acts outside the family. Researchers who have reviewed and categorized studies of intimate partner violence have found that some assailants do not commit violent acts outside the family (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, & Stuart, 1999). This suggests that assaults on partners are a specialized type of crime. Conversely, other studies have found that partner assaulters have a history of criminal tendencies (Buzawa, Hotaling, Klein, & Byrne, 1999; DeLucia, Owens, Will, & McCoin, 1999; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). This suggests that partner assailants do not commit this type of crime exclusively but have a general tendency to commit crime. This article investigated

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intimate partner violence focusing on Mexican ethnicity, criminal history, and the specialist approach versus the generalist approach to crime. This article will use the term *Mexican American* unless the literature specifically states the term *Hispanic*.

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. Students constitute a sizeable population in many countries. In the USA, for example, there are about 15 million currently enrolled. Students are at a formative period in their lives, especially in relation to the development of appropriate patterns of behavior with a partner. The patterns manifested at this age are often enduring features of their relationships, (O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994; Pan, Neidig, & O'Leary, 1994).

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 a 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.

Furthermore, White and Koss (1991) conducted a study of dating violence among college students. Their study of a national representative sample of 2,602 women and 2,105 men enrolled in 32 universities across the United States assessed verbal and physical aggression in heterosexual relationships. Thirty-seven percent of their sample experienced some form of physical aggression. Among those who experienced some form of physical aggression, there were no differences by ethnicity.

Additionally, Rouse (1988) studied abuse in dating relationships among 326 Black, White, and Hispanic college students from a southwestern university using a three-page questionnaire. Using cross-tabulation, she found very small, nonsignificant differences in physical abuse among the three ethnic groups. Of the differences that were found, Hispanics reported the lowest

rates of abuse followed by the White respondents with the Black respondents reporting the highest rates.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE BY MEXICAN AMERICANS

As was mentioned above, research addressing ethnic differences in intimate partner violence has produced mixed results for Mexican Americans. The studies reviewed can be classified into three groups: (a) Mexican Americans have lower levels of intimate partner violence when compared to African Americans and non-Mexican Whites (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2000; Fagan, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983; Rouse, 1988; Sorenson, Upchurch, & Shen, 1996); (b) Mexican Americans are more violent than non-Mexican Whites (Sorenson & Telles, 1991; Straus & Smith, 1990); and (c) no differences in intimate partner violence between Mexican Americans and non-Mexican Whites (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994; White & Koss, 1991). A comparative study of intimate partner violence among ethnic groups could provide further clarification to a body of literature and research that has produced mixed results.

HISPANIC CULTURE

Another potential issue that could contribute to the issue of Mexican Americans and intimate partner violence is the issue of culture. For example, family organization focuses on a preference for a collectivistic model with strong support for parents and children (Falicov, 1998). This is different from the nuclear family model where mobility is encouraged and the collectivistic model is not as prevalent.

Also of importance is the issue of family life cycle among Mexican Americans. Stages and transitions that families go through can be culturally specific (Falicov, 1998). For example, contact with one's immediate family would be more prevalent among Mexican Americans than someone in the nuclear family structure. The prevalence of contact with other family members could work in two ways in reference to intimate partner violence. On one hand, frequent contact with the family could serve as a barrier to stop intimate partner violence. An assailant could think twice before harming an individual with a strong social support network. Conversely, the strong and private nature of the family could work as a screen to keep all activity (such as intimate partner violence) that goes on in the family unnoticed by outsiders.

RESEARCH ON CRIMINAL HISTORY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

One of the issues that will be examined in this article will be the possible connection between a person with a criminal history and the likelihood of assaulting a partner.

In their review of male batterer typologies, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) identified what they called the generally violent or antisocial batterer as the most likely to engage in extrafamilial violence. This type of batterer has a more extensive history of criminal behavior and is also more likely to have problems with alcohol and drug abuse.

Moffitt, Krueger, Avshalom, & Fagen (2000) investigated intimate partner violence (psychological and physical) and its relation to other forms of crime. Their longitudinal study analyzed a cohort of 1,037 individuals born between April 1, 1972, and March 1973. Their results revealed a significant relation between partner abuse and other crime.

Buzawa et al. (1999) reviewed court records for 353 cases of male to female domestic violence. Eighty-five percent of those interviewed had a history of assaultive behavior, property crimes, and drug or alcohol use. DeLucia et al. (1999) evaluated the arrest history of 168 offenders enrolled in a treatment program for domestic violence. They found that 76% of their population had some kind of arrest history. Jacobson and Gottman (1998) studied 140 couples that experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their relationship. They found that 27% of the assailants had a history of violence.

The difference in the percentage of individuals who committed assaults against a partner and have a criminal history could be in the populations studied, specifically whether the research studied persons apprehended by the criminal justice system for intimate partner violence or persons who reported intimate partner violence in a self-report survey.

STUDIES OF EARLY ONSET OF CRIME

One of the earliest studies that found an association between criminal activity at an early age (early onset) and a lifelong pattern of crime studied 500 children in the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; McCord, 1991). This could potentially lead to other crimes such as assaulting a partner. Since then, numerous studies have found similar results. For example, Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin (1972) followed 9,945 boys born in Philadelphia in 1945. They found chronic juvenile offenders had an 80%

chance of becoming adult criminal offenders. Laub and Sampson (1990) found that juvenile criminals were 4 times more likely to become adult offenders than juveniles who did not commit crimes. Individuals with no juvenile arrests had only an 18% chance of being arrested as an adult. These findings suggest that people who commit crimes early in life are more likely to commit a crime later in life. This study will focus on how crime committed early in life can be useful in understanding intimate partner violence.

CRIMINAL SPECIALIZATION AND CRIMINAL HISTORY

Another issue that this study will also focus on is the type of criminal history participated in and if there is a cross-over effect. For example, are people with a history of property crime more likely to assault their partner or are they more likely to stick to property crime?

Farrington, Snyder, and Finnegan (1988) found only a small degree of specialization in type of crime (about 20%) among 70,000 juvenile offenders. Wolfgang et al.'s (1972) study found no evidence of specialization in one type of crime among their sample of juvenile delinquents. Other studies have found no pattern of specialization among deviant youths (Lab, 1984; Shelden, Horvath, and Tracy, 1989). However, Hamparian, Schuster, Dinitz, and Conrad (1978), in his study of 1,222 youth in Columbus, Ohio, found that those who did commit crimes tended to also engage in forms of crime other than the one for which they had been arrested. A more recent study by Moffitt et al. (2000) found a significant relationship between partner abuse and other forms of crime. Farabee, Joshi, and Anglin (2001) in a sample of 7,189 respondents found that former drug addicts who began their criminal careers after their addiction careers were more likely to engage in victimless crimes, thus showing a cross-over effect. Furthermore, those dependent on drugs had a greater criminal diversity to commit other types of crimes, again showing a cross-over effect into other types of crimes.

This study will investigate if people who assault their partners specialize in violent behavior or if they are more general in their criminal behavior and commit other types of crimes (property crimes).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. The more crimes committed in the past, the higher the probability of physically assaulting a partner.

2. Early onset crime is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence than criminal behavior beginning later in life.
3. Violent crime is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence than property crime.
4. A criminal history is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence for Mexican Americans than non-Mexican Whites.

METHOD

Sample

The initial sample consisted of 650 respondents from two southwestern universities. Of the 650 respondents, 576 chose to complete the questionnaire. Of these, 33 questionnaires were omitted because they were non-eligible or partially completed. Finally, of the 543 remaining questionnaires, 348 were selected for this study because they met the criteria of having no missing data for any relevant issue in this study.

This is a convenience sample in which respondents filled out the questionnaire in a classroom setting during the fall 1999, spring 2000, and summer 2000 semesters. Classes included introductory courses to sociology, anthropology, statistics, and history. Students were offered extra credit to participate in the study.

Each respondent received a booklet consisting of the following: (a) a cover sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the participant's rights, and the name of a contact person and telephone number for those who might have questions after the test session was over; (b) the demographic questions; and (c) the instruments described in this section. The purpose, task demands, and rights were explained orally and in printed form at the beginning of each session. Respondents were told that the questionnaire would include questions concerning attitudes, beliefs, and experiences they may have had. They were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and they were told that the session would take an hour or slightly more. All students were asked to sign a written consent form before completing their questionnaires.

A debriefing form was given to each participant as they turned in their questionnaire. It explained the study in more detail and provided names and telephone numbers of local mental health services and community resources, such as services for battered women. Students that voluntarily participated in the study were offered extra credit points by their professors.

The questionnaire was distributed to respondents in English only. This was appropriate as most, if not all students from the two southwestern universities, attended grade school and high school in the United States and were

first generation college students at the time of the survey. Additionally, the universities required an English proficiency exam as a prerequisite before students were allowed to enroll in classes. This assured that any and all respondents were sufficiently familiar with the English language when filling out the questionnaire.

Measures

Partner assault. The measure of partner assault is from the revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The original CTS has been used in more than 100 studies during the past 25 years (Archer, 1999; Straus, 1990a).

The CTS2 classifies assaults into minor and severe. The CTS2 uses the following items to measure minor assault: threw something at partner, twisted arm or hair, pushed or shoved, grabbed, and slapped. The CTS2 uses the following items to measure severe assault: used knife or gun on partner, punched or hit, choked, slammed against wall, beat up, burned or scalded, and kicked. Respondents were asked how many times they had committed any of the physical assault behaviors items in the past year. The coefficient of reliability for the Physical Assault scale that was used in previous studies was .86 (Straus et al., 1996), .72 for the Minor Assault scale for this study, and .76 for the Severe Assault scale.

The minor and severe assault measures were combined to create mutually exclusive violence types with the following categories: 0 = no assault, 1 = minor assault only, and 2 = severe assault.

Criminal history. The measuring instrument used to assess criminal history is the Criminal History scale of the Personal and Relationship Profile (PRP). The PRP is an instrument designed to measure risk factors for partner assault. The Criminal History scale was constructed by using a two-by-two design in which early and later crime is crossed with property and violent crimes. The questions are given in Table 1. The eight items were summed to create the Criminal History scale (range: 0 to 8). The alpha coefficient of reliability for the eight-item scale is .81. The higher the score the more criminal acts committed by the respondent.

Early and later criminal history. The Early Onset Crime subscale measures crimes committed by the respondent up until the age of 14. Age 14 was chosen as a marker between early and later onset crime to be consistent with

TABLE 1: Criminal Acts Committed For Mexican Americans and Non-Mexican Whites

<i>Crime</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>	<i>Non-Mexican (%)</i>	<i>Mexican (%)</i>	χ^2
Stole money before age 15	41	39	42	.545
Stole money after age 15	34	34	35	.898
Attacked someone to hurt them before age 15	33	32	33	.774
Attacked someone to hurt them after age 15	38	37	39	.789
Stole something worth more than \$50 before age 15	21	17	23	.151
Stole something worth less than \$50 after age 15	27	27	26	.789
Carried hidden weapon before age 15	22	22	20	.646
Carried hidden weapon after age 15	20	20	21	.901
Mean number of crimes	2.3	2.3	2.43	
Median number of crimes	2	2	1	

NOTE: Total: ($N = 348$), non-Mexican ($n = 135$), Mexican ($n = 213$), χ^2 : ($N = 348$).

the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The manual uses the age before and after 15 as a criterion when assessing an antisocial personality. Subscales for early and later criminal history (range: 0 to 4) were computed. The Early Onset Crime subscale had an alpha of .68 and the Later Onset Crime subscale had an alpha of .67.

Property and violent criminal history. The Property Crime and Violent Crime subscales both had an alpha of .77. As was the case with the overall Criminal History scale, the higher the score, the more criminal acts committed by the respondent.

Socioeconomic Status scale. The Socioeconomic Status scale was created by summing the scores for the education of the respondent's parents (range: 1 to 7) and family income (range: 1 to 9). The range of the scale was 3 to 23. The alpha coefficient of reliability for the Socioeconomic Status scale was .72. The theoretical rationale for using education and income is that these are the two main indicators of a person's well-being. As education and income increase access to more information and opportunities increase the likelihood of a better lifestyle.

Social Desirability scale. Research that uses self-report data needs to take into account the minimization of socially undesirable behavior by respondents. This study used the Social Desirability scale of the PRP. This is a 13-item scale that has been adapted from the Crowe Marlowe Social Desirability Scale by Reynolds (1982). The scale measures the degree to which a respondent will tend to avoid admitting undesirable behavior, such as partner assault and other forms of crime. The scale is intended to measure things that are slightly undesirable but true of everyone. The higher the social desirability score, the less likely the respondent is to disclose undesirable information on the self-report survey. A high score indicates that the respondent is more likely to deny socially undesirable behavior (range: 13 to 52, *Mdn* = 34, *M* = 34.5).

It is important to note that the Social Desirability scale was not developed for or normed on Mexican Americans, therefore the results must be taken with caution.

Acculturation. This study measured acculturation using six questions that assessed place of birth, country of residence, citizenship, and language spoken in different social settings (preference, home, with friends, and at work). The response categories were the following: Spanish all the time, Spanish most of the time, Spanish and English equally, English most of the time, and English all of the time. Only the Mexican American respondents were analyzed in reference to acculturation.

The scale is designed with higher scores indicating higher levels of acculturation into American society. The scale scores were transformed into quintiles, thus the range of the acculturation scale is from 1 to 5. The acculturation variable was transformed into quintiles to simplify preliminary analysis such as cross-tabulation and to reduce skewness. Similar results were found in the preliminary analysis using acculturation as a continuous scale and as a quintile.

Overall, 314 respondents (91%) were born in the United States, 338 respondents (97%) live in the United States, 320 (92%) respondents are U.S. citizens, 255 (73%) respondents prefer to speak English most of the time, 231 (66%) respondents speak English most of the time at home, 270 (77%) speak English most of the time with friends, and 205 (81%) speak English most of the time at work. Given this information and the fact that the Mexican American respondents are participating in higher education, it is safe to say that the sample used in this study has a higher acculturation level than other groups of Mexican American ethnicity.

RESULTS

Ethnic Differences in Respondents' Characteristics

Table 2 shows differences between the Mexican American and non-Mexican White students in reference to demographic and independent variables.

About two thirds of the respondents are female with the same pattern holding by ethnicity. The median age for the entire sample was 23 years, with the Mexican group being about 2 years older than the non-Mexican White group. Looking at the three variables that were used to compute the socioeconomic status, a *t* test showed that there are statistically significant differences between Mexicans and non-Mexicans. There was a \$40,000 difference in family income with the non-Mexican White respondents having the higher median income. non-Mexican White parents had achieved a higher level of education than Mexican Americans parents. More than one fourth of the non-Mexican respondents' fathers had a college degree versus 7% for the Mexican group. Mother's education also showed a similar pattern with 19% of the non-Mexican respondents' mothers having a college degree versus 8% for the Mexican group. The *t* test showed that there were statistically significant differences between ethnic groups for father's education only. Therefore, it was important to control for socioeconomic status in the analysis. Finally, Mexicans had a significantly higher social desirability score (35) than non-Mexican (33) respondents. The implications for this study are that non-Mexican respondents are disclosing more of their undesirable behavior than Mexican respondents. The analysis includes respondents from single-parent households.

Prevalence of Criminal History

Table 1 displays the prevalence rates for each specific criminal act that was committed by Mexican Americans and non-Mexican Whites. The total column shows that more than a third of all the respondents stole money before and after the age of 15. Looking at the same column, a third or more of all respondents attacked someone intending to hurt them before and after the age of 15. These high rates of criminal acts committed are consistent with other studies of self-reported crime (Farrington, 1989; Robinson & Zaitzow, 1999).

Overall, Table 1 shows that there were no large differences in the crimes committed by Mexican Americans and non-Mexicans. A chi-square test was used to assess whether there was a significant difference in criminal acts committed between Mexican Americans and non-Mexican Whites. The chi-

TABLE 2: Ethnic Differences in Respondents' Characteristics

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Total</i> (N = 348)	<i>Mexican</i> (n = 213)	<i>Non-Mexican</i> (n = 135)	χ^2 <i>probability</i> (N = 428)
Respondents' gender				
Male	38%	36%	40%	0.470
Female	62%	64%	60%	
Year in university				
Freshman	10%	13%	5%	0.030*
Sophomore	18%	15%	21%	
Junior	28%	26%	33%	
Senior	45%	47%	41%	
Age in years (<i>Mdn</i>) ^{a, b}	23	23	21	0.033*
Relationship type				
Dating	67%	65%	70%	0.344
Engaged	11%	13%	8%	
Married	22%	22%	22%	
Cohabiting	32%	32%	32%	0.989
Relationship status				
Current	68%	70%	64%	0.284
Previous	32%	30%	36%	
Sexually active	80%	80%	79%	0.691
Relationship length				
1 to 12 months	38%	35%	42%	0.176
13 to 24 months	15%	14%	16%	
25 or more months	47%	51%	42%	
Family income				
Median group	\$40,000 to \$49,999	\$30,000 to \$39,999	\$70,000 to \$79,999	0.000***
Father's education				
High school or less	44%	55%	25%	0.0966
Some college	26%	27%	22%	
College degree	15%	7%	27%	
Graduate school	16%	10%	26%	
Mother's education				
High school or less	51%	66%	27%	0.000***
Some college	23%	20%	28%	
College degree	12%	8%	19%	
Graduate school	14%	7%	26%	
Social desirability (<i>M</i>)	34.5	35	33	0.006**

NOTE: Bonferroni's multiple comparison test and *t* test were run for the following Characteristics categories: Age, Relationship length, Family income, Father's education, Mother's education, and Social desirability.

a. The categories are 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 to 24, 25 to 29, 30 to 39, and 40 to 49.

b. The categories are 1 = about one month, 2 = about 2 months, 3 = 3 to 5 months, 4 = 6 to 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.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

square test revealed no statistically significant differences by ethnicity, as can be seen in the column on the right side of Table 1.

Demographic Correlates of Criminal History

Criminal history. The only demographic variable that was significant is gender. Females have lower Criminal History scale scores than males.

Early, Later, Property, and Violent Criminal History subscales. Once again, gender was the only demographic variable that was related to all of the Criminal History subscales. Correlation analysis indicates that females committed less crime before and after the age of 15 than males. Females were also less likely to have engaged in either property crime or violent crime than males. This is consistent with another study that found lower crime rates for women (Steffensmeier, 1996). The remaining correlations ranged from $-.09$ to $.08$ and were all not statistically significant.

Criminal History and Partner Assault

Multinomial logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between criminal history, ethnicity, and intimate partner violence. Only variables that were correlated with criminal history and theoretically important were included in the model for simplicity and parsimony. In Tables 3, 4, and 5, the column labeled *RRR* shows the relative risk ratios, which resemble the odds ratios given by logistic regression (Hamilton, 1998). The dependent variable categories used in the multinomial logistic regression are no violence, minor violence, and severe violence, with the reference category being no violence.

Table 3 shows that Criminal History was not significantly related to Minor Assaults on a partner. It does show that Mexican Ethnicity was significant. The odds of a minor assault rather than no violence on a partner almost double when the respondent was Mexican American, controlling for criminal history, gender, socioeconomic status, and social desirability.

The results indicate that criminal history was associated with severe assaults on a partner. The odds of a severe assault rather than no violence on a partner increased about 16% with each 1-point increase in criminal history, controlling for ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and social desirability.

Interaction of ethnicity and criminal history. The hypothesis that criminal history was more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence for Mexican Americans than non-Mexican Whites was not supported.

TABLE 3: Multinomial Logistic Regression of Intimate Partner Violence on Criminal History, Ethnicity (Mexican Americans and Non-Mexicans), Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Social Desirability

	<i>Minor Violence</i>		<i>Severe Violence</i>	
	<i>RRR</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>RRR</i>	<i>SE</i>
Criminal history total (range: 0 to 8)	.9822	.0590	1.1654*	.0853
Mexican = 1	1.978*	.6528	1.0981	.4631
Female = 1	.8307	.2397	1.4143	.5562
Socioeconomic status (range: 3 to 23)	.9983	.0295	.9779	.0380
Social desirability (range 13 to 52)	.9281**	.0279	.9610	.0382

NOTE: RRR = relative risk ratio. No Violence is the comparison group. Number of observations = 348; Logistic Regression $\chi(8) = 18.89$; Probability $> \chi^2 = .0417$; Pseudo $R^2 = .0314$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The hypothesis was tested in two ways: First, predicted probabilities were obtained and graphed to show the relation of the Criminal History scale to the probability of partner assault. Second, an interaction term was created by multiplying the Criminal History scale variable by the ethnic group variable. It was not significantly related to minor or severe assaults.

Early and Later Crime

Table 4 shows the multinomial logistic regressions that test the hypothesis that early onset crime is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence than criminal behavior beginning later in life. This hypothesis was supported but only for severe assaults. Comparing the Early Criminal History regression with the Later Criminal History regression, only severe violence was significant for Early Criminal History. The odds of a severe assault rather than no assault were multiplied by 31% with each 1-unit increase in criminal history, controlling for ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and social desirability. Crime committed early in life was a better predictor of severe assaults than crime committed later in life.

It is important to note that ethnicity was also significant but only for minor assaults on a partner for the Early Onset and Later Onset Criminal History subscales. The odds of a minor assault on a partner increase when the respondent is Mexican American.

TABLE 4: Multinomial Logistic Regressions of Intimate Partner Violence on Early Criminal History, Later Criminal History, Ethnicity (Mexican Americans and Non-Mexicans), Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Social Desirability

	Early Criminal History			Later Criminal History				
	Minor Violence		Severe Violence	Minor Violence		Severe Violence		
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE		
Criminal history (range: 0 to 4)	.9162	0.1010	1.309*	0.1709	1.0295	0.1166	1.2991	0.1861
Mexican = 1	1.9988*	0.6606	1.1206	0.4701	1.9487*	0.6426	1.1094	0.4682
Female = 1	.7968	0.2285	1.3717	0.5317	.8735	0.2506	1.3521	0.5281
Socioeconomic status (range: 3 to 23)	.9967	0.0295	.9807	0.0383	.9990	0.0294	.9737	0.0378
Social desirability (range: 13 to 52)	.9248**	0.0269	.9547	0.0376	.9341*	0.0284	.9589	0.0383

NOTE: RRR = relative risk ratio. No Violence is the comparison group. Number of observations = 348; Logistic Regression $\chi^2(8) = 19.82$; Probability $> \chi^2 = 0.0310$; Pseudo $R^2 = .0330$.

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

TABLE 5: Multinomial Logistic Regressions of Intimate Partner Violence on Property Criminal History, Violent Criminal History, Ethnicity (Mexican Americans and Non-Mexicans), Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Social Desirability

	Property Criminal History			Violent Criminal History				
	Minor Violence		Severe Violence	Minor Violence		Severe Violence		
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE		
Criminal history (range: 0 to 4)	1.0325	0.1057	1.3747**	0.1763	.9161	0.0966	1.1543	0.1477
Mexican = 1	1.9458*	0.6436	1.0728	0.4520	1.9769*	0.6509	1.1683	0.4897
Female = 1	.8691	0.2422	1.3238	0.5053	.7806	0.2289	1.2735	0.5025
Socioeconomic status (range: 3 to 23)	.9993	0.0294	.9771	0.0379	.9968	0.0295	.9761	0.0380
Social desirability (range: 13 to 52)	.9346*	0.0280	.9676	0.0391	.9247**	0.0269	.9433	0.0362

NOTE: RRR = relative risk ratio. No Violence is the comparison group. Number of observations = 348; Logistic Regression $\chi^2(8) = 20.18$; Probability $> \chi^2 = 0.0276$; Pseudo $R^2 = .0336$.

Property and Violent Crime

Table 5 shows the multinomial logistic regressions to test the hypothesis that violent crime is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence than property crime. No support for the hypothesis was found. In fact, the opposite was found but, again, only for severe violence on a partner. The results show that property crime was more closely linked to severe intimate partner violence than a violent criminal history. Violent crime was not significant for either minor or severe intimate partner violence. Again, the results show that ethnicity was significant for minor assault. The odds of a minor assault on a partner almost double when the respondent was Mexican American.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed a sample of 348 undergraduate students from two southwestern universities to determine to what extent those who physically assaulted a partner had a history of crime and whether this relationship differed for crime committed early in life, crime committed later in life, property crime, and violent crime. It also assessed whether there were differences between Mexican American and non-Mexican respondents in reference to their criminal history.

Limitations

There are a couple of reasons why the results of this study should be treated with caution. First, when using a self-report measure of crime, full disclosure can be a problem. Some respondents may not be willing to admit that they committed a crime. Respondents who did not fully admit to committing the crimes in the Criminal History scale also may not have admitted to assaulting a partner. However, I attempted to control for this by including the Social Desirability scale in the model tested. Second, the Criminal History scale used does not include a large variety of crimes. Despite this, high prevalence rates were found.

Additionally, this study does not measure defensive violence by those who were assaulted, therefore it is not known if the violent act against the partner was an act of self-defense as opposed to acting out first. Furthermore, these findings can only be applied to Mexican American students who have a high degree of acculturation in American society as measured by place of birth, citizenship, and language usage.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study add to the understanding of characteristics related to intimate partner violence and also to more general issues in criminology. Overall, it is important to restate that this group of Mexican Americans is highly acculturated into American society based on the acculturation data that assesses place of birth, citizenship, and language preference, and participation in higher education that requires a high degree of acculturation.

Criminal History and Intimate Partner Violence

Criminal history was associated with an increased probability of severely assaulting a partner. This finding is similar to a recent study by Moffitt et al. (2000) who found a significant relationship between partner abuse and other forms of crime. However, criminal history was not associated when the measure of violence was restricted to minor assaults.

Early and Later Criminal History

The findings from this study also contribute to understanding factors associated with a criminal career. Early onset crime is more associated with an increased risk of a severe assault on a partner than criminal behavior beginning later in life.

Violent and Property Crime

This study also found that violent crime is more associated with an increased risk of intimate partner violence than property crime. This finding was the opposite of what was initially hypothesized. Property crime was a better predictor of severe intimate partner violence than violent crime. A possible explanation for this could be that in American culture, a property crime may be perceived as more criminal than most types of interpersonal violence. Stealing something is a clear violation of social norms. When you hit someone, other social norms arise, such as justifying violence by stating "there was no way out" or "he or she deserved it." In addition, this finding supports the generalist perspective of crime, which states that assailants do not commit one type of crime exclusively but have a general tendency to commit other forms of crime. This is opposed to the specialist perspective, which states that assailants specialize in one type of crime such as hitting their partner.

Ethnicity and Intimate Partner Violence

Mexican American ethnicity was associated with an increased probability of minor violence, but not related to severe violence. Mexican Americans in this sample were almost twice as likely to commit a minor assault on their partner than non-Mexican Whites, controlling for criminal history, gender, socioeconomic status, and social desirability. This finding is different from the study by White and Koss (1991) that looked at a national representative sample of men and women enrolled in 32 universities across the United States.

The results raise the question of whether minor and severe violence against a partner could have a different etiology in general for both ethnic groups. Several authors have put forward what can be called a *differential risk factor theory* (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000; Straus, 1990a). They suggest that minor and severe violence against a partner have a different etiology or differential risk factors. For example, social factors may be more relevant for understanding what Straus (1990b) call "ordinary violence" and what Johnson et al. (Johnson, 1995; Johnson and Ferraro, 2000) call "common couple violence," although psychopathology and criminal tendencies may be more important for understanding offenders who engage in more severe assaults on a partner.

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