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**NORMATIVE AND BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN
SPOUSES: PRELIMINARY DATA ON A NATIONALLY
REPRESENTATIVE USA SAMPLE***

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Aphorisms often give important insights about human nature and human society. This seems to be the case with the expression "A man's home is his castle." First, note that the home belongs to the husband, not the wife. This is a fact which I have elsewhere suggested has profound implications for explaining why beaten wives continue to put up with violent attacks by their husbands (Straus, 1976, 1977b). Another important aspect is the imagery of the "castle" with its implications of being shut off from intrusion by outsiders. What goes on within the walls of the castle is shielded from prying eyes. Among the things hidden is the fact that modern homes, like medieval castles, often contain torture chambers. In fact, on the basis of what evidence we could find at the time, my colleagues and I suggested that aside from war and riots, physical violence occurs between family members more often than it occurs between any other individuals (Steinmetz and Straus, 1974:3; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1976). Our evidence was drawn from numerous sources, including official statistics on murder, assault, and child abuse; national surveys of attitudes towards violence and violent behavior; and small pilot studies. Using this evidence as a basis, I suggested that violence between family members may be at least as common as love (Straus, 1974b).

These conclusions were highly tentative since they had to be based on piecing together scattered and often inadequate evidence. But the situation is now changed because during the past year data were gathered on violence between husbands and wives, parents and children, and siblings in a representative sample of American households.*1 This paper reports on one aspect of that data: the incidence, modes, and patterns of husband-wife violence in the United States.

PREVIOUS ESTIMATES OF HUSBAND-WIFE VIOLENCE

Murder. Murder is the one aspect of intrafamily violence on which there are reasonably good data. Steinmetz and Straus (1974) suggest that this is because it is a crime which leaves physical evidence that cannot be ignored in the same way that the normative bias of the society caused both laypersons and researchers to ignore other forms of intrafamily violence in the past. A graphic indication of the extent of intrafamily murder can be gleaned from our estimate that in any one year about as many people are murdered by their relatives in New York City as have been killed in all of the disturbances in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1977. In Atlanta, 31% of the 255 homicides in 1972 were the result of domestic quarrels (*Boston Globe*, 1973:12). The situation in Atlanta is typical of the nation at large and apparently also a number of other societies (Curtis, 1974). For example, the African societies studied by Bohannon (1960:243) similarly range from 22 to 63 percent intrafamily homicides, and the highest rate (67 percent) is

for a Danish sample. Canadian data reported in this conference by Bell, shows that for the period 1961-74, 39% of all murders were within the family.

Assault. One source of information on the incidence of violence between spouses is police reports of "domestic disturbance" calls. Just as relatives are the largest single category of murder victim, so family fights are the largest single category of police calls. One legal researcher (Parnas, 1967:914) estimates that more police calls involve family conflict than do calls for all criminal incidents, including murders, rapes, non-family assaults, robberies and muggings. Twenty-two percent of all police fatalities come from investigating problems between man and wife or parent and child (Parnas, 1967). Aggravated assault between husbands and wives made up 11% of all aggravated assaults in St. Louis (Pittman and Handy, 1964:467), and 52% in Detroit (Boudouris, 1971:668). These figures are almost certainly an underestimate of the percentage of assaults between husbands and wives due to the fact that many wives do not see an attack by a husband as a case of legal assault. Even if they do, most police officers attempt to dissuade wives from filing assault charges. Therefore, one cannot tell from these data on police calls and assault charges just what proportion of all husbands and wives have had physical fights.

Aside from our own work, the closest previous estimate of spousal violence rates is to be found in the studies of Levinger (1966) and O'Brien (1971). Both studied applicants for divorce. O'Brien found that 17 percent of his cases spontaneously mentioned overt violent behavior. Levinger found that 23 percent of the middle class couples and 40 percent of the working class couples gave "physical abuse" as a major complaint. These figures underestimate the amount of physical violence between the husbands and wives in their samples because there were probably violent incidents which were not mentioned spontaneously or which were not listed as a main cause of the divorce. Perhaps these figures should be at least doubled. Even then we are far from knowing the extent of husband-wife violence. First, there is a discrepancy between the O'Brien and the Levinger figures. Second, these figures apply to couples who have applied for divorce. It may be that physical violence is less among a cross-section of couples. Or it may be, as I suspect, that the difference is not very great.

The closest thing to data on a cross-section of the population is to be found in a survey conducted for the U.S. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence which deals with approval of violence (Stark and McEvoy, 1970). One of four men in this survey, and one out of six women, approve of slapping a wife under certain conditions. As for a wife slapping a husband, 26 percent of the men and 19 percent of the women would approve. Of course, some

people who approve of slapping will never do it and some who disapprove will slap--or worse. Probably the latter group is larger. If so, we know that husband-wife violence at this minimal level occurs in at least one quarter of American families.

Finally, our own pilot studies give some indication of the frequency of violence in the family. The first of these pilot studies (Gelles, 1974) is based on informal depth interviews in 80 families. This revealed that 54 percent of the couples have used physical force on each other at some time. However, since this study is based on a small non-random sample of small town New Hampshire families, the representativeness of the data is unknown.

Generalizations from the second of our exploratory studies are limited by the fact that it is a study of students at the University of New Hampshire (Straus, 1974a, b). These students responded to a series of questions about conflicts which occurred in their families during their senior year in high school, and to further question about how these conflicts were dealt with. Included in the conflict resolution section were questions on whether or not the parties to the disputes had ever hit, pushed, shoved, or threw things at each other in the course of one of the disputes.

The results show that during that one year 52 percent of these high school seniors had used physical force on a brother or sister and 16 percent of their parents had used physical force on each other. These are figures for a single year. The percentage who had ever used violence is probably much greater. How much greater is difficult to estimate. One cannot simply accumulate the 16 percent for one year over the total number of years married because some couples will never have used violence and others will have done so repeatedly. Nevertheless, it seems safe to assume that it will not always be the same 16 percent.

The figures just presented should make clear the basis for asserting that violence between family members is by far the most common type of violence a typical person is likely to experience. But even accepting the correctness of this assertion, the limitations of the studies on which it is based do not enable us to know how frequently each of the various forms of family violence occurs. Each of the studies has major limitations of one sort or another. For example, divorced couples may well differ from other couples in their use of violence, reports of whether "physical abuse" was one of the reasons for divorce may not adequately describe the extent to which husband-wife violence occurred, university students are not likely to know about all such fights between their parents; and in any case, their parents are probably not representative of the general population, especially the lower socioeconomic status

groups. All of these limitations suggest the need for studies which can provide data on a representative sample of the population and which uses techniques that will minimize the problems of measurement which we noted.

NORMS AND MEANINGS

Just as we need to know the extent to which violence acts occur between husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters, it is also necessary to know the subjective meaning of intrafamily violence, including the normative approval-disapproval dimension. The issue is difficult to deal with because in our judgement, there exists simultaneously norms condemning and also norms which justify violence within the family (Straus, 1973, 1974b). Thus, at one level there are formal and informal norms strongly opposed to husbands and wives hitting each other. But at the same time, there seem to be implicit but powerful norms which permit and even encourage such acts. This is illustrated by the case of a husband who, having hit his wife on several occasions, felt that this was wrong, regretted the occasions on which it happened, but nonetheless did so again. He explained that he and his wife get so worked up in their arguments that he loses control. Thus, in his perception, it was almost a non-voluntary and certainly a non-normative act. But the marriage counselor in the case brought out the implicit norms which permitted him to hit his wife by asking the husband why he did not stab his wife (Straus, 1973:120). This possibility (and the fact that the husband did not stab the wife despite "losing control") shows that hitting the wife was not simply a reversion to primitive levels of behavior, but in fact was under normative control. It seems that the implicit, unrecognised, but nonetheless operating norms for this husband enabled him to hit his wife, but not to stab her. There is other evidence which tends to support the proposition that the marriage license is also a hitting license, including jokes, plays such as those of George Bernard Shaw, one laboratory experiment, and one field experiment (Straus, 1976). However, none of these provides the kind of systematic and broadly representative data which is needed.

In addition to the intrinsic importance of the data on norms and meanings, normative data is also necessary to properly make use of the data on overt violent acts. It is a sociological truism that the same overt act can have vastly different antecedents and consequences depending on the actor's subjective definition of the situation. In particular, as noted in another paper (Gelles and Straus, 1977), the legitimacy of an act is of crucial importance. Researchers using informal case study methods will have no difficulty taking into account the subjective meaning and normative stance of the people they study since this is one of the traditional strengths of informal field methods.

However, in the context of quantitative survey research the method for doing so is not immediately obvious. The method employed in this study was a series of questions used to classify respondents in respect to their normative stance. The normative data can then be cross classified with the violent acts data to produce the four types depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Family Violence Typology*

		LEGITIMACY OF VIOLENCE FOR THE RESPONDENT	
		Low	High
FREQUENCY OF VIOLENT ACTS	High	3. Illegitimately Violent	4. Legitimately Violent
	Low	1. Legitimately Non-Violent	2. Illegitimately Non-Violent

*There actually needs to be three such classifications for each family since either norms or acts or both can differ between the spousal role, parental role, and sibling role.

SAMPLE AND MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES*

Studies of various aspects of the family have been a staple of sociological research at least since the time of LePlay. Why then, after more than 100 years of surveys and other studies of the family, have we been dependent on indirect evidence and the pilot studies conducted by members of the New Hampshire Family Violence Research Program? The answer is partly that this is a taboo topic which is difficult to investigate, especially if one wants data from a truly representative sample (Gelles, 1976). Another part of the answer is the largely unrealized conspiracy of silence in regard to violence in the family. This is well expressed in the title of Erin Pizzey's book on wife-beating Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear (1974). In the social sciences, this "selective inattention" (Dexter, 1958) to a pervasive aspect of the family is clearly indicated by the fact that the first 36 volumes of the Journal of Marriage and the Family (from its founding to the 1971 special issue on violence) did not contain a single article with the term violence in the title.

Of course, we would be last to deny that violence is an extraordinarily difficult topic on which to gather data from a representative sample of families since we found it necessary to spend almost five years developing and refining the techniques for gathering the data to be reported in this paper. Even with these efforts, the method has a number of shortcomings, including the likelihood of substantial underreporting. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of the presently available data and a consideration of the alternatives, suggested that our techniques provide the most promising method for assessing the extent of intrafamily violence in a cross section of the population.

Sample. The Response Analysis national probability sample was used for this study.*3 The first stage was selection of a sample of 103 primary areas (counties, or groups of counties) stratified by geographic region, type of community, and other population characteristics. Within these primary areas, 300 interviewing locations (census districts or block groups) were randomly selected. Each location was divided into 10 to 25 housing units by interviewers trained for this purpose. Sample segments from each interviewing location were selected. The last step involved randomly selecting an eligible person to be interviewed in each designated household.

Eligible families consisted of a couple who identified themselves as married or being a "couple" (man and woman living together as a conjugal unit). A random procedure was used so that the respondents would be approximately half male and half female. The final national probability sample produced 2,143 completed interviews. Interviews were conducted with 960 men and 1,183 women.*4 Comparison with census data shows that this sample is representative in terms of major demographic attributes of American families.

The interviews were conducted between January and April, 1976. They averaged approximately 60 minutes and were designed to measure both the extent of family violence and some of the factors thought to be associated with violence between family members.

Definition and Measurement of Violence. For the purposes of this study, violence is nominally defined as "an act carried out with the intention of, or perceived intention of, physically injuring another person." The "physical hurt" can range from slight pain, as in a slap, to murder. The basis for the "intent to hurt" may range from a concern for a child's safety (as when a child is spanked for going into the street) to hostility so intense that the death of the other is desired (Gelles and Straus, 1977).

Violence was operationalized through the use of the "Conflict Tactics (CT) scales." This technique was first developed at the University of New Hampshire in 1971 and has

FIGURE 2. CONFLICT TACTICS (CT) SCALES FORM AS USED IN 1976 NATIONAL SURVEY

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read a list of some things that you and your (husband/partner) might have done when you had a dispute, and would first like you to tell me for each one how often you did it in the past year.

HAND RESPONDENT CARD A	Q. 78									Q. 79							Q. 80		
	RESPONDENT-IN PAST YEAR									HUSBAND/PARTNER-IN PAST YEAR							EVER HAPPENED		
	NEVER	ONCE	THICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	NEVER	ONCE	THICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
a. Discussed the issue calmly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
b. Got information to back up (your/his) side of things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
c. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
d. Insulted or swore at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
e. Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
f. Stomped out of the room or house (or yard)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
g. Cried	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
h. Did or said something to spite the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
i. Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
j. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
k. Threw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
l. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
m. Slapped the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
n. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
o. Hit or tried to hit with something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
p. Beat up the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
q. Threatened with a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
r. Used a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
s. Other (PROBE): _____	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X

79. And what about your (husband/partner)? Tell me how often he (ITEM) in the past year. _____

FOR EACH ITEM CIRCLED EITHER "NEVER" OR "DON'T KNOW" FOR BOTH RESPONDENT AND PARTNER, ASK:

80. Did you or your (husband/partner) ever (ITEM)? _____

been used and modified extensively over the next five years in numerous studies of family violence (see for example: Allen and Straus, 1975; Bulcroft and Straus, 1975; Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, 1974, 1976). The Conflict Tactics (CT) scales are designed to measure intrafamily conflict in the sense of the means used to resolve conflicts of interest (Straus, 1976:4). The CTS contains three groups of items: (1) Reasoning: the use of rational discussion and argument; (2) Verbal Aggression: the use of verbal and symbolic expressions of hostility--such as insults or threats to hurt the other; and, (3) Violence: the use of physical force as a means of resolving the conflict. The Violence scale contains 18 items (items k through r in Figure 2).

Figure 2 about here

The administration of the CTS involves asking the respondents what they did when they had a disagreement with their spouse. The list of possible actions start with those low in coerciveness (such as discussing the issue with the husband or wife). The items gradually become more coercive and physically violent, ending with whether the respondent had ever used a knife or a gun on his or her spouse. This sequence enhances the likelihood that the subject will become committed to the interview and continue answering the questions. Analysis of the responses to the items indicates that there was no noticeable drop in the completion rate of items as the list moved from the Reasoning Scale questions to the most violent conflict tactics.

Reliability and Validity. The reliability and validity of the Conflict Tactics (CT) scales have been assessed over the five year period of its development and modification. Pretests on more than 300 college students indicate that the indices have an adequate level of internal consistency reliability (Straus, 1976:11). Bulcroft and Straus (1975) provide evidence of concurrent validity. In addition, evidence of "construct validity" exists in that results from several pilot studies show relationships which are consistent with previous empirical findings and theories (Straus, 1976:13).

THE OVERALL LEVEL OF HUSBAND-WIFE VIOLENCE

Violence Rates. The most general measure of violence between spouses consists of the percentage of couples who had engaged in any of the eight violent acts included in the CTS. For the survey year this comes to approximately one out of six couples (16.0%).*5 If the reference period is the duration of the marriage rather than the previous year, the figure is between one out of four and one out of three couples (27.8%). Since the CTS items range from a slap to beating up and using a knife or gun on one's husband or

wife, one must consider the data on each specific type of violent act to get a more realistic picture of the level of violence in American marriages. This is done in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Specific Violent Acts. While it is clear from Table 1 that the least severe of the eight violent acts sampled by the CTS (for example, slapping) occur more frequently than do the most severe acts (for example, beating up one's spouse), it is also clear that the overall incidence figures given in the previous paragraph reflect more than just a few slaps or shoves. Indeed, the figures on the number of couples who had ever beaten up their spouse or actually used a knife or gun are astoundingly high. Specifically, well over one out of a hundred husbands and wives had gone beyond slapping, kicking, throwing things, or hitting with an object and said that they had beaten up or been beaten up by a spouse in the past year, and over 1 out of 20 had been involved in such a beating at some point in the marriage.*6

Even more startling is the fact that one out of two hundred had been involved in an incident in which a knife or a gun had actually been used in the previous year and almost four out of a hundred had done so at some point in the marriage.*7 The magnitude of this most extreme form of violence in the family can be grasped if we translate these percentages into what they imply for the total number of marriages affected. Since there were approximately 47 million couples living together in the United States in 1975, the rates just given mean that over 1.7 million had at some time faced a husband or wife wielding a knife or gun, and well over two million had been beaten up by their spouse.

To further clarify this point, we also computed a "Severe Violence Index." This omits the throwing things, pushing, and slapping and includes only the six items starting with kicking, biting, and hitting with a fist (N through R). The results presented in the last row of Table 1 show that about one out of 16 American couples had engaged in severe and high-injury risk violence in the survey year, and that about an eighth of all American couples (or about six million couples) had experienced violence of this magnitude at some point in their marriage.

Accuracy of Estimates. It is difficult to estimate the accuracy of these figures because several different sources of error are possible. First, these are estimates based on a sample. But the sample is reasonably large and was chosen by probability methods which should make it quite representative of the US population. Comparisons with

Table 1. Percent of Couples Engaging in Each Type of Violent Act (N=2143)

CTS Violence Item	Percent in:	
	1975	Ever
K. Threw something at spouse	6.7	16.7
L. Pushed, grabbed, shoved spouse	13.0	23.5
M. Slapped spouse	7.4	17.9
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with fist	5.2	9.2
O. Hit or tried to hit with something	4.0	9.5
P. Beat up spouse	1.5	5.3
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun	1.0	4.4
R. Used a knife or gun	0.5	3.7
Any of the above	16.0	27.8
Any of items N through R	6.1	12.6

Table 2. Comparison of Husband and Wife Violence Rates

CTS Violence Item	Percent in 1975		Mean Frequency*	
	H	W	H	W
K. Threw something at spouse	2.8	5.2	5.5	4.5
L. Pushed, grabbed, shoved spouse	10.7	8.3	4.2	4.6
M. Slapped spouse	5.1	4.6	4.2	3.5
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with fist	2.4	3.1	4.8	4.6
O. Hit or tried to hit with something	2.2	3.0	4.5	7.4
P. Beat up spouse	1.1	0.6	5.5	3.9
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun	0.4	0.6	4.5	3.1
R. Used a knife or gun	0.3	0.2	5.3	1.6
Any of the above	12.1	11.6	8.8	10.3
Any of items N through R	3.8	4.6	8.0	8.9

*Mean of those engaged in each act, i.e., omits those with scores of zero

selected characteristics reported in the US census show that this in fact is the case. Still, there is the possibility of sampling error. We therefore computed the standard errors for each of the percentages given in Table 1. The largest is for the data on the percentage of couples who engaged in any of the sampled violent acts. Even that is only one percent. This means that there is a 95% chance that the true percentage of couples admitting to ever physically assaulting one another is somewhere between 26 and 30 percent.

"Admitting to" is underlined because this points to a much more serious and likely source of error. The 26 to 30% figure assumes that there was no underreporting. But it is almost certain that not everyone "told all," especially in respect to the most serious types of violence.

Three of the reasons for underreporting are:

(1) Underreporting of domestic violence is likely to occur among two of people, but for opposite reasons. On the one hand, there is a large group for whom violence is so much a normal part of the family system that a slap, push, or shove (and sometimes even more severe acts) is simply not a noteworthy or dramatic enough event to be remembered. Such omissions are especially likely when we asked about things which had ever happened during the entire length of the marriage.

(2) Somewhat paradoxically, there is also underreporting at the other end of the violence continuum. Among those who experienced such severe violent acts as being bitten, hit with objects, beaten up, or attacked with a knife or gun, there is reluctance to admit such acts, which go beyond the "normal violence" of family life. This is because of the shame involved if one is the victim, or the guilt if one is the attacker.

(3) A final reason for regarding these figures as drastic underestimates lies in the nature of our sample. Since a major purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which violence is related to other aspects of husband-wife interaction, we sampled only couples living together. Divorced persons were asked only about the current marriage (again because of interview time limits and recall accuracy problems). Since "excessive violence is a major cause of divorce, and since our sample is limited to couples living together, these data probably omit many of the high violence cases.

So the figures could easily be twice as large as those revealed by this survey. In fact, based on pilot studies and informal evidence (where some of the factors leading to underreporting were less), it seems likely that the true figure is closer to 60% than to 30% of all US couples.

Returning to sampling error, most of the other standard errors were substantially below 1% because of the large sample size and the fact that we are dealing with rates that are for the most part under 10%. For example, the standard error for the "Kicked, bit, or hit with fist" item is .0066 (i.e. approximately seven tenths of one percent), and that for the "used a knife or gun" item is .0042 (i.e. less than half a percent). Consequently, it is very likely that if all American couples had been interviewed, rather than a sample of couples, the results would have been very close to what we found.

SEX DIFFERENCES

The phenomenon called "wife beating" has been a focus of increasing public concern in the last few years. In part this reflects the national anguish over all aspects of violence, ranging from the Vietnam war to the upward trend of assault and murder statistics. Another major element accounting for the public concern with wife beating is the feminist movement; and behind that, the factors which have given rise to the rebirth of the feminist movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's.*8

Wife beating is a problem of major national importance (Langly and Levy, 1977; Martin, 1976; Straus, 1976), and one which calls for immediate corrective steps, some of which I have described in a previous paper (Straus, 1977). But violence between spouses is far from a one way street. The old cartoons of the wife chasing a husband with a rolling pin or throwing pots and pans are closer to reality than most of us (and especially those of us with feminist sympathies) realize, as can be seen from an inspection of the husband columns in Table 2.

----- Table 2 about here -----

Violence Rates. Starting with the overall figures shown in the next to the last row of Table 2, we can see that for all violent acts during the survey year, there is only a slightly higher incidence for husbands than for wives (12.1% versus 11.6%). In addition, those wives who were violent tended to engage in such acts somewhat more frequently than did the husbands in this sample (10.3 times in the year compared to 8.8 times for the husbands). However, the last row of Table 2, which gives the data on severe violence, suggests that the wives were more violent even in this traditional sense of the word violence.

Specific Violent Acts. If we look at the specific types of violent acts sampled by the CTS, there is evidence for the pot and pan throwing stereotype since the number of wives who threw things at their husband is almost twice as

large as the number of husbands who threw things at their wife. For half of the violent acts, however, the rate is higher for the husbands, and the frequency is higher for the husbands than for the wives for all but two of the items. The biggest discrepancy in favor of wives occurs in the kicking and hitting with objects. Such acts are less dependent on superior physical strength to be effective. This seems to be consistent with the view that a main difference between male and female domestic violence stems from the smaller size, weight, and muscle development of most women, rather than from any greater rejection of physical force or moral or normative grounds.

Wife-Beating and Social Policy. Although these findings show high rates of violence by wives, this should not divert attention from the need to give primary attention to wives as victims as the immediate focus of social policy. There are a number of reasons for this:

(1) A validity study carried out in preparation for this research (Bulcroft and Straus, 1975) shows that under-reporting of violence is considerably greater for violence by wives than it is for violence by husbands. This is probably because the use of physical force is so much a part of the male way of life that it is typically not the dramatic and often traumatic event that the same act of violence is for a woman. To be violent is not unmasculine. But to be physically violent is unfeminine according to contemporary American standards. Consequently, in simple numerical terms, wife-beating is the more severe problem.

(2) Even if one does not take into account this difference in the extent of underreporting, the data in Table 2 show that husbands have higher rates the most dangerous and injurious forms of violence (beating up and using a knife or gun.

(3) Table 2 also shows that when such acts are committed by a husband, it is repeated more often than is the case for wives.

(4) These data do not tell us what proportion of the violent acts by wives were in response to blows initiated by husbands. Wolfgang's data on husband-wife homicides (1957) suggests that this is an important factor.

(5) The greater physical power of men makes it more likely that a woman will be seriously injured when beaten up by her husband than the reverse.

(6) A disproportionately large number of attacks by husbands seem to occur when the wife is pregnant (Gelles, 1975) thus posing a danger to the as yet unborn child.

(7) Women are locked into marriage to a much greater extent than men. Because of a variety of economic and social constraints, they often have no alternative to putting up with beatings by their husband (Gelles, 1976; Straus, 1976a, 1977b).

In short, wives are victimized by violence in the family to a much greater extent than are husbands and should therefore be the focus of the most immediate remedial steps. However, these data also indicate that a fundamental solution to the problem of wife-beating cannot be restricted to assaulting husbands. Rather, violence is embedded in the very structure of the society and the family system itself (Straus, 1976a). The particularly brutal form of violence known as wife-beating is only likely to end with a change in the cultural and social organizational factors underpinning parent-to-child, child-to-child, and wife-to-husband violence, as well as husband-to-wife violence. Some of the specific steps to accomplish this are outlined in another paper (Straus, 1977).

BLUE COLLAR VERSUS WHITE COLLAR

One of the purposes of this research is to help resolve the question of whether the seeming greater rates of domestic violence among families of low socioeconomic status reflects a real difference in family patterns or simply the greater vulnerability of such families to official intervention and recording. As of this writing the multidimensional SES index which is needed to adequately examine this issue has not yet been computed.*9 However, it was possible to compare families in which the husband was a white collar worker with those in which the husband was a manual worker. These data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Blue Collar and White Collar Spousal Violence Rates

CTS Violence Item	Percent 1975		Percent Ever		Mean 1975 Frequency*	
	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	White
K. Threw something at spouse	7.8	5.1	17.0	16.5	6.9	3.8
L. Pushed, grabbed, shoved spouse	14.9	10.9	25.1	22.1	7.7	4.1
M. Slapped spouse	9.0	5.5	19.9	16.1	5.7	4.1
N. Kicked, bit, or hit with fist	5.5	2.8	10.3	9.3	6.9	4.3
O. Hit or tried to hit with something	5.1	2.8	10.3	8.7	9.2	5.0
P. Beat up spouse	2.0	1.0	5.9	5.1	6.6	4.0
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun	1.6	0.3	4.9	4.1	4.2	3.4
R. Used a knife or gun	0.8	0.1	3.9	3.8	4.0	3.7
Any of the above	18.4	12.5	29.7	26.4	17.0	8.9
Any of items N through R	8.0	4.0	14.0	11.3	13.5	7.5

*Mean of those engaging in each act, i.e., omits those with scores of zero

Table 4. Percent of Respondents Approving Marital Violence

Couples Slapping Each Other is:	Sex of Respondent		Occ. Class	
	Male	Female	Blue	White
Necessary	8.8	4.3	7.9	4.6
Normal	28.0	23.2	26.3	25.0
Good	15.3	8.7	11.8	11.8
Any of the above	31.3	24.6	28.8	27.2

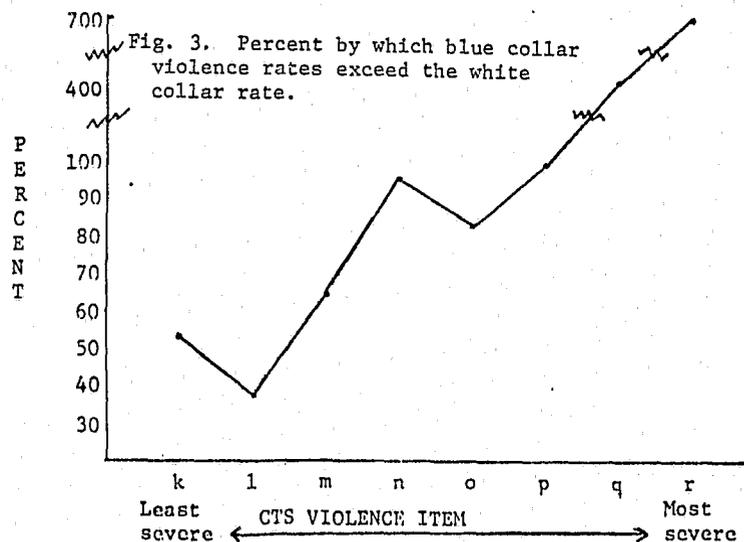


 Table 3 about here

Violence Rates. Starting with the overall indices shown in the last row of Table 3, there is a consistent tendency for more violence to have occurred in marriages of blue collar husbands as compared to the white collar occupation group. The difference is small when the data refer to whether any act of violence had ever occurred in the marriage (29.7% of blue collar versus 26.4% of white collar). But when the measure is focused on "serious violence" the difference between the blue collar and the white collar becomes greater. When we turn to the rates for 1975, the differences become still larger; and for the most serious forms of husband-wife violence, the blue collar rate is exactly double that of families in which the husband is a non-manual worker. Finally, if we consider how frequently violence occurred among those who were violent (last two columns of Table 3), the rates for blue collar husband families are almost twice those for white collar husband families. It seems then that although about as many white collar husband families have experienced at least some violence during the course of the marriage as blue collar families, the frequency and seriousness of family violence is considerably greater in the blue collar sector of the society.

Specific Violent Acts. Now let us compare the occupational class groups on each of the eight violent acts sampled by the CTS. The most general finding is that no matter which act, and irrespective of whether the act had ever occurred, occurred in the survey year, or how often it occurred--in short, for every one of the 24 comparisons in Table 3--the blue collar husband families have higher rates of spousal violence.

In general, the differences are lowest when the measure concerns whether the act had ever occurred in the marriage (center two columns), and tend to be largest when the measure is how often each type of violent act occurred in those marriages where it occurred at all (last two columns of Table 3). One other interesting finding is revealed by comparing the first two columns of Table 3: the more serious the violence, the greater the extent to which the rate for blue collar husband families exceeds that for white collar husband families. Since this is obscured by the fact that the more serious the violence the lower the overall rate of occurrence, Figure 3 plots the percentage by which the blue collar rate exceeds the white collar rate.

 Figure 3 about here

NORMS AND BEHAVIOR

The primary focus of this research is on actual violence rather than attitudes, values, and norms concerning violence. Despite this emphasis, a consideration of normative factors is essential for a full understanding of violence in the family. Our interest in the role of attitudes, norms, etc., however is not with attitudes, etc., as causes of behavior since we regard such "dispositional states" type variables as only one of many factors leading to violence. Indeed, it is the high frequency with which all of us do things which we do not value, and fail to do things which we do value, that creates the need for the type of analysis which is probably most crucial. To be more specific, to slap or hit one's husband or wife when such an act is contrary to family norms is likely to be an entirely different experience (especially in its consequences) than in a family in which such a prohibition is minimal or not present at all. In short, this is an example of the principle that the social meaning of an act is as important as the act itself, and that the identical act can have vastly different meanings and consequences in different families.

The technique used to measure norms concerning violence consists of six sets of semantic differential items. In this paper, only the data on the set referring to husband-wife violence will be presented. The "concept" or "attitude object" rated by the subjects was the phrase "Couples slapping each other." Each subject was asked to rate this concept on three seven-interval graphic rating scales. The three scales are: Unnecessary.....Necessary, Not normal.....Normal, and Good.....Bad.

 Table 4 about here

Table 4 gives the percentage of respondents who rated "Couples slapping each other" as Necessary, Normal, and Good. Overall, the last row of that table shows that over one out of four respondents saw this type of physical force between spouses as either necessary, normal, and/or good. These figures are remarkably close to the figures presented earlier in this paper from another national sample. The previous study revealed that about one quarter of the persons interviewed said they could think of circumstances in which it would be alright for a husband to hit his wife or a wife to hit her husband (Stark and McEvoy, 1970). While this is slightly lower than the percentages in the last row of Table 3, had the two questions in the previous survey been combined in the way these three questions are combined, the results could well have been just about identical.

Sex and Class Differences. The sex differences revealed by Table 4 are consistent in showing that women have a lower rate of violence approval than men, especially in respect to viewing violence as "necessary" or as "good."

In respect to socioeconomic status group differences, there is no difference at all between the blue collar and the white collar groups in the proportion viewing violence as "good," and almost no difference in the extent to which violence is regarded as "normal." This finding is consistent with most other research which reports actual data on class differences in approval of violence (Ball-Rokeach, 1973; Erlanger, 1975; Smith and Snow, 1975). However, the blue collar rate of viewing violence as "necessary" is considerably higher than the white collar group's rate. This suggests that the basis for the wide belief in social class differences in attitude toward violence (despite the studies showing no difference) is the fact that lower class people live in a situation where violence is present and often necessary for self-preservation. They do not favor violence any more than do middle class people. But the blue collar group seems to differ in recognizing violence as an inevitable--even though disliked and disapproved--aspect of life. To the extent that this is true, it supports the view that the so-called "culture of violence" simply reflects the violent realities of lower class life rather than being a cause of the violence (Owens and Straus, 1975; Steinmetz and Straus, 1974:7).

Another conclusion suggested by comparing the three different ratings in Table 4 is that, irrespective of sex and socioeconomic status, a large proportion of American husbands and wives see violence as a normal part of married life. It may not be good, and it may not be necessary, but it is something which is going to happen under normal circumstances. Or, as I have put it in previous papers (Straus, 1974b, 1976), "the marriage license is a hitting license" for a substantial part of the population, and probably for a much greater proportion than could bring themselves to rate it as "normal" in the context of this survey.

Spousal Violence Types. The last set of findings to be presented concerns the relationship between norms and behavior. It was assumed at the time the research was planned that there would be only a small relationship between norms concerning violence and actual violence. This is because normative conceptions, although important, are only one of many factors which affect whether or not a violent act will take place. This assumption was tested by computing the correlation between the Marital Violence Approval Score (obtained by summing the responses to the three semantic differential items).^{*10} The resulting correlations followed the expected low positive pattern: Using the 1975 Husband-to-Wife violence score for male

respondents, the correlation was found to be .09, and using the 1975 Wife-to-Husband violence score for female respondents produced a correlation of .18, and taking all respondents and using as the dependent variable the violence score which combines all instances of violence by either party for the duration of the marriage, resulted in a correlation of .15.

These low correlations might be due to the measure of Marital Violence Approval being inadequate. But assuming that it is at least as good as other measures of attitudes toward violence, one can conclude that such attitudes or norms are only one small factor in explaining why marital violence takes place. While that in itself is valuable information, we are primarily interested in the low correlation because it makes possible the taxonomy described in Figure 1 earlier in this paper.

To classify the sample into the four types identified in Figure 1, the sample was dichotomized on the Marital Violence Approval Index and on each measure of actual marital violence. Although the "Legitimately Non-Violent" type--that is, those who both disapprove of marital violence and who did not engage in any violent acts--is by far the most frequently occurring, there are substantial numbers of cases in the other three cells of the typology. The next phase of the research will compare families falling into each of these types. Among the questions to be answered is a version of the old cultural relativity theory: To what extent can normative sanction make anything right? In this case, the specific question is whether the negative consequences of violence in the family revealed by our pilot studies are eliminated or reduced when such violence is seen as at least minimally legitimate.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The data presented in this paper describe the incidence, modes, and patterns of violence between husbands and wives in a nationally representative sample of 2,143 American couples. Taking the entire duration of the marriages of the people interviewed, approximately 28% reported at least one instance in which physical violence had occurred between themselves and their spouse.

Eight types of violent acts were sampled, ranging from a slap to punching to actually using a knife or a gun. About one out of every 100 husbands and wives had experienced violence which went beyond slapping, kicking, punching, or hitting with an object and said that they had been beaten or had beaten up a spouse in the last year. About five percent had been involved in such a beating at some point in the marriage. Almost four percent had been involved in an incident in which a knife or gun had actually been used.

Although extensive pilot studies were carried out to develop the techniques used in gathering these data, there are many possible sources of error, of which the most important is the likelihood of underreporting. It is doubtful that many respondents would report use of physical violence if they had not done so. Thus, the statistics presented in this paper are probably underestimates of the true level of marital violence in the United States. In fact, on the basis of the pilot studies and informal evidence, it seems likely that 60% rather than 30% of all American couples have experienced violence in their marriage.

Interesting and important as are these descriptive statistics, the major thrust of the research is an accounting for the variation in family violence. Why is their a high level of violence in some marriages, a low amount of violence in other marriages, and none at all in still others? A first preliminary step in tracing out the sources of variation has been made in this paper by examining sex differences and social class differences in violence rates and in the meaning violence has for couples in general, for men as compared to women, and for men in blue collar occupations compared to white collar occupations.

The findings show only relatively small sex differences, except for the most severe types of violence where the rates are higher for men. A more detailed examination of the sex differences suggest that the lower level of female violence may reflect the physical strength disadvantage of women. Another source of sex difference is attitude towards violence. A Marital Violence Approval Index was computed to examine this issue. Although fewer women thought of violence in marriage as being necessary or good, almost the same proportion regarded it as a normal part of married life.

The social class differences in Marital Violence Approval were even smaller than the sex differences. On the other hand, substantial class differences were found in the rates of actual violence between spouses. Families in which the husband was a manual worker had higher rates of the more severe types of violence (punching, hitting with an object, beating up, using a knife or gun), and for those who did use violence, the frequency of such incidents were greater during the survey year.

These findings may seem to be contradictory to much that has recently been written about social class differences in violence, and especially the many statements that wife-beating is a phenomenon which is found across the whole range of socioeconomic status groups. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real. First, this study does show that violence between spouses is frequent in both

the blue collar husband and the white collar husband groups. But it also shows that the rate and severity is even greater in the blue collar group. If one's interest is in social stratification, then the class difference is the salient point. But if one's interest is in social amelioration, then the salient point is the high level of husband-wife violence which is to be found in both occupational class groups.

Second, these data are consistent with other recent research on social class differences in violence. When one divides the studies into those which provide data on attitudes and those which provide data on actual violent acts, the former tend to show little or no difference and the latter tend to show moderate to large differences depending on the type of violence. This difference, together with the fact that the one attitudinal item for which a social class difference was found in this study has to do with violence being "necessary" rather than good supports the view that class differences in actual rates of violence primarily reflect the circumstances of lower class life rather than a lower class "culture of violence" which values violence to a greater extent than is found in the middle class.*11

The relatively small social class and sex difference in marital violence approval, coupled with the larger differences in actual rates of marital violence suggests that attitudinal factors play only a relatively small part in accounting for variation in actual rates of family violence. This was shown more directly by correlating the Marital Violence Approval Index with the various indexes of actual violence. All correlations were low (.09, .15, .18). These low correlations permit the classification of couples into those whose norms concerning violence correspond to their behavior and those for whom there is a discrepancy. It is anticipated that much will be learned by comparison of these groups. A rich pool of data is available on each of the couples included in the sample. This will permit the comparisons to be made in respect to a range of factors.

The data from this survey will also be used to examine a wide variety of factors which could influence the level of violence in families. Among the questions we hope to take up are: Is the amount of violence that husbands and wives use towards each other related to how violent they are toward their children, and to how violent the children are to each other? Does "letting off steam" verbally help to avoid physical violence, or does it warm people up for physically violent conflict? Is social and economic stress related to how violent family members are towards each other? Do families in which the balance of power is on the side of the husband have more or less violence than do other families? Are there rural-urban and regional differences in the incidence and modes of family violence? And does the

level of husband-wife violence go down or up with the length of time a couple is married?

FOOTNOTES

*Paper read at the Symposium on Violence in Canadian Society, March 12, 1977, sponsored by the Department of Criminology, Simon Fraser University. I would like to thank Richard J. Gelles for comments and suggestions which aided in the revision of this paper.

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*1. The results of this research will be presented in a forthcoming book, BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: VIOLENCE IN THE AMERICAN FAMILY, by Murray A. Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz.

*2. A complete methodological report will appear in VIOLENCE IN THE AMERICAN FAMILY.

*3. Response Analysis Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey carried out the household survey.

*4. The completion rate for the entire sample was 65%. This rate is somewhat lower than was hoped despite intensive efforts on the part of the contractor to increase the completion rate through call backs, letters, and monetary incentives. The completion rate varied from a low of 60.0% for metropolitan areas to a high of 72.3% for nonmetropolitan areas. Due to differential response rates by sex and location, the extrapolations and incidence estimates presented in this paper will later be modified using a weighting procedure. Thus, the results will be slightly altered in the final presentation of the data.

*5. Since the field work began in January, 1976 and since we asked for information concerning the "previous year," the survey year can be thought to be 1975.

*6. The term "beating up" was defined for the respondents by its placement in the list of CTS violence items. Specifically, it came after the items dealing with kicking, biting, hitting with a fist, and hitting with an object, and before the items dealing with a knife or gun. Thus, it is something more than just a single blow, but the precise meaning of the term undoubtedly varied from respondent to respondent.

*7. Again, we do not know exactly what is meant by "using a gun or a knife." In the case of the knife it could mean threw the knife or actually stabbed or attempted to stab. In respect to a gun, it could have been fired without anyone being wounded. However, the fact is that the respondent admitted employing the weapon, not just using it as a threat.

*8. See Archer and Gartner (1976) and Straus (1977b) for an analysis of the links between war and within-society violence, and Straus (1974c) for a discussion of the factors which seem to underly the growing national concern with violence in the family.

*9. Part of the reason for the delay in computing the SES index is that we feel it essential to include the status conferring characteristics of the wife in any such index, rather than follow the traditional pattern of basing SES placement solely on the characteristics of the husband (Steinmetz, 1974). There are many technical problems connected with forming such an index, some of which are outlined in Steinmetz and Straus, 1973.

*10. Since each item can have a score from 1 to 7, the resulting score has a range of 3 to 21, with 21 indicating that the highest rating was given for violence as necessary, normal, and good. Although this score, as might be expected, is skewed to the low approval end (with a mean of 4.8), there are substantial numbers of subjects who had high scores, including the scores of 21.

*11. Another possibility has to do with differential reporting of violent acts. It may be that the class differences reported in this paper reflect differences in willingness to admit to violent acts rather than a real difference in the frequency of such acts. To check on this, a brief post-interview was carried out in which respondents were asked about their reactions to the questions and whether the context of the interview led them to exaggerate or play down the level of violence reported. These data will be analyzed for the forthcoming book on this research.

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