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The Nexus between Economics and Family Violence: The Expected Impact of Recent Economic Declines on the Rates and Patterns of Intimate, Child and Elder Abuse

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The Nexus between Economics and Family Violence: The Expected Impact of Recent Economic Declines on the Rates and Patterns of Intimate, Child and Elder Abuse

The 2008-09 economic recession is causing profound consequences in the U.S. and beyond: housing values have plummeted across most western societies, in some localities by nearly 30 percent in one year (National home-value drop accelerated in fourth quarter 2009); many global equities are now less than half their worth when compared to just one year ago (World Markets 2009); and the U.S. unemployment rate has increased nearly 45 percent in just two years, now exceeding the 1983 rate (United States Unemployment Rate 2009). Yet, as shocking as these quantitative measures illustrate, many scholars and others are now discussing how this recession is qualitatively different from recent dips and its forthcoming contagious, harmful effects. Some of these contagious consequences are becoming self evident (Robb 2008), while others may not materialize for years or even decades (e.g., Elder Jr. & Liker 1982). Arguments are appearing in the news and elsewhere contemplating that this recession is unlike any we have experienced since the “Great Depression”, some of these arguments are more precisely suggesting that this downturn will usher in structural changes in the global job market that will last for decades if not longer (Goodman & Healy 2009). Others have also argued that because this recession started with a decline in home values and an upswing in their foreclosures, the one notable consequence to watch for is the decline not just now, but for decades, in the ability of inner city communities and neighborhoods to foster collective efficacy (Foreclosure help needed 2009). The concentrated, mass foreclosures and the resulting systemic unoccupied housing has not only hit the long-established inner cities neighborhoods, many of which have not dealt well with the nearly forty years of decline in manufacturing jobs, but has also begun to negatively affect suburban and wealthy rural areas (Wilson & Paulsen 2008). These latter two

areas are just now beginning to wrestle with the consequence of the rapid contraction of white-collar position across all industries (Hahn 2009). If these areas too begin to demonstrate patterns of high unoccupied housing with broken windows, sidewalks, depleted streets and playgrounds, and the influx of new residents from disparate cultural backgrounds, these communities may too demonstrate a rise in the sale and use of controlled substance, incivilities, and violent crime that for decades victimized inner city neighborhoods across the United States (Tuthill 2008). These factors are in turn linked to increased risks for childhood depression, anxiety disorders, and aggression (Gorman-Smith et al. 1998).

Because many economists believe that this recession started with housing and the focus of this [BLANK] is the consequence of the resulting structural change in housing, this paper will discuss the corollaries that this economic change may have on the nature of families and patterns of family violence across America's neighborhoods. This focus makes immense sense since a home is where most families spend the majority of their time together, expend the majority of their shared resources, and mutually build a life time of memories and the joint capital they hope to pass to later generations (e.g., homeownership is viewed as a good measure of family wealth in the near term and across generations (Boehm & Schlottmann 2001). While the specific question we seek to address is about how will home foreclosures impact family functioning, we have determined somewhat because of necessity (i.e., lack of theory, data and research) to expand the spotlight to more generally address the concern of whether or not there is a nexus between changes in a family's micro-economic conditions and the likelihood of family violence. In this context, family violence may take one or more of a variety of forms including conventional acts of assaults between intimates and those targeting children, and also include those actions or lack of actions that result in elder abuse or neglect. While other papers will

address the ecological correlates of family violence and violence more generally, we will focus more narrowly on the individual micro-markers that will help us to understand the extent to which economic hardships and domestic violence are related.

Unfortunately, it is not too difficult to find someone who has already made the connection between today economic hardship and violence, nor is the idea that there is nexus between the two a particularly novel discussion among academics. By March 2009 the Internet and other social arenas are replete with stories about the link between home foreclosures and more generally the economic downturn and incidents of family violence. There are numerous heartbreaking stories documenting how the 2008-09 economic slump has not only caused families to lose their homes, but is also implicated as a cause of familiar violence and the breakup of families. For example, there is the 2008 suicide of an older husband and wife in Oregon that followed their home foreclosure (Armour 2008). In Los Angeles, California, an unemployed man who once worked for Pricewaterhouse and Sony Pictures murdered his wife, three sons and his mother-in-law before turning the gun on himself. He left a suicide note saying that he was in deep financial trouble and had considered killing only himself, but decided that it was more honorable to kill his entire family before committing suicide (Winton et al. 2008). Family physicians in social setting are also talking about how they now must also address familiar problems that are arising among their patients when just recently they did not.

These stories are likely not unique and in may fact represent a pattern of increased violence among family members. Across the United States (from California to Florida and up to Massachusetts), family and mental health counselors are reporting substantial increases in complaints related to money and mortgages and the resulting violence (Armour 2008). For instance, the Women Center in Stockton, California reported that during 2008 domestic violence

reports increased 12 percent and “that the majority occurred on families that are losing their homes through foreclosures” (Banks 2008). “Foreclosure, or the threat of it, can destroy families, says the group’s executive director, Joelle Gomez. ‘The housing market is still bottoming out and we are really bracing to see far more clients utilizing both our shelter services and our help lines and counseling, she says” (Jensen 2008). Similarly, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) reported that calls were up 21 percent in September 2008 when compared to the September 2007 count. They also reported that between mid-November 2008 and the end of the year that among 7,868 callers who agreed to participate in their study, 54 percent said that there was change in their household’s financial situation in the past year, and 64 percent also believed that “abusive behavior has increased in the past year” (Increased financial stress affects domestic violence victims 2009). This increased demand for help extends beyond domestic violence hotlines as reported by the Polk County, Florida crisis hotline in late September 2008. Their crisis phone line reported a 30 percent increase in calls, with many of their callers complaining that because of lost jobs they can no longer care for their children (Down economy means crisis calls go up 2008). Likewise, the San Diego’s Police Chief claims that because of the bad economy, calls for domestic and alcohol-related crimes, and white-collar crimes are increasing. He also reports that that there are more "identity theft, mortgage fraud, senior abuse, too — people taking advantage of seniors, trying to get to their money" (Sullivan 2008). One advocate has speculated that if the economic downturn is restricting once-functioning couples’ ability to separate, we may now face a period of rising and often dangerous relationships that more frequently turn to abuse rather than uncoupling (Bad economy makes love go wrong - Domestic violence cases sharply increase 2009; Scheerer 2009; At risk of

foreclosure? Help may be on the way 2008). As evidence of this point, some advocates have spoken about an increase in their victims needing services but not shelter (Santich 2009).

In other locations, domestic violence shelters are feeling a surge in their housing requests. In Spring Hillsborough, Florida, the number of women seeking shelter increased by more than 100 percent, going from 90-95 per month to 196 in October 2008 (Danielson 2008). Olvera Lighter, the Spring's president believes that what is "driving this [increases] is [the] increased stress over the economy," Lighter maintains that "because domestic battery is about power and control, when you're standing on a shrinking iceberg of what you can control, some people might tend to lash out" (Danielson 2008). This increased demand for use and stay at shelters hurts in two ways: while demand for their services is up, funding is down (Danielson 2008). Although, this secondary stress may be reduced somewhat with the \$50 million added to the Federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Transitional Housing program through the 2009 American *Recovery* and Reinvestment Act (i.e., President Obama's *Stimulus* plan) (VAWA Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking Victims 2009).

There are also those instances where negative economic outcomes such as foreclosures are caused by domestic violence (Stop foreclosure in Virginia Beach 2009; Baird 2007). Williams (1998: 1) believes that "among the many reasons for homelessness, domestic violence and low-cost housing shortages experienced within a context of poverty are fundamental for low income women living in shelters. [W]omen's stories indicate a pattern in their persistent poverty and battering relationships prior to becoming homeless". Others have also looked at the issue of the direction of effect more generally. For example, Barnett and LaViolette (1993) examined the link between a women's violence victimization and her subsequent social economic status. These

two scholars contend that intimate partner violence contributes to several negative economic outcomes, particularly among poor women (c.f., Farmer & Tiefenthaler 2003a). To address this problem, many states now provide permit unemployment insurance benefits to domestic violence victims regardless of whether they are looking for work or are attempting to find a safe place to live (States that permit victims of domestic violence to receive unemployment insurance 2008).

The Nexus of Economics and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence advocates frequently claim that violence against intimates is a “classless” problem. They argue that assaults of “women and children occur in all social class, across occupation types, in all racial and ethnic groups in all types of neighborhoods, in cities, and rural areas.” (Fagan 1993: 209). Indeed, a wealth of research published over the past forty years has measured domestic violence among families in every social class, supporting the anecdotal evidence provided by advocates for this claim (Gelles 1993). For instance, analysts of both the 1985 and the 1995 National Family Violence Survey report finding violence in every social class (Straus et al. 1980; Fagan & Browne 1994). Nevertheless, a claim that the rate of family violence is independent of several socially constructed categories “runs counter to empirical evidence about the social epidemiology of violence between spouses and other intimates” (Fagan 1993: 209). Gelles (1993: 33) argues that family violence is more likely found among the poor and unemployed or those holding low-prestige jobs (c.f., Finkelhor et al. 2005). In the remainder of this paper we will review the scholarship and research that seeks to test the extent to which one or more economic dimensions (regardless of whether the dimension is measured by income, employment status, or status incompatibility) is at least minimally correlated with one or more variations of family violence.

Historical Perspective on the Nexus.

Before examining the systematic evidence collected over the past forty years (the period that marks the modern day research movement on violence against women), we will first review scholarship by historians on domestic conflict and violence including looking closely at several recently published historical reviews (e.g., Pleck 2004; Gordon 2002). While this body of scholarship is neither extensive nor consistently systematic, it is unusually rich in illustrations of the violence (particularly compared today's quantitative modeling approaches). In the broad context of family conflict and violence, we believe it fair to claim that the two most frequently discussed linked demographic concepts include a cadre of variables that generally describe the poor or working class, and a closely related concept of alcohol abuse (c.f., Foyster 2005). Both concepts often appear together, sometimes even in the same paragraph, when the scholar is describing the nature of a domestic assault victim or offenders. For example, Haag (1992) wrote a piece titled the "Ill-use of a wife: patterns of working-class violence in domestic violence and public New York City, 1860-1880," in which he first describes domestic violence as "Irish Catholics and all drunkards...men and women fighting in' a basement rum shop" and then states that his "paper will explore violence in New York City's working-class community from its lowest common denominator – as a male phenomenon that consequently exposes a great deal of concerning definition of masculinity. Similarly, Pleck (2004: 12) describes clients of institutions to address family violence in the 1920 and the 1960s as "mainly poor or working class; the founders were the more privileged," and later she (2004: 57) depicts the mid-1850 survivals/victim seeking shelter as largely "poor or working class and Irish," and then paraphrased an advocate who called one victim's husband a "drunkard".¹

Similar to U.S. scholars, English academics studying the 1800s and early 1990s frequently described family violence as a crime of the poor. Behlmer (1994: 252), referencing an 1878 English article published in *Contemporary Review*, argued that the “only meaningful protection that a magistrate might give a battered working-class women... ..was a judicial separation whereby she and her children could legally live apart from her husband”². He (1994: 252) later quoted an English magistrate who in 1889 stated that “men of the prisoner’s class must understand that they cannot be allowed to assault women with impunity,” and subsequently stated that “within the working-class communities there endured an expectation of friction between husband and wives, friction produced as often by the assertion of matriarchal claims as by patriarchal aggression”, and that “each day in [magistrate] courtrooms violence was sadly commonplace in working-class marriages”.

Why several historians have frequently commingled violence with several economic conditions, a number of contemporary scholars stress that this connection is likely more spurious than causal. Williams (1998) cites for example Linda Gordon’s criticism of other’s scholarship focused on the early 1900s that too often connected family violence to poor people (Gordon 2002: 151). Gordon provides a table that shows that the level of employment and poverty varied substantially between the years 1880 and 1960 among Boston’s family violence offenders, and that the average level of unemployment was just 28 percent and poverty was at 53 percent during this period 80 year span (Gordon 2002: 148). She concludes that in some cases “what is being measured is as much the sensibility of caseworkers as the conditions of clients,” and then cautions her readers that “throughout the twin crises – Depression and war – emphasis on poverty and its relief tended to hide intrafamily conflict oppression and violence. This crisis sensibility promoted a view of a family unity as essential to survival and of intrafamily tensions

as ephemeral products of economic hardship” (Gordon 2002: 158). More recently, observation of the police in the early 1960s by Cumming et al. (1965: 285) suggested that the "poor, uneducated people appear to use the police in the way that middle-class people use family doctors and clergymen- that is, as the first port of call in time of trouble [, and] that the police often enforce...laws among...poor at the same time that [they] see these laws being flouted by those in positions of power." Thus, in terms of using official data to make this connection, Fagan (1993) and Moore (1997) both assert that any comparison on several economic and demographic variables using official data will likely contain a sampling biases that is caused by the selection processes coproduced by those seeking services and those officials delivering those services (c.f., Jasinski 2003).

Contemporary Perspective on the Nexus.

For the past forty years of systematic family violence research, researches seeking to explain the epidemiology of family violence or the patterns of recidivism following interventions have included several forms of economic capital including employment (e.g., Bowlus & Seitz 2006; Cunradi et al. 2009; DeMaris et al. 2004; Rodriguez et al. 2001), income (e.g., Berger 2005; Drake & Pandey 1996; Rogers & DeBoer 2001), SES (e.g., Christy-McMullin & Shobe 2007; Weissman et al. 2003; Conger et al. 1990), or some composite measure to capture economic difference between those involved in the relationship (e.g., Hood 1986; Mahalik et al. 2005; Avakame 1999; Fox et al. 2004). Generally the choice of which these measure to model seems more often determined by their available than by a theoretical argument arguing for one over another. In this section we will focus on three of these measures: employment, income, and

difference between partner variables. We will first discuss why these measures are often linked and then review the literature that measures the extent of this linkage.

Employment We begin by assessing the question about the link between employment status and family violence. Of the many theoretical arguments available, the most simplistic links employment and domestic violence through a change in either or both family member's routine activities (Cohen & Felson 1979). Out-of-the-home employment of one or both spouses removes the presence of both perpetrator and target from each others' presence for at least some hours of the day. If both spouses are in the home throughout the day due to unemployment, frustration may build as each feels their space is invaded. During working hours, neighbors who normally serve as capable guardians (those who make noise complaints or are likely to alert police) may be at their own workplaces or alternatively addressing their own home foreclosure and therefore are unavailable to intervene or reduce the likeliness of violence disputes. This matter is of no small importance for preventing domestic violence prevention since about fifty percent of calls to police for domestic violence are made by neighbors. Similarly, children are at school during the day and not able to play the role of the "capable guardian." Thus, any connection between employment and violence may have nothing to do with most stresses, less resources, or symbolism, but purely opportunity: more employment equates to less contact. On the flip-side of this theory, while working long hours reduces contact (and the opportunity for violence) and increases household income, it can also increase stress on the employee and his family such that when the partners are in contact, the likelihood of violence is increased (Fox et al. 2002). Thus, theories and policies linking more employment to less violence may find their antithesis in overworked individuals.

Previous scholars have also argued that an individual's "stake in conformity" may suppress battering behavior (Sherman 1992; Fagan 1993). While the "stakes in conformity" theory is not developed well enough to specifically identify which sorts of measures ought to be good or bad indicators of a person's stakes or even the exact nature of the interaction, most of the scholarship in the area of family violence connecting stakes to violence have relied on employment as the key proxy. Employment is consistently viewed as an overt measure of a person's stakes since it is generally accepted that individuals wish to avoid crime and formal punishment so as not to reduce their chances of establishing or retaining employment. More specifically under the social control theme, the conditional deterrence hypothesis asserts that formal sanctions can only deter offenders if they will also suffer social costs because of their bond to conventional commitments or norms. Employment as well as home ownership serves as one of several social bonds (Hirschi 1969), insuring a person's commitment and attachment to their family, neighborhood and community. In fact, more so than length of residence, homeownership is a critical determinant of one's bond or attachment to their neighborhood (Brisson & User 2007; Oh 2004). Thus, just like losing a job, losing a home should weaken a person's bond that may have deterred them from using violence.

In the context of formal social controls, sanctions such as arrest or mandated treatment are then believed to be mediated by the reinforcing stimuli of other informal controls. The hypothesis would therefore predict that the addition of a criminal sanction should have no deterrent effect among those that have no concurrent conventional "stakes", and only deter among those that do have some "stakes". Alternatively, the social control replacement hypothesis argues that criminal sanctions are only noticeably effective when other informal controls are missing. For those with social controls, the presence of a criminal sanction adds little to the

overall cost already imposed by other social control mechanisms. In other words, those without informal controls can be deterred by the direct cost of the criminal sanction (e.g., a night in jail or a monetary fine), while others are deterred by other costs (e.g., lost of a job or breakup of a marriage) arising solely from informal social controls. Finally, the additive hypothesis claims that both informal and formal controls independently deter future deviance, and that more of either type of control results in failures. As such, those with the highest degree of social control should have less frequent offending, while those with the least control should have the highest level of failing.

The “stakes” hypothesis would therefore predict that family violence should go up as men transition from an employed to an unemployed status, even if the system applies more sanction to compensate for the reduced quantity of informal social controls. In fact, Sherman (1992) suggest the application of more sanctions may make the situation worse or backfire, which may be particularly true if the men believe their lay-offs are due to the economic crisis rather than their employee performance. This process may damage a person’s belief in a fair and just economy and lower their sense of procedural justice (i.e., anomie). Conversely, in times of economic hardship, when any employment is highly valued, many more men than usual may be unwilling to risk unemployment by engaging in violent behavior. Thus, any increases in violence among those with lower stakes because they lost their jobs, may in the aggregate, be offset by an increased fear felt among those still (but now marginally) employed.

Changes in employment status loss of a home status may also represent a ‘turning point’, as in and Laub and Sampson’s (1993) life-course model. As individuals proceed along their life-course trajectory, life changes can alter the path of the trajectory and lead individuals in a different direction, including toward or away from a criminal lifestyle. A sudden home

foreclosure caused by unemployment can be a negative turning-point, directing otherwise law-abiding individuals towards criminal behavior. When the subject's place of employment fosters frequency, duration and intensity of pro-social bonds, sudden unemployment may result in the severing of these bonds and the formation of new, less positive attachments (Sutherland 1947). If a person was previously mixing socially with other employed peers, he may have been discouraged from offending as it would threaten these social bonds. After a lay-off, the same individual may form bonds with other unemployed peers who may be pursuing illegitimate sources of income. This leads to the normalization of criminal behavior, allowing the individual to integrate antisocial norms into his cognitive schemata and rationalize behavior he would previously have rejected. Bowker (1984) suggested that these types of bonds (through reinforcement) that can lead to violence or make it more difficult to stop.

Another casual process that is often discussed in criminology to explain delinquency, though not discussed among family violence researchers, is Agnew's revision of strain theory (1992). Of special importance to researchers is Agnew's notion of self-generated norms, as this may tie strain theory to theories of social learning and environment. In this context, Agnew suggests that economic capital such as employment is a source of positive stimulus and that its removal (unemployment) will trigger anger, frustration, and criminal behavior. This process would certainly also exist when someone loses their home to a foreclosure regardless of whether they lost employment as well. The resulting anger would surely arise when a home foreclosure is considered unfair and unrelated to an individual's ability to pay prior monthly balances but can no longer keep-up because of an adjustment of the interests, as is the case with many subprime loans.

Closely related to this theoretical tangent is the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al. 1939). When applied to layoffs and violence, the frustration-aggression hypothesis predicts that men who are laid-off will have an increased risk for violence while men who fear lay-offs will have a reduced risk. A direct test of provocation/inhibition effects (and subsequent study replication) supported this approach (Catalano et al. 2002). Layoffs have been found to increase angry, irritable and insulting behaviors (Vinokur et al. 1996). One study found that men who were laid off between the first and second study interviews were six times more likely to report poor psychiatric condition versus subjects who had retained employment (Catalano et al. 1993). Interestingly, men who were employed in relatively unstable fields (for example, contract work as opposed to stable industries) were twenty percent less likely to engage in violent behavior. Both findings remained significant when controlling for age, gender, socioeconomic status, marital status, psychiatric and alcohol disorders. Thus, it appears that the effect of employment on violence may be illustrated by a mediated rather than a linear model. Men who fear unemployment may practice greater self-control, to which (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) attribute most desistance from crime.

Stress-fueled violence is not limited to intimate partnerships. The impact of the economic downturn may also reach children and the elderly. Inquiry into the nature and prevalence of elder abuse is only in its early stages, but risk factors have been identified that should generate concern about an increase in violence due to financial stress. As budgets tighten, family members pool their resources and move in together, often creating excess tension (Armour 2009). This is especially true in the case of home foreclosure, where moving in with family may be necessitated by losing a home. Combined with other caregiver stresses, this tension may lead to greater violence. Elderly women are at the greatest risk of abuse, as they may also be victims of intimate

partner abuse, though generally such abuse declines with age. The percentage of assaults by other family members remains fairly constant (Bachman & Meloy 2008). This suggests that, while intimate violence perpetrators “age out”, the stress of caring for a dependent elderly parent is more likely to occur later in life and incite abuse perpetration amongst an older cohort.

The *National Center on Elder Abuse* uses the phrase “financial abuse” to describe an assortment of property offenses, also known as fiduciary abuse, financial mistreatment, financial deprivation, monetary abuse, and so on. Property offenses can be divided into two categories—exploitation by primary contacts and fraud by secondary contacts (Payne 2000). In this discussion, we are concerned with crimes within the family, and will focus on only the former. “Exploitation by primary contact” offenses are those offenses in which trusted individuals use various methods to steal items or money from the victim. For example, Hall (1989) describes a situation in which adult children would come to live with an elderly parent the first week of every month in order to exploit government assistance payouts. In situations where the child’s home has been seized, this informal living arrangement may extend for much longer than a week, straining the meager resources provided by retirement and Social Security. Elders may also be victims of “protecting the will”, when adult children restrict their parents’ access to bank accounts in order to assure themselves a larger inheritance (Littwin 1995). Bachman and Meloy (2008) also find that crimes against the elderly are more likely to be motivated by the perpetrator’s potential economic gain than crimes against younger people. Greenberg and colleagues’ (Greenberg et al. 1990) inquiry into dependent adult children living with an elderly parent found that substance dependency and unemployment increased the risk of elder abuse, but that these abused elderly parents repeatedly welcomed their children back home under conditions that were inevitably violated (e.g., the child could remain in the home as long as he stayed

sober). This suggests a certain amount of role ambiguity on behalf of parent and child, where the adult child is dependent (as a child) but physically abusive (with the strength of an adult), and the elderly parent wishes to care for the child (as a parent) but is physically more fragile and easily injured (as a child). Given this finding, we find it a safe assertion that in poor economic periods, crimes against the elderly will increase, especially when the care-giving adult child sees the elder as a source of income or financial gain.

Besides symbolizing a “stake” or a “bond”, employment may also serve as a status or resource indicator in the relationship between a working partner and a non-working spouse. Feminist theories of male dominance and traditional gender roles would suggest that unemployment strips the male of one method of dominance over his spouse, leaving him only force or its threat (Goode 1971). If the female partner maintains employment, the male may feel pressured to exert his dominance through using physical aggression (Macmillan & Gartner 1999). Financial stress and ambiguity of gender roles may damage a normally loving and supportive relationship, removing the otherwise positive effects of this bond. This tension could be exacerbated by women wanting their partners to work longer hours (presumably to increase household income) (Fox et al. 2002). Comparative resource theory suggests that the interaction effect of men’s and women’s employment is “as salient to violence as the independent effect of each alone” (Fox et al. 2002).

As an alternative to the causal mechanism suggested by strain theory or the mediating model proposed by the “stakes” proponents, employment may also be viewed as a simple proxy for self-control. Punctuality, compliance, and overall work ethos may all symbolize an individual’s commitment and attachment to one’s workplace and greater environment. Alternatively, these employee characteristics may simply provide evidence of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) “self-

control”. As this example illustrates, the relationships between microeconomic variables and intimate violence can be dangerously spurious. While not well studied within the context of family violence, some research implies that intimate or family violence, including violence directed at older family members, has more to do with personality characteristics like low self control than stress (Pillemer & Finkelhor 1989; Sellers 2006).

Certainly, some of these theoretical arguments are more supported than others.

Employment has been found to deter or prevent violence, functioning as a protective factor while unemployment is a risk factor (Bachman 2000; Bowlus & Seitz 2006; Mistry et al. 2008; O'Donnell et al. 2002). In a German study, researchers found that men who were unemployed or expected to be unemployed in the near future self-reported an increase in their violent behavior, though this relationship was reduced by the presence of greater “self-awareness” (Fischer et al. 2008), a possible connection to what Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) label “self-control”. Tauchen and Witte (2001) also found that employed men were less likely to be violent than those who were unemployed. When combined with the earlier findings of Catalano and colleagues (2002) suggests that employment serve as a social bond that mediates aggressive behavior. When employment disappears, the resulting frustration manifests as violence.

There is also substantial evidence to support gendered theories of domestic violence. When comparing employment as a protective factor for men and women, it has been found that employment is a stronger deterrent for men than for women (Magdol et al. 1997). When considered alone, male and female unemployment did not produce significant changes in violence (Macmillan & Gartner 1999); this relationship was found to hinge upon marital equality rather than individual employment. Female employment functioned as a protective factor only when her partner was also employed; if an employed woman was partnered with an unemployed

spouse, her risk of violence increased. This certainly suggests, as feminist theories would claim, that male violence is a function of a masculine need for dominance in the relationship. This concept will be revisited in the further discussion of status incompatibility.

Income. Theoretical connections between income and the perpetration of violence are largely similar to those mentioned for employment and homeowners. We can consider income an important financial variable for detecting more subtle differences than employment or unemployment. The greater the income, for example, the greater the prestige of the occupation, in reference to the afore-mentioned studies highlighting discrepancies in occupational prestige between spouses. The greater the income, the greater the stakes in conformity – a man of high status with a high-earning position has more to lose than a lower-class man if his abuse is publicized. However, income is often inextricably entangled with other socioeconomic factors and may serve as a proxy for age, race, education or gender. In a culture where men have a higher average income than women, we could argue that “batterers have higher incomes than their victims” and simply be detecting gender differences rather than income effects. Finally, income is the predominant factor in socioeconomic status, and a favorite predictor of violence in the cadre of “drunken bum” (Kantor & Straus 1987) theories, with or without alcohol abuse.

Historically, income has been measured at the household level. Women of lower-income households have been found to have a higher risk of abuse (Smith et al. 2002; Bachman 2000). While some may take this to mean that income is a proxy for general socioeconomic status, income has been found to have a significant negative relationship with risk of abuse when controlling for other socioeconomic variables (O'Donnell et al. 2002). Based upon data from the National Family Violence Survey and the National Crime Survey, Fagan (1993) argued that

income's effects are confounded with race and urbanism. In central cities, spousal assault rates were highest for low-income groups. However, regardless of household location, spousal assault rates were consistently over thirty percent for the poorest of African American families. These rates do decline as income increases, but only in suburban and rural areas. Rates remain high in central cities, independent of income. For white couples, spouse-assault rates are inversely associated with income in central cities but not elsewhere. Low income is also associated with high rates of child abuse, though only in single-parent families (Berger 2005).

It may be important, however, to separate female and male income in order to better detect their relationship with risk of abuse. Exploration of female income as a protective or risk factor has produced mixed results. Research has found that marital dissatisfaction and wives' proportion of household income has a relationship resembling an inverted U-shape, with divorce rates being highest when wives contribute 40-50 percent of household income. When wives' incomes is measured in dollars, the relationship appears to be linear – the higher the wife's income, the higher the likelihood of divorce (Rogers 2004). Higher income and educational attainment appears to be a protective factor against emotional abuse (Kaukinen 2004). However, in a meta-analysis of common risk factors for spousal abuse, (Hotelling and Sugarman 1986) found only three studies measuring female income, none of which found a significant relationship with husband-to-wife violence. Of four studies measuring male income, three found a negative relationship between income and violence, and one found no significant relationship.

Income also appears to be closely tied to women's cycle of abuse. Researchers have identified that the consequences of abuse and the presence of dependent children impact a woman's ability to earn, often resulting in her dependence on welfare. Welfare reforms enacted in 1996 require that welfare beneficiaries work to receive support, a demand that can seem

impossible to meet when there is a lack of court-ordered child support and few affordable childcare options Riger & Staggs 2004). When evidence suggests that economic dependency significantly influences women to remain with an abusive partner (Barnett 2000; Scott et al. 2002), it seems unreasonable to enact welfare reforms that *increase* a woman's dependency on a breadwinning partner rather than *decrease* dependency by providing childcare and empowering women to find and maintain employment.

Status Incompatibility. Current evidence points to income discrepancy and status incompatibility being a more likely risk factor for domestic violence than employment or income alone. Women appear to be at a higher risk of abuse when they are employed and their partners are not, a relationship that is not significant when employment of either spouse is considered separately (Macmillan & Gartner 1999). Studies on status relationships and marital satisfaction have found that a woman's greater status in relation to her husband is associated with the husband's marital dissatisfaction (Hornung et al. 1981). The cultural depiction of the husband as breadwinner has supported the greater rewards accorded to men in the workplace, legitimized male power within the family, and provided men with a resource for demonstrating their masculinity (Ferree 1990; Stark & Flitcraft 1996). When this resource is removed, men may resort to violence instead. Female employment functioned as a protective factor only when her partner was also employed; if an employed woman was partnered with an unemployed spouse, her risk of violence increased. This certainly suggests, as feminist theories would assert, that male violence is a function of a masculine need for dominance in the relationship. When economic dominance (through more prestigious employment) is no longer possible, men may resort to physical violence and assert their dominance through strength rather than employment

status. Raphael 2001) argues that male dependency (a product of male unemployment and female employment, in this case) causes shame, which can then fuel violence. This argument has been supported with findings that women who can at least equalize their ‘occupational prestige’ with their husbands (no more, no less) may find a safe balance between being a threat to masculinity and being economically dependent Lambert & Firestone 2000). Research shows that women making more money than their spouse are at a higher risk for abuse Atkinson et al. 2005), and this risk increases as the portion of household income contributed by the woman increases Fox et al. 2002). Anderson (1997) found that the odds of male-perpetrated domestic violence are approximately 40 percent lower when their female partners earn less than 31 percent of the couple's total income. When women earn slightly more (between 55%-69%) of the couple's earnings, men have approximately 3.5 times greater odds of perpetrating violence than men with earnings similar to their female partners. This risk increases to over 5.5 times greater odds of male violence when women earn 70 percent or more of the couple's income. In today’s economic climate, where traditionally male-dominated manufacturing jobs are disappearing, we may see women retaining employment where men do not, increasing status incompatibility and ultimately heightening the risk of domestic violence. In light of the above evidence, however, it is interesting to note that Farmer and Tiefenthaler 1997) find that external and independent sources of income for women (child support, government assistance, lawsuit payouts, family money, etc.) reduce women’s risk and that greater economic equality for women will lead to a decrease in violence. Perhaps female equality must strike a delicate balance between “not enough” and “too much” when considering the contribution to household income.

Conclusion

For as long as scholars have sought to understand the nature and etiology of violence within families and between intimates, the notion that both parties' economic capital plays a role in the causal process is consistently found. There are tens if not hundreds of studies that explicitly model economic variables to explain the variance in the rates of family violence. Regardless of whether these variables are measuring income, employment or a composite of both (e.g., SES), or measuring the product of the difference between the two partners, the research results are fairly consistent: money matters, at least to some degree. Unfortunately, no research has specifically measured the connection between homeownership or change in homeownership and domestic violence. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that less income and unemployment, and most likely an involuntary change in homeownership, are strongly correlated with violence within the family. This is consistent with previous statements that "to argue that intimate violence is not distinguished by socioeconomic status is inconsistent with the extant literature" (Moore 1997: 95; see also Fagan 1993). This conclusion is largely not conditional or dependent upon time or place, by type of violence, or source of data, and is likewise consistent with a cadre of theoretical models that all predict that money should matter. In fact, all but two theoretical models that we discussed above foresee that more economic resources should result in less family violence. However, the exact process that these theories use to connect the two variables is not necessarily the same. For example, one argues that less capital causes more stress which can lead to violence, while another argues that men do not use violence because they fear doing so would cause them to lose their jobs which would in turn lower their status among friends and family. Nevertheless, it appears that feminist theories of resources and relationship dominance are best supported by the literature, closely followed by theories of social bonds related to

employment and occupational networks.

Among the two models that do not subscribe a causal relationship between capital and violence are Gottfredson and Hirshi's (1990) self-control explanation for crime, which argues that if there is a relationship it is simply a spurious one because low self-control can simultaneously explain a person's poor economic performance and their higher proclivity to use violence. The second model that does not necessarily argue for a linear, negative relationship between economics and violence, is a feminist position that family violence, or at least intimate partner violence, is largely caused by a gap between men's and women's economic resources. This model suggests the women who are more dependent on a man's income for their status are more likely victimized by their partner because they have fewer alternatives to protect their status. In other words, men will use violence to control their female partners because they know their partners cannot leave without costs.³ This concept of status may also be applied to other forms of family violence, like child abuse (high adult status vs. dependent, low-status children) and elder abuse (high adult status vs. dependent, low-status elders).

Because of the regularity of empirical findings between economics and family violence, their consistence with the ad-hoc evidence we found on the Internet, and the cadre of theoretical models predicting such a relationship, it would easy for us to conclude that family violence should rise as the 2008-09 economic crisis deepens. It fits with common sense and is consistent with what many scholars report finding after analyzing data that captures family functioning, some of which dates back beyond the 1900s. Yet, after a close assessment of this large body of literature, we have identified several methodological weaknesses that are not trivial in our opinion, and therefore we conclude that it is too soon to assert that the current economic crisis will result in significantly more family violence.

The first methodological weakness we found is that the vast majority of the studies linking economics to family violence use cross-sectional designs which ask about violence and income at the same time. Thus, it is possible that repeated violence may cause some respondents to report less income than they once could because the violence led to less wages and more physical or mental health problems. Another possibility, as indirectly suggested by Gottfredson and Hirshi 1990), is that the negative correlation between capital and violence that is detected in the cross-sectional studies is more likely driven by a third variable, self-control. Accordingly, the more self-control one possesses, the more likely he or she is employed or have higher income, not likely to take on a risky subprime home loan, and less prone to use violence to achieve their goals.

A second reason for not yet accepting the economic-violence casual process is that the few longitudinal studies that link variables such as employment to violence are weak because they rely on stagnant employment data (c.f., Catalano et al. 1993; Fox et al. 2002). As best as we can tell, just two studies have tested what happens in households or in the relationships when there is a change in one or both partners' employment statuses or incomes. In other words, if a man transitions from employed to unemployed, does this lead him to begin using violence or to use it more frequently than before? Alternatively, does an unemployed subject who becomes employed during the study report less frequent use of violence, or do they completely desist? This latter scenario is particularly important because some suggest that for women, an improvement in their employment status should reduce the likelihood of violence (e.g., Farmer & Tiefenthaler 2003b). Some claim that as women gain resources through their employment, they should become less dependent on their male partners, who should in turn fear more that the women will leave them if they try to use violence to control the relationship. These latter two

scenarios are also consistent with predictions arising out of the “stakes in conformity” and “the turning-point” models we reviewed earlier. Both theories suggest that the male’s employment status is linked to legitimate or illicit bonds that in turn protect against or promote the use of violence.

Several other methodological issues also make our conclusions tentative to suspect. For example, when considering economic variables, it appears to be extremely important to measure not at the household or family level, but at the individual level, as status discrepancies between spouses may be more powerful predictors of violence than income or employment alone. We must also make a greater effort to control for other demographic variables that confound the effects of income and employment, such as race, age, and education. Finally, the body of literature we have reviewed offers no evidence about the connection to understand male intimate violence victimization, though there is substantial evidence to suggest this victimization often occurs.

Besides these methodological flaws and aforementioned sampling biases, we also assert that today’s employment environment may well represent something qualitatively different than it did in 2001 and certainly different when compared to the years before the 1980s; therefore, we believe there is far greater likelihood of generating false positives by generalizing from past research to today. While it is difficult for us to set aside the painful stories we noted earlier, there are several notable contemporary employment facts that make our generalizability argument fairly clear: for the most part, women are participating in today’s workforce more so than they ever did before, and less of them are unemployed when compared to men (Global Employment Trends for Women 2008)⁴. This upward employment trend began in the early 1980s (Howe 1990) and by the end of 2008 women represented 49 percent of the entire workforce

Mulligan 2009). Nearly 20 percent of the married women today make more than their husbands (Mulligan 2009). Labor force participation rates, 1975-2008 (2008). Furthermore, it is expected that in the near future more women will work than men. This gap is the product of the shift in the US economy from manufacturing jobs traditionally filled by men to a service economy, in which women play a much larger role (Gavin 2008). On the flip side of employment, in February 2009 the female unemployment rate had risen to 6.7 percent, but this rate is about 20 percent lower than the male unemployment rate (6.7% vs. 8.1%) (Kirchhoff 2009). This gap is because, during the first 13 months of the recession starting December 2007, men account for 82 percent of job losses (Rampell 2009).

This structural employment shift offers both opportunities for women (and research) and the potential for some negative consequences. While women in 2009 generally produce and control more resources than ever before, they still do not make as much money as men, and therefore must continue to manage the burden that this gap places on them. For instance, women are now more likely than ever before to be the sole breadwinner in the family, yet their bread is still not as large nor does it come with as many fringe benefits as what their husband's jobs once provided (Warren 2006). Given both the symbolic meaning of this turn-of-events, and the practical problems caused by women still contributing a disproportionate amount of household labor, this period could cause more stress and strains than ever experienced by families. At the same time, their experience in the labor force may also bring them a better understanding of their husbands' unemployment plight and help them to adjust to their new role; a process that is in stark contrast to what happened in families facing unemployment of the male as recently as the early 1990s (Nordheimer 1990). For example, one working woman interviewed in 2009 by the New York Times, who started work after her husband lost his job for the first time in the

early 2000s, now claims that “[t]hings are not happy in the house if I blame him all the time, so I don’t do any of that anymore, I know he is doing his best” Rampell 2009). At the same time, men are reporting that they are responsible for more household tasks. The combination of these two changes may lessen today’s strains when compared to those once felt when women became the sole income producer.

Because of the two methodological shortcomings mentioned earlier and the need to make our analysis more contemporary to reflect today’s economic-social climate, we recommend a focused and rigorous program of research before ringing the alarm bells. We need to study how changes with the economic conditions of a family or intimate relationship change the dynamics of the relationship/partnership, and how this process interacts with changes in the long term macro-economic shifts/ developments we experienced over the past several decades. These two questions need answering simultaneously because the impact of people moving from the employed to unemployed category cannot be divorced from what is transpiring among their neighbors, across their communities, and the nation as a whole. These questions can even be further refined, for example, by asking whether any correlations that are found are equally related to both the onset and desistance of violence, or whether the correlations exist only for the frequency of violence among active offenders. If it turns out that economic changes impact different criminal career parameters than the current crisis, while creating an aggregate increase in violence, may well impact individual households differently. If, for example, the rapid increase in employment is touching families who have never experienced unemployment, then the onset of violence may not increase because these families represent a different group of households than those who are regularly live with unemployment. Alternatively, if the rapid increase in unemployment is largely concentrated among those household that already have

systemic unemployment problems, then violence might already exist but could become more frequent or severe as the family deals with a period of household unemployment.

Fortunately, we believe there are shovel-ready data that can address these questions. Specifically, by combining the NCS and the NCVS into a stacked, concatenated database that links the six respondent interviews over three years, we can test whether the size of any relationship between a household's absolute economic condition or the change in this condition and any form of family violence changes as a function of the absolute or change in the GNP over a nearly thirty-five year period. As of March 2009, these analyses can incorporate data that reaches back to 1973 and covers the first six months of 2008, and by August 2009 these analyses could incorporate the October to December 2008 stock and employment crash. Because of the design of the NCVS, this analysis could also incorporate several criminal career parameters such as onset and desistance, as well as frequency and severity. The initial models could first test whether there is a relationship across the six panel interviews as any given time, and then the analyst could disaggregate the data by years to test whether the correlations are stronger or weaker if the economy changes.

The weakness of the NCVS is that it does not capture some of the "subjective" meanings of employment, jobs, and income that Fox et al. (2002) argue are necessary to fully capture the nexus of economics and domestic violence. Accordingly, as an alternative shovel-ready study, one could expand Fox et al. (2002) work by incorporating the third wave of data from the National Study of Families and Household (NSFH) to assess the stability of their findings and to extend the tests to included child abuse outcomes (the NSFH interviews took place in 1987-88, 1992-94, and 2001-2003). Along with additional years, the additional analysis could add alternative dependent measures such as child abuse and violence against the male partner. The

weakness of these data however is that they are largely collected during periods just following a recession and not during a period interning or during a recession.

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¹ Pleck (Pleck 2004: 85) suggest that violence occurred in other classes when, after claiming that “anticruelty societies intervened primary in immigrant poor and working-class homes,” she states that “the occasional investigation of a middle-class family was handled more gently, because such households were better able to maintain a façade of respectability”.

² The article titled “Wife-Torture in England” was written by F. P. Cobbe and published in *Contemporary Review* 32 (April 1878).

³ It is this later model that has largely driven nearly forty years of policies designed to reduce violence against women, although recent evidence finds little support for the connect between adding more resources (e. g., shelters, hotlines, legal services, counseling programs, etc.) and less violence (see Davis et al. 2006; Farmer & Tiefenthaler 2003b; Harrell et al. 2007; Post et al. In press).

⁴ The rise in female labor for participation is not just confined to the United States according to a March 2008 report about global employment trends for women. The reports shows that the number of employed women grew by almost 200 million over the last decade, to reach 1.2 billion in 2007 compared to 1.8 billion men. However, the number of unemployed women also grew from 70.2 to 81.6 million over the same period. (Global Employment Trends for Women 2008).