

RACE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN, LATINA, AND WHITE WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study used standardized interview surveys to examine the differences in demographic characteristics, social support networks, marital power, and abusive experiences among White, African American, and Latinas/Hispanic women who sought assistance from a local shelter (N=41). The main research objective was to examine racial differences in the experiences of and responses to intimate relationship violence. Findings derived from ANOVA and a discriminant function analysis identified a set of two variables that characterized the group differences: help from friends and the number of times in the shelter. However, there were no statistically significant differences in demographic variables, marital power, and abusive behaviors among the three groups. White women were most likely to seek help from friends and use shelters among these three groups. Research implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence research centering on issues of racial differences is both necessary and problematic. The *necessity* arises out of the racially stratified social service and criminal justice response to both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. While seeking social service or criminal justice support, women of color may encounter racism and suspicion from police and service providers, and may not find emergency shelters able to meet their needs (Ginorio, Reno 1986; White 1994; Zambrano 1985). Men of color who are arrested for domestic violence face similar vulnerabilities at the hands of a racially unjust criminal justice system (Black 1980; Mann 1993). The necessity, in other words, arises from the understanding that domestic violence cuts across all racial, ethnic, and class lines, and the lack of sufficient evidence to support this claim.

The *problem* with research that centers on race occurs when race gets conflated with culture, and domestic violence is transformed into a "cultural value" (Rasche 2001; Torres 1991). For example, in their book, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz argue that

...minority males are violent because they are attempting to live up to a culturally prescribed model of the aggressive and dominant male... (1981 134)

The problem, in other words, is that research of this type may simply reinforce existing racial stereotypes about communities of color (Lockhart 1991). Studies on the etiology of

domestic violence that equate minority cultural values with causality should, therefore, be interpreted with caution – especially within the violent (and racist) context of the United States.

Our study enters this research conundrum on the side of necessity. There is much evidence to suggest that domestic violence cuts across all racial, ethnic, and class boundaries (Agtuca 1994; Burns 1986; Carrillo, Tello 1998; Locke, Richman 1999; Lockhart 1987; Finn 1986; Straus et al 1981; White 1994; Zambrano 1985), and that the cause of this violence is not reducible to any specific configuration of these variables. Race, ethnicity, and class may, however, play a role in shaping marital relationships and domestic violence within those relationships and the purpose of our research is to explore the connection between these variables. Specifically, we attempt to examine the differences in demographic characteristics, social support variables (ie, help from friends/relatives, shelter use, and report to the police), marital power, and wife abuse among Whites, African Americans, and Latinas/Hispanics. This study is based on interviews with 41 battered women who sought assistance from a local battered women's shelter.

PAST RESEARCH

An estimated 6 million American women are physically abused one or more times each year and 1.8 million women are severely battered each year (Straus & Gelles 1990). In a recent study conducted jointly by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, Tjaden and Thoennes (Ei-

genberg 2001) report that over 1.3 million women were victims of physical assaults by their intimates in the 12 months preceding the survey. This violence, moreover, cuts across class, race, ethnic, and cultural boundaries (Agtuca 1994; Burns 1986; Carrillo, Tello 1998; White 1994; Zambrano 1985). What is at issue here is the extent to which the crossing of these boundaries changes the frequency, type, severity, motives, and responses to domestic violence. While most of the spouse abuse literature makes the assertion that domestic violence involves everyone (Rasche 2001), the findings regarding the extent of this involvement are inconsistent.

Domestic Violence as an Equal Opportunity Crime? Or not?

Since the advent of the battered women's movement in the 1970s, grass-roots and feminist activists have characterized domestic violence as a crime involving all men and all women as potential perpetrators and victims (Schechter 1982). Research findings, however, have not been as consistent regarding the likelihood of involvement in domestic violence by individuals occupying different racial, ethnic, and class locations.

On the one hand, many researchers have found no significant relationship between race and incidence of domestic violence when controlling for socioeconomic status and other demographic variables (Hutchison, Hirschel, Pesackis 1994; Straus, Smith 1990).¹ Finn's (1986) study of 300 college undergraduates shows that there are no racial differences in attitudes toward physical violence between white and African American students for both genders. Furthermore, Sorenson and Telles (1991) maintain that spousal-abuse rates are almost equal between Mexican Americans born in Mexico and non-Hispanic whites born in the United States. Similarly, in her study comparing lower, middle, and upper class African-American and European American women, Lockhart

found no significant difference between the proportions of African-American and European-American women who reported that they were victims of husband-to-wife violence... (1991 99)

These findings suggest that race, by itself,

is not a sufficient explanatory variable in determining causes of domestic violence.

At the same time, other researchers examining the relationship between race/ethnicity and wife abuse have found that minority members are more likely to abuse their spouses than whites (Anderson 1997; Smith 1990; Straus et al 1981; Ellis 1989). Some studies find minority families to be more violent, especially when the violence is severe (Goetting 1989; Neff, Holamon, Schluter 1995). According to Carrillo and Tello (1998 4), both local and national studies have shown higher spousal homicide rates among ethnic minorities. Specifically several studies they reviewed reported substantially higher rates of marital homicide among African-Americans (Mercy, Seltzman 1989; Zahn 1988) when compared to both Whites and Latinos.

Using homicide data from nine cities, Zahn found that 47% of family homicides among Whites and 56% of homicides among African Americans were perpetrated by spouses while only 18% of Hispanic family homicides involved spouses. (Carrillo & Tello 1998 6)

Clearly, the relationship between race, ethnicity, class and propensity for involvement in domestic violence has not been definitively established. Similar to the variation in rates of violence in minority communities, explanations for why domestic violence occurs within communities of color also vary.

Explaining Domestic Violence

To explain these differences, some researchers argue that racially/ethnically and culturally minority people (Mexican Americans and other Latin Americans) are more tolerant of domestic violence, especially when they live in rigid, patriarchal, male-dominated families (see Rasche 2001). Other minority people (African Americans and Asian Americans) are "more likely to be suspicious and disrespectful of outsiders" and are less likely to report incidents of wife abuse to individuals outside the family (Asbury 1993 162; see also Okamura, Heras, Wong-Kerberg 1995; Scully, Kuoch, Miller 1995). According to Abney and Priest,

[r]eporting of...abuse by African Americans is further complicated by the realization that

a significant number of African Americans have experienced negative encounters with the police, criminal justice system, and other social service workers. (1995 20)

Seen in this light, it is possible to conclude that "tolerance of abuse" may, in fact, not be about tolerance at all, but instead a reluctance to report abuse to authorities. Moreover, in 1976 Staples argues,

[African-Americans and/or lower class] individuals may be over represented in official statistics regarding spousal violence because of their socioeconomic and colonized status rather than their race. (cited in Lockhart 1991 86)

Although African Americans have gained in education, political representation, and white-collar employment (Handy 1984), African Americans are still disproportionately poor and not middle-class (Griffin, Williams 1992). Poverty fosters frustration and anger about one's circumstances, and this increases the potential for violence and abuse. This argument may explain the higher spousal homicide rate as it pertains to African American wives (7.1 per 100,000 population) as opposed to that of white wives (1.3 per 100,000 population) from 1976 to 1985 (Mercy, Saltzman 1989). Oliver stated that interpersonal relations between African American males and females

...are prone to lead to the assault and murder of black females at a greater frequency than heterosexual relationships among members of all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. (1989 264)

McGee also reports that domestic violence is prevalent in the Latino/Hispanic community and the estimated rate of domestic violence is between 26 and 60 percent per year. McGee argues that the reasons for high rates of domestic violence are

[the] existing hierarchical family structure, limited economic opportunities, and a large power differential between men and women.... (1997 137)

In African American families, gender role segregation is not traditionally expected (Lewis in Boye-Beaman, Leonard, Senchak

1993). Asbury stated that

[c]hildren are likely to be treated without strict differences determined by sex and are likely to be reared to consider competence in interpersonal relationships more important than competence in dealing with the physical environment. (1993 162)

According to McGee (1997), African American women are expected to perform multiple roles including child-rearing and financial management. By contrast, Latino/Hispanic gender roles are traditionally described as rigid. McGee also maintains that Latinos/Hispanics are twice as likely to live in traditional family structures as compared to African Americans and Whites from the same socioeconomic status. In these family structures, males were expected to be protectors and providers, while females are non-aggressive nurturers (McGee 1997). Furthermore, studying attitudes toward domestic violence between ethnicities and genders, Locke and Richman (1999) found that European-American participants, relative to African-Americans, held more positive views of women and exhibited stronger disapproval of wife beating.

Barnett, Robinson, Baily, and Smith (1984), who studied 41 lower-income African American families, found that 15 percent of African American families indicated "husband" as the decision maker, while 27 percent indicated "wife" and 58 percent indicated both "husband and wife" as the decision maker. Barnett et al stated that lower-income African American families often made decisions jointly. Boye-Beaman et al concluded that

If, indeed, gender identity socialization differs by race, then it may be reasonable to speculate that a different relationship between gender identity and aggression may also exist for blacks and whites. (1993 305)

Since the late 1970s, a wide variety of research on domestic violence has been conducted. However, we still know very little about the dynamics of domestic violence with respect to race/ethnicity, social characteristics, motives, responses to domestic violence, and the frequency and type of wife abuse. As Torres asserts,

Table 1 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latino/Hispanic Males on Demographic Characteristics (N=41)

Variables	White Males		African American Males		Hispanic/Latino Males		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Age	34.53	19	33.08	12	36.90	10	.68	40	.514
Education	12.63	19	12.17	12	9.29	7	3.12	37	.056
Income (\$)	17,542.11	19	24,558.18	11	4,453.33	9	3.27	38	.050*
Job	.79	19	.67	12	.40	10	2.30	40	.114

*p<.05

Research on family violence that makes explicit comparisons between different cultures is needed to obtain knowledge regarding family violence and to analyze family violence in its cultural context. (1991 114)

METHODS

The purpose of the present study is to examine racial differences in the experiences of and responses to intimate relationship violence. The data were collected using a standardized interview survey methodology. This research, conducted in 1994, included interview surveys with 58 self-identified battered women. A non-random purposive sampling strategy was employed. After obtaining consent from shelter officials to conduct our research, we initiated our selection of respondents. Over a six-month period, each potential shelter resident was asked during her intake interview whether she would participate in our study. All the women approached agreed to participate.

The survey instrument used in this study was developed in collaboration with local shelter advocates. Local collaboration was undertaken, in part, to ensure that the wording and ordering of questions reflected both the local context *and* the assumptions of the survey design. Two uniformly trained interviewers conducted all 58 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Our primary rationale for using an interview survey methodology was to ensure a higher response rate (Babbie 1992 269).

Because the focus of the study is on the differences in intimate relationship violence among White, African American, and Latino/Hispanic couples, other racial categories and interracial couples are excluded from the sample. The final sample consisted of 19 (46.3%) White women, 12 (29.3%) African American women, and 10 Latinas/Hispanic women (24.4%). Fifty percent (or 5) of Latinas/Hispanic women were Mexican American. Af-

rican American women were over-represented in the sample, while Latinas/Hispanic women were under-represented. The percentage of whites was close to that of the region's population. Due to the lack of a representative sample, the findings will not be generalized to a larger population. Also, because the information obtained about batterers was collected by asking battered women, the research findings are herein presented with due caution.

The present study contains two sets of abusive behaviors exhibited by respondents' husbands or partners: mental abuse (MENT) and physical abuse (PHYSI). Mental abuse includes: threatening a divorce, leaving home, screaming, and cursing, while physical abuse includes throwing things, kicking, slapping, hitting, and using weapons. For the two sets of abuse categories, respondents were asked to indicate on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (scored 1) to "often" (scored 4). Mental abuse has reliability with a coefficient alpha of .66 and physical abuse has a coefficient alpha of .79.

This study also includes demographic variables such as couples' age, education, annual income, job (whether or not they are employed), marital status, children (the number of children), and length of relationships (in years). Couples' age was measured by asking their current age. The level of their education was measured by asking what level of education they had completed. Income was measured by asking respondents two questions. First, respondents were asked: "What is your annual income, not counting your spouse's?" Second, they were asked: "What is your and your spouse's combined annual income?" For both questions the answers indicate an *approximation* of the annual income reported by respondents. Their spouse's income was obtained by subtracting the respondent's income from the figures given for combined incomes. Re-

Table 2 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latina/Hispanic Females on Demographic Characteristics (N=41)

Variables	White Females		African American Females		Hispanic/Latina Females		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Age	34.26	19	31.17	12	34.80	10	.70	40	.504
Education	12.37	19	12.58	12	9.70	10	3.83	40	.030*
Income (\$)	9,874.74	19	5,868.33	12	9,552.00	10	.56	40	.575
Job	.21	19	.17	12	.60	10	3.32	40	.047*

*p<.05

spondent's job was measured by asking whether they were currently employed. This dummy variable was coded 1 if they were currently employed full-time or part-time, and coded 0 if they were unemployed. Marital status is also a dummy variable. If respondents were married they received a 1, and if they were unmarried they received a 0.

In addition, social support variables (help from friends/relatives, shelter use, and report to the police) are included. For the variables "help from friends" and "help from relatives," respondents were asked how often they sought help from friends/relatives in the past. The answer categories consisted of (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, and (4) often. For the variable "shelter use," respondents were asked how many times they used the shelter in the past. For the final variable "report to the police," respondents were asked whether they had ever called the police in the past. The answer was (0) no and (1) yes.

The final variable was decision-making power. In the present study, the decision-making variable consists of eight areas of decisions, which were derived from Blood and Wolfe's (1960) original work. Thus family decision-making power was measured by asking respondents who made the following eight decisions: 1. What job should the husband take; 2. What kind of car should be purchased; 3. Should life insurance be purchased; 4. Where should the couple go on vacation; 5. What house or apartment should be selected; 6. Should the wife go to work or quit work; 7. What doctor should be selected; and 8. How much money can the family afford to spend per week on food.

Of the 41 respondents, 31 respondents claimed that their partners made decisions alone in at least one of the decision-making categories. In addition, 31 respondents stated that they made decisions alone in at least one of the decision-making categories. Seventeen respondents reported that they

made decisions jointly in one of the decision-making categories. By way of contrast, there were 6 respondents (3 White women, 2 African-American, and 1 Latina) who made decisions separately. Of the 6 women, five women made decisions separately in only one category. Two women for the "doctors" category and three women for the category "car." While one woman made decisions separately in two areas: "car" and "insurance." For our study we focused on decision-making categories most commonly used by respondents. Hence, our concentration on three types of decision-making categories including; male decision-making, female decision-making, and joint decision-making, and our exclusion of the separate decision-making category.

In order to create a decision-making variable, the following calculation was made. The decision-making variable = (# of male decision-making) * (-1) + (# of joint decision-making) * (0) + (# of female decision-making) * (+1). For example, if a respondent's partner made all eight decisions alone, she received a score of -8 for the decision-making variable. By contrast, if a respondent made all eight decisions alone, she received a score of +8 for the decision-making variable. For those couples who made 8 decisions jointly, she received 0. The decision-making variable represents the distribution of power in the household.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the three racial/ethnic groups of males (White males, African American males, and Latino/Hispanic males) on each of the demographic variables (see Table 1). Table 1 shows that there were differences in their annual income levels ($F=3.27$, $p=.05$). On the average, African American males earned more income than White males and Latino/Hispanic males

Table 3 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latino/Hispanic Couples (N=41)

Variables	White Couples		African American Couples		Hispanic/Latino Couples		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Marital Status	47.00	19	.45	11	.50	10	.02	39	.980
Number of Children	1.89	19	2.75	12	3.10	10	2.62	40	.086
Length of Relationship	7.97	18	8.59	9	7.20	10	.12	36	.888

Table 4 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latinas/Hispanic Females on Social Support Variables (N=41)

Variables	White Females		African American Females		Hispanic/Latina Females		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Help from Friends	2.79	19	1.58	12	1.43	7	7.46	37	.002**
Help from Relatives	2.17	18	2.00	12	1.44	9	1.22	38	.306
# of Times in Shelter	1.26	19	.67	12	.70	10	.50	40	.613
Called the Police	.68	19	.75	12	.60	10	.27	40	.768

**p<.01

Note: Help from Friends: How often have you sought help from your friends? 1) Never, 2) rarely, 3) occasionally, and 4) often; Help from Relatives: How often have you sought help from your relatives? 1) Never, 2) Rarely, 3) Occasionally, and 4) Often; # of Times in Shelter: How many times have you entered the shelter in the past? and Called the Police: Have you ever called the police about the violence in your home? 0) No and 1) Yes.

(\$24,558.18, \$17,542.11, and \$4,453.33, respectively). The level of Latino/Hispanic males' annual income was below the poverty level.²

Although controversy exists over the association between socioeconomic status and wife abuse, the majority of research demonstrates that those with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be involved in wife abuse than those with higher socioeconomic status (Anderson 1997; Smith 1990). Our findings, however, have shown that batterers' income varied greatly from \$0 to \$60,000 for White males, from \$0 to \$80,000 for African American males, and from \$0 to \$16,000 for Latino/Hispanic males (findings not shown). Thus, our results indicate that batterers in our sample came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, other demographic characteristics were not statistically significant, although batterers' educational levels were almost significant ($F=3.12$, $p=.056$). Latino/Hispanic males had the lowest educational level (9.29 years), in comparison with African American males (12.17 years) and White males (12.63 years). In addition, 40 percent of Latino/Hispanic males, 67 percent of African American males, and 79 percent of White

males held a job ($F=2.30$, $p=.114$). On the average, abusers' age ranged from 33.08 to 36.90 years old ($F=.68$, $p=.514$).

Table 2 presents the results of ANOVA conducted to compare the three racial/ethnic groups of females (White females, African American females, and Latinas/Hispanic females) on each of the demographic variables. The results show that there were statistically significant differences in their educational levels and job status. Latinas/Hispanic females had the lowest level of education, in comparison with African American females and White females (9.79 years, 12.37 years, 12.58 years, respectively) ($F=3.83$, $p=.030$). Despite the low level of education, 60 percent of Latina/Hispanic women held a job, while 21 percent of White women and 17 percent of African American women held a job ($F=3.32$, $p=.047$). Although there was no statistically significant difference in their annual income levels, White women and Latinas/Hispanic women earned more income than African American women (\$9,874.44, \$9,552.00, and \$5,868,233, respectively) ($F=.56$, $p=.575$). Comparing their income levels with those of their spouses, we find that White women and African American women earned substantially less than their spouses.

Table 5 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latina/Hispanic Females on Marital Power (N=41)

Variables	White Females		African American Females		Hispanic/Latina Females		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Husband's Job	1.21	19	1.56	9	1.29	7	.70	34	.505
Car	1.68	19	1.89	9	1.89	9	.30	36	.742
Insurance	1.69	16	2.00	9	1.86	7	.35	31	.710
Vacation	1.62	13	2.25	8	1.80	5	1.19	25	.322
House	1.65	17	2.29	7	2.00	7	1.31	30	.287
Wife's Job	2.18	17	2.73	11	2.33	9	1.22	36	.309
Doctor	2.33	18	2.64	11	2.30	10	.63	38	.539
Food	2.21	19	2.50	12	2.30	10	.45	40	.642
DM	1.05	19	1.67	12	.10	10	1.21	40	.308

Note: DM: Decision-making (what job should the husband take?, what kind of car should be purchased?, should life insurance be purchased?, where should the couple go on vacation? what house or apartment should be selected?, should the wife go to work or quit work?, what doctor should be selected?, and how much money can the family afford to spend per week on food?).

Table 6 - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among White, African American, and Latina/Hispanic Females on Wife Abuse (N=41)

Variables	White Females		African American Females		Hispanic/Latina Females		F	df	p
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N			
Mental Abuse									
Threaten Divorce	2.31	13	1.67	9	2.29	7	.70	28	.505
Leave Home	2.58	12	2.25	8	2.83	6	.31	25	.738
Scream	3.69	16	3.40	10	4.00	8	1.04	33	.365
Cursing	3.58	19	3.58	12	4.00	8	.93	38	.402
Physical Abuse									
Throwing Things	2.33	12	2.50	10	3.57	7	2.22	28	.129
Kicking	2.08	13	2.70	10	2.86	7	1.01	29	.377
Slapping	2.69	16	3.30	10	3.13	8	.82	33	.450
Hitting	2.78	18	3.33	12	3.56	9	1.71	38	.196
Use Weapons	1.86	14	2.00	12	2.14	7	13.00	32	.875
MENT	11.83	12	10.71	7	12.20	5	.41	23	.670
PHYSI	10.82	11	13.38	8	14.50	6	1.32	24	.287

Note: MENT: threatening a divorce, leaving home, screaming, and cursing; and PHYSI: throwing things, kicking, slapping, hitting, and using weapons.

By contrast, Latinas/Hispanic women earned more income than their spouses. Their age ranged from 31.17 years old to 34.80 years old ($F=.70$, $p=.504$).

Table 3 presents their marital status, children, and length of relationships. There were no differences in these three variables among the three groups. Approximately 50 percent of the couples were married. On the average, White couples had 1.89 children, African American couples had 2.75 children, and Latino/Hispanic couples had 3.10 children. The length of relationships ranged from 7.20 to 8.59 years.

According to Table 4, only one variable differentiated significantly among the three

groups of women. White women were more likely to receive help from their friends than African American women and Latinas/Hispanic women ($F=7.46$, $p=.002$). By contrast, all three groups of women received assistance from their relatives equally, although Latinas/Hispanic women received less than White and African American women. However, the other two variables ("shelter use" and "report to the police") did not differentiate among the three group of women, indicating that they hold similar experiences. For example, most women had not used a battered women's shelter before (.67 times for African Americans, .70 times for Latinas/Hispanics, and 1.26 times for whites in the past).

Table 7 - Stepwise Discriminant Analysis Among White, African American and Latina/Hispanic Females (N=41)

Step Number	Variable Entered	Wilk's Lambda	P
1	Help from Friends	.58	.008**
2	# of Times in Shelter	.40	.003**

Table 7A - Eigenvalues

Function	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Canonical correlation
1	1.50	99.4	.77
2	.01	.6	.10

Sixty percent of Latinas/Hispanic women, 68 percent of White women, and 75 percent of African American women called the police at least once in the past, because of their experience of abuse.

According to Table 5, there were no statistically significant differences in the decision-making variable among White, African American, Latino/Hispanic couples ($F=1.21$, $p=.308$). This finding is similar to that of Hanrahan (1997) who has found that overall, the power-control measure of the family structure (egalitarian verses patriarchal households) did not have a significant effect on spousal violence. Although there were no differences in the decision-making pattern, White couples were slightly more likely to be male-dominant than Latino/Hispanic and African American couples ($DM=-1.05$, $.10$, 1.67 , respectively). By contrast, African American couples were slightly more likely to be female-dominant than the other two couples. Despite researchers' argument that Latino/Hispanic households are characterized by power differences between males and females and rigid gender role prescriptions for males and females (McGee 1997), our findings point out that Latino/Hispanic couples are more likely to make decisions jointly than White and African American couples.

Table 6 shows that overall, there were no statistically significant differences in the levels of mental abuse ($F=.41$, $p=.670$) and physical abuse ($F=1.32$, $p=.287$) among the three groups of women. Our results are similar to those of Gondolf, Fisher, and McFerron (1988) who found little differences in physical abuse among Whites, African Americans and Latinas/Hispanic women in various shelters. Although no significant differences were found, our findings show that Latinas/His-

Table 7B - Wilk's Lambda

Test of functions	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	df	p
1 through 2	.40	16.19	4	.003
2	.99	.17	1	.684

panic women were slightly more likely to be abused mentally (threatening divorce, leaving home, screaming, and cursing) than White and African American women. However, White females were least likely to be abused physically (throwing things, kicking, slapping, hitting, and using weapons) among the three groups.

As a next step, stepwise discriminant function analysis was conducted to identify a combination of variables that best characterizes the differences among the three groups. Table 7 shows that of all variables that examined above (demographic characteristics, social support networks, marital power and abusive behaviors), two variables were found to separate the three groups of women: help from friends (Wilk's lambda=.58, $p=.008$) and the number of times in shelter (Wilk's lambda=.40, $p=.003$).

According to Table 7A, the first canonical variable (or canonical discriminant function) accounts for 99.4 percent of the total dispersion, while the second variable accounts for only .6 percent. Moreover, Table 7B shows that after removing the first canonical variable (function), Wilk's lambda is .99 and the significance level is .684, indicating that the centroid (mean) of function 2 does not differ significantly across the three groups. Table 7B also presents that 40 percent of the variance in the discriminant scores was not explained by the group differences (Wilk's lambda=.40). Further analysis demonstrates that the difference between Whites and African American women was the largest ($F=9.53$, $p=.006$), followed by the difference between Whites and Latinas/Hispanic women ($F=7.20$, $p=.015$), indicating that whites and nonwhites are apart or differ with respect to help from friends and the number of times in shelter (findings not shown). In other words, White women sought help from friends and used a shelter most often, while African American women and Latinas/Hispanic women used social support networks and a shelter much less than Whites.

Likewise, the study on help-seeking behavior by Latinas and White women conducted by West, Kantor, and Jasinski (1998) has

documented that Latinas were less likely than White women to seek help from informal (friends and family members) and formal (psychologists) sources. Unlike our study, however, West et al's (1998) finding has shown no statistically significant difference in the use of battered women's shelter between Latinas and White women.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our findings have shown that taking into account all variables (demographic characteristics, social support networks, marital power, and abusive behaviors), two social support variables (help from friends and shelter use) are found to play a role in separating the three groups of women (White, African American, and Latinas/Hispanic women) in the local shelter. Unlike Gondolf et al's (1988) findings, Latinas/Hispanic women in our sample were very similar to African American women in terms of the utilization of shelters and the help from friends, in comparison with White women. As for abusive behaviors, our research cautiously confirms the statement that domestic violence cuts across racial, ethnic, and class differences.

When dealing with domestic violence, race matters – but not because people of color are disproportionately over-represented in official statistics. Race matters because the United States is a racist and racially stratified society. Race matters because women and men of color receive different treatment from the social institutions and agencies that constitute our current responses to domestic violence.

The perceptions of women of color to such differential treatment, in turn, shapes their responses to violence against them by men of color. Thus, perhaps they may become suspicious of authorities and reluctant to report incidents of abuse to them. As White notes:

The traditional response of the black community to violence committed against its most vulnerable members—women and children—has been silence. This silence does not stem from acceptance of violence as a black cultural norm (a view that the media perpetuates and many whites believe), but rather from shame, fear, and an understandable, but nonetheless detrimental sense of racial loyalty. (White 1994 12)

For Latinas/Hispanic women, the dilemma they face in response to intimate violence may be further bound by norms such as "family loyalty" (Zimbrano 1985 160-161) and "loyal motherhood" (Gondolf et al 1988 112). Perhaps, they are not *more* tolerant of abuse, but instead are more reluctant to report incidents of abuse to outsiders and share these incidents with service providers in order to protect their families and children.

Although an increasing number of shelters provides assistance for a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse group of women, the access to such services may be problematic. For example, Latinas/Hispanic women may not be able to go to shelters due to language difficulties, limited mobility due to larger families, less personal income, more binding marital norms, and discrimination (Heckert & Gondolf 2000). Furthermore, some Latinas/Hispanic women may experience immigration problems, which may prohibit them from seeking help from their friends and/or going to shelters. Although undocumented battered women are now protected by the law, this information is not common knowledge. Some women may, therefore, think that if they report incidents of abuse to authorities they will be deported.

Our Latina/Hispanic respondents received counseling in either English or Spanish, whichever they preferred. They were employed and also earned some income. But not all Latinas/Hispanic women are fortunate to find such shelters. Therefore, local communities and service agencies need to implement shelter programs that can accommodate all women's needs.

In order to measure social support variables more accurately, we need to understand social norms associated with cultural backgrounds. As West et al (1998) note, not all Latinas/Hispanic women possess the same social norms associated with their cultural backgrounds, and not all Latinas/Hispanic women come from the same country, or same region within a country. Therefore, although we do not believe that cultural values are causes of domestic violence, it is helpful to understand various cultural norms and values (Is it a shame to receive outside help? Do they mistrust authorities?), which can assist service providers in becoming more sensitive to those with cultural backgrounds differing from their own.

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ENDNOTES

¹Official statistics are limited in their usefulness for examining the relationship between domestic violence and race/ethnicity. This limitation is due, in part, to the inconsistent use of racial/ethnic categories by criminal justice agencies (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone 2000). For example, arrest data in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation does not include Hispanics as a separate category, but includes them as whites (Walker et al 2000). Thus, instead of using official statistics such as the UCR, some researchers collect their own data to examine race/ethnicity and domestic violence.

²In 1993, the poverty of one person under age 65 was \$7,518.00 (US Bureau of the Census 1994).



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