Battered Women’s Profiles Associated with Service Help-Seeking Efforts

Based on the work of
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Presentation developed by Zach Addison, MSW student
This presentation is drawn from the following study, which examines the factors that explain help seeking behaviors among battered women as well as their implications for practice:

Partner Violence and Help Seeking

- Battered women often seek assistance from
  - Informal supports
  - Agencies not specializing in domestic violence
- Tend to rely on informal means as long as possible (Coker, Derrick, Lumpkin, Aldrich, & Oldendick, 2000)
  - As a result, long-standing needs or severe problems may be present when formal assistance is sought
Goal

- The article from which this presentation is drawn seeks to “…provide practitioners with detailed information about the needs, resources, and characteristics of battered women as they seek help, predominately from service providers other than violence specialists.”

(Macy, Nurius, Kernic, & Holt, 2005, p.137)
Factors Considered in Study

- A combination of partner violence, biopsychosocial, and demographic factors should be used to capture battered women’s needs and resources.

- This study examines:
  - Behavioral acts and women’s appraisals of threat (Smith, Earp, & DeVellis, 1995)
  - Three subtypes of partner violence
    - Psychological
    - Physical
    - Sexual (Sackett & Saunders, 2001)
Factors Considered in Study cont.

- This study examines (cont.):
  - Biopsychosocial characteristics related to partner violence
    - Depression (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000)
    - Physical illness and injury (Petersen, Gazmararian, & Andersen, 2001)
    - Substance abuse (Levine & Greene, 2000)
  - Positive and negative social relationships (Lincoln, 2000)
  - Demographics (Henning & Klesges, 2002)
Scope of Study

- Measure of help seeking efforts includes both successful and attempted efforts
- Spectrum of formal human service agencies
  - Domestic violence
  - Legal
  - Health care
  - Public assistance
  - Counseling
  - Substance abuse
  - Religious/spiritual
Qualifications for Participation

- Participants were
  - Adult (18+)
  - Female
  - Residents of Seattle, WA
  - Abused by former/current intimate male partner
  - Involved in the filing of a police report or protection order
    - Incident for which participant filed=index incident (i.i.)
Participant/Non-Participant Comparison

- 448/762 (60.4%) persons eligible enrolled and fully completed the study
- Participants similar to non-participants in terms of
  - Age
  - Marital status
  - Proportion having a child with the abuser
  - Type of offense reported to police
- Participants different from non-participants
  - More likely to have obtained a protection order (56.5% participants vs. 41.8% non)
  - Less likely to be living with abuser at time of i.i. (26.7% participants vs. 36.4% non)
Survey

- Survey given to participants one month after i.i.
- Participants given option of completion by mail or over phone
  - 81% phone, 19% mail
  - No significant difference between these groups
Help Seeking Measures

- 22 items e.g. domestic violence services, health care
- Domestic violence services
  - Shelter/housing
  - Support groups
  - Advocacy
  - Domestic violence counseling
- Legal services
  - Assistance with divorce
  - Custody
  - Protection order
  - Crime victim’s compensation
  - Paternity action
Help Seeking Measures cont.

- Economic services
  - Welfare
  - Food stamps
  - Social security
  - Food bank services
- Substance abuse services
  - Drug treatment
  - Alcohol treatment
  - AA/NA
- Services from religious and/or spiritual organizations
- Health care related to index incident
  - On-scene 1st aid from paramedics
  - ER
  - Overnight hospital stay
Help Seeking Scale

- Participants asked if they received certain services since i.i.
  - Attained service=2
  - Attempted but did not attain service=1
  - Did not attempt=0

- Help seeking items in a service category summed to create weighted help seeking indices

- Aggregated help seeking scale from summed values of all types of help seeking
Partner Violence Measures

- Behavioral indicators
  - Measured with subscales of revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996)
    - Frequency of physical abuse on i.i. and in the year prior to its occurrence
    - Frequency of sexual abuse on i.i. and in the year prior to its occurrence
    - Frequency of psychological abuse on i.i. and in the year prior to its occurrence
  - Threat of partner violence measured with Women’s Experience with Battering scale (WEB) (Smith et al., 1995)
    - 10 items on 6 point Likert summed to create a scale
Measures of Biopsychosocial Factors - Social Relationships

- Social relationships measured with Social Adjustment Scale (SAS-M)
  - Engagement with friends
  - Engagement with extended family
  - Participation in leisure activities
    (Cooper, Osborn, Gath, & Fegetter, 1982; Weissman & Paykel, 1974)
- 5 point Likert scales for 7 positive items and 9 negative items
- Used to create a positive and negative social relationships/activities scale
Measures of Biopsychosocial Factors - Depression

- Depression symptomatology measured with Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)
  - One-week period following i.i.

- 20 items on a 4 point Likert scale
  - Score of 16 or less = no depression
  - 17-26 = mild depression
  - 27+ = severe depression
Measures of Biopsychosocial Factors—
Physical Health and Injury

- Overall physical functioning level measured with physical health component short-form 12 (PCS-12) (Ware, Kosinski, & Keller, 1995)
  - Mean score of 49.11 for U.S. women
  - SD 9.92, lower scores indicate poor health

- Injury score created from sum of positive responses to questions, “Did you receive ____ (e.g. broken bone, bruise) during i.i.?”
Measures of Biopsychosocial Factors - Drug and Alcohol Abuse

- Alcohol abuse for year prior to i.i. measured using three items from the alcohol abuse screening tool, the NET (Russell et al., 1994)
  - Have a drink in first thing in the morning
  - Feel the need to cut down on drinking
  - Blackout parts of evening spent drinking

- Drug abuse measured by one item
  - If participant had used illegal drugs in year prior to the i.i.
Measures for Demographic Factors

- Income assessed ordinally 1-7
- Education assessed ordinally 1-7
- Employment assessed ordinally 0-2
  - Higher numbers indicate greater income, more education, and full employment
- Racial and ethnic groups examined separately through use of one-way ANOVA
  - No significant differences among different groups of women of color on help seeking indices
    - all women of color aggregated and compared to Euro-American women
- Relationship with perpetrator on date of i.i. assessed
Analysis

- Participants split into help seekers (both successful and attempted) and non-help seekers
- Group differences tested with t tests and chi squares
- For help seeking group, bivariate correlations used to explore relationships between characteristics and types of service sought
- Multivariate forward stepwise regression
  - Entrance criterion: $p<.05$
  - Removal criterion: $p<.10$
- Partner violence, biopsychosocial, and demographic factors regressed on help seeking indices and aggregated help seeking index
Results for Help Seeking

For the entire sample, 85% reported some type of service help seeking

- Legal (66%)
- Domestic violence (38%)
- Economic (32%)
- Counseling services (31%)
## Group Differences for Partner Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T or X²</th>
<th>M or %</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M or %</th>
<th>SD</th>
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*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001
### Group Differences for Biopsychosocial Factors

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Help Seekers (N=382)</th>
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*aApproaches statistical significance at p≤.06  
*p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001
## Group Differences for Demographics

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<td>Euro American: 53% women of color: 47%</td>
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## Correlations-Help Seeking (N=382)

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<th>Health</th>
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### Correlations - Biopsychosocial Factors (N=382)

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## Correlations - Demographics (N=382)

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Domestic Violence Help Seeking Correlations

- Domestic violence service help seeking significantly and positively related to
  - Other categories of help seeking except economic
  - All biopsychosocial factors except alcohol and drug use
  - Age, but no other demographic variables
Health Help Seeking Correlations

- Health help seeking
  - Negatively related to employment
  - Positively related to
    - Substance use help seeking
    - DV help seeking
    - Legal service help seeking
    - Past year and incident partner violence
    - Being a woman of color
Economic Help Seeking Correlations

- Economic help seeking
  - Not related to
    - Partner violence exposure
    - Biopsychosocial factors
    - Demographic factors
  - Inversely related to
    - Employment
    - Income
    - Education
  - More common among women of color
Substance Abuse Help Seeking
Correlations

- Substance abuse help seeking
  - Inversely related to
    - Employment
    - Income
    - Education
  - Positively related to
    - Alcohol abuse
    - Illegal drug use
    - Negative social relationships
    - Impaired physical functioning
    - Incident psychological abuse
Regression Analyses

- Forward stepwise regression analyses revealed help seeking efforts related to sets of needs and resources addressed by the respective services.
- Threat appraisal accounted positively for variance in:
  - Domestic violence help seeking efforts
  - Legal help seeking efforts
  - Aggregated help seeking efforts
Regression Analyses cont.

- Perpetrator involvement
  - Accounted for domestic violence and counseling help seeking
  - Inversely related to legal help seeking

- Physical health inversely accounted for help seeking efforts in these areas:
  - Domestic violence
  - Legal
  - Health care
  - Aggregated
Regression Analyses cont.

- Injury accounted for health care service help seeking
- Alcohol abuse accounted for substance abuse help seeking
- Employment and income inversely accounted for economic help seeking
- Education positively accounted for counseling help seeking
- Employment inversely accounted for substance abuse help seeking
- Incident psychological abuse accounted for
  - Legal help seeking
  - Substance abuse help seeking
  - Aggregated help seeking
Considerations—Help Seeking Outside of Formal and Domestic Violence Agencies

- Woman who did not seek formal services appeared less acutely in need
  - Less extensive abuse in preceding year
  - Lower threat appraisal
  - Less depression
  - Less physical impairment
  - Fewer negative social relations

- Majority of women seeking services other than specialized domestic violence
  - Highlights importance of human service providers spectrum screening for needs of battered women
    - Not yet common practice (Levine & Greene, 2000)
Considerations - Abuse

- Type of partner violence affects help seeking
  - Sexual abuse associated with religious help seeking
  - Psychological abuse associated with legal help seeking
    - Legal help seeking
    - Substance help seeking
    - Aggregated help seeking

- Sexual and psychological abuse of battered women should be assessed
Considerations—Types of Services

- Generally needs drive help seeking efforts
  - Human service providers likely to serve battered women with presenting problems consistent with their mission
  - Thus, providers may miss the problem of partner violence
  - In addition to presenting problems, providers should ask about partner violence
Considerations - Vulnerable Groups

The most vulnerable groups of women seek certain types of services

- Women with fewer socioeconomic resources seek public assistance
- Women with lower employment levels seek substance use services
- Women of color seek medical treatment
- Older women seek counseling and religious services
- Women involved with perpetrator seek help from domestic violence and counseling services
Considerations-Assessment and Interventions

- Battered women’s needs correspond with help seeking, but may not be presented in relation to their abuse
  - Intervention opportunities missed when social workers in all settings do not screen for abuse
- Battered women usually have biopsychosocial difficulties resulting from abuse (Riger et al., 2002)
  - Social workers in domestic violence agencies should connect battered women to a range of services for co-occurring needs
Considerations-Connecting Successfully

- Social workers in different settings should have skills to refer and provide resources
- Targeted programming and outreach may be needed (Lee, Thompson, & Mechanic, 2002)
- Fear and threat appraisal have strong effect on help seeking efforts
- Those seeking legal services more likely to be white and have higher income and education levels
  - Reinforces importance of dv agencies providing legal services or collaborating with legal services
- Noticeable difficulties in everyday functioning spur help seeking
  - Requires assessment as physical problems may limit ability to implement safety plan
Limitations

- Women choosing to not participate
  - Similar in most regards, except
    - Less likely to have protection orders
    - More likely to live with abuser
  - Possible relevant differences explaining non-participation
    - Greater informal supports
    - More threatened or vulnerable
- Diverse sample, but with small sample sizes for particular ethnicities/races
- Results may not generalize to women in situations less amenable to calling police (e.g. immigrants, women in rural areas)
Future Research

- Need to examine whether women from different cultures and communities define help seeking differently than presented here.

- Women’s needs and resources alone cannot explain help seeking.
  - Need to consider:
    - Factors beyond woman’s control (e.g. availability of resources)
    - Environmental and social context (Mitchell & Hodson, 1986)
Recommendations

- Social workers across practice settings should assess for violence (Dienemann, et al., 2000)
  - May need to work around barriers presented by purpose and structure of agency

- Create links between service providers at community level

- At macro level, address co-occurrence of domestic violence and other problems
  - Advocate for increased funding
  - Promote collaboration across state and federal agencies
References


References cont.


References cont.

References cont.


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