

## **Helping the Victim Get Help: Toward a Strategy to Reduce Intimate Violence**

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### *Abstract*

Attempts to prevent, interrupt, or even adjudicate intimate violence against women raises a set of problems different from those officials typically face when addressing non-intimate violence. Because the victim has a private relationship with the offender, successful intervention usually depends on the victim's willingness to seek help. This presentation presents research that examines the conditions that might lead intimate partner violence victims to reach out.

I present findings from the project, "The Differential Risk of Retaliation by Relational Distance: A More General Model of Violent Victimization," which is authored by Laura Dugan and Robert Apel. The study introduces a theory of help-seeking behavior, and then use data from the National Crime Victimization (NCVS) to see if actual behavior is consistent with the expectations of the theory. We test the following two hypotheses: 1) the probability of retaliation (violence) increases as relational distance decreases; and 2) if attack costs are high enough, the victim of spousal violence will end the relationship.

We find that the data only support the first hypothesis. Risk factors of violence are higher for spousal violence compared to stranger violence. For example, those living in households that move frequently, are separated, or as a lone adult with at least one child are more likely to be violently victimized by a spouse or ex-spouse than a stranger. Furthermore, protective factors fail to help battered wives. For example, while owning a home is normally a protective factor for stranger violence, it is neither protective nor harmful to the potential victim of spousal violence. The findings do suggest that marriage is a protective factor for spousal and stranger violence. However, further investigation suggests that marriages with violence are more likely to fall apart; and are therefore not represented in the data. In fact, spousal violence is the biggest predictor of marital separation or divorce.

The second hypothesis is not supported. When we only examine those victims of spousal violence who were married during the previous iteration of the survey, we find that the severity of injury fails to predict marital separation or divorce. The only predictor of separation is having children under 12. Also, when others are present during the incident, the probability of separation is reduced substantially.

We conclude that policy-makers should carefully consider the choice models of women at risk of partner violence. While rational choice plays a role in their decisions, it is likely that something else is going on that is keeping women in violent relationships, despite their severity. Future work will consider the possibility that those who are accustomed to a culture of violence are less likely to recognize alternatives to violent victimization. If true, policy-makers and practitioners may need to develop creative methods to get the attention of victims of violence and encourage them to seek help.

# Helping the Victim Get Help: Toward a Strategy to Reduce Intimate Violence

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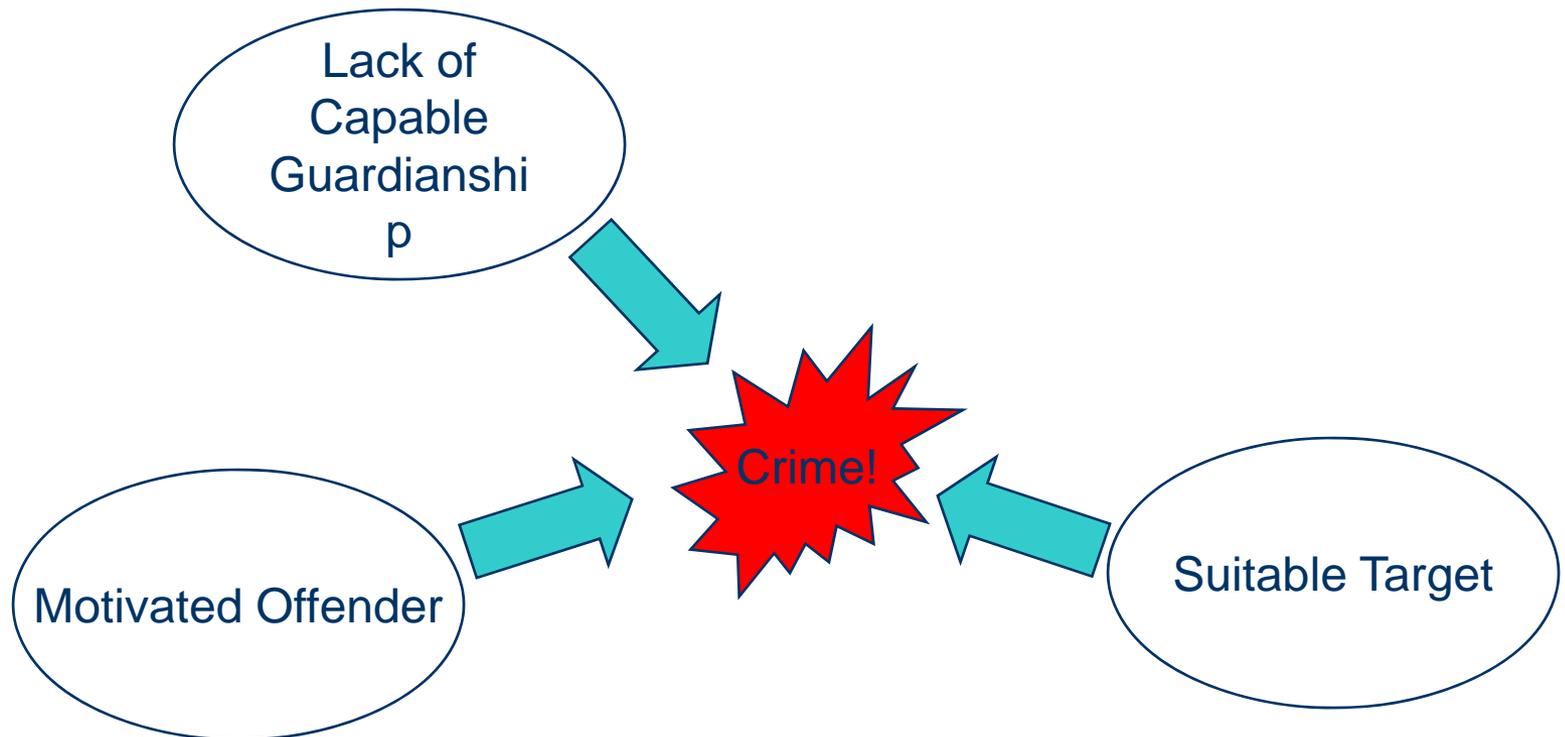
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based on research with Robert  
Apel of The University at Albany

# Using Theory to Inform Policy

## Routine Activity Theory

(Cohen & Felson 1979)



# Implicit in the Routine Activity Model

1. The offender's targeting strategy is opportunistic.
2. The target is responsible for reducing his/her own exposure to possible violence.

# Problem 1: Not All Predatory Violence is Opportunistic



## Opportunistic

Stranger Victimization

Public Space

Low Likelihood of  
Retaliation

## Deliberate

Known Victimization

Private or Personal  
Space

Higher Likelihood of  
Retaliation

# Problem 2: Policy Efficacy Depends on the Targets' Help-Seeking Behavior

## Rational Choice Theory from a Target's Perspective

### **Costs**

- P(Retaliatio) (P(R))
- Attack Costs (AC)
- Resource Costs (RC)

$$P(R) \times AC + RC$$

### **Benefits**

- Reduction in Attack Costs (ER)

$$AC(1-ER)$$

Where  $ER \in [0,1]$ , 0 is no exp red & 1 is total exp red

# Decision Rule

If

$$\frac{RC}{AC} < (1 - ER) - P(R)$$

Then Alter Routine  
Activities

# Costs and Benefits for Females Threatened by Strangers vs. Intimates

## Stranger

- Low Resource Costs
- Low P(Retaliatioin)
- Low Level of Exposure Reduction is Sufficient

$$\frac{RC}{AC} < 1 - ER - P(R)$$

- Decision: alter activity

## Intimate/Family

- High Resource Cost
- High P(Retaliatioin)
- High Level of Exposure Reduction is Necessary

$$\frac{RC}{AC} < 1 - ER - P(R)$$

- Decision: depends on attack costs

# Hypotheses

1.  $P(\text{Retaliation})$  increases as relational distance decreases.
2. Given high attack costs, an intimate will end a relationship

# Data

## National Crime Victimization Survey

- All Females Ages 12 or Older
- Interviewed Between January 1992 & June 2000
- Redesign Survey

**Hypothesis 1: The P(Retaliatio**n**) increases as relational distance decreases.**

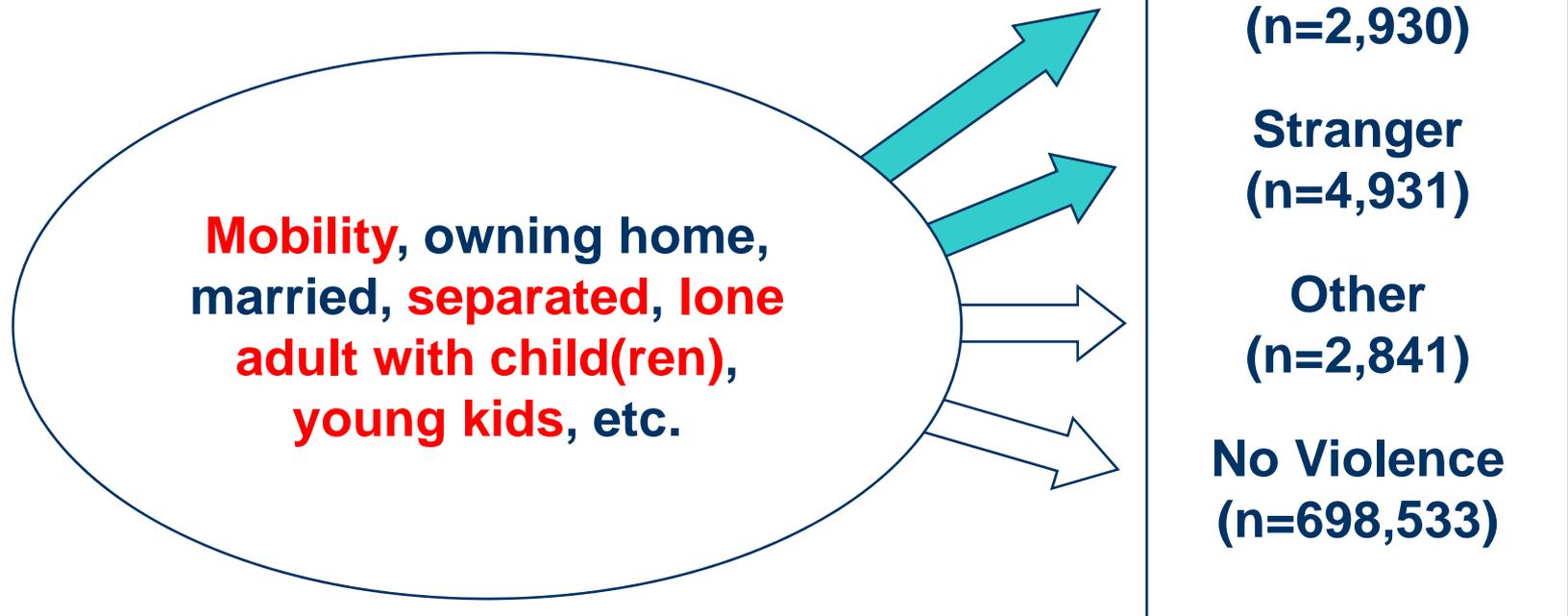
i.e.

Typical “protective” factors for stranger violence will not protect females from intimate/family violence as effectively

Typical “risk” factors for stranger violence will produce a higher risk of intimate/family violence

# 1) Modeling Violence (Retaliation)

All Females (n=709,235)



# Results: Relative Risk Compared to No Violence

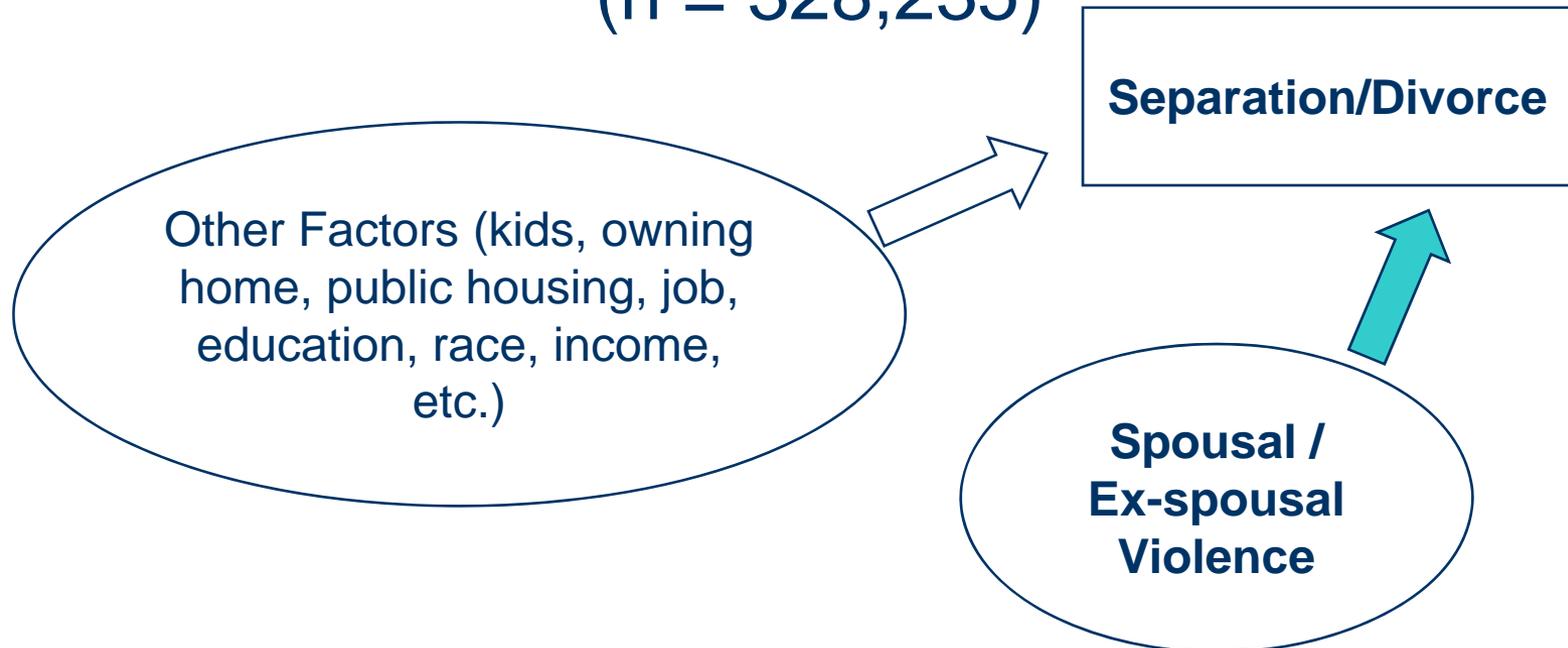


## **Hypothesis 2: Given high attack costs, an intimate will end a relationship**

Since the “deliberate” offender generally has access to the target’s home, the target will disrupt the home, in order to avoid victimization... if the attack costs are high enough.

## 2a) Modeling Separation

All females married last time period who are either married or separated this time period  
(n = 328,235)



## 2b) Modeling Separation | Violence

All female victims of current- or ex- spousal violence who were married last period and are either still married or divorced or separated (n = 442)



## 2a Results (largest effects)

Variable	Odds Ratio
(Ex) Spousal Offender	56.363
Low Income (und \$15,000)	2.487
Job	1.828
Over 60 years old	0.255
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.515

## 2b Results (all significant effects)

Variable	Odds Ratio
Kids Under 12	2.050
Others Present	0.477

**Intensity of attack does not appear to predict who leaves a marriage.**

# Conclusion

- Policy-makers should consider the choice models of those at risk
- It is reasonable to use rational choice theory to elaborate on routine activities, but that does not tell the whole story
- Turn to feminist and other theories to explore additional components of the choice process (e.g., normalization of violence)