Psychological Abuse In Intimate Relationships: A New Zealand Perspective

Randye J. Semple
Columbia University, New York

Psychological abuse in intimate relationships occurs across all communities, throughout all social and economic classes, and in all cultures. There are indications that in New Zealand, psychological abuse committed by men against their female partners is more prevalent than physical or sexual abuse and may result in greater negative effects. This paper reviews how psychological abuse is characterised when it is attendant to and independent of physical or sexual abuse. Some of the characteristics and determinants of men who abuse their partners are described. Psychometric assessments of psychological abuse are reviewed and relevant portions of the Domestic Violence Act (1995) are discussed. Prevention programs and psycho-social perspectives on treatment for both perpetrators and victims are critically examined. The author offers recommendations for future research.

Domestic violence refers to physical, sexual or psychological abuse within close relationships. When psychological abuse occurs in intimate relationships, it is inevitably a component of domestic violence. However, psychological abuse can and does occur without attendant physical or sexual violence. On the other hand, because physical or sexual violence against another person contains elements of fear, power and control, psychological abuse is inherent in these forms of domestic violence. Although the focus of this paper is on psychological abuse in intimate adult relationships, much of the research literature necessarily overlaps with physical and sexual abuse specifically, and with some broader issues of domestic violence in general.

Although the true prevalence of domestic violence in New Zealand is not known, the estimated costs are enormous. A report commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare conservatively estimated the annual cost of family violence in New Zealand at more than NZ $1.2 billion (Snively, 1995). Adding an estimate of the value of women's lost work productivity, Snively reported that the actual cost could exceed NZ $5.3 billion annually. Given the estimated high prevalence of psychological abuse in New Zealand (Leibrich, Paulin, & Ransom, 1995), it is reasonable to assume that a significant fraction of this NZ $5.3 billion cost might be directly attributable to psychological abuse.

Psychological abuse occurs across all communities, throughout all social and economic classes, and in all cultures (Hague & Malos, 1993). Traditionally, the overriding attitude toward domestic violence was to consider it a private matter between husband and wife. Historically, there has been a strong tendency to excuse or minimise the violence, and blame the woman (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 2000). As recently as 1994, 65% of New Zealand men felt that hitting their female partner "in some circumstances" was justified (Leibrich, Paulin, & Ransom, 1995). Alcohol is often seen as a common and easy explanation that obviates the need to ask further questions (Hague & Malos, 1993). However, most researchers have concluded that while alcohol is an important factor in domestic violence, it is neither a necessary nor sufficient explanation (Ratcliffe, 1997).

Amongst researchers in New Zealand, Europe and North America, there is now widespread acceptance that domestic violence grows out of a patriarchal ethos of male dominance and control (Adams, 1988; Chang, 1996; Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson, 1997; Hague & Malos, 1993). Although there is no cross-cultural research that has focused on psychological abuse, there is also little evidence to suggest radical differences between psychological abuse in New Zealand and that of other western countries that share this patriarchal ethos. Therefore, I assume some generalizability in research findings across these countries. Since patriarchal dominance is a deeply rooted value in most countries, we are led to the conclusion that pervasive

attitude changes may be necessary to effect a significant reduction or elimination of domestic violence. A wide range of community education programmes and treatments for perpetrators and victims has been attempted with mixed results. I will discuss a representative sampling of these programmes.

Scope and Significance of the Study

At some point in their lives, most men and women have been both perpetrators and victims of psychological abuse (Hart, Brassard, & Karlson, 1996). Yet, perhaps because of the profeminist theories that dominate current research, less interest is directed toward women's abuse of men. Although one British study found no sex differences in the degree to which partners are psychologically abusive (Russell & Hulson, 1992), there are fewer complaints of abuse by men, and certainly less physical injury to men as a result of women's abuse (Jacobson, et al., 1994). Russell and Hulson also concluded that female participants in their study were abusive primarily in response to abuse from their partners. Hague and Malos (1993) noted that there are no male refuge houses and no great demand for any to be funded. Between 95% and 97% of reported acts of domestic violence in New Zealand are of men committing violence against women or children (Balzer, 1995). Therefore, the focus of this paper is on chronic psychological abuse perpetrated by men toward their women partners. The relationships I discuss here are intimate rather than platonic, although the partners are not necessarily in "*live-in*" arrangements or in formalised marriages. Female partners can be de facto partners, wives or girlfriends.

Although there are similarities to the abuse that occurs in adult relationships, I will not discuss psychological abuse by adults toward children. Likewise, the effects of abuse on children, either as recipients or as witnesses is beyond the scope of this paper. While recognising that abuse occurs in gay and lesbian relationships, there is less empirical research in this area. Although many of the problems are of similar nature and proportion to psychological abuse in heterosexual relationships, there are indications of additional issues in homosexual relationships (Hague & Malos, 1993). Consequently, the following discussion about heterosexual relationships may have limited applicability to persons in same-sex relationships.

Based on research in New Zealand (Leibrich, Paulin, & Ransom, 1995), Britain (Hague & Malos, 1993), and the United States (Marshall, 1996), there are indications that psychological abuse is more pervasive and more insidious than physical or sexual abuse. Leibrich, Paulin and Ransom (1995) reported that while 35% of New Zealand men have performed an act of physical abuse against their partners, 62% have committed psychological abuse. There are also indications that chronic psychological abuse may have a stronger psychological impact on its victims than physical violence (Ellington & Marshall, 1997; Stets, 1990). These are important reasons to understand psychological abuse as it manifests attendant with, and independent of, physical abuse.

Multicultural Issues

Although there is little published literature that addresses issues of psychological abuse specific to persons of Maori heritage, there are some indications that the prevalence of psychological abuse amongst Maori may be higher than that of Pakeha. For example, Morris (1997) indicated that Maori women reported significantly higher levels of agreement with statements characteristic of psychological abuse than did non-Maori women. Women's refuge statistics for 1997 indicate that Maori and Pacific Island women are over-represented, with approximately half the women assisted being Maori and one-tenth being Pacific Island women.

Information garnered from substance abuse research suggests that treatment strategies for abusers and their victims may include referral to specialist Maori group-counsellors and holding meetings with *whanau* (Robertson et al., 2001). It is also widely believed that a sense of belonging to an *iwi* can contribute to the prevention process (Huriwai, Robertson, Armstrong, Kingi, & Huata, 2001). An evaluation of *Te Roopu o Te Whanau Rangimarie O Taamaki Makaurau* (People for Peace in the Auckland Region) concluded that Western-based non-violence programmes were not adequately meeting the needs of Maori (Gilgen, 1991). Gilgen suggested that Maori must be responsible for the design, development and implementation of Maori-based programmes, for these to be successful. In line with this strategy, the Maori Women's Development Unit of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges was established in March 1998. The unit specifically targets violence in Maori families by providing policy advice, monitoring and assessment of services for women and children, as well as developing new services. We need more research to determine if similar strategies might prove effective in the prevention and treatment of abuse for those with Pacific Island heritages.

Pacific Island peoples living in New Zealand often treat abuse within families as a private 'domestic' matter. Family values are the essence of the Pacific peoples. Living arrangements in New Zealand are typically more private and less open than on the islands, where abusive behaviour is less tolerated. Thus, for example, one focus of the Pacific Island Women's Project (Wellington) is to encourage women to tell someone or to seek outside help when abuse occurs (Pacific Island Women's Project, 1998). Other barriers to reporting abuse include lack of knowledge of helping agencies, complete dependence on one's partner for physical survival needs, lack of language facility, fear of racism, and conflict between safeguarding oneself and protecting the community's public image. Pacific Island and Maori-specific issues are not explored further in the current review. However, given the diverse populations in New Zealand, the development and implementation of culturally appropriate research, assessment, and treatment services should be a high priority.

Defining and Measuring Psychological Abuse

Defining Psychological Abuse

One difficulty in measuring psychological abuse lies in the problem of defining it. There is no consensually accepted definition of psychological abuse. Another difficulty is that abuse victims are often made to feel guilty or ashamed, and are sometimes accused of somehow being responsible for being abused (Douglas, 2000). Guilt or shame makes it difficult for many women to report abuse, which contributes to the problems of underreporting that I will discuss later. Much of the world accepts male dominance as natural and right. For that reason, victims often avoid reporting psychological abuse unless it occurs in conjunction with physical or sexual abuse. Table 1 outlines some significant differences in the relationships of physically and psychologically abusive couples.

Psychological abuse is generally considered an ongoing pattern of behaviour that produces a climate of fear in the recipient (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 2000; McDowell, 1995). Some behaviours need to be contextualised to be considered abusive. For example, in a healthy relationship, a man leaving flowers on the kitchen table for his partner would not be considered abusive. When the woman is under protection orders and the man is legally forbidden to contact her, the same action may be perceived as threatening. Douglas (2000) stated that abusive relationships are characterised by inequality. Ellington and Marshall (1997) noted that overt maliciousness is not a prerequisite of psychological abuse. Harmful behaviour can be cloaked in a loving context.

Hoffman (1984) defined psychological abuse by its outcome, "*Behaviour sufficiently threatening to the woman so that she believes that her capacity to work, to interact in the family or society, or to enjoy good physical or mental health, has or might be threatened*" (p. 37). In one of the first in-depth studies of psychologically abused women, Hoffman found that more than three-quarters of males criticised their partners' "points of strength." Hoffman stated that if the areas perceived as strengths are attacked, the remaining remnant of a woman's self-esteem could be more readily destroyed. Hoffman also found that the duration of abuse correlated with the degree to which women accepted their partner's negative evaluations of themselves as accurate. Murphy and Cascardi (1993) suggested that psychological abuses occur in three major ways: by instilling fear, by increasing dependency, and by damaging self-esteem. This definition may be more relevant to psychological abuse that is attendant to physical or sexual abuse than is Ellington and Marshall's (1997) definition. The use of diverse definitions makes it difficult to interpret findings across studies, and creates inconsistencies in this body of research.

Based on accumulated information gathered from the research literature, I propose that psychological abuse consists of at least nine constituent elements. Some of these elements include overt or covert behaviours (e.g., threats or invalidation), some are related to perceptions or interpretations of behaviours (e.g., subtle insults or criticisms), and some address the consequences of abusive behaviours (e.g., guilt or low self-esteem). Psychologically abusive relationships may incorporate any of these factors singly or in combination:

Emotional abuse[1] includes humiliation, degradation, undermining a partner's self-esteem, denying or invalidating their reality, making perfectionistic demands, and emotional withholding. This covert form of abuse includes setting up one's partner for failure (e.g., by giving a box of chocolates to a woman who is dieting).

Physical isolation involves controlling what one's partner does, who they see or speak to, and restricting where they go.

Jealousy and possessiveness includes accusations or recriminations of infidelity and refusal to allow others to provide emotional support.

Intimidating behaviours create fear in partners by using looks, actions, gestures or violence against property, household pets or another person.

Table 1. Attributes of Physical versus Psychological Abuse (adapted from Chang, 1996)

Physical Abuse	Psychological Abuse
Tends to be episodic and acute	Tends to be ongoing and chronic
Visible physical injury	No physical evidence
Difficult to deny	Easy to deny
Low cultural tolerance	High cultural tolerance
Couples experience repeated reconciliations and separations	Few or no attempts to reconcile once separated
Female is optimistic about future relationships	Female is pessimistic about future relationships
Abuse is evident to others	Abuse is not evident to others
Shift from private to public awareness of conflict occurs earlier in relationship	Shift of awareness occurs later in relationship
Separation occurs while female is still emotionally attached	Female emotional detachment occurs prior to separation
Male feels guilt and remorse	Male feels behaviour is justified
Male makes attempt to change	Male refuses to attempt change

Those who use "**male privilege**" treat partners like servants or inferiors, consistently make unilateral decisions, and insist on maintaining stereotypical gender roles.

Threats of sexual or physical violence, threats against children, threats to commit suicide, and threats to report partners to authorities are forms of psychological abuse.

Abuse may consist of using children to make women feel guilty, threatening to take children away, or using children to carry negative messages between partners.

Verbal abuse includes insults, repeated criticisms, and ridicule using words or tone of voice.

Economic control includes dominating another person by preventing them from getting or keeping a job, and controlling or denying access to money.

In a study of 578 American women in "bad or stressful" heterosexual relationships (Marshall, 1996), cluster analysis identified six distinct patterns of psychological abuse, each of which had characteristic features. Although the manifestations and effects of psychological abuse differed between the six clusters, it is noteworthy that psychological abuse was generally an important determinant of the participants' perceptions of their relationships.

Cluster 1:   Most serious and included physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Relatively short relationships and the women were the youngest in the study. There was no denigration of women or control of finances.

Cluster 2:   Serious but more subtle psychological abuse along with moderate violence and comparatively little sexual aggression. Relatively long-term relationships. Little overt domination, but many acts designed to undermine the women's certainty and confidence.

Cluster 3:   Low levels of reported physical, sexual, or psychological abuse but high levels of covertly dominating-controlling behaviours[2]. Relationships were of relatively short duration and the women were generally younger.

Cluster 4:   Women were similar in age and relationship duration to those in Cluster 1 but experienced the least physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. However, the abuse that existed was overt, (i.e., frequent criticism, control of eating, sleeping, and finances, public denigration, and shifting blame for men's behaviour).

Cluster 5:   Comprising the oldest women in the longest relationships. They experienced high psychological abuse and moderately high levels of physical and sexual abuse. High levels of overt dominance and control were evident in the men's use of imposed rules, punishment, denigration, isolating tactics, and invading the women's privacy.

Cluster 6:   Relationships were of moderate duration. High psychological abuse and moderately high levels of physical and sexual abuse were experienced. Unlike Cluster 5, threats of physical violence were infrequent, and the dominance behaviours were of a different character. The male partners used enforced secrecy, omnipotence and making the women feel powerless. Conflicts were frequent. Withdrawal and revenge were common responses to perceived transgressions.

Tham, Ford and Wilkinson (1995) assessed the prevalence of domestic abuse in a sample of 184 patients presenting acutely for psychiatric services in Britain. Twenty-five percent of the patients felt that their history of domestic violence was related to their mental state at the time of assessment. Marshall (1996) found that, for American women, levels of psychological abuse were related to a variety of health outcomes. These included increased visits to physicians, more serious or chronic illnesses, more attempts with relationship therapy, and higher use of psychotropic medications.

Epidemiology and Problems with Under-reporting

Domestic violence occurs in all communities, by persons from all cultural backgrounds, and across all socio-economic classes (Hague & Malos, 1993). Yet, accurate statistics on the prevalence of psychological abuse do not exist. Estimates of the annual prevalence of psychological abuse in the United States ranges from 11% to 97% (Murphy & Cascardi, 1993). Inconsistent definitions of psychological abuse are likely to explain some of the variability in these data. Leibrich and her colleagues (1995) reported that 62% of New Zealand men have committed at least one act of psychological abuse toward their partner. The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (1996) reported that 89% of New Zealand women who used residential support services in 1995 experienced some form of psychological abuse. This figure is likely to reflect the incidence of psychological abuse that is attendant to physical or sexual abuse.

It also seems that estimates of violence vary when using reports by men and reports by their partners (Russell & Hulson, 1992). Arias and Beach (1987) found that a tendency to give socially desirable responses was related to individuals' reports of their own aggression, but not to their partner's aggressive behaviours. This bias would moderate each partner's report of their own aggressive behaviours, whereas negativity biases are likely to increase reports of partner's abusive behaviours. Socially desirable response biases and attribution biases are likely to contribute to the problem of underreporting. There is evidence that male perpetrators are more likely to deny or minimise abusive behaviour to maintain their own self-esteem (Jacobson et al., 1996). At the same time, their abused partners may doubt if what they experienced was, in fact, abusive – after being convinced that they "deserved" or "provoked" what happened (Murphy & Cascardi, 1993).

A survey of 500 women (Morris, 1997) indicated that New Zealand women experienced higher levels of controlling behaviour than did women in a Canadian survey. Nearly all (94%) of the women with recent partners reported that they had experienced some form of psychologically abusive behaviour. Table 2 describes the statements that were presented and the proportion of women who said that their partner behaved in the ways described. As found in other studies (see Chang, 1996; Marshall, 1996), most of these women felt that the cumulative effects of psychological abuse were more damaging than the effects of physical

Table 2. Percentage of Women Reporting Psychologically Abusive Behaviour (Morris, 1997)

Behaviours	Women with Current partners N = 438	Women with Recent partners N = 71
	%	%
He insists on knowing who you are with and where you are.	31	75
He puts you down in a way that makes you feel bad.	28	80
He tries to limit your contact with family and friends.	10	62
He frightens you.	8	60
He prevents you from knowing about the family income, even if you ask.	5	35
He prevents you from being employed outside the home.	3	23
At least one of these	**44**	**94**

Notes: Nine women were included in both samples, since they had both current and recent partners. Psychological abuse is generally thought of as an ongoing pattern rather than an isolated incident. Morris interpreted the endorsement of multiple statements as representing a higher level of abuse than endorsement of a single statement. The frequency or duration of the behaviours does not seem to have been addressed in this study. It is unclear from Morris' report whether the women agreed that the statements described their partners or if they were asked *how often* these behaviours described their partners.

abuse. Methodological problems with Morris' study include biases associated with the use of retrospective self-reports and potential bias in sampling methods.

Measuring utilisation of legal, health or social services to assess levels of psychological abuse drastically underestimates the extent of the problem. One report estimated that for each woman who seeks help from authorities, there are five more who obtain help from private sources (Snively, 1995). Women of lower socio-economic status have fewer financial resources to access private services, and make more use of police, medical, and refuge services. Middle and upper class women can more easily afford private medical care and housing, and therefore are less likely to come to the attention of authorities. Furthermore, health statistics do not distinguish types of abuses or the severity, frequency, or duration of abuse (Hague & Malos, 1993). Dramatic increases in reports of domestic violence over the past decade may reflect a greater awareness of psychological abuse rather than an increased incidence of abuse (Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998). Public education campaigns by the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Courts, the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, and others, may well account for part of this apparent increase in prevalence rates.

Assessing Psychological Abuse

The *Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS; Straus, 1979) is a widely used and widely criticised instrument for measuring domestic violence. After reviewing a number of studies, Jackson (1999) listed four critiques of the CTS. First, the CTS does not take into account the meaning, consequences, intention, or motivation for acts of violence. Second, as used in the CTS, "conflict" assumes that both partners are equally involved in the interaction. Third, the scale does not recognise the contextual pattern of fear, intimidation and threats that precedes acts of violence. Fourth, violence is considered a conflict resolution strategy rather than a strategy for eliminating conflict through domination. Additionally, physical differences in size or strength, and physical

consequences are not assessed (Hague & Malos, 1993). The CTS was not designed primarily to address psychological aggression, and was not developed from a qualitative understanding of the subjective experiences of abuse victims (Murphy & Cascardi, 1993).

Other scales are more focused on assessing psychological abuse. Tolman (1989) developed the *Psychological Maltreatment Scale* that consists of 58 items covering six themes: (a) attacking her personhood, (b) defining her reality, (c) controlling her contacts, (d) demanding subservience, (e) withholding positive reinforcers, and (f) threatening non-physical punishment. Although the *Psychological Maltreatment Scale* is presently the most comprehensive questionnaire measure of psychological abuse, there is low partner agreement on individual items (Murphy & Cascardi, 1993). Other researchers (e.g., Hoffman, 1984; Marshall, 1996) prefer interviews and open format self-report measures.

Determinants of Psychological Abuse

Male abusers are profiled as having strong beliefs in sex role stereotypes, an acceptance of violence as a means of controlling their female partners, and a high degree of possessiveness and jealousy. They may believe that self-esteem and a secure male identity are built around concepts of male dominance and control. They often believe absolutely that their own needs, wants, and interests are more important than their partner's needs are. They may be persuasive, logical, and have a charismatic façade that is presented to the world outside their homes (SAFTINET, 1998). They identify their own behaviour as morally right and justified. Therefore, unlike physical abusers, those who psychologically abuse do not cycle through regular sequences of abuse and remorse (Chang, 1996; Douglas, 2000).

Demographic Risk Factors

A survey of 2,000 New Zealand men found no correlations between abusive behaviours and personal income, educational level, socio-economic status, or employment

status (Leibrich, Paulin, & Ransom, 1995). These findings are consistent with the clear majority of research on abusive behaviours. Abusive attitudes and behaviours can be learned in some sub-cultures such as gangs, or in certain professions such as the police and the military (Hague & Malos, 1993). Hague and Malos noted that it is tempting to think of both perpetrators and victims of abuse as belonging to a special deviant group. However, the high prevalence of abusive behaviour suggests this is not correct.

Biological and Psychosocial Influences

There is strong evidence for a link between abusive behaviour and violence in the family of origin (Russell & Hulson, 1992). We do not know the relative contributions of heritability and environmental influence on abusive behaviours. Still, a cycle of abuse persists across generations. Murphy and Cascardi (1993) have inferred a stable personality trait that reflects a motivation to influence others, which has been labelled "need for power." O'Leary (1993) found correlations between abuse and antisocial behaviours, suspiciousness, and compulsivity. Family role models, media and literature images, and social reinforcement also help develop the attitudes and beliefs that underlie abusive behaviour (Franzoi, 1996). McKenry, Julian and Gavazzi (1995) studied a sample of 102 married American men to evaluate the relative contributions of biological and psychosocial influences in domestic physical abuse. They found that significant predictors included alcohol, family income and relationship quality, and concluded that the best estimates of violence probability are the social variables. Large-scale twin and adoption studies may provide some answers to the question of heritability, but this work has not been undertaken.

In a British study of 53 couples, Russell and Hulson (1992) found that psychological abuse was associated with the male partner's irritability, high rumination, low-self esteem, state anxiety, aggressiveness when drunk, and an attitude permissive of violence between spouses. However, the strongest predictor of abuse was the man's attitude of acceptance toward spousal abuse. Interestingly, the only factor associated with the female partner that predicted psychological abuse was her low self-esteem.

In the American State of Tennessee, Brookoff and his colleagues (1997) found that in 92% of police call-outs for domestic violence, alcohol or drugs had been used on the day of the assault. Dobash and Dobash (1984) found alcohol to be a factor in only 25% of violent relationships in Scotland, while Gorney (1989) found that 60% to 70% of violent American men abuse their partners while drunk. New Zealand men tended to report that they felt alcohol was a trigger for abusive behaviour rather than an under-lying cause (Leibrich, Paulin, & Ransom, 1995). The connection between alcohol and physical violence may relate to impulsivity, cognitive disinhibition, and impaired judgement associated with being under the influence of alcohol (Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson, 1997). On the other hand, psychological abuse tends to be chronic rather than acute, so the potential relationships between alcohol and psychological abuse are less clear. Stress and negative life events are positively related to psychological abuse, while social support is a major insulator against the occurrence of abuse (McKenry, Julian, & Gavazzi, 1995). Stress related factors might also influence interpretations of abuse, and evoke different responses in the victims of abuse (Weaver & Clum, 1995).

Prevention

Changing Societal Attitudes

The power and control wheel shown in Figure 1, developed by the *Domestic Abuse Intervention Project* in Duluth, Minnesota, is a useful model for understanding both physical and psychological abuse in relationships. Psychologically abusive tactics such as isolation, intimidation, invalidating her reality, and manipulation using children or economic privileges, underlies most physical and sexual abuse. In fact, Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns and Shortt (1996) proposed an inverse correlation between physical and psychological abuse. Once dominance is established by physical means, psychological abuse is sufficient to maintain control.

Following in-depth interviews of couples in Britain, Russell and Hulson (1992) concluded that the main reason husbands were abusive was that they believed it was acceptable behaviour. That belief mirrors institutional structures that denigrate women's contributions, and patriarchal legislation that assumes men's "right" of authority and economic control over women (Hague & Malos, 1993). Generally accepted values in New Zealand of personal privacy, of so-called "traditional" family morals, and even our language supports a widespread acceptance of male dominance and entitlement (Adams, Towns, & Gavey, 1995). The phrase, "I'm the man of the house," carries an implicit assumption of male superiority and self-evident authority. Furthermore, the helping professions have historically protected conventional patterns of family authority and supported a cultural ethos of family privacy, thus unwittingly sanctioning abuse rather than censuring it (Gelb, 1995).

Community education may help change attitudes of tolerance to and acceptance of all forms of abuse in intimate relationships. "Zero tolerance" campaigns are designed to convey the message that domestic violence is not acceptable under any circumstances (Swanney, 1998). Legislation aimed at protecting the rights of victims while providing for their security, may, if enforced, enhance the support that women have often found lacking in the mostly male police and judicial systems.

Legislative Action: Domestic Violence Act (1995)

In 1996, the New Zealand government enacted the Domestic Violence Act (DVA; 1995). Unlike previous legislation, in the DVA and policies arising from it, domestic violence is deemed to include sexual abuse, neglect, and psychological abuse in addition to physical violence (Phipps, 1996). The primary objective of this bill was to provide greater protection to victims of domestic violence. The DVA also established closer relationships between community services

and private agencies, and broadened the range of individuals who can seek protection under the Act. Secondary objectives were to define which behaviours are socially unacceptable, and to strengthen the legal sanctions against those behaviours.

Implementation and Enforcement Issues

There are numerous difficulties in accessing the protection of the DVA. According to Barwick, Gray and Macky (2000), barriers to access include: "...*cultural and social pressures, cost, language difficulties, lack of knowledge of the Act and its provisions, fear and lack of confidence in the court system. Informants believed that cultural pressures can inhibit Maori, Pacific peoples and people from other cultures from using the Act. Some people from these groups may experience language difficulties and be resistant to using the New Zealand justice system. Men, lesbians and gay men face social stigma. Cost is a major barrier for women and men who are not eligible for legal aid*" (p. 46).

To address some of these issues, Family Courts throughout New Zealand now have *Counselling Co-ordinators* to help people with domestic problems by providing counselling, agency referrals and information about court procedures. District Courts also employ *Victim Advisors* who facilitate victims' participation in the court process.

Figure 1. Wheel of Power and Control
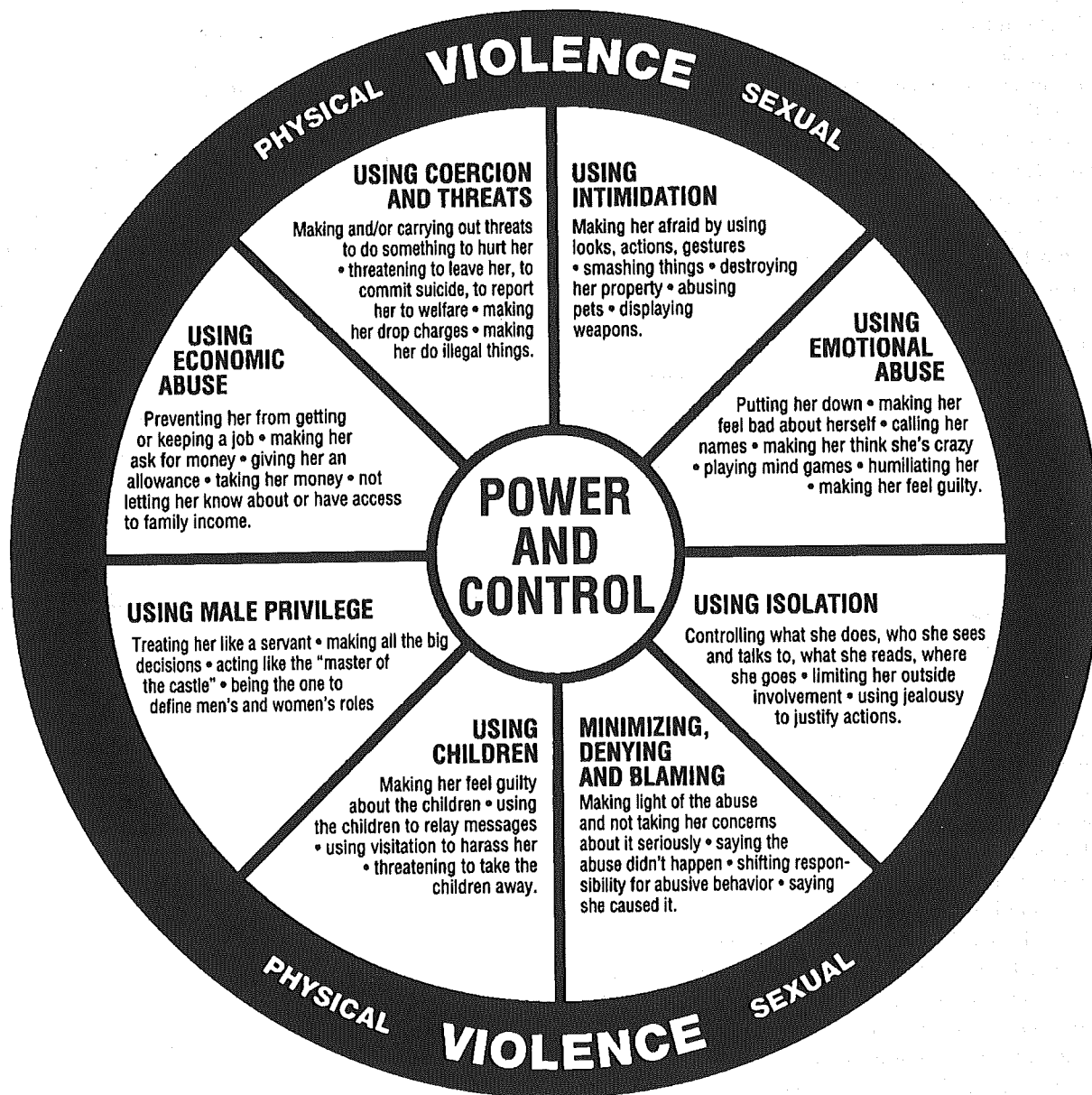
Power and Control Wheel – by permission, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802, 218. 722. 2871.

In response to the DVA, the New Zealand police have implemented explicit policy guidelines for dealing with domestic violence (NZ Police Officer's Guild, Inc., 1996). Applying information acquired from the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (HAIPP), which I will discuss later, the New Zealand police policy has three key objectives: (a) to protect the victim, (b) to maintain consistent policies and practices between agencies, and (c) to hold assailants accountable for their behaviour. Such police initiatives, if implemented consistently, may eventually help change societal attitudes.

A recent Ministry of Justice report notes that, nationally, 82% of applications under the DVA cited grounds of physical abuse, while 78% cited grounds of psychological abuse (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000). Yet, psychological abuse independent of physical or sexual abuse is rarely punished (Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson, 1997). Even given support from the DVA, I suggest that the difficulties of defining psychological abuse, and the near impossibility of proving a direct link from abuse to specific adverse consequences, makes convictions solely for psychological abuse relatively unlikely. Even so, psychological abuse is a good predictor of the continuance of physical violence and of separation or divorce (Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson, 1997; Gortner, Jacobson, Berns, & Gottman, 1997; Jacobson et al., 1996).

Sanctions, Supports, and Treatments

Treatment programmes were developed for perpetrators and victims of physical and sexual abuse. The programmes were not specifically designed to treat psychological abuse. However, some workers in this field now consider psychological abuse to lie along the same continuum as physical and sexual abuse. For example, while violent men may continue or increase their psychological abuse after treatment (Adams, 1988), remediating the psychological abuse may stop the physical and sexual abuse (Marshall, 1996). The following discussion of sanctions, on the one hand, and supports and treatments on the other, is based on the DVA and the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (HAIPP), respectively.

HAIPP is a comprehensive, community-wide intervention programme developed in 1992. It was modelled after the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. These programmes are based on the profeminist ideas that male power and control are pervasive in our culture, and that the community as a whole is responsible for ending the abuse of men toward women (Robertson, 1996). I will discuss the programmes for victims and perpetrators separately.

Victims

Protection and Support

The legal system is a tool that can provide both support and redress for abused women. The DVA was primarily intended to provide greater protection to victims of abuse. New Zealand police have been widely criticised for their failure to protect victims of domestic violence (Robertson, 1996).

Some police and court staff have expressed discouragement about the lack of resources available to ensure DVA programme compliance (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000). My discussions with local agencies suggest that enactment of the DVA has effected a greater degree of awareness of misconceptions about abuse victims by police and court personnel (J. Drumm, personal communication, August 21, 1998; J. Elvidge, personal communication, September 2, 1998). Consistent interagency co-operation and agreed protocols are required to communicate a message of reform in institutional attitudes (Robertson, 1996). Indicators suggest that unfailing co-operation has not been fully realised (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000). Local women's refuges offer crisis support lines in conjunction with the HAIPP office. Police are expected to notify a HAIPP crisis line whenever an arrest is made. This is intended to insure that a woman's advocate is always available to the victim to provide counselling support, information, and access to services. Again, limited resources may restrict the availability of support services.

Treatments

HAIPP provides community education, counselling support and group therapy for abuse victims. Group sessions can provide normalisation of affect, inspirational motivation, reduced isolation, productive feedback and problem-solving strategies (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Chang, 1996). Dominick, Gray and Weenick (1995) completed an evaluation of the HAIPP women's programmes. Although many women considered the groups helpful, practical issues such as timing, lack of transportation, and lack of childcare still need to be addressed. A small number of women found information services unhelpful, because of the way in which information was delivered or the unavailability of the services described. For women whose partners participated in one of the men's programmes, 32% felt that any positive effects were short-lived or accompanied by negative changes, and 17% felt that the results were only negative.

Despite the emphasis in the DVA on the safety of the victims, Dominick and her colleagues (1995) reported that some male abusers resent enforced participation in treatment programs, which leads to further abuse of their female partners or their children. Concerns for the safety of victims have also been expressed in interviews conducted in the course of a DVA process evaluation (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000). Some women reported that their partners learned to be more skilled at inflicting verbal abuse after attending programmes. Knowledge of psychological techniques of dominance and control in relationships can be distorted and misused for the benefit of the abuser, and result in increasingly severe abuse. It seems clear that careful attention must be given to the characteristics of each individual abuser relative to the treatment programme. The mixed results from HAIPP suggest that one programme is not suitable for treatment of all. These data highlight the importance of ongoing process and outcome evaluations, and of maintaining a flexible attitude toward programme changes.

Perpetrators

Punishment

Emery and Laumann-Billings (1998) suggested that men should be treated in a supportive or punitive manner based on the nature of the abuse. They noted that remedial programmes are generally less successful when the abuse is more serious and chronic. Under HAIPP, the arrest and charging of male abusers is mandatory whenever there is evidence that abuse has occurred. The victim is not required to lodge a complaint. The police can impose bail conditions. Male abusers are also remanded to educational programmes (Robertson, 1996). Although these sanctions are stated government policy, it is not clear that they are being consistently implemented. A recent Ministry of Justice report suggested that it is more difficult to get police enforcement for claims of psychological abuse than for threats of physical violence (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000).

Treatments

Although many individual therapies address components of male psychological abuse, there are no programmes specifically designed to treat men who psychologically abuse their partners. The programmes described below were developed primarily to treat perpetrators of physical or sexual abuse. However, psychological abuse can continue long after physical abuse ceases (Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson, 1997; Gortner, Jacobson, Berns, & Gottman, 1997). Thus, it is clear that addressing psychological abuse must be an integral component of any effective treatment programme for domestic violence. Adams (1988) reviewed five treatment models for male abusers. Hague and Malos (1993) outlined the psychological paradigms underlying these five models.

The *insight model*, a traditional approach to understanding psychological abuse is based on psycho-dynamic theories. The abuser's increased awareness of how he has been affected by developmental experience is believed to result in more appropriate responding to present situations. This model assumes that the man is frustrated, depressed, has poor impulse control, and impaired ego functioning. Developing good self-esteem and establishing a stable ego are believed to lead to healthy behaviours. The issue of abuse is considered secondary to treating the underlying psychological problems. Challenging the abuse and taking responsibility for one's own behaviours are not central to these models. This therapeutic model also ignores social and political issues regarding instrumental control and power.

The *ventilation model* operates on the basis that venting anger is the way to get rid of it. Some research supports the notion that abusive men have poor anger-management skills (Holtzworth-Munroe & Smutzler, 1996). The ventilation model does not explain why these same men do not act out aggressive urges against persons outside the home. Furthermore, a substantial body of social research reports that engaging in cathartic expressions of anger does not eradicate aggressive urges but rather escalates them (see Franzoi, 1996). On the contrary, Adams (1998) reported

that escalation of conflict is a common pattern in domestic disputes.

The *interaction model* is based on family systems theory, and the treatment consists of couples counselling. One major difficulty with this model is that it can cloud the issue of responsibility for abuse. Additionally, power differences within the family system are not acknowledged, and mediation may act to maintain an unequal power relationship (Robertson, 1996). In a recent review, Gottman (1998) concluded that treatment gains in couples counselling are modest and rarely maintained over time. Since many couples stay together anyway, couples counselling can sometimes be justified for pragmatic reasons. When there is a history of physical violence, issues of safety for the woman and children should be carefully considered before recommending couples counselling based on the interaction model.

The *cognitive-behavioural* and *psycho-education models* assume that abusive behaviour is learned and can be unlearned. Men are treated in groups, which focus on topics such as stress reduction, relaxation training, assertiveness training, anger management, and communication skills. Cognitive restructuring is an integral component of this program. Unfortunately, there are some indications that programmes of this type may lead to increases in psychological abuse by teaching the abuser interpersonal skills that can be used to further dominate his partner (Hague & Malos, 1993; Robertson, 1996). This model also does not explain why most men abuse only their partners and not other people, or why the abuse is frequently situation specific.

Many agencies, including HAIPP, favour the *profeminist model*. The feminist paradigm takes a multidimensional approach to the problem that is in sharp contrast to the interaction model. Abusive behaviour is understood to be controlling behaviour that is intended to maintain an imbalance of power within the relationship. To varying degrees, an ethos of male power and dominance is embedded in the customs of all New Zealand peoples. Because of this power differential, the first priority of the HAIPP is safety for the women, although as noted earlier, some concerns have already been raised about victim safety procedures. The legal system is utilised as both a restraining and punitive influence. Men are treated with group therapy in which stopping violent and psychologically abusive behaviour is the centre of attention. The common defences of denial and minimisation are debunked, and issues of personal responsibility are emphasised. Some programmes have a women representative attend the group sessions to insure that the women's perspective is made explicit.

Discussion

Unfortunately, many women have learned that the persons they rely on most for comfort and emotional support are the ones that can inflict the deepest wounds. Psychological abuse typically occurs within an ongoing relationship, where one person is in a position of power over the other. A major difficulty in measuring psychological abuse lies in defining it.

The subtle nature of abuse, beliefs in family privacy,

and shame or guilt on the part of the victim, increases the difficulty of estimating its true prevalence by making it more difficult for women to report abuse. Insensitivity on the part of agencies who work with victims, lack of adequate support facilities, inconsistent enforcement and punishment, ineffective treatment programs, and a pervasive attitude of tolerance toward psychological abuse exacerbate the problem of underreporting by reducing the motivation for women to report abuse. Lack of agreement as to what constitutes psychological abuse makes it problematic to compare findings across studies. Despite all these factors, there is little doubt that psychological abuse in New Zealand is widespread and has costly effects.

Since there is no one cause of psychological abuse, there is no single way to prevent it. Widespread attitude changes are necessary to reduce this problem. Enhanced public awareness of the nature of psychological abuse and acceptance that family violence is a community problem are required. Primary prevention programmes include effective legislation, comprehensive community education about the seriousness of psychological abuse, and a wholehearted "zero tolerance" campaign. Police and lawyers should be educated with regard to legal proceedings and the availability of resources so that they can provide timely and accurate information to victims of psychological abuse. Simplifying the terminology used on information brochures and legal forms could ease women's fears and lack of confidence in the legal system. Written information should be prepared and distributed in multiple languages.

Male abusers must accept responsibility for their behaviours. The police and judicial system must impose and enforce appropriate punishment for abusers. Enforcement must be consistent. Otherwise, we send the message that domestic violence is tolerated and will not be punished. Men can be taught interpersonal skills to improve relationships with their partners, but close follow-up is necessary to ensure that this knowledge is not distorted in the service of continuing abuse.

Even when psychological abuse is identified, there is evidence in New Zealand of inappropriate responding from law enforcement, judiciary and support service providers, such as the abuse being minimised or abused women being treated insensitively (Dominick, Gray, & Weenick, 1995). The *Domestic Violence Act* will not achieve its goal of deterring abusers if women do not report the crime or seek assistance. I suggest that women, by and large, will not do so until the protection offered is useful to their particular situation. The risk of involvement with the criminal justice system may well put them in danger of physical retaliation from their former partners.

Other barriers to accessing the protection of the DVA include (a) cost, particularly for those on low incomes, or for women in partnerships where the male controls finances, (b) lack of confidence in the court system, (c) shame and embarrassment, (d) lack of knowledge about the availability of protection orders, and (e) personal and cultural acceptance of domestic violence and male domination.

Psychological abuse is a good predictor of physical violence and of separation or divorce. I believe that the victims of psychological abuse must be encouraged to come forth and participate in available community support programmes. It is equally essential that these women be provided with the resources necessary to insure their safety. Each barrier to achieving these aims is a topic for further research. Qualitative, community-participant research methods might reduce these barriers by seeking solutions directly from individuals that have the most to gain from finding workable solutions.

Although much has been accomplished in the past decade, there is a need for readily available psychotherapies, a more effective protective system, and enhanced support networks for victims. Social skills and employment training may also prove helpful. Since most studies collect information from individuals rather than couples, we need to consider reporting biases when interpreting research results. Behaviour does not occur in isolation. The interpersonal aspects of psychological abuse are not well studied. We may find it productive to conduct more research that accumulates data from both partners. Culturally appropriate design, implementation, and effectiveness studies should be developed for Maori and Pacific Island women. For all victims of abuse, logistical barriers to access treatment and support programmes need to be addressed (e.g., child care and transportation). Difficult though it may seem, the issues of primary prevention, enforcement, punishment, support and treatments must be addressed concurrently.

At present, psychological abuse of women within intimate relationships is widely accepted and tolerated. Psychological abuse, along with other forms of domestic violence, is embedded in a historically patriarchal ethos of male dominance and control. For example, it was not until 1986 that rape within marriage became a legal offence in New Zealand. Historically, domestic violence has been seen as a private matter between partners, and not an issue that needs to be addressed by the entire community. Psychological abuse is a matter of concern for all the people of New Zealand. Despite significant legislative reforms, few meaningful transformations will occur until our culture changes its attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of abuse toward women.

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Notes

1. Some researchers use psychological and emotional abuse interchangeably, while others consider emotional abuse to be one element of psychological abuse. I have chosen to consider emotional abuse as the latter.

2 . Marshall (1996, p. 382) defines psychological abuse in a way that does not imply the use of dominating or controlling behaviours. Others take the opposite view (e.g., Chang, 1996; Murphy & Cascardi, 1993). This difference in opinion illustrates the problems with definitional inconsistencies mentioned earlier.

Address for correspondence:
Randye J. Semple
Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027-6696
U.S.A.

Telephone: (212) 678-3267
E-mail: rjs243@columbia.edu.