

PREDICTING RECIDIVISM AMONG ABUSIVE MEN

Question: What factors are associated with continued violence among men who have abused their intimate partners?

Background: Abuse of women by their male partners is increasingly recognised as a serious social issue. When men are identified as abusive, it is important to know whether they are likely to do it again. Recidivism risk assessments are crucial for decisions in the criminal justice system, such as determining the need for incarceration, restraining orders, and the intensity of community supervision. Women's expectations of the likelihood of further abuse guides their decision to stay, leave, or hide. Although some research has been conducted, much remains to be known about the factors associated with recidivism among abusive men.

Method: The study examined factors associated with recidivism among 320 male batterers who were referred to one of five specialised treatment programs across Canada. The characteristics of the men were assessed through detailed self-report questionnaires prior to treatment and after treatment (3 – 6 months later). Women's reports of the men's

behavioural history were also collected for about half of the men. Recidivism information was collected through national R.C.M.P. records.

Results: During the 5 year follow-up period, 17.2% were arrested for a new violent offence and 25.6% were arrested for any new offence. The comparison of the recidivists and non-recidivists suggested that the persistent batterer tends to be young, likely to be unmarried, with a history of criminal behaviour. His lifestyle is unstable, characterised by frequent moves, poor accommodation, unstable employment, substance abuse, and little commitment to prosocial values. He adopts a sexist, adversarial approach to intimate relations, and he has recently begun a relationship with a woman who is willing to tolerate such behaviour. He attends treatment reluctantly, where he has a negative relationship with staff, or simply drops out.

There was no evidence that potential recidivists were deterred by expectations of negative consequences, either social (e.g., friends would disapprove) or official (e.g., arrested, lose job).

Policy implications:

1. Not all abusive men are equally likely to reoffend. Consequently, the recidivism risk of male batterers should be considered when determining the nature and intensity of criminal justice sanctions and therapeutic intervention.
 2. Many of the characteristics that predict recidivism among a general offender population also predict violent recidivism among male batterers. Consequently, the same principles that guide effective
- intervention with general offenders are also relevant when designing interventions for abusive men.
3. Increasing the severity or likelihood of criminal justice sanctions would not be expected to reduce the recidivism rates of abusive men.

Source: Hanson, R.K., & Wallace-Capretta, S. (2000). *Predicting Recidivism Among Male Batterers*. User Report 2000-06. Ottawa: Department of the Solicitor General of Canada.

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