

Understanding Male Partner Violence Against Cohabiting and Married Women: An Empirical Investigation With a Synthesized Model

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Based on research consistently showing that cohabitators are more likely to be violent than married couples, it is argued that the practice of equating these two marital status groups may obfuscate our understanding of the etiology of male partner violence against women. A synthesized model for understanding marital status differences is presented and tested on a large-scale representative sample of Canadian women. The results show little support for most existing explanations and suggest that unique processes are operating in the production of violence for different marital status groups. In addition to disaggregation by marital status, other directions for future research are discussed.

KEY WORDS: partner violence; cohabitation; marriage; women; theories.

INTRODUCTION

Since the “discovery” of male partner violence against women some three decades ago, many researchers have undertaken the task of quantifying the extent, severity, and consequences of “marital” violence. Most define “marital” as including common-law or cohabiting relationships. The most thoughtful exposition for this act comes from DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991) who cite several reasons for their position. First, they argue that the

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two groups should be combined simply to be consistent with other studies that have done so. Second, they assert that there are few differences between the two groups, because both groups adhere to the same patriarchal gender norms. Third, they argue that cohabitators are treated the same as marrieds by the legal system when they have children and/or when they have been living together for a sufficient amount of time. Finally, they report that cohabitators report comparable levels of satisfaction and closeness as well as similar conflicts and problems. DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991, pp. 8-9) conclude, "Our view is that it is difficult to differentiate between cohabitators and legally married women. Thus, our definition includes both groups."

In an exhaustive review of the literature, Brownridge and Halli (2000) demonstrate an inexorable pattern showing greater likelihood of violence by cohabiting compared to married men. Figure 1 summarizes the results of studies that have included a comparison of the prevalence of violence by marital status. Despite methodological differences across these studies, such as sample size, location, time-frame, and measurement, the striking finding in Fig. 1 is that a consistently higher proportion of cohabiting than married persons report violence. Indeed, an inspection of these results shows that the prevalence of violence for cohabitators is typically between one and two times that of marrieds. We argue that the consistent differences in the prevalence of

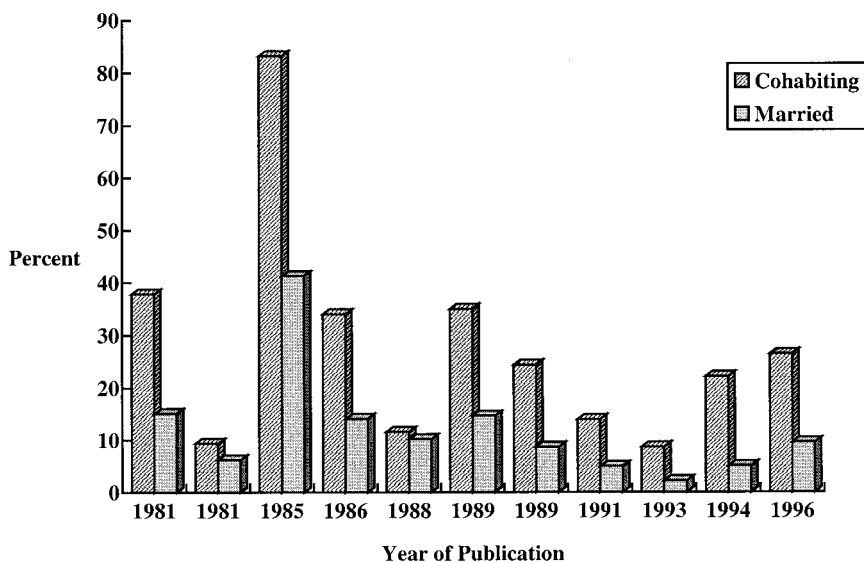


Fig. 1. Prevalence of violence for cohabiting and marital unions reported in American and Canadian studies.

violence between cohabitators and marrieds means that subsuming cohabitators within marrieds is not justified. We view the differences in rates of violence as an indication that something unique may be operating in the production of violence for cohabitators. If this is the case, it follows that combining these two groups in analyses may prevent a complete understanding of the complex problem of male partner violence against women. Moreover, we argue that even among married respondents the rates may not be uniform. That is, researchers should distinguish between marrieds who have never cohabited and those who have a history of cohabitation. It is reasonable to argue that marrieds with a history of cohabitation are likely to be different because of their past experiences with cohabitation.

Despite extensive documentation of differential rates of violence in cohabiting and marital unions, the reasons for this phenomenon are not well-understood. Although there are many theories to explain violence against women generally, there is no theory specifically designed to understand the higher rate of violence in cohabiting unions. To bridge this gap, we have elsewhere applied these theories to the study of the problem of violence in cohabiting unions. These theories are as follows: (1) Feminist theory, which predicts cohabiting men are more likely to adhere to patriarchal ideology which may, in turn, be linked to their greater likelihood to be violent. (2) Resource theory, which predicts cohabiting men are more likely to use the “ultimate resource” of violence to restore gender status consistency because they are more likely to have fewer resources than their partner. (3) Routine activities theory, which suggests the lifestyle of cohabitators takes them to places and leads to engage in activities that increase the risk of partner violence. (4) Social learning theory, suggesting cohabitators are more likely to have been exposed to violence by their father against their mother. (5) Sex-role theory, which suggests that cohabiting women’s greater participation in the labor force may lead to greater risk because they are not conforming to traditional sex-roles. (6) Social isolation, which predicts cohabiting women are more socially isolated thereby removing barriers to violence and support if they decide to leave the relationship. (7) The DAD model, which says that variations on measures of dependency, availability, and deterrence may account for marital status differences in violence. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide details of these theories and their empirical verification, for further elaboration we suggest interested readers refer to Brownridge and Halli (2000).

It should be noted that, although these theories have been able to show relevance for understanding violence against women, none have been able to entirely account for violence against women. This may be because these theories have typically been used by researchers to the exclusion of other explanations.

The purposes of this paper are to present a holistic framework for understanding marital status differences in violence and provide an empirical verification of this framework using a national study conducted in Canada.

TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS

The variables linked to different theories may act simultaneously in producing violence against women. For example, indicators of patriarchy, such as the man dominating his partner through controlling her access to the family income, are influenced by the woman's access to resources in the family. Similarly, one can also draw a connection between Routine Activities and Social Learning theories. For example, a lifestyle of heavy drinking may be linked to having observed parental violence. In essence, then, all of the theories are interrelated. To examine the influence of any one of them requires simultaneous control for indicators of the others.

Indicators representing the theories outlined above can be distinguished, at least analytically, as either selection or relationship factors. For example, indicators of Social Learning Theory would consist of characteristics of the respondent and/or her partner that are brought with the individual to the union. On the other hand, indicators of the Social Isolation explanation would be defined as characteristics of the respondent and/or her partner that tend to occur within the context of their relationship together. For the purpose of understanding violence against women, then, it seems sensible to bring all of the theories together into one framework so that we can look at the problem of violence against women in a holistic manner.

Marriage, Cohabitation, and the Social Construction of Violence

The synthesis employed here begins with Cunningham and Antill's observation that our knowledge of cohabitation lacks an understanding of the processes that take place in these unions (Cunningham & Antill, 1995). Berger and Kellner (1994), who originally published their thesis in 1964, argue that marriage is a nomos-building instrumentality; that through marriage individuals unwittingly construct a new reality that gives them greater stability in their lives. According to these theorists, marriage constitutes a nomic rupture for both individuals because with marriage a new nomic process commences. In marriage, two strangers essentially unite and redefine themselves. They do so, according to Berger and Kellner (1994), primarily through conversation. This conversation ultimately results in a common objectivated reality that is stable. A detailed discussion of Berger and Kellner's

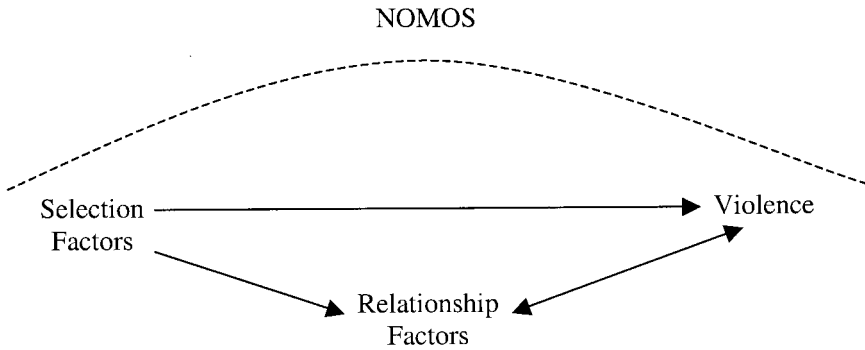


Fig. 2. Model of reality construction process leading to violence for cohabitators.

concepts is beyond the scope of this paper. Hence, we suggest that interested readers refer to Berger and Kellner (1994). For an excellent discussion of Berger and Kellner’s concepts readers may also wish to refer to Frank III (1979).

Similar to marriage, it would seem reasonable to argue that cohabitation also constitutes a nomic rupture. However, given a consistently higher rate of violence among cohabitators, it is possible to argue that there are differences between cohabitators and marrieds that might render the content of the reality construction process, and hence the outcome, quite different.

Figure 2 provides a pictorial depiction of the process of reality construction leading to violence for cohabitators. Based on past research it appears possible that factors such as youth, low socioeconomic status, status inconsistency, histories of having witnessed or experienced violence, previous marriage, region of residence, greater independence, and less willingness to invest in a relationship may select such individuals into a less committed type of union, that of cohabitation. Characteristics that select individuals into cohabitation may be directly related to violence. These selection factors may also render cohabitators less likely than marrieds to project actions in conjunction with their partner and less amenable to have their identity take on a new character, thus making them less likely to “settle down” to the same extent as marrieds. This, in turn, may affect the relationship. For instance, the lower security in such unions may lead to higher levels of compensatory domineering behavior, more sexually proprietary behavior, greater social isolation, more alcohol consumption, and a higher probability of depression. Some combination of these selection and relationship characteristics may then result in more disagreements, conflict and violence. In effect, then, cohabitators may unwittingly establish a less stable nomos than do marrieds.

Within this frame of thought, it is also reasonable to suggest that a second nomic rupture for partners who have lived together, marriage, may be insufficient in reconstructing a stable world for the couple. Once the couple has already established a reality in the context of living together unmarried, the more nomos-building changes that accompany marriage may not be enough to overcome the couple's already existing, and less stable, reality. Similarly, it is also possible that there is a carry-over effect from a previous cohabiting relationship(s) to persons other than one's marital partner. We argue that nomos becomes *sui generis* and thus acts on each individual in the couple to shape her or his subjective reality. In the case of a break-up, one's subjective reality carries over to a new relationship. Thus, previous cohabitation experiences with one's marital partner or someone other than one's marital partner may affect the stability of the relationship.

This is, of course, not to say that all marriages or all cohabiting relationships are exactly alike. A number of different types of marriages (Cuber & Harroff, 1965) and cohabiting unions (Davidson & Moore, 1992) have been identified. However, this paper argues that differences in the overall patterns of violence between marital and cohabiting unions support the utility of the synthesized framework.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Data Set

The data employed in this study are from Statistics Canada's *Violence Against Women Survey* (VAWS; Statistics Canada, 1994). A random sample of 12,300 women 18 years of age or older completed in-depth telephone interviews concerning experiences of violence they have encountered since reaching the age of 16. The sample from the VAWS used in this study consists of 8,418 women living married or common-law at the time of the survey. There are 7,396 married respondents and 1,022 cohabiting respondents. The large subsample of cohabitators is very important. As Brownridge and Halli (2000) have shown, most previous studies are based on very small subsamples of less than 50 cohabitators. The representativeness and generalizability of these results are therefore questionable. Moreover, even the past study with the largest subsample of cohabitators (Stets, 1991) has less than half the number of cohabitators in the VAWS. Among married respondents, 6,837 had not lived common-law prior to their marriage leaving 552 respondents who had lived in a common-law union with someone other than their husband prior to their marriage. It is important to add that in all analyses the weighting scheme suggested by Statistics Canada (1994) has been followed.

Measurement

Marital Status

Only women currently married or living common-law are included in the study. Three marital status groups are examined. Women who were cohabiting at the time of the study, married women with prior cohabitation experience (PC married), and married women without prior cohabitation experience (non-PC married). The only other violence researcher to make a distinction between marrieds with and without prior cohabitation experience has noted that measuring premarital cohabitation only with a current partner, as Boba (1996) does, blurs the distinction between PC and non-PC marrieds. Booth and Johnson (1988, p. 255) have indeed suggested that “cohabiting with individuals other than the person they eventually marry may affect marital quality.” Although the measure used here overcomes this problem, because premarital cohabitation with the current marital partner cannot be determined it is still limited.

Selection Variables

Several selection variables are included in the study. Age refers to the respondent's age. Age heterogamy refers to the difference in age between the respondent and her partner. Education consists of respondent's highest level of education in years. Respondent's and partner's employment refer to whether they and their current partner had worked at a business or paid job in the 12 months prior to the survey. Income refers to respondents' best estimate of their annual personal income before deductions. To calculate income consistency, the respondent's income was subtracted from the annual household income. Income consistency is then derived by calculating the ratio of the respondent's income to this estimate of her partner's income. Because of concerns of linearity with such calculations (Anderson, 1997), a squared transformation was used to account for a possible curvilinear relationship. This method was also used for education consistency, calculated as the respondent's education divided by her partner's education. Partner's social learning refers to whether or not the male's father was violent toward his wife whereas respondent's social learning refers to whether or not her father was violent toward her mother. To measure dating violence a question is employed that asks respondents who had reported violence with their current partner whether this had also happened before living married/common-law. Previous partner violence refers to whether or not a respondent was ever threatened and/or physically or sexually attacked

by a previous husband/common-law partner. Previous marriage refers to whether or not a respondent had been married prior to her current relationship. Region is measured by identifying the respondent's region of residence. Respondents from Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick are combined to represent the Atlantic region. Respondents from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta represent the prairies. The provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec represent unique regions unto themselves.

Relationship Variables

Duration of relationship refers to how long the couple has been married or living together. Jealousy is derived from a question that asks respondents if their partners are jealous and do not want them talking to other men. A man keeping tabs on his partner is measured with a question that asks the respondent if her partner insists on knowing who she is with and where she is at all times. There are two variables to measure alcohol consumption. The first refers to frequency of drinking and asks how often a respondent's partner consumed alcohol in the month prior to the interview. The second question taps the frequency of heavy drinking by asking respondents how many times in the month prior to the interview that her partner had five or more drinks on one occasion. Social isolation is measured with a variable that asks respondents if their partner tries to limit their contact with family or friends. To measure dominance, a question is employed that asks respondents whether their partner prevents them from knowing about or having access to the family income, even if she asks. The presence of children is computed from a variable that includes a categorization of respondents in terms of currently living with their spouse only or living with their spouse and a single child less than age 25. Finally, depression is measured with a question that asks respondents if they had used drugs or medication to help them get out of depression in the month prior to the interview.

Violence

This study defines male partner violence against women as acts of physical assault (being pushed, grabbed, or shoved; being slapped; being choked; having something thrown that could hurt; being hit with something that could hurt; being threatened with or having a knife or gun used; being kicked, bit or hit with a fist; being beaten up), verbal abuse (being called names to put the respondent down or make her feel bad), psychological aggression (being

threatened to hit her with his fist or anything else that could hurt), and sexual coercion (being forced into any sexual activity by being threatened, held down, or hurt in some way) perpetrated by a woman's current marital or common-law partner at some time during their relationship. The rate resulting from this definition is referred to as the lifetime prevalence of violence (Brownridge & Halli, 1999).

Methods of Data Analysis

Descriptive comparisons are conducted by calculating means for variables measured at the interval level and frequencies for categorical variables. Multivariate analyses are conducted using logistic regression. Logistic regression is the most appropriate technique for predicting a dichotomous dependent variable from a set of independent variables. This method also has a very simple interpretation. For a given variable it simply provides a ratio of the odds of an event occurring, in this case violence. If the value of the odds is greater than one, the variable is positively related to violence. If it is less than one, the variable is negatively related to violence.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table I contains a comparison of the three marital status groups for each variable in the study. Not surprisingly, married women without a history of cohabitation tend to be older and to have longer term relationships than women in the other two groups. As one would also expect, cohabitators are most likely to be found in Quebec and currently cohabiting women are far less likely to have children than married women. Interestingly, almost all of the remaining comparisons show similarity between cohabiting women and married women with a history of cohabitation. For example, in contrast to married women who have not cohabited with anyone other than their husband, women in the other two marital status groups are more likely to be employed. As well, cohabiting and PC married women are far more likely to have been exposed to violence in their family of origin, to have been married to someone other than their husband, to have had a previous husband or common-law partner that was violent, and to have a current partner that is jealous. These results suggest that women who cohabit and women who have lived with someone other than their husband share greater similarity in characteristics than women without a history of cohabitation. However,

Table I. Means/Frequencies for Selection and Relationship Variables by Marital Status

	Cohabitor	PC married	Non-PC married
<i>Selection variables</i>			
Age	32.1	35.9	44.4
<i>Age difference</i>			
Partner 6+ older	22.7	21.7	17.8
Partner 1–5 older	40.6	40.0	53.0
Partner 1–5 younger	10.8	9.2	12.3
Partner 6+ younger	19.6	24.8	15.2
Same age	6.4	4.2	1.7
Woman's education	11.9	11.7	11.6
<i>Woman's employment</i>			
Worked past year	80.3	75.7	64.7
Did not work	19.7	24.3	35.3
<i>Partner's employment</i>			
Did not work	11.1	8.9	20.6
Worked past year	88.9	90.6	79.4
Woman's income	20,589.0	20,967.3	18,384.3
Income consistency	0.5	0.4	0.4
Education consistency	0.5	0.5	0.5
<i>Partner's father violent</i>			
Yes/think so	11.8	11.8	9.0
No/do not think so	88.2	88.2	91.0
<i>Woman's father violent</i>			
Yes/think so	24.9	28.6	14.6
No/do not think so	75.1	71.4	85.4
<i>Dating violence</i>			
Yes	5.5	7.8	2.5
No	94.5	92.2	97.5
<i>Previous marriage</i>			
Yes	35.0	26.8	9.3
No	65.0	73.2	90.7
<i>Previous partner violence</i>			
Yes, violent	31.2	51.8	5.1
No, not violent	68.8	48.2	94.9
<i>Region</i>			
Atlantic	19.6	18.5	24.8
Quebec	29.7	12.3	13.4
Prairies	16.2	19.4	20.3
British Columbia	20.2	25.7	28.6
Ontario	14.3	24.1	12.9
<i>Relationship variables</i>			
Duration	4.4	8.5	20.7
<i>Jealousy</i>			
Yes	11.1	9.8	5.4
No	88.9	90.2	94.6
<i>Know whereabouts</i>			
Yes	14.2	15.5	9.5
No	85.8	84.5	90.5
Heavy drinking	1.4	1.3	0.7
Frequency of drinking	5.1	5.6	5.0
<i>Limit contact</i>			
Yes	5.9	7.3	3.7
No	94.1	92.7	96.3

Table I. (Continued)

	Cohabitor	PC married	Non-PC married
Prevent income access			
Yes	3.2	3.3	2.0
No	96.8	96.7	98.0
Children <25			
Yes	36.7	66.8	59.6
No	63.3	33.2	40.4
Depression			
Yes	3.5	5.3	2.7
No	96.5	94.7	97.3

such descriptive comparisons do not tell us about the relationship of these variables to violence.

Multivariate Analysis

Table II provides the results of the logistic regressions on violence for selection and relationship variables. The first model contains the results for the marital status variable without any controls. The results in Table II show that cohabiting women have 11% higher odds of violence than the reference category of non-PC married women. Based on past research, one would have expected this difference to be larger. One explanation for this result is the lack of control for duration combined with the use of a lifetime time frame. As Brownridge and Halli (1999) have discussed, in the absence of controls for duration of relationship, one would expect a smaller difference in rates between cohabitators and marrieds because marrieds, whose unions tend to last longer than cohabitators’ (Burch & Madan, 1986; Halli & Zimmer, 1991),

Table II. Results of Logistic Regressions on Lifetime Prevalence of Violence for Selection and Relationship Variables

Covariates	Odds ratio			
	Marital status (n = 8365)	Selection (n = 7282)	Relationship (n = 7984)	Full model (n = 7023)
Marital status				
PC married	1.446 [‡]	1.105	1.444 [†]	1.149
Cohabitor	1.114	1.007	1.068	1.020
Non-PC married	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Constant	-1.676 [‡]	-1.438 [‡]	-2.606 [‡]	-1.962 [‡]
-2 Log likelihood	7422	6048	6097	5143
χ^2	11	427	933	1043

[‡] p < 0.01. [†] p < 0.05.

will have had a greater chance to accumulate incidents of violence. Moreover, even if the odds are similar, based on past research it is possible that the sources of violence in these unions are different.

In addition to the descriptive analysis, it is clear from the results in Table II that separating marrieds by those who have and have not had a history of cohabitation is justified. Married women with a history of prior cohabitation have 45% higher odds of violence during their relationship than do their counterparts without a history of prior cohabitation. These results demonstrate that differences in violence between cohabitators and marrieds are not due to simply living in a cohabitation relationship or a marriage. If this were the case, one would expect the odds to be very similar for PC and non-PC marrieds. The results of this study show the odds of violence to be highest for PC marrieds. This suggests that there is something about cohabiting that is linked to violence. It may be that cohabitators and PC marrieds are alike. However, PC marrieds and cohabitators do not have similar odds in comparison to non-PC marrieds suggesting that perhaps there are unique processes operating in the production of violence for each marital status group.

The second model in Table II controls for the selection variables. The results show that controlling for selection variables, the odds for cohabitators are reduced to being virtually identical to non-PC marrieds. It appears that the greater odds of violence for cohabiting women can be accounted for by factors that select them into cohabitation. Controlling for selection variables reduces the odds of violence for PC marrieds compared to non-PC marrieds by 34%. Selection variables, then, play an important role in the greater odds of violence for both current and previous cohabitators.

Relationship variables are controlled in the third model in Table II. With these controls, the odds of violence for PC marrieds compared to non-PC marrieds remain virtually unchanged. Relationship variables appear to have no effect on differences between PC marrieds and non-PC marrieds. Relationship variables have a limited effect on violence for cohabitators compared to non-PC marrieds, with a 4% reduction in odds.

When both selection and relationships variables are entered into the full model in Table II, the odds of violence for cohabitators and PC marrieds relative to non-PC marrieds are not reduced as much as when selection variables alone are controlled. This appears to reaffirm that it is primarily selection variables that lead those who cohabit to have a greater propensity for violence than those who have never cohabited. In spite of this, the inclusion of relationship variables together with selection variables may be justified, at least theoretically, because of their representation of different theoretical arguments. Moreover, controlling for them will further clarify the effect of selection variables on violence.

Although the logistic regressions already discussed provide insights into the impact of selection and relationship variables on marital status differences in violence, these regressions cannot identify which variables are important for each marital status group and in what manner. To identify the relative impact of risk markers for each marital status group, separate logistic regression analyses are performed. The results of these logistic regressions are presented in Table III.

Selection Variables, Marital Status, and Violence

A quick inspection of the direction and magnitude of the effects of variables across marital status groups shows several differences. This is further evidence for the importance of analyzing the marital status groups separately.

The results show that youth is an important risk marker of violence for cohabiting women. Each year of increase in a cohabiting woman's age leads to a 5% decrease in the odds of violence. It appears that particularly young women in cohabiting unions are experiencing violence. From a Routine Activities perspective, the importance of youth for cohabiting women may be linked to their lifestyle. Young cohabiting women may be more likely than young married women to engage in activities, such as going to the bar, that increase the risk of violence.

Interestingly, age heterogamy is linked to violence most strongly for PC married women. Wu and Balakrishnan (1995) assert that age heterogamy is often the result of attempts to avoid the costs of spending more time searching for a partner that is a closer match. Although women with a partner 6 or more years younger than they have higher odds of violence regardless of marital status, age heterogamy in any direction is linked to increased odds of violence for PC marrieds. This rather surprising pattern suggests that PC married women may be more vulnerable to violence when there are disparate characteristics between the partners.

The results also suggest that socioeconomic status does not account for higher violence among cohabitators. It is often conjectured in the violence literature that cohabitators tend to rank low in terms of socioeconomic status and that the links between socioeconomic status variables and violence play a large role in understanding cohabitators' higher rate of violence. The indicators of socioeconomic status in this study do not support such conjecture. The only indicator that would fit such an explanation is woman's employment, which suggests that unemployed cohabiting women face higher odds of violence than employed cohabiting women. Given that the other indicators of socioeconomic status suggest no impact of low socioeconomic status

Table III. Results of Logistic Regressions on Lifetime Prevalence of Violence for Marital Status Subgroups

Covariates	Odds ratio		
	Cohabitor (<i>n</i> = 863)	PC married (<i>n</i> = 478)	Non-PC married (<i>n</i> = 5682)
<i>Selection variables</i>			
Age	0.948 [†]	0.965	0.995
Age difference			
Partner 6+ older	0.736	2.308	0.938
Partner 1–5 older	0.991	1.859	0.925
Partner 1–5 younger	0.975	2.163	1.015
Partner 6+ younger	1.890	2.815	1.429
Same age	1.000	1.000	1.000
Woman's education	1.044	1.051	0.997
Woman's employment			
Worked past year	0.798	1.141	1.053
Did not work	1.000	1.000	1.000
Partner's employment			
Did not work	0.989	0.335*	0.805
Worked past year	1.000	1.000	1.000
Woman's income	1.000	1.000	1.000
Income consistency	1.000*	1.000 [†]	1.000
Income consistency square	1.000*	1.000*	1.000
Education consistency	1.806	0.031 [†]	0.563
Education consistency square	0.820	3.470 [†]	1.350*
Partner's father violent			
Yes/think so	1.781*	3.277 [‡]	2.449 [‡]
No/do not think so	1.000	1.000	1.000
Woman's father violent			
Yes/think so	1.437	1.133	1.587 [‡]
No/do not think so	1.000	1.000	1.000
Dating violence			
Yes	2.389 [†]	4.129 [‡]	2.641 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Previous marriage			
Yes	0.712	1.389	0.062
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Previous partner violence			
Yes, violent	2.215 [†]	1.124	1.083
No, not violent	1.000	1.000	1.000
Region			
Atlantic	1.155	0.936	0.777
Quebec	0.696	0.264 [‡]	0.718 [‡]
Prairies	1.056	1.008	0.988
British Columbia	0.968	0.600	1.318 [†]
Ontario	1.000	1.000	1.000
<i>Relationship variables</i>			
Duration	1.100 [‡]	1.074 [†]	1.020 [†]
Jealousy			
Yes	1.177	4.466 [‡]	3.112 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Know whereabouts			
Yes	3.498 [‡]	1.404	2.371 [†]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000

Table III. (Continued)

Covariates	Odds ratio		
	Cohabitor (n = 863)	PC married (n = 478)	Non-PC married (n = 5682)
Heavy drinking	1.046	1.050	1.059 [‡]
Frequency of drinking	1.004	1.014	1.004
Limit contact			
Yes	5.915 [‡]	7.933 [‡]	5.047 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Prevent income access			
Yes	3.169*	1.143	7.207 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Children <25			
Yes	0.795	1.628	1.438 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Depression			
Yes	3.702 [†]	2.043	1.984 [‡]
No	1.000	1.000	1.000
Constant	-2.035*	-0.910	0.247
-2 Log likelihood	592	357	4096
χ^2	201	138	800

[‡] $p < 0.01$. [†] $p < 0.05$. * $p \leq 0.10$.

on violence, it is perhaps more insightful to look to sex-role theory to understand the effect of woman’s employment. Cohabitors who behave in an egalitarian way, in the sense that the female partner works, are less likely to experience violence. For marrieds, on the other hand, egalitarianism in terms of female employment does not reduce the likelihood of violence. It seems possible that married men tend to be more traditional and when confronted with a wife who works they are more likely to be violent.

Applying resource theory to marital status differences in violence, one could point to cohabiting men’s greater likelihood to have fewer resources than their female partner (Ellis, 1989). Consistent with the findings of previous research (Anderson, 1997), the results of this study show the ratio of female to male income does not have an impact on the odds of violence for any marital status group. However, unlike Anderson (1997), the results show education consistency to have a large impact on violence. For marrieds, and particularly PC marrieds, the odds are greater than one. Thus, married men are affected by their wives being more educated than they. This could be indicative of a patriarchal belief by these men that the man in the relationship should have greater resources. On the other hand, higher female to male education levels actually reduce the odds of violence among cohabitors. This contradiction to what resource theory would predict along with the finding that income consistency has no impact on violence suggests that resource theory is not able to account for violence among cohabitors.

Consistent with previous research (Jackson, 1996), partner's social learning (partner's father violent) has a significant impact on violence regardless of marital status. However, this variable impacts the odds of violence by far the most for marrieds. The fact that the odds are higher in marital relationships despite men in all groups having the same social learning experiences may indicate that perhaps some married men still view the marriage license as a hitting license. Woman's social learning also has an impact on the odds of lifetime prevalence of violence, though the effects are not as large in any of the marital status groups as they are on the partner's social learning variable. It appears that, despite having similar social learning experiences in all three groups, the subset of non-PC married women are most likely to experience violence. Because social learning generally has a higher impact on violence for marrieds, it does not appear able to account for the higher likelihood of violence among cohabitators.

It appears that neither the experience of violence while dating their current partner nor having been previously married distinguish cohabitators from marrieds. Although it could be hypothesized that experiencing violence while dating and weariness about remarriage would select individuals into cohabitation, it is evident that PC marrieds seem to be particularly affected these selection variables. It may be that PC married women have fewer options, or perceive themselves as such, in terms of potential mates and are therefore more likely to marry violence-prone men.

Although dating violence and previous marriage do not differentiate cohabitators from marrieds, having experienced violence by a previous partner is linked to particularly high odds of violence for cohabitators. Cohabiting women who had a previous partner that was violent face 122% higher odds of violence by their current partner. Although some victims of violence by a previous partner may choose to cohabit out of mistrust, it is evident that cohabitation does not shelter these women from violence. Perhaps a mistrust of men as evidenced by selection into cohabitation leads to problems in the relationship which are, in turn, linked to violence.

The results for the region variable show that the odds of violence against women in Quebec are lower than in any other region of Canada. Not only is this the case for marrieds, but also for cohabitators. This is surprising since Quebec has the highest rate of cohabitation in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1997). Given the higher rate of violence among cohabitators, one might expect a higher likelihood of violence in Quebec. These results may point to the impact of culture on the development of relationship nomos in different marital status groups. It has been argued that the Quiet Revolution in Quebec has led to a less patriarchal culture (Pollard & Wu, 1998) and it seems possible that this explains both Quebec's higher rate of cohabitation and its lower rate of violence.

Relationship Variables, Marital Status, and Violence

Recall that the logistic regressions in Table II demonstrate selection variables to be most important in understanding marital status differences in violence. However, in Table III one can examine the impact of the relationship variables separately from one another. An examination of Table III indicates that some of the relationship variables operate differently than one might expect, thereby providing further insight into the underlying dynamics leading to violence in each union type. For example, given the lower public commitment of cohabiting couples, one would expect jealousy to be linked to higher odds of violence for cohabitators than marrieds. However, the results show jealousy to have a much larger impact on the odds of violence for marrieds. Perhaps men who are jealous but feel that their partner can leave them more easily are less apt to be violent. Similarly, given that cohabiting men have more alcohol problems (Horwitz & White, 1998) and that alcohol abuse is linked to violence (Bennett, 1995), one would expect frequent and heavy alcohol consumption to be linked to higher odds of violence for cohabitators. However, the results show that alcohol consumption is neither a strong indicator of violence nor does it differentiate the marital status groups. In a bivariate comparison, marital status and alcohol consumption are significantly related (results available upon request). It is possible that the failure of alcohol consumption to be an important determinant of violence among cohabitators is due to controlling for the effect of age. Another finding that is somewhat surprising concerns the effect of social isolation. The results show social isolation to have a large impact on the odds of violence for all three groups, the highest being for PC marrieds. This finding may be linked to the measure of social isolation. Although the measure does indicate isolation or attempted isolation from family and friends, the source of this isolation is different from isolation imposed by ideologies based in societal disdain of cohabitation. However, with the increasing prevalence and acceptance of unmarried cohabitation, it is likely that social isolation due to ideology has diminished. Despite an ideological shift, cohabitators nevertheless have higher rates of violence than non-PC marrieds. It would seem that social isolation is not a salient explanation for marital status differences in violence against women.

The results in terms of the presence of children show that married women with children face increased odds of violence. It may be that for marrieds the presence of children is an additional strain that leads men to vent their frustrations through violence against their wife. Interestingly, having children reduces the odds of violence for cohabitators. It may be that cohabiting relationships that include children indicate greater commitment to a permanent loving relationship, given the fact that most cohabitators prefer

to marry before having children (Cunningham & Antill, 1995). The link between childlessness and violence for cohabiting women fits with a Routine Activities explanation. Childless women, who are also in a less publicly committed union and are probably young, may be more likely to share a lifestyle with their partner that may lead to violence. This may be related to the importance of "keeping tabs" for understanding violence in cohabiting unions. Of women with a partner who insists on knowing her whereabouts, it is cohabiting women who have the highest odds of violence. It may be that cohabitators tend to live more of a separate lifestyle. As a result, men who are insecure about such an arrangement may be more likely to become violent.

Among women suffering from depression, those who are cohabiting face the highest likelihood of violence. Stets (1991) reasoned that depression is one result of a lack of social support. Stets (1991) argues that an association between cohabitators' depression and violence is indicative of a spurious relationship with social isolation. However, an examination of Stets' (1991, p. 675, Table III) results indicates that depression has a significant impact on violence even after controlling for a number of social support/isolation variables. Similar results are found in this study. Very little is known about differences between marrieds and cohabitators in terms of depression and what role it might play in understanding marital status differences in violence. Nevertheless, what is known suggests that the role of depression in violence, particularly among cohabitators, is worthy of further investigation.

Finally, women who have a domineering partner, in the sense that he prevents access to the family income, are most likely to experience violence if they are married and have never lived in a cohabiting union. It may be that the institution of marriage combined with the traditionalism of these women allows domineering patriarchal men greater latitude to translate their domination into violence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although suggesting that selection variables are of primordial importance, results of this study demonstrate that both selection and relationship variables have merit in understanding marital status differences in violence. More importantly, their explanatory value depends on which marital status group one is investigating. Something different appears to be operating in the production of violence across marital status groups and an application of the theoretical synthesis points to different underlying processes at work in each of these union types. For cohabiting women results demonstrate that violence is linked to the selection factors of youth, woman's unemployment, past partner violence, and the relationship factors of childlessness, having a cohabiting partner who keeps tabs, and depression. As already

mentioned, the importance of some of these variables points to Routine Activities Theory, but, in addition, the theoretical synthesis of this study suggests that underlying the importance of these selection and relationship characteristics is a less stable nomos. It seems that the type of people who choose to cohabit are less amenable to developing a stable nomos and the characteristics of their relationships, perhaps including their routine activities, both reflect and reinforce this state of affairs. It also appears that PC married women's selection and relationship characteristics lead them to be more likely to establish a less stable nomos than women who did not live with anyone other than their husband before getting married. Although some might expect cohabitators to be less conventional than PC marrieds because the latter have eventually chosen to abide by tradition and marry, multivariate analysis shows selection and relationship characteristics that point to a more general social marginality are linked to violence for this group. PC married women who are previously married, who are married to a partner of a different age than they, who translated a violent dating relationship into a marriage, whose partners were exposed to violence as a child and are jealous and socially isolating are particularly likely to experience violence. In other words, it seems that these women have been limited to marginal relationship choices and are with men who may be less inhibited from being violent. These more socially marginal selection and relationship characteristics also point to the development of a less stable relationship nomos. On the other hand, although cohabitators and PC marrieds may have a less stable nomos than non-PC marrieds, the characteristic of non-PC marrieds that stands out as being particularly important relative to cohabitators and PC marrieds is dominance. To be sure, the stability of marriage that Berger and Kellner (1994) discuss is couched in a society with a patriarchal structure and ideology. One might say that the nomos to which they refer is a patriarchal nomos. The analysis in this study further confirms the work of feminist researchers who find that marital violence is linked to patriarchy.

We began with the observation that most of the substantial body of research on violence against women subsumes cohabitators within marrieds. Although DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991) should be commended for making a rare effort to justify combining marrieds and cohabitators into one group, the present work nevertheless takes issue with these and other researchers who would do the same. To treat marrieds and cohabitators as one for the sake of consistency with past studies is tantamount to arguing that researchers should not approach problems from different angles than their analytical predecessors. The justification of DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991) that the legal system treats certain cohabitators and marrieds equally places the proverbial cart before the horse. The institutions of society should look to social researchers for guidance in attempting to understand the underlying dynamics

of social problems rather than vice versa. DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991) also argue that there are few differences between marrieds and cohabitators since cohabitators and marrieds report comparable levels of satisfaction and closeness and because these two groups report similar conflicts and problems. However, both this study and past research have shown that there are several important differences between these two groups. Recent research regarding levels of satisfaction, closeness and conflicts, shows that cohabitators are less likely than marrieds to be happy (Boba, 1996; Stack & Eshleman, 1998), they are less committed to their relationships (Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Nock, 1995), they have differing expectations about the future (Bumpass *et al.*, 1991; Waite, 1995), and they report both more trouble in their relationships and more disagreements (Boba, 1996).

Using a large-scale representative sample of Canada this study has demonstrated that women who cohabit, and those who cohabited with someone other than their husband prior to getting married, are more likely to experience violence than married women who have never cohabited with someone other than their husband. Although DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991, pp. 8–9) conclude “it is difficult to differentiate between cohabitators and legally married women,” the results of previous studies combined with the findings of the present investigation suggest that mixing these marital status groups results in problematic analyses that obscure our understanding of the causes of violence against women.

Having found that cohabitators, PC marrieds, and non-PC marrieds are three distinct groups with respect to violence, it would seem reasonable to conclude that for a better understanding of the causes of partner violence against women, disaggregation by marital status is warranted in future research. To be sure, cohabitators and marrieds should not be combined simply to elevate marrieds’ rates of violence or to increase the subsample of “married” victims of violence in a given study. PC marrieds in particular, with their surprisingly higher rate of violence and unique characteristics, should be studied because we know even less about this group than we know about cohabitators.

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