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Working couples face greater odds of intimate partner violence

HUNTSVILLE, TX (11/30/12) – Intimate partner violence is two times more likely to occur in two income households, compared to those where only one partner works, a recent study at Sam Houston State University found.

The study, conducted by Cortney A. Franklin and Tasha A. Menaker and supported by the Crime Victims' Institute, was titled, "Differences in Education/Employment Status and Intimate Partner Victimization." It looked at the impact of education levels and employment status differences among heterosexual partners on intimate partner victimization. While differences in education levels appeared to have little influence on intimate partner violence, when both partners were working, intimate partner violence increased.

"When both male and females were employed, the odds of victimization were more than two times higher than when the male was the only breadwinner in the partnership, lending support to the idea that female employment may challenge male authority and power in a relationship," said Franklin and Menaker.

The study was based on telephone interviews with 303 women who identified themselves as either currently or recently in a serious romantic relationship. Based on the Fourth Annual Texas Crime Victimization Survey, a total of 67 percent of these women, who ranged in age from 18 to 81, reported some form of physical or psychological victimization by their partner during the preceding two year period. These actions included having something thrown at them; being pushed, grabbed or shoved; slapped, hit, kicked or bitten; or threatened with a gun or knife.

The study found that more than 60 percent of women in heterosexual working couples reported victimization, while only 30 percent of women reported victimization in cases when only the male partner was employed.

"When women are home-bound through their role as domestic workers, they lack connections to co-workers and the social capital that is produced through those connections, in addition to wages, job prestige, resources, and thus, power. In turn, they must rely solely on their male partner for financial sustenance and can benefit from the distinction that his employment brings the couple," said Franklin and Menaker. "Those women who work outside the home have access to these tangible and intangible assets, which may devalue or, in some cases, even undermine the contributions and provisions supplied by male-only employment."

The study also explored other factors that may contribute to intimate partner violence, including witnessing violence by a parent during childhood, accepting the use of violence in adult relationships, and experiencing relationship distress, such as problems generated by money, chores, social activities or sexual relations. Distress in the relationship and witnessing intimate partner violence during childhood increased the odds of victimization.

Finally, the study found that Hispanic women were significantly less likely than white females to report intimate partner violence and that older women of all races/ethnicities were less likely to be victimized than younger women. As a result of these findings, Franklin and Menaker recommended that clinicians who treat victims of intimate partner violence develop specific strategies to address these risk factors and cultural differences. The study also suggested that clinicians should target youth who have witnessed violence during childhood with additional programming for better methods of conflict resolution among adults in intimate relationships.

The full study is scheduled to be published in the journal, *Violence Against Women*, in the near future.

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