Journal of Family Violence, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1990

Gender Comparisons in the Relationship Between Parental and Sibling Violence and Nonfamily Violence

William D. Mangold, Jr.[1] and Patricia R. Koski[1]

This paper addresses two neglected areas in the research on the relationship between family violence and violence outside the home: violence other than parent-child abuse and the effect of gender. Specifically, we consider both parental and sibling violence as independent variables, nonfamily violence as the dependent variable, and gender as the specification variable. The data were collected from a sample of 306 students in Introductory Sociology and Social Problems classes. The finding of particular importance is that the interaction between the gender of both the aggressor and the victim has a significant effect on the relationship between violence within the home and nonfamily violence.

KEY WORDS: family violence; violence; sibling violence; parental violence.

INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, social scientists have shown considerable interest in the issue of family violence (e.g., Finkelhor *et al.*, 1983; Johnson, 1981). A part of this inquiry has focused on the relationship between family violence and violence outside the home ("nonfamily" violence) (e.g., Bolton *et al.*, 1977; Hunner and Walker, 1981; McCord, 1984; Norland *et al.*, 1979; Reich and Gutierres, 1979). In spite of the attention given to this issue, there are some surprising gaps in the available knowledge. A significant, and unexpected, omission is the absence of a detailed analysis of gender (Koski, 1987). This is surprising, given the resurgence of interest in this variable for theories of

[1]Center for Social Research, Department of Sociology, 209 Carnall Hall, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701.

0885-7482/90/0900-0225$06.00/0

deviance in general (White and LaGrange, 1987). A second gap is the lack of attention paid to the effects of family violence other than child abuse (Koski, 1987). In the context of the relationship between family and nonfamily violence, the term "family violence " is much too broad. There are several types of family violence, including parental, parent-child, sibling, parent-sibling, and sibling-parent. It is unlikely that each of these interactions is linked to nonfamily violence in the same way or to the same extent. Rather, each of these interactions must be considered as a separate area of research (Koski, 1987). No matter how much research there is on the link between parent-child and nonfamily violence, then, we cannot say that we understand the relationship between *family* violence and behaviors outside the home. To make that statement, we must consider each type of behavior separately. In this paper, we look at sibling violence and parent-parent violence.

Thus, we have two research questions: (1) what is the relationship between sibling and nonfamily violence, for males and females? and 2) what is the relationship between parental violence (as witnessed by the child) and nonfamily violence, for males and females? It is important to emphasize, here, that our investigation will focus on the child's perceptions of parental violence and how those perceptions are associated with nonfamily violence. In the following we discuss the previous research and develop our hypotheses.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Sibling Violence

Although criminologists assume that females are less violent outside the home than males, this may not be true for violence within the home and particularly, for sibling violence. There is little evidence that females are less violent toward their siblings than males. In fact, Straus *et al.* (1980) report that the likelihood of sibling violence is a virtual certainty irrespective of gender.

At the same time, however, it is well documented that females are less violent outside the home. This is particularly interesting since Gully *et al.* (1981) found that the only significant predictor of nonfamily violence in their sample of college students was sibling violence. This cautions us to remember that social factors, such as sex-role stereotypes, may affect the relationship between violence in the home and outside the home, and that what one learns in the home may not be easily translated to situations outside the home. It also reminds us that learning is more complex than mere observation and imitation. For example, when girls commit violence against siblings, they may be told "girls don't do that," while violent boys may be told not to hurt their siblings but may still be given some positive messages such as "don't let me *catch* you

doing that again." Nonetheless, as we have suggested, there is a scarcity of research on the relationship between violence in the home and outside the home for males and females considered separately. Based on the limited research that has been done, we offer these three hypotheses: (1) there will be large and significant gender differences in nonfamily violence; (2) there will be no gender differences in sibling violence; and (3) there will be a relationship between sibling violence and nonfamily violence only for males.

Parental Violence as Witnessed by the Child

Previous research, although still sparse and preliminary, suggests that gender may be relevant both in the perception of parental violence and in its effects. For example, Gully *et al.* (1982) found that violent females remembered more parental violence than did violent males. Whether and in what ways these perceptions may affect nonfamily violence is still largely an unexamined question, but Straus (1981) found a positive link only for males.

We hypothesize, following Gully *et al.* (1982), that females will report more parental violence than males. We also hypothesize that these perceptions will differ by the gender of the aggressive parent, but we make no specific predictions in advance. Finally, we hypothesize that perceptions of parental violence will be positively associated with nonfamily violence, again, only for males (following Straus, 1981).

METHOD

Procedure

Our sample consisted of 303 students in Introductory Sociology and Social Problems classes at a moderate-sized university in a South Central state. We administered a questionnaire that asked about conflict in their homes and violent activities they engaged in outside of the home. Among respondents, there were 156 males and 147 females. Reflecting the nature of the courses where the questionnaire was administered, a majority (81 percent) were either freshmen or sophomores and were predominantly in their early twenties. Reflecting the overall composition of the student body, 93 percent were white.

In order to reduce the likelihood that respondents would use different time frames, they were asked to answer the questions about family violence with respect to their senior year of high school and to the questions about nonfamily violence for the period of time since the beginning of the semester (about 3 months). Family conflict was measured through the use of a modified

Conflict Tactics Scale (see Straus, 1979), with response categories of (0) never used, (1) used in about one-fourth of the arguments, (2) used in about one-half of the arguments, (3) used in three-fourths of the arguments, and (4) used in all of the arguments. Information about nonfamily violence was obtained through the use of a modified Short-Nye Self-report scale, with response categories ranging from (0) never engaged in this behavior to (4) engaged in this behavior six or more times. The specific items were: "(have you ever) attacked someone (not a family member) with the intention of seriously hurting him/her?" and "(have you ever) punched or hit someone other than a family member?"

Four conflict relationships for family violence were constructed (with the aggressor given first and the victim given second): (1) mother-father, (2) father-mother, (3) respondent-sister (to be referred to as sister violence), (4) respondent-brother (to be referred to as brother violence). An unweighted (summated) score reflecting family conflict was calculated for each of the preceding categories of family interactions by adding the responses for the following modified CTS items: (1) threatened to hit (other) with hand, fist, or object; (2) pushed or shoved (other); (3) slapped, hit, bit, or kicked (other); (4) threatened (other) with a knife or gun. Responses to each CTS item were collapsed into three levels: 0 = never used, 1 = used less than one-half of the time, and 3 = used more than one-half of the time. The summated scale has a range from 0 (never used any) to 12 (used each at least one-half of the time).

Before discussing the results, we must mention some of the limitations of the methodology. While use of cross-sectional self-report questionnaires is a common technique in criminology, there are some cautions that must be kept in mind. First, external validity is limited. At the most, we can only generalize to similar college students. Second, use of self-reports means that there will be errors of memory and those errors may not operate in a random fashion. Third, while it was necessary to specify a time-frame to make sure that the answers could be compared, such a time-frame necessarily limits the answers. A respondent could have witnessed a great deal of parental violence during the sophomore year, for example, and none during the senior year. Similarly, a respondent could have engaged in nonfamily violence in high school but not during the first three months of college. Despite these inherent short-comings, however, it is possible to establish whether there is a link between family and nonfamily violence, as measured here, and to determine whether that link varies by gender, with these respondents. The findings should be considered, as we would argue all research findings should be considered, as one piece of a puzzle to be combined with other studies carried out other populations.

Table I. Mean Sibling Violence Scores by Direction of Violence and Respondent's Gender

Direction of Violence	Gender of Respondents: Male	Female	t	p^a
R → Brother	4.15 (60)	1.60 (70)	-5.45	0.001
R → Sister	1.54 (59)	1.50 (52)	-0.01	0.460

[a]One-tailed.

Table II. Means of Reported Family Violence by Direction of Violence and Respondent's Gender in Rank Order

Direction of Violence	Gender of Respondent: Male	Female
R → Brother	4.15 (60)	1.60 (70)
R → Sister	1.54 (59)	1.50 (52)
Father → Mother	0.57 (129)	0.44 (127)
Mother → Father	0.54 (131)	0.28 (126)

RESULTS

In this section we examine the hypotheses we discussed earlier.

Hypothesis 1. There are significant gender differences in nonfamily violence.

Consistent with much previous research, males in our sample are more likely than females to report being violent outside the home. The mean nonfamily violence score for males is 1.39 versus 0.36 for females ($p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 2. There is no gender difference in respondent-sibling violence.

This hypothesis is partially supported, but significant differences are obtained for brother violence. As Table I shows, males have a significantly higher average level of violence than do females when the object of the violence is a brother. The level of brother violence reported by males is approximately two times higher than that reported by females. In fact, as shown in Table II,

Table III. Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients Between Nonfamily Violence and Parental and Sibling Violence by Gender

Direction of Violence:	Respondent's Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
R → Brother	0.45***	0.27**	0.50***
R → Sister	0.61***	0.00	0.39***
Father → Mother	0.24**	−0.01	0.17**
Mother → Father	0.18*	0.24**	0.14**

Note. * < 0.05, ** < 0.01, *** < 0.001.

Table IV. The Effects of Sibling Violence, Respondent's Gender, and the Interaction on Nonfamily Violence

Independent Variables	B	*p*
X_1 R → Brother Violence	0.1976	0.080
X_2 Gender (1 = male)	0.0685	0.543
X_3 Interaction (X_1 * X_2)	0.3280	0.034
	R^2 = 0.29	
	$F_{(3,126)}$ = 18.2, p < 0.0001	
X_1 R → Sister Violence	0.0000	1.000
X_2 Gender (1 = male)	- 0.0120	0.450
X_3 Interaction (X_1 * X_2)	0.5680	0.000
	R^2 = 0.30	
	$F_{(3,107)}$ = 16.6, p < 0.0001	

violence directed by a male toward a brother is the highest of any of the reports of family violence. It should be emphasized that the gender of both the subject and object of the violence are important in these data.

Hypothesis 3. There is a significant relationship between sibling and nonfamily violence for males, but not for females.

Table III contains the zero-order correlation coefficients between nonfamily violence and sibling violence. As can be seen, both brother and sister violence are significantly correlated with nonfamily violence when they are considered without regard to the gender of the respondent. When gender is added, nonfamily violence is significantly correlated with sibling violence among males. Among females, however, a significant correlation is obtained only for brother violence. Thus, it appears that gender of the respondent and the nature of sibling violence are important elements in specifying the effect that sibling violence has on nonfamily violence. A series of regression equations, including

Table V. Gender Differences in Perceptions of Mother-Father and Father-Mother Violence

Direction of Violence:	Gender of Respondent		t	p^a
	Male	Female		
Mother → Father	0.54	0.28	-1.38	0.08
	(131)	(126)		
Father → Mother	0.57	0.44	-0.66	0.590
	(129)	(127)		

[a]One-tailed.
Note. Values are the means of perceived parental violence.

this interaction term, was constructed in order to assess the extent of this interaction.

Table IV indicates that gender has a trivial effect on nonfamily violence but the interaction between gender and the level of brother violence produces a relatively large effect. In fact, the interaction term has a greater effect on nonfamily violence than the level of brother violence alone.

The betas for the effects of gender, sister violence, and the interaction of the two on nonfamily violence closely parallel the preceding. Both gender and sister violence have trivial effects on nonfamily violence when considered separately, but the interaction effect is large and significant. In other words, the level of sister violence has no effect on nonfamily violence among females, but males who are violent toward their sisters are likely to be violent toward nonfamily members also. Again, this suggests that the gender of the aggressor *and* the victim are important.

Hypothesis 4. Females perceive more violence between parents than do males.

This hypothesis is not supported for either the mother or the father (see Table V). In fact, males report a higher level of violence between parents, particularly mother-father violence, than do females. In addition, males tend to perceive violence by either parent toward the other as the same, while females are more likely to perceive a higher level of violence directed by the father toward the mother. It should be noted that this finding is not consistent with previous research (e.g., Gully *et al.*, 1982). Perhaps the most striking finding here is the very low levels of violence between parents perceived by these respondents.

Table VI. The Effects of Mother-Father Violence, Respondent's Gender, and the Interaction on Nonfamily Violence

Independent Variables	B	*p*
X_1 Mother → Father Violence	0.0237	0.420
X_2 Gender (1 = male)	0.2982	0.000
X_3 Interaction (X_1 * X_2)	0.1356	0.120
$R^2 = 0.12$		
$F_{(3,107)} = 12.6$, $p < 0.001$		
X_1 Father → Mother Violence	-0.0667	0.230
X_2 Gender (1 = male)	0.2630	0.000
X_3 Interaction (X_1 * X_2)	0.2616	0.003
$R^2 = 0.14$		
$F_{(3,107)} = 14.4$, $p < 0.001$		

Hypothesis 5. There is a relationship between perceived parental conflict and nonfamily violence only for males.

Examination of the correlation coefficients for both males and females in Table III reveals that while nonfamily violence is directly associated with perceptions of parental violence, it makes little difference whether the father is the subject or object of the violence. When the gender of the respondent is considered, mother-father violence is associated with higher levels of nonfamily violence for both males and females. However, violence directed by the father toward the mother is associated with higher levels of nonfamily violence among males but (insignificantly) lower nonfamily violence among females.

Regression equations for nonfamily violence, perceptions of parental violence, gender, and the interaction of gender and perceptions of parental violence are shown in Table VI. The results indicate that while gender has a significant effect on nonfamily violence, perceptions of mother-father violence and the interaction term are not significant.

When father-mother violence is considered, both gender and the interaction effect are significant, but the perceived level of father-mother violence is not. Thus, increasing amounts of father-mother violence have a trivial effect on nonfamily violence in general, but increased perceptions of violence directed by the father toward the mother have a significant additional effect on the violence of males. This partially confirms our initial hypothesis that males are more affected by parental violence, but only when it is directed by their fathers

toward their mothers. This suggests the importance of gender-specific role models, a suggestion which has implications for behavior outside of the home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We have argued that there are relationships between sibling and parental violence and nonfamily violence, but that they are specified by the gender of the aggressor and the victim. The findings reported in this paper underscore this argument, and point out the need to consider how the gender of all participants affects not only violent behavior, but perceptions of violence as well. If we are seeking to establish whether a link between family and nonfamily violence exists so as to lay the foundation for a theoretical understanding of such a relationship, then we need to know not only the conditions under which the link does exist but also those in which it does not. Our findings have illustrated that gender is important for understanding this.

In every relationship considered, with the exception of perceptions of parental conflict, the relationships were specified by the gender of the observer, and the gender of the subject and/or object of the behavior. Males in our sample are more likely than females to aggress against a brother but not more likely to aggress against a sister. Gender has no effect on the relationship between brother violence and nonfamily violence, but males who are violent toward their sisters are much more likely than females to be violent outside the home. Although witnessing violence directed by the mother toward the father has a relationship with nonfamily violence for both males and females, father's violence against the mother is significant only among males. Males who report more father-mother violence also report that they commit more nonfamily violence; this is not the case for females. Finally, a surprising finding was that when we added a term in the regression equation for the interaction between gender and respondent-brother or -sister violence, the initial significance of gender as a determinant of nonfamily violence decreased dramatically but the interaction term remained strong. This suggests that is may not be gender per se, but the interaction between gender and sibling violence that is associated with nonfamily violence. This is a surprising finding because it challenges the criminological truism that males will be more violent outside the home than females and actually suggests that the probability of violence may be *similar* for males and females who have similar experiences in the home. For example, we found no differences in nonfamily violence between males and females who are violent toward a brother. Conversely, this finding also suggests that when males and females experience what appear to be similar violent interactions in the home, those experiences may actually *not* be similar. For example, we found that males who aggress against a sister are more likely than females who ag-

gress against a sister or brother to be violent outside the home. There may be no experience for a female in our culture which means the same thing as a male practicing violence on a female, and thus the outcome of that practice would likely be different. If future research supports the finding of this interaction, the implications for theory development are great.

There is an additional implication with regard to our findings on parental violence. Much of the previous literature has focused on the "cycle of violence" in which family violence seems to be maintained over generations. Our data suggest that this "cycle of violence" may also occur outside the home. That is, males (but not females) who witness their father being aggressive against their mother (but not vice versa) are likely to learn from that role model, not *just* in terms of their interactions with their own spouses, but *also* in their interactions with nonfamily members. This must remain speculative, of course, since the present study does not test this notion, but future research should be directed at this issue.

Given the methodological limitations of the present study, and the intriguing findings, it is critical that future research with different limitations and on different populations retest these hypotheses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a revision of a paper delivered at the Southern Sociological Society annual meetings, April 1986. We thank Donna Darden and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments.

REFERENCES

Bolton, F. G., Reich, J. W. and Gutierres, S. E. (1977). Delinquency patterns in maltreated children and siblings. *Victimology* 2: 349-357.

Findkelhor, D., Gelles, R. J., Hotaling, G. T., and Straus, M. (eds.) (1983). *The Dark Side of Families*, Sage, Beverly Hills.

Gully, K. J., Dengerink, H. A., Pepping, M. and Bergstrom, D. (1981). Research note: Sibling contribution to violent behavior. *J. Marr. Fam* 43: 333-337.

Gully, K. J. Pepping, J., and Dengerink, H. A. (1982). Gender differences in third-party reports of violence. *J. Marr. Fam* 44: 497-498.

Hunner, R. J., and Walker, Y. E. (eds.) (1981). *Exploring the Relationship Between Child Abuse and Delinquency*, Allanheld and Osmun, Montclair.

Johnson, J. (ed.) (1981). *J. Fam. Issues* 2, (December), entire issue.

Koski, P. R. (1987). Family violence and nonfamily deviance: Taking stock of the literature. *Marr. Fam. Rev.* 12: 23-46.

McCord, J. (1984). Parental Aggressiveness and Physical Punishment in Long-Term Perspective. Paper presented at the Second National Conference for Family Violence Researchers, Durham, NH, August.

Norland, S., Shover, N., Thornton, W. E., and James, J. (1979). Intrafamily conflict and delinquency. *Pac. Soc. Rev.* 22: 223-240.

Reich, J. W., and Gutierres, S. E. (1979). Escape/aggression incidence in sexually abused juvenile delinquents. *Crim. Just. Beh.* 6: 239-243.

Straus, M. A. (1979). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The conflict tactics (CT) scales. *J. Marr. Fam.* 41: 75-88.

Straus, M. A. (1981). Family violence and non-family crime and violence. Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, Washington, DC.

Straus, M. A., Gelles, R. J., and Steinmetz, S. K. (1980). *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*, Anchor, Garden City, New York.

White, H. R., and LaGrange, R. L. (1987). An assessment of gender effects in self report delinquency. *Soc. Focus* 20: 195-213.