

Report Title: *Measuring Interference with Employment and Education Reported by Women with Abusive Partners: Preliminary Findings*

(Source: Violence and Victims, forthcoming).

Research Team: University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Psychology

Authors: Stephanie Riger, Courtney Aherns, and Amy Blickenstaff. Women's Studies Program, (M/C360) University of Illinois at Chicago, 1007 W. Harrison Street, Room 1152, Chicago, Illinois 60607-7137 (312) 413-2300, sriger@uic.edu.

Sample: Participants were recruited through a larger study of domestic violence victims residing in four shelters in Chicago (Riger et al, 1998) with a sample size of 57. Of the original sample, 35 women had worked or gone to school during their relationship with their abuser. The group of 35 women constitutes the sample for the current study, which was conducted to develop a reliable, valid measure of abusive acts by intimates that prevent or interfere with women's employment and/or education. The average woman in the sample was 31 years old and had two children under 14 years of age living with her. Of the 35 women in the current study, 11% were married, 83% were African American, 51% had at least a high school diploma, and 68% were receiving welfare benefits at the time of the study.

Time Frame of Study: February to April 1997

Methods: The authors were testing the *Work/School Abuse Scale*, a new assessment tool developed to measure abusers' impact on women's work and school activities. The study evaluated if the W/SAS is a valid, reliable measure of work/school sabotage. The tool uses a 0 to 1 scale, with 0 representing no interference. The W/SAS consists of two sets of six questions each (a total of 12 items). One set, the "Restraint Tactics Scale," describes behaviors that prevent women from going to work or school (e.g. stealing the car keys or money). The second set, the "Interference Scale," measures interference with participation when women are at work or school, for example, lying about children's health or safety to make the women leave work or school. To test its reliability and validity, the W/SAS was compared to two other abuse measurement tools. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) measures physical violence, and the Psychological Abuse Index (PAI) assesses the frequency of psychological abuse. Based on correlation with the CTS and the PAI, the W/SAS was found to be a valid and reliable tool to measure work and school sabotage.

FINDINGS

A. Relationship between Work/School Abuse and Other Abuse

- The Restraint Tactics Scale of the W/SAS correlated significantly with the CTS, indicating that the more physical abuse a woman suffered, the more the abuser tries to restrain her from going to work and/or school.
- The Interference Tactics Scale of the W/SAS correlated significantly with both the CTS and the PAI, indicating that the more physical and psychological abuse a woman suffered, the more the abuser also interfered with her work and/or school participation.
- Using just the W/SAS scales, women who missed work because of abuse reported significantly higher scores, averaging .39 on the Interference scale, than the group that did not miss work and had scores averaging .07.
- Women who were fired or quit their jobs as a result of abuse reported significantly higher scores, with averages of .56 on the Restraint Scale and .49 on the overall W/SAS, than those women who did not stop working and who had average scores of .30 and .28 respectively.

- Women who reported leaving school because of abuse also reported higher scores on the W/SAS as a whole (averaging .59), its Interference sub-scale (averaging .57) and its Restraint sub-scale (averaging .62) than those women who did not leave school and who had corresponding average scores of .21, .20, and .22.

B. Conclusion

Work Interference Linked to Physical and Psychological Abuse

Through the use of a new measurement tool, this study shows that increased physical and psychological abuse are closely linked with increased work and school interference. Programs serving battered women on welfare can use this information to help assess participants' employability. The authors caution that the small sample size in this study limits confidence in their findings. However, they put forth the W/SAS as a timely first step in developing a tool to examine whether changes in welfare policies affect levels of physical force and non-violent interference in women's employment and education, as suggested by the Family Violence Option.