

# *When Ending the Relationship Doesn't End the Violence: Women's Experiences of Violence by Former Partners*

RUTH E. FLEURY  
CRIS M. SULLIVAN  
DEBORAH I. BYBEE  
*Michigan State University*

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*Much of the existing research on intimate male violence against women has focused on the prevalence of and response to abuse that occurs within an ongoing intimate relationship. Little attention has been paid to the abuse that occurs after women have ended abusive relationships. In the current study, women leaving a shelter for women with abusive partners were interviewed across 2 years. More than one third of the women were assaulted by a former partner during the time of the study. Several factors under the control of the batterer were found to be related to ex-partner assaults, including his prior violence, threats, and sexual suspicion. Several factors under partial control of the survivor were also explored and were found to be less strongly related to violence by an ex-partner. Implications for improving the community response to women with abusive partners and ex-partners are discussed.*

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*Melanie Edwards left her abusive husband Carlton in October, taking their 2-year-old daughter and going to a local shelter. She obtained a restraining order against him and bought a car that her estranged husband would not recognize. Visitation was arranged so that each would drop off and pick up their daughter at a supervised*

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site through a local social service agency. On December 9, Carlton dropped his daughter off after an overnight visit. About half an hour later, Melanie arrived to pick her up. As mother and daughter got in the car to leave, Carlton shot and killed both of them. He killed himself a few days later. As one of Melanie's friends said, reacting to the murder, "She was trying to get out of this, doing all the right things. And then this happened" (Barker, 1998).

Conservative estimates indicate that nearly one in four women in the United States will be assaulted at least once by an intimate partner during adulthood (American Psychological Association, 1996). Although most of the research on intimate male violence against women has focused on the prevalence of and response to abuse that occurs within an ongoing marital, dating, or cohabitating relationship, more recently attention has begun to be paid to the abuse that continues even after women have ended abusive relationships.

It is commonly assumed that women with abusive partners should end their relationships to stay safe; women who do not separate from abusive men are often labeled as helpless or as tolerating violence (Browne, 1993). However, the link between separation and violence is multidirectional and complex. Some women with abusive partners may not end relationships because they have been threatened with increased violence if they leave. Others fear for the safety of their children, family, or friends. Although some women stay in relationships because they believe their partners will change, others stay for fear that the violence will escalate against themselves or their loved ones should they leave.

It should be remembered that many women with abusive partners do end their relationships. For instance, the majority of women who seek separation or divorce include physical violence as one reason for their decision (Kurz, 1996). In some cases, ending the relationship does result in an end to the abuse. For other women, the end of a relationship may be the first time that violence occurs (Kurz, 1996).

In spite of the widespread misconception that ending the relationship will end the violence, it is quite common for batterers to continue or even escalate their violence after the relationship ends (American Psychological Association, 1996; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Mahoney, 1991). Mahoney (1991) defines separation assault as "the attack on the woman's body and volition in which her part-

ner seeks to prevent her from leaving, retaliate for the separation, or force her to return . . . . It is an attempt to gain, retain, or regain power in a relationship, or to punish the woman for ending the relationship" (pp. 65-66). Leaving represents a threat to the batterer's control; violence is a way to attempt to regain or maintain that control.

Sev'er (1997) suggests that violence by an ex-partner takes much the same form and has many of the same dynamics as violence by a current partner. Just as batterers use violence to control their current partners, they also use violence after a separation to reassert control over their former partners. The power and control model (Pence & Paymar, 1993) was modified by Sev'er to include the four components most relevant to abuse after a separation: use of economic and legal abuse, use of children and other loved ones, escalated intimidation, and coercion and explosive violence.

Research has shown that separation assault is not uncommon. The majority of domestic assaults reported to law enforcement agencies occurred after the couples had separated (U.S. Department of Justice, 1983). A recent survey found that nearly one in five separated wives were assaulted while they were separated. Of those women who were assaulted, 35% reported that their husbands became more violent after the separation (Johnson & Sacco, 1995).

The most extreme case of separation assault is separation homicide. A study of homicides in three locations (Chicago, Canada, and New South Wales, Australia) demonstrated that estranged wives were more likely to be killed by their husbands than were still-married women (Wilson & Daly, 1993). Research supports the idea that re-establishing control is often the motive behind these crimes. In one study of intimate partner homicide in Philadelphia and Chicago, the woman's leaving the relationship was the motive in more than 1 in 4 cases in which a woman was killed by a male ex-partner. Similarly, Campbell (1992) found that attempts to reassert control over the ex-partner were the underlying cause of murders of women by estranged partners. In the majority of these killings, there was a documented history of abuse. It is not uncommon for women to report their batterers telling them, "If I can't have you, nobody can." Homicide, then, becomes the ultimate final control.

Although we are beginning to understand more about the prevalence of homicide against female ex-partners, less is known

about women's experiences of nonlethal abuse after they end abusive relationships. This is in spite of the fact that homicide is rare relative to ex-partner sublethal assaults. Research has begun to explore certain predictive factors that may be associated with intimate partner homicide. Documenting factors associated with sublethal ex-partner assaults is also needed to protect women from abusive ex-partners.

The Danger Assessment instrument (Campbell, 1995) is one list of factors found to be related to intimate partner homicide. These factors include the frequency and severity of previous abuse, threats, violent jealousy, and drug and alcohol use. Research on nonlethal intimate partner violence also suggests that drug and alcohol use by batterers tends to co-occur with violent behavior (e.g., Kantor & Straus, 1987). However, although alcohol and other drug use may co-occur with intimate partner violence, it is not a cause of the violence (Limandri & Sheridan, 1995; Miller & Wellford, 1997). Although research has examined factors related to lethal violence and to intimate partner violence in general, research has not examined these factors as they may relate specifically to violence against ex-partners.

The current study examined a number of variables related to the likelihood of assaults against an ex-partner, including prior violence and threats, timing of initial abuse within the relationship, batterer's substance abuse, batterer's level of sexual suspicion, whether the survivor was in a new relationship, and the batterer's access to the survivor (geographic proximity). Variables were selected based in part on lethality research (e.g., Campbell, 1986; Cazenave & Zahn, 1992; Wilson & Daly, 1993) and on theories of power and control (e.g., Sev'er, 1997; Wilson & Daly, 1992). The variables examined formed three blocks: batterer characteristics and behaviors, survivor characteristics and behaviors, and system response.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

This study presents data from a larger, longitudinal research project examining the effects of providing paraprofessional

advocacy services to women with abusive partners and ex-partners (see Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Participants were 278 women recruited from a domestic violence shelter program. The shelter program is located in a medium-sized industrial city with 130,000 residents. Approximately 70% of the city residents are White, 20% are African American, and 8% are Latino. One in five residents lives at or below the poverty line.

Women who spent at least one night in the shelter and who planned to remain in the area were invited to participate in the study; 93% of the eligible women agreed to participate. Women were interviewed six times: immediately on shelter exit, 10 weeks later, and then every 6 months for 2 years. At each of these interviews, the retention rate was more than 95%.

## MEASURES

Several measures of batterer behavior were examined: his physical violence, threats, sexual suspicion, alcohol and drug use, and proximity to the survivor. Several measures of women's behavior were also examined: the number of times the police had been contacted, the number of prior separations from the batterer, whether the woman was involved in a new relationship, and helpseeking efforts. System response was measured by the number of times the batterer was arrested.

*Physical violence experienced.* In each of the six interviews, an extended version of Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale was used to measure the frequency of the violence women experienced. This measure was quite reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .91 and corrected item total correlations ranging from .38 to .90. If women had experienced violence since the previous interview, they were asked if they had been involved with the batterer at the time of the violence.

Women were also asked how long after they had become involved with their batterer that they were first physically assaulted. On average, they had been involved 1.2 years ( $SD = 2.26$ ) prior to the first physical assault.

*Injuries.* If women indicated that there had been violence against them, they were asked to indicate if any of 10 injuries, such

as cuts or bruises, broken bones, soreness without bruising, or internal injuries, had resulted from the violence (Cronbach's alpha = .65 with corrected item total correlations from .26 to .40).

*Threats.* During each of the interviews, women were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale how often the batterer had threatened them (1 = *never* to 6 = *more than 4 times per week*). Women were also asked to indicate on a 4-point scale how often the batterer had threatened their family or friends (1 = *never* to 4 = *often*) during the 6 months before they came to the shelter.

*Sexual suspicion.* Based on findings from lethality research, women were asked during the initial interview how often their batterers had accused them of having or wanting other sexual relationships during the 6 months before they came to the shelter (1 = *never* to 6 = *more than 4 times per week*).

*Batterers' drug and alcohol use.* Women were asked to indicate if their batterers currently had an alcohol and/or drug problem during each of the interviews.

*Batterer proximity.* Women were asked to indicate at each interview whether their batterers lived in the same city they did or if they lived elsewhere.

*Calls to the police.* During the initial interview, women were asked how many times in the 6 months before they went to the shelter the police were called about the violence.

*Separations.* As part of the initial interview, women were asked how many separations they had had from their batterers prior to going to the shelter.

*New relationships.* Women who were not in a relationship with their batterers at the time of each interview were asked if they were involved in a new relationship.

*Helpseeking behaviors.* If women reported experiencing any violence by their ex-partners during the interview time frame, they

were asked to report who they told about the violence. Possible response options included the police, medical personnel, local shelter personnel, friends, and/or family members.

*Arrests.* Each woman was asked whether her batterer had ever been arrested for assaulting her at any time before she entered the shelter. If women reported experiencing any violence by their ex-partner during the interview time frame, they were asked to indicate how many times they contacted the police. Women who reported contacting the police about violence by their ex-partner after leaving the shelter were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with the police response (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 4 = *very satisfied*). These women were also asked whether their batterer was arrested.

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS PLAN

Initial inspection of the data revealed the complexities of attempting to study women's various experiences across time. Numerous unique patterns of uninvolvement, reinvolvement, and violence emerged. Some women were assaulted by their ex-partners only after multiple breakups; other women were assaulted by their ex-partners after the first breakup. Still other women were only assaulted while they were involved with their batterers. To facilitate a more straightforward description of factors related to violence by ex-partners across time, a subsample of women was selected. The analyses reported here were conducted using the group of women who were involved with their batterers when they came to the shelter, but who were no longer involved with them 10 weeks after shelter exit ( $n = 135$ ). The remaining women were either not involved with their batterers prior to shelter entry ( $n = 51$ ) or were involved with them 10 weeks after shelter exit ( $n = 92$ ). Limiting the analysis to women who had been involved with their batterers prior to shelter entry held constant the time since the relationship ended, and including only women still separated from their batterers 10 weeks after shelter exit ensured that all had some period at risk for abuse by an ex-partner.

Even within this sample, numerous patterns of uninvolvement, reinvolvement, and violence across the five time periods were

evident. To cope with the complexities in the data, the decision was made to examine only the time to either (a) the first incident of violence by an ex-partner, (b) the first reinvolvement with the batterer, or (c) the end of the study.

Event history analysis was used to examine factors related to women's different experiences of ex-partner violence. Because we did not know exactly when an assault had occurred within each time interval, we used a discrete rather than continuous time model (Allison, 1984). A logistic regression model was used, with a separate case created for each time a woman was known to be at risk of violence by her ex-partner. Cases were then censored at the time of violence by the ex-partner, at the time of reinvolvement, or at the end of the study period. For example, if a woman was not reinvolved with her ex-partner at the 6-month interview and reported an assault by the ex-partner at the 12-month interview, she would be represented by three cases: 10 weeks after shelter exit, 6 months, and 1 year. If a woman reported being reinvolved with her assailant at the 6-month interview, then she would have two cases: 10 weeks and 6 months. Factors about the batterers, about the women, and about the system were then entered into the logistic regression model, and their association with abuse by the ex-partner was examined.

## RESULTS

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Most of the 135 participants were African American (54%) or White (36%). A smaller percentage of the participants were Latina (6%) or Asian American (1%). Ages ranged from 17 to 59 with a mean age of 28 years. Before coming to the shelter, most women were living with but not married to their batterers (59%). About one in five (21%) were married to their batterers, and 18% were intimately involved but not living together. Nearly all of the participants had at least one child (92%). Approximately one third of women had less than a high school diploma (36%). Almost half (42%) had been employed since leaving the shelter.

### EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE BY AN EX-PARTNER OVER TIME

The time period of the first event (an assault by an ex-partner, reinvolved with the ex-partner, or the end of the study) was examined for each participant. One in three women (36%) were assaulted by an ex-partner at least once prior to either reuniting or the end of the study. The majority of the initial assaults by an ex-partner took place soon after the end of the relationship; 51% took place within 10 weeks of shelter exit. Although the risk of a first assault by an ex-partner decreased over time, it did not go away; 8% of first assaults by an ex-partner occurred between 18 months and 2 years after the relationship ended. For 11% of the women, reinvolved with their batterers was the first event prior to the end of the study. Slightly more than half of the participants (53%) were not assaulted by their ex-partners and did not become reinvolved with them. The number of women who were assaulted by an ex-partner and the number who were reinvolved with their batterer at each time period are shown in Figure 1.

Most of the incidents of violence by ex-partners were severe in nature. Nearly three quarters of the 49 women assaulted by their ex-partners (72%) were the victims of at least one form of severe or potentially lethal violence (see Straus, 1979), such as being kicked, raped, choked, stabbed, or shot (see Table 1). Violence by an ex-partner was not an isolated attack; one in four survivors experienced at least one form of severe or potentially lethal violence more than once a month.

Almost half of the women assaulted by ex-partners (45%) experienced some sort of injury. One third experienced cuts or bruises, one in five experienced sprains or strains, and 8% had broken bones. One in five women sought medical treatment for the injuries they experienced (21%). Of those who did seek medical treatment, the majority (70%) sought it more than once. Table 1 presents the level of violence and injuries experienced by women during initial re-assaults by ex-partners.

Women who were assaulted by their ex-partners sought help from both informal and formal help sources. Nearly three quarters (71%) told someone about the violence by their ex-partners. More than half (55%) told at least one informal source of help,

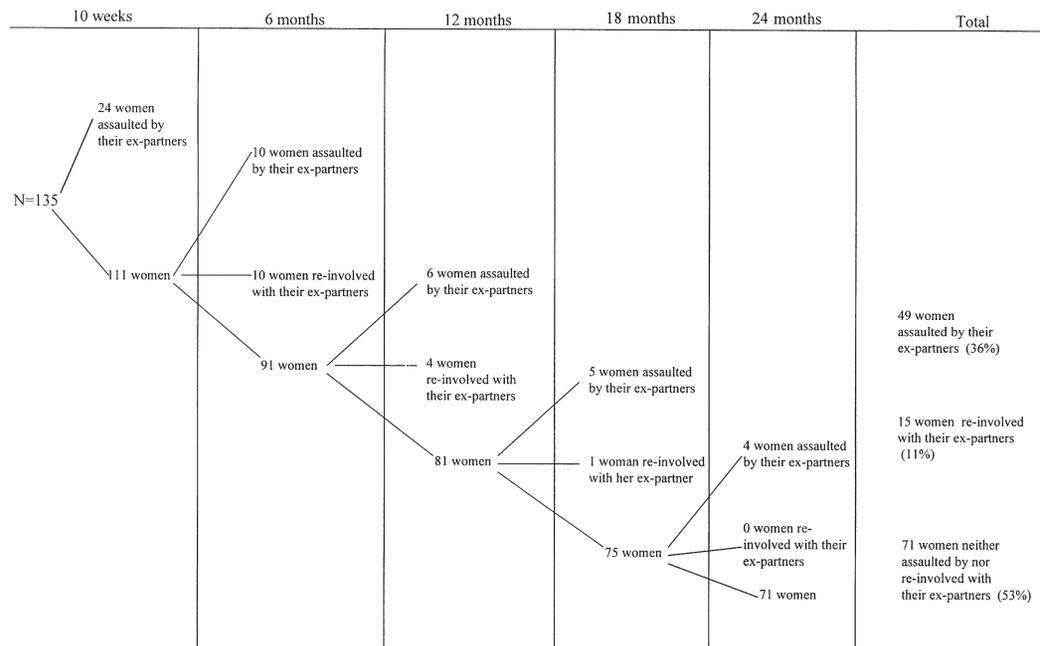


Figure 1: Womens' experiences of ex-partner violence and reinvolved over time

**TABLE 1**  
**Types of Violence and Injuries Perpetrated Against Women**  
**by Ex-Partners at Time of First Re-Assault (N = 49)**

	<i>% of Women</i>
Violence	
Grabbed	73
Pushed or shoved	55
Object thrown at	35
Slapped	33
Tore clothing	33
Choked	29
Punched	29
Threatened with gun or knife	27
Kicked	27
Raped	20
Hit with an object	16
Shot or stabbed	8
Injuries	
Soreness without bruising	37
Cuts or bruises	33
Sprains or strains	18
Broken bones	8
Dislocated joints	8
Internal injuries	4
Gun or knife wound	4

such as friends or family members, about the violence. About half of the women (49%) assaulted by their ex-partners told at least one formal source of help, such as shelter personnel, medical personnel, or the police.

Half of the women who were assaulted by their ex-partners called the police at least once, and of the 25 women who contacted the police, frequency of contact ranged from once to 30 times ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 5.98$ ). Overall, women who called the police at least once reported feeling "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with the general police response ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ). If the police were contacted, about two in five of the perpetrators (40%;  $n = 10$ ) were arrested.

#### **A MODEL OF EX-PARTNER VIOLENCE OVER TIME**

To explore some of the variables that may be related to violence by an ex-partner, event history analysis was used. A discrete time

method was selected, due to the 6-month time lags between interviews. This method of analysis employs a logistic regression model in which a separate case is created for each time that an individual was known to be at risk of violence by an ex-partner. In this instance, there were 469 "cases" (risk periods) where a survivor was at risk of assault by her ex-partner; in 48 of these cases such an assault occurred. Those cases where survivors became reinvolved with their batterers were censored at that time; this occurred in 15 instances. This method of analysis allowed for the use of predictors that are either constant (i.e., true for each woman at all time points) or varying over time (i.e., taking on different values for the same woman at different time periods; see Allison, 1991). Both types of variables were used in this analysis. Variables constant for each woman across time periods included frequency of violence prior to shelter entry, frequency of threats against her family or friends prior to shelter entry, the length of the relationship prior to the first assault, the batterer's sexual suspicion prior to shelter entry, the number of separations prior to shelter entry, the number of times the police were called prior to shelter entry, and whether the batterer was arrested prior to shelter entry. These constant variables were assessed immediately following shelter exit. Variables that varied over time were the batterer's residence (same city as woman or not), whether the batterer currently had an alcohol and/or drug problem, and whether the woman was currently in another relationship. Prior threats against the woman was a lagged predictor, measured at the interview prior to each risk period (e.g., threats reported at the 6-month interview were used as a predictor of violence at 12 months). Other time-varying predictors were measured over the same interval as each period of risk (e.g., whether the woman was involved in a new relationship at 6 months was used as a predictor of ex-partner violence at 6 months).

A logistic regression model was created in three steps. First, the frequency of partner violence prior to shelter entry was entered. Previous violence did not significantly improve model fit, but the decision was made to leave this predictor in the model because it was expected that prior violence would be related to subsequent violence and because the odds ratio was in the predicted direction. Survivors who had been assaulted more frequently prior to

**TABLE 2**  
**Variables Related to Violence by an Ex-Partner**

	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Frequency of violence prior to shelter entry	.55	NS	1.19
Batterer variables			
Threats against woman prior to assault	10.40	$p < .01$	1.36
Threats against her family/friends prior to shelter entry	1.12	NS	1.18
Length of relationship prior to first assault	5.52	$p < .05$	1.15
Batterer's extreme sexual suspicion prior to shelter entry	7.85	$p < .05$	1.85
Batterer's proximity (same city as woman or not)	18.20	$p < .001$	4.64
Batterer currently has alcohol/drug problem?	.37	NS	1.28
Survivor variables			
Number of separations prior to shelter entry	3.01	NS	1.00
Times police were called	.52	NS	.98
Is survivor currently in another relationship?	5.91	$p < .02$	.42
Criminal justice system factor			
Batterer ever arrested prior to shelter entry?	1.69	NS	1.66

a. Logistic regression model chi-square = 57.32,  $p < .001$ .

shelter entry appeared slightly, but not significantly, more likely to be assaulted by their ex-partner (odds ratio = 1.20).

Six assailant characteristics and behaviors were entered as the second block. These characteristics were threats against the woman, threats against her family or friends prior to shelter entry, the length of the relationship prior to the first assault, the batterer's sexual suspicion prior to shelter entry, whether the batterer currently lived in the same city as the woman, and the batterer's current alcohol and other drug use. As expected, this block of variables about the batterer was significantly related to whether violence occurred after the relationship ended ( $\chi^2 = 47.4, p < .001$ ). Each of these variables, as well as the wald statistics and odds ratios for each factor in the final model, are listed in Table 2.

Threats by the perpetrator at the previous interview time point were related to the likelihood of assault (odds ratio = 1.40). Women who were threatened more frequently at the previous time period were more likely to be assaulted by their ex-partners. A second measure of threats—how often prior to shelter entry the

batterer threatened her friends or family—was not significant (odds ratio = 1.13).

The longer the batterer and the woman had been involved before he first assaulted her, the more likely the batterer was to assault her after the relationship had ended (odds ratio = 1.16). Batterers who were more sexually suspicious were also more likely to assault their ex-partners (odds ratio = 1.65).

If the batterer and the woman no longer lived in the same city, she was less likely to be assaulted by her ex-partner (odds ratio = 4.37). It should be noted that the majority of women stayed in the same city; the difference seemed to be whether batterers moved out of the area.

The remaining variable in this block was not a significant predictor of ex-partner violence. Whether the batterer currently had an alcohol and/or drug problem was not related to whether he was assaultive after the relationship ended (odds ratio = 1.02).

The third block of variables entered was at least partially under the control of the woman: the number of separations prior to shelter entry, the number of times the police had been contacted prior to shelter entry, and whether the woman was currently involved in another relationship. This block was also significantly related to violence by an ex-partner ( $\chi^2(3) = 8.22, p < .05$ ). The first factor in this block, the number of previous separations from the assailant, was not significant (odds ratio = 1.00). The second factor, the number of times the police had been called prior to shelter entry, was also not significant (odds ratio = .99). The only significant factor in this block was whether the woman was currently involved in a new relationship (odds ratio = .42). Women who were involved in a new relationship were less likely to be assaulted by their ex-partners.

The final block entered consisted of a single variable representing the criminal justice system's response to the batterer. Whether the batterer had been arrested for an assault against her before the woman went to the shelter was not related to violence after the relationship ended (odds ratio = 1.66).

Overall, the full model did significantly improve prediction ( $\chi^2 = 57.3, p < .001$ ); however, the model only accounted for a small proportion (12%) of the variance (see Menard, 1995).

## DISCUSSION

For more than one third of the women in the sample, ending the relationship did not mean an end to the violence against them. Several variables were found to be related to violence by their ex-partners. Not surprisingly, most of the related variables were characteristics or behaviors of the batterers. With one exception, variables related to the survivors' behavior were not related to ex-partner violence against them.

Contrary to expectations, the frequency of violence prior to shelter entry, when a woman was involved with her batterer, was not related to the odds that she would be assaulted by him after the relationship ended. This absence of a relationship may be due to a ceiling effect; the participants had all gone to a shelter for women with abusive partners and thus all had experienced frequent and severe violence during the relationship. Although this predictor was not significant, it was in the expected direction; women who were assaulted more frequently prior to shelter entry were slightly, but not significantly, more likely to be assaulted after the end of the relationship.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the frequency of threats against the survivor during the prior time period was related to an increased risk of violence by the ex-partner during the subsequent time. This finding is consistent with the predominant theory of battering, which is that domestic violence is about the batterer controlling his partner (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Pence, 1999; Pence & Paymar, 1993). The batterer uses threats as a way to manipulate or control his partner. When the threats are not enough, the batterer uses violence. To keep women safe, criminal justice personnel and other service providers need to be aware of threats against the survivor and to take those threats seriously. On the other hand, the baseline (prior to shelter entry) frequency of threats against women's family or friends was not related to subsequent violence by ex-partners. This, again, was likely due to a ceiling effect, given the high levels of threats experienced by women prior to shelter entry.

An interesting finding was that those women who had been in a relationship longer before the first incident of violence were

more likely to be assaulted after the end of the relationship. If the relationship had lasted longer before the violence started, batterers may have had more invested in maintaining control over their partners. Thus, the violence may have started as a way to continue that control. Once the survivors ended the relationships, these batterers may have continued to use violence to re-exert control. In contrast, if the relationship was shorter before the violence started, the batterers may have been more comfortable with the end of that relationship. They may have had less investment in that particular relationship and were thus less invested in maintaining control over that particular woman.

The more often batterers had accused survivors of having or of wanting other sexual relationships before they went to the shelter, the more likely they were to continue to be violent after the end of the relationship. Consistent with prior research (Sev'er, 1997; Wilson & Daly, 1992), this sexual suspicion may be another part of a pattern of control. Service providers and criminal justice system personnel need to be aware that extreme sexual suspicion is not the same as ordinary jealousy or insecurity. Instead, it may be a warning sign of increased violence.

Whether the survivors and the batterers lived in the same area was also related to the likelihood of violence by an ex-partner. Perhaps not surprisingly, if they did live in the same area, batterers were more likely to assault their ex-partners. Interestingly, nearly all of the survivors stayed in the area; the difference appears to be whether the batterers stayed as well. However, this may well be a spurious relationship: Those batterers who for other reasons are more likely to assault their ex-partners may also be less likely to move away.

Whether a batterer had ever been arrested for an assault against the woman (before she went to the shelter) was not related to whether he assaulted her after the relationship ended. Unfortunately, the current research could not address batterers' entire previous arrest histories for assaults against other partners and/or for other violent crimes. To the extent that some batterers are violent across relationships, only addressing arrests for violence against a current partner may not be enough. Research studies using more inclusive measures of criminal history do suggest that men with prior arrests are more violent toward their partners (Browne, 1988; Campbell, 1995). Moreover, prior research on the police re-

sponse to woman battering (e.g., Stalans & Finn, 1995; Worden & Pollitz, 1984) suggests that factors besides the violence also affect police officers' decisions to arrest. Future research needs to address whether batterers' history of violence and/or criminal records are related to violence against their ex-partners.

Alcohol and drug use by batterers during the current time period was not related to violence against ex-partners. This finding is consistent with the feminist position that, although some batterers may abuse alcohol and other drugs, their drug use does not cause their violent behavior (Limandri & Sheridan, 1995; Miller & Wellford, 1998). However, the current research only asked if the batterers had an alcohol and/or drug problem. Frequency of use and whether batterers were using alcohol or other drugs during assaults was not asked. A more refined measure of alcohol or drug use may have led to different findings.

Three variables that were at least partially under the control of survivors were also examined as possible correlates of ex-partner violence. Two of these variables—the number of previous separations and the number of times the police had been called prior to shelter entry—were not related to violence by ex-partners. The number of separations prior to shelter entry is an interesting variable. Women who feared retaliation for separating may have had fewer separations prior to going to the shelter. In contrast, those women who experienced more frequent and/or more severe violence may have had more separations. Other issues, such as economic dependence, may well affect the number and length of separations from violent partners. Unfortunately, the current research did not examine why these separations occurred.

The number of times the police had been contacted before women went to the shelter also was not related to violence by their ex-partners. Common sense might argue that the more frequent or severe the violence, the more likely the police would be contacted. This frequent and/or severe violence, however, might also prevent women from getting to a phone. Women may also be threatened with increased violence should they contact police. Given the number of reasons that affect women's decisions to call the police (see Fleury, Sullivan, Bybee, & Davidson, 1998), it is not surprising that calls to the police were not related to violence by an ex-partner. In contrast, if survivors actually were involved in another intimate relationship at a given risk period, their ex-

partner was less likely to assault them. These new relationships may be acting as a protective factor. It may be harder for batterers to find survivors alone, or they may be avoiding a confrontation with new partners. Even this variable, which is under partial control of the survivor, is likely protective because of the way it affects batterers' decisions and behavior. Clearly, it is the batterers' behaviors—not the women's—that need to be addressed if we are to end intimate partner violence.

Accounting for assaults that prevent a woman from leaving a relationship needs to be addressed in future research. Mahoney's (1991) definition of separation assault includes assaults that seek to prevent women from leaving. This definition suggests that most research, including the current study, will underestimate the rates of separation assault. Only those cases where women were assaulted after the end of the relationship were considered in the current research, but more women may have been assaulted because they threatened to leave or because their batterers thought they might leave. These sorts of assaults may have actually prevented some women from leaving. We as a community need to address the needs of survivors who are not ending relationships at least in part because they know the violence will only get worse or because they are simply prevented from leaving.

In this research, the survivors all had recently left a shelter. A sample from a shelter may or may not also represent experiences of women who never went to a shelter. Unfortunately, little information exists on how battered women who use shelters are different from those who do not. Further research needs to examine the experiences of ex-partner violence against those women who choose not to go to a shelter.

If we as a community are going to stop violence against women, we also need much more research and intervention focusing on intervening with batterers. It is their violent behavior, not the survivors' decisions to stay or leave, that determines whether a survivor will be assaulted again. The current study was part of a larger project with a different focus and thus could not thoroughly address issues pertaining to ex-partner abuse. For example, are there differences in the types of threats made by those batterers who are more likely to assault ex-partners? Why do some batterers

leave their ex-partners alone, whereas others do not? What kinds of other controlling behaviors do batterers use against their ex-partners? Future research also needs to examine the patterns of violence by ex-partners, including the frequency of repeat assaults, the types of violence, and the adequacy of community responses to the survivor and to the batterer.

Other research has explored behaviors such as violence outside of the relationship and violence toward children (Browne, 1988; Campbell, 1995; Saunders, 1995) that are related to whether men batter their partners. Research needs to continue to focus on batterers' motivations for battering and to explore what is necessary to change their behavior.

The complexities of women's lives also make avoiding the batterer, even after the relationship is over, that much more difficult, particularly if children are involved. Women may need to continue contact with their batterers due to custody and visitation issues. Even when children are not involved, survivors and batterers may still live in the same area or have other social connections to each other. Expecting survivors to move away or to cut important social ties as a means of protecting themselves is unrealistic and unfair.

Overall, of the subsample of survivors who ended the relationship after leaving the shelter, more than half were not later assaulted. For some women, then, ending the relationship did lead to increased safety. Also, some of those women who were assaulted by an ex-partner may still have been safer than they were while in the relationship, even though the violence continued. Some of the women who were not assaulted by their ex-partners may have experienced greater fear of them because they knew their leaving could trigger more severe violence. Additional research needs to explore these complex and difficult issues.

Ultimately, the survivors themselves are in the best position to determine whether staying or ending the relationship is the best decision for their lives. We as a community need to ensure that women have the resources and support they need to make that decision. Ultimately, survivors of intimate partner violence are not in control of whether they are assaulted again. They will only be safe when we as a community hold batterers accountable for their behavior.

## NOTE

1. At the initial interview, women were asked about the 6 months before they went to the shelter.

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*Ruth E. Fleury is an assistant professor of individual and family studies at the University of Delaware. Her research focuses on the criminal justice system and community response to violence against women.*

*Cris M. Sullivan is an associate professor of ecological/community psychology at Michigan State University and director of evaluation for the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Her research areas of expertise include developing and evaluating community interventions for battered women and evaluating victim services.*

*Deborah I. Bybee is an associate professor of ecological/community psychology at Michigan State University. Her primary interest is in quantitative methods and how they can be used to understand complex real-world phenomena, especially those that are longitudinal in nature. Substantively, she has applied her methodological interests to a variety of areas, including advocacy for women with abusive partners, intervention with children who have witnessed domestic violence, housing assistance for individuals who are homeless and mentally ill, supported education for individuals with a mental illness, and mothering by women coping with a serious mental illness.*