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Domestic violence in general practice: prevalence and predictors

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HUNTER CENTRE FOR HEALTH ADVANCEMENT

**Domestic Violence in General
Practice: Prevalence and
Predictors.**

A BRIEF REPORT

Sallie Newell & Lucy Bates

August 1996

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Introduction

Why Investigate Domestic Violence in General Practice?

Domestic violence is associated with major health, social and economic costs: in New South Wales alone, it has been estimated that the annual cost of domestic violence is \$1.5 billion. Although there have been few methodologically adequate assessments of the prevalence of domestic violence, it has been estimated that up to one third of Australian women will experience domestic violence at some time in their lives.

As the vast majority of women attend a general practitioner (GP) at least once a year, general practice represents a reasonable place for the detection of victims of domestic violence. Therefore, it was decided to conduct this study to assess the prevalence of domestic violence among women attending a GP and to attempt to identify predictors which could alert GPs to the possibility of domestic violence.

What is Domestic Violence?

For this study, a woman was classified as having experienced domestic violence if she reported that she had been injured by someone close to her, such as a relative or partner, and that the injury was intentional or occurred when the perpetrator was out of control owing to alcohol, drugs or other circumstances. This definition was used in an attempt to identify women who had been hurt by their partners but did not use the label “domestic violence” to describe the cause of their injuries.

Survey Methods

Who was Surveyed?

We set out to survey 20 women from each of 20 general practices, giving a total sample of 400 women. In order to achieve this, we approached a total of X women. X (X%) of these women were eligible to take part in the survey and 395 (X%) of these eligible women consented and completed the survey. Women were considered ineligible for the survey if {insert exclusion criteria, with numbers & % excluded for each reason}.

What Did the Survey Ask About?

The survey, which was administered by trained female interviewers and took between 10 and 30 minutes to complete, included questions relating to four main areas:

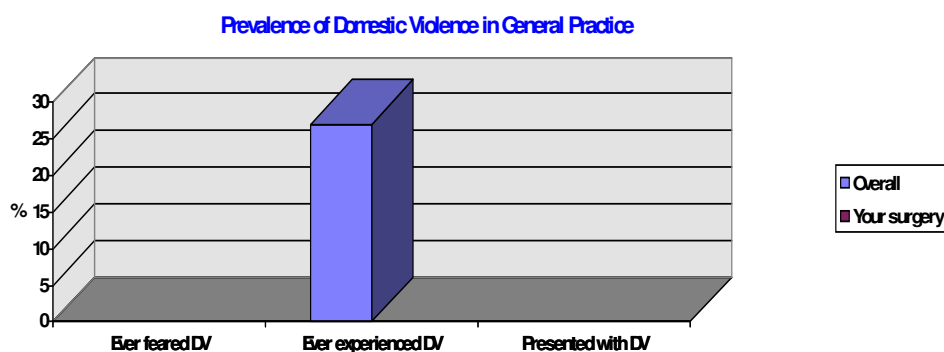
- **Demographic information:** about the woman and her partner, if relevant.
- **Reason for attending the practice:** these were divided into four categories - injury or accident, illness, social or to obtain medications. This section included questions about whether the woman's visit was a result of the behaviour of another person.
- **History of domestic violence - as a victim:** women were asked if they had ever been physically hurt by someone close to them. Women answering yes were asked a further series of questions about the most recent incident, as well as where, if anywhere, they had sought help and what action they had taken, if any.
- **History of domestic violence - as a perpetrator:** women were asked if they had ever hurt another adult. Women answering yes were asked a further series of questions about the most recent incident, as well as where, if anywhere, they had sought help for this problem.
- **Wind down:** this section returned to the reason for the woman's current visit and how she travelled to the practice. This section was intended to defuse any anxiety experienced by women when answering the violence-related questions.

Survey Results - Women as Victims

How Many Women Had Experienced Domestic Violence?

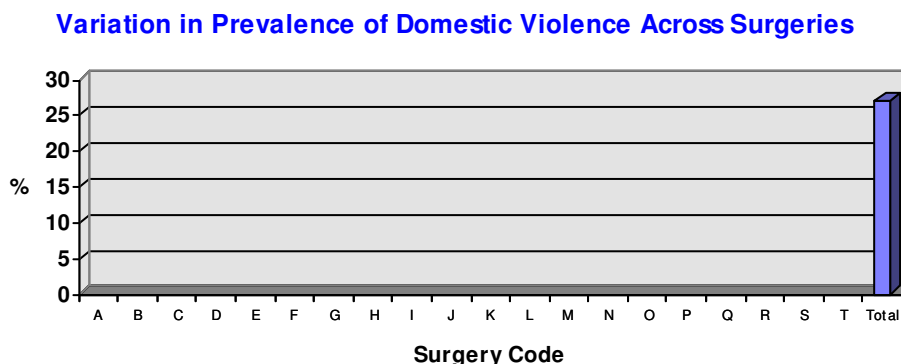
As shown in the graph below, of the 395 women surveyed:

- 105 (27%) reported having experienced domestic violence at some time in the past. The prevalence among women attending your practice was {much higher/slightly higher/about the same/slightly lower/much lower} than the prevalence among all women surveyed.
- X (X%) reported that they had, at some time, feared that they might be physically hurt by someone close to them. The prevalence among women attending your practice was {much higher/slightly higher/about the same/slightly lower/much lower} than the prevalence among all women surveyed.
- X (X%) were categorised as presenting with domestic violence: X with injuries and X with illnesses attributable to domestic violence. The prevalence among women attending your practice was {much higher/slightly higher/about the same/slightly lower/much lower} than the prevalence among all women surveyed.



How Did the Prevalence of Domestic Violence Vary Between Surgeries?

As shown in the graph below...{summarise differences and/or similarities}.



Which Women Had Experienced Domestic Violence?

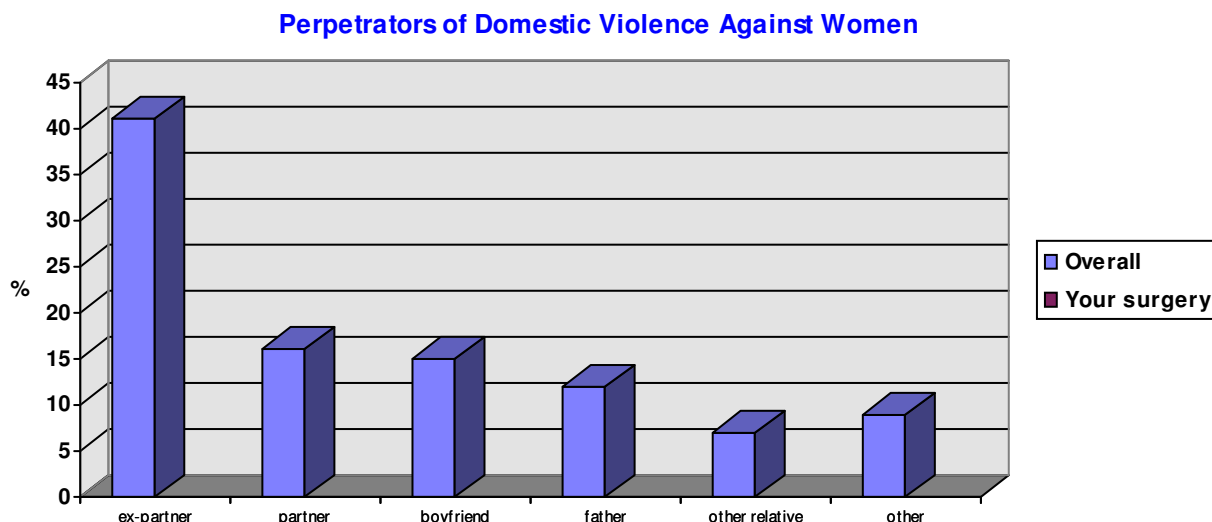
The table below summarises the demographic characteristics of the overall sample of women surveyed and compares those women who reported having experienced domestic violence with those who did not. Census data describing all women in the region is also included to show the representativeness of the overall sample.

Characteristic	1991 Census (N=???)	Total Sample (N=395)	Victims (N=105)	Non-Victims (N=290)
Age				
17 - 29 years		26%		
30 - 39 years		20%		
40 - 59 years		26%		
60+ years		28%		
Place of Birth				
English-speaking		95%		
Non-English-speaking		5%		
Education Level				
< HSC		63%		
HSC, technical or nursing		31%		
Tertiary		6%		
Religion				
None		14%		
Catholic		27%		
Anglican		35%		
Uniting Church		16%		
Other		8%		
Marital Status				
Married or de facto		56%		
Divorced or separated		15%		
Single or widowed		29%		
Private Medical Cover				
No		57%		
Yes		43%		
Employment Status				
Full-time		16%		
Part-time		24%		
Other		60%		

As shown in the above table, victims of domestic violence were more likely to be {insert characteristics with sig diffs} than the non-victims.

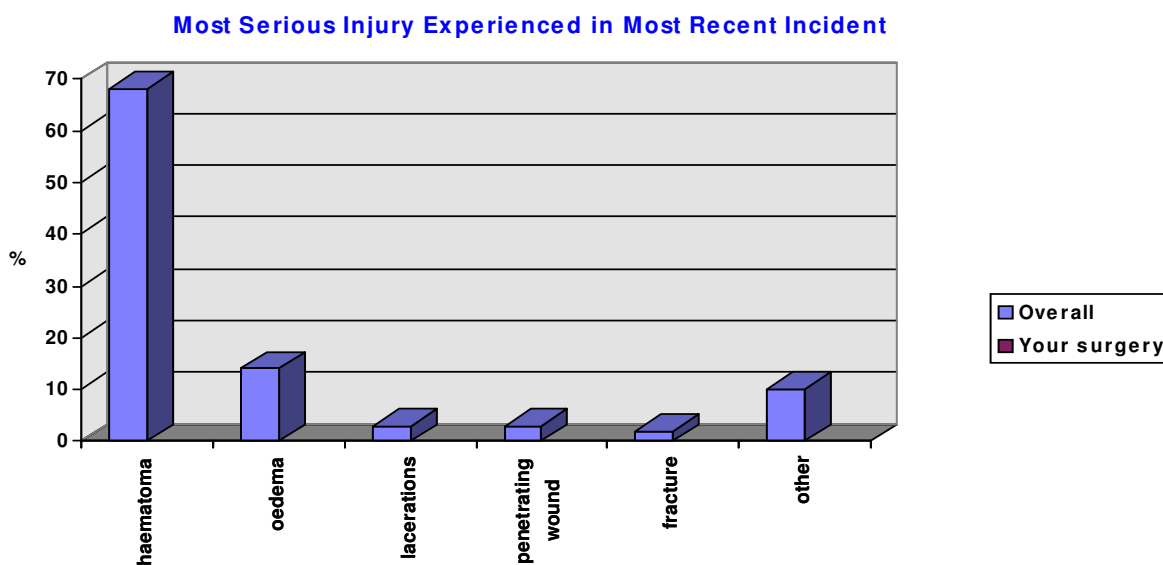
Who Were the Perpetrators of Domestic Violence Against Women?

As shown in the graph below, ex-partners represented the most common group of perpetrators, followed by current partners and boyfriends. {compare to this surgery}



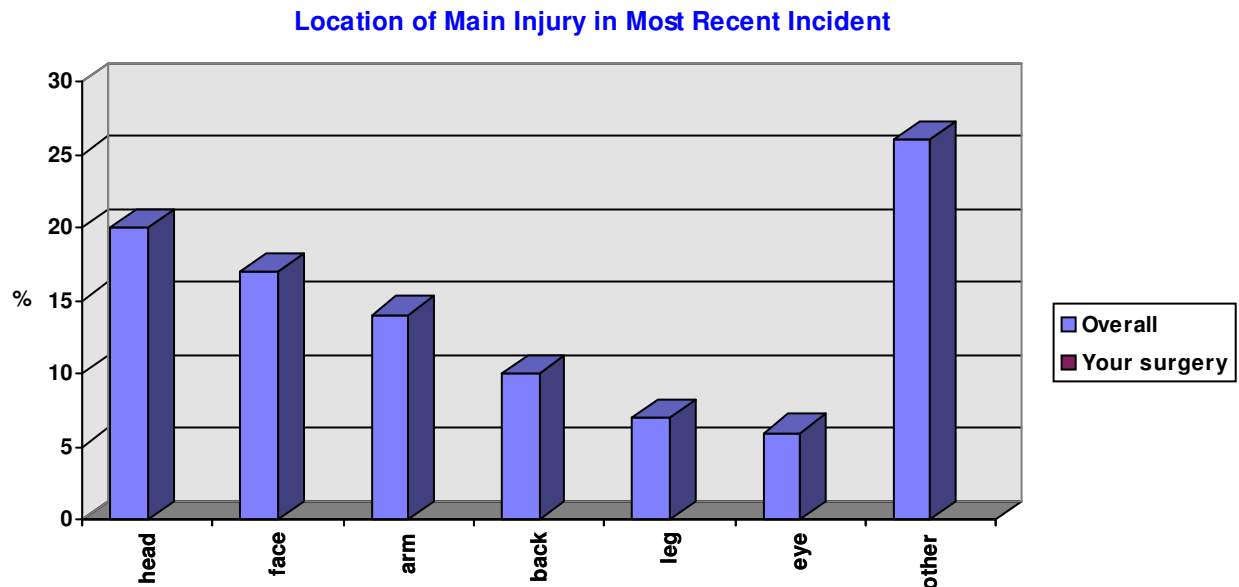
What Types of Injuries Did the Women Experience?

The 105 women with a history of domestic violence were asked about the most serious injury sustained during their most recent domestic violence incident. As shown in the graph below, haematomas represented the most commonly reported injury, followed by oedemas among the overall sample. {compare to this surgery}



Where Were the Women Injured?

As shown in the graph below, women's heads, faces and arms were the most common sites of injury. {compare to this surgery}



Where Did Injured Women Seek Treatment?

Of the 105 women reporting having been physically injured as a result of domestic violence:

- 62% reported having treated themselves at home.
- 8% reported having visited a GP for treatment.
- 5% reported having been admitted to hospital.
- 12% reported having done nothing for their injuries.

What Actions Did Women Take to Prevent Further Domestic Violence?

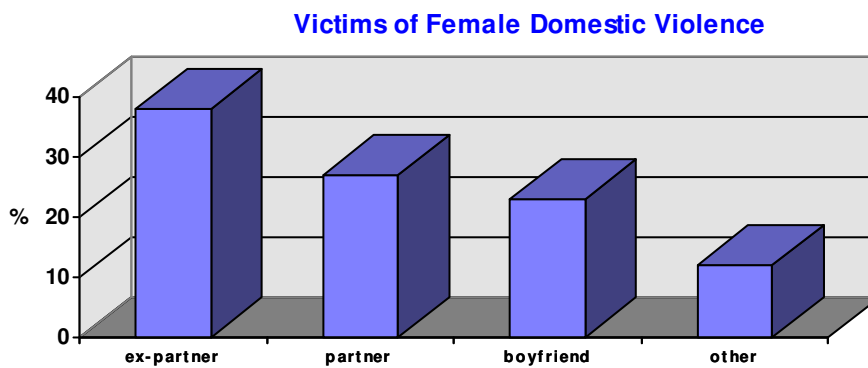
Of the 105 women reporting having been physically injured as a result of domestic violence:

- 47% reported having moved out of home.
- 35% reported having gone to the police for help.
- 33% reported having asked the perpetrator to leave.
- 18% reported having gone to see a counsellor.
- 12% reported having taken other actions.

Survey Results - Women as Perpetrators

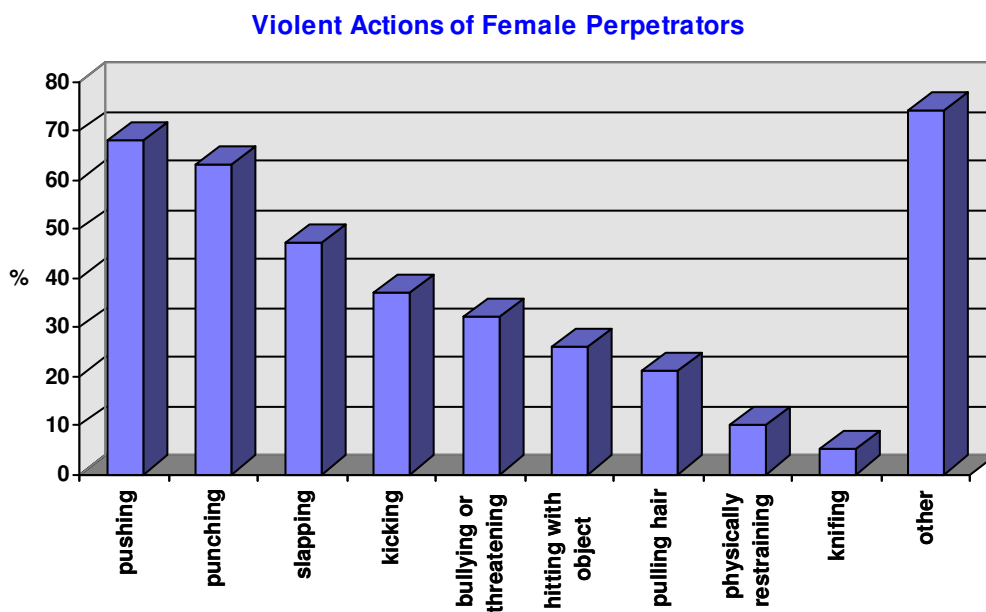
Who Do Women Perpetrate Domestic Violence Against?

Of the 395 women surveyed, 26 (7%) reported having hurt another adult. As shown in the graph below, ex-partners represented the most common group of victims, followed by current partners and boyfriends. With this small number of female perpetrators, it is not meaningful to present the data for individual surgeries.



What Types of Violence Did Women Perpetrate?

The graph below shows the proportion of the 26 female perpetrators of domestic violence who reported having done each of the following during their last violent incident. As shown, pushing, punching and slapping were the most commonly reported violent actions.



Where To From Here?

The results of this survey confirm the belief that domestic violence is a major public health problem in Australia - with approximately 1 in 4 women attending general practice reporting having experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives.

What next??