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Document Title: Public Opinion about Domestic Violence

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Document No.: 198319

Date Received: December 2002

Award Number: 98-WT-VX-0018

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Public Opinion About Domestic Violence

Draft Report

National Institute of Justice 98-wt-vx-0018

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February 5, 2001

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ACCEPTED AS FINAL REPORT

Approved By: *Debra Rosen*

Date: 11/21/2002

FINAL REPORT

Approved By: *M Battle*

Date: 11/21/02

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

I. Introduction

Historically, society has viewed violence between married and unmarried partners as a private and possibly intractable problem, one ill-suited for legal or community responses. Since the 1960s, however, when feminist advocates brought the problem of partner abuse to the attention of the public and policy makers, criminal justice system processing of domestic violence cases has been criticized. Police were criticized because they did not take wife assault seriously, were reluctant to arrest, and treated domestic violence victims differently from victims of stranger violence (Fagan and Browne, 1994). Prosecutors were criticized because they too often dismissed wife assault cases, contributing to disincentives for police to arrest. Judges, too, have been criticized for their reluctance to impose serious sanctions, or to utilize intermediate sanctions such as probation and mandated treatment for batterers, unless victims were seriously injured (Fagan and Browne, 1994). The system in general has been criticized for being insensitive to victims' needs and deaf to their preferences.

Since late 1970s, reforms in criminal justice policy and practice have increasingly criminalized partner violence, and more recently reforms have addressed the needs and problems of victims. For the most part, however, the focus of criminal justice system attention in domestic violence cases has been on the sanction and control of known offenders, and more recently their rehabilitation. Over the past decade, the cornerstone of this strategy has been specific deterrence:

holding offenders accountable for violent incidents, largely through more extensive use of arrest and, more recently, treatment programs (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1993; Sherman, 1992; Stark, 1993). Only recently have public policy makers and practitioners begun to systematically augment this strategy, through programs aimed at increasing victim and witness reporting, improving victims' access to the legal system and social services, initiating public information campaigns, and contributing to primary prevention through education. These innovations are grounded in the premise that community awareness and intervention, and an informed and responsive public, are necessary elements of any strategy aimed at long-term reduction of violence.

The purpose of this research is to learn more about public attitudes and beliefs about violent and abusive relationships. Specifically, this study explores public beliefs about the causes of violence, the extent and accuracy of knowledge about laws regarding domestic violence, views about appropriate criminal justice responses to domestic violence cases, and perceptions of community criminal justice practices. The following chapters report the results of analyses of a survey of 1200 respondents in six communities, not only examining variation on these beliefs, but also testing hypotheses about the influence of respondents' social background and experiences, as well as community context, on beliefs and opinions. Increasing our knowledge about these issues is important for several reasons.

First, public policies and criminal justice strategies directed toward domestic violence — deterrence; holding offenders accountable; better identification and screening of victims; more aggressive enforcement and prosecution; victim assistance, protection, and empowerment; and especially, prevention — are linked to assumptions about what the public knows and believes

about the causes domestic violence, what society should (and should not) do when it occurs, and what difference it is likely to make. For example, stringent arrest and sentencing laws aimed at deterring would-be offenders can only be effective if the potential offenders believe such laws exist and will be enforced. Enforcement of such laws and more effective identification of victims relies upon the willingness of victims and witnesses (as well as their family members and acquaintances) to see violence and abuse as unacceptable criminal behavior rather than merely "private troubles." Interventions that attempt to challenge offenders' denial, minimization, and rationalization may be thwarted if peers express values and attitudes that endorse male violence. Further, the effectiveness of these strategies may be influenced by contextual factors such as community values that support or oppose public responsibility for the amelioration of partner violence.

Second, understanding public attitudes and the extent of public knowledge about domestic violence is important because citizen perceptions about this complex social problem and beliefs about what should be done about it form the context in which public policy is formulated and criminal justice agencies respond. Many people have first- and second-hand knowledge of abusive relationships among friends, relatives, or acquaintances (Klein, Campbell, Soler, and Ghez, 1997); and increasingly, the efforts of victim advocates, as well as media attention, have reduced the social stigma of victimization. However, despite widespread exposure to this form of violence, few people come into direct contact with criminal justice officials, and those who do may receive ambiguous messages about culpability and blame. As a result, they may misapprehend not only the criminal nature of the behavior, but also the nature of the official reaction to an incident report.

Third, victims' utilization of legal remedies and their participation in prosecution may be related to their perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system (Stalans, 1996). People may not report victimization because they expect an unhelpful response or no response, they may fear intrusive measures, or they simply believe that, despite good intentions, the law cannot protect victims. For the same reasons, friends or relatives may dissuade victims from reporting violent incidents.

Finally, although partner violence is more proximate to many people's lives than most other forms of crime, and although intervention strategies are often grounded in premises about what the public believes (including the extent of consensus and malleability of those beliefs), our baseline knowledge about public beliefs regarding domestic violence is limited. National surveys, such as the Family Violence Prevention Fund's recent survey (Klein et al., 1997) have provided valuable information about some aspects of public opinion, such as how people distinguish abusive behavior from violent behavior that they feel *should be* criminalized, and have begun to identify patterns of similarities and differences in beliefs across population subgroups. But we still know little about how the public perceives criminal justice responses, how those perceptions vary, and what factors influence that variation.

II Research on Public Opinion About Domestic Violence

Although there is little published research regarding what the public thinks about domestic violence, several areas of inquiry merit investigation. First, what sorts of behavior does the public believe constitute domestic violence, and under what conditions are such behaviors considered excusable or justifiable? Second, how do people account for domestic violence?

Third, at what point does the public believe that domestic violence or abuse ceases to be a private matter and becomes a social issue that warrants some type of public intervention -- and of what should such interventions consist? Relatedly, how knowledgeable are people about contemporary legal responses to domestic violence? Finally, given the diversity of public beliefs on all these questions, to what, if anything, should variation in opinions be attributed?

Definitions, Perceptions of Prevalence, and Tolerance of Domestic Violence

The few empirical studies that have queried respondents about what constitutes domestic violence suggest that the public defines this concept broadly. Recent research suggests that a majority of the public generally regards acts of physical aggression (e.g., slapping, shoving, hitting, punching) between intimate partners as domestic violence (Johnson and Sigler, 1995; Klein et al., 1997). In fact, the Family Violence Prevention Fund's (FVPF) poll found that even a loud fight involving screaming was labeled domestic violence by over half of their national sample.¹ Similarly, Johnson and Sigler (1995) found that a majority of their Alabama respondents regarded acts of emotional abuse such as telling a person she was worthless, making her stay at home, or not talking with her as "sometimes" or "always" spouse abuse.

Because early studies did not ask similar questions, we cannot determine whether public attitudes about what constitutes domestic violence have changed, although it is reasonable to suppose that one consequence of increased public attention to the subject has been that the public

¹ This interpretation is subject to reconsideration, however, since respondents may have been expressing the view that overhearing such a fight would signal a reasonable probability that physical violence was occurring, or about to occur — not necessarily that arguing alone constitutes "violence".

has been socialized to use the term "domestic violence" to include a broader range of abusive behavior than merely severe physical violence. Only one study has considered changing attitudes over time: Johnson and Sigler (2000) compared responses at three points in time (1986-87, 1991-92 and 1996-97) among Alabama adults. They found that by the third time period most respondents defined all acts of physical violence as abuse, although 20% did not consider occasional hitting with a belt or stick abusive. Over time they also observed an increase in the percentage of respondents who considered wife abuse a felony (Johnson and Sigler, 2000).

Regarding perceptions of prevalence, there is evidence that the public not only sees domestic violence as a common problem but may, in fact, overestimate its prevalence and impact. In the FVPPF survey (Klein et al., 1997), on average respondents estimated that half of all men have used violence toward intimate partner, more than double the lifetime prevalence based on national probability samples of self-reported violence (Straus and Gelles, 1986) and much higher than more recent surveys. For example, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000), using data from the National Violence Against Women Survey, found that a lifetime intimate partner violence prevalence for women of 20%; annual incidence was 1.1%, which is consistent with findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995).

Regarding secondhand experience, approximately one-third of the FVPPF respondents reported having personally observed a man beat his wife or girlfriend, and 15% said they had witnessed a woman beat her husband or boyfriend (Klein et al., 1997). Stalans (1996) found that her respondents estimated the extent of injury to the wife in spouse abuse cases to be 67%, although reported injury rates are significantly lower. For example, 42% of women who reported partner violence in the National Violence Against Women survey reported injuries (Tjaden and

Thoennes, 2000). This relatively low rate of injury is due largely to the fact that the majority of intimate partner violence consists of acts of "minor" violence such as slapping and shoving, which may have powerful effects on victims' mental health and sense of safety, but do not cause injuries that are likely to lead to criminal conviction in most states (Straus and Gelles, 1986).

Regarding tolerance of wife assault, the earliest survey findings of public acceptance of marital violence are inconsistent. For example, Stark and McEvoy's (1970) research indicated that only 20% of those polled approved of a man slapping his spouse, while a survey of male college students and businessmen found that 62% believed that "sometimes" spousal violence would be appropriate (for example, in response to an extramarital affair) (Whitehurst, 1971, cited in Klein et al., 1997). Using data from the 1975 national survey regarding family violence, Dibble and Straus (1980) reported that 28% of their respondents agreed that slapping a spouse was "necessary," "normal" or "good," although only 5% agreed that it was all three.² A later telephone interview study replicating Stark and McEvoy's (1970) domestic violence questions with small sample of New Jersey adults found that two thirds of the thirty male respondents and half of the fifty female respondents identified some circumstances under which they believed it would be "appropriate or reasonable" for a husband to hit his wife (Greenblat, 1983). The most common justifications mentioned by male respondents were the wife's behavior, self-defense or defense of a child, the husband's feelings, or the husband's use of drugs or alcohol. Women's justifications included the wife's behavior, the husband's feelings, and the husband's insanity or

²Interestingly, one-third of those with the most pro-violent attitudes (the 5% who saw slapping as necessary, normal, and good) reported having actually engaged in violence toward a spouse. Among respondents who were less tolerant of or approving of violence, only 8% reported having engaged in violence toward their wife or husband (Dibble and Straus, 1980).

drunkenness.

Based on these early studies, it appears that although only a small segment of the population believed that violence is appropriate, a larger percentage could imagine circumstances under which it would be justifiable. More recently, in a survey of Alabama adults, Sigler (1989) reported that 86% said that hitting a spouse was always wrong, while 11% said it was sometimes wrong. Over two-thirds said they would sometimes report such an act to the police. The most recent public opinion research on this topic, the FVPPF survey (Klein, et al, 1997) did not inquire about the moral or social acceptability of partner assault. However, the weight of the earlier and more limited studies' findings suggest low tolerance for use of physical aggression in marriage. In combination with other findings regarding the public's willingness to label physical aggression and acts of emotional abuse as domestic violence, one might surmise that social tolerance of wife abuse has diminished.

Beliefs About Causes of Domestic Violence

Much has been written about causes of and risk factors for intimate partner violence. A recent summary of this research concluded that no single factor explains the occurrence of domestic violence (Carlson, Worden, van Ryn, and Bachman, in press). Rather, risk is associated with numerous factors, including social background (youth, low income, urban residence), relationship characteristics (conflict, marital status), and history and characteristics of perpetrators as well as victims (early exposure to family violence, stress, and personality problems of offenders).

Despite extensive research on the causes of intimate partner violence, we know little about the average citizen's perceptions or beliefs about these causes. Public perceptions of

causes, contributing factors, or risk factors are important because they have implications for effective prevention and intervention programs. Only the recent FVPF surveys systematically studied this issue, and these findings suggest that respondents have difficulty identifying causes of domestic violence (Klein, et al. 1997). For example, many respondents were uncertain about causes, and in the aggregate they responded differently to open-ended and close-ended questions, suggesting that views about the causes of violence are not well-formed.

Research suggests that people attribute domestic violence to diverse causes. Respondents in early studies accounted for violence in terms of stress experienced by the abuser and the victim, as well as the abuser's personality (Davis and Carlson, 1981). In the FVPF study, causes commonly mentioned were the husband's need to control the wife and get his way, witnessing spousal assault as a child, drunkenness, emotional disturbance, and lack of communication skills (Klein et al., 1997). A study of jurors' knowledge of battered women, although not about causes of domestic violence per se, offers additional information about what the public believes about spouse assault dynamics. Respondents "understood that these women typically feel anxious, depressed, and helpless to change their situations, that they believe their husbands might kill them, and that leaving would result in further harm" (Greene, Raitz, and Lindblad, 1989, p. 116), but not that victims may provoke violence to get it over with.

For the most part, the public does not blame female victims for abuse, although they hold women accountable for exiting abusive relationships. Stalans's study of Georgia jury pool members (1996) found little evidence that the public attributes violence to victim behavior. However, research on service providers has concluded that although this group holds husbands primarily responsible for abusing their wives, they do not hold victims altogether blameless

(Davis and Carlson, 1981; Kalmuss, 1979). Likewise, Ewing and Aubrey (1987) found that 38% of their sample of middle class, educated potential jurors held the wife "at least somewhat responsible" for being abused in a hypothetical scenario, and about the same number believed that she would be "at least somewhat masochistic" if she didn't leave in response to continued beating by her husband. Finally, the FVPF (Klein et al., 1997) study reports that one in eight respondents held women responsible in some way for partner violence.

In summary, people attribute violence to many different causes, although there is some evidence that beliefs about causes of violence are not well-formed or strongly held. Some research suggests that respondents are aware of the complexity of partner violence, but a significant minority may continue to underestimate the difficulties women face in leaving violent relationships.

Opinions About Criminal Justice and Community Responses to Violence

While several studies have examined people's opinions about what should occur following a domestic violence incident, how one interprets the findings of these studies depends on whether one is judging respondents' beliefs about what victims should do about violent relationships, what criminal justice agents should do with violent perpetrators, or what communities should do about the social problem of domestic violence.

Research suggests that most people believe that women should extract themselves from abusive relationships. Carlson's (1996) vignette study of college students found that respondents overwhelmingly recommended that relationships should be terminated in response to a dating violence incident and that both victim and perpetrator should receive counseling – outcomes that

rarely happen in practice (Makepeace, 1981; Pirog-Good and Stets, 1989).³ Likewise, in their study of attitudes toward domestic violence among a jury pool sample, Ewing and Aubrey (1987) found that respondents overwhelmingly thought the solution to the domestic violence depicted for them was counseling sought by the wife-victim (a "solution" endorsed by 83% of respondents). In contrast, only 16% thought the wife should stay with the abusive husband and could rely on the police and courts to keep her safe.

Research also suggests support for criminal justice interventions, particularly when respondents are presented with hypothetical scenarios that involve injuries. Stalans (1996) asked respondents to select preferred police responses for detailed domestic violence scenarios. When no visible injuries were described, respondents preferred that police give advice (44%), separate the disputants (28%), mediate (13%), or do nothing (15%); only 1.3% preferred arrest. In contrast, participants responded to depictions of moderate injuries with preferences for separation of the parties (34%), giving of advice (29%), arrest (26%), and mediation (10%). Those who were reluctant to recommend arrest also tended to believe that arrest would not lead to a conviction, an accurate appraisal of what occurs most often in actual practice in many jurisdictions (see Ford and Regoli, 1993; Rebovich, 1996). Presence of injuries was the strongest predictor of arrest among vignette characteristics, also an accurate reflection of historical practice when arrest is a discretionary decision (Berk and Loseke, 1980; Friday, Metzgar, and Walters, 1991; Worden and Pollitz, 1984). Similarly, Carlson's study on dating violence reports that

³ Unfortunately, these findings cannot be generalized to adults and to the problem of spousal assault, since dating relationships involve less emotional, legal, familial, and economic entanglement and fewer barriers to dissolution.

more serious violence, in particularly injurious violence perpetrated by a male offender, was more likely to prompt calls for serious intervention such as police action (Carlson, 1996).

Few researchers have explored public opinion about appropriate punishments for violence (perhaps because, like policy makers, researchers and the public have only recently reached agreement that domestic violence should be treated as a crime). Stalans (1996) reports that 75% of respondents favored a police referral to marriage counseling (a practice that would be frowned upon in most police departments); and most preferred that if arrested, offenders be found guilty and mandated to counseling or mediation, rather than be acquitted, or sentenced to probation or jail. Johnson and Sigler (1995) found that their community respondents were overwhelmingly willing to punish spouse abuse with unrealistically severe sanctions: over one quarter supported sentences of up to five years in jail, and almost one third favored six to twenty years of incarceration.

Interestingly, only two in five respondents favored criminal justice remedies as the *best method* for dealing with spouse abuse, with one third preferring treatment and the remainder recommending other strategies (Sigler, 1989). This finding is paralleled in the FVPPF study: when asked an open-ended question about effective ways of reducing domestic violence, the most common answers were more counseling (27%), school-based education for children (18%), and stronger laws (12%). Other alternatives were mentioned, but fewer than 10% of respondents recommended them; significantly, only 6% recommended more arrests (Klein et al., 1997).

One can conclude from these studies that although the public agrees that violence that causes injuries requires public intervention, there is no strong consensus about what that intervention should be, nor about the responsibility of victims to curtail violence by exiting

abusive relationships. Although respondents certainly favor criminalization of domestic violence, they do not necessarily agree that police should routinely use arrest or other punitive sanctions instead of alternatives. This seeming uncertainty may be the result of people's ambivalence about the uses of criminal sanctions: on the one hand, they may believe that offenders deserve the punishment of arrest or jail, but on the other hand they may be realistic about the effectiveness of punishment in changing violent behavior or protecting victims. They may be more likely to find rehabilitation, as well victim-focused and community-focused changes more promising. However, like most criminal justice interventions, these changes – victims ending relationships, offenders receiving treatment, schools educating against violence – remain uncommon outcomes. Researchers have seldom explored public beliefs about how the criminal justice system really responds to violence, nor about what sorts of programs or strategies are underway in their communities; but the frequency with which the public expresses preferences for these interventions suggests that they are optimistic, but not very well-informed, about strategies for reducing violence.

Correlates of Beliefs About Violence

Respondent characteristics, in particular gender and education, have been found in some studies to be associated with attitudes about domestic violence and responses to it, although these findings are not consistent across studies. Researchers have uncovered differences in women's and men's beliefs about the causes of violence (Davis and Carlson, 1981; Kalmuss, 1979; Carlson, 1996), as well as gender and age differences in attitudes about women's role in violence

(Ewing and Aubrey, 1987).⁴ The FVPF survey revealed that responses about what the police should do, and whether victims should leave abusers, varied significantly with the gender and ethnicity of the respondent (Klein et al., 1997). However, Stalans' research (1996) concluded that the only social background variable to significantly predict a preference for arrest was respondent education; age, ethnicity, gender, and previous victimization experience were not associated with this preference. However, respondents' social context -- characteristics of their neighborhoods or communities, and the character of local domestic violence policies and practices -- have not been explored systematically as possible influences on attitudes about domestic violence or preferred remedies.

Summary

Based on existing research, one can conclude that the majority of the public defines most acts of physical aggression between intimates as domestic violence, and many also label acts of emotional or psychological abuse as domestic violence as well. While people may be less tolerant or accepting of domestic violence than they were several decades ago, they remain uncertain about what causes domestic violence, perhaps accurately reflecting the complex reality of spousal assault found by scholars and practitioners. Victim injury appears to constitute the threshold at which people believe society ought to intervene, although many believe that acts of physical aggression are unlawful, even if they do not warrant *formal* intervention by the criminal justice system.

⁴ This study's findings are somewhat puzzling, however; male and older respondents were significantly more likely to believe the female victim was partially responsible in hypotheticals, but women (as well as older respondents) were more likely to agree that the victim was "at least somewhat masochistic" if she didn't leave in response to continued beating by her husband (Ewing and Aubrey, 1987).

The public expresses stronger support for offender counseling than incarceration, suggesting preferences for (or optimism about) rehabilitation more than retributive justice. This limited support for punitive sanctions may reflect continued ambivalence about defining spouse abusers as criminals, but it may also reflect lack of faith in the effect of tough responses on repeat violence, insofar as at least one study (Ewing and Aubrey, 1987) found very little confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to protect victims from spousal abuse. Many people still locate the problem of (and solution to) violence in women's choices about remaining in or exiting violent relationships, suggesting an unrealistic understanding of what these choices entail. Although a limited range of potential remedies have been presented to the public for consideration (primarily arrest, incarceration, and counseling for offenders), a much wider variety of alternative sanctions and remedies are possible; we have no information about public opinion regarding these other alternatives.

In summary, previous research gives us reason to believe that the public is converging on a more inclusive definition of domestic violence, and increasingly defines this sort of violence as criminal behavior. The public expresses more diversity of opinion on what causes violence, however. Furthermore, we still know very little about two important questions: first, regardless of what they believe ought to be done about violence, what do they think police and other community agents really do? and second, given the considerable diversity of opinion on all these questions, to what extent is that variability attributable to differences in people's social background, experiences, and community environment? This project was designed to further explore these questions.

II Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The research reported here has three general and related objectives:

(1) to gather descriptive information on public attitudes, values, and perceptions about domestic violence, with a view toward discovering the degree of consensus or dissensus on these issues and identifying the thresholds of violence that the public defines as illegal and criminally sanctionable;

(2) to test theoretically derived hypotheses about the relationships between individual and community characteristics and beliefs about partner violence;

(3) to examine theoretically derived hypotheses about the relationships between individual characteristics and attitudes about the threshold of illegal partner violence and beliefs about likely interventions and sanctions. This objective has implications both for estimating the applicability of deterrence theory to domestic violence policy and interventions, and for assessing the prospects for increasing victim recognition, reporting, and access to services and legal assistance.

The study examines the following questions, which are exploratory and descriptive in nature:

II. How does the public define and explain partner violence?

- A. How does the public define "domestic violence"? Has this definition broadened over time, and is society in agreement on what should come under this label?
- B. Where do people draw the line between domestic violence, and what they believe to be *criminal or unlawful* domestic violence?
- C. How prevalent does the public believe domestic violence to be?
- D. How do people account for domestic violence? How commonly do people subscribe to explanations that locate the source of violence in individuals? Couples or families? Society itself? How commonly do people attribute violence to victims' behavior or choices?

III. What do people believe are appropriate societal responses to domestic violence?

- A. The police are often the first public officials who are notified about a violent incident, usually (although not always) because a complainant or victim requests help. Furthermore, many police departments have officially adopted "pro arrest"

policies in domestic incidents, in marked contrast to traditional "hands off" policies that encouraged police to take limited action, to simply remove one of the parties, or to attempt to informally mediate resolutions. What do people believe ought to happen when police respond to a domestic incident?

- B. How does the public believe the courts should deal with cases involving people who are arrested for violent behavior? In addition to making choices about conviction and punishment, courts make decisions that involve tradeoffs of victim safety and defendants' rights (such as issuing protective orders and determining child visitation and custody); how does the public feel such decisions should be made?
- C. What does the public believe are effective community-level responses to domestic violence? Are people's beliefs about effective policies or programs consistent with their preferences for individual case outcomes?

IV. What does the public predict that police will do when they are called to the scene of a domestic violence incident? Most Americans have been exposed to extensive media images of police responses; many know friends, relatives, or acquaintances who have had contact with police over a domestic incident. We know little, however, about how these experiences may shape people's beliefs about the kinds of actions police will take.

In addition to mapping the variation and distributions of beliefs on these three broad areas, we examine the relationships of these opinions to characteristics of circumstances, individuals' social backgrounds, their experiences with violence, and their communities:

- I. Survey participants were exposed to hypothetical situations and items that varied across three variables: the nature and severity of violence, the gender of the aggressive party, and the marital status of the couple. Following on the findings of previous research, we hypothesized that:
 - A. Violence perpetrated by women would be viewed with less gravity than that committed by men.
 - B. More serious violence – specifically, violence that causes visible injuries – would prompt more calls for law enforcement responses, in particular more demands for arrest, but also more support for actions aimed at protecting victims. Similarly, we hypothesize that the public will be more likely to predict (as well as prefer) arrests in these more serious cases.

- C. We also hypothesized that respondents would be more likely to favor, as well as to predict, different responses to married and dating couples: police might be expected to try to reconcile married partners, but are expected to make an arrest or separate dating couples. This disparity might exist because people place higher value on the married couple's relationship (and are reluctant to see it sundered), or because they feel that it is unduly punitive to remove a married man from his home, or both.
- II. Based on the findings of previous research, and on general patterns in attitudes about crime and justice, we expected to find that some social background characteristics were associated with attitudes and beliefs. For example:
- A. Women may be more inclined than men to define domestic violence broadly and inclusively, and more inclined to favor and to predict more authoritative and controlling criminal justice reactions to violence. They may also be more likely to endorse actions that protect victims and families from violent men.
 - B. Older respondents, socialized at a time when family violence was seldom discussed openly and almost never subject to formal intervention, may be less likely than younger people to adopt broad definitions of domestic violence, to believe that violent acts are unlawful, to favor aggressive law enforcement actions, and to expect such actions from police. Such traditional thinking may also be associated with beliefs that women are responsible for violence, or for preventing its occurrence.
 - C. People with higher socioeconomic attainment – particularly higher education – may be more familiar with more complex explanations for violence, and more likely to favor responses that are problem-focused rather than merely punitive (such as preventive education and victim assistance). They may be more knowledgeable about what is and is not against the law, as well as more accurate about probable police responses, however, and less likely to assume that police will arrest suspects.
 - D. Respondents who belong to racial minorities, particularly African Americans, may be more likely than whites to predict enforcement-oriented police responses, although not necessarily more likely to believe that such responses are likely to be effective or appropriate.
 - E. Individuals in higher-risk subgroups for victimization – people who are young, minority members, female, unmarried, and economically disadvantaged – are more likely to make high estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence.
- III. We also expect to find that personal and second-hand experience with violence will shape

beliefs and opinions. For example:

- A. People with experience as victims, offenders, or acquaintances in domestic violence situations are likely to make higher estimates of the prevalence of violence.
 - B. Respondents with personal domestic violence experience as a victim or perpetrator will be less likely to define acts as domestic violence and illegal.
 - C. Victims (as well as respondents at high risk for victimization) will be more likely to favor multi-faceted interventions — assistance to victims, accountability for offenders — compared with more simplistic attitudes that may be expressed by those who have had little reason to think about the complexity of partner violence as a social or criminal justice problem.
 - D. Individuals who have firsthand knowledge of domestic violence interventions in their communities will assess more accurately the likelihood of specific outcomes, particularly arrest.
- IV. We predict that two aspects of communities will be associated with beliefs about domestic violence: rural areas will differ from urban communities, and communities whose criminal justice agencies have adopted proactive policies and embarked on community coordination efforts will engender different public expectations than those with more traditional responses.
- A. Residents of rural areas are frequently characterized as traditional and conservative in their social attitudes; rural responses to criminal justice are typically described as limited. One might predict that they will subscribe to more limited notions of what is and is not domestic violence, and will be more likely to attribute violence to simple causes (such as stress); one might also predict that they will favor more restrained responses on the part of police and the courts, and that they will expect the same of local law enforcement.
 - B. Underlying recommendations for tougher arrest policies and greater community coordination around the issue of domestic violence is the belief that the public can be re-educated to better understand the issue, and to more strongly condemn violent behavior. Therefore we predict that residents of communities with established community responses will be more informed about the prevalence, causes of violence, and more inclined to favor both enforcement-oriented and victim-oriented reactions (as well as to expect such responses).
- V. Further, we predict, albeit cautiously, that beliefs about prevalence, causes, and illegality of violent behavior will be associated with views about what society should do about the

problem.

Finally, we consider some of these topics across the following two dimensions:

- I. Based on previous research, do our findings indicate *changes in attitudes over time*? Media coverage, policy changes, and federal and state (as well as corporate) reform initiatives have increasingly brought the problem of domestic violence into the open, reduced the stigma of victimization, and increased calls for offender accountability. At the present time, therefore, one might predict that victim-blaming is less prevalent than reported previously. Likewise, one might predict higher rates of support for actions such as arrest, conviction, and incarceration.

- II. Over the past two decades, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted on the prevalence and causes of violence, as well as on the utilization and effectiveness of some (although not all) criminal justice and community responses. Against the backdrop of this knowledge base, *how informed is the public about these important questions?*

The following chapters describe our research methods (Chapter 2); findings regarding survey respondents' beliefs about what constitutes domestic violence, its prevalence, and its causes (Chapter 3); findings regarding how respondents think the criminal justice system should respond to incidents of domestic violence (Chapter 4); and findings regarding what respondents think actually happens in their communities in terms of criminal justice responses to domestic violence (Chapter 5). We conclude (Chapter 6) with implications of these findings for public policy and criminal justice policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

I. Introduction

To study public beliefs about domestic violence — what it is, the circumstances under which it is considered criminal, what people think should be done about it, and what they think is being done about it — we designed a telephone survey that was administered to 1200 adults across six sites in New York State. Telephone surveys are used when information from representative samples of geographically dispersed populations is needed, when the topic of the research may require more complex questions and responses than is possible with other public opinion information gathering strategies (like mail questionnaires), and when strong responses rates are desired to maximize confidence in the generalizability of the sample.⁵

II Sampling Strategy

Scientific random probability samples of 200 adult residents were drawn from each of six sites. Telephone numbers used in the sampling were generated by random digit dialing. In addition to the universe of published telephone numbers, this technique includes in the sample unlisted and newly established numbers. The rigorous methods used by the polling firm, Fact Finders, assured that each household with a telephone had an equal probability of being selected

⁵Limited resources prohibited use of in-person interviews. At the same time we recognize that individuals who cannot afford a telephone by definition cannot be included in the sample, thereby losing the poorest segment of the population. We contracted with an established public opinion research firm to conduct the interviews using standard random digit dial methods.

for inclusion in the sampling frame. Within each household, the respondent selection process requested "an adult, 18 or older, living in the household." The statistical sampling error associated with the overall findings based on each random probability sampling of 200 ranges from ± 4.2 to ± 6.9 percentage points.

These six sites were selected on two dimensions: the degree of urbanization, and the character of the local criminal justice system's domestic violence policy and practices. Sites included two rural counties (exclusive of cities within those counties); two small cities (populations of approximately 25,000 and 50,000); and two larger cities (populations of approximately 150,000). Each pair represents a contrast in law enforcement prioritization of domestic violence, coordination among criminal justice agencies, and history of collaboration across criminal justice and victim services agencies. Three of these sites were the subject of recent research on community coordination; two were studied in preparation for that research.⁶

These sites include a rural county with no significant population center (Essex); a small county seat on the outskirts of Buffalo (Lockport); a small freestanding city in the central part of the state (Utica); the outlying rural county surrounding Utica (but also excluding the other significant city in Oneida County); a large demographically diverse city adjacent to New York City (Yonkers); and a large upstate city (Syracuse). The sites include several pairings that will permit us to draw at least preliminary inferences about the impact of community demographics *and* criminal justice practice on public attitudes and perceptions. For example, Syracuse and

⁶ Information on sites is based on Alissa Pollitz Worden's current research, funded by the National Institute of Justice (95-Wt-NX-006) and research on the impact of mandatory arrest legislation, funded in part by the state of New York. The following brief description of each site is gleaned from official records, original data collection by the PI, extensive interviewing with criminal justice and victim services policy makers and practitioners in each site, and on-site observation.

Yonkers are cities of comparable size and demographic characteristics. However, the Syracuse police department and prosecutor have collaborated with each other and with victim advocates for over a decade on proactive policies to create an inclusive set of protocols and programs that track domestic violence cases, target recidivists, and provide victims with support and follow-up. Yonkers, on the other hand, has a low arrest rate in domestic violence cases, and a relatively high dismissal rate in the courts; although a well-organized program in the District Attorney's office provides contact and services to victims, those opportunities appear to benefit only a small percentage of cases that come to the attention of authorities.

Similarly, the small suburban city of Lockport, located between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, has developed a comprehensive protocol for domestic violence cases; compared with other communities in the state, police arrest a larger proportion of offenders, and procure and execute warrants for offender-absent cases; and city judges make frequent use of probation, mandatory counseling and oversight for compliance, and orders of protection in misdemeanor cases. In contrast, Utica, a small city in predominantly rural Oneida County, evidences little coordination among criminal justice agents: police seldom seek warrants, judges frequently dismiss cases, and not infrequently refer defendants and their partners to couples counseling as a condition of adjournment.

In the geographically extensive outlying area of Oneida County, excluding the small city of Rome, law enforcement officials report significant practical difficulties in responding quickly to domestic calls, getting defendants arraigned in a timely fashion, and connecting remote victims with social services — problems commonly reported in rural areas. However, the sheriff of that county has adopted innovative strategies for overcoming these barriers, and both he and

the prosecutor appear committed to prioritizing domestic violence despite these barriers. Essex County, in the Adirondacks, has no central population center larger than a village; it relies upon the county sheriff, state police, and township magistrates to respond to domestic incidents; there is little evidence of coordination among these agents, and little evidence of the presence of victim advocates.

To summarize, there are two large urban sites (Syracuse and Yonkers), two small cities (Lockport and Utica) and two rural areas (Oneida and Essex counties). With respect to criminal justice practices in response to domestic violence, three of the sites have relatively progressive (Syracuse, Lockport, and Oneida County), whereas the other three are known for more traditional practices (Yonkers, Utica, and Essex county). It should be noted that these distinctions are general, not precise; and comparisons across communities' residents should be interpreted as illustrative, rather than definitive, of the potential variation in (or similarities across) different environments.

The sampling plan generated 200 responses from adult residents of these six sites, for a total sample of 1200. Table 2.1 reports response rates in the six sites and for the sample as a whole.

- Table 2.1 About Here --

III. The Survey Instrument

The survey covered three key domains: (1) beliefs about violence and causes; (2) opinions about effective responses to violence; and (3) perceptions about what really happens in

communities when criminal justice agents are called to domestic violence incidents. A pilot survey of community college students, as well as pre-testing of the draft instrument, suggested that beliefs about many issues are complex and multi-dimensional, and hence would not be adequately captured by single items or close-ended questions (Worden, Beery, and Carlson, 1998). For that reason, and because no standardized instruments are available to measure the constructs of interest, we developed a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions. The final questionnaire was pilot tested by telephone prior to implementation of data collection, and typically was administered within fifteen to twenty minutes.

The questionnaire is divided into several sections. The *introduction* confirms eligibility for the study and secures informed consent (the study was approved by the University at Albany Institutional Review Board prior to data collection). In *section 1*, questions are posed regarding perceptions of prevalence of community violence, followed by prevalence of domestic violence in the respondent's community. Next, *section 2* asks questions about causes of violence, beginning with an open-ended question, "In your opinion, what causes couples to physically hurt one another?" Multiple responses were recorded. This is followed by five closed-ended questions that probe respondent opinion regarding 10 possible causes, including four items that tap women's responsibility for causing or ending domestic abuse; half of the sample received one set of five close-ended cause questions, and the other half received the other five questions.

Section 3 probes respondent views on what constitutes domestic violence. This section includes questions about ten different behaviors, five committed by women and five by men; these behaviors ranged from unambiguously violent and criminal behavior ("a wife punching her husband with her fist") to more legally ambiguous actions ("a husband calling his wife a stupid

slob"). Each respondent was asked whether these behaviors, which included a combination of male and female perpetrators, constituted "domestic violence or abuse" in their minds.. For each behavior the respondent was also asked to indicate whether he or she believes this behavior was "against the law in New York state."⁷

Section 4 addresses attitudes toward effective and appropriate interventions and responses using vignettes that described a neighbor's 911 call when a fight was overheard. Four versions of the vignette were randomly read to respondents; they varied on two dimensions, level of violence and injury (slapping, compared with punching that resulted in a black eye and bleeding) and marital status (married, compared with dating couples). Following the vignettes, interviewers asked an open-ended question: "based on this situation, what do you think should happen after the police arrive at their home?" Multiple responses were coded. Then respondents were asked two close-ended questions about what they believed would really happen if the situation described had occurred in their neighborhood and police had been called.

Section 5 addresses opinions about legal responses to domestic violence subsequent to arrests. Respondents were asked about (1) what should happen following an arrest for domestic violence, (2) what actually does happen, and (3) what should happen following a conviction for domestic violence. In addition, respondents were asked five questions: whether New York State has a mandatory arrest law,⁸ whether counseling should be required when a man has been

⁷Each respondent heard a random assortment of five of these ten possibilities, which reduced the possibility of survey fatigue but, given the sample size, nonetheless allows us to draw inferences about the population's attitudes about these actions.

⁸New York's mandatory arrest law, which went into effect in 1996, states that police must arrest offenders in misdemeanor "family offenses" if there is probable cause that the crime took place. State statute defines family offenses to include crimes such as misdemeanor-level assault, harassment, and menacing if committed by a spouse,

arrested for domestic violence; how often counseling is required in these cases in the respondent's community; whether a man arrested for domestic violence should be ordered to stay away from the victim; and how often such orders are imposed in the respondent's community.

Section 6 addresses orders of protection, awareness of community-based domestic violence services, and secondhand experiences with domestic violence. It begins with a series of questions about what such an order is, how it is obtained, and whether the respondent knows someone who has obtained one. It continues with questions on the frequency of domestic violence, the frequency with which violent men are jailed, and whether domestic violence should be taken into account in custody decisions. Then respondents are asked whether they personally know individuals who have been involved in domestic violence situations.

Section 7 obtains social background information about the respondent and asks whether they have ever been the recipient of violence in a partner relationship; whether they have used violence toward a partner; and whether they would like information about domestic violence services in their community. The final survey question asks respondents what they believe should be done about domestic violence in their communities, and is open-ended.

Throughout, concerns about respondent safety were taken into account. All interviews were conducted by skilled interviewers who received training specific to this project prior to commencing interviewing. All interviews were completed between January 6 and March 2, 2000. Respondents were contacted in the evenings from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on weekdays and

former spouse, person with one has a child in common, or other blood relative. This law does not apply to other partners or household members (such as cohabiting or dating partners, or homosexual couples). Although in practice many police departments do not observe this legal distinction (regardless of whether or not they routinely make arrests in domestic incidents), the legal distinction is meaningful in the courts.

from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Interviews lasted from 15 to 25 minutes. Once randomly selected for inclusion in the sample, a phone number was subject to up to fifteen callbacks before a substitution was made. All respondents were anonymous to minimize non-response error and enhance safety.

IV Sample Description

Characteristics of the sample as a whole and by site are presented in Table 2.2. The sample is approximately half male and half female; this did not vary significantly across sites. Overall, 80% of the sample is white, with 8% African American, 3% Latino, 2% Asian American, and 1.6% Native American. However, there is significant variation in ethnicity across sites. Not surprisingly, the rural and small city sites have a greater proportion of whites than the urban sites.

- Table 2.2 About Here -

Regarding education, 35% of the sample reported having a high school diploma or its equivalent, 37% had received some college, and 29% reported at least a bachelor's degree. There was some site variation: respondents from Yonkers were most likely to have a college degree and those from Utica least likely. A wide range of household income was reported: 9% report incomes less than \$10,000, 12% report an income of \$10,000 to \$20,000, 14% report an income of \$30,001 to \$40,000, 15% report an income of \$40,001 to \$50,000, 18% report an income of \$50,001 to \$60,000, and 18% report an income higher than \$75,000. Income too varied by site, with the highest incomes reported in Yonkers and Oneida county, and the lowest incomes

reported in Syracuse and Utica.

About half the sample is married; 27% are single, 11% are divorced, 8% are widowed, and 4% are separated. Respondents in the two rural counties were most likely to report being married. Syracuse reported the highest percentage of single respondents. The mean age is 45 years; 10% of the sample is between 18 and 24 years of age, 20% are age 25 to 34, 24% are age 35 to 44, 19% are age 45 to 54, and 28% are age 55 or older.

Table 2.3 reports comparisons of our samples with 1990 census data for each community or county.⁹ In many respects our samples mirror the communities from which they are drawn. However, in two important respects these figures differ from Census data. Our sample is, across all communities, better educated than the communities from which they are drawn: they are both more likely to have taken some college coursework after high school, and more likely to have completed a four-year degree. We infer from this that better educated respondents are more likely not only to have telephones and be accessible to interviewers, but also that college educated respondents may be more likely to participate in a survey of this sort, on this topic. Further, our sample is younger than expected: in the four cities, we were more likely to interview middle-aged people (and less likely to interview people over 55) than one would predict from Census statistics. In the two rural areas, we were more likely to interview middle-aged people, and less likely to interview young people (under 35) than one would have expected.

⁹ Because our items did not mirror census measures, particularly of race and ethnicity, we report the closest possible comparisons. Our race/ethnicity question included Hispanic/Latino as a choice; the Census distinguishes between race (white, African-American, etc.) and Hispanic ethnicity. Census information for Oneida County was calculated after subtracting relevant figures for the cities of Utica and Rome, to replicate our rural sample; and hence does not reflect total county demographic information.

Table 2.3 About Here

Overall, almost one-third of respondents reported that they had been the recipients of violence by a partner (hereafter referred to as "victims," although we recognize that these individuals might not designate themselves in this way). As reported in Table 2.4, significantly more female respondents (35%) report victimization by an intimate partner than male respondents (26%). Eighteen per cent of the sample reported that they have used violence toward an intimate partner (hereafter referred to as offenders or perpetrators, although again such individuals probably would not label themselves in those terms). Fourteen percent of men reported having used violence against a partner in contrast to 21% of women, a statistically significant difference.

- Table 2.4 About Here -

Overall, respondents reported substantial secondhand experience with domestic violence, as reported in Table 2.4. Almost two thirds have known someone who has been the recipient of partner violence (significantly more women than men), and half have known someone who has used violence toward a partner. Almost half have overheard a domestic violence incident, know someone who has received counseling due to victimization, and know of someone who received an order of protection. Over two thirds have known of an incident where the police were called to a home as result of domestic violence. Fewer respondents report knowing someone who has used a shelter or received counseling due to using violence toward their partner. These findings

are remarkably similar to those of Klein et al. (1997), one third of whose respondents reported that they had witnessed a male using violence toward a female partner (15% had witnessed a woman being violent toward her partner). The Family Violence Prevention Fund survey did not include questions about secondhand experience with criminal justice responses or counseling or other services received as a result of domestic violence.¹⁰

V. Analyses

The following three chapters report three sets of analyses: description of beliefs about the nature and causes of violence and tests of hypotheses about variation in those beliefs (Chapter 3); description of opinions about appropriate criminal justice and community responses to violence, and tests of hypotheses about variation in those opinions (Chapter 4); and description of perceptions about how respondents' neighborhoods and communities respond, and tests of hypotheses about those perceptions (Chapter 5).

¹⁰Cross-tabulation of these variables suggested that these experiences are cumulative: those who reported the least common experiences (such as knowing someone who had gone to a shelter or used other victim services) were highly likely to also report the more common experiences (such as knowing someone who got an order of protection). To reduce these eight variables into a single, more manageable variable that captures the extent of knowledge about exposure to legal and social systems, we added them together to create the Secondary Domestic Violence Experience Index. Overall, the mean score for respondents was 3.37; women have significantly more secondhand experience ($X = 3.57$) than do men ($X = 3.12$, $p < .007$).

Table 2.1
Response Rates for the Sample as a Whole and By Site

Final disposition	Total	Essex	Lockport	Oneida	Syracuse	Utica	Yonkers
Completed	1200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Refused	2259	290	581	244	395	354	395
Disqualified	579	40	112	43	139	122	123
Other*	6683	1118	1346	726	1460	1059	974

*Includes answering machines, call back requests, terminations, business/government lines, wrong counties, not in service, and disconnects.

Table 2.2 Characteristics of Sample and Site Subsamples

	Utica	Yonkers	Oneida	Syracuse	lockport	Essex	Total
Gender: male	49.5	42.0	43.0	50.3	44.5	47.0	46.0
Ethnicity:							
White	82.6	51.6	97.0	73.0	89.4	93.5	81.3
African-American	7.2	20.3	0.5	15.8	6.1	0.0	8.2
Hispanic/Latino	2.6	15.1	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.0	3.3
Native American	2.6	0.0	1.0	2.6	2.0	1.5	1.6
Asian	1.0	7.8	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
Other	4.1	5.2	1.5	6.1	1.5	3.0	3.6
Age:							
18-24	14.6	8.6	3.6	15.1	12.1	5.5	9.9
25-34	20.7	24.7	12.8	19.1	23.2	19.1	19.9
35-44	21.2	27.3	22.4	24.1	24.2	21.6	23.5
45-54	17.2	13.6	24.5	17.1	17.7	23.1	18.9
55 and over	26.3	25.8	36.7	24.6	22.7	30.7	27.8
Education							
High school	38.0	30.7	32.7	36.0	37.2	33.5	34.7
Some college	41.5	34.7	37.7	33.5	35.7	36.0	36.5
College degree	20.5	34.7	29.6	30.5	27.1	30.5	28.8
Marital status							
Single	29.8	26.1	14.6	39.7	27.6	22.5	26.7
Married	44.4	48.7	63.1	36.7	50.8	59.0	50.5
Separated/divorced	15.1	15.1	15.1	16.6	16.1	10.5	14.8
Widowed	10.6	10.1	7.1	7.0	5.5	8.0	8.0

	Utica	Yonkers	Oneida	Syracuse	lockport	Essex	Total
Income							
under 10,000	13.9	6.2	5.9	10.7	7.0	8.5	8.7
10-20,000	13.9	9.0	6.5	17.3	14.0	12.8	12.2
20-30,000	19.3	11.9	12.4	15.5	10.5	19.7	14.9
30-40,000	13.3	9.0	14.1	17.3	15.8	12.2	13.6
40-50,000	11.4	12.4	15.3	8.9	22.2	17.0	14.6
50-75,000	21.1	19.8	18.2	17.3	15.2	19.1	18.5
Over 75,000	7.2	31.6	27.6	13.1	15.2	10.6	17.6

Table 2.3: Comparison of Sample to 1990 Census Statistics

	Utica		Lockport		Syracuse		Yonkers		Essex		Oneida	
	sample	Census	sample	Census	sample	Census	sample	Census	sample	Census	sample	Census
% male	49.5	46.8	44.5	46.9	50.3	46.6	42.0	46.6	47.0	51.3	43.0	49.8
Race/ethnicity:												
% white	82.6	86.7	89.4	93.4	73.0	75.0	51.6	76.5	93.5	95.9	97.0	96.7
% African American	7.2	10.4	6.1	5.6	15.8	20.2	20.3	14.1	0.0	2.8	0.5	2.1
% other¹¹	10.2	2.9	4.5	1.0	11.2	4.8	28.1	9.4	6.5	1.3	2.5	1.1
% Hispanic	2.6	3.3	0.0	1.5	1.5	2.5	15.1	16.3	1.0	2.0	0.0	1.2
Education:¹²												
% w/u pto h.s. grad	37.3	62.8	36.8	60.7	35.5	56.5	30.9	58.0	33.6	61.5	32.8	54.5
% with some college	41.4	24.9	35.6	25.2	32.5	21.5	32.6	20.1	34.6	22.7	37.0	26.1
% with bach degree	21.3	12.3	27.5	14.2	30.8	22.0	35.9	21.9	31.9	15.8	30.2	19.4
Age:												
18-34	35.8	36.5	35.4	37.9	34.5	46.7	33.3	35.1	25.1	33.7	16.9	34.4
35-54	39.5	26.5	43.2	30.1	40.7	25.3	41.7	30.5	44.1	34.3	47.6	34.4
55 and over	24.7	37.0	21.4	32.0	24.7	28.0	25.0	34.5	30.8	32.0	35.4	31.1

¹¹Survey included Hispanic as part of single race/ethnicity question; "other" includes Hispanics. "% Hispanic" indicates percentage of total who self-identified as Hispanic on this item.

¹²Percentages calculated only on respondents above aged 24, for comparability with census statistics.

Table 2.4: Direct and Indirect Experiences with Victimization

Direct experience with domestic violence:	Percentage answering "yes"		
	Overall	Men	Women
Have you ever been slapped, shoved, hit, beaten, or otherwise hurt by your spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend?	31	26	35***
Have you yourself ever slapped, shoved, hit, beaten, kicked or otherwise hurt your spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend?	18	14	21***
Secondary experience with domestic violence			
Have you personally known anyone who has been hit or beaten by their partner?	62	58	66***
Have you personally known anyone who has hit or beaten their partner?	50	51	50
Do you know of a time when the police were called because someone was being violent or abusive toward their partner? (% of total sample; asked only of Rs who reported knowing a victim, offender or witnessing, n = 831)	48	43	51*
Have you ever known anyone who got an order of protection as a result of a domestic violence or abuse situation? (% of sample; asked of all who reported having heard of an order of protection, n = 1143)	48	44	51**
Have you ever witnessed or overheard anyone abusing or being violent toward their partner?	46	43	48
Have you ever known anyone who has received counseling as a result of being a victim or abuse or violence <u>from</u> their partner? (% of sample; asked of Rs who reported knowing a victim, offender or witnessing, n = 826)	32	29	34
Have you ever known anyone who received counseling as a result of being violent or abusive <u>toward</u> their partner? (% of sample; asked of Rs who reported knowing a victim, offender or witnessing, n = 827)	26	27	26
Have you ever known anyone who has used a domestic violence shelter or other type of service for a victim of domestic violence or abuse? (% of sample; asked of Rs who reported knowing a victim, offender or witnessing, n = 833)	24	21	27

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

CHAPTER 3

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This chapter addresses public opinion in three areas: what constitutes domestic violence, perceived prevalence of domestic violence, and perceived causes of domestic violence.

I. What constitutes beliefs about domestic violence and criminal domestic violence?

The survey included questions about ten behaviors that might be considered domestic violence, spanning the domains of physical violence, psychological abuse, and stalking. In each instance respondents were asked "would you consider it domestic violence for [each behavior]?". In addition, respondents were asked "from what you know, is it against the law in New York State for [each behavior]?". Half the sample was asked about five of the ten behaviors, and the other half was asked about the remaining five behaviors. In half of the cases the behavior was perpetrated by a male and in the other half the perpetrator was a female. Table 3.1 depicts the findings for the sample as a whole, showing the exact wording of all 10 items.

- Table 3.1 About Here -

First, we can see from the table that there is the strongest agreement that spouses punching, forcing sex, and slapping constitute domestic violence and are criminal acts. However, for each behavior, respondents are less likely to agree that the act either should be considered domestic violence or is unlawful when a woman is described as the perpetrator. A

small majority of the sample (54%) considers a husband calling his wife a "stupid slob" to be domestic violence (but far fewer believe this behavior is against the law). A similar proportion (58%) consider a man's stalking to be illegal behavior, although fewer than half believe these acts are illegal when a woman commits them. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers (Johnson and Sigler, 1995; Klein et al., 1997), who also found that acts of emotional abuse such as name calling were defined as domestic violence by a majority of those polled.

In general, respondents are more certain about what they believe should be labeled "domestic violence" than about what they believe is unlawful behavior. "Don't know" responses ranged from .5% to 9% on the former series of items, but were notably higher (ranging from 13% to 46%) on the latter series. In general, we can conclude that there is consensus that a man or woman who punches, slaps, or forces sex on a partner has committed an act that constitutes domestic violence and, further, is illegal in New York State.

Correlates of Beliefs About What Constitutes Domestic Violence

We hypothesized that the inclusiveness of respondents' definitions of domestic violence, as well as beliefs about what forms of abuse are unlawful, would be shaped by social background, personal experience with violence, and their community. We hypothesized that people with personal domestic violence experience (either as a victim or perpetrator) would be *less* likely to define acts as domestic violence and illegal. Although there has been little empirical research on these questions, we also hypothesized that community context would influence people's definitions of domestic violence. Specifically, ^{we} hypothesized that rural residents would hold more traditional, and restrictive, definitions of partner violence than urban residents. We also predicted that residents of communities with progressive and coordinated

domestic violence initiatives may have been influenced both by those practices, and perhaps by public outreach and information activities, and hold more inclusive views of what constitutes domestic violence. We also explored the associations between respondents' social background and beliefs about what constitutes domestic violence.

- Table 3.2 About Here -

Respondent characteristics. There was near unanimity (94% to 100%) across demographic groups that a husband punching his wife is domestic violence and slightly less agreement (80% to 96%) that a wife punching her husband constitutes domestic violence. We found somewhat less, though still substantial, agreement that a husband or wife forcing a partner to have sex, and a husband or wife slapping a partner are considered to be domestic violence (see Table 3.2). There was more variability in responses to items about a spouse calling a partner a stupid slob and former boyfriends and girlfriends stalking their partners. However, relatively few statistically significant demographic differences were found; they are shown in Table 3.2. For example, women are more likely than men to consider a husband slapping, a wife calling her husband a slob, and female stalking to be domestic violence. Older respondents were less likely to see a wife punching, a wife forcing sex, and husband slapping as domestic violence. Finally, respondents reporting more financial hardship were more likely to see a wife calling her husband a slob as domestic violence but less likely to see the following as domestic violence: wife punching, a wife forcing sex, and husband slapping. Overall, however, what is most noteworthy is the unanimity of responses across different categories of respondents.

Experiences with domestic violence. Surprisingly, admitting that one has hit a partner or has

been hit by a partner were unrelated to perceptions of any of the ten acts as domestic violence, and thus our hypothesis was not supported. Nor were definitions of domestic violence associated with knowing of an incident where the police were called. However, several other types of indirect experiences with domestic violence were related to beliefs. For example, knowing a victim of domestic violence was associated with defining the following acts as domestic violence: a wife forcing sex, husband and wife slapping, and a woman stalking a former partner. Similarly, knowing an offender was associated with defining the following acts as domestic violence (all pertaining to female offenders): a wife forcing sex, wife slapping, wife calling husband a slob, and a woman following her former boyfriend. In addition, having witnessed or overheard domestic violence was associated with a greater likelihood of seeing four behaviors as domestic violence: wife slapping, a wife calling her husband a slob, and male and female stalking. Exact percentages and other bivariate relationships are reported in Table 3.3.

- Table 3.3 About Here -

Community differences. There was only one significant community difference, with respondents from two urban communities, one large (Yonkers) and one small (Utica), less likely to perceive a wife forcing sex as domestic violence, the only rural-urban difference found. It does not appear that differences in community criminal justice practices or domestic violence services were related to differences across communities in what constituted domestic violence or what was believed to be criminal domestic violence.

Multivariate analysis: To examine the relative influences of these independent variables on the

breadth of respondents' definitions of domestic violence, we regressed these variables on an index of domestic violence acts (the sum of the number of acts each respondent considered to be domestic violence).¹³ Variables that were significantly associated with beliefs at the bivariate level were included in the model: gender, age, education, household income, and knowing a domestic violence victim. Results indicated that several factors significantly predicted more inclusive definitions of domestic violence when other variables were controlled: women (compared with men) and those who knew victims (compared with those who did not) include more aggressive acts in their definitions of domestic violence. Furthermore, older respondents, and those whose educations had ended in high school, held more conservative views about the scope of domestic violence. However, very little of the variance in the Domestic Violence Index was accounted for by the model tested (R square = .030). This may be explained by the degree of unanimity among respondents regarding most of the behaviors being considered domestic violence.

Table 3.4 About Here

Correlates of Beliefs about Illegal Domestic Violence

Respondent characteristics. As was the case with beliefs about what constitutes domestic violence, respondents' social background predicts little about their beliefs about unlawful partner violence. As reported in Table 3.5, age was a factor in perceptions of nine out of 10 acts (all but male stalking), and in each instance older respondents, in particular those over age 55, were less

¹³Because each respondent was only asked about five of the 10 behaviors, the index total ranged from 0 to 5 (X = 3.50, SD = 1.08, N = 1200).

likely to believe that the particular act was against the law. Gender was also a factor, but not in the expected way: male respondents were more likely than female to perceive both husband and wife punching and husband and wife slapping as illegal.

- Table 3.5 About Here -

Personal experiences with domestic violence. Contrary to expectations, being the perpetrator of domestic violence was unrelated to beliefs about which acts were illegal, as shown in Table 3.6. However, being the recipient of violence from a partner was associated with a greater likelihood of believing that both husband slapping and wife slapping were against the law. More importantly, knowing a victim was associated with a greater likelihood of seeing four acts as criminal, all involving female offending: a woman punching a partner, forcing sex, slapping, and stalking. In addition, knowing an offender was associated with being more likely to perceive eight of the ten acts as criminal, regardless of the sex of the perpetrator: punching, forcing sex, slapping, and stalking. Finally, having witnessed or overheard domestic violence was also associated with the same eight acts being perceived as criminal.

- Table 3.6 About Here -

Community factors. These results suggest no community differences in perceptions of the illegality of domestic violence.

We also summed the ten behaviors we asked respondents to evaluate in terms of whether they were against the law (five for each respondent, $X = 2.38$, $SD = 1.35$, $N = 1200$), creating a

Criminal Domestic Violence Index. We conducted multiple regression analysis on this index, including in the model variables that were significantly associated with individual behaviors at the bivariate level: social background variables (employment status, gender, education, age, income) and experience variables (having known a victim, having known a perpetrator, and having witnessed domestic violence). As Table 3.7 reports, higher scores on the criminal domestic violence index were given by men, younger respondents, those with education beyond college, and those with lower incomes. Furthermore, those who reported knowing perpetrators of violence, or having witnessed abusive incidents, defined a broader range of actions as unlawful. This model accounted for about 8% of the variance in the criminal domestic violence index.

- Table 3.7 About Here -

Summary

There was a high degree of consensus in the sample as a whole and across demographic groups about what constitutes domestic violence. Spousal - male or female - punching, slapping or forcing sex on his or her partner is considered domestic violence by 82% to 99% of the sample; a negligible number of respondents were unsure about whether such behaviors should be considered domestic violence. Many fewer respondents considered insulting a spouse or following a former romantic partner to be domestic violence (33% to 59%). Other researchers have also found that the public considers most acts of physical violence toward a spouse to be domestic violence and that in addition, significant numbers of people perceive verbal aggression and psychological or emotional abuse to be domestic violence (Klein et al., 1997; Sigler and

Johnson, 1995; Wagner and Mongan, 1998). In each instance, a smaller proportion of the sample considered such behaviors to constitute domestic violence when perpetrated by a wife. Few respondent characteristics or experiences were related to these judgments. Wagner and Mongan (1998) also found that abuse history was not related to perceptions of what constituted abuse.

Although there was noticeably less certainty about the illegality of this set of behaviors ("don't know" responses ranged from 13% for a husband punching his wife to 46% for a wife forcing her husband to have sex), a majority of the sample believed five of these behaviors to be illegal: husband and wife punching, husband forcing sex, husband slapping, and a man following his former girlfriend. Only 40% to 48% considered a wife forcing sex or slapping, and a woman stalking her ex-boyfriend to be against the law. Multivariate analysis of judgments about the scope of unlawful behavior suggests that men, younger people, highly educated people, and those with lower incomes believe a wider range of behaviors are illegal, as do those with secondary experience with domestic violence. Unfortunately, the unavailability of published research on public perceptions of illegal domestic violence prohibits us from making comparisons with the findings of others.

II. How prevalent does the public perceive domestic violence to be?

On the basis of existing literature (Klein et al., 1997), we hypothesized that respondents would overestimate the prevalence of domestic violence. Table 3.8 depicts the findings from two questions posed on the survey on the prevalence of domestic violence¹⁴: (1) "And in your

¹⁴The first question followed two more general questions about respondent perceptions of community violence at the very beginning of the survey, which were designed to "warm up" respondents and provide a context

community, how often do you think violence occurs between adult members of the same household, sometimes referred to as domestic violence or abuse?" and (2) "Thinking about the people in your community, what percentage of partners who are married, living together or dating physically hurt one another by pushing, slapping or hitting?" Table 3.8 reports the distribution of respondents' answers to these close-ended questions.

- Table 3.8 About Here -

More than one fifth of the sample believes that domestic violence occurs very often, and fully two thirds perceive that it occurs sometimes or very often; one fifth believe it occurs rarely or never; only 11% had no opinion. When asked to estimate the percentage of couples who had violent relationships, 22% of respondents replied that they did not know. Among those who offered an estimate, one in four respondents estimated that 5% or fewer couples experienced violence; equal numbers say it happens among 6 to 10% of couples, and 11% to 25% of couples; and 16% believe violence occurs in 25 to 50% of couples; only 6% estimate that it occurs in more than half of all couples.

The half of the sample that estimates prevalence rates of 6% to 25% of couples are accurate, inasmuch as they concur with recent estimates of lifetime domestic violence prevalence (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). The 22% of the sample who say it occurs among 25% of more of couples may be overestimating its prevalence, a finding similar to that of the FVPF study (Klein in et al. 1997), whose respondents on average estimated that half of all men had abused a female

for questions that followed on domestic violence. The second question came after the sections on criminal justice actions and just before the experience with domestic violence questions. See instrument in Appendix 1.

partner at least once. The 25% who estimate that fewer than 5% of couples experience violence are probably underestimating its occurrence. Thus, there is little support for our hypothesis, based on the findings of previous public opinion studies, that people overestimate the prevalence of domestic violence, but ample evidence that the community is aware of the extent of this problem.

Correlates of Beliefs about the Prevalence of Violence

Because we were interested in understanding factors that might explain respondents' judgments about prevalence of domestic violence, we examined responses in relation to the three sets of predictors discussed above: respondents' social background characteristics, community of residence, and experience with violence. In addition, we examined the role of respondent beliefs about community violence more generally.

Table 3.8 indicates that most respondent characteristics are related to perceptions of the frequency of domestic violence, and especially to estimates of the percentage of violent couples: gender, marital status, ethnicity, education, employment status, age, and hardship. The following types of individuals perceive domestic violence as more common: women, unmarried, black and Latino, the less educated, younger, and those experiencing greater financial hardship. These respondents' perceptions may reflect the fact that these categories of individuals have more personal experience with domestic violence, consistent with research showing that domestic violence is more prevalent among women, younger individuals, those with less education and income, and ethnic minorities (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 19XX). Community differences were also evident, with those from Utica and Syracuse perceiving more frequent and those from Oneida county (a rural setting) estimating less frequent domestic

violence.

We also hypothesized that both direct and indirect experiences would be associated with greater perceived frequency of partner violence. Most measures of first- and second-hand experience – being a victim or offender, knowing a victim or offender, knowing someone receiving either services or counseling for being a victim or offender, and witnessing a domestic violence incident or knowing of an incident where the police were called as a result of domestic violence – are associated with the belief that domestic violence is a more frequent occurrence and affects a larger percentage of couples. This hypothesis was supported. These findings are reported in Table 3.9.

- Table 3.9 About Here --

Table 3.10 reports the results of multivariate analysis of respondents' estimates of the prevalence of violence. The dependent variable is dichotomized, distinguishing those who overestimated the percentages of violent couples (estimates of 25% or greater) from those with lower estimates. Several respondent characteristics were significantly associated with high estimates of the prevalence of violence: women, African Americans, younger respondents, and those who reported significant financial hardship are more likely to estimate that at least one in four couples experiences violence. This is not surprising, inasmuch as those groups are at higher risk for violence in the population, and they may be accurately reporting the experiences they have observed among their peers. Furthermore, one's perception of community violence generally is significantly associated with one's perception of the prevalence of partner violence. Residents of rural Oneida County make lower estimates of prevalence.

Experience with domestic violence has a limited effect on estimates of prevalence, as measured in this model. Respondents who report having experiences as victims and perpetrators are significantly more likely than anyone else to make high prevalence estimates; interestingly, respondents who report limited (but non-zero) secondary experience are more likely than others to make lower estimates.

-- Table 3.10 About Here --

III. What does the public believe causes domestic violence?

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Two kinds of questions were asked about respondent perceptions of causes, open-ended and closed-ended. We asked the open-ended question relatively early in the survey, in an attempt to obtain unbiased responses and to avoid suggesting appealing explanations that respondents would not have offered on their own. We asked a general question: "In your opinion, what causes couples to physically hurt one another?" Unlike Klein et al.'s respondents, who were reportedly reticent in discussing causes of domestic violence, our respondents had no difficulty sharing their thoughts about causes.¹⁵ We created a coding scheme that included twenty-eight categories; and then, based on research on risk factors for violence, recoded these items into the nine broader topical areas reported in Table 3.11. These areas can be organized

¹⁵However, this method is somewhat different from that used by Klein et al.(1997) who asked an open-ended question about the causes of violence following a vignette.

into three broad categories: individual level factors, family/couple level, and macro level or societal causes.¹⁶

Table 3.11 reports the distribution of responses; percentages sum to more than 100 because many respondents identified causes that fell into more than one category (up to six (in rank order) were: financial and work stresses or problems (mentioned by 37%), substance abuse (30%), anger and loss of control (28%), relationship problems (20%), early exposure to family violence (17%), adultery or jealousy (15%), and perpetrators' mental health problems (14%).¹⁷

- Table 3.11 About Here -

To better understand these beliefs, we analyzed them in relation to respondents' social background characteristics, first- and second-hand experiences with domestic violence, and community of residence. Bivariate relationships between beliefs about causes and respondent characteristics are reported in Table 3.12. These analyses indicate that

- women are less likely to attribute violence to relationship problems, but more likely to attribute violence to early exposure to family violence, anger and loss of control, and mental health or personality problems;
- married respondents are more likely to see work stresses and exposure to family violence,

¹⁶Individual level codes included: controlling/dominating personality/punitive, stress (not otherwise defined, substance abuse, anger, history of family violence, exposure to violence in general, mental health/emotional problems of the offender, personality problems, lack of education, factors pertaining to the woman, breakdown of the marriage, breakdown of morality, victim provocation, machismo. Family/relationship codes included: communication problems, adultery, jealousy, disrespect, familial stress, children, social isolation, and nature of the relationship. Macro level codes included: financial stress, unemployment, other work-related stresses.

¹⁷For a review of causes of domestic violence see Carlson, Worden, van Ryn, and Bachman (in press).

and less likely to see adultery and mental health/personality problems, as causes;

- African-American and Latino respondents are more likely to see relationship problems and adultery as causes of domestic violence compared with white respondents;
- respondents with more education are more likely to attribute violence to work stresses, exposure to family violence, anger, and mental health/personality problems, and less likely to attribute violence to relationship problems; and
- older respondents are more likely to attribute domestic violence to a breakdown in social norms, work/financial stress, and substance abuse.

- Table 3.12 About Here -

To summarize, gender, marital status, ethnicity, education, and age were related to the frequency with which respondents attributed to domestic violence to certain causes.

Experience is also associated with beliefs about domestic violence, as reported in Table 3.13. Self-reported victims are more likely to attribute domestic violence to adultery or jealousy, substance abuse, and mental problems and less likely to a breakdown in social norms.

Interestingly, offenders are more inclined to attribute domestic violence to mental health or personality problems of offenders. Respondents who know victims more likely to attribute domestic violence to exposure to family violence, substance abuse and mental health problems and less likely to a breakdown in social norms. In contrast, respondents who reported being personally acquainted with an offender were more likely to cite substance abuse as a cause.

Respondents who know someone who sought counseling for victimization are more likely to attribute domestic violence to exposure to family violence, as were respondents who have

witnessed or overheard domestic violence. The latter group were also more likely to attribute violence to relationship problems, adultery or jealousy, and substance abuse, and less likely to attribute it to a breakdown in social norms. In summary, the most important experience variables in terms of explaining open-ended causes were being a victim, knowing a victim, and having witnessed or overheard domestic violence.

-- Table 3.13 About Here --

Overall, community of residence was not strongly associated with beliefs about causes of violence, as measured by these items. Respondents from Syracuse and Yonkers were the most likely and those from Oneida county, Lockport and Essex county least likely to attribute domestic violence to adultery or jealousy, perhaps suggesting that a difference in the social norms or values of urban and small-town or rural communities.

To summarize: based on the open-ended question about what causes couples to physically hurt one another, respondents identified a wide variety of causes: financial and work stresses, substance abuse, anger and loss of control, relationship problems, exposure to family violence, adultery and jealousy, and mental health problems of the offender. These diverse responses reflect very different explanations for violent behavior, and most of them have been the subject of research. However, respondents seldom or never suggested other risk factors identified by researchers, such as youth, relationship status, history of previous victimization, history of emotional abuse, sexist beliefs and gender role stereotyping, ethnic and cultural background, and urban residence (for a review, see Carlson et al., in press; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).

Closed-Ended Questions About Causes of Domestic Violence

Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with statements that directly or indirectly identified causes of domestic violence. Responses for these ten items (five of which were asked of each respondent) are reported in Table 3.14. Respondents exhibited highest levels of agreement (at least 50%) with the following statements: substance abuse, men's psychological problems, women's provocation, socialization of boys to be aggressive, women failure to leave abusive relationships, escalation of verbal aggression to physical aggression, and the low likelihood that violent people will change, ~~ing~~ difficulty. However, substantial minorities of respondents (about 20%) expressed uncertainty about most of these

- Table 3.14 About Here --

In some respects the responses to these close-ended items echo those of the open-ended question analysis; in particular, both types of question suggest that significant numbers of respondents attribute violence to stress, substance abuse, men's psychological problems, and socialization into aggression or violence. The striking difference, however, is in the level of agreement that women may initiate violence, and that they may be partially responsible for continued abuse. These beliefs show up only when respondents are asked directly. This suggests the possibility that social desirability has inhibited respondents from spontaneously mentioning those factors in response to the open-ended question. Alternatively, whereas the open ended question may have prompted respondents to reflect on why individuals become violent, the close-ended items stimulated them to consider more complex issues, such as the

variety of circumstances that precede violent incidents, and why violence continues in relationships.

As reported in Table 3.15, agreement with these statements is associated with several respondent characteristics, in particular education and age. For example, those with less education are more likely to agree that violence is a normal response to stress, and to subscribe to the belief that women could get out if they wanted to; on the other hand, they are less likely to attribute partner violence to societal factors. Older respondents were also more likely to agree that stress and violence are related; they also are more likely to agree that substance abuse causes violence, and that verbal abuse can escalate into physical violence. In addition, older respondents are also more likely to attribute domestic violence to the way women treat men, and to believe that some women enjoy abuse.

- Table 3.15 About Here-

Having firsthand experience as a victim or perpetrator was also related to several possible causal factors, as reported in Table 3.16. Victims were more likely to attribute violence to escalating verbal abuse, women starting fights, men's psychological problems, substance abuse, and the way women treat men. Although this may be surprising, it should be noted that a substantial percentage of men reported victimization (26% of men, 35% of women). Those who report having used violence toward an intimate partner (21% of females and 14% of males), were more likely to attribute violence to escalating verbal abuse, men's psychological problems, and substance abuse. These findings present some evidence that secondhand experience with domestic violence may influence beliefs about causes. For example, respondents who reported

knowing a victim were more likely to agree that society teaches boys to be aggressive, that verbal abuse is likely to escalate, and that women provoke and tolerate violence. Those who report knowing a perpetrator tend to agree with these statements as well, as do those who report having witnessed abusive behavior.

- Table 3.16 About Here -

Interestingly, the bivariate associations between experience with violence and beliefs look somewhat different when women and men are analyzed separately, inasmuch as every statistically significant bivariate relationship described above becomes significant for only one gender. For example, only among women is victimization significantly associated with the beliefs that verbal abuse escalates and ^{3,} that belief that abuse is caused by women's behavior. In contrast, three associations were significant for men only - between self-reported offending and believing that violent people do not change, that women start fights, and that men's psychological problems cause violence. Similarly, only among men is victimization ~~is~~ associated with believing that abuse is caused by women starting fights, men's psychological problems, and substance abuse[^].

To summarize: Combining responses to the open-ended and closed-ended questions about causes of domestic violence, it is clear that the public believes a wide variety of factors - at the societal level, the family or couple level, and the individual level - play contributing roles. Most respondents gave multiple answers to the open-ended questions, and most agreed with more than one of the five items we posed to them. Aside from the victim blaming that comes through in the closed-ended responses (discussed below), in the aggregate there is substantial correspondence between respondent beliefs and what recent research has shown to be risk factors

for abuse – individual level factors related to the perpetrator (in particular substance abuse, anger and loss of control, mental health problems, and exposure to violence when growing up), family problems such as communication and child-related stress, and financial stress. One can infer that there is some appreciation of the complexity of domestic violence, as well as awareness that these behaviors are difficult to change and that psychological abuse often escalates into physical violence. On the other hand, numerous risk factors identified by researchers such as young age, cohabitation, and urban residence were not mentioned by respondents, suggesting that the full complexity of domestic violence has yet to be appreciated by the general public.

Evidence of Victim Blaming

We hypothesized that due to extensive public education and increased awareness about domestic violence, we would find little evidence of victim blaming. This expectation was largely supported in the analysis of the open-ended items about causes, to which only 2% attributed violence to factors related to women victims.

Unfortunately, however, responses to the close-ended items about causes paint a somewhat different picture. Four items pertain directly to the role of women in causing or continuing domestic violence. In these answers, there is evidence that many people continue to hold women responsible for initiating violence, or for continuing abusive relationships. Although approximately 60% disagree that women secretly want to be abused, one in four respondents agree with this item and one in five is unsure. Almost half of the sample believes that at least some violence is caused by the way women treat men, and over two thirds agree that "some violence is caused by women starting physical fights."

Due to differences in methods and measurement, it is difficult to compare these findings directly with those of other research, but it appears that these respondents hold victims at least as accountable, and maybe more so, than have those in previous studies. For example, in a study of jurors in Colorado Springs and Seattle, Green, Raitz, and Lindblad (1989) found that respondents expressed high levels of disagreement with the statement "A woman deliberately provokes violence" (see also Ewing and Aubrey, 1987). Both of these studies found that women were less likely than men to subscribe to victim-blaming attitudes, a finding not replicated in the analyses of individual items in the present study. Hence, the extent of victim blaming found in this sample is thus surprising as well as disturbing.

Most disturbing, perhaps, is that 63% of our respondents believe that women could find ways of leaving abusive relationships if they really wanted to, suggesting a widespread lack of understanding of the complexities involved in terminating abusive relationships, especially when children are involved. Battered women's advocates and others have documented the extreme difficulty women have in leaving abusive relationships due to a variety of internal barriers (e.g., depression, fear of retaliation by the abuser, fear of losing child custody) and external barriers (e.g., lack of services, lack of affordable housing, lack of support in the criminal justice system; see Barnett, 2000; and Barnett, 2001).

In an effort to determine whether responses to these items represent discrete and independent beliefs, or alternatively whether they represent a more general tendency to attribute violence to women's actions or inaction, we explored the dimensionality of people's beliefs about the causes of violence by conducting a factor analysis of these ten discrete items.¹⁸ The

¹⁸Because each respondent heard five of these items, missing values on the remainder were recoded to mean values for the purposes of conducting this analysis.

analysis resulted in in four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which in and of itself suggests that people's thinking about this topic is complex, but also confirms the expectation that one critical dimension of people's beliefs about violence is their tendency to accept or resist the temptation to blame violent behavior on its victims. The factors can be interpreted as follows:

1. The first factor captures a dimension of belief that women contribute to the violence perpetrated against them (variables loading high on this factor include views that women could get out of abusive situations if they wanted to; that violence is caused by the way women treat men; and that some women like being abused). Scores on this factor reflect the degree to which people do and do not blame women for their victimizations.
2. The second factor captures a dimension of belief that partner violence is endemic and engrained in society (items loading high on this factor include the belief that women cause fights as well as men; boys are socialized into violence; people who are verbally abusive are likely to become physically abusive; and people who are violent are unlikely to change). High scores on this factor represent pessimistic views that violence is widespread and resistant to control (low scores represent the absence of such views).
3. The third factor captures a dimension of belief that perpetrators' individual problems (drugs, alcohol, personality problems) cause them to be violent (two variables load high on this factor: the statement that alcohol and/or drugs cause men to be violent, and the statement that men who are violent have psychological or personality problems). High scores represent belief that perpetrators' problems or defects lead them to be violent; low scores represent disagreement with this view.
4. The fourth factor captures a dimension of belief that violence is normal if not normative in our society (high values on this factor are associated with agreement with the

statements that women start fights, and that violence is a normal reaction to stress, and disagreement with the view that violent people are unlikely to change). High scores represent acceptance of this view.

In the attempt to better understand who does, and does not, subscribe to woman blaming attitudes, we performed a multiple regression analysis using the first factor scale score described above. Table 3.17 reports the results of that analysis. Our model was significant in predicting woman blaming, although it explained only 4% of the variance. Those who scored high on woman blaming, not surprisingly, were more likely to be male, have less education, were older, and were less likely to be Hispanic (compared to white).

- Table 3.17 About Here -

Conclusions: Public Opinion About the Nature, Extent and Causes of Domestic Violence

There was a strong consensus among respondents that all six acts of physical violence perpetrated by spouses (punching, slapping, and forcing sex) constitute domestic violence, regardless of whether they are initiated by a husband or wife. However, there was stronger agreement that such acts are domestic violence when committed by a husband rather than a wife. There was also agreement that calling one's spouse a stupid slob is domestic violence, as is following an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, but less agreement than on acts of physical violence. Of all the respondent characteristics and experiences with domestic violence we measured, only gender and knowing a victim significantly predicted scores on the Domestic Violence Index we

created by summing answers across the five items asked of respondents: Being female and knowing a victim predicted perceiving more acts as domestic violence.

Although there was greater uncertainty among respondents about which of the ten acts were illegal in New York State, there was strong unanimity for both women and men that punching and slapping a spouse is criminal behavior. Although most agreed that a husband forcing sex on his wife was criminal, fewer than half thought a wife forcing sex was against the law. Similarly, although a small majority thought it was illegal for a man to follow his former girlfriend, just under half thought such behavior was against the law for a woman. For each behavior, fewer respondents thought such an act was illegal when committed by a woman. Three respondent characteristics and two secondhand experience variables were associated with the Criminal Domestic Violence Index. Respondents who were male, younger, and less educated as well as those who knew a perpetrator or had witnessed abuse were more likely to see more acts as illegal. Contrary to expectations, community factors were largely unrelated to perceptions of criminal domestic violence.

In general, respondents believe that domestic violence is a problem that occurs "sometimes" (the modal answer offered by 45% of the sample), with one in five saying it occurs very often, and one in five saying it occurs rarely or never. When asked to estimate the percentage of couples who are violent, most of the sample were generally accurate in their estimates of the prevalence of partner violence. Estimating its frequency as higher than 25% may be related to being a member of a group that is at higher risk for violence, such as women, African Americans, young adults, and those who are more financially stressed.

Respondents mentioned a wide variety of causes of domestic violence when asked in an

open-ended question format. Most commonly mentioned causes were financial or work stress, substance abuse, anger or loss of control, relationship problems, exposure to family violence, adultery or jealousy, and mental health problems of the perpetrator. Although numerous respondent characteristics were associated with certain causes, no particular characteristic explained perceived causes more generally.

In response to our queries about specific causal factors, respondents were most likely to agree that substance abuse, men's psychological problems, women's provocation, and the escalation of verbal abuse contributed to partner violence; they also agreed that boys are socialized into aggressive behavior, women could exit violent situations if they wanted to, and that violent people were unlikely to change. Education, age, being a victim or perpetrator and several types of secondhand experience were related to several beliefs about causes; gender moderated the relationships between victimization, perpetration and perceived causes.

We found substantial similarity in responses to open-ended and closed-ended questions about causes, in particular on the topics of stress, substance abuse, and perpetrators' mental health problems. However, these types of questions yield quite different understandings of public opinion on the subject of holding women responsible for initiating or continuing violence -- a matter seldom mentioned spontaneously, but one that elicited considerable agreement when raised by the interviewers. Thus, there appears to be a disturbing amount of responsibility assigned to women for domestic violence, despite two decades of public education and public policy to the contrary.

Table 3.1
Responses to Questions About What is Considered Domestic Violence
and Criminal Domestic Violence*

Respondent belief	Domestic Violence			Criminal		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
A husband to punch his wife with his fist	99%	7%	5%	85%	2%	13%
A wife to punch her husband with her fist	90%	7%	3%	66%	9%	25%
A husband to use physical force to make his wife have sex with him	95%	3%	1%	64%	6%	30%
A wife to use physical force to make her husband have sex with her	81%	12%	7%	41%	13%	46%
A husband to slap his wife during an argument	91%	7%	2%	64%	7%	29%
A wife slap her husband during an argument	82%	14%	4%	40%	17%	43%
A husband to insult his wife by calling her "a stupid slob"	54%	39%	7%	10%	58%	33%
A wife to insult her husband by calling him "a stupid slob"	33%	59%	9%	3%	71%	25%
A man to follow his former girlfriend all over town to try to get her to get back together with him	48%	41%	1%	58%	19%	24%
A woman to follow her former boyfriend all over town to try to get him to get back together with her	33%	59%	9%	48%	26%	26%

Table 3.2
Percent of Agreement That Various Acts Constitute Domestic Violence, by Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Respondent characteristics		Husband punches wife	Wife smashes husband	Husband forces sex	Wife forces sex	Husband slaps wife	Wife slaps husband	Husband calls wife a job	Wife calls husband a job	Male stalking	Female stalking
Gender	male	99	90	93*	77	91	78****	50	26***	45	28**
	female	99	91	97	84	92	86	58	39	50	35
Marital status	married	98	88	94	83	89	85*	52	33	46	31
	not married	100	93	96	79	94	80	55	33	49	32
Ethnicity	white	99	91**	96	82	92	82	52	30	48	31
	black	94	80	92	76	91	81	62	48	39	33
	Latino	100	95	85	84	84	100	68	50	45	47
Education	HS or less	98	84**	95	63****	82****	80	56	37**	51	29**
	some college	99	93	96	90	96	85	52	36	46	35
	college grad or higher	99	96	94	90	97	82	53	23	46	31
Employment	employed	99	94***	94	86****	95**	84	52	31	44	32
	not employed	99	85	96	72	86	78	57	37	54	31
Age	under 35	99	93****	95	86****	93**	86	57	33	44	27
	35 to 54	99	94	96	85	95	82	51	32	49	32
	55+	99	82	96	71	85	79	53	36	48	36

Respondent characteristics		Husband punches wife	Wife punches husband	Husband forces sex	Wife forces sex	Husband slaps wife	Wife slaps husband	Husband calls wife a job	Wife calls husband a job	Male walking	Female walking
Financial hardship	easy/not too difficult	99	91*	95	84**	94*	81	55	26***	46	32
	somewhat difficult	99	93	98	82	90	86	50	43	51	32
	very difficult	96	80	93	66	83	71	59	38	49	29
Community	Utica	98	91	95	74**	94	83	63	31	44	29
	Yonkers	99	85	93	75	90	87	52	38	51	35
	Oneida county	99	93	96	86	94	80	56	30	48	33
	Syracuse	99	89	96	82	86	80	51	37	45	28
	Lockport	98	92	96	83	91	85	53	33	44	36
	Essex county	100	92	96	85	93	77	48	28	54	29

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

*** $p < .0001$

Table 3.3: Percent of Agreement That Various Acts Constitute Domestic Violence, by Experiences with Domestic Violence

Respondent characteristics		Husband punches wife	Wife punches husband	Husband forces sex	Wife forces sex	Husband slaps a wife	Wife slaps a husband	Husband calls wife a SOB	Wife calls husband a SOB	Male stalking	Female stalking
Victim	yes	98	92	99*	82	92	86	53	40	54	34
	no	99	90	94	80	91	81	54	30	45	31
Offender	yes	90	89	98	80	89	84	57	40	48	36
	no	99	91	95	81	92	82	53	32	48	31
Know victim	yes	99	92	96	85****	94*	85*	54	35	50	36***
	no	99	88	95	74	88	77	53	30	46	25
Know offender	yes	98	91	96	83*	92	87**	53	37*	50	37**
	no	100	90	95	79	91	77	55	29	45	27
Know police	yes	99	91	96	82	93	85	55	35	52	37
	no	98	91	95	88	93	86	55	33	49	31
Know someone in offender counseling	yes	99	91	96	85	92	85	55	43**	55	40
	no	99	91	95	84	93	86	54	30	48	32
Know someone in victim counseling	yes	99	93	96	88	94	86	59	38	57*	39
	no	98	90	95	81	91	85	49	32	47	31
Know of someone getting DV services	yes	98	93	97	88	94	83	58	42	56	37
	no	99	90	95	82	92	87	52	31	47	34
Witnessed/overheard domestic violence	yes	98	89	95	82	91	87**	54	38*	56***	36*
	no	99	92	96	80	93	77	54	29	41	28

Table 3.4
OLS Regression on Domestic Violence Index

	D.V. Index	
	B	standard b
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	-.26	-.12***
Young (under 35)	-.04	-.00
Older (55 or older)	-.14	-.06*
Highest education: high school or GED	-.19	-.09**
Highest education: completed 4-year college	-.04	-.02
Household income under \$30,000	-.06	-.03
Reports knowing victim of partner violence	.12	.06*
Constant	3.67	

Entries are unstandardized and standardized coefficients; *** indicates $p < .01$; ** indicates $p < .05$; * indicates $p < .10$. $R^2 = .030$.

Table 3.5
Percent of Agreement That Various Acts Constitute Criminal Domestic Violence, by Demographic Characteristics

Respondent characteristics		Husband punching	Wife punching	Husband forcing sex	Wife forcing sex	Husband slaps wife	Wife slaps husband	Husband calls wife slob	Wife calls husband slob	Male stalking	Female stalking
Gender	male	90**	71**	68	44	72****	48**	12	3	59	48
	female	81	62	62	38	57	36	8	4	55	49
Marital status	married	84*	67	62	39	62	38	7	3	53	50
	not married	86	66	68	44	66	42	12	3	61	47
Ethnicity	white	84	66	62	40	63	37	7	2	56	46
	black	94	69	81	40	67	56	16	10	63	60
	Latino	85	79	75	47	74	40	26	15	80	58
Education	HS or less	87*	68	66	40	64	41	14*	5	64*	49
	some college	87	69	68	46	67	44	7	3	55	52
	college grad or higher	79	63	57	39	61	33	7	2	51	44
Employment	employed	88****	71**	66	44	67	43*	7**	3	59	51
	not employed	79	59	62	36	58	34	13	4	55	45
Age	under 35	87*	72****	80****	54****	73****	51****	10*	2****	61	47**
	35 to 54	88	74	59	43	68	39	9	3	54	57
	55+	78	51	24	49	31	9	6	60	39	

Respondent characteristics		Husband punching	Wife punching	Husband forcing sex	Wife forcing sex	Husband slaps wife	Wife slaps husband	Husband calls wife slob	Wife calls husband slob	Male stalking	Female stalking
Financial hardship	easy/not too difficult	84	68	64	40	63	39	9	2	55	45
	somewhat difficult	85	68	66	44	66	41	9	5	62	54
	very difficult	87	58	64	37	64	40	17	4	56	46
Community	Utica	89	70	73	39	64	40	13	2	54	48
	Yonkers	86	66	73	43	71	36	13	5	60	47
	Oneida county	82	61	53	42	61	30	9	2	46	47
	Syracuse	80	64	62	44	61	47	12	3	59	46
	Lockport	86	74	61	42	69	45	7	3	68	50
	Essex county	86	63	65	37	57	42	3	5	56	53

Table 3.6: Percent of Agreement That Various Acts Constitute Criminal Domestic Violence, by Experiences with Domestic Violence

Respondent characteristics		Husband punches wife	Wife punches husband	Husband forces sex	Wife forces sex	Husband slaps wife	Wife slaps husband	Husband calls wife a job	Wife calls husband a job	Male stalking	Female stalking
Victim	yes	89	73	70	48	72**	51***	7	6	64	51
	no	83	63	62	38	60	35	10	2	54	47
Offender	yes	86	70	66	47	73	47	8	5	59	55
	no	85	66	64	40	62	38	10	3	57	47
Know victim	yes	87	72***	66	45*	68	45**	9	4	59	55****
	no	82	57	62	35	59	31	10	3	55	38
Know offender	yes	88*	72**	70**	46*	70**	48****	11	5	62*	59****
	no	81	61	59	37	59	32	9	2	52	38
Know police	yes	89	74	69	46	68	49*	11	3	64	56
	no	83	64	62	43	64	37	8	6	52	50
Know someone in offender counseling	yes	88	73	72	46	72	51*	8	3	64	55
	no	86	68	62	45	63	42	11	4	57	53
Know someone in victim counseling	yes	87	71	69	48	68	47	10	4	61	55
	no	87	68	65	42	66	44	10	4	59	52
Know of someone getting domestic violence services	yes	85	75	60*	48	73	48	12	4	63	61
	no	88	68	70	43	64	44	8	4	58	51
Witnessed/overheard domestic violence	yes	89**	70*	70*	47**	68**	50****	10	4	64**	54***
	no	81	64	59	36	61	30	9	3	51	44

Table 3.7
OLS Regression on Criminal Domestic Violence Index

	Criminal D.V. Index	
	B	standard b
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.27	.10***
Young (under 35)	.19	.07**
Older (55 or older)	-.38	-.12***
Highest education: high school or GED	-.01	-.00
Highest education: completed 4-year college	-.25	-.08**
Household income under \$30,000	.16	.06*
Employed	.10	.10
Reports knowing victim of partner violence	-.07	-.02
Reports knowing perpetrator of partner violence	.37	.14***
Reports having witnessed abuse	.19	.07**
Constant	2.02	

Entries are unstandardized and standardized coefficients; *** indicates $p < .01$; ** indicates $p < .05$; * indicates $p < .10$. $R^2 = .08$.

Table 3.8
Perceptions of the Prevalence of Domestic Violence by Demographic Characteristics

Respondent characteristics		Estimated frequency of domestic violence				Estimated % of violent couples			
		Very often	Sometimes	Rarely/never	don't know	10% or less	11-25%	25% or more	don't know
Gender	male	19.2*	45.1	25.0	10.7	44.9***	21.7	12.9	20.5
	female	24.6	45.0	19.5	11.0	34.3	21.0	21.9	22.7
Marital status	married	17.3***	48.8	23.3	10.6	34.2***	19.4	20.6	21.8
	not married	26.9	41.3	20.8	11.0	44.4	23.7	14.5	21.5
Ethnicity	white	22.7	46.6	20.5	10.2	40.6***	22.2	14.5	22.7
	black	19.6	43.3	25.8	11.3	36.1	9.3	38.1	16.5
	Latino	15.4	33.3	33.3	17.9	30.8	30.8	30.8	7.7
Education	HS grad or less	22.0*	41.8	26.1	10.1	36.7	22.9	18.8	21.5
	some college	24.1	43.6	22.7	9.6	39.7	18.8	20.0	21.6
	college grad or higher	20.1	50.9	16.3	12.8	41.9	23.0	13.7	21.5
Employment	employed	22.8***	48.2	19.5	9.5	39.6***	24.2	16.2	18.3
	not employed	20.5	39.4	27.2	12.9	39.0	16.7	18.5	27.4
Age	under 35	20.6	47.0	23.9	8.5	36.1***	27.9	23.9	12.1
	35 to 54	23.3	46.7	19.9	10.1	41.0	21.1	17.1	20.9
	55+	22.1	39.4	3.9	14.5	40.0	15.8	11.8	32.4

Respondent characteristics		Estimated frequency of domestic violence				Estimated % of violent couples			
		Very often	Sometimes	Rarely/never	don't know	10% or less	11-25%	26% or more	Don't know
Financial hardship	easy/not too difficult	20.4	46.2	22.4	11.0	41.7**	21.7	15.0	21.6
	somewhat difficult	22.0	46.2	21.7	10.1	37.8	23.2	18.5	20.5
	very difficult	28.9	34.2	23.7	13.2	28.1	18.4	31.6	21.9
Community	Utica	31.5***	40.5	16.0	12.0	31.0***	23.0	26.6	19.5
	Yonkers	11.0	42.5	30.0	16.5	42.5	17.0	20.5	20.0
	Oneida county	16.5	44.5	28.0	11.0	47.5	19.5	5.5	27.5
	Syracuse	30.0	41.0	16.5	12.5	33.0	22.0	23.0	22.0
	Lockport	26.5	53.5	15.5	4.5	37.0	26.5	16.0	20.5
	Essex county	17.0	48.5	26.0	8.5	44.0	20.5	15.0	20.5
Sample percentages		22.1	45.1	22	10.8	39.2	21.4	17.8	21.7

Table 3.9: Perceptions of Prevalence of Domestic Violence by Experiences with Violence

Respondent characteristics		Estimated frequency of domestic violence				Estimated % of partners who hurt each other			
		very often	sometimes	rarely/never	don't know	10% or less	11-25%	> 25%	don't know
Victim	yes	32.3***	40.8	16.8	10.1	29.3***	26.6	27.4	16.6
	no	17.7	46.9	24.4	11.1	43.8	19.1	13.3	23.8
Offender	yes	30.8***	46.0	13.3	10.0	27.0***	22.7	32.2	18.0
	no	20.3	44.8	23.8	11.1	41.9	21.1	14.6	22.4
Know victim	yes	28.7***	46.2	17.8	7.3	35.5***	24.0	23.9	16.6
	no	11.5	43.0	28.9	16.6	45.5	12.2	7.7	29.6
Know offender	yes	28.8***	45.5	18.1	7.7	34.8***	24.4	25.4	15.4
	no	15.5	44.4	26.3	13.8	43.8	18.5	10.1	27.6
Know of police being called	yes	31.7***	45.3	16.4	6.5	34.6***	22.8	27.9	14.8
	no	16.6	50.6	22.6	10.2	40.8	25.3	11.7	22.3
Know someone in offender counseling	yes	35.7***	42.4	15.6	6.4	34.4*	25.2	26.8	13.7
	no	21.4	49.4	20.8	8.4	38.5	22.4	20.2	18.9
Know someone in victim counseling	yes	37.7***	45.9	12.2	4.2	36.1***	23.9	27.9	12.2
	no	18.0	47.6	23.8	10.7	37.6	23.3	18.2	20.9
Know of someone getting DV services	yes	40.6***	39.9	13.6	5.9	32.5***	22.0	31.8	13.6
	no	19.2	50.7	21.5	8.6	39.4	23.7	17.7	19.2
Witnessed/overheard domestic violence	yes	30.9***	43.0	18.8	7.4	34.4*	22.4	28.1	15.1
	no	14.9	46.7	24.6	13.8	43.2	20.7	9.0	27.1

Table 3.10
Logistic Regression: Estimates of Number of Violent Couples:
Estimating 25% or Higher

	Perceptions of Prevalence: 25% or more		
	B	S.E.	Wald
Gender (1=male)	-.53	.18	8.56***
Young (under 35)	.35	.20	3.09*
Older (55 or older)	-.17	.24	.52
Marital status (1=married)	-.05	.18	.06
African-American	.71	.27	6.64**
Hispanic	.30	.42	.51
Perceives that violence occurs rarely in community	-.50	.25	4.09**
Perceives that violence occurs often in community	.57	.20	8.11***
Reports victimization (no offending)	.29	.24	1.47
Reports perpetrating (no victimization)	.11	.51	.05
Reports both victimization and perpetrating violence	.65	.23	7.82***
Limited experience with domestic violence	-.63	.32	3.90**
Diverse experience with domestic violence	.04	.32	.02
Experiencing some financial hardship	.02	.19	.01
Experiencing great financial hardship	.66	.28	5.74**
Yonkers	-.08	.29	.07
Utica	.36	.27	1.81
Oneida	-1.09	.39	8.01***
Lockport	-.32	.29	1.21
Essex	-.05	.31	.03
Constant	-1.11	.41	7.49***

Variables for perceptions of community violence were coded as rarely, sometimes, often; "sometimes" is the excluded value for this model. Variables for secondary experience with domestic violence is coded none, low, and high; none is the excluded value. Variables for financial hardship were coded low, some, and great; "low" is the excluded value.

*** indicates $p < .01$; ** indicates $p < .05$; * indicates $p < .10$.

Table 3.11: Respondent Perceptions of Causes (based on open-ended questions)

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
1. Adultery/jealousy	15%
Adultery	10%
Jealousy	6%
2. Exposure to family violence	17%
Family history of violence	16%
Exposure to violence	1%
3. Substance abuse (alcohol or drugs)	30%
4. Anger, loss of control	28%
5. Mental health/personality problems	14%
Mental health/emotional problems	6%
Other personality problems	4%
Controlling/dominating personality	6%
OTHER	
Disrespect	4%
Social isolation	.1%
Lack of education	6%
Factors related to the woman	2%

MACRO FACTORS	
1. Work/financial	37%
Financial stress	33%
Unemployment	3%
Other work stresses	5%
2. Breakdown of norms	3%
Morality	2%
Marriage	1%
FAMILY FACTORS	
1. Relationship	20%
Communication problems	18%
Nature of the relationship	2%
2. Child or family stress	9%
Family stress	2%
Child stress	7%

Table 3.12
Open-Ended Causes by Demographic Characteristics

Respondent characteristics		Breakdown in norms	Work/financial	Relationship problems	Child or family stress	Adultery/jealousy	Exposure to family violence	Substance abuse	Anger	MHI/personality problems
Gender	male	2.7	37.9	22.5*	7.1	13.6	14.1*	27.2	23.2**	12.0*
	female	3.1	36.9	17.9	9.7	15.3	18.9	31.7	31.4	16.4
Marital status	married	3.3	42.0***	19.6	9.0	10.5***	19.1*	29.9	26.1	12.1*
	not married	2.5	32.5	20.3	8.0	18.6	14.2	29.3	29.3	16.8
Ethnicity	white	3.0	38.5	18.8*	8.3	12.5***	17.6	30.0	29.0	14.2
	black	2.1	36.1	24.7	9.3	27.8	13.4	22.7	19.6	10.3
	Latino	0	23.1	35.9	7.7	23.1	15.4	17.9	28.2	15.4
Education	HS grad or less	2.7	32.1*	19.8*	7.2	19.8***	10.6***	30.7	20.8**	11.1*
	some college	2.5	39.4	17.0	8.7	12.2	16.7	30.3	27.1	15.1
	college grad or higher	3.8	37.2	24.1	9.6	10.8	23.5	27.6	36.9	17.4
Employment	employed	2.7	38.6	19.2	8.1	12.4**	18.1	29.6	28.9	14.3
	not employed	3.3	34.8	21.2	9.3	17.9	14.1	29.4	25.5	14.3
Age	under 35	1.1***	31.5*	22.0	6.5	15.5	14.6	23.7*	27.0	14.6
	35 to 54	2.4	41.6	20.1	9.7	12.7	18.5	32.2	27.6	12.5
	55+	5.8	37.3	18.2	8.5	16.4	15.8	32.4	27.9	17.3

Respondent characteristics		Breakdown in norms	Work/financial	Relationship problems	Child or family stress	Adultery/jealousy	Exposure to family violence	Substance abuse	Anger	MH/personality problems
Financial hardship	easy/not too difficult	2.8	37.4	20.2	7.7	13.6	18.5*	28.6	28.6	16.2
	somewhat difficult	3.0	39.0	19.5	9.9	16.0	15.3	30.1	27.7	11.6
	very difficult	2.6	32.5	22.8	9.6	14.0	9.6	31.6	26.3	14.9
Community	Utica	1.5	38.0	19.0	4.0	16.0**	11.0	27.0	27.0	10.5
	Yonkers	1.5	39.5	23.5	10.5	20.0	15.0	27.0	26.0	16.5
	Oneida county	4.5	37.0	17.5	8.5	9.0	22.0	30.0	33.0	14.0
	Syracuse	4.0	34.0	19.5	8.5	20.0	16.0	27.5	27.5	18.5
	Lockport	3.5	33.0	22.0	9.5	10.5	19.5	27.5	30.5	12.5
	Essex county	2.5	42.5	18.5	10.5	11.5	16.5	38.5	21.5	14.5

Table 3.13: Open-Ended Causes by Experiences with Violence

Respondent characteristics		Breakdown in norms	Work/financial	Relationship problems	Child or family stress	Adultery/jealousy	Exposure to family violence	Substance abuse	Anger	MH/personality problems
Victim	yes	1.1*	36.4	22.6	10.3	18.5**	16.6	33.7*	29.3	17.4*
	no	3.7	37.8	19.0	7.6	12.7	16.8	27.8	26.7	12.7
Offender	yes	1.9	37.4	23.7	10.9	18.0	18.5	30.3	32.7	20.4**
	no	3.0	37.4	19.2	7.9	13.8	16.4	29.5	26.6	13.0
Know victim	yes	1.9*	38.2	21.5	9.3	15.2	19.7***	31.7*	29.0	16.1*
	no	4.4	36.0	17.2	7.3	12.8	11.9	26.5	25.2	11.7
Know offender	yes	2.0	38.1	22.1	9.7	16.2	18.7	32.9*	27.6	15.4
	no	3.9	36.5	17.7	7.4	12.6	14.6	26.6	27.3	13.3
Know police	yes	1.9	39.0	20.5	8.8	16.4	19.8	33.3	27.7	16.0
	no	2.6	37.0	23.4	10.2	14.0	17.7	28.7	30.9	14.0
Know someone in offender counseling	yes	1.9	42.0	22.3	8.9	18.5	20.7	35.0	26.8	17.2
	no	2.3	36.4	21.0	9.5	13.6	18.1	30.0	29.8	13.8
Know someone in victim counseling	yes	2.4	40.6	22.5	9.3	14.6	23.6***	31.8	29.7	18.0
	no	2.0	36.7	20.4	9.3	16.7	14.9	31.3	27.3	13.3
Know of someone getting DV services	yes	1.7	37.8	23.1	10.1	17.1	22.0	33.2	28.3	16.8
	no	2.4	38.5	20.6	8.8	15.1	17.7	30.7	29.0	14.8
Witnessed or overheard domestic violence	yes	1.8*	38.8	22.4*	8.8	17.6**	18.9*	33.1*	27.2	15.8
	no	3.9	35.9	17.6	8.4	11.9	14.7	26.9	28.0	13.3

Table 3.14
Frequencies of Responses to Closed-Ended Questions about Causes of Domestic Violence

Item	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Some women who are abused secretly want to be treated that way	23.0	59.6	17.5
Most men who act abusively toward family members have psychological or personality problems	70.4	11.8	17.8
Much domestic violence is caused by alcohol and drug abuse	84.7	7.5	7.8
Most women could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to	63.1	23.8	13.1
Some violence is caused by the way women treat men	45.9	32.1	22.0
A lot of what is called "domestic violence" is really just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	37.5	50.8	11.6
People who are violent toward their family members are not likely to change	50.2	29.8	20.0
Husbands who shout, yell, and curse at their wives are likely to become physically violent eventually	55.7	25.3	19.0
Society teaches boys to be physically aggressive	64.7	22.8	12.5
Some violence is caused by women starting physical fights	68.3	14.3	17.4

Table 3.15
Percent of Agreement About Causes of Domestic Violence, by Respondent Demographic Characteristics*

Respondent characteristics		Stress	Violent people don't change	Verbal leads to physical	Society makes boys violent	Women start fights	Women like abuse	Men's psych. problems	Substance abuse	Women could get out	Way women treat men
Gender	male	41.9	47.0	50.4	66.7	67.2	24.3	68.8	83.3	66.0**	49.7
	female	34.1	52.8	59.9	63.2	69.1	21.8	71.8	85.9	60.3	42.6
Marital status	married	37.7	48.8	48.2***	65.8	70.5	21.3	68.8	87.3	63.1	42.9
	not married	37.6	51.7	63.1	64.1	66.1	25.1	72.2	82.7	63.1	49.2
Ethnicity	white	37.7	53.6**	54.0	66.2	69.5	23.5	69.5	85.4**	61.2	47.4**
	black	38.5	34.6	63.5	55.8	69.2	22.2	75.6	82.2	68.9	37.8
	Latino	60.0	35.0	70.0	50.0	55.0	53.0	78.9	66.7	57.9	10.5
Education	HS grad or less	46.5***	54.0	58.4	55.0***	64.4	25.4***	65.7	84.0	76.1***	44.6**
	some college	37.3	45.3	58.5	67.8	67.8	19.4	73.1	82.5	60.7	42.3
	college grad or higher	26.5	53.4	48.4	72.7	74.1	24.6	72.7	88.5	50.3	51.9
Employment	employed	34.9	47.8	53.7	66.7	72.8**	21.9	69.1	84.7	64.4	43.8*
	not employed	43.1	55.2	60.2	61.2	59.4	24.9	72.4	85.2	60.8	49.8
Age	under 35	26.6***	47.9	56.8***	60.4	66.9	17.1*	61.5*	78.6*	71.7	36.9***
	35 to 54	36.9	48.3	48.7	70.1	72.3	22.2	73.1	85.5	59.8	44.9
	55+	51.0	57.8	68.8	60.4	63.2	30.9	76.0	90.8	58.9	57.7

Respondent characteristics		Stress	Violent people don't change	Verbal leads to physical	Society makes boys violent	Women start fights	Women like abuse	Men's psych. problems	Substance abuse	Women could get out	Way women treat men
Financial hardship	easy/not too difficult	33.1*	52.7	56.7	64.3	69.6	22.7	72.4	84.7	61.3	43.6
	somewhat difficult	46.8	43.3	52.7	66.7	68.7	22.0	67.8	82.9	64.9	48.3
	very difficult	34.5	61.8	63.6	60.0	61.8	23.7	67.8	91.4	69.5	49.2
Community	Utica	44.0	46.0	59.0	63.0	66.0	18.0	76.0	84.0	68.0	38.0
	Yonkers	46.5	45.5	51.5	61.4	64.4	24.2	72.7	83.7	64.6	37.4
	Oneida county	40.0	60.0	50.0	65.0	75.0	30.0	65.0	89.0	62.0	54.0
	Syracuse	30.0	44.0	64.0	67.0	68.0	19.4	70.9	80.6	68.0	52.4
	Lockport	37.6	51.5	54.5	64.4	70.3	22.2	66.7	79.8	60.6	45.5
	Essex county	27.0	54.5	55.6	67.7	66.0	24.0	71.0	91.0	55.0	48.0

Table 3.16
Percent of Agreement That Various Acts Constitute Causes of Domestic Violence
by Experiences with Domestic Violence

Respondent characteristics		Stress	Violent people don't change	Verbal leads to physical	Society makes boys violent	Women start fights	Women like abuse	Men's psych. problems	Substance abuse	Women could get out	Way women treat men
Victim (n = 368)	yes	38.3	54.6	70.5***	69.4	77.6***	22.2	73.0*	78.3*	63.2	41.6*
	no	37.5	48.8	49.3	63.3	63.9	23.4	69.1	87.6	63.0	48.2
Offender (n = 211)	yes	40.7	46.3*	72.2***	72.2	76.9	23.1	62.5*	77.7**	64.4	43.3
	no	37.0	51.3	52.3	63.1	66.7	23.1	71.9	86.2	62.8	46.6
Know victim (n = 741)	yes	33.7***	51.6	60.0*	71.1***	73.7***	24.2*	69.2	82.1	61.8*	44.5*
	no	43.6	47.9	48.4	53.9	58.6	21.0	73.0	88.8	66.1	47.6
Know offender (n = 598)	yes	35.1**	50.8	61.3*	73.4***	73.4**	26.1	68.8	82.0	65.8*	46.4**
	no	39.7	50.0	50.0	56.1	63.4	20.0	72.3	87.3	61.3	45.3
Know police (n = 567)	yes	32.2	53.6	61.0	72.2	76.6	25.5	65.0***	80.2	61.3	42.7
	no	44.2	50.4	58.9	68.2	67.4	21.9	77.4	86.9	62.0	45.3
Know someone in offender counseling (n = 314)	yes	33.1	51.0	64.3	75.8*	74.5	27.8	74.1	88.0*	57.6	46.2
	no	36.9	54.0	57.0	67.7	73.4	22.1	66.4	78.2	63.2	41.5
Know someone in victim counseling (n = 377)	yes	26.7**	54.5	67.5*	74.9*	75.4	27.1	74.5	84.0	57.4	43.1
	no	43.5	51.7	53.9	67.2	73.3	21.9	65.8	79.8	63.9	43.4

Respondent characteristics		Stress	Violent people don't change	Verbal leads to physical	Society makes boys violent	Women start fights	Women like abuse	Men's psych. problems	Substance abuse	Women could get out	Way women treat men
Know of someone getting DV services (n=286)	yes	26.9*	51.0	67.6	75.2	77.2	23.9	70.4	84.5	61.3	43.7
	no	39.7	53.1	56.3	69.3	72.9	24.5	68.9	80.9	61.9	44.0
Witnessed or overheard dv (n=544)	yes	37.7	53.2*	61.3*	72.5***	76.1***	24.0	70.7	83.2	63.9	43.3** *
	no	37.3	47.1	51.0	57.7	60.8	22.4	70.1	86.3	62.7	48.1

Table 3.17
OLS Regression on Woman Blaming

	Blaming factor scale score	
	B	standard b
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.17	.07**
Age category	.06	.08**
Education level	-.10	-.11***
Estimate of % of partners who hurt each other	-.03	-.03
Self-reported victim	-.08	-.04
Hispanic	-.40	-.08**
African-American	-.03	-.01
Domestic violence index	-.04	-.05
Constant	.24	

Entries are unstandardized and standardized coefficients; *** indicates $p < .01$; ** indicates $p < .05$; * indicates $p < .10$. $R^2 = .08$.

CHAPTER 4

BELIEFS ABOUT COMMUNITY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSES

Introduction

This chapter examines public opinion about the role of criminal justice agencies and communities in responding to partner violence. Specifically, we examined survey respondents' beliefs about (1) what actions police should take, in four domestic violence vignettes, (2) how the courts should handle domestic violence cases, and (3) how their communities should respond to the problem of domestic violence. Six broad questions guide the analyses presented in this chapter:

- (1) Are respondents' beliefs about appropriate or effective public responses characterized by punitive, rehabilitative, or protective orientations, or by some combination thereof?
- (2) How much consensus or dissensus exists among the public on these questions?
- (3) Are public attitudes about appropriate responses in line with typical policies, practices, and programs?
- (4) Are individuals' attitudes about responses to partner violence influenced by their social backgrounds? By their first- or second-hand experience with violence? By their beliefs about the causes of violence? By the character of their communities?

I. Attitudes about Police Responses to Domestic Incidents

Despite conventional wisdom that people believe family violence is a private matter, our findings [?] ~~about confirm~~ that large sectors of the public believe most violent acts should be criminalized, and recent research suggests that the public in general, as well as many practitioners who deal with domestic violence incidents, endorse law enforcement responses to incidents involving physical violence. Based on these studies, and consistent with high levels of agreement that many aggressive actions constitute not only domestic violence but also criminal behavior in this study (as reported in Chapter 3), we expected to find that the public supported police actions that clearly defined aggressors as criminal suspects. However, given that society remains ambivalent about the efficacy of enforcement and arrest, we also predicted that respondents would express diverse views about the police role in domestic cases.

Views about appropriate or desirable police responses were examined through use of a vignette, which varied across two dimensions: level of violence and injury used by the perpetrator, and marital status of the couple. Each respondent heard one of the four versions of the vignette, followed by an open-ended question about what should happen when police are called to the scene:

*Consider the following situation: a man and a woman have been [dating/married] for almost one year. One night they had arranged to meet at [the woman's apartment/home] after work. After the woman arrived, a loud argument started. The man ended up [slapping her across the face/punching her in the face, leaving her with a black eye and bloody nose]. A neighbor overheard the yelling and screaming coming from their apartment and called the police. Based on this situation, what do you think **should** happen after the police arrive at their home? [allow multiple responses. Ask "anything else?"]*

Table 4.1 summarizes the variety and distributions of responses to this question,

distinguishing between the version with lesser violence and that with more serious violence. Virtually all respondents recommended at least one action: only 1% did not have an answer to offer. Coding produced thirty distinct responses, allowing for fine distinctions between codes (for example, arrest was distinct from "taking into custody" at the initial coding stage). As reported in Table 4.1, responses were then recoded into seven categories, capturing substantive differences in the preferred action. Because respondents often mentioned more than one action, totals for both specific and recoded categories sum to greater than 100%.

--Table 4.1 about here--

By a large margin, the most common target for preferred police action was the male perpetrator, and the most commonly recommended action involved traditional law enforcement activity (most frequently arrest). In both less severe and more severe violence scenarios, the most common preferred response was arrest: 39% of respondents in the former, and 64% in the latter, scenarios favored arrest of the perpetrator. Two other categories of law enforcement action were coded, exclusive of arrest: use of legal authority (to investigate, warn of arrest, file reports), and use of coercive power to separate the parties (by removing the perpetrator, or requiring him to leave the scene to "cool off"). Respondents were twice as likely to recommend these actions in the less severe violence vignette. All in all, almost all respondents (86% in V1, 90% in V2) recommended some sort of enforcement-oriented action in these cases.

To the extent that respondents suggested other sorts of actions, therefore, they were

largely in addition to, rather than instead of, enforcement-oriented action (about 40% recommended more than one category of response as recoded here¹⁹). Small minorities of respondents thought the police should direct the perpetrator to counseling (fewer than 10%). A minority of respondents directed their attention toward victims, preferring that police provide transportation, medical assistance, or legal protection (more commonly in the severe violence scenario). Fewer than 20% of respondents thought that police should make efforts to reconcile the parties or mediate the problem.

It is important to note that very few respondents (2%) believed that police should not take any action in either incident, and an equally small percentage believed that the police should take similar enforcement actions against both parties. However, about one in five respondents added to their recommendations (most frequently preferences for arrest) that police should act only at the victim's initiative, or in compliance with her preferences.

Table 4.2 summarizes the recoded response categories, distinguishing responses to each of the four vignettes. It appears that respondents' knowledge about the marital status of the couple does not greatly influence their attitudes about appropriate police responses, especially in the severe violence scenario. In the less severe violence scenario, respondents presented with a married couple were less likely to see arrest as appropriate, and more likely to see mediation or reconciliation efforts as appropriate.

¹⁹Respondents who suggested more than one action differ in some respects from those who express only one: those who suggested only one (typically enforcement-oriented action) were more likely to be over 55, have only high school education, and be male.

-Table 4.2 about here--

To summarize, the public predictably defines the police role in domestic incidents largely in terms of traditional law enforcement powers and actions, directed toward controlling perpetrators. Interestingly, both incidents elicit significant support for arrest, although only the more severe violence vignette would be likely to result in misdemeanor charges under current New York state law. Respondents are much less likely to define the police role in terms of victim-oriented support or protection, or to expect police to mediate or facilitate mediation by third parties.²⁰ Respondents' beliefs about appropriate police responses are, in the aggregate, best characterized as punitive rather than rehabilitative, and offender-focused rather than victim- or couple-focused. However, some respondents' views about arrest are tempered by the belief that police should rely on victims' wishes or initiative in enforcing the law.

Despite the strong plurality favoring enforcement-oriented police responses, it would be inaccurate to suggest that there is consensus among respondents on appropriate actions, however. Previous research has provided few leads in accounting for this variation, much of which is probably attributable to experiences, socialization, and cultural influences that would be difficult if not impossible to measure. However, consistent with what we know from previous research and about public opinion regarding criminal justice issues more generally, we hypothesized that

²⁰Strong support for arrest may be in part attributable to the relatively unambiguous culpability of the male in the vignettes. To the extent that the public is ambivalent about treating domestic violence as criminal behavior, the ambivalence may be due to the assumption that both parties were partially at fault, that the violence was mutual, or that the victim provoked the attack through her words or behavior; the vignette presented in the survey did not include such cues.

respondents' perspectives on police would be shaped by social background characteristics, beliefs about what causes partner violence, first- and second-hand experiences with partner violence, community, and one's beliefs about the magnitude of community crime problems generally and domestic violence specifically.

Social background characteristics: Two general sets of attitudes -- beliefs about gender roles and beliefs about the need for greater crime control -- are often associated with political and social conservatism; yet on the topic of partner violence, those beliefs may cut in opposite directions (for example, those who feel in general that police should exercise more enforcement power may also believe that spouse abuse is a private or family matter rather than a public offense). We hypothesized that preferences for arrest would be more prevalent among men, younger respondents, whites rather than minorities, and those with less formal education. We also hypothesized that victim-oriented preferences would be more common among women. Table 4.3 reports bivariate associations among four of the recoded preference variables, for respondents who heard the severe as well as the less severe violence vignettes.²¹

As predicted, older respondents were less likely than younger to favor arrest in the less

²¹ For the purposes of this analysis, responses to vignettes involving the married and dating couple are combined; there were no significant differences in the associations between social background variables and preferred police action across this dimension. Excluded from this table are use of legal authority short of arrest (inasmuch as this recommendation does not have an unambiguous focus on either offender or victim, nor does it clearly connote either a punitive or a restorative perspective); efforts to rehabilitate the offender through counseling (inasmuch as this preference was very rarely expressed); and deferring to victim initiative or preference (inasmuch as this was usually a condition or proviso attached to a recommendation for arrest, not a substantive recommendation in and of itself).

severe violence scenario, and Hispanic respondents were in even greater consensus on arrest than were whites or African Americans in the more severe violence scenario. Better educated respondents were somewhat less likely to prefer arrest in the less severe violence situation, and slightly more likely to favor victim assistance in the more serious situation. However, the most important observation to be made from this table is that social background appears to account for little variation in preferences about police actions.

Beliefs about what causes partner violence: As reported in the preceding chapter, respondents were asked both open-ended and close-ended questions about causes of domestic violence. We hypothesized that beliefs about culpability of perpetrators, the role of victims in provoking or tolerating violent behavior, and the role of stress or family problems would be associated with preferences for punitive or controlling response such as arrest, restorative responses such as mediation or joint counseling, and victim-oriented responses. Table 4.4a reports bivariate associations between responses to open-ended questions about the causes of violence and the four police actions: arrest, separation of parties, attempting to settle or mediate, and providing help to the victim.

- Table 4.4a About Here -

Again, these associations suggest that there are at best modest associations between understanding the causes of violence and recommending police responses. In the less severe violence scenario, those who believe that violence begins in the family of origin are slightly more

likely than others to want police to take steps to mediate or reconcile. In the more severe scenario, preferences for arrest are modestly associated with beliefs that violence is linked to drug or alcohol abuse, histories of family violence, mental health problems, and decline in moral values; while those who attribute violence to anger or loss of control, or to family stress, are less likely to find arrest appropriate. However, preferences for other police actions are not consistently associated with beliefs about causes, as measured this way.

Table 4.4b reports parallel associations with close-ended items about causes of violence. Respondents who agree that violence is associated with psychological problems or boys' socialization, and those who believe that violent people are unlikely to change, are more likely to favor arrest in the less severe vignette, while those who believe that women initiate some fights and that women's treatment of men causes violence are less likely than those who disagree to favor arrest. These latter variables are also associated, inversely, with preferring that police separate the parties or settle arguments on the scene. A preference for police providing assistance to victims is associated, but not strongly, with the belief that violence is caused by alcohol and drug abuse; those who attribute violence to women's behavior are less likely than others to favor police helping victims.

- Table 4.4b About Here -

First- and second-hand experiences with partner violence: Relatively few studies have examined the effect of individual life experiences with partner violence on beliefs about social

responses. At a simplistic level, we hypothesized that self-reported perpetrators would favor police responses other than arrest (and perhaps no response at all), while self-reported victims would favor protective responses. A straightforward extension of these simple hypotheses would be the prediction that those who were acquainted with victims and offenders would, at more modest levels, share those perspectives.

But these predictions oversimplify the nature of experience with violence. As reported in the preceding chapter, notable numbers of respondents acknowledged perpetrating violence as well as being victimized by partners; and there is significant overlap in these groups among both women and men. Even higher percentages of the sample reported knowing people who had been victims or perpetrators (and, as reported in Chapter 3, many of those knew of incidents that entailed police involvement, orders of protection, offender treatment, and victim counseling and service provision). Table 4.5 reports bivariate associations among measures of victimization, offending, and acquaintance with victims and offenders in partner violence incidents. In the less severe violence scenario, having been or known a victim is associated with slightly higher preferences for arrest, while the absence of experience with violence is modestly associated with a preference for having police try to mediate or reconcile the parties. In the more severe violence scenario, respondents with some experience were slightly more likely to want the police to assist the victim. Interestingly, the few patterns that emerge have less to do with direct experience (as either a perpetrator or victim) than with second-hand experience. However, given the complex relationships among these various types of experience and gender, bivariate associations offer only a limited picture of the influence of experience on attitudes.

- Table 4.5 About Here -

Community context and beliefs about community crime: Consistent with previous research on public attitudes about crime and communities, we hypothesized that beliefs about what the police should do in domestic incidents would be shaped by community characteristics as well as by respondents' subjective assessments of the magnitude of crime in their communities. As described in Chapter 2, the research sites varied on at least two dimensions. The first is urbanization (two sites were urban, with populations in excess of 150,000; two were small free-standing cities; and two were the rural areas of large sparsely populated counties). The second is the character of the local criminal justice system's response to domestic violence: three sites had adopted coordinated intervention strategies, publicly at least favoring mandatory arrest of offenders and collaborating in providing services to victims; the other three had traditional responses, characterized by low rates of arrest, fragmentation or scarcity of victim services, and little investment by key actors in changing policy and practices.

We predicted that in communities with progressive responses to domestic violence, particularly the most longstanding intervention, engaged in public outreach (Syracuse), citizens would favor both enforcement-oriented and victim-oriented responses. We further predicted, however, that residents of rural areas would be reluctant to invoke either police power or services for victims to resolve domestic cases (cites). Table 4.6 reports the percentages of respondents in each jurisdiction who favored the four police actions, across the two sets of vignettes. In the less severe violence vignette, Syracuse residents are significantly more likely to favor arrest, while rural respondents are less likely to do so (consistent with our predictions). Interestingly,

residents of the small progressive city of Lockport are markedly more likely to favor having the police mediate or reconcile. It appears that urban residents may be more likely to recommend that the police provide assistance to victims. However, these differences are by and large not dramatic; and variation in the demographic makeup of these communities (rather than community characteristics themselves) may either account for or mask associations in this simple analysis.

- Table 4.6 About Here -

Finally, we hypothesized that individuals' beliefs about the prevalence of violence generally, and of domestic violence specifically, would influence their beliefs about how proactive police responses should be: in particular, those who believe violence and domestic violence occur frequently may be more inclined to prefer proactive responses than those who believe violence is relatively rare. In general, these expectations were supported, as reported in Table 4.7: respondents who believe violence of any sort is rare are less likely to favor police providing assistance to victims in the more severe violence scenario; and those who believe violence happens often are more likely to favor arrest. We also compared respondents' understandings about the breadth of criminal law as it applies to domestic violence with their preferences for police action; those who believe that the criminal law is more inclusive (defining more acts as unlawful when committed between partners, including insulting and stalking as well as physical assault) are more likely to believe police should arrest in both vignettes.

-- Table 4.7 About Here --

Multivariate analysis: Table 4.8 presents logistic regression analysis results of two key preferences for police responses: arrest and providing assistance to victims. For both the less severe and more severe violence vignettes, we hypothesize that preferences for these actions are influenced by social background characteristics (gender; age; race/ethnicity; education); beliefs about the causes of violence (using the four factor scales described in the preceding chapter); first- and second-hand experience with violence; community context and beliefs about community crime. For the purposes of this analysis, the reference categories for social background variables were female gender, middle-age (35-54), Caucasian race/ethnicity, some college education. Beliefs about causes variables are factor scale scores. Secondary experience with violence is an index of experiences that includes knowing a victim, knowing an offender, witnessing a violent situation, knowing of a situation where police were called, knowing of a situation that resulted in an order of protection, knowing of an offender who received counseling, knowing of a victim who received counseling, and received victim services. Primary experience variables distinguish among those who acknowledged using violence against a partner, those who reported having been victimized by a partner, and those who report both. Finally, respondents' perceptions about crime are dichotomized, across two variables: the first distinguishes between those who estimate the incidence of partner violence at 25% or greater, and those who make lower estimates; the second distinguishes those who believe that community violence occurs "very often" rather than sometimes or seldom.

- Table 4.8 About Here -

Results of the multivariate analyses suggest that relationships among these predictor variables and preferences for both arrest and victim helping are by and large null, or modest at best, although generally in the predicted directions. Men are more likely than women to prefer arrest, significantly so in the less severe violence scenario; as are younger respondents. However, non-whites do not differ from whites in their preferences for either arrest or victim assistance, nor does education appear to influence either preference. Those who believe that women play a contributing role in partner violence are less likely to favor police assistance to victims, while those who see violence as relatively normal are less likely than others to favor arrest in the less severe violence situation.

Interestingly, while level of secondary experience with violence makes no difference in preferences for arrest, higher levels of experience are associated with more concern for police helping victims. Personal experience makes little difference, with one exception: those who report having both victimized and been victimized are significantly less likely to favor arrest, but only in the less serious violence situation (probably the sort of violence they in fact engaged in themselves). Community context likewise makes little consistent difference in preferences for police action; rural residents are less likely to favor police assisting victims, and those who believe that levels of community violence are high are more likely to favor arrest.

II Attitudes About Court Responses: Adjudication, Punishment, and Protection

Based on the foregoing analyses, the public seems to prefer enforcement-oriented police actions in domestic incidents, often even in those that would be unlikely to result in any further legal action or in conviction. The relatively low frequency of recommendations for victim-oriented or couples-oriented responses may reflect Americans' generally narrow view of the functions of law enforcement: to identify and apprehend people who have committed unlawful acts. However, the high rates at which respondents favored such actions in these incidents (and the very high rate at which they favored authoritarian actions short of arrest, such as requiring the suspect to leave the scene) prompts us to explore what they believe the legal system should do when confronted with a suspect in such a case. Respondents were asked a series of questions about what they thought should happen if a man were arrested for physical violence against a partner. We assumed that respondents might be less knowledgeable or certain about the range of decisions that court actors might make, so these questions were largely close-ended, eliciting agreement or disagreement with statements that a particular decision be made.

Table 4.9 reports the percentage of respondents who agreed with statements about what should happen following reporting of a violent incident involving a male perpetrator and a female victim.²² About 10% of the sample responded that they did not know what should happen following a legal intervention in these cases. However, consistent with findings about responses to open-ended vignettes, almost half the respondents favored conviction of a man arrested for

²²Note: these items were not worded identically: they differ by whether the man is said to have "been arrested" or "been convicted" of "using violence," "assault," and "abusing the woman." Also, originally, the codes for "depends on circumstances" was not in the survey scheme, but sufficient numbers of respondents qualified their responses this way spontaneously that we coded this response separately. It is also important to remember that all of these items characterized the perpetrator as male and the victim as female; yet we know from results presented in Chapter 3 that people respond differently to female and male partner

violence; one in four thought he should receive a warning instead, while the remainder said that it depended on the circumstances (most commonly, whether or not the suspect was a repeat offender, and/or the nature of injuries sustained).

- Table 4.9 About Here -

Respondents favored sanctions far harsher than those imposed in typical assault cases: 78% favored probation, 65% favored fines, and over 50% favored jail sentences. Many respondents thought multiple punishments were appropriate: four out of ten wanted to see the courts impose probation, fine, and jail. Only 1% of respondents preferred that none of these sanctions be imposed. Fines generally were an additional punishment - only 15 respondents wanted the court to impose a fine but no other sanction. Slightly over half the respondents believed that the perpetrator should receive counseling.²³

Importantly, respondents were in strong consensus on two other legal interventions: issuing of an order of protection, and taking domestic violence into account in making child custody and visitation decisions. However, across all these legal actions, respondents' preferences were in excess of what typically occurs in a domestic violence assault case in most New York jurisdictions.²⁴

²³The question was originally worded to give respondents a choice between the male getting counseling, the female getting counseling, and both getting counseling. Almost all respondents at a minimum said "both" (92%). However, a previous question asked "what else should happen" in addition to or instead of fines, probation, or jail; 52% said some sort of counseling for him, and that item is the primary basis for this variable.

²⁴In New York, as elsewhere, arrests are overwhelmingly resolved as misdemeanors; fines are the modal punishment; probation is seldom imposed; and jail terms are rare. Orders of protection are not routinely issued, and only recently have judges in Family Court been required to take into account evidence of previous violence in

The very high levels of support for fines and probation may reflect either a misapprehension that these sanctions are commonly viewed as appropriate by court officials themselves (and therefore appropriate to use for this sort of case), or alternatively, the belief that these sanctions are a means of punishment that is not drastic. Overall, people of varying backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and from different communities favor them at similarly high rates. However, there is greater variation in respondents' endorsement of conviction, jail, and counseling as appropriate court sanctions, and we hypothesize that this variation is attributable in part to differences among respondents' backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and communities.

Social background factors: Table 4.10 reports levels of agreement with court outcomes, across social background variables. Women favor all three outcomes by modest margins; older respondents are markedly less likely to favor these restrictive sanctions. A higher proportion of whites (compared with African Americans and Hispanics) agree that conviction is appropriate, although these groups do not differ in their endorsement of offender counseling. Those who have completed a four-year college degree are more likely to favor conviction, as well as counseling, a pattern that predictably is also visible among more affluent respondents.

-Table 4.10 About Here -

Beliefs about causes of violence: Table 4.11 reports levels of agreement with court outcomes, by

making custody and visitation decisions (Worden, 2000; Report to the NYS Legislature, Evaluation of the 1994 Family Protection and Domestic Violence Intervention Act, December 2000).

agreement with the ten close-ended questions about causes of violence. We hypothesized that those who agreed with statements that attribute responsibility for violence to individual perpetrators, or to society, would be more likely to favor criminal justice sanctions; those who attribute violence to day-to-day stress, and those who find victims at least partially culpable, will be unlikely to favor legal sanctions. There is some support for these hypotheses. For example, those who attribute violence to men's drug or alcohol use are more likely to favor conviction and jail time, as well as counseling; those who agree that violence is a normal reaction to ordinary frustration and stress are markedly less likely to favor any of these formal responses. However, the most notable pattern is in the differences among those agree or disagree with statements that hold female victims accountable for violence: those who agree are significantly less likely to believe the legal system should take action against offenders.

- Table 4.11 About Here -

First and second-hand experiences with partner violence: Table 4.12 reports levels of agreement with court outcomes, distinguishing among respondents with different types of first- and second-hand experience with partner violence. We hypothesized, as discussed above, that personal victimization experience would be associated with greater concern for restraining perpetrators; and that self-reported perpetrators would be less punitive, and perhaps more inclined to endorse counseling. Support for these hypotheses is modest, however.

- Table 4.12 About Here --

More significant is evidence that attitudes about appropriate sanctions are shaped by second-hand experience – knowing of someone who had any of a range of experiences as offenders, victims, either entangled in the legal system or accessing services. While these relationships are modest for each variable, they are extremely consistent. Perhaps the experience of watching an acquaintance or friend engaged in a system response makes that response appear more effective, accessible, or appropriate.

It is also possible that the impact of victimization (or perpetrating) violence is conditioned by sex: women and men may experience these events differently, and these experiences may have differential impacts on beliefs. Bivariate associations suggest that this may be the case [results not reported in tabular form here]. For example, self-reported offenders are predictably less likely to favor jail, fines, and probation, yet more likely to favor jail than non-offenders, but a closer look suggests that gender and offending behavior interact: male offenders are less likely to favor conviction (49%) than female non-offenders (65%), female offenders (62%), and male non-offenders (62%). Male offenders are least likely to favor jail (62%), and female offenders are most likely to favor jail (80%), compared with female non-offenders (70%) and male non-offenders (66%). Those who report victimization, but no violent behavior, are more likely than others to favor conviction (73%, compared with 54% for those who report offending only; this latter group is also much more likely than others to favor offender counseling, 73%, compared with 51-55% for other subgroups).

Community context and beliefs about community crime: We hypothesized that community

context, and perceptions of community crime, would shape respondents' attitudes about appropriate responses. In communities with less progressive domestic violence practices and policies there is slightly less support for conviction, although the same pattern does not hold for jail sentences nor for counseling (see Table 4.13). Rural respondents are not notably different from urban counterparts on these preferences. However, respondents' perceptions about the prevalence of violence, and of domestic violence, in their communities is associated with preferences for both conviction and jail; while those who believe either form of violence is rare are less likely than others to believe court should impose counseling on offenders (see Table 4.14).

- Tables 4.13 and 4.14 About Here -

Multivariate analysis: Table 4.15 presents the results of multivariate analyses for the three court outcome variables: conviction, jail sentence, and counseling. With few exceptions, the direction of coefficients predicting conviction and jail are in the same direction, suggesting that respondents inclined to hold offenders accountable see both these outcomes as punitive or restrictive. Women, people under the age of 55, and people with some education beyond high school are more likely than men to favor these outcomes. As predicted, those who attribute violence to women's behavior, and those who believe it is a relatively normal part of family life, are less likely to endorse these sanctions, while those who perceive violence as endemic in society, and those who attribute to perpetrators' individual problems, are more likely to favor them. Rural residents are more inclined to favor these legal outcomes than are urban

respondents.

- Table 4.15 About Here -

Some, but not all, of the same patterns apply to preferences for offender counseling. More education is clearly associated with a preference for counseling. Interestingly, respondents' beliefs about why violence occurs do not appear to influence their attitudes about counseling, although those who report greater second-hand experiences with partner violence are more likely to favor counseling, and those who report having committed violence are as well.

III. Attitudes About Community Responses to Domestic Violence

Although much of the survey was devoted to exploring respondents' beliefs about the causes of violence and about criminal justice responses, we recognize that people's beliefs about the best way to reduce domestic violence might involve diverse community agencies, strategies, and target populations. In addition to coding responses that departed from criminal justice recommendations and including items specifically about victim-oriented responses, we included an open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey that asked:

Finally, in your opinion, what if anything should be done about domestic abuse or violence in your community?

Interviewers were instructed to allow for multiple responses. Despite the fact that this question

came at the conclusion of a lengthy survey, over 80% of respondents replied with at least one substantive suggestion (15% said they did not know, and 3% said that nothing could be done).

Table 4.16 reports the distributions of responses offered by survey participants. These responses were recoded into six discrete categories:

1. **Offender accountability through greater use of criminal law and enforcement:** 22% of respondents offered at least one recommendation of this sort, ranging from making more or tougher laws, to making greater use of legal sanctions such as arrests and jail.
2. **Making the criminal justice system more responsive to victims and to domestic violence incidents:** 19% of respondents suggested that the criminal process should be modified (through, for example, training, better enforcement of protection orders, better treatment of victims, less victim-blaming).
3. **Enhancing victim services:** 23% of respondents suggested that services for victims of domestic violence should be enhanced, and/or that outreach efforts for helping victims access services should be improved.
4. **Offender treatment:** 10% of respondents recommended that greater use be made of offender counseling and treatment programs; interestingly, these recommendations very rarely involved substance abuse treatment (despite the large percentage of respondents who attributed violence to alcohol and/or substance abuse).
5. **Couples counseling:** A small minority of respondents (7%) suggested couples counseling or marriage counseling.
6. **Preventive education:** the most common category of response (suggested by 27% of respondents) involved community education aimed at preventing violence (not at responding to offenders or victims involved in specific incidents). These responses included increasing community awareness, reducing social tolerance and/or glorification of violence in communities, early education programs, and increasing community responsibility for responding to violence (distinct from criminal justice interventions).

- Table 4.16 About Here -

There are several observations to be made from these data. First, only small minorities of respondents suggested less conventional responses, such as greater church attendance and public

shaming of offenders (through registries or media publication). Second, only a small number of participants suggested in response to this question that the criminal justice system should focus on women, those who were themselves abusive or who were thought to manipulate the criminal justice system for inappropriate reasons. Third, despite the survey's emphasis on gauging criminal justice system knowledge and attitudes, answers related to criminal justice responses did not dominate this question. In all, only one in three respondents mentioned criminal justice reforms: 186 respondents (15.5%) favored enforcement-oriented changes in criminal justice; 147 (12.2%) favored reforming the system to be more responsive to victims; 79 (6.6%) favored both of these. In short, despite their high levels of support for legal and punitive responses to questions that focused on specific incidents of violence, respondents seem to define effective interventions in much broader terms. The following sections explore the correlates of beliefs about the efficacy of greater enforcement, more responsiveness to victims, victim services, offender treatment, and preventive education efforts.

Social background characteristics: Table 4.17 reports crosstabulations of community response variables with respondents' social background characteristics. In general, it appears that one's background predicts relatively little about one's views about community changes. As was true with attitudes about some criminal justice interventions, beliefs about the appropriateness of most community-level responses differed by age: in particular, respondents over 55 were less likely to recommend interventions aimed at victims, offenders, or prevention. Respondents of higher socioeconomic status (measured by education and by household income) were more likely than others to favor enhancing victim services and preventive education. Hispanic respondents

are distinguished from whites and African-Americans in their stronger support for more victim-oriented criminal justice processes, although they are not significantly more inclined to favor punitive responses to offenders.

- Table 4.17 About Here -

Beliefs about causes of violence: Table 4.18 reports bivariate associations between respondents' beliefs about the causes of violence (from close-ended items) and beliefs about effective community responses. Those who believe that violence results from the way society socializes boys are more likely to favor all types of community interventions, while those who perceive violence as an ordinary response to stress are less likely than others to favor many of these. Consistent with findings about criminal justice responses, beliefs about community responses are associated, albeit modestly, with views about women's culpability for men's violence.

- Table 4.18 About Here -

First- and second-hand experiences with violence: As was true with beliefs about criminal justice responses, beliefs about community responses do not appear to be associated with self-reported victimization or offending experiences, as reported in Table 4.19. However, second-hand experience is consistently associated with all areas of community-level change, most markedly with views about the value of preventive education.

- Table 4.19 About Here -

Community context and beliefs about community crime: Table 4.20 summarizes beliefs about community interventions in the six research sites. While there are differences among these samples' responses, they are not clearly associated with either the rural/urban dimension or with the nature of the community's criminal justice response to domestic violence. Predictably, beliefs about the prevalence of crime and of domestic violence are associated with support for some interventions, although these relationships are quite modest.

- Table 4.20 About Here -

Multivariate analysis: Table 4.21 reports the results of logistic regression analyses for the five community change variables. With other factors controlled, it appears that older respondents are less likely to suggest many of these changes, while better educated respondents are more likely to endorse victim- and community-targeted changes. Of the four scales measuring beliefs about causes of violence, the only consistent predictor of attitudes about community responses – and particularly change in the criminal justice response to offenders and victims – is the dimension that measures women's culpability for violence.

- Table 4.21 About Here -

Interestingly, those who have experienced violence – as perpetrators or offenders – are

not significantly different from those who have not.²⁵ However, the more extensive one's second-hand experience with violence, the more likely is one to endorse almost all community changes. Finally, however, community context makes little difference in beliefs about effective community interventions once other factors are controlled; participants in communities with more progressive criminal justice practices are more likely to favor offender treatment, but not other changes.

IV. Conclusions

Guided by both general exploratory questions, and specific hypotheses about people's normative attitudes about responses to domestic violence, the analyses presented in this chapter lead to several observations, and suggest additional questions for future research.

Most people define the police intervention role primarily in terms of law enforcement.

Asked what they think should happen if police respond to a domestic incident, respondents are likely to state that arrest, or some sort of coercive or authoritative response short of arrest, is the appropriate reaction; they are less likely to cast the police in the role of mediators, or to prescribe that they take immediate actions to help the victim. Just as respondents were more likely to define aggressive acts that resulted in injuries as violence, and as criminal behavior, they are more likely to recommend arrest when injuries result.

Respondents are ambivalent about the best way to adjudicate domestic assault. Most favor punitive court reactions – over half see conviction, fines, probation, or jail as appropriate in

²⁵An interesting and unexpected exception is the relationship between victimization and beliefs about offender treatment: those who reported having been victimized are less likely than others to endorse this option.

all or some circumstances, and many favor combinations of these punishments. However, they also strongly favor counseling, both for offenders and for couples (but do not believe that courts should mandate *victims* to counseling). Importantly, there is strong consensus that courts should take legal actions that protect victims and children from violent offenders, even though those actions may restrict men's autonomy and parental rights.

People's beliefs about the best ways to respond to domestic violence suggest that they see the criminal justice system as necessary, but not sufficient, to reduce violence. When asked what police and courts should do, respondents reply in a punitive fashion; when asked what communities should do, their attention is at least equally focused on victims and on primary prevention. This is an important finding, consistent with the implications of some previous research: people are inclined to recommend that the legal system use the tools at its disposal, but may lack faith in the system's ability to effect real change in levels of violence.

Most of the variation in people's beliefs about how best to respond to domestic violence cannot be accounted for by the variables studied here – clearly attitudes about responding to violence, like attitudes about causes of violence, are very complex. Yet age, gender, and education are associated with these opinions, as are beliefs about the causes of violence, experiences with violence, and community context, although not always in predicted ways.

While men appear to favor arrest, women are more likely to recommend conviction and incarceration, but are also more likely to want communities to improve victim services. Older respondents (primarily, those over 55) were less likely to favor arrest or conviction of known offenders, although more likely to favor jail; they were also less likely to define the proper police role to help or be sensitive to victims. Middle-aged respondents, more than their elders or

youngers, were likely to see promise in preventive education strategies. Educational attainment was associated with greater support for conviction and jail, but also greater support for post-conviction counseling, reform of the legal system to better serve victims, improved victim services, and community education. Race and ethnicity had no consistent effect on beliefs. Community context may make a difference in people's opinions: rural residents were somewhat more likely to favor punitive sanctions, and those who perceived violence as more frequent favored greater use of enforcement powers. Residents of communities with more progressive criminal justice policies were more likely to endorse offender treatment.

Of greater interest to policy makers may be the findings that beliefs about the causes of violence, even measured in a fairly simple fashion, are associated with beliefs about what should be done about it: for example, the more likely one is to attribute violence to normal family stress, the less likely is one to favor arrest or jail for convicted offenders, and those who place greater blame on women victims are less likely to favor conviction, jail terms, or reform of the criminal justice system either in the direction of greater enforcement efforts or responsiveness to victims. Those who attribute violence to the problems or defects of perpetrators are by contrast more likely to favor jail, but also treatment for offenders and preventive education efforts.

Importantly, these findings suggest that self-reported personal experience, as a victim, offender, or both, has little consistent effect on one's ideas about what should be done by police, courts, and communities - but the more extensive and varied one's second-hand knowledge of violence, the more one is likely to favor police assistance to victims; conviction of offenders; and counseling for offenders; and these people are also more likely to recommend reform of criminal processes to be more responsive to victims, improved community services for victims, offender

treatment programs, and general education efforts.

These latter findings are significant, insofar as people's beliefs about why violence occurs, and (to a lesser extent) their perceptions about the value of legal and social responses to acquaintances involved in violence are subject to change efforts, in the form of public information campaigns, educational programs, and reformed practices and policies. However, a final cautionary observation is in order: *that so many respondents recommend extensive (and expensive) interventions, often aimed at multiple targets, suggests that they may be realistic about the complexities of the problem, but unrealistic about current practices and programs.* The following chapter explores these respondents' beliefs about what really happens when women are victimized by their partners.

Table 4.1: Responses to open-ended question about what police should do in vignettes

Notes: totals add to greater than 100% because many respondents suggested multiple actions; actions are not mutually exclusive either within or across categories. Responses reported for each category for which at least .5% of respondents made recommendation. Responses are combined for married/dating versions.

Respondent believes police should: (n=600)	V 1: less severe	V2 more severe
Arrest	39%	64%
2. ovarrest: Arrest him/charge him- instigator	29%	54%
3. ovarrec: Arrest him only if he is a recidivist	2%	1%
11. ovcustod: Take custody - to station/apprehend	4%	5%
13. ovjail: He should go to jail - get locked up	7%	11%
14. ovjailre: Jail if recidivist	1%	0%
Use of legal authority (exclude arrest)	32%	16%
7. ovwarn: Warn of arrest - reprimand/lecture him	5%	3%
24. ovinvest: Investigate- find out what happened -get facts - find out who started it; file report	38%	27%
Use of coercion: separating parties (exclude arrest)	27%	16%
9. ovremove: Remove him from scene	22%	18%
26. ovsepar: Separate - time out/cool off period	17%	13%
Provide help, assistance to victim	7%	19%
15. ovrfcoun: Refer her to counseling	1%	4%
17. ovremwom: Take her from scene/ to safeplace	2%	2%
18. ovsheltr: Take/refer woman to shelter	0%	2%
19. ovhealth: Refer her to/provide med treatment - see if treatment needed	2%	9%
28. ovordpro: issue order of protection	2%	5%

Respondent believes police should: (n=600)	V 1: less severe	V2 more severe
Settle, reconcile, mediate, restore parties	17%	14%
22. ovrbthcn: Refer both to counseling - generally - marriage counseling - couple	9%	9%
23. ovmbthcn: Mandate both to counseling - both have to go to counseling	2%	2%
25. ovmediat: Mediate - help resolve - settle the argument - calm them	8%	3%
Rehabilitation: offender counseling	5%	8%
4. ovrmcoun: Refer him to counseling	2%	5%
5. ovmmcoun: Mandate him to counseling	2%	3%
6. ovmcoun: Mandate to counseling if recidivist	1%	0%
Defer to victim initiative, preference	19%	22%
20. ovwomres: Arrest and or jail if she presses charges - she should do something - burden for initiating legal action should be on/victim - she should get a restraining order - file charges	18%	21%
21. ovcomply: Ask woman what she wants - comply with victim's wishes	2%	2%
Other, miscellaneous		
27. ovarrbth: Arrest both; punish both	2%	2%
1. ovnothing: Do nothing /let couple resolve	3%	1%
30. ovother: Other - specify	1%	2%
31. ovdk: Don't know	2%	0%

Table 4.2: Contrasting Four Vignettes: Married/Dating vs. Minor/Severe Violence

	% of respondents who recommended each action, by vignette:			
	Dating couple, minor violence	Married couple, minor violence	Dating couple, severe violence	Married couple, severe violence
Arrest	44%	34%	66%	62%
Use of legal authority	26%	38%	15%	17%
Use of coercion: separation	29%	24%	16%	16%
Settle, mediate	11%	23%	10%	17%
Provide help to victim	7%	7%	20%	18%
Rehabilitation	4%	5%	9%	6%
Defer to victim initiative	18%	20%	24%	20%

Table 4.3: Respondent Characteristics and Percent Recommending Police Actions

Respondent characteristics		Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
		Arrest	Separate parties	Settle/mediate	Help victim	Arrest	Separate parties	Settle/mediate	Help victim
Sex	male	42	23	16	8	68	15	10	15
	female	36	30	17	6	61	17	16	22
Marital status	single, divorce, widow	43	25	16	8	66	13	14	22
	married	34	29	17	7	63	19	13	16
Age	Under 35	48	24	18	9	71	13	11	18
	35 to 54	38	28	15	8	63	17	14	21
	55 and older	30	28	19	4	60	16	14	16
Ethnicity*	white	38	26	18	7	65	16	13	18
	African-American	44	33	11	7	60	21	13	25
	Hispanic	40	33	13	7	83	4	13	29
Education	high school grad, GED	41	27	14	6	65	18	10	14
	some college	42	26	19	7	62	19	15	21
	college degree or graduate	30	29	17	9	68	11	15	23
Household income	less than \$30,000	44	20	14	7	66	14	13	22
	\$30 to \$50,000	36	30	20	7	66	18	17	18
	greater than \$50,000	37	31	16	9	63	15	12	20

* excludes X% who self-identified as Asian, Native American, other.

Table 4.4a: Bivariate relationships between attitudes about causes (open-ended) and preferred police responses to vignettes

% respondents who prefer police action in, broken out by attitude about cause of partner violence:		Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
		Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help	Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help
Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs)	no	38	27	16	8	62	17	11	18
	yes	41	26	18	6	70	14	19	22
Anger, loss of control	no	38	26	16	7	67	14	11	19
	yes	40	31	19	9	59	20	20	20
Exposure to family violence	no	39	27	15	6	63	16	13	19
	yes	37	25	26	13	70	18	14	19
Adultery, jealousy	no	39	27	17	7	65	16	13	18
	yes	36	29	18	6	62	17	16	26
Mental health, personality problems of perpetrator	no	39	27	16	8	63	17	14	17
	yes	37	25	21	5	72	11	11	28
Relationship, communication problems	no	40	26	16	8	65	16	13	19
	yes	33	32	22	2	61	18	14	19
Child or family-related stress	no	38	27	16	7	65	16	14	19
	yes	43	29	20	9	57	20	13	22
Work, financial problems, stress	no	39	25	16	7	66	15	12	18
	yes	38	30	18	7	61	18	16	21
Breakdown of social norms	no	39	27	17	7	64	16	14	19
	yes	47	20	20	7	70	15	10	30

Table 4.4b: Respondents' Beliefs about Causes (close-ended) and Preferences for Police Response to Vignettes

% respondents who prefer criminal justice response by beliefs about cause of partner violence:		Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
		Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help	Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help
DV caused by alcohol and drug abuse	agree	41	22	18	9	67	14	13	20
	disagree	40	25	1	5	64	20	8	12
Abusive men have psychological problems	agree	42	21	16	7	65	14	13	22
	disagree	35	23	20	15	65	19	16	19
Some violence is caused by women starting fights	agree	39	31	15	6	64	18	14	20
	disagree	50	18	26	8	65	21	8	21
Society teaches boys to be physically aggressive	agree	39	31	18	5	64	18	13	21
	disagree	28	34	16	3	58	20	17	16
Most abused women could get out if they really want to	agree	41	22	18	7	67	14	13	15
	disagree	42	25	15	10	61	13	16	29
Verbally abusive husbands are likely to become physically violent	agree	37	33	16	6	64	17	14	18
	disagree	44	28	19	6	60	21	12	21
Violent people are not likely to change	agree	39	30	17	5	67	14	11	20
	disagree	31	32	17	7	59	21	16	18
Some violence is caused by the way women treat men	agree	37	20	22	7	62	19	11	14
	disagree	47	29	9	14	73	9	16	28
Normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	agree	32	36	16	5	61	23	18	18
	disagree	44	26	15	6	65	15	14	22
Some abused women want to be treated that way	agree	38	21	16	7	60	17	16	16
	disagree	39	25	17	9	68	12	11	21

Note: table reports % of respondents who agreed with each item; questions were asked of half samples so base n=600.

Table 4.5: Respondent experiences with violence and percent recommending police action

Respondent reported experiences with partner violence	Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
	Arrest	Separate parties	Settle/mediate	Help victim	Arrest	Separate parties	Settle/mediate	Help victim
No report of victimization	38	25	18	8	65	13	15	17
Reported having been victimized	42	32	13	4	62	22	11	23
No report of perpetrating	39	26	17	8	65	13	13	18
Reported having perpetrated	40	30	14	3	60	28	15	25
Has not known a victim of violence	35	24	18	6	63	14	15	11
Reports knowing victim	41	28	16	8	65	17	13	24
Has not known a perpetrator	36	26	20	6	63	13	16	14
Reports knowing perpetrator	42	27	14	8				

Table 4.6: Vignettes: Respondent preferences for police action in six communities

% Respondents in each community who favored selected police action	Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
	Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help victim	Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help victim
Yonkers (urban, traditional)	38	33	12	10	59	18	14	27
Syracuse (urban, progressive)	48	26	12	8	69	17	16	20
Utica (small city, traditional)	43	23	16	6	66	8	10	21
Lockport (small city, progressive)	38	21	30	6	63	19	11	17
Essex County (rural, traditional)	35	23	13	6	66	11	13	18
Oneida County (rural, progressive)	31	35	17	7	63	23	17	11

Table 4.7: Beliefs about community crime and violence and preferred police actions in vignettes

Preferred police action in partner violence vignette, comparing respondents' beliefs about violence in their communities		Less severe violence vignette				More severe violence vignette			
		Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help	Arrest	Separate	Settle	Help
From what you know, how often does violence occur in your community?	Very often	48	26	14	6	66	17	15	23
	Sometimes	40	26	20	7	65	15	15	21
	Rare/never	32	29	13	9	61	17	13	13
	don't know	28	31	22	3	69	14	0	21
In your community, how often do you think violence occurs between adult members of the same household, sometimes referred to as domestic violence or abuse?	Very often	46	28	13	7	72	12	9	28
	Sometimes	39	26	19	8	62	20	18	19
	Rare/never	32	29	15	8	66	14	12	13
	don't know	39	24	22	39	58	15	8	15
Additive index of beliefs about what is against the law in New York when perpetrated by a wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend: Slapping during argument Use of force to have sex Insulting by calling "slob" Following around town Punching with fists	0	23	26	25	2	49	21	11	19
	1	32	27	15	8	58	15	15	16
	2	36	35	15	6	65	18	15	17
	3	41	26	17	7	65	13	15	23
	4	49	21	17	10	76	14	13	18
	5	53	21	11	11	58	33	0	25

Table 4.5 Multivariate Analyses of Preferences for Police Responses: Arrest and Victim Assistance (Logistic Regression Analysis)

	Preference for arrest (open-ended)				Helping victim (open-ended)			
	Less severe violence		More severe violence		Less severe violence		More severe violence	
	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.31*	1.37	.25	1.28	.27	1.31	-.32	.73
Young (under 35)	.41*	1.50	.33	1.39	.10	1.11	-.40	.67
Older (55 or older)	-.22	.80	-.09	.92	-1.03*	.36	-.19	.83
African-American	.20	1.23	-.14	.87	.03	1.03	.06	1.06
Hispanic	.06	1.06	.93	2.54	-.06	.94	.13	1.14
Highest education: high school or GED	-.04	.96	.18	1.12	.09	1.10	-.32	.73
Highest education: completed 4-year college	-.51	.60	.22	1.25	.41	1.51	.40	1.49
Beliefs: women contribute to violence	-.05	.95	-.07	.93	-.27	.76	-.23**	.80
Beliefs: violence is inevitable	.04	1.04	.12	1.12	.13	1.14	.03	1.03
Beliefs: individual problems	.11	1.11	.01	1.01	-.18	.83	.10	1.11
Beliefs: violence is normal	-.23**	.80	-.07	.94	.07	1.07	-.02	.98
Secondary dv experience: scale (coded 0 to 8)	.02	1.02	.00	1.00	.13*	1.14	.12***	1.13
Self-report victimization, no report of offending	.06	1.06	-.14	.87	-.72	.48	-.00	1.00
Self-report offending, no report of victimization	-.37	.69	.02	1.02	-5.93	.00	-.69	.50
Self-report both victimization and offending	.27	1.31	-.24	.78	-1.82**	.16	.22	1.24
Rural community	-.18	.83	.12	1.12	-.15	.86	-.53*	.59
Community has progressive dv policies	.10	1.11	.14	1.15	-.19	.83	-.30	.74
Belief:dv is frequent (25% of couples	-.15	.86	.10	1.10	.25	1.29	.40	1.49
Belief:community violence occurs "very often"	.43**	1.54	.23	1.26	-.20	.82	.03	1.03

* indicates significant at .10 level; ** indicates significant at .05 level; *** indicates significant at .01 level.

Table 4.9: Respondents' Preferences for Criminal Justice Responses: Close-ended Questions

Survey item:	Response	% sample
Thinking about a situation where a man is arrested for using violence against a woman he has a relationship with, in your opinion, after his arrest, should the man...	Be convicted of a crime?	46%
	Depends on circumstances	21%
	Receive warning from judge	24%
	Don't know	9%
Thinking about a man who has been convicted of assault for using violence against a woman he has a relationship with, should the man...	Have to pay a fine?	65%
	Depends on circumstances	2%
	Should not pay a fine	22%
	Don't know	11%
Thinking about a man who has been convicted of assault for using violence against a woman, should the man...	Be put on probation?	78%
	Depends on circumstances	4%
	Should not be put on probation	10%
	Don't know	8%
Thinking about a man who has been convicted of assault for using violence against a woman, should the man...	Have to go to jail?	51%
	Depends on circumstances	16%
	Should not have to go to jail	18%
	Don't know	16%
If a man is arrested for assault for using violence against a woman he has a relationship with, should a judge legally order the man to stay away from the woman? ²⁶	Yes	81%
	No	8%
	Don't know	11%
In a situation where a man has been arrested for abusing a woman he lives with, who, if anyone, should be required to get counseling? ²⁷	The man	52%
	The woman	0%
	Both	92%
In your opinion, should a history of domestic violence be taken into account in deciding whether a father should get custody of his children after a divorce?	Yes	91%
	No	3%
	Don't know	6%

²⁶Includes respondents who added "stay away" and "order of protection" to preceding open-ended question.

²⁷Composite of two questions, including open-ended answers to followup on preceding questions; numbers add to more than 100% because more than one choice offered.

**Table 4.10: Respondent Characteristics and Percent Preferring Selected Post-Arrest Sanctions
(versus "depends", "no": "DK" excluded)**

Respondent characteristics		Conviction	Jail	Counseling
Sex	male	47%	55%	50%
	female	54%	64%	54%
Marital status	single, divorced/ separated, widow	51%	61%	50%
	married	51%	59%	54%
Age	Under 35	62%	67%	53%
	35 to 54	53%	59%	56%
	55 and older	36%	60%	45%
Ethnicity*	white	54%	61%	53%
	African-American	43%	59%	53%
	Hispanic	41%	71%	52%
Education	high school graduate, GED	42%	57%	40%
	some college	53%	64%	53%
	college degree or graduate	59%	58%	64%
Household income	less than \$30,000	49%	61%	46%
	\$30 to \$50,000	55%	60%	58%
	greater than \$50,000	54%	63%	57%

* excludes X% who self-identified as Asian, Native American, other.

Table 4.11: Respondents' Beliefs about Causes (close-ended) and Preferences for Criminal Justice Responses

% respondents who prefer criminal justice response by beliefs about cause of partner violence:		Criminal justice system should		
		Convict	Jail	Counsel
DV caused by alcohol and drug abuse	agree	50	61	56
	disagree	44	55	42
Abusive men have psychological problems	agree	49	59	53
	disagree	48	57	63
Some violence is caused by women starting fights	agree	53	59	54
	disagree	46	63	44
Society teaches boys to be physically aggressive	agree	56	63	54
	disagree	41	51	42
Most abused women could get out if they really want to	agree	45	57	49
	disagree	57	67	61
Verbally abusive husbands are likely to become physically violent	agree	55	65	50
	disagree	47	57	56
Violent people are not likely to change	agree	55	65	53
	disagree	47	54	50
Some violence is caused by the way women treat men	agree	40	50	52
	disagree	61	74	61
Normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	agree	42	54	45
	disagree	60	66	57
Some abused women want to be treated that way	agree	47	51	43
	disagree	55	65	59

Note: table does not include respondents who said dk on a cause item; questions were asked of half samples so base n=600.

Table 4.12: Self-reported experiences with violence and attitudes about criminal justice responses

Experience with violence		Conviction	Jail	Counseling
Personal experience				
Victim of partner violence (31%)	no	61	68	51
	yes	66	72	53
Perpetrator of partner violence (18%)	no	63	68	51
	yes	58	74	59
Secondary experience				
Has known a victim of partner violence (64%)	no	55	65	44
	yes	67	72	56
Has known perpetrator of violence (52%)	no	59	66	48
	yes	67	72	56
Has known of police being called (47%)	no	58	67	48
	yes	67	72	57
Has heard/seen partner violence (46%)	no	60	68	48
	yes	65	71	57
Has known someone with protection order (46%)	no	61	69	51
	yes	65	71	54
Has known victim who rec'd counseling (31%)	no	60	67	48
	yes	68	73	59
Has known offender who rec'd counseling (26%)	no	61	69	50
	yes	67	72	57
Has known victim who used d.v. services (24%)	no	60	68	49
	yes	69	75	62

Table 4.13: Respondents' Attitudes about Criminal Justice Responses in Six Communities

Community	Conviction	Jail	Counseling
Yonkers	44%	54%	52%
Syracuse	52%	60%	56%
Utica	48%	63%	48%
Lockport	53%	61%	52%
Oneida County	58%	63%	53%
Essex County	51%	60%	51%

Table 4.14: Preferences for criminal justice responses and beliefs about community crime

Preference for criminal justice response, compared with respondents' beliefs about violence in their communities		Criminal justice system should...		
		Convict	Jail	Counsel
From what you know, how often does violence occur in your community?				
	Very often	66	73	53
	Sometimes	62	70	55
	Rare/never	61	67	47
	don't know	58	62	52
In your community, how often do you think violence occurs between adult members of the same household, sometimes referred to as domestic violence or abuse?				
	Very often	70	76	57
	Sometimes	63	69	54
	Rare/never	57	64	46
	don't know	56	69	52

Table 4.15: Multivariate Regression Analyses of Preferences for Court Responses

	Preference for conviction (OLS)		Preference for jail sentence (OLS)		Preference for offender counseling (logistic)	
	B	standard b	B	standard b	B	Odds ratio
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	-.06**	-.06	-.06**	-.07	-.12	.89
Young (under 35)	.08***	.09	.07	.06	-.06	.94
Older (55 or older)	-.13***	-.14	-.06*	-.06	-.25	.78
African-American	-.10**	-.07	.02	.01	.02	1.02
Hispanic	-.09	-.04	.04	.02	.05	1.05
Highest education: high school or GED	-.12***	-.13	-.06*	-.07	-.41***	.67
Highest education: completed 4-year college	.03	.08	-.05	-.05	.46***	1.59
Beliefs: women contribute to violence	-.04***	-.09	-.04**	-.10	-.19	.83
Beliefs: violence is inevitable	.04***	.10	.03**	.08	.00	1.01
Beliefs: individual problems	.02	.04	.03**	.08	-.00	1.00
Beliefs: violence is normal	-.01	-.03	-.04***	-.09	-.04	.96
Secondary dv experience: scale (coded 0 to 8)	.01**	.09	.00	.02	.07***	1.07
Self-report victimization, no report of offending	.06	.05	-.01	-.01	.01	1.01
Self-report offending, no report of victimization	-.06	-.03	.14*	.06	.87**	2.39
Self-report both victimization and offending	-.08**	-.07	.04	.03	.11	1.12
Rural community	.11***	.12	.08**	.09	.04	1.04
Community has progressive dv policies	.04	.05	.03	.03	.16	1.17
Belief:dv is frequent (25% of couples	.01	.01	.02	.02	-.16	.85
Belief:community violence occurs "very often"	.06*	.06	.03	.03	.02	1.02

* indicates significant at .10 level; ** indicates significant at .05 level; *** indicates significant at .01 level.

Table 4.16: Respondents' beliefs about appropriate community responses to domestic violence

Criminal justice/legal responses: enforcement of the law, increased criminalization (22%)	More laws	1%
	Tighten laws/better laws	6%
	Tougher penalties	5%
	More arrests	4%
	Warn offenders about arrest	0%
	More prosecution of dv cases	1%
	Use of probation/supervision of offenders	1%
	Put offenders in jail	7%
	Tougher penalties for recidivists	3%
Make criminal justice system more reponsive to victims (19%)	More sensitive criminal justice system	18%
	More orders of protection issued for victims	2%
Enhance victim services (23%)	More victim services	10%
	Education about availability of victim servivcés	14%
	More counseling for victims	3%
Enhance offender treatment options (10%)	More programs for offenders	7%
	Mandate and/or refer offenders to counseling programs	4%
	Address drug/alcohol problems	0%
Preventive education (27%)	Increase education in community to prevent violence	27%
Couples counseling (7%)	couples counseling	7%
Other	Current services adequate	6%
	Church	2%
	Increase reporting (by witnesses, neighbors, victims)	2%
	Public shaming	1%
	Nothing can be done	3%
	Separate couple	2%
	Focus on abusive women, women who manipulate system	2%
	Don't know	15%

Table 4.17: Respondent Characteristics and Percent Preferring Community Responses

Respondent characteristics		Enforce law	Responsive cj system	Victim service	Offender treatment	Preventive education
Sex	male	23	18	19	9	25
	female	21	20	27	12	28
Marital status	single, divorced/ separated	24	19	20	11	24
	married	20	19	26	10	29
Age	Under 35	27	20	25	10	23
	35 to 54	22	21	25	11	33
	55 and older	17	14	19	10	21
Ethnicity*	white	23	20	24	10	27
	African-American	20	13	23	13	26
	Hispanic	15	36	23	3	28
Education	high school grad, GED	22	18	12	10	16
	some college	23	17	23	10	26
	college degree or graduate	22	23	38	12	40
Household income	less than \$30,000	23	19	15	10	20
	\$30 to \$50,000	23	20	26	12	28
	greater than \$50,000	21	21	31	9	33

* excludes X% who self-identified as Asian, Native American, other.

Table 4. Respondents' Beliefs about Causes (close-ended) and Preferences for Community Responses

% respondents who prefer criminal justice response by beliefs about cause of partner violence:		Community should respond by				
		Enforce law	Responsive c.j. system	Victim services	Offender treatment	Preventive education
DV caused by alcohol and drug abuse	agree	18	18	18	7	29
	disagree	23	17	27	11	26
Abusive men have psychological problems	agree	21	14	25	4	32
	disagree	23	17	24	12	25
Some violence is caused by women starting fights	agree	24	23	20	9	23
	disagree	22	21	23	11	31
Society teaches boys to be physically aggressive	agree	17	14	18	10	21
	disagree	25	23	25	12	32
Most abused women could get out if they really want to	agree	19	20	38	13	28
	disagree	24	15	20	9	24
Verbally abusive husbands are likely to become physically violent	agree	20	20	22	9	28
	disagree	24	19	23	12	28
Violent people are not likely to change	agree	20	18	22	16	26
	disagree	28	24	21	10	27
Some violence is caused by the way women treat men	agree	29	26	28	10	25
	disagree	18	13	25	9	25
Normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	agree	26	22	26	11	33
	disagree	20	18	20	11	24
Some abused women want to be treated that way	agree	25	20	28	12	26
	disagree	17	10	23	8	26

Note: results do not report results for those who responded "don't know"; questions were asked of half samples so base n=600.

Table 4.19: Self-reported experiences with violence and attitudes about community responses

Experience with violence		Enforce law	Responsive cj system	Victim services	Offender treatment	Preventive education
Personal experience						
Victim of partner violence (31%)	no	22	19	24	11	27
	yes	23	19	23	23	27
Perpetrator of partner violence (18%)	no	22	19	23	10	26
	yes	20	18	22	12	28
Secondary experience						
Has known a victim of partner violence (64% 6	no	22	14	19	7	21
	yes	22	21	25	12	30
Has known perpetrator of violence (52%)	no	22	17	22	9	24
	yes	22	21	24	12	30
Has known of police being called (47%)	no	20	17	23	9	24
	yes	24	21	23	12	29
Has heard/seen partner violence (46%)	no	20	17	23	9	25
	yes	24	21	24	11	28
Has known someone with protection order (46%)	no	21	17	21	9	23
	yes	24	22	25	12	31
Has known victim who rec'd counseling (31%)	no	21	16	20	9	22
	yes	24	24	30	14	35
Has known offender who rec'd counseling (26%)	no	22	18	21	9	24
	yes	23	21	28	14	32
Has known victim who used d.v. services (24%)	no	22	18	22	9	23
	yes	22	23	28	13	37

Table 4.20 Respondents' Attitudes about Community Responses in Six Communities

Community	% of respondents preferring that community respond by:				
	Enforce law	Responsive cj system	Victim services	Offender treatment	Preventive education
Yonkers	18	21	26	6	27
Syracuse	26	18	22	16	29
Utica	25	17	19	12	24
Lockport	24	24	22	11	22
Oneida County	21	15	23	12	29
Essex County	19	20	30	7	30

Table 4.21: Preferences for community responses and beliefs about community crime

Preference for criminal justice response, compared with respondents' beliefs about violence in their communities		Community should...				
		Enforce law	Responsive cj system	Victim services	Offender treatment	Preventive education
From what you know, how often does violence occur in your community?	Very often	25	20	21	15	29
	Sometimes	22	18	26	10	27
	Rare/never	19	19	21	8	25
	don't know	23	18	23	10	24
In your community, how often do you think violence occurs between adult members of the same household, sometimes referred to as domestic violence or abuse?	Very often	23	23	24	15	29
	Sometimes	24	20	26	9	29
	Rare/never	21	16	17	10	22
	don't know	14	13	20	9	22

Table 4.22: Multivariate Regression Analyses of Preferences for Community Responses

	Enhanced enforcement	Responsive cj system	Victim services	Offender treatment	Preventive education
	B	B	B	B	B
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.19	-.06	-.59***	-.35	-.21
Young (under 35)	.27	-.04	.15	.03	-.45***
Older (55 or older)	-.31	-.47**	-.24	-.07	-.51***
African-American	-.24	-.55	-.02	.13	-.05
Hispanic	-.52	.67*	.03	-1.22	.34
Highest education: high school or GED	.04	.28	.80***	.09	-.54***
Highest education: completed 4-year college	-.01	.46**	.73***	.19	.66***
Beliefs: women contribute to violence	-.13*	-.26**	-.10	-.12	.03
Beliefs: violence is inevitable	.17**	.13	.06	-.03	.09
Beliefs: individual problems	.08	.03	.04	.28**	.13*
Beliefs: violence is normal	-.12	-.08	.05	.12	-.01
Secondary dv experience: scale (coded 0 to 8)	.01	.07**	.06**	.09**	.10***
Self-report victimization, no report of offending	.05	-.12	-.05	-.73**	-.14
Self-report offending, no report of victimization	-.29	-.33	-.10	-.30	-.21
Self-report both victimization and offending	-.20	-.35	-.15	-.28	-.07
Rural community	-.12	-.15	.19	.00	.24
Community has progressive dv policies	.23	.08	-.14	.59***	-.02
Belief:dv is frequent (25% of couples	.38*	.25	-.03	.41	-.13
Belief:community violence occurs "very often"	.07	-.13	-.09	.36	.17

* indicates significant at .10 level; ** indicates significant at .05 level; *** indicates significant at .01 level.

CHAPTER 5

EXPECTATIONS ABOUT LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSES

I. Introduction

From the perspectives of social scientists as well as those who advocate prevention and education, it is important to know what people believe about causes of partner violence, to understand the origins of those beliefs, and to assess the accuracy of those beliefs. From the perspectives of those who craft criminal justice policy, it is important to learn more about people's beliefs about what constitute appropriate interventions in violent incidents. It is also important to learn more about what people expect from community and criminal justice agents, since their expectations may shape their willingness to report violent incidents, and may influence their judgements about the legitimacy and effectiveness of these agents.

The interventions and services targeted at domestic violence vary greatly across communities, and we recognize that criminal justice agents are by no means the only, nor necessarily the primary, access point for victims of violence. However, increasingly police and other criminal justice agents are called upon not only to provide immediate protection for victims and control of perpetrators, but also to facilitate victims' access to social services and legal protection. This chapter focuses on people's predictions about how police in their communities, if called to the scene, would respond to domestic violence incidents. The analyses reported in this chapter are guided by the following general questions:

1. What do people believe *will happen* if police are called to the scene of a violent incident? How closely do their expectations align with their preferences for police responses?

2. How frequently does the legal system take actions that are incapacitative or punitive, rehabilitative, and protective, in the eyes of the public?
3. Are people's predictions about criminal justice responses shaped by social background factors? By personal and secondary experiences with violence? By beliefs about the scope of criminal law, or by community context?

II. Public Predictions About Police Interventions

Analyses of survey responses about *preferred* police responses to the domestic violence vignettes analyzed in the preceding chapter suggest that in general, respondents favor actions that hold offenders legally accountable for violent behavior, but are less mindful of interventions that are aimed at protecting victims. These questions about preferred police responses were followed immediately by close-ended questions about *probable police responses* in respondents' communities, phrased as follows:

1. *If a situation like the one I just read happened in your neighborhood, what do you think the police in your community would do? Would they:*
 1. *Leave and take no further action?*
 2. *Talk to the couple and try to help them settle their problems?*
 3. *Arrest the man?*
 4. *Or you do not know?*
2. *If they did stay and get involved, do you think the police in your community would*
 1. *Tell the man to find another place to stay?*
 2. *Offer to take the woman to a shelter or some other safe place?*
 3. *Let the couple decide if one person should leave?*
 4. *Something else? [specify]*
 5. *Or you do not know?*

Although these questions were originally intended as close-ended forced-choice items, in practice many respondents volunteered more than one answer, to each one; and interviewers were instructed to record all answers given. Therefore, each possible answer was captured in a

dummy variable, as reported in Table 5.1.

---- Table 5.1 About Here ----

The table reports predictions about neighborhood responses for each vignette. In contrast with responses to questions about what police *should* do, responses to these questions about what police *would* do elicited high rates of "don't know". Responses suggest that very few people expect the police to do nothing if called to the scene, although interestingly this is deemed no less likely for those who heard the more severe violence vignette. The modal response for the first question is clearly to predict that the police would talk to the couple and try to help them resolve their problem; this is predicted by over a third of respondents even in the severe violence scenario. However, this prediction is about matched by the prediction that the police will make an arrest in that scenario. Settling or mediating was deemed more probable when the couple was married, and arrest more likely (in the serious violence vignette) when the couple was described as dating. Importantly, one in four respondents replied that s/he did not know which course the police were likely to take, regardless of scenario -- significantly more than expressed uncertainty in items that elicited opinions about what police *should* do.

The second question asked respondents to imagine that the police did not leave -- presumably plausible to almost all -- and to predict whether officers would remove one party or the other, or to allow the couple decide who was to stay or leave. As phrased, the question suggests that removing the woman would be non-coercive and protective; removing the man would be a means of defusing the situation or increasing her safety. Those who predicted in the

preceding item that the police would merely talk to the couple were most likely to respond "don't know" to this question. Those who provided an answer were most likely to predict that the man would be told to leave if the couple were described as dating, regardless of violence level. However, respondents were less likely to predict that police would send the man away if he was married to his victim.

Table 5.2 summarizes the answers to these two items in a different way: it reports results when these responses are recoded into an ordinal scale that measures the highest level of predicted proactivity. These two questions were recoded into a six-point scale, coded for each respondent as the most proactive/aggressive action noted or mentioned across the two prediction questions. Because many respondents offered more than one answer, this measure offers an imperfect but more standardized report of the most authoritative actions each respondent predicted might be taken by police. A very small percentage predicted no action at all, and an almost equally small percentage thought the police would not go beyond allowing the couple to decide whether one of them should leave for the night. Substantial minorities (a plurality, 42%, in the less severe/married vignette) predicted that the police would try to settle the conflict on the scene. For three of the four vignettes, a plurality, but not a majority, predicted arrest.

- Table 5.2 About Here -

Several observations are worth making here. First, despite the fact that arrest was included in the close-ended responses, significantly fewer respondents predicted arrest compared with those who preferred arrest – about two thirds. Second, in the less severe violence scenario,

respondents had markedly different expectations for married and dating couples: the former were more likely, people believed, to be subjected to mediation, the latter more likely to separation or arrest. Third, few respondents predicted that the police would offer to help the woman find shelter or a safe place, even when that option is suggested in a close-ended item. Finally, as was the case with preferences about police action, predictions reveal significant diversity of opinion: regardless of the circumstances of the vignette, respondents predict a wider range of outcomes.

III Correlates of Predictions about Police Proactivity

Given the diversity of opinions about how police would respond to these scenarios, we hypothesized that social background, experience with violence, community context, and beliefs about crime and violence might influence predictions about police response.

Social background characteristics: In general, research on public expectations about law enforcement offers competing hypotheses about population subgroups' beliefs about police actions. On the one hand, at the individual level, one might predict that younger, male, less educated, and minority respondents are more likely to predict arrest or other forms of control of offender, insofar as these groups are more likely than others to have had recent contact with legal authorities, not necessarily in the context of domestic violence. On the other hand, deterrence research suggests that those with less exposure to crime/law enforcement have exaggerated ideas about the risks of arrest for lawbreaking: women, whites, older, and more educated respondents. On the specific topic of domestic violence, these hypotheses are further complicated by the gendered nature of the offense: to the extent that some groups, in the aggregate, are less likely to

believe such behavior is criminal, or is perceived as criminal by police, they may also be less likely to predict a proactive police response.

Table 5.3 reports bivariate relationships among social background variables and a simplified version of the proactivity scale: the most proactive response for each participant was classified as "settling" (which included leaving without action, or talking to the couple), "separating" (which included offering to take the woman to a safe place, as well as telling the man to find another place to stay), and "arrest."²⁸ The results suggest that, consistent with the first set of hypotheses, men, younger people, and African-Americans are more likely than others to predict arrest. Subgroups are generally about equally likely to predict that police will separate the parties; the significant difference is between predicting arrest and on-scene mediation. Social class, as measured by educational attainment, makes little difference in predictions, with one exception: those who have completed college are twice as likely to predict mediation as separation or arrest for the less severe violence scenario.

- Table 5.3 About Here -

Primary and Secondary Experience with Partner Violence: We hypothesized that people who have experience with violence – either as victims, perpetrators, or acquaintances of individuals involved in violent relationships – are less likely than others to predict arrest, largely because

²⁸For this table and those following, responses to the vignettes for married and dating couples are combined. These three groupings are presented both for the sake of parsimony, and because they represent the three modal police responses as studied in previous literature (mediating, separating, and arresting).

arrest is not a likely outcome of a violent incident when police are called to the scene. However, this hypothesis is advanced cautiously, because it oversimplifies matters considerably, inasmuch as most victims (and certainly few perpetrators) contact police during or after a violent incident.

Tables 5.4a and 5.4b summarize the percentages of respondents who predicted police actions for the two vignettes, distinguishing among those who had, and had not, (1) been a victim of partner violence, (2) perpetrated partner violence, (3) known of someone who had been victimized by a violent partner, (4) known someone who had been violent toward a partner. Regardless of experience and severity of violence in the vignette, small minorities predicted no action, that the police would let the couple make a decision about someone leaving, or that police would offer to take the woman to safety or shelter. However, any sort of experience with violence appears to result in lower probabilities of expecting police to simply mediate the situation by talking with the couple, slightly higher probabilities for predicting that police would make the man leave, and notably higher predictions that the an arrest would be made, particularly in the first vignette.

The last rows of these two tables report the predictions of respondents who had, and had not, known of police being called to a domestic violence incident – a more precise measure of informed experience about police responses. Interestingly, this measure of experience produces nearly the same patterns as the more inclusive measures, suggesting that specific knowledge of police intervention does not diminish the general expectations associated with knowing about violent incidents.²⁹

²⁹It is helpful to remember the meaning of this index: high values indicate more and different types of experiences with legal and social interventions (although presumably second-hand ones); low values suggest little

Community Context: We hypothesized that respondents' expectations about police responses would be shaped by local criminal justice practices. This is a plausible, albeit not compelling, hypothesis for two reasons. First, given the high proportions of respondents who report not only knowing about violence, but also knowing of situations to which police were called, it is reasonable to presume that standard practices have been experienced, at least second-hand, by significant proportions of community members. Second, and relatedly, aggressive enforcement policies are justified in part by their projected general deterrence and victim-empowering effects: to the extent that arrest, for example, becomes a routine practice in domestic violence incidents, would-be perpetrators as well as victims are thought to expect that outcome. Therefore, we predict that residents of communities with traditional (rather than progressive) law enforcement and criminal justice responses will be less inclined to predict arrest. We also predict that residents of rural areas will be less likely to expect proactive responses from police, compared with city residents.

Tables 5.5a and 5.5b report the percentages of respondents making each prediction, in each of the six community sites. The first three responses -- doing nothing, letting the couple decide if someone should leave, and talking to the couple -- suggest traditional reactions. These responses, combined, were more common in the two rural jurisdictions, and in one of the traditional sites in the less severe violence vignette. Arrest was correspondingly less commonly predicted in these sites, and much more frequently predicted in the small progressive city (for both vignettes). However, these results must be interpreted with caution, since these sites also

knowledge of people's experiences with violence.

vary in terms of demographic attributes (and hence sample characteristics).

-- Tables 5.5a and 5.5b About Here --

Beliefs about Domestic Violence and Law: People's predictions about what the police will do, and particularly about whether they will make an arrest, are hypothesized to be shaped by what they believe the police must do, or ought to do. As reported in Chapter 3, respondents were asked several questions about their understanding of the law as it applied to domestic violence incidents, including questions about whether particular acts were unlawful, and a question that asked whether New York had a law that required police to arrest in domestic violence incidents. Table 5.6 reports the associations between responses to these items and predictions about police action.

- Table 5.6 About Here -

As reported in Ch. 3, slightly less than a majority of respondents were aware of New York's mandatory arrest law for domestic violence misdemeanors; about an equal number were not sure, and a minority believed that no such law existed. Those who believed that such a law was in effect were significantly more likely to predict arrest than those who did not, or were not sure, for both vignettes (although interestingly, even among those who believe police are required to arrest, only 35% in the first vignette, and 54% in the second, actually predict this outcome). Likewise, those who believe that a wider rather than more limited range of aggressive

acts is unlawful are more likely to predict arrest. These results also suggest that respondents tend somewhat to expect what they prefer: those who *preferred* arrest were markedly more likely to predict that outcome than those who did not, in both vignettes.

Multivariate Analysis – Predicting Police Responses: Bivariate analyses suggest that public predictions about what the police will do in a domestic incident are associated with some social background characteristics – particularly age, race, and gender – as well as experience with violence, community context, and beliefs about the law and domestic violence. However, these variables are not themselves theoretically or empirically independent. Table 5.7 reports the results of regression analyses of the ordinal measure of police proactivity.³⁰ These analyses are conducted separately for respondents who received the less severe and more severe violence scenarios, and a control variable is included in each equation for the marital status of the parties in the vignette.

– Table 5.7 About Here –

Three models were run for each vignette. The first includes only social background variables: gender (coded 1 for male); two dummy variables for age (young and older); two dummies for minority race/ethnicity (African-American and Hispanic); and two dummies for

³⁰We also considered the possibility that responses would be more appropriately measured as a categorical variable (see Table 5.3), rather than an ordinal one. However, both multinomial logit analysis and discriminant analysis support the interpretation that respondents' beliefs about responses align along a single dimension of greater proactivity or intervention, at least as captured by the items included in this survey.

educational attainment (no more than high school, and completion of a four-year degree). For each vignette, this model explains only a small part of the variance (r^2 of .08 and .05). However, in both models men are significantly more likely to predict proactive responses. In the less severe violence vignette, respondents over 55 were less likely to predict such responses (as they were for the second vignette), while African-Americans were more likely to predict aggressive interventions.

The second pair of equations adds experience variables to the models: the eight-point secondary experience scale; and six dummy variables that isolate the interactive effects of experience and gender.³¹ For the first vignette, inclusion of these variables attenuates the initial effects of gender, age, and race; second-hand experience with domestic violence emerges as a highly significant correlate of predictions, as does the dummy variable that isolates males who report both victimization and offending experience. A somewhat similar pattern occurs with the more severe violence vignette, except that the effect of younger age increases, while none of the dummy variables for direct experience with violence emerges as significant.

The final pair of equations adds dummy variables for community attributes (rural, and progressive), as well as three variables that capture beliefs about the law and enforcement: a trichotomized measure of belief about statutory mandatory arrest³²; the index of beliefs about unlawful aggressive acts; and preference for arrest in the vignette. Addition of these variables significantly increases the amount of variance explained, although for both vignettes, r^2 remain

³¹As reported in Chapter 3, experience with violence, as either a victim or offender, and gender are not readily separable.

³²For purposes of this analysis, this variable was measured as follows: 0=believes there is no mandatory arrest; 0.5=not sure, don't know; 1=believes there is such a law.

modest. More importantly, however, controlling for these variables appears to further attenuate the effects of social background characteristics and experience, while these variables themselves emerge as highly significant.

Specifically, the complete model suggests that for the less severe violence vignette, respondents' predictions about police proactivity were unaffected by any of the measured social background factors, although those respondents with higher levels of secondary experience, and men who reported both victimization and offending, remain more likely to predict more authoritative police actions. In the second vignette, men remain more likely to predict the same, as do younger respondents, although coefficients for secondary experience do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. However, respondents who live in rural areas are markedly more likely to predict traditional, low-level police responses, while those whose communities have adopted progressive criminal justice policies are less likely to do so.

The most significant findings (although not necessarily the most surprising) involve respondents' beliefs about the scope of criminal law and appropriate police action. Those who believed that New York state law required police to make arrests were reasonably more likely to predict arrest, as bivariate associations suggested. Those who defined a broader range of acts as unlawful were more likely to predict arrest (and by equal margins) in *both* vignettes. Finally, and importantly, those who believed that arrest is a desirable police response are markedly more likely to believe that the police will make arrests, again in both vignettes.

In short, the multivariate analyses suggest that when these four categories of variables are entered simultaneously, the effects of social background are subsumed by the effects of personal experience and beliefs about the law and violence.

IV Summary and Conclusions

These findings suggest that respondents feel less confident telling interviewers what they believe really happens than what they believe ought to happen when police respond to domestic incidents in their communities. It is possible that the high rates of "don't know" responses are attributable to the close-ended question format (although one could have easily predicted the opposite effect).

These findings also suggest that simple bivariate associations, and predictive models that do not include community variables, may misstate the influence of some social background variables. For example, the effects of gender, and age are clarified by the inclusion of measures of experience and community; inclusion of these measures almost triples the variance explained by the models for both vignettes.

Substantively, the analyses reported here offer some support for the prediction that residents of rural areas have lower expectations about police responses, and residents of progressive communities have higher expectations. This is an important finding, inasmuch as people in different communities did not differ very much or very systematically (across these dimensions) in their beliefs about what police *should* do.

What remains unknown, of course, is why people's expectations are different in these different types of communities. Several possibilities present themselves. First, real differences in practice might be observable to the public, to a sufficient degree that people's expectations are adjusted accordingly. This seems possible, although unlikely; while one might expect such effects on public views on highly visible practices such as traffic enforcement, responses to domestic violence incidents seldom involve people other than the participants themselves.

Second, real differences might be observed, in a sense, second-hand: more aggressive enforcement may become the topic of conversation among friends, relatives, and neighbors, particularly when arrests are made. Third, public information campaigns, the priorities given to domestic cases by local police chiefs, and local media coverage of domestic violence cases might raise the visibility of such matters; in particular, emphasis on the recently-enacted arrest laws might suggest that arrests are routine to the public.

Finally, but importantly, these findings suggest that people's expectations about responses are shaped by their beliefs about how the law formally treats such incidents, and by how they prefer such incidents be treated. This is a potentially important finding for policy and practice. Just as police cannot in practice stop every reckless driver or intercept every child abuser, they cannot intervene in every domestic incident, regardless of what the law permits or requires. However, to the extent that potential offenders believe that the law requires arrest, they may be more likely to forecast that outcome for themselves; to the extent that victims believe arrest will occur if they call 911, they may act on that prediction.³³

³³This issue is itself a topic of lively debate, of course. Arrest may or may not serve victims' needs, interests, and preferences, so a victim who wanted police help but not arrest might be deterred from reporting a dangerous situation if she were convinced of that outcome.

Table 5.1: Predicting Police Response in Four Vignettes: Married/Dating vs. Minor/Severe Violence

	% of respondents predicting each action, by vignette:			
	Dating couple, minor violence	Married couple, minor violence	Dating couple, severe violence	Married couple, severe violence
leave, take no action	6%	7%	5%	7%
talk, try to help couple settle problems	44%	54%	35%	42%
arrest	26%	16%	38%	34%
don't know	25%	26%	25%	23%
let couple decide if one should leave	19%	25%	18%	16%
offer to take woman to safe place	13%	15%	19%	22%
tell man to find another place to stay	30%	22%	33%	23%
no answer, don't know	38%	38%	30%	39%

Note: percentages based on entire sample (n=1200, 300 for each vignette).

Table 5.2: Predicting Police Response in Four Vignettes: Married/Dating vs. Minor/Severe Violence

	% of respondents who predicted <i>most proactive police</i> action:			
	Dating couple, minor violence	Married couple, minor violence	Dating couple, severe violence	Married couple, severe violence
leave, take no action	3%	3%	2%	2%
let couple decide if one person should leave	6%	8%	4%	4%
talk, try to help couple settle problems	28%	42%	20%	26%
offer to take woman to safe place	8%	11%	9%	12%
tell the man to find another place to stay	25%	18%	21%	15%
arrest	31%	18%	44%	41%

Note: percentages based on non-missing cases (n=1025)

Table 5.3 Respondent Characteristics and Predicted Police Proactivity

Respondent characteristics		Less severe violence vignette			More severe violence vignette		
		settle	separate	arrest	settle	separate	arrest
Sex	male	41	28	32	24	25	51
	female	48	34	19	34	31	35
Age	Under 35	35	28	37	33	27	40
	35 to 54	45	32	23	22	29	49
	55 and older	54	33	13	37	29	35
Ethnicity*	white	48	31	21	39	29	42
	African-American	28	30	43	22	27	51
	Hispanic	33	42	25	37	21	42
Education	high school grad, GED	42	33	26	31	29	40
	some college	42	34	24	30	29	41
	college degree or graduate	53	23	23	26	27	47

* excludes those who self-identified as Asian, Native American, other. Note: for this table, the original ordinal scale of proactivity is collapsed into a three-category variable, coded as follows: "settle" includes responses limited to police leaving, letting couple decide if someone should leave, and attempting to settle; "separate" includes offering to remove the woman to a shelter or safe place and telling the man to find another place to stay; "arrest" includes arrest.

Table 5.4a: Experiences with Violence and Predictions of Police Responses: Less Severe Violence Vignette

% Respondents in each community who predicted police action	Less severe violence vignette (married, dating versions combined)					
	nothing	couple decides	talk to couple	take victim to safety	make man leave	arrest
No report of victimization	3%	7%	40%	9%	20%	22%
Reported having been victimized	4%	6%	23%	10%	25%	32%
No report of perpetrating	3%	7%	36%	10%	21%	23%
Reported having perpetrated	2%	5%	27%	8%	26%	33%
Has not known a victim of violence	2%	8%	39%	14%	20%	17%
Reports knowing victim	4%	6%	32%	7%	22%	29%
Has not know perpetrator	2%	9%	42%	12%	19%	17%
Reports knowing perpetrator	4%	5%	28%	8%	24%	31%
Hasn't known of police called to dv	3%	9%	40%	11%	18%	19%
Known of police called to dv scene	4%	5%	29%	8%	25%	30%

Table 5.4b: Experiences with Violence and Predictions of Police Responses: More Severe Violence Vignette

% Respondents in each community who predicted police action	More severe violence vignette (married, dating versions combined)					
	nothing	couple decides	talk to couple	take victim to safety	make man leave	arrest
No report of victimization	1%	5%	26%	10%	17%	41%
Reported having been victimized	4%	3%	16%	11%	21%	45%
No report of perpetrating	2%	4%	25%	10%	17%	42%
Reported having perpetrated	4%	3%	15%	12%	20%	45%
Has not known a victim of violence	2%	4%	27%	11%	1%	39%
Reports knowing victim	2%	4%	20%	10%	19%	45%
Has not know perpetrator	2%	4%	26%	11%	18%	40%
Reports knowing perpetrator	3%	4%	19%	10%	19%	46%
Hasn't known of police called to dv	2%	4%	29%	9%	17%	38%
Known of police called to dv scene	2%	4%	16%	13%	19%	47%

Table 5.5a: Community Context and Predictions of Police Responses: Less Severe Violence Vignette

% Respondents in each community who predicted police action	Less severe violence vignette (married, dating versions combined)					
	nothing	couple decides	talk to couple	take victim to safety	make man leave	arrest
Yonkers (urban, traditional)	1%	8%	30%	4%	29%	29%
Syracuse (urban, progressive)	2%	9%	30%	13%	21%	26%
Utica (small city, traditional)	6%	1%	41%	10%	21%	21%
Lockport (small city, progressive)	1%	4%	26%	7%	21%	41%
Essex County (rural, traditional)	7%	7%	41%	10%	20%	15%
Oneida County (rural, progressive)	1%	11%	42%	13%	18%	16%

Table 5.5b: Community Context and Predictions of Police Responses: More Severe Violence Vignette

% Respondents in each community who predicted police action	More severe violence vignette (married, dating versions combined)					
	nothing	couple decides	talk to couple	take victim to safety	make man leave	arrest
Yonkers (urban, traditional)	1%	3%	19%	11%	22%	44%
Syracuse (urban, progressive)	2%	7%	21%	8%	14%	46%
Utica (small city, traditional)	3%	3%	18%	11%	20%	44%
Lockport (small city, progressive)	0%	6%	20%	8%	13%	53%
Essex County (rural, traditional)	2%	4%	23%	11%	18%	42%
Oneida County (rural, progressive)	1%	2%	23%	10%	22%	42%

Table 5.6: Respondent Beliefs about Law and Violence and Predicted Police Proactivity

Respondent beliefs about law		Less severe violence vignette			More severe violence vignette		
		settle	separate	arrest	settle	separate	arrest
Beliefs about New York d.v. arrest law	Arrest not mandatory	46	25	19	31	32	37
	Not sure if arrest mandatory	56	29	16	38	30	33
	Police mandated to arrest	34	32	35	21	26	54
Preference for police response	Preferred no arrest be made	56	30	15	39	34	27
	Preferred that police arrest	28	32	40	24	25	51

* excludes those who self-identified as Asian, Native American, other.

Table 5.7: OLS Regression Predicting Police Proactivity in Vignettes: Three Models

	Prediction of Police Action			Prediction of Police Action		
	Less severe violence			More severe violence		
Social background						
Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.30**	.23	.11	.43***	.38**	.27*
Young (under 35)	.20	.21	.10	-.38**	-.44***	-.51***
Older (55 or older)	-.41***	-.26	-.06	-.37**	-.29*	-.23
African-American	.55**	.47*	.30	.26	.17	.03
Hispanic	.11	.17	.20	-.23	-.30	-.33
Highest ed: h.s. or GED	.01	-.03	-.07	-.09	-.04	-.09
Highest ed: 4-yr degree	-.24	-.25	-.13	.07	.07	.05
Experience with violence						
Known dv: scale (coded 0 to 8)		.07***	.06**		.05**	.04
Female: victim only		.17	.23		.07	.05
Male: victim only		.05	.10		.24	.35
Female: perpetrator only		.38	.61		.69	.85
Male: perpetrator only		.69	.56		.46	.43
Female: both victim and perp		-.12	-.22		-.17	-.19
Male: both victim and perp		.79**	.68**		.01	.04
Community context and beliefs						
Rural site			-.32**			-.33**
Progressive dv site			.28**			.18
Belief about arrest law			.52***			.44**
Belief about criminal acts			.12**			.12**
Preferred arrest			.67***			.47***
Vignette: control for married	-.39***	-.37***	-.34***	-.21	-.21	-.13
Constant	4.25	3.96	3.09	4.77	4.62	3.85
r2	.082	.120	.232	.050	.066	.142

* indicates significant at .10 level; ** indicates significant at .05 level; *** indicates significant at .01 level. Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, for each of three models, for each dependent vignette. Dependent variable is 6-point ordinal scale.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
POLICY AND RESEARCH

In this chapter, we summarize key findings from the research, and return to the questions raised at the outset of the study. In reporting what the survey reveals about the public's beliefs and perceptions about partner violence and societal responses, we place these findings in the context of both public policy discussions and recommendations for future research.

I. Public Perceptions About the Nature, Prevalence, and Causes of Partner Violence

Our findings suggest that most people include in their definitions of "domestic violence" a wide range of aggressive behaviors. Overwhelmingly, respondents defined physical aggression as domestic violence; and many respondents deemed verbal insults and stalking former partners as domestic violence. However, from ten to twenty percent of respondents define these acts as "domestic violence" when perpetrated by men, but not by women. Respondents are somewhat less likely to believe that many of these acts are against the law, although most regard men's physical violence as illegal. Many express uncertainty about whether or not acts such as forced sex, slapping, and stalking a spouse are illegal. Interestingly, more respondents reported that they believed stalking to be illegal than reported that they defined it as domestic violence.

Moreover, although opinions on the prevalence of violence vary greatly, many people believe that partner violence is widespread. Almost 40% of respondents believe that more than

ten percent of all couples experience violence. This is not surprising in light of the proximity of violence to these respondents' lives: over a fourth of men and over a third of women reported having been victimized by a partner themselves; half reported knowing a victim of partner violence; and at least one in four reported knowing about someone who had been involved in police, court, and social services interventions.

Respondents' beliefs about the causes of violence vary greatly. In the aggregate these beliefs reflect the diversity of situational, behavioral and psychological causes that have been explored in the research literature, although that is not to say that most respondents accurately understand the complexity of causes or risk factors that are associated with violence. Over a third of respondents attribute violence to financial stress, while one in five attributes violence to relationship and communication problems; significant minorities blame violence on individuals' anger and loss of control, substance abuse, or personality problems; jealousy; and histories of family violence. Most people agree, when asked, that violence is associated with substance abuse, and psychological problems; over half reject the notion that violence is normal reaction to ordinary stress. Importantly, although very few respondents spontaneously attribute violence to the characteristics or behavior of victims, many feel that at least some violence is caused by women's actions, and that women could exit violent relationships if they wanted to.

II Public Opinion About Appropriate and Effective Responses to Violence

Our findings suggest that most people's expectations for police and court responses to domestic violence are targeted at controlling perpetrators, through arrest or other coercive action, and that most people define the criminal justice role in largely traditional enforcement terms.

They are unlikely to recommend that police mediate, or take actions aimed directly at helping victims. While most favor conviction and punishment of assaultive men, they even more strongly favor counseling. Overwhelmingly, respondents believe that the court authority should be used to protect victims and potential victims (such as children) from violent men.

However, asked about how communities might reduce violence, respondents were as likely to focus on helping victims, and community prevention and education efforts, as on legal and criminal justice responses. We infer from this that while many favor using the law to restrain and punish offenders, and to provide some measure of physical and legal protection to victims, they have limited faith in the criminal justice system as a tool for reducing violence. In other words, although there appears to be an emerging consensus that incidents of violence are the legitimate business of the law, there remains considerable diversity of opinion about whether the legal system, social services for victims, or primary prevention is the most promising avenue for addressing partner violence.

These opinions are generally consistent with many advocates' recommendations for policy and practice (eg., Frisch, 1992; Hart, 1996). However, in practice police make fewer arrests, courts issue fewer protective orders, and offenders are subject to far less punishment and treatment than model policies prescribe. To that extent, public notions of appropriate or effective responses are not fulfilled in most communities.

III. Public Perceptions About Law Enforcement

Consistent with their views that authoritative action is an appropriate police response to violence, most people believe that police will, in fact, take such action, particularly if violence

results in injuries, or the perpetrator is not married to the victim. Very few respondents predicted that police would respond passively to reported violence, and a minority predicted that they would try to mediate on the scene. While these data do not permit us to judge the accuracy of respondents' predictions, it is safe to say that the minorities of respondents who predicted responses short of arrest are more realistic than those who expect police to take formal legal action.

IV Correlates of Attitudes: Social Background, Experience, and Community Context

We hypothesized that attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence would be shaped by social background, experiences with violence, and community context. On the one hand, we suspected that individuals who are members of subgroups at higher risk -- young people, women, economically disadvantaged people, and minorities -- would differ from others in their assessments of prevalence, causes, and effective police responses. On the other hand, research on public opinion about criminal justice issues more generally suggests that enforcement-oriented attitudes are held by very different groups -- particularly older citizens and men (Flanagan and Longmire, 1996). To complicate matters further, domestic violence is a gender-lined crime, so one might expect women and men to react differently to portrayals of partner assault. Moreover, while we examined the direct effects of these factors, we also measured directly reports of first-hand and secondary experiences with partner violence. We also considered the potential effects of community, comparing the responses of residents of rural with urbanized sites, as well as comparing responses across jurisdictions with more and less progressive and proactive criminal justice policies.

These findings suggest that while there is considerable variation in attitudes across the three broad domains outlined above, these sets of explanatory variables account only modestly for that variation. They also suggest that bivariate associations among predictors and attitudes may be misleading; for instance, some associations among social background characteristics and beliefs evaporate when one controls for personal experience with violence. The findings lead us to the following substantive observations:

- Women's views differ from men's views on many of these issues; and although these differences are modest, taken together they suggest that domestic violence is an issue of greater salience and concern to women than to men. Women define domestic violence more inclusively, make higher estimates of prevalence, are less likely to hold women responsible for victimization, and are more likely to favor societal responses that hold offenders accountable, provide services to victims, and provide primary prevention. Importantly, this gender difference does not appear to be attributable to differences in victimization experiences.
- Second, older respondents, as predicted, hold more traditional attitudes about partner violence: they use the term "domestic violence" more sparingly, estimate its prevalence more conservatively, are more inclined to blame women, and are consistently less likely than younger respondents to endorse legal, social service, or community responses.
- Third, these findings suggest that once other variables are controlled, racial minorities' views about domestic violence are not significantly different from

those of whites. African Americans make higher estimates of the prevalence of violence, and also are more likely to predict arrest, which may reflect real differences in the experiences of these population groups in American society. However, the beliefs and normative opinions of racial groups do not otherwise differ.

- Fourth, to the extent that socioeconomic status is associated with beliefs (as captured in our limited measures), it is education, not income, that influences attitudes, and this influence is manifested mostly in opinions about what should be done about violence. Better educated respondents were more likely to favor victim-oriented and community-based responses, and more likely to recommend a mix of responses, than were those who had ended their education in high school.

Conventional wisdom suggests that being a victim or an offender would bias one toward punitive and protective responses or toward minimization and leniency. However, these analyses suggest that once other factors are controlled, self-reported victimization and offending experience do not appear to have consistent effects on people's views about violence. This seemingly counter-intuitive finding must be understood in the context of our findings about the complex associations between victimization, offending, and gender: contrary to stereotypes, in these data (like those of other researchers), women and men were nearly equally likely to report both types of personal experience, and most people who reported perpetrating violence also claimed to have been victimized. Hence these results cannot be interpreted as the responses of male offenders and female victims. Further research is clearly necessary to understand the ways in which personal experience shapes beliefs (if, indeed, it does); the complexity of this question

may call for more sensitive measures or methodology than those employed in survey studies.

However, secondary experience – knowing individuals who had been victimized and the accumulation of knowledge about people’s experiences with legal and social service interventions – is consistently associated with a range of attitudes. Those with more extensive and diverse experience define partner violence more inclusively, predictably estimate its prevalence at higher levels, and importantly, endorse more and more varied social and community responses (but, interestingly, not more punitive responses).

Our predictions about community-level influences on attitudes were based on both conventional wisdom about cultural differences between rural and urban areas, and assumptions about exposure to different community policies and practices. Although rural residents are often characterized as more conservative and traditional than city dwellers, in the aggregate their views on domestic violence are little different, and the differences that do exist are not consistently in the hypothesized direction (for example, rural respondents were more likely to favor punitive responses for offenders). This finding does not bely the existence of traditional rural culture, but it does suggest caution in stereotyping rural residents as more traditional, less sympathetic to victims, or less supportive of law enforcement than urban counterparts.

Of perhaps greater significance, we found little evidence that respondents’ beliefs about the causes of violence, or their opinions about what should be done about it, were different in communities that had adopted progressive and proactive criminal justice policies. However, these respondents were more likely to predict an enforcement-oriented response in their neighborhoods. To be sure, we did not explicitly measure public information or outreach efforts, nor did we assess respondents’ exposure to such information; further research should explore not

only better measures of exposure to outreach efforts, but also associations with other domains of knowledge (for example, awareness of victim services). Future research should also examine the interactive relationships between criminal justice policy, personal experiences with those policies, and perceptions about effective interventions.

V. Attitude Consistency Across Domains

Our previous research on practitioners' attitudes about domestic violence suggested that views about the salience, causes, and solutions to the problem might not be internally consistent – in particular, that people's perspectives on what do about violence may not match their diagnosis of the causes (Worden et al., 1999). A complete exploration of that question on this study's sample is beyond the scope of this report, but one important finding demands attention. We found that a significant proportion of respondents hold women responsible for violence, in various ways and to different degrees: one might believe victims ought not to be held culpable, but one might also believe that victims can (and should) end violence by exiting abusive relationships, that women's behavior provokes violence, and/or that women initiate physical conflicts. Our imperfect measure of the intensity of victim-blaming was associated with beliefs about the appropriateness of victim-oriented interventions, as well as legal actions directed toward perpetrators. We cannot predict with much accuracy who will, and will not, hold victims responsible for violence, but these data suggest that policy makers should be attentive to this correlation, inasmuch as negative attitudes about victims may justify opposition to programs aimed at reducing victimization.

Further, these findings suggest that people's views about what *should* be done in response

to domestic violence are correlated with what they believe police *really* do. Our analyses did not explain a great deal of variation in the former, but it is not surprising to learn that real-world predictions are colored by preferences. To the extent that both sets of attitudes are inconsistent with actual practice, however, the public might prove to be not only surprised but also disappointed to learn that their ideas about effective interventions are not being implemented.

VI. Limitations of the Study

This research project capitalizes on opportunities that were largely unavailable to authors of previous studies, including a large, diverse sample of New York state respondents, and representation from communities of different types. These included rural and urban jurisdictions, as well as areas with both progressive and traditional criminal justice approaches to domestic violence. However, this study also has limitations, and lessons for future researchers.

First, the response rate, while typical for responses to telephone surveys, may be particularly significant for this type of study. Some research suggests that for surveys on special topics such as domestic violence, potential respondents with more personal experience in the topic area may be more likely to participate. Because second-hand experience was so prevalent and influential in our analyses, this potential source of bias is important and should be investigated in future research.

A second limitation pertains to the design employed, particularly the use of a vignette format to elicit responses about preferred and actual criminal justice responses at the community level. The construction of the vignettes, and the factors that were varied (marital status and violence severity) were selected a priori by the investigators. As predicted, they turned out to

play a role in respondents' views about what should be done about violence. However, other factors of theoretical and policy interest might also be varied, such as the age or ethnicity of the parties, or the role of the woman in provoking violence. Future research might profitably consider such variables.

Third, we asked open- and closed-ended questions for three major topical areas in the study: beliefs about the causes of violence, preferences for police action, and predictions about neighborhood law enforcement responses. Responses to these two types of query were not contradictory, but they nonetheless produce different answers to questions about *levels of support or agreement* with particular theories, interventions, or policies. This calls for careful interpretation, qualification, and reporting of these and other survey-based findings.

Fourth, with respect to perceived causes of violence, we queried respondents about a set of possible causal factors that we deemed worthy of exploration, in particular the role of women in contributing to their own victimization. Other risk factors for partner violence might also be worthy of investigation.

VII. Future Directions for Research

This study offers some lessons for future researchers -- both those who are interested in studying domestic violence, and those interested in studying opinion about criminal justice more generally. The findings of this study may direct future research on this topic both substantively and methodologically. Researchers may want to pay particular attention to the following:

- These findings reveal strong support for law enforcement actions. However, they also suggest that support for arrest is contingent on legal and social factors, such

as the presence of injuries and the marital status of the couple. It is possible that support for police actions may be contingent on other factors that were unmeasured in our study, and hence we should be cautious in interpreting these results as unqualified support for mandatory arrest policies.

- As is true in other studies of public opinion and criminal justice, survey respondents were inclined to support almost all interventions proposed to them; but we did not explicitly ask them to consider competing values or costs. It would be interesting to learn how they would prioritize responses if prompted to do so – for example, would they prefer to see offenders jailed, or mandated into treatment? Would they prefer to see scarce resources spent on victim services, specialized courts, or prevention programs?
- Conventional wisdom assumes that culture shapes attitudes about domestic violence, and anecdotal evidence sometimes appears to support this assumption. For example, many assume that African-American women are reluctant to call the police (Rasche, 1988). However, these findings do not support hypotheses that in general people of different social, racial, or demographic backgrounds differ much in their views about violence. Future research should address this matter directly and in detail, oversampling population groups who could not be accessed through our methodology,³⁴ and testing hypotheses about interactions among social background, experience, and beliefs.

³⁴The companion study to the one reported here may help us answer some of these questions; NIJ has funded a supplemental survey of a Hispanic sample residing in one of the sites studied here. These findings will be disseminated in a forthcoming report.

- These findings suggest that the more diverse one's second-hand exposure to social responses to violence, the more supportive one is of victim-oriented and community-oriented initiatives. We do not have information that helps us interpret this finding, but it would be interesting to learn whether one's assessment (positive, negative) of these responses mediates the relationship between experience and support. Given the significant associations between experience, as measured here, and beliefs, future research should employ more detailed measures of experience.
- Finally, these findings argue strongly for more research on the public's views about women's responsibility for violence and for ending violence. Consistent with previous research, this survey suggests that most people believe that leaving an abusive relationship is a way to end violence; people may both underestimate the practical difficulties of such strategies, and overestimate the safety that victims can achieve this way.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Public opinion research does not have direct implications for policy or practice.

However, these findings may be of value to those who plan and implement society's responses to partner violence, in at least three ways.

- First, these findings may inform policy makers about levels of support for innovations. In general, the public is not resistant to criminalization of many aggressive behaviors, and in fact many people are seemingly under the impression that some acts are unlawful that in fact are not. The public appears to favor a

more protective and interventionist role for the courts than they have historically adopted, somewhat at odds with the restricted roles that many judges impose upon themselves (McLean and Worden, 2000).

- The results of this study may inform public information initiatives insofar as they suggest points of departure for education and outreach. For example, there appears to be little need to convince the public that domestic violence is a common problem, that it is illegal, or that it calls for police intervention; few people believe that partner violence is normal or acceptable. However, the public may be misinformed about other issues, such as the difficulties women face exiting violent relationships.
- Finally, these findings may be of use to program administrators who work with targeted populations. For example, they may provide baseline information about how self-reported victims and perpetrators think about violence; they may also be of value to those who train practitioners (in criminal justice, social services, public health, and educational settings).

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