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Women hitting men

I decided a while ago not to engage in the debate over whether women hit men as often as men hit women. You can parse the data any way you want to answer that debate. Winning it, losing, it is irrelevant because it doesn't bear on whether you can roll out an intervention, or prevention program that actually is going to be effective. This is what I know. I know that men hit women, probably more often than women hit men. Men kill women far more often than women kill men. I know that women who fight back, who engage in violence towards their partners, escalate the violence more than women who don't fight back, which is a bit of a surprise. I know that violence between couples affects the likelihood that children are going to engage in violent behavior. I know that violence between couples influences whether children are going to have behavioral, emotional issues. So, I'm going to side with my colleague Murray Strauss. And say, look, if you really want to effectively intervene, and prevent you can't simply pull out violence against women, and say this is all we're interested in. And then pass legislation, which we've in fact done, and implement policies, which we've in fact done, that says we're going to turn a blind eye to any woman who hit any man, because that's really not part of the issue. That's -- naive is probably not a good term for that. It's not productive. It's not going to get anybody to where they want to get, which is much greater reduction in how much violence occurs between intimates.

Meeting the needs of victims?

We just finished a study, we being one of my doctoral students, whom I supervise, and she examined women who have been involved in arrests. Now this is a first kind of drilldown into the criminalization beyond what happens when an offender is arrested. And she came up with two findings that I think bear notice. One, the women themselves don't see the criminal justice system as what they want to turn to first, and as particularly effective. They also didn't see the shelters as the intervention they wanted to turn to first, or that were particularly effective. So, from a victim's point of view, the irony is what we have put in place across a couple of studies going back to Lee Bowker studies in the 70's and Murray Strauss and my studies in the mid 80's, and now Melissa's study in 2009. The victims themselves don't feel advantaged at all by criminalizing. From an advocacy point of view it seemed to be a very important step to take to say, "hey this is pretty serious behavior." But is it meeting the needs of victims? Apparently not.

Readiness to change

One of the questions I decided not to answer anymore is what works. It's been a decade since I said I would answer that question. And now I say, "Look don't ask that. Ask me what works for what individuals, under what circumstances." A lot of the work I've done in the last 15 years has looked at readiness to change. And the assumption that offenders want to change, and the assumptions that victims want to change. It simply doesn't hold

up. And if you look at the intersection between research, and behavior change, and research on typologies of violence you come away with an answer that says for fairly severe offenders who have no interest in changing, arrest isn't going to be sufficient. Arrest and incapacitation is going to be sufficient. For low-level offenders who show some bilateral willingness to change, that's both husband, and wife. There, *verboden* couples counseling, which has been great third rail of violence against women, looks to be promising.

Batterer intervention programs

One of the difficult problems with batterer intervention programs in general is the high drop out rate. So, they're all successful if you only look at the people who finish; 69, 70, 80 percent non-recidivism, but if you look at everybody who starts the recidivism rate is 80 percent. So, the question is, well we've got a decent model here, but how do you keep people engaged? Well the model structure might work, but the content is going to have to be menu'd depending on people's readiness to change. There is no short answer for this. The short answer is a much more nuanced approach to offenders ranging from incapacitation to couples counseling. Taking a look both, at the level of risk they bring to the relationship, as well as their willingness to change.