



# **The Great Recession's Impact on Family Violence and Implications for Policy**

Denise A. Hines, Ph.D.  
Clark University  
Department of Psychology

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## The Boston Globe

### **Rising economic stress cited in domestic violence increase**

**By Peter Schworm and John M. Guilfoil, Globe Staff | February 3, 2010**

The Westford man who shot his wife Monday, critically wounding her, before fatally shooting his daughter and himself is the second to allegedly kill a family member in this suburb in less than a month, and the fatal shootings are the latest in a rash of domestic killings in Massachusetts this year.

Since Jan. 9, at least five women have been killed in domestic violence. Two others were severely wounded in the total of six different incidents.

The violence has alarmed authorities and advocates for women, who point out that women's groups are reporting dramatic increases in domestic abuse in Massachusetts and across the country.

"I haven't seen this level of violence - and it's not just the homicides, it's the assaults and attempted murders - and I've been doing this for over 30 years." said Joanne Tulonen, director of the YWCA/Battered Women's Resources organization in Leominster, where a domestic dispute led to a knife attack on two women Sunday morning.

## Incidence of Family Violence

- NIS-4: 1.25 million children in the U.S. were maltreated in 2005-2006
- Domestic Violence: ranges from 3.8 to 34 per 1,000 women and 1.3 to 48 per 1,000 men in one year.

# Costs of Family Violence

- Personal Suffering
  - Cognitive, behavioral, & physical and mental health problems
- Productivity Costs
  - Reliance on state assistance
  - Unemployment

## Economy's Effects on Family Violence

- Compared to children with employed parents, children with no employed parents experienced 2-3 times the rate of maltreatment.
- Children in the lowest socioeconomic households experienced maltreatment at more than 5 times the rate of other children.
- During the 1981-1982 recession, a majority of states reported an increase in rates and severity of child maltreatment.
- Domestic violence occurs more often in households facing job instability, financial strain, and lower income levels.



# Complex Relationship Between Economic Indicators and Family Violence

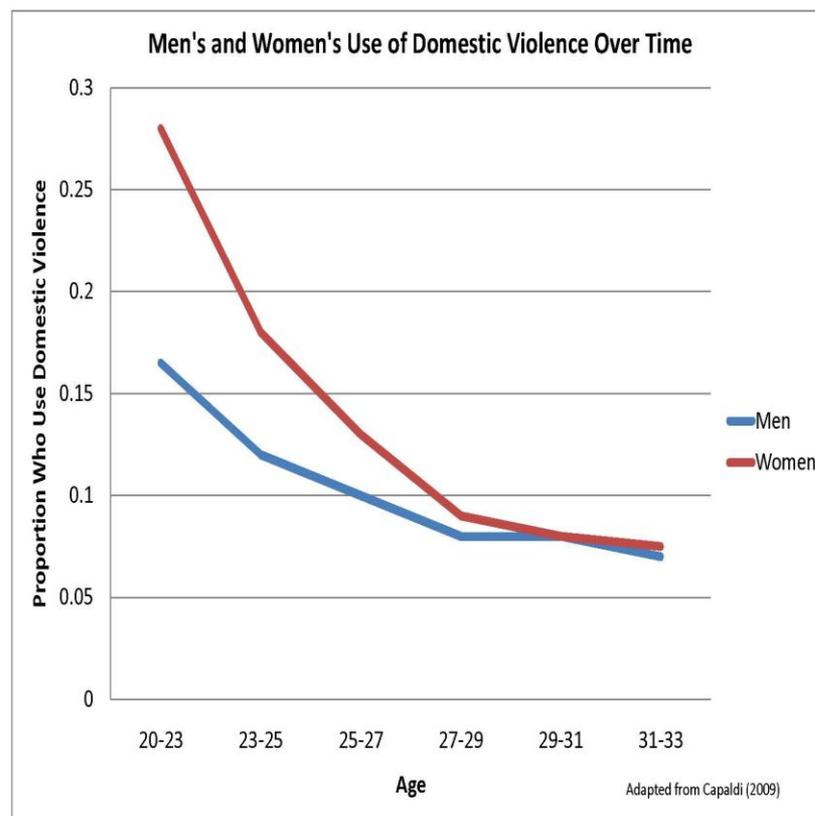
- Doesn't control for other possible factors.
- Doesn't differentiate between chronically v. newly unemployed.
- Economic instability related to family violence because of:
  - increased time spent together
  - greater family conflict over financial matters
  - lowered self-esteem of the unemployed person
  - increased likelihood that frustration will be directed towards family members.
- Such violence may only occur among those people with dysfunctional relationship skills or a tendency to react to stress with violence.

## Current Trends

- Prior to the Great Recession, national rates of both child maltreatment and domestic violence had steadily declined since the early 1990s.
- In Massachusetts: a surge in clients served by DCF from June, 2007 to June, 2008.
- New Bedford DV agency reported an increase of 25% in the previous 18 months in requests for services, but...
  - Other DV agencies experienced no notable increase.

# Public Awareness and Education

- Declining rates of family violence have been widely attributed to the increasing attention that these issues have been given in the media and educational systems.
- Incorporating programming into the health curriculum.





## Conflicting Messages in a Coordinated System

- Child Maltreatment
  - Social Services
  - Family Preservation
- Domestic Violence
  - Criminal Justice
  - Family Separation
- “Greenbook Initiative”
  - Does it lead to a decrease in family violence?



# Polices and Programs for Child Maltreatment

- What works
  - Home visitation programs
    - e.g., Healthy Families Massachusetts
    - Saves state \$26,298 per child served
  - Family Intervention Programs
    - e.g., Functional Family Therapy
    - Effective for resistant-to-treatment families



# Polices and Programs for Child Maltreatment

- What doesn't
  - Parent training programs
    - Primary intervention relied upon by DCF
    - Don't improve parenting or decrease child maltreatment
    - Better to assess each family and offer only more intensive programming when needed.

# Polices and Programs for Domestic Violence

- Criminal Justice Involvement
  - Reporting an incident to the police has a strong deterrent effect
  - Does not matter what criminal justice sanction is used.
  - Characteristics of the offender predict recidivism ten times better than the specific criminal justice intervention

## Arrest as an Overarching Policy

- Arrest does not reduce recidivism
- Mandating or strongly encouraging arrest will probably take community's resources away from identifying and responding to the worst offenders and victims at most risk.
- Reporting of domestic violence to the police decreases when arrest is likely.
- Time to have police discretion?

## Victim Services

- Shelters
  - Reduces re-abuse
- Legal Advocacy
  - Leads to greater conviction rates
- Police/Victim Assistance Crisis Teams
  - No evidence for cost-effectiveness



## Programs for Batterers: Current Model

- Operate on a “power and control” model.
- If men are sentenced by the courts into a batterer intervention program, this is the program that is mandated.
- Programs do not work to reduce recidivism as currently constructed.

## Programs for Batterers: Alternative Models

- Tailored to batterers' needs through intake
- Can include one or more of the following:
  - Evidence-based alcohol/substance abuse treatment
    - Decreases domestic violence, even if violence is not addressed in program content
  - Comprehensive mental health treatment
    - >80% of batterers in criminal justice system have a mental health issue
  - Couples' treatment
    - *With proper screening and monitoring*, couples therapy has been shown to be effective in reducing domestic violence.



## Contact Information

Denise A. Hines, Ph.D.

Clark University

[dhines@clarku.edu](mailto:dhines@clarku.edu)

508-793-7458