

Husbands' hostile, anti-social behaviors increase wives' symptoms of depression, researchers find

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Christine Proulx is an assistant professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies in the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. Credit: MU News Bureau

Thousands of men, women and children experience family violence each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Traditionally, therapy for violence survivors has predominantly focused on evaluating their trauma and pain. In contrast, a University of Missouri researcher broadens the therapeutic focus to empower survivors through highlighting their resilience, resourcefulness, and ability to overcome adversity.

"Therapists and mental health practitioners can expand the lens of how

survivors see themselves and help them recognize their strengths and the resilience they've learned from their situations," said Kim Anderson, associate professor in the MU School of Social Work. "Utilizing a strengths-based approach can greatly improve recovery for victims of family violence. As with any situation, helping people focus on their abilities instead of their problems increases their motivation and will to succeed."

Compared to current approaches that emphasize diagnosing symptoms and [mental health issues](#), the strengths-based approach helps identify survivors' abilities, such as perseverance and overcoming, and how those skills can be used in their present-day lives.

"What are normally regarded as negative traits in survivors of family violence might actually be their survival strengths," Anderson said. "Traits that practitioners often try to change may be extremely important to maintain and can help survivors thrive in environments where there isn't violence."

The strengths-based approach trains [social workers](#), mental health practitioners, educators and students to uncover the positive in survivors' life stories—the skills gained by enduring and coping with immense adversity. This facilitates a more collaborative process, where the professional and the survivor each utilize their individual expertise to develop solutions.

"Victims of family violence find it difficult to see their own strengths and self-worth because it's often colored by shame and blame," Anderson said. "Similarly, practitioners find it difficult because they tend to focus only on victims' problems. Instead, they need to cast a light on survivors' abilities to cope and overcome the adversity brought on by [family violence](#). This reveals hope that they won't always be victims of violence and they can achieve what they want in their lives, whatever

their dreams are."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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