

# Study finds similar personality types in male and female domestic violence perpetrators

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New research published in the August edition of the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, is providing a better picture of the roles played by gender, personality and mental illness in domestic violence.

"Intimate partner violence is a major public health concern," says the study's lead author Zach Walsh, assistant professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Okanagan campus. "Examining subtypes of perpetrators is an important way of learning more about why people are violent in close relationships. Understanding why different people are violent may be crucial for developing new ways to reduce violence in relationships. "

Walsh and colleagues Marc Swogger (University of Rochester), Brian O'Connor (UBC), Yael Schonbrun (Brown University), Tracie Shea (Brown University), and Gregory Stuart (University of Tennessee-Knoxville) analyzed data drawn from the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study to examine normal personality, psychopathic characteristics, and mental illness among 567 civil psychiatric patients, including 138 women and 93 men with histories of domestic violence.

"Although both men and women engage in substantial levels of domestic violence, fewer studies have examined female perpetrators," says Walsh. "These new findings are among the first to highlight similarities between subtypes of domestically violent men and women."

Prior studies of domestically violent men have found that perpetrators can be categorized into three groups. The study provides preliminary evidence that the following three subtypes also exist among female perpetrators:

- Antisocial perpetrators are often violent outside the relationship and have high levels of psychopathic personality traits
- Dysphoric perpetrators may have high levels of anxiety, depression and other forms of mental illness
- Low Pathology perpetrators have generally normal personalities and are rarely violent outside of intimate relationships

The findings also suggest that subtypes from studies of domestic violence perpetrators in the community can be applied to perpetration by psychiatric patients. Learning more about psychiatric patients who perpetrate domestic violence is important, as they engage in higher levels of [domestic violence](#) than do the general population.

Walsh encourages caution in generalizing from psychiatric patients to the larger community, and is currently working with his students to examine these subtypes among other group

**More information:** *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 119, No. 3, 563-574.

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