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# Intimate Partner Violence and the Victim-Offender Overlap

Marie Skubak Tillyer<sup>1</sup> and Emily M. Wright<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Objectives:* Examine the prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization and offending, as well as the overlap of these experiences. *Method:* Data from wave 4 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health were analyzed to examine IPV among adults ages 24 to 33. A multinomial logistic regression model was estimated to determine whether the correlates of IPV vary across victims, perpetrators, and victim-perpetrators. *Results:* Approximately 20% of respondents reported some IPV involvement in the past year, one-third of whom reported victimization *and* perpetration. The victim-offender overlap was observed for males and females across various measures of IPV. Bivariate correlations suggest victimization and perpetration have common correlates. Multivariate analysis, however, reveals considerable differences once we distinguish between victims, offenders, and victim-offenders and control for other variables. Perpetrators and victim-perpetrators were more likely to live with a nonspouse partner; feel isolated; display negative temperaments; and report substance use problems. “Victims only” were more likely to live with children and have lower household incomes. *Conclusions:* The victim-offender overlap exists for IPV across a variety of measures. Though perpetrators and victim-perpetrators have similar characteristics, those who are victims only appear distinctly different. We discuss the implications for theory, policy, and research.

**Keywords** victim-offender overlap, intimate partner violence

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Strangers do not always present the greatest threat of criminal perpetration—in fact, we are more likely to be victimized in our own homes by our loved ones rather than attacked by strangers on the street (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006). Estimates from the National Violence against Women and the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence surveys report that up to 36 percent of females and 29 percent of males have experienced some form of violence by their intimate partner during their lifetime (Black et al. 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Further, recent data show that while the majority of cases of intimate partner violence (IPV) processed by state courts involve a male defendant and a female victim, approximately 12 percent involve a female offender and a male victim (Smith and Farole 2009). These figures challenge traditional stereotypes about the gender of IPV victims and offenders (e.g., Straus 2011) and raise the question of whether those involved in IPV can be neatly categorized as “victims” and “offenders.”

Research on criminal victimization and offending more generally demonstrates that victims and perpetrators of crime are not necessarily distinct groups. Rather, there is considerable overlap in these populations (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007). Several explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, including the notion that victims and offenders share common routine activities and similar traits that create opportunities for both criminal victimization and offending. There has been little empirical attention paid, however, to whether the victim-offender overlap exists among those involved in IPV. This omission in the research may be due in part to long-held beliefs that IPV is an expression of male domination over women (see the feminist perspective on domestic violence, e.g., Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dobash et al. 1992; Lawson 2012); individuals, therefore, are assumed to be victims *or* perpetrators of IPV.

Yet, if we consider that at least some instances of IPV might be better understood as conflicts that are not necessarily used for domination and control purposes but which nonetheless occur within intimate settings, an investigation of

the victim-offender overlap with respect to IPV becomes more tenable. The family violence perspective, for instance, sees “conflict between family members as universal and inevitable, and violence between any family members (including violence between spouses) is viewed as one method utilized by those members to resolve this predictable conflict” (Lawson 2012:575). Though a family violence perspective hints that there might be considerable victim-offender overlap with respect to IPV, this issue has received little empirical attention by criminologists.

Given that a substantial body of research has established the victim-offender overlap in general (Berg et al. 2012; Jennings et al. 2010; Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991), violence by loved ones is a somewhat common occurrence (Black et al. 2011; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006), *and* some violence between partners has been characterized as “mutual” (Johnson 1995; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006), the existence of the victim-offender overlap within IPV seems plausible and warrants investigation. Further, the very nature of intimate partners—that is, individuals who have self-selected into relationships that routinely bring them into contact with one another (Carbone-Lopez and Kruttschnitt 2010)—suggests that an initial act of violence may be followed by subsequent violence: The conditions that led to the initial violence may remain unresolved and/or the violence itself might produce opportunities and motivations for additional fights. Because much empirical research on IPV focuses on female victimization or male offending exclusively, it is also unclear whether the established correlates of IPV apply to all types of involvement in IPV, or if there are important differences that distinguish those who are both victims *and* offenders of IPV from those who are involved in IPV solely as victims *or* offenders.

We aim to fill these voids by exploring the prevalence of IPV victimization and perpetration in adulthood, as well as the overlap of these experiences, in a nationally representative sample of adults ages 25 to 33. To this end, we draw on the

existing research in the areas of IPV and the victim-offender overlap to examine the extent to which the correlates for IPV vary across victims, perpetrators, and victim-perpetrators using multinomial logistic regression analysis. Our findings suggest a number of implications for theory, policy, and future research.

## *IPV*

The existing research on IPV suggests that victims and offenders have many common characteristics. Like other forms of violence, IPV is inversely related to age (Rennison and Welchans 2000). Young couples are less likely to be married or to have been in a relationship for a long period of time, and it has been suggested that they may lack the skills and experience needed to successfully resolve arguments and reach compromise in conflicts and may not yet understand each other's boundaries for acceptable behavior (DeMaris et al. 2003). Younger people are also generally more violent and aggressive than older people (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983), perhaps explaining why younger couples are more volatile in their relationships.

Minorities also appear to engage in or report IPV more often than non-minorities (Rennison and Welchans 2000). This may be due to cultural differences in the meaning of partner violence and/or stress and frustration that arise when they are faced with limited opportunities for upward mobility due to their position in society (Cloward 1959; Gelles and Straus 1988). Likewise, couples in the lower socioeconomic strata, as indicated by low educational or occupational attainment or low income, may experience more stressors arising from financial difficulties, or may experience more frustration due to limited opportunities—all of which might increase the likelihood of IPV occurring (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, and Bates 1997). Individuals with low education or occupational attainment may also be more prone to resort to violence when verbal discussion fails them (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), or may lack effective negotiation skills

(Feldman and Ridley 2000; Ridley and Feldman 2003).

Violence within relationships has also been linked to other problems, particularly alcohol and drug use, as well as anger and hostile attitudes. IPV is approximately three times more likely to occur when drug use is involved (Moore et al. 2008). It has been suggested that substance use releases inhibitions regarding the use of violence against one's partner or that it is used as an excuse to justify behaviors (such as IPV) that are normally considered unacceptable (Kaufman Kantor and Straus 1987). Furthermore, substance use may be used as a coping mechanism for stress and frustration, poor relationship quality, or may be used among victims as a result of partner violence (Kilpatrick et al. 1997). Attitudes condoning violence in general, and against partners specifically, are positively associated with IPV, as are feelings of anger, hostility, and negative emotionality (Moffitt et al. 2000; Norlander and Eckhardt 2005; Stith et al. 2004). It may be that persons willing to use violence in general are more apt to use violence within their relationships as well or that persons unable to regulate their emotions are more likely to lash out at others, even intimate others (Norlander and Eckhardt 2005; Sugarman and Frankel 1996).

Couples who are cohabiting but who are not married are more likely to experience IPV (DeMaris et al. 2003; Stets 1991); scholars have suggested that this relationship may reflect lower commitment levels between the partners (Stets 1991) or that unmarried cohabiting couples are more likely to be younger and therefore more violent (Magdol et al. 1998). Violence between partners occurs most often inside of the couple's (or victim's) house (Rennison and Welchans 2000; Thomas, Dichter, and Matejkowski 2011), with few or no witnesses of the violence, with the exception of young children living in the household (Holt, Buckley, and Whelan 2008). Theoretically, however, the presence of adult third parties may deter violence or lessen the severity of abuse through shaming, other control mechanisms (Stets 1991; Van Wyk et al. 2003; Wilkinson and Hamerschlag 2005), or by

increasing the likelihood that victims reach out to others for help (Browning 2002; Coker et al. 2002). When the third parties are minor children, however, it is possible that their presence may add to relationship stress and actually increase violence (Wilkinson and Hamerschlag 2005).

Finally, social support, and its antithesis, social isolation, have been suggested as important factors that may inhibit or increase IPV. Social support may be related to a reduced risk of victimization because supportive relationships can provide the opportunities, financial means, or physical alternatives needed to escape a violent relationship. For instance, support may increase the likelihood that the victim seeks and receives help from others (e.g., Browning 2002; Cullen 1994), since they have people to turn to for emotional, physical, or financial assistance (Van Wyk et al. 2003). Social isolation, on the other hand, is related to increased risk of violence within partnerships. It has been suggested that social isolation may lead to less support and control within relationships, which in turn may lead to more aggression (Stets 1991), or that social isolation keeps violence within relationships private, while also increasing dependence between the partners (Van Wyk et al. 2003). Further, social isolation may leave victims with few resources with which to leave their violent partners (MacMillian and Gartner 1999; Van Wyk et al. 2003).

In sum, many consistencies exist between the predictors of IPV perpetration and victimization. As noted above, studies indicate that 29 percent of men and 36 percent of women report having experienced some form of violence by their intimate partner during their lifetime (Black et al. 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000), which suggests that IPV is not limited to male perpetration and female victimization. The vast majority of the IPV research, however, examines the predictors of IPV perpetration and victimization separately, often relying on gendered analyses (e.g., male-only perpetrators or female-only victims, see Bachman and Saltzman 1995; Tjaden and Thoennes 1998) that may not fully capture differences across

victims, perpetrators, and victim-perpetrators. We now turn to the literature on the victim-offender overlap to examine possible explanations for the phenomenon and how it might apply to IPV.

### *The Victim-Offender Overlap*

Research has demonstrated a substantial and consistent overlap among those who have been victimized and those who have perpetrated offenses against others (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007). Studies examining the victim-offender overlap indicate that offending increases the likelihood of victimization, but also that victimization increases the likelihood of offending (Lauritsen and Laub 2007; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991). The victim-offender relationship is robust, having been found in the United States as well as other countries, over time, across various contexts, and within various demographic subgroups. Further, this relationship has been observed across numerous victimization and offending measures, and despite the use of a variety of control variables (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007). Most of this research has focused on crimes such as violence, delinquency, property crimes, and arrests, but the greatest overlap appears to be among the most severe crimes, particularly homicide (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007).

Although the victim-offender overlap is one of the most consistent findings in criminology (Lauritsen and Laub 2007), the theoretical mechanisms underlying this relationship are somewhat less agreed upon. It is possible that an underlying trait—such as impulsivity, risk taking, or negative emotionality—conducive to both victimization and offending accounts for the overlap (Lauritsen and Davis Quinet 1995; Lauritsen and Laub 2007). The “principle of homogamy” (e.g., Cohen, Kluegel, and Land 1981; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991) implies that persons are more likely to be victimized when they come into contact with other offenders



and that offenders are more likely to become victims because of their disproportionate contact with offenders. It is also feasible that victimization and offending may change an individual's future risk of certain behaviors, such as subsequent victimization or offending (Lauritsen and Davis Quinet 1995; Lauritsen and Laub 2007). Indeed, much literature suggests that the relationship between victimization and offending is due to common risk factors shared between these two groups (Jennings et al. 2010; Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012). Consistent with these ideas, Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle (2012:17), in their comprehensive review of the research, contend that routine activities theory is "by far the most recognizable" of theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain the victim-offender overlap, in that "the theory centers on the influence that opportunity structures and risky life- styles have on increasing the likelihood for committing an offense or experiencing victimization." Mustaine and Tewksbury (2000), for example, used a lifestyles-routine activities perspective to examine similarities and differences across college students who participated in assaults as victims, offenders, and victim-offenders. Their analyses indicate that these are distinct groups with different sources of criminal involvement, leading them to conclude that "routine activity theory rationales offer more useful explanations for the assault risks of the more heavily criminally involved individual (those who are *both* victim *and* offender) over the individuals who are involved only as a victim *or* an offender" (Mustaine and Tewksbury 2000:356).

### *Intimate Partners as Offenders and Victims*

Despite the considerable attention that has been devoted to the victim- offender overlap, few studies have examined this phenomenon among couples in intimate relationships. To be sure, the "cycle of violence," or the idea that victimization within family relationships might beget offending later in life, has been discussed and empirically examined (e.g., Lussier, Farrington, and Moffitt 2009; Widom

1989). There are, however, few empirical investigations of the overlap of victimization *and* offending within an intimate relationship. As suggested above, this may be due in part to the influence of the feminist perspective on the study of IPV. If IPV is assumed to be the result of male domination over women, it makes little sense to expect a victim-offender overlap.

It is also possible that this criminological phenomenon has rarely been explored within IPV because IPV and IPV offenders are viewed differently than typical “street” offenders and the crimes they commit. Though some research suggests IPV offenders are similar to non-IPV offenders (Felson and Lane 2010), there is also evidence that the two groups differ on important characteristics (Moffitt et al. 2000). For example, violence within relationships involves intimate knowledge of the victim/offender and emotions that may not typically be present in stranger crime (Dugan and Apel 2005), shared characteristics (e.g., routines, violent proclivities, behavioral preferences) resulting from self-selection of partners (Carbone-Lopez and Kruttschnitt 2010; Wright et al. 1999), and potentially different motivations for violence against one’s partner as opposed to violence against strangers (e.g., control, see Felson and Messner 2000; rage, see Thomas, Dichter, and Matejkowski 2011).

Interestingly, however, it is the very nature of IPV—that is, violence between two individuals who are in a relationship and interact on a routine basis—that makes it particularly well suited for an investigation of the victim-offender overlap. Most explanations of the victim-offender overlap rely on common traits and routine activities that contribute to opportunities for crime (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012; Lauritsen and Laub 2007; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2000). In the case of intimate partners, individuals have self-selected into the relationship, possibly because of their shared traits (Carbone-Lopez and Kruttschnitt 2010; Wright et al. 1999), and the relationship repeatedly brings potential victims and perpetrators in close proximity to one another. General

discussions of the “victim-offender” overlap typically refer to an individual whose victim and perpetrator are not likely the same person (e.g., a drug dealer who is the victim of a robbery). When we consider the victim-offender overlap within the context of IPV, however, we are essentially investigating mutual violence between only two individuals, where the possibility of becoming a victim *and* an offender exists within a single relationship.

There are a number of explanations for why we might expect to see an overlap of victims and offenders in intimate relationships. First, the initial circumstances that produced the violence, if left unresolved, can lead to additional fights. These circumstances might be external factors that put stress on the relationship or they could be common traits that the partners share that make conflict resolution difficult. This explanation for recurrent and mutual violence is consistent with the principal of homogamy, in that common traits between the offenders and victims increase the likelihood that offenders will be victimized. Such a possibility is supported by the many shared risk factors for IPV perpetration and victimization reviewed above.

Second, the violence itself can increase the likelihood of additional violence. The initial crime event—in this case, the violence used against one’s partner—has the potential to create motivation and opportunity for subsequent violence, either during the same incident or in future fights. Not only might the initial victim feel justified in using violence (e.g., as in the case of violent resistant partner violence, see Johnson 2008, or in self-defense efforts), but the initial perpetrator may be left with little recourse—in terms of turning to others for help—given his or her own perpetration. Thus, it is plausible that the victim-offender overlap applies to violence that occurs between intimate partners. The current study explores this possibility and examines whether the existing correlates of IPV apply to all types of IPV involvement.

## **The Present Study**

The present study examines the prevalence of IPV victimization and perpetration in adulthood, as well as the overlap of these experiences. Given that the victim-offender overlap has been observed in numerous studies measuring general offending and victimization, and that most assaults occur between parties that are acquainted, we argue that such an overlap is plausible. Further, the very nature of IPV—that is, violence between two people who have self-selected into the relationship and are routinely in contact with another—presents ongoing opportunities and motivations for future violence once an initial act of violence has occurred. We draw upon the existing empirical research on IPV to explore whether the correlates for IPV vary across victimization, perpetration, and victimization-perpetration prevalence. Specifically, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What proportion of individuals involved in IPV are victims only, offenders only, and victim-offenders?
2. Do the established correlates of IPV apply to victims only, offenders only, and victim-offenders?

### *Data*

The present study uses public-use data from the fourth wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine the prevalence and correlates of IPV victimization and perpetration. Wave 1 data were collected from a nationally representative sample of adolescents enrolled in American middle and high schools (Harris et al. 2009). Systematic and stratified sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 80 high schools and 52 middle schools. Students in grades 7 through 12 during the 1994–1995 school year completed the wave 1 in-school self-report survey. Wave 1 of the public-use Add Health data includes 6,504 cases.

Wave 4 of the Add Health was designed to examine the developmental and health trajectories of the Add Health

respondents into young adulthood. Approximately 92.5% of the original wave 1 respondents were located and 80.3% of eligible individuals were interviewed in 2008 (Harris et al. 2009). This resulted in data from 5,114 respondents ages 24 to 33.<sup>1</sup>

Because the present study focuses on IPV in heterosexual romantic relationships, individuals who described themselves as “bi-sexual” or “homosexual” were removed from the sample, resulting in 4,926 cases. In addition, we removed those who reported being active duty military and those who were interviewed in prison during wave 4, given that these individuals may not have had the opportunity to experience IPV in the past year. This reduced the sample size to 4,795 cases. Listwise deletion of cases based on missing data for study variables resulted in 4,275 cases for analysis. The descriptive and inferential statistics presented below use normalized weights to account for the Add Health sampling design.<sup>2</sup>

### *Measures*

The dependent variable examined in this study measures the prevalence of IPV involvement, both as a victim and as a perpetrator. To create our four- category nominal outcome, we first created two dichotomous variables to measure IPV victimization and perpetration prevalence. *IPV victim* is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the respondent reported experiencing any of three events in the past year: (1) partner threatened you with violence, pushed or shoved you, or threw something at you that could hurt, (2) partner slapped, hit, or kicked you, and (3) you had an injury, such as a sprain, bruise, or cut because of a fight with your partner. If the respondent reported experiencing any of these events in the past year, *IPV victim* was coded as 1. *IPV perpetrator* is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the respondent reported engaging in any of three events in the past year: (1) threatened partner with violence, pushed or shoved partner, or threw something at partner that could hurt,

(2) slapped, hit, or kicked partner, and (3) partner had an injury such as a sprain, bruise, or cut because of a fight with you. If the respondent reported experiencing any of these events in the past year, *IPV perpetrator* was coded as a 1. *IPV involvement* is a four-category nominal variable created from the *IPV victim* and *IPV perpetrator* variables. Respondents were coded as no involvement, victim only, perpetrator only, or victim and perpetrator.

We operationalized a series of variables that prior IPV studies have established as correlates of IPV victimization and/or offending. We created several variables to measure the age, race, and gender of the respondents. *Age* is the respondent's age in years at the wave 4 interview. We created three dummy variables to measure race and ethnicity—*Black*, *Hispanic*, and *Other*, with White Non-Hispanic being the omitted reference category. *Male* (0 ¼ No; 1 ¼ Yes) measures the respondent's gender. We also created three variables to measure the socioeconomic status of the respondents. *Education* is an ordinal variable that measures the educational attainment of the respondent (1 ¼ *Less than high school diploma*, 2 ¼ *High school graduate*, 3 ¼ *Some college or vocational/technical training*, 4 ¼ *College degree*). *Employed* is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the respondent works for pay for a minimum of 10 hr per week (0 ¼ No; 1 ¼ Yes). *Household income* measures the respondent's total household income before taxes and deductions, with values ranging from 1 ¼ *Less than \$5,000* to 12 ¼ *\$150,000 or more*.

*Substance use* is a dichotomous variable that measures whether respondents report their drug or alcohol use has caused problems (i.e., problems with work, school, family, or friends; legal troubles; put them or others at risk; 0 ¼ No; 1 ¼ Yes). In addition, we created a factor to tap the degree to which the respondent reports feelings of stress, frustration, and irritability. Eight survey items that asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with various statements were used to create the *negative temperament* factor, with

responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Specifically, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements that they have frequent mood swings, get angry easily, get upset easily, get stressed out easily, lose their temper, are not easily bothered by things, rarely get irritated, and keep their cool.<sup>3</sup> Factor scores were created using principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. All items loaded on a single factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.64 to 0.83 (Eigenvalue  $\frac{1}{4}$  4.20, a  $\frac{1}{4}$  .87).

We also created a series of variables to measure the composition of people with whom the respondent resides. Prior IPV research typically distinguishes between couples who live together but are not married, and those who live together and are married, given speculation that unmarried couples are less committed to each other (Stets 1991) or that unmarried cohabitating couples are more likely to be younger and therefore more violent (Magdol et al. 1998). Therefore, we distinguish between these two different types of relationships by measuring *lives with non-spouse partner* (0  $\frac{1}{4}$  No; 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Yes) and *lives with spouse* (0  $\frac{1}{4}$  No; 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Yes). *Lives with adults* indicates whether the respondent lives with one or more nonromantic partner adults (0  $\frac{1}{4}$  No; 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Yes). *Lives with children* indicates whether the respondent lives with one or more individuals under the age of 18 (0  $\frac{1}{4}$  No; 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Yes).

Beyond living arrangements, we also included variables to measure the respondent's social relationships that might prevent IPV victimization and/ or perpetration. *Attachment to friends* measures the number of people the respondent reports feeling at ease with, can talk to about private matters, and can call on for help. Responses ranged from 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  None to 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  10 or more friends. *Attachment to parents* is the average response to two questions asking respondents how close they feel to their mother figure and how close they feel to their father figure (1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Not at all close, 2  $\frac{1}{4}$  Not very close, 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  Somewhat close, 4  $\frac{1}{4}$  Quite close, and 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  Very close). Finally, *isolated* measures how often the respondent

feels isolated from others (0 ¼ *Never*, 1 ¼ *Rarely*, 2 ¼ *Sometimes*, 3 ¼ *Often*). Diagnostics indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern among the independent variables (variance inflation factors [VIFs] ::; 2.06).

### *Analysis*

We begin by examining the frequency of the *IPV involvement* dependent variable to assess the overlap in IPV victimization and perpetration. Recall that our measure of IPV prevalence includes a range of behaviors, including threats, pushing and shoving, and throwing things that could hurt. Though our multinomial regression analysis focuses on this more inclusive definition of IPV, we also examine—by gender—the distributions of the items used to create our measure of *IPV involvement*. This allows us to observe whether the overlap exists for both men and women across all levels of IPV prevalence severity. Next, we present the bivariate correlations among the independent variables and *IPV perpetrator* and *IPV victim*.

We use multinomial regression to examine the correlates of IPV involvement—either as a victim, perpetrator, or both—controlling for the other independent variables in the analysis. Multinomial regression was selected because it allows for categorical dependent variables, such as our four-category measure of *IPV involvement*. The analysis produces one set of coefficients for each category of the dependent variable, minus one for the omitted reference category (Pampel 2000). For our purposes, “no involvement” in IPV as a victim or perpetrator is the omitted reference category. Each set of coefficients can be interpreted as the effect of one unit change in the independent variable on the logged odds of falling into each category of the dependent variable, relative to the “no involvement” in IPV (i.e., the omitted reference category of the dependent variable; Pampel 2000).



## Findings

Table 1 presents the distribution of IPV among respondents. The frequency of the dependent variable, *IPV involvement*, reveals considerable overlap in terms of IPV victimization and offending. Nearly 80% of respondents reported no involvement in IPV in the past year, while 9.7% identified as an IPV victim only and 3.8% identified as a perpetrator only. The remainder—6.7%—reported experiencing IPV as both a victim and a perpetrator in the prior year. The remaining columns in Table 1 reveal that even when we adopt an increasingly narrow definition of IPV, the victim-offender overlap is still observed, and observed for both genders. These findings challenge the assertion that females are strictly victims of IPV and any violence against their partners is purely in self-defense. A higher percentage of women, relative to men, reported being “perpetrators only,” across all definitions of IPV. Conversely, a higher percentage of men, relative to women, reported being “victims only.”

Means and standard deviations for all independent variables are presented in Table 2, as well as the bivariate correlations among the independent variables and *IPV perpetrator* and *IPV victim* (recall that these latter two variables do not account for the victim-offender overlap and are not used in the multivariate analysis). As expected, there is a positive and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) bivariate correlation between IPV perpetration and victimization. Furthermore, each of these outcomes maintains statistically significant relationships at the bivariate level with many of the same independent variables. For example, *Black*, *Hispanic*, *substance use*, *negative temperament*, *lives with non-spouse partner*, *lives with children*, and *isolated* are all positively correlated with both IPV perpetration and victimization at the bivariate level. Conversely, *education*, *household income*, *lives with spouse*, *attachment to friends*, and *attachment to parents* are all negatively associated with both IPV perpetration and victimization. In addition, IPV perpetration maintained a

negative relationship with *male* and *employed*, and a positive relationship with *other* race; IPV victimization is positively associated with *male* at the bivariate level.

Table 3 displays the multinomial logistic regression results for *IPV involvement* in the past year. Recall that “no involvement” in IPV is the omitted reference category for the dependent variable. Respondents who live with children, are male, and are Black were *more* likely to identify as a “victim only” of IPV relative to “no involvement” in IPV. Conversely, older respondents, those with higher levels of education, and those who report higher household incomes were less likely to report being “victims only” of IPV relative to “no involvement” in IPV.

When we examine the predictors associated with being a “perpetrator only” of IPV relative to “no involvement,” several independent variables were significant in the expected direction. Respondents who are Black and Hispanic are more likely to be perpetrators only. In addition, substance use, negative temperament, living with nonspousal partner, and feeling isolated were all positively related to being a perpetrator only of IPV. Older respondents, males, and those with higher levels of education were less likely to fall into the perpetrator only category.

Finally, the third panel in Table 3 presents the coefficients for being a victim *and* a perpetrator of IPV in the past year, relative to “no involvement.” All racial and ethnic groups (relative to White non-Hispanics) were more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of IPV. Substance use, negative temperament, living with nonspousal partner, and feeling isolated were all positively related to being a victim and perpetrator of IPV. Finally, those reporting higher levels of education were less likely to be IPV victims and perpetrators. Below we discuss the results and the implications for theory, policy, and future research.

Table 1. Intimate Partner Violence Involvement.<sup>a</sup>

	IPV Involvement All Respondents (%)	IPV Involvement		“Threatened, Pushed/Shoved, Thrown Something”		“Slapped, Hit, Kicked”		“Injury”	
		Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)
No involvement	79.9	80.4	79.4	81.9	82.0	89.3	87.1	95.7	95.6
Victim only	9.7	5.7	13.8	6.1	11.7	2.0	9.9	2.0	2.9
Offender only	3.8	6.3	1.1	5.2	1.2	5.4	0.4	1.1	0.6
Victim-Offender	6.6	7.6	5.7	6.8	5.1	3.3	2.6	1.1	0.9

*Note:* Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup>The percentages are based on the weighted data.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations.<sup>a</sup>

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
(1) IPV perpetrator	.10 (.31)	1.00																		
(2) IPV victim	.16 (.37)	.44**	1.00																	
(3) Age	28.43 (1.84)	-.02	-.02	1.00																
(4) Black	.14 (.35)	.08**	.12**	.05**	1.00															
(5) Hispanic	.11 (.31)	.05**	.03*	-.02	-.14**	1.00														
(6) Other	.07 (.25)	.04*	0.02	.01	-.11**	-.09**	1.00													
(7) Male	.49 (.50)	-.12**	.08**	.07**	-.02	.00	.00	1.00												
(8) Education	3.01 (.89)	-.08**	-.14**	.00	-.08**	-.09**	.00	-.13**	1.00											
(9) Employed	.84 (.37)	-.04*	-.02	-.01	-.04*	.03*	-.01	.15**	.11**	1.00										
(10) HH income	8.08 (2.58)	-.07**	-.13**	.04**	-.20**	.04*	.04*	.08**	.33**	.24**	1.00									
(11) Substance use	.39 (.49)	.08**	.04*	-.05**	-.15**	-.05**	.01	.14**	.02	.04*	.04*	1.00								
(12) Negative temp.	.00 (1.00)	.20**	.09**	.00	-.02	.01	.01	-.17**	-.14**	-.07**	-.12**	.04*	1.00							
(13) Live w/ partner	.19 (.39)	.07**	.07**	-.08**	.00	.01	.04*	.02	-.08**	.02	-.03	.05**	.01	1.00						
(14) Live w/ spouse	.46 (.50)	-.04**	-.08**	.14**	-.16**	-.01	-.02	-.08**	.05**	-.03	.23**	-.13**	.02	-.44**	1.00					
(15) Live w/ adults	.27 (.44)	.02	.03	-.10**	.07**	.09**	.08**	.11**	-.13**	-.04*	.03	.06**	.01	-.11**	-.35**	1.00				
(16) Live w/ children	.53 (.50)	.05**	.04*	.14**	.07**	.05**	.00	-.19**	-.24**	-.12**	-.07**	-.14**	.11**	-.02	.32**	-.12**	1.00			
(17) Friends	3.18 (.99)	-.07**	-.07**	-.02	-.14**	-.06**	.00	.07**	.22**	.10**	.16**	.09**	-.13**	-.02	-.04**	.01	-.18**	1.00		
(18) Parents	3.98 (1.04)	-.08**	-.07**	-.07**	-.09**	.01	-.05**	.03	.14**	.03*	.14**	-.04*	-.11**	-.03*	.06**	-.01	-.06**	.11**	1.00	
(19) Isolated	.92 (.90)	.14**	.09**	.01	.02	-.03*	.05**	-.03	.02	-.12**	-.15**	.12**	.26**	-.04*	-.10**	.05**	-.06**	-.15**	-.18**	1.00

IPV ¼ intimate partner violence; HH ¼ household.

<sup>a</sup>The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are based on the weighted data.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression for IPV Involvement.<sup>a,b,c</sup>

	Victim only			Perpetrator only			Victim and Perpetrator		
	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp(B)	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp(B)	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp(B)
Intercept	0.73	0.91	—	-0.20	1.46	—	-2.01	1.10	—
Age	-0.08*	0.03	1.08	-0.11*	0.05	1.12	-0.01	0.04	—
Black	0.70**	0.15	2.02	1.19**	0.24	3.30	1.02**	0.18	2.77
Hispanic	0.27	0.18	—	0.64**	0.25	1.89	0.75**	0.20	2.12
Other	-0.05	0.24	—	0.08	0.36	—	0.81**	0.22	2.24
Male	1.00**	0.12	2.71	-1.78**	0.24	5.88	-0.21	0.14	—
Education	-0.20**	0.07	1.22	-0.24*	0.11	1.27	-0.25**	0.08	1.28
Employed	0.15	0.16	—	0.36	0.24	—	-0.09	0.17	—
HH income	-0.09**	0.02	1.09	0.02	0.04	—	-0.03	0.03	—
Substance use	0.08	0.11	—	1.06**	0.18	2.90	0.54**	0.14	1.72
Negative temp.	0.06	0.06	—	0.53**	0.08	1.69	0.45**	0.06	1.56
Live w/ NS partner	0.11	0.16	—	0.65**	0.25	1.92	0.53**	0.18	1.69
Live w/ spouse	-0.24	0.16	—	0.39	0.24	—	0.00	0.18	—
Live w/ adults	-0.18	0.14	—	0.08	0.22	—	0.03	0.16	—
Live w/ children	0.25*	0.13	1.29	0.07	0.19	—	0.13	0.15	—
Friends	-0.06	0.06	—	-0.01	0.09	—	-0.04	0.07	—
Parents	-0.05	0.05	—	-0.10	0.08	—	-0.04	0.06	—
Isolated	0.06	0.06	—	0.19*	0.10	1.21	0.37**	0.07	1.44
Nagelkerke R2	0.18								
Model x2	607.33**								

<sup>a</sup>“No involvement” in IPV is the omitted reference category of the dependent variable in the analysis.

<sup>b</sup>The multinomial logistic regression results are based on the weighted data.

<sup>c</sup>Odds ratios for negative coefficients are inverted for ease of interpretation.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01

## Discussion

Three broad conclusions summarize our findings. First, there is considerable overlap in IPV victimization and perpetration. Consistent with research on the victim-offender overlap in general (see Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012), this overlap was observed for both genders across various measures of violence. Unlike previous research, however, we found less overlap for more serious forms of IPV, while the overlap was greatest when more “minor” forms of violence were examined. These findings suggest that female IPV perpetration cannot be fully explained as “defensive” actions. Though the purpose of our study was not to test a theoretical model of IPV, the observed victim-offender overlap is consistent with a “family conflict/ violence” perspective that suggests that most IPV is “situational or common couple” (Johnson 1995, 2008) violence, characterized by violence perpetrated by both partners, with males and females engaging in roughly the same amount of violence (see also Straus 2011; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006).

Second, though IPV victims and perpetrators appear to have similar characteristics when we examine the bivariate correlations, there are important differences once we distinguish between victims, offenders, and victim-offenders and control for other variables. It seems that the common bivariate correlates are due, in part, to the fact that victim-perpetrators are being counted as both “IPV perpetrators and “IPV victims” in Table 2. The importance of considering the victim-offender overlap in IPV studies is highlighted by the fact that IPV “victims only” did *not* share many of the same correlates as “victim-perpetrators,” and individuals falling into the “victim-perpetrators” category appear to be more similar to perpetrators. Thus, it seems that common characteristics, routines, and/or behaviors shared between offenders and *some* victims (e.g.,

Carbone-Lopez and Kruttschnitt 2010; Lauritsen and Davis Quinet 1995; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991) may help to account for the observed overlap in IPV. This is consistent with the principle of homogamy (Cohen, Kluegel, and Land 1981; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991) discussed in the broader literature regarding the victim-offender overlap. Being a victim-only of IPV, however, is explained by correlates *not* shared with perpetrators and victim-perpetrators, suggesting that the nearly 10% of individuals who are “victims only” may require different theoretical explanations. For example, the negative influence of household income and the positive influence of living with children suggest that those who are “victims only” may have fewer options available to them, as they may have children to support and few financial resources. Such dependency issues have been suggested in the broader literature on partner violence (Yount 2005). Thus, our study does not invalidate previous research on correlates of IPV, but rather it clarifies the influence of various factors by highlighting the importance of considering the victim-offender overlap.

Third, as interesting as our victim-offender overlap findings might be, of equal importance is the relatively large proportion of individuals who report being an IPV victim *or* perpetrator exclusively. Some of this violence likely goes beyond the “common couple” conflicts described by the family violence perspective, and in certain cases, may represent the frequent and severe violence often described by the feminist perspective. Though the focus of the present study was on IPV *prevalence*, we did explore frequency of IPV in preliminary descriptive analyses. Of note, among those who reported being “victims only” of IPV injury, six women reported being injured 20 or more times in the past year. There were no men in that category, and in the next category (11 to 20 injuries) there were no women or men.

In short, there appears to be a very small proportion of the sample in which gendered, ongoing, and serious violence is occurring.

Given our findings, there are likely two (or more) phenomena captured by our measure of IPV involvement that occur within varied relationship dynamics: common couple violence with considerable victim-offender overlap, and violence perpetrated by one partner against the other, which may be high in frequency and gendered. Our study, using an inclusive measure of IPV prevalence to explore the victim-offender overlap in a nationally representative sample, is more appropriate for examining the former. We acknowledge, however, that included within these data are perpetrators and victims of much more serious and repeated brutal attacks that are not the focus of the present study, but remain an important area of study for future research.

The victim-offender overlap in IPV presents challenges for those working to address violence between intimates. For instance, police officers who respond to IPV incidents may find it especially difficult to determine the “offender” and “victim” in any single incident, given that both parties may have a history of both perpetration and victimization. Actions preventing or responding to IPV perpetration may be relevant for those who are both offenders *and* victims, but “victims-only” will likely require distinctly different services. Treatment providers, police, courts, and other service providers should be aware of the factors that increase both victimization and perpetration of IPV, and when possible, reduce or respond to these risk factors. In particular, counselors and treatment providers should target to change substance use problems, isolation, and negative temperaments that were observed for IPV perpetrators and victim-perpetrators. They should attempt to increase education levels among both offenders and victims.



Additionally, taking steps to reduce the opportunity for violence, such as enforcing (not just issuing) no-contact orders, may help curb further violence. Cultural differences should also be considered in the response to violence in relationships. African Americans and Hispanics were more likely to be involved in violent relationships as both perpetrators and victim-perpetrators; perhaps, “fighting back” or mutual violence is more acceptable among these groups and service personnel who attempt to address such violence should be aware of this. Conversely, those who are victims, but not perpetrators, will require different responses. In particular, variables related loosely to dependence, such as living with children, education, and income, appear to be important to victims-only of IPV, and should therefore be targeted for intervention efforts.

Despite the contribution of the present study to our knowledge of IPV and the victim-offender overlap, there are data limitations that warrant further discussion and suggest directions for future research. First, we examined how respondent characteristics affect respondent offending and respondent victimization. We do not, however, have measures of the partner’s characteristics. Thus, we cannot examine how the combination of respondent and partner characteristics affect the outcomes. Future research should examine the IPV victim-offender overlap in partner samples.

Second, the present study relied on cross-sectional data. This is fairly common among studies that examine how proximal conditions influence victimization and offending. Using longitudinal data that measure independent variables one or more years prior to the outcomes presents its own limitations with respect to measurement error. However, it is important to acknowledge that we cannot establish temporal order with certainty, and in fact, we suspect that there are likely reciprocal relationships between some of the independent variables and IPV. Social

isolation, for example, may be both a cause and a consequence of IPV.

Third, because we examine individuals as the unit of analysis, rather than incidents, we are not able to determine the immediate context which facilitates or prevents IPV. It is likely that some of the respondents identified as victim-perpetrators were actually victims who engaged in violence as self-defense. Unfortunately, we cannot ascertain which respondents were engaging in retaliatory or defensive violence. This problem is not unique to IPV or our study; despite our interest in understanding crime incidents, most crime research uses individual-level data. Studies that use incidents as the units of analysis (i.e., National Incident Based Reporting System or the National Crime Victimization Survey) can tell us what crime incidents look like and the characteristics that predict outcomes of those incidents (e.g., victim injury, arrest of suspect), but we have no comparison for incidents that do not result in a crime. There is no system that records noncrime incidents (not to mention the challenges of defining what constitutes an “incident”).

Finally, we want to emphasize that our findings reflect the analysis of data collected from a general population sample. While this is not a limitation per se, it is important to acknowledge that samples drawn from high-risk populations, such as shelter samples, may have very different compositions with respect to the victim-offender overlap. Further, it is possible that examining the frequency and/or severity of violence, instead of prevalence, may have produced different results regarding the victim-offender overlap. Our precursory examination of the frequency of violent acts, discussed above, demonstrates that the nature of IPV is complex and varied. We suggest that future research consider this issue, as the victim-offender overlap may be less pronounced when the measure of IPV is

limited to the most frequent and severe cases.

An additional avenue for future research is to examine the influence of neighborhood context on IPV and the victim-offender overlap. Recent research by Berg and colleagues (2012) demonstrates that the magnitude of the victim-offender overlap for violence in a sample of African American youth varied depending on neighborhood context. Prior research suggests that neighborhood context influences IPV in general (Miles-Doan 1998; Pinchevsky and Wright 2012; Wright and Benson 2011); whether these same factors influence the victim-offender overlap for these crimes is unknown.

In sum, the present study examined the victim-offender overlap with respect to IPV. Results suggest that there is considerable overlap, with approximately one-third of those involved in IPV in the past year reporting both perpetration and victimization. This overlap was observed across men and women, and varying levels of violence severity. Our multivariate analysis revealed that those who are both victims and perpetrators of IPV are more similar to those who report being IPV perpetrators only than IPV victims only. Future research is needed to determine whether these relationships are observed in other types of samples and across various contexts.

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### **Notes**

1. Though other waves of the Add Health do include measures of IPV, we examined wave 4 data exclusively because we were interested in this stage of the life course, which presumably has notable differences from the adolescent stages observed in waves 1 and 2 and the late adolescence/young adulthood observed in wave 3. Given the age of the respondents at wave 4, there is substantial variation with respect to marriage, cohabitation, children, and employment, all of which are common correlates of IPV and are of importance to our study. That being said, future research should examine

the victim-offender overlap in IPV at other stages of the life course.

2. We used the Wave IV weights provided with the Add Health data to create proportional weights that sum to  $N$  (4, 275), so that the proportions between the weights are correct and the scale effect of the weights is eliminated. This produces unbiased estimates and correct significance tests. For more information on how the Add Health created the sample weights, please see *Wave IV Weights* at <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/codebooks/wave4>.
3. Responses to the latter three items were reverse coded for the factor analysis.

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