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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2003 annual meeting, "Research to Policy," June 12-14, 2003

YOUNG WOMEN'S AND YOUNG MEN'S AGGRESSION IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS MATTERS

New Research Sheds Light on Aggression in Couples

- Are both men and women aggressive in intimate relationships?
- Do people in seriously abusive relationships look different from those with minor aggressive incidents?
- Is it possible to prevent violent behavior toward a romantic partner?
- What is the impact of the wives' aggression on marital outcomes? Does it differ from the impact of husbands' aggression?

Aggression within couples involves women being assaulted by men – or, at least, that has been the assumption. As a result, intervention and prevention programs have focused on violence by men.

One study to be presented at the Society for Prevention Research meeting indicates that both men and women use aggression in romantic relationships. When the aggression is not serious, females are more often the aggressors. But for a violent relationship to get to the point of having clinical consequences (injuries, police contact, etc.) requires a violent male as well as an aggressive woman. These findings and other recent studies suggest that both the partners' behaviors and characteristics have a role in contributing to aggression in intimate relationships.

Also, one-third to one-half of engaged and newly married couples report the presence of physical aggression in their relationships. Further, relationship violence is associated with a variety of physical and psychological disorders in aggressors and victims of violence, and in the children who are raised in homes in which violence occurs.

Another study to be presented at the SPR annual meeting finds that only husbands' aggression was found to influence a marriage's success or failure. Wives' aggression, although as prevalent as husbands' aggression, did not significantly predict marital outcomes, suggesting the need to differentiate between overall prevalence and subsequent impact of spousal violence. Overall, these results support the need to differentiate between husbands' and wives' behaviors in terms of prevention efforts.

Sources: Deborah Capaldi and Hyoun K. Kim, Oregon Social Learning Center; Miriam Ehrensaft, Columbia University; Erika Lawrence, University of Iowa.