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MULTI-SITE FAMILY STUDY ON INCARCERATION, PARENTING AND PARTNERING

Intimate Partner Violence Experiences During Men's Reentry from Prison

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Partnering, and Parenting offers a unique opportunity to examine intimate partner violence among 666 couples who participated in an evaluation of family strengthening programming.

- After the male partner's reentry from prison, MFS-IP study participants experienced IPV at substantially higher rates (for physical violence, 5-6 times higher) than rates reported in the general U.S. population.
- Although observed rates of IPV at reentry were very high, MFS-IP study participants were *less* likely to experience IPV after reentry than before the incarceration.
- Both men and women experienced physical violence and controlling behavior victimization. Within couples, however, women reported more *severe* physical and sexual violence victimization and more *frequent* physical violence victimization than did their male partners.
- Couple members generally agreed about whether there was any physical violence in their relationship. However, reports of men's frequent or severe abuse of women often differed within couples (with women reporting victimization when men did not report perpetration). Reports of women's abuse of men were not significantly different within couples.
- Men and women who were not romantically involved with their partners at reentry were more likely to report various forms of IPV victimization by those partners than those who were. IPV appears to have been a contributing factor in some break-ups.

About This Research Brief

This descriptive brief presents findings on intimate partner violence experiences during men's reentry from prison from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP). The study includes implementation and impact evaluations and qualitative and quantitative analyses of participants in programs funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide services to incarcerated fathers and their families.

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BACKGROUND

With over 7 million people incarcerated or on community supervision, the lives of many American families are shaped by the criminal justice system (Glaze, 2010). Involvement with the system can have a tremendous impact on incarcerated men, their partners and children.

Separation during incarceration may lead to challenges in parenting and romantic relationships, including attachment disruption, economic hardship, stigma, and changes in family structure and living arrangements (Arditti, 2005; Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Braman & Wood, 2003; Hairston, Rollin, & Jo, 2004; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Nurse, 2004; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002; Phillips, Erkanli, Keller, Costello, & Angold, 2006). The period following an individual's release from prison also presents acute strains and challenges, as men often return to overwhelming child support debt, housing instability, family role renegotiation, and pressure to find employment quickly in the face of employment discrimination (Hairston & Oliver, 2011; Rodriguez, 2016; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009).

**IPV Prevalence among Justice-Involved Couples:
Previous Research**

Baseline estimates from the MFS-IP study indicate very high prevalence of IPV among justice-involved couples compared to the general population. During a period of 6 months immediately prior to incarceration of the male partner (with the men incarcerated for a variety of criminal charges, not related to IPV), 48 percent of men and 42 percent of women reported experiencing any physical violence from their study partner (McKay et al., 2013). In the general U.S. population, 5 percent of men and 4 percent of women report experiencing any physical violence from a partner during the prior 12 months (Breiding et al., 2014). (For a critique of apparent gender symmetry in findings like these, refer to "Measuring Men's and Women's IPV Experiences" on p. 6.)

Intimate partner violence (IPV) may pose a particularly serious risk for couples during this time (Bobbit, Campbell, & Tate, 2006; Hairston & Oliver, 2007). Individual risk factors for IPV—such as young age, personality disorder, and histories of substance abuse and childhood abuse—are highly prevalent among justice-involved men (Dutton & Hart, 1992; White et al., 2002). The experience of incarceration can lead men to develop traits such as hypervigilance, interpersonal distrust and psychological distancing, which can promote interpersonal violence (Hairston & Oliver,

2011; Haney, 2001; Herman Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008). The known stressors of transitioning from prison to community environments can cause some individuals to adopt harmful behaviors in order to cope (Freeland Braun, 2012). Data from focus groups with low-income women of color who were survivors of IPV and with incarcerated or paroled men and their partners suggest that IPV commonly arises in the context of these stressors—extreme financial strain, renegotiating roles, coparenting difficulties, accusations of infidelity, disconnection from employment and social services systems, and feelings of helplessness and anger (Freeland Braun, 2012; Oliver & Hairston, 2008; Boggess & Groblewski, 2011). A history of IPV in the couple prior to the male partner's incarceration, and the presence of children in the homes to which men return, can further increase risk (Fishman, 1990; Hairston & Oliver, 2006; McKay et al., 2013).

Little is known, however, about the prevalence of IPV at reentry, how it compares to IPV prevalence before incarceration, and how men's and women's experiences might differ within couples and by relationship status. This brief uses data from the Multi-site Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP) to address those gaps.

STUDY PURPOSE AND METHODS

Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Office of Family Assistance, the MFS-IP study has documented the implementation and effectiveness of relationship and family-strengthening programming for justice-involved couples during a male partner's incarceration and after his release. The results presented in this paper are not findings about the impact of the funded programs, but rather focus on understanding IPV experiences after men return from prison.

Data Collection Approach

MFS-IP survey data collection with incarcerated men and their partners was conducted in five impact sites (Indiana, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota). Beginning in December 2008, couples participating in a federal family-strengthening demonstration¹ and a set of similar couples not participating in that programming were enrolled in the impact study. Interviews were conducted at baseline and at 9- and 18-month follow-up with 1,991 men and 1,482 of their female partners in the five sites, and 34-month follow-up interviews were conducted with over 1,000 couples in two sites. During the baseline interview, at which point all the men were incarcerated, men were asked to identify their primary intimate or coparenting partners (referred to here as “survey partners”), who were then recruited for baseline interviews. The longitudinal surveys completed by both couple members collected information about IPV (using a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale²), relationship quality, family stability, and reentry experiences. In-depth qualitative interviews were also conducted among a subsample of couples to better understand the context of family relationships during incarceration and reentry.

This paper examines IPV among a subsample of couples in which the male partner was released from prison prior to the 9-, 18-, or 34-month interview and in which both partners completed the first post-release interview (n=666 couples).³ Baseline interview data and data from the each couple member’s first post-release interview are used, with data combined across sites and for treatment and comparison groups.⁴ The programs in which treatment group members were enrolled were focused on family strengthening and were not designed to reduce IPV, (although some treatment and some comparison group members may have received other IPV-related programming). Respondents were all subject to the selection criteria for the evaluation, which focused on men in self-identified, committed intimate or coparenting relationships.

Measuring IPV among Reentering Couples

The subsample of reentering fathers and their committed romantic or coparenting partners used for this analysis represents a population of justice-involved families with clear importance for policy and practice focused on supporting safe and successful reentry from prison. Findings reported here are based on data from 666 couples in which both partners completed a baseline interview and the first follow-up survey after the male partner’s release from prison. The analysis uses data from these two points in time. (Sample numbers for each of the specific analyses reported here, which accompany each data display, are often lower due to item non-response.) At baseline, participants reported on events that occurred during the 6 months prior to the male partner’s incarceration; throughout this paper, this period is referred to as “baseline.” At the time of the first follow-up survey after the male partner’s release from prison, participants reported on the time period since his release (a median of 6 months); this period is referred to in the paper as “after the male partner’s release” or “after reentry.”

Sample Characteristics

In this sample of 666 reentering couples, men were an average of 34 years old at baseline, and women were, on average, 33. Men had been incarcerated for a broad variety of reasons,

¹ Programming offered under the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners differed by site, but typically included couples-based relationship education, parenting education, and other services such as case management and child-friendly prison visitation.

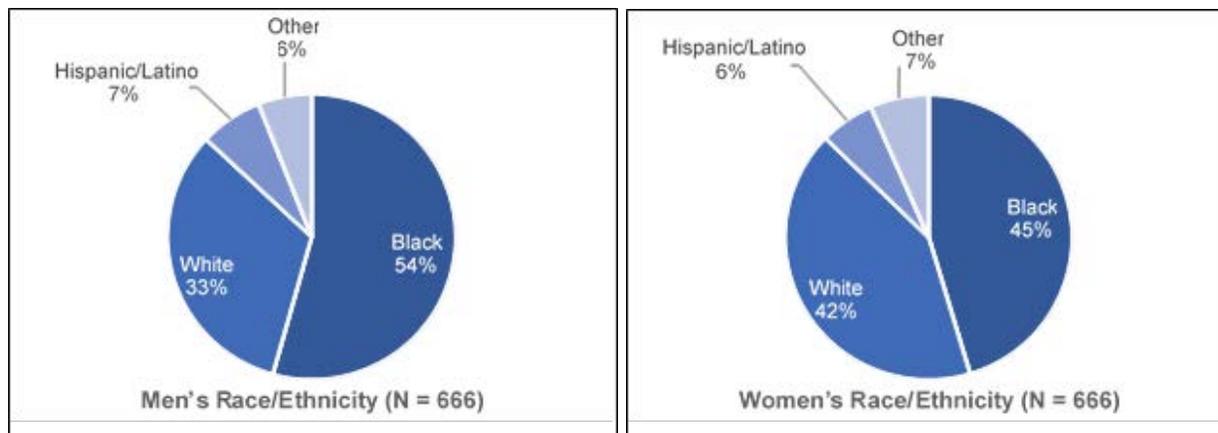
² Men and women were each asked to complete a shortened version of the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) during independent interviews. These items elicited information on the number of times each respondent had perpetrated a given behavior and the number of times he or she was victimized by his or her survey partner in that manner. The Psychological Aggression and Sexual Coercion subscales of the CTS2 were shortened, and the Injury and Negotiation subscales were omitted. More detail on the measurement of IPV is provided in the text box, “How was IPV Measured in the MFS-IP Study?” on page 12.

³ Men’s first post-release interviews took place a median of 6 months after release. On average, men’s interviews took place 6 days later than women’s.

⁴ Forty percent of men in the study sample reported in their baseline interviews that they had participated in relationship education classes, the focal “treatment,” at some point since being incarcerated.

including property crimes (16%), drug crimes (30%), and crimes against persons (37%). As shown in **Figures 1a-1b**, about half of men (54%) and women (45%) in this sample are black, another 33 percent of men and 42 percent of women are white, and 7 percent of men and 6 percent of women are Hispanic/Latino.

Figures 1a-1b. Race/Ethnicity of Men (N=666) and Women (N=666) in Reentering Couples



At the time of the baseline interviews, all men were incarcerated and were not asked to report on current income. After the male partner's release, the median annual income was \$15,600 for men and \$15,180 for women (not shown).

Couples in this sample tended to be in serious, long-term intimate and coparenting relationships with one another. As shown in **Table 1**, most (96% of men and 87% of women) reported that they were romantically involved with their study partners at baseline, when male partners were incarcerated, and had been together for an average of 7.9 years according to male partners' reports and 7.2 years according to female partners' reports (data not shown). At baseline and after the male partner's release, most men and women reported parenting minor children (with each reporting an average of 2-3 children).

Table 1. Family Characteristics of Reentering Couples Sample

	Baseline		After Release	
	Men (N = 666)	Women (N = 666)	Men (N = 666)	Women (N = 666)
Relationship Status				
Romantically involved with study partner	95.6%	86.8%	69.5%	67.9%
Parental Status				
At least one child under 18	86.6%	82.7%	88.1%	86.6%
Mean number of children	2.7	2.0	2.8	2.3

After the male partner's release, about two-thirds of these couples remained romantically involved with one another. Sixty percent of men and women reported living together, compared to 70 percent of men and 64 percent of women who said they lived together during the 6 months before the male partner's incarceration (data not shown).

Analytic Approach

This paper uses data from these 666 reentering men and their partners to examine IPV prevalence by gender, assess congruence in IPV reports within couples (or the extent to which survey responses from both members of the couple agreed), and compare IPV prevalence

rates by relationship status and by how much time had passed since the male partner’s release. The analytic approach used in this brief was selected based on the research literature. **IPV prevalence at reentry** was assessed based on findings from prior research suggesting the potential for elevated IPV risk during men’s reentry from prison (Freeland Braun, 2012; Bobbit, Campbell, & Tate, 2006; Hairston & Oliver, 2007). **Gender differences in IPV prevalence** were examined based on evidence of substantial IPV victimization among both men and women, but higher prevalence of some forms of IPV and more severe physical and mental health impacts of IPV among women (Coker et al., 2002; Black et al., 2011). The couples-based MFS-IP research approach also allowed for inclusion of analyses on **couple congruence or incongruence** in reports of IPV. General population studies have found that incongruence (one partner reports that IPV occurred in their relationship and the other does not) is very common among heterosexual couples surveyed about IPV (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 2002; Berger et al., 2012). Finally, **IPV and relationship status** was examined due to strong evidence that IPV is a predictor of relationship dissolution (Shortt et al., 2006; Zlotnick, Johnson, & Kohn, 2006; DeMaris, 2000; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Shortt, 1996).

To carry out these analyses, we used data from each sample member’s baseline interview (which took place an average of 2.6 years after men were incarcerated) and the first interview following the male partner’s release from prison (which took place a median of 6 months after men’s release from prison). Detail on our analytic approach can be found in the text box, “Understanding IPV within Couples and over Time: Analytic Approach,” on page 12.

IPV PREVALENCE AT REENTRY

Rates of IPV during the time following the male partner’s release from prison were very high (**Table 2**). Rates of physical partner violence victimization in this sample during that time were 26 percent for men and 25 percent for women, approximately 5-6 times higher than rates of physical partner violence measured in the general U.S. population.⁵

Table 2. Prevalence of IPV Victimization after Male Partner’s Release from Prison

	Men (N=635 ^a)	Women (N=591)
Any physical violence	26.0%	24.7%
Any controlling behavior	27.1%	28.3%
Severe physical or sexual violence**	5.9%	9.7%
Frequent controlling behavior	9.5%	11.0%
Frequent physical violence**	5.4%	8.3%

^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 635 men and 591 women for whom data were available on any of the variables presented in this table.

Asterisks indicate that differences between male and female partners within couples were statistically significant at the p<0.05 level (*), the p<.01 level (**), or the p<.001 level (***)

Physical violence victimization and controlling behavior victimization were common among both men and women in this sample; however, within-couple gender differences were evident in violence severity and frequency. Within couples, women were more likely to report *severe* physical or sexual violence victimization (p<.05) and *frequent* physical violence victimization (p<.05) than were their male partners.

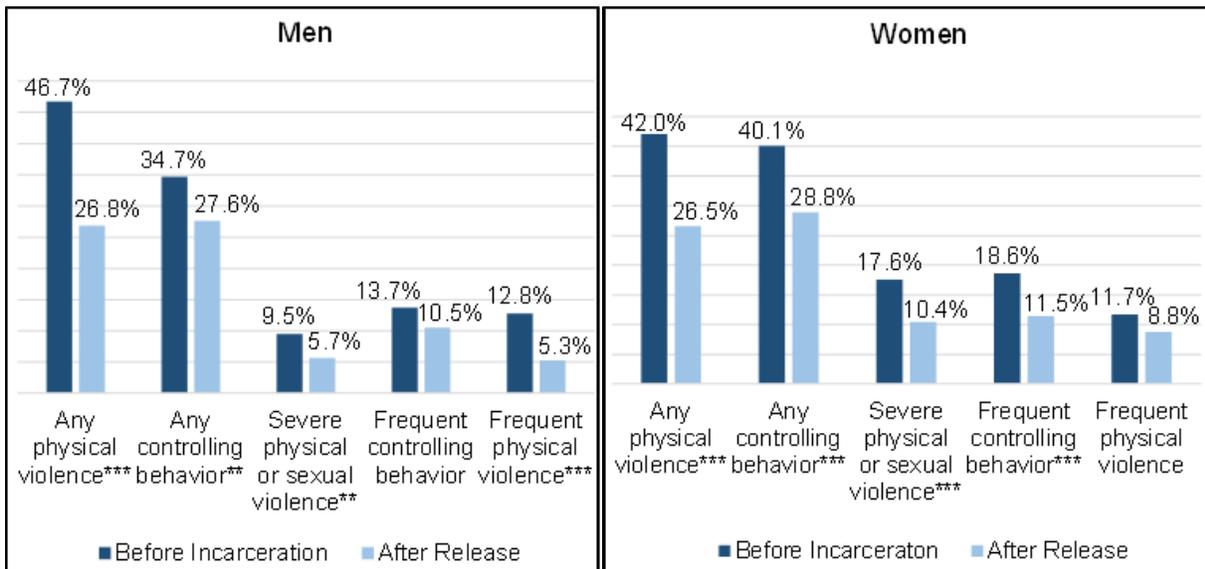
⁵ In the general U.S. population, 5% of men and 4% of women report experiencing any physical violence from a partner during the last 12 months (Breiding et al., 2014).

Measuring Men’s and Women’s IPV Experiences: Lessons from Previous Research

Estimates of men’s and women’s IPV perpetration and victimization tend to differ depending on the context and type of measure used. Population surveys and studies using a Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2)-type measurement approach, as used in the MFS-IP study, tend to find comparable rates of IPV perpetration and victimization for men and women. Yet studies based in health care, justice, and service provider agency settings often find gender asymmetry, with higher rates of men’s IPV perpetration and higher rates of women’s IPV victimization. As discussed in Hamby’s (2014) review of self-report IPV measures that do *not* produce gender parity, the use of measurement techniques intended to reduce false positives, such as addition of the phrase “not including joking or horsing around” to an item, also tends to result in gender asymmetry, with women reporting more IPV victimization than men. In addition, asking respondents to report on abuse without specifying the perpetrator (i.e. “someone” instead of “my partner”) tend to produce higher reports of severe victimization among women (Hamby, 2014).

IPV victimization as reported by both women and men generally decreased from baseline (when respondents were asked about the 6 months before the male partner’s incarceration) to after release (when respondents were asked about the period since the male partner’s release, a median time of 6 months⁶), as shown in **Exhibits 1a-1b**.

Figures 2a-2b. Men’s (N=554^a) and Women’s (N=490) Reports of IPV Victimization before Incarceration and After Release



^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 554 men and 490 women for whom data were available at both time points (baseline and first post-release interview) for any of the variables presented in the charts.

Asterisks indicate that differences (within each gender) between IPV before incarceration and after release were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (*), the $p < .01$ level (**), or the $p < .001$ level (***).

All forms of victimization except men’s frequent controlling behavior victimization and women’s frequent physical violence victimization were significantly less common after the male partner’s release than before his incarceration.⁷

⁶ The “time to first post-release interview” was capped at 274 days, with a range of 1-274 days and a mean of 154 days.

⁷ These findings are based on matched pair t-tests looking at changes in each individual’s report from baseline to the first post-release interview. As discussed previously, the analytic sample used for this report included both treatment and comparison groups. Since the first study interview asked about the 6 months immediately prior to the incarceration, it is not possible to determine whether the prevalence of IPV observed during the immediate pre-incarceration period represented an increase, decrease, or stability relative to prior periods in the relationship.

Once men in the MFS-IP sample reentered the community, rates of IPV appeared to increase over time, although they remained lower than pre-incarceration levels (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Differences in IPV Prevalence by Time since Male Partner's Release

	Men's Reports		Women's Reports	
	90 Days or Fewer in the Community (N=185 ^a)	More than 90 Days in the Community (N=448)	90 Days or Fewer in the Community (N=154)	More than 90 Days in the Community (N=435)
Any physical violence				
Perpetration	15.2%	27.2%***	22.7%	33.1%*
Victimization	18.9%	27.6%*	16.3%	28.0%**
Any controlling behavior				
Perpetration	9.7%	18.1%**	19.6%	26.3%
Victimization	20.0%	28.3%*	18.3%	32.0%***
Severe physical or sexual violence				
Perpetration	3.3%	4.7%	2.0%	5.7%
Victimization	4.3%	6.3%	3.9%	11.7%**
Frequent controlling behavior				
Perpetration	0.5%	4.0%*	3.3%	6.7%
Victimization	7.6%	10.7%	5.2%	13.4%**
Frequent physical violence				
Perpetration	2.2%	2.7%	3.2%	6.9%
Victimization	3.8%	6.1%	3.9%	9.9%*

^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 185 men and 154 women in the “90 or fewer days” group and 448 men and 435 women in the “more than 90 days” group who provided data on any of the items presented in this table.

Asterisks indicate that differences (within each gender) between respondents in couples in which the male participant had been released 90 days or fewer and those in which he had been released more than 90 days were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (*), the $p < .01$ level (**), or the $p < .001$ level (***)

Men's reports of several forms of IPV perpetration and women's reports of several forms of IPV victimization were significantly higher among couples in which the male partner had been out of prison for more than 90 days, compared to those in which the male partner was more recently released. Regression models indicated that the longer the male partner had been in the community, the more likely a couple was to report any physical violence in the relationship ($p < .001$) (data not shown).

IPV after Release from Prison: Previous Research

Prior qualitative work suggests that the decreased IPV prevalence in the post-release period observed in our analyses could be due in part to increased consequences of IPV perpetration and IPV reporting during this time, when many men are under parole supervision, and couples are often deciding whether to break up or stay together (Hairston & Oliver, 2011).

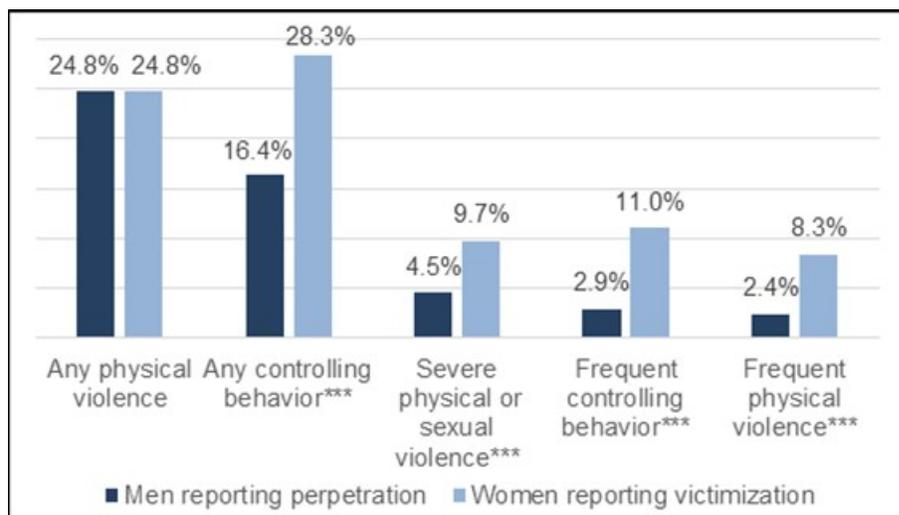
Qualitative work also suggests that the weeks and months immediately following reentry can represent a period of intense conflict and upheaval that may precipitate IPV, or a “honeymoon” period of conciliation during which IPV perpetrators are on their best behavior (Hairston & Oliver, 2007; Comfort, 2007).

COMPARING WITHIN-COUPLE IPV REPORTS

The couples-based MFS-IPV study design offered a unique opportunity to examine whether men and women within couples differed in their accounts of IPV. While it is known that partners often disagree in their reports of IPV experiences, less is known about the extent of agreement—particularly for justice-involved couples. Our analyses examined congruence between male and female members of reentering couples regarding the presence of male- and female-perpetrated IPV in the relationship. While agreeing as to whether there had been any physical violence, male and female partners within couples differed significantly on whether some forms of male-perpetrated IPV had occurred in their relationship (**Exhibit 2a**). Women were more likely to report that their partners ever used controlling behavior, frequently used controlling behavior, perpetrated severe physical or sexual violence, or perpetrated frequent physical violence against them than their male partners were to report having perpetrated those forms of IPV ($p < .001$).

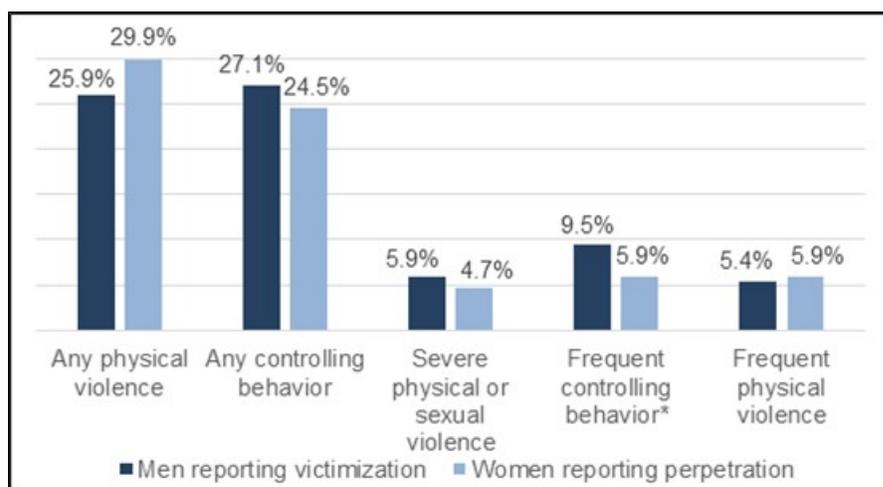
In contrast, couple members' reports of female-perpetrated IPV tended to be more congruent (**Exhibit 2b**). The only statistically significant difference was with regard to reports of frequent controlling behavior by women. Men were more likely to report that their female partners had frequently used controlling behavior against them than women were to report having frequently used it ($p < .01$).

Figure 3a. Within-Couple Agreement about Male-Perpetrated IPV (N=580^a)



^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 580 couples in which both partners answered survey items about male-perpetrated IPV within the couple. Asterisks indicate that differences within couples between male and female partners' reports of male-on-female abuse were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (*), the $p < 0.01$ level (**), or the $p < 0.001$ level (***) .

Figure 3b. Within-Couple Agreement about Female-Perpetrated IPV (N=580^a)



^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 580 couples in which both partners answered survey items about female-perpetrated IPV within the couple. Asterisks indicate that differences within couples between male and female partners' reports of female-on-male abuse were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (*), the $p < 0.01$ level (**), or the $p < 0.001$ level (***) .

Comparing Men's and Women's IPV Reports within Couples: Previous Research

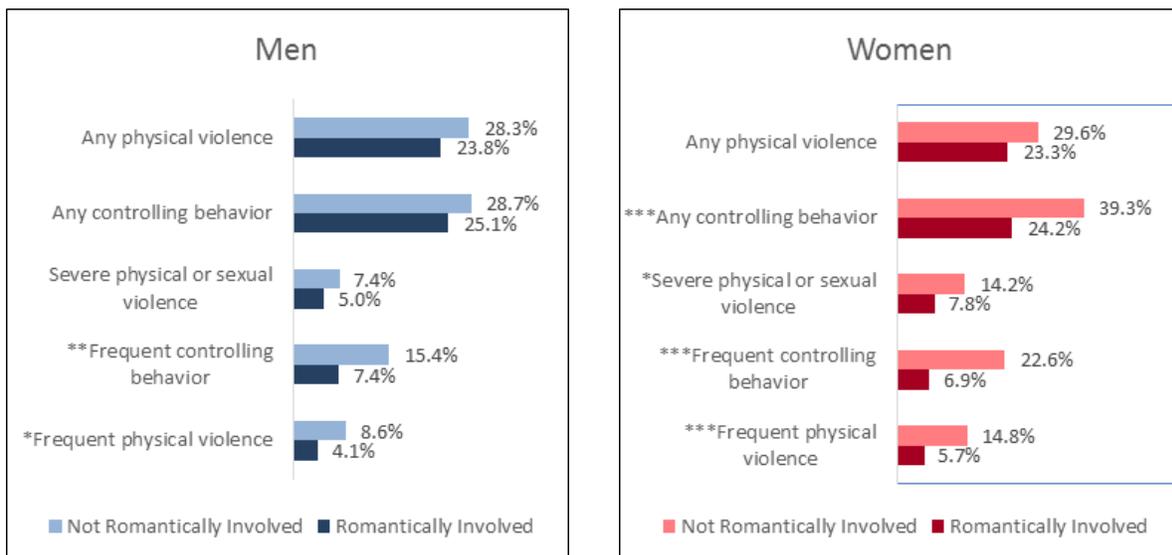
Prior research suggests that differences in men's and women's reports of IPV perpetration and victimization within their relationships are common. A study of cohabiting heterosexual couples in the 48 contiguous states found low partner congruence on reports of both male-to-female violence and female-to-male violence, as measured by an adapted version of the Conflict Tactics Scale. Approximately 50 percent more couples disagreed (that is, one partner reported violence and the other did not) than agreed on reported IPV in their relationship (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 2002).

Similarly, a study of young adult couples (age 18 – 28) found limited couple congruence in reports of IPV. Among those couples reporting some form of IPV, both partners reported this violence less than one-third of the time. (Among couples in which at least one partner reported that the man experienced violence, 33 percent of reports came from both partners. Among couples in which one or both partners reported that the woman experienced violence, 30 percent of reports came from both partners [Berger, Wildsmith, Manlove, & Steward-Streng, 2012].) In both studies, when violence was reported by only one member of the couple, women were more likely than men to be the reporter; this held true regardless of whether the violence was male- or female-perpetrated. Factors that have been theorized to contribute to such discordance include social desirability, cognitive dissonance, and fear of reprisal (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 2002).

IPV AND RELATIONSHIP STATUS

About one-third of the reentering couples in this sample reported that they were not romantically involved with each other at the first study interview after the male partner's release from prison (**Table 1**). Several forms of IPV were more common among men and women who were not romantically involved with their study partners⁸ than among those who were. These included any controlling behavior victimization ($p < .001$ for women only), severe physical or sexual violence victimization ($p < .05$ for women only), frequent controlling behavior victimization ($p < .01$ for men and $p < .001$ for women), and frequent physical violence victimization ($p < .05$ for men and $p < .001$ for women) (**Exhibits 3a-3b**).

Figures 4a-4b. Men's (N=635^a) and Women's (N=591) Reports of IPV Victimization by Relationship Status after Release



^a Among the 666 couples who form the sample for these analyses, there were 635 men and 591 women who answered survey items about both IPV and relationship status at reentry. Asterisks indicate that differences in IPV within each gender between respondents who were and were not romantically involved were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (*), the $p < .01$ level (**), or the $p < .001$ level (***).

⁸ Based on the female partner's report of relationship status at the first post-release follow-up interview.

The higher likelihood of IPV victimization among individuals who were not romantically involved with their study partners could indicate that violence was a contributing factor in the dissolution of some relationships; alternatively, some couples may have experienced separation-instigated violence.⁹ Although the structure of the MFS-IP data does not allow us to test those hypotheses in this analysis, the surveys asked about reasons for break-up. Ten percent of men and 28 percent of women who reported having separated from their study partners since their last interview indicated that physical partner violence (“Your fights got too physical, like pushing or hitting”) was one of the reasons for ending their relationships.¹⁰

In addition, cross-lagged autoregressive modeling indicated that when the male partner in a couple reported IPV victimization at the first post-release interview, it was statistically more likely that he would report not being romantically involved with his partner at the next post-release interview ($p < .05$).¹¹ No comparable effect was present for women’s IPV reports.

Understanding IPV within Couples and over Time: Analytic Approach

Our analytic approach took advantage of the longitudinal, couples-based nature of the MFS-IP dataset to compare IPV reports within couples and over time using a variety of statistical tests:

- To compare men’s and women’s IPV victimization reports within couples at the first post-release interview, and to compare IPV experiences across the two interview time points, we used matched pair t-tests.
- Two-sample t-tests were then run to compare IPV reports at the first post-release interview, stratified by the male partner’s time in the community (i.e., the number of days elapsed between his release and the first post-release interview), and bivariate logistic regression was used to assess whether time since release influenced the likelihood of IPV.
- Two-sample t-tests were run to compare IPV reports after release, stratified by relationship status.
- The direction of influence between IPV and relationship status was examined using cross-lagged autoregression, a single-step, structural equation model that estimates the relative magnitude of reciprocal causal effects between two constructs over time. (Unlike the other analyses, the autoregressive models used data from each available follow-up interview point—not just baseline and first post-release interviews.)
- To examine demographic and family characteristics of the couples and to establish the prevalence of IPV experiences before the male partner’s incarceration and at the first post-release interview, we used simple descriptive statistics.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The results presented in this research paper have several important implications for research and policy.

Addressing IPV is crucial to supporting the reentry process. The reentering men and their partners in this study experienced physical partner violence at rates approximately 5-6 times higher than the general population. Rates of physical partner violence increased as a function of time since the male partner’s release from prison; however, prevalence was high even among couples in which the male partner was in the community for 90 or fewer days. Because IPV events occur relatively soon after an incarcerated partner’s release and become increasing common thereafter, interventions to support safety among couples navigating community reentry should be equipped to reach them before release and continue as part of ongoing reentry and reintegration support in the community. Further, study participants who were no longer in relationships with their study partners experienced significantly higher rates of several

⁹ “Separation instigated violence” refers to a situation in which a previously non-violent partner perpetrates violence against his or her partner during the process of separation and relationship dissolution (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). In this study, relationship status and IPV experiences were measured at the same time point, making it difficult to differentiate between situations of separation-instigated violence and situations in which IPV experiences precipitated a separation.

¹⁰ The 256 study respondents who reported after the male partner’s release that their relationships had ended since their last study interview identified the reasons for the breakup from a list of 14 predetermined responses.

¹¹ When intervention group was included in the models, this finding held, but was only evident among men in the treatment group (not among those in the comparison group).

forms of IPV, and IPV experiences were named by a sizeable minority of men and women as a contributing factor in relationship dissolution. These findings suggest that individuals who choose to end their relationships may need particular support for doing so safely during reentry.

IPV-related supports should also be available to justice-involved couples prior to incarceration. Comparisons between pre-incarceration and post-release IPV indicated that IPV was even more prevalent in the MFS-IP sample during the 6 months immediately preceding the male partner's incarceration than after his release from prison. There has not been any substantial research on IPV in the context of the arrest and adjudication experiences that typically precede incarceration. Questions remain regarding how to identify members of justice-involved couples who are experiencing IPV and what strategies might be most effective for preventing and addressing abuse in couples at this stage of justice system involvement.

Federal family-strengthening programs need strategies for safely and appropriately serving participants who experience IPV. This study has identified a high prevalence of pre-incarceration and post-release IPV in a population served by a federal healthy relationship program demonstration initiative. At the time these programs were implemented, staff tended to report that IPV was not present among their target population or was a rarity (McKay et al., 2013). More research is needed regarding appropriate, effective approaches to IPV screening, education, and referral within such programs. In addition, a better understanding is needed of whether the kinds of healthy relationship skills these programs promote are helpful (or not) in supporting some couples to avoid the use of violence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Observed gender differences in reported IPV experiences require more investigation. Women were more likely than their male partners to report *severe* physical or sexual violence victimization and *frequent* physical violence victimization during the period following the male partner's release. Further, men's and women's accounts of IPV within their relationships often disagreed with regard to male-perpetrated IPV, with some men not reporting perpetration when their female partners reported having been victimized in the relationship. These divergent within-couple accounts of IPV highlight the importance of continued inquiry into gender differences in IPV reporting and non-reporting, and the need for caution in interpreting results of survey-based IPV prevalence estimates for men and women. They also suggest the need to test IPV screening tools and other protocols for this population that take into account these gendered reporting differences, as well as other issues that could specifically affect IPV reporting among couples who are navigating one partner's reentry from prison (such as fears of parole violation and reincarceration of the recently released partner).

Much can be learned from the evident variation in couples' IPV experiences after release. Although IPV prevalence was generally high, sample members' post-release IPV experiences varied widely, and many who reported IPV in the relationship prior to the male partner's incarceration did not report it at the first post-release follow-up interview. This finding suggests an opportunity to learn from study participants who navigated the strains of reentry without abuse, even though IPV had occurred in their relationships prior to incarceration. Future work could take advantage of this observed variation to identify predictors of post-release IPV experiences—both the malleable factors that might be targets for intervention, and the less-malleable factors that could inform stronger IPV screening approaches and protocols. Taken together, these efforts would help to ensure that reentering men and their families receive the services they need to navigate reentry safely and successfully.

How Was IPV Measured among MFS-IP Participants?

The MFS-IP survey was designed to facilitate candid, accurate reporting of IPV while protecting respondents' safety. Several characteristics of the survey design were important to enhance data quality and participant safety:

1. Questions about IPV focused on specific behaviors, rather than general terms, to avoid labeling participants' experiences in (sometimes stigmatized) terms that they themselves might not have used. The reference periods used in the interviews were 1) the six months before incarceration, and 2) the time since the male partner was released. For reporting purposes, behaviorally specific individual-level measures were combined into the following categories:
 - *Any controlling behavior*—One or more incidents in which one partner threatened to hurt the other partner or children, family members, or loved ones; tried to keep the other from seeing or talking to friends or family; or tried to keep money from the other, took money from him or her, or made him or her ask for money
 - *Any physical violence*—One or more incidents in which one partner shoved, hit, slapped, grabbed, threw something at, beat, choked, slammed, kicked, burned, or beat the other; used a knife or gun on the other; or forced him or her to have sex by hitting, holding down, or using a weapon
 - *Frequent controlling behavior*—Six or more incidents of controlling behavior
 - *Frequent physical violence*—Six or more incidents of physical violence
 - *Severe physical or sexual violence*—One or more incidents in which one partner beat, choked, slammed, kicked, burned, or beat the other; used a knife or gun; or forced him or her to have sex by hitting, holding down, or using a weapon
2. Surveys were administered to each member of the study couple separately. Interviews were conducted by different interviewers at different appointment times at locations where only one member of the couple was present.
3. Each member of the study couples was asked the same questions about IPV. This approach was designed to capture instances of abuse more comprehensively than relying only on the individual report of one member of a couple.
4. Consistent with the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) approach, survey items were constructed to ask about perpetration and victimization for each behavior in close succession in order to increase reporting of victimization.
5. A condensed version of the CTS2 was used that shortened subscales on coercion and omitted subscales on injury and verbal aggression.
6. Items dealing with IPV and other sensitive issues were answered by participants using an audio computer-assisted self-interviewing system that allowed them to read the questions to themselves on a laptop screen and simultaneously hear them read aloud through headphones. Participants entered their answers directly into the computer in a self-locking, password-protected module that ensured that their answers could not be seen by the interviewer.

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Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering

Funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Multi-site Family Study of Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MSF-IP) is focused on exploring the effectiveness of relationship and family-strengthening programming in correctional settings.

Implementation Study: Annual site visits entailing in-depth interviews and program observations were conducted with all 12 grantee programs through fall 2010. The implementation evaluation comprehensively documented program context, program design, target population and participants served, key challenges and strategies, and program sustainability.

Impact Study: From December 2008 through August 2011, couples participating in MFS-IP programming and a set of similar couples not participating in programming were enrolled in the national impact study conducted in five of the grantee program sites. Study couples completed up to four longitudinal, in-person interviews that collected information about relationship quality, family stability, and reentry outcomes.

Qualitative Study: A small qualitative study was added in 2014, in which in-depth interviews were conducted with about 60 impact study couples to capture detailed information about the families' experiences during the male partner's reentry.

Predictive Analytic Models: Using the impact study sample of more than 1,482 couples (from the 1,991 men who did baseline interviews), a series of analyses is being conducted to examine the trajectories of individual and family relationships and behaviors before, during, and after release from incarceration. A public use dataset will be released for further analysis at the completion of this project.

This brief and other publications related to the MFS-IP study are available from the HHS ASPE Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/evaluation-marriage-and-family-strengthening-grants-incarcerated-and-reentering-fathers-and-their-partners>.

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