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# The incidence and prevalence of woman abuse in Canadian university and college dating relationships\*

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*Abstract.* This paper presents incidence and prevalence data gathered from the first Canadian national representative sample survey on the sexual, physical, and psychological victimization of women in university/college dating relationships. The results, derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale and the Sexual Experiences Survey, reveal that men are more likely to report having engaged in less lethal forms of abuse, and women are more likely to report having been victimized by such behaviour.

*Résumé.* Ce texte présente les données d'incidence et de fréquence recueillies à l'occasion du premier sondage national Canadien représentatif sur les atteintes sexuelles, physiques et psychologiques aux femmes des universités et des collèges lors des fréquentations. Les résultats obtenus en utilisant la Conflict Tactics Scale et le Sexual Experiences Survey révèlent que les hommes sont plus prêts à admettre des formes moins graves d'abus tandis que les femmes sont plus prêtes à se dire victimes de ces comportements.

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Research shows that men who physically assault their spouses do so because their partners have violated, or are perceived as violating, the ideals of familial patriarchy (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Smith, 1990a; 1993). According to Smith (1990a), relevant themes of this ideology are an insistence upon women's obedience, respect, loyalty, dependency, sexual access, and sexual fidelity. Some scholars contend that many men in college and university dating relationships also espouse a set of attitudes and beliefs supportive of familial patriarchy (DiIorio, 1989; Lamanna and Reidman, 1985; Laner and Thompson, 1982). When their partners either reject or fail to live up to these "ideals" and "expectations" (Smith, 1990a), men experience stress which motivates them to abuse women for the purpose of maintaining their dominance and control (DeKeseredy, 1988; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1993). While this feminist account of courtship abuse has not yet been directly tested, it is a promising interpretation of the large body of survey data which demonstrate that male-to-female physical, sexual, and psychological assaults are endemic to American university and college dating relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Very few comparable Canadian studies have been conducted. Canadian researchers have focused mainly on the incidence, prevalence, correlates, and causes of male physical and psychological attacks on married, cohabiting, and separated/divorced women (Brinkerhoff and Lupri, 1988; Ellis and Stuckless, 1992; Ellis and Wight, 1987; Ellis et al., 1987; Kennedy and Dutton, 1989; Lupri, 1990; Smith, 1985; 1987; 1988; 1989; 1990a; 1990b; 1991a; 1991b). There are some survey data on the extent of female victimization in post-secondary school dating relationships (Barnes et al., 1991; DeKeseredy, 1988; DeKeseredy et al., 1992; Elliot et al., 1992; Finkelman, 1992); however, these findings are derived only from non-probability samples of university and college students in Ontario, New Brunswick, and western Canada. Table 1 presents these results and the methods used to generate them.

Although the surveys in Table 1 support the claim that Canadian female students' lives "rest upon a continuum of violence" (Stanko, 1990: 85), they do not provide accurate information on how many male-to-female assaults take place in the Canadian post-secondary student population at large. Only random sample surveys can achieve this goal. This study attempts to fill a major research gap by providing estimates of the incidence and prevalence of woman abuse in Canadian university/college dating relationships which are derived from the first national representative sample survey of men and women. Incidence refers here to the percentage of women who stated that they were abused and the percentage of men who indicated that they were abusive in the past twelve months. Prevalence is, since they left high school, the percentage of men who reported

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1. See DeKeseredy (1988), DeKeseredy et al. (1993), Koss et al. (1987), Lloyd (1991), Sugarman and Hotaling (1989), and Ward et al. (1991) for comprehensive reviews of these studies.

having been abusive and the percentage of women who indicated having been abused.

## **Method**

### *Sample design*

Since a critical goal of this research was to yield estimates of woman abuse that are representative of undergraduate and community college students across Canada, a multi-stage, systematic sampling strategy was developed with the assistance of York University's Institute for Social Research (ISR). This sampling plan is described below.<sup>2</sup>

### Regional breakdown

For the purpose of making regional comparisons, Canada was divided into six strata: Atlantic Canada, including Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick; Quebec (French-speaking schools); Ontario; the Prairies, consisting of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; British Columbia; and a Language Crossover stratum which included both English-language institutions in Quebec and French-language schools outside of this province (e.g., in Ontario and New Brunswick). The number of schools selected in each area was based on the regional distribution of the Canadian student population as documented by Statistics Canada (1992a; 1992b). Table 2 presents the number of students enrolled in each stratum and Table 3 describes the number of institutions selected in each region (Pollard, 1993).

After the data were collected, the marginal distributions were compared to the distribution in Table 2, and the results were weighted accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

### The selection of institutions

For each region, the ISR prepared a listing of all universities and colleges that might be included in this study. Universities with fewer than 500 students and colleges with less than 100 students were excluded. Then, random numbers were used to pick schools to participate in this survey, and the selection was based upon each institution's population relative to the overall regional student population.

The sample plan required the selection of 48 institutions (27 universities and 21 community colleges); but, four schools were randomly picked twice,<sup>4</sup> and thus a total of 44 institutions were chosen. Additionally, each stratum was over-sampled because we anticipated that several schools would not want to participate due to the sensitive and controversial subject matter, even though both

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2. For more detailed information on the sample design, see Pollard (1993).

3. See Pollard (1993) for the precise weighting factors.

4. The selection procedure allowed for the inclusion of schools that were randomly selected more than once.

**Table 1. Woman abuse in university/college dating surveys.**  
Description of surveys

Survey	Survey Location	Sample Description	Interview Mode	Measure(s) of Abuse	Abuse rates Incidence Rate(s)	Prevalence Rate(s)
DeKeseredy (1988)	Southern Ontario	308 male university students	Self-administered questionnaires	CTS* & 2 modified SES <sup>b</sup> items	70% reported physical and/or psychological abuse; 69% stated that they engaged in psychological abuse; 12% reported being physically abusive; 2.6% admitted to having been sexually aggressive	Not examined
Barnes et al. (1991)	Manitoba	245 male university students	Self-administered questionnaires	CTS, VBN <sup>c</sup> & CRA <sup>d</sup> Abuse Index	Not examined	42% reported using violence; 92.6% stated they emotionally abused women
DeKeseredy et al. (1992)	Eastern Ontario	179 female & 106 male university/college students	Self-administered questionnaires	CTS & SES	13% of the men reported using physical violence; 68% reported psychological abuse; 8% indicated being sexually aggressive. 26% of the females indicated being physically abused; 69% said they were psychologically victimized; 28% stated that they were sexually abused	18% of the men stated they used physical violence; 75% psychologically abused women; 12% reported acts of sexual assault. 32% of women reported experiencing physical violence; 78% indicated being psychologically attacked; 40% stated they were sexually abused

Elliot et al. (1992)	University of Alberta	1,016 undergraduate students (men & women)	Self-administered questionnaires	Modified SES	Not examined	44% of the students who reported an unwanted sexual experience while registered at the U. of A. stated that the offender was a romantic acquaintance & 18% said that the perpetrator was a casual or first date <sup>e</sup>
Finkelman (1992)	University of New Brunswick & St. Thomas University	447 undergraduate students (men & women)	Self-Administered questionnaires	SES	Approximately 34.4% of the 127 respondents who reported one or more unwanted sexual experiences were victimized by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date <sup>e</sup>	Not examined

a. Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979).

b. Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss and Oros, 1982)

c. Violent Behavior Inventory (Domestic Abuse Project, cited in Gondolf, 1985).

d. CRA Abuse Index (Stacy and Shupe, 1983).

e. Gender variations in victimization are not reported in this study.

**Table 2: Student enrolment by region.**

	<i>Universities</i>		<i>Colleges</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Atlantic Canada	63,718	8.71	5,554	1.92
Quebec (French)	162,724	22.24	109,566	37.91
Ontario	261,996	35.81	90,339	31.25
The Prairies	117,842	16.11	30,697	10.62
British Columbia	52,450	7.17	26,475	9.16
Language Crossover	72,846	9.96	26,408	9.14
<b>Total</b>	<b>731,576</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>289,039</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 3: Number of institutions selected by region.**

	<i>Universities</i>	<i>Colleges</i>
Atlantic Canada	4	3
Quebec (French)	5	4
Ontario	6	5
The Prairies	4	3
British Columbia	4	3
Language Crossover	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>

respondents and institutions were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. Sixty institutions, for example, refused to participate in Koss et al.'s (1987) comparable study.

Two of the 48 schools originally selected chose not to participate. Administrators at one of these institutions stated that they did not have a policy on research involving human subjects and until one was in place, they would not participate. The other school was simply not amenable to the study.

#### Selection of programs of study

Some people believe that the leisure activities of students enrolled in certain programs are characterized by sexist interpersonal dynamics, which in turn lead to woman abuse (Johnson, 1992). On the other hand, some people assert that students who take women's studies courses are less likely to be abusive because they are more sensitized to the negative effects of gender inequality (Schwartz and Nograd, 1993). Reliable empirical support for both arguments, however, is not yet available. In order to ascertain whether disciplines vary in their conduciveness to woman abuse, the sample was also stratified by program of study. The ISR assembled this sampling frame by first listing the faculties in each institution and then listing all of the subjects taught within each faculty. The university data are derived from the *1991 Corpus Almanac and Canadian Source*

*Book* (Southam Business Information and Communications Group, 1990). Statistics on community colleges were collected from college calendars.

To select classes within each participating school, a main program of study or faculty was first selected through the use of random numbers, and the probability of selection was directly related to the percentage of students enrolled in each faculty. These statistics were compiled from Statistics Canada (1992a; 1992b) sources. Students enrolled in larger faculties, such as Arts, had a greater chance of being selected. When a main program of study was picked (e.g., Engineering), all of the subjects taught under this rubric were given random numbers and a particular subject (e.g., Civil Engineering) was chosen.

#### Selection of classes

The sample was further divided into junior and senior segments in anticipation of different responses from students who attended university or college for various lengths of time. Incoming students were categorized as junior undergraduates and third year undergraduates (second year students in some community colleges) were classified as seniors. Two classes were selected at each institution (four at institutions selected twice), resulting in a grand total of 96 classes. More than 96 classes were selected for sampling and several classes had to be replaced because either they were ineligible or they did not want to participate.

In order to be eligible to participate in this study, university classes had to have enrolments of not less than 35 and college courses were required to have a minimum of 20 students enrolled. Twenty-one classes were replaced because of ineligibility and 17 departments or individual instructors refused an invitation to be included in the survey. One instructor would not allow the investigators to visit his class until January, 1993. Since this would have delayed the completion of the study, his class was excluded from the final study. Thus, we surveyed 95 of the projected 96 classes.

#### *Arrangements for data collection*

Before the questionnaires could be administered, in the summer of 1992, the ISR phoned the Chairs of the 96 college and university departments that had been randomly selected to participate. During each call, the purpose of the study was made explicit, questions were answered, and the ISR tried to gain initial approval to administer our survey. After the Chairs gave their verbal approval, letters were sent to confirm the details of the data gathering techniques and to determine the precise location of the class, the time of our visit, and any other details about the distribution of the survey.

The participating institutions were concerned about the ethics of doing this research, and the investigators responded to their demands. In several cases, despite approval from ethical review boards, professors insisted on obtaining the

consent of their students before responding to the research team's request to survey their classes.

It should be noted in passing that prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, several instructors did not tell their students that the research team was going to visit their class. Others, however, gave their students advance notice and told them about the purpose of the survey. It might be argued that these announcements influenced some students not to participate in this study. For example, instead of answering a questionnaire, several people may have decided to pursue leisure activities or work on various assignments, such as term papers. Additionally, those who have been sexually, physically, or psychologically assaulted may not have attended class because they did not want to be reminded of these painful experiences. There may also have been some students who did not take part because they thought that they did not have much to contribute to the study, especially if they did not experience dating abuse. Unfortunately, the precise number of students who did not participate for the above reasons is unknown.

#### *Data collection procedures*

In each classroom two questionnaires, one for men and one for women, were distributed. Although both instruments contained some identical items, the wording was changed to ensure that the proper gender was identified as the dating partner. The questionnaires also contained some different items. For example, the women's questionnaire asked about their use of social support services for abused females, and the men's asked about peer support.

The questionnaires were distributed in classrooms for two reasons. First, consistent with Russell (1986), the researchers felt that it was important to be present to offer emotional and informational support (e.g., referral to a woman's centre or rape crisis centre) to any respondents who might be traumatized or upset by the subject matter or the recollection of their past experiences. Additionally, the investigators' presence ensures a higher completion rate and encourages respondents to answer all of the questions (DeKeseredy, 1989; Sheatsley, 1983).

Prior to each administration, students were asked to participate in a study on problems in male-female dating relationships. Also made explicit to them was the fact that participation in this survey is strictly voluntary and that any information they provide will be kept completely confidential. Students were also told that they did not have to answer any question that they did not want to and they could stop filling out the questionnaire at any time. This information was also printed on the cover of the questionnaire which respondents were asked to read prior to beginning.

Following each administration, we provided a debriefing which discussed the reasons for the research, the existing information on the frequency and severity of dating violence, and the role that peers play in the process. All respondents were given a list of local (on- and off-campus) support services for survivors and abusers. Additionally, participants were encouraged to ask us any questions or

to discuss the survey with us after completion. These debriefing techniques are similar to those used in Koss et al.'s (1987) national sexual assault study.

*Sample characteristics*

The sample consisted of 3,142 people, including 1,835 women and 1,307 men. Table 4 presents the demographic characteristics of these respondents and Table 5 shows their educational characteristics. As described in Table 4, the median age of female respondents was 20 and the median age of males was 21. Most of the participants identified themselves as either English Canadian or French Canadian, and the majority of them (81.8 percent of the men and 77.9 percent of the women) were never married. Table 5 shows, as was anticipated, that most of the participants were junior students and a sizeable portion (42.2 percent of the

**Table 4: Demographic characteristics of the sample.**

	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>
Age (median)	21	20
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Central American	.2	.1
Scandinavian	1.1	1.0
French Canadian	27.0	22.4
English Canadian	46.0	47.9
British <sup>a</sup>	4.3	5.5
West European <sup>b</sup>	2.9	3.2
East European <sup>c</sup>	2.9	3.2
South European <sup>d</sup>	4.9	5.5
Far Eastern <sup>e</sup>	5.0	5.3
African <sup>f</sup>	1.9	1.6
Caribbean	1.0	1.6
Middle Eastern <sup>g</sup>	1.0	1.4
Latin American	.3	.3
Aboriginal	1.9	1.8
Black	.2	.1
Jewish	.2	.1
Other	1.0	.7
Refugee	1.7	.7
Recent immigrant	4.3	3.8
<i>Marital status</i>		
Never Married	81.8	77.9
Married	7.8	7.6
Living with an intimate heterosexual partner	8.4	10.5
Separated	.7	1.8
Divorced	.8	1.9
Widowed	.5	.3

a. Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland, England; b. France, Germany, Holland, etc.; c. Russia, Poland, Baltic States, Hungary, etc.; d. Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, etc.; e. Japan, China, India, Hong Kong, etc.; f. North, Central or South; g. Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, etc.

**Table 5: Educational characteristics of the sample.**

	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>
<i>Year of study</i>		
First	39.2	42.4
Second	27.9	23.8
Third	19.3	19.6
Fourth	9.4	10.2
Other	4.0	4.0
<i>Major</i>		
Arts	29.6	42.2
Education	3.2	11.2
Fine Arts	1.3	2.0
Agriculture	6.1	2.9
Engineering	4.4	.7
Health	1.1	2.8
Sciences	13.2	9.0
Business	15.2	12.5
Law	3.8	3.0
Trades	6.5	5.8
Service occupation	1.0	3.0
Technology program	13.0	3.3
Don't know	1.6	1.7
Current fraternity member	3.0	0
Past fraternity member	2.6	0
Current sorority member	0	1.6
Past sorority member	0	1.2

women and 26.9 percent of the men) were enrolled in Arts programs. Approximately 2 percent of the women were members of sororities and 3 percent of the men belonged to fraternities.

#### *Abuse measures*

Any intentional physical, sexual, or psychological assault on a female by a male dating partner was defined as woman abuse. Following Okun (1986) and DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991), the term abuse was chosen over terms such as “battering” and “violence” because its connotation addresses the fact that women are victims of a wide range of assaultive behaviours in a variety of social contexts. Indeed, a large body of research shows that male-to-female victimization in intimate relationships is “multidimensional in nature” (DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991).

To measure psychological and physical abuse, a modified version of Straus and Gelles’ (1986) rendition of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was used.<sup>5</sup> The CTS consists of at least 18 items and measures three different ways of handling

interpersonal conflict in intimate relationships: reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical violence. The items are categorized on a continuum with the first ten describing non-violent tactics and the last eight describing violent strategies.

Two new items were added to the CTS. They were employed by Statistics Canada in their pretest for a national Canadian telephone study on violence against women. These measures are: “put her (you) down in front of family” and “accused her (you) of having affairs or flirting with other men.” Previous research shows that these items are related to physical violence in marital relationships (e.g., Smith, 1990a).

The CTS has been extensively criticized as a simple count of abuse with no sense of the context, meaning, or motives for being violent (Breines and Gordon, 1983; DeKeseredy and MacLean, 1990; Dobash et al., 1992). These criticisms are generally in response to some researchers who use sexually symmetrical CTS data to justify their claims that intimate, heterosexual violence is a “two-way street” and that there is a “battered man syndrome” (e.g., McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, 1987; Steinmetz, 1977-78). While their data do show that women hit men as often as men hit women, these findings do not demonstrate “sexually symmetrical motivation” (Dobash et al., 1992). For example, as Schwartz and DeKeseredy point out (1993), there has never been any doubt that *some* women strike their partners with the intent to injure. However, research specifically on the context, meanings, and motives of intimate violence shows that most female-to-male assaults are acts of self-defence (Berk et al., 1983; Browne, 1987; DeKeseredy, 1992; Dobash and Dobash, 1988; Dobash et al., 1992; Makepeace, 1986; Saunders, 1986; 1988; 1989; Schwartz and DeKeseredy, 1993).

In response to the above criticisms, also included in our version of the CTS were three questions asking male and female participants to explain why they engaged in dating violence since they left high school. The following measures are modified versions of those developed by Saunders (1988).<sup>6</sup> The responses to them, however, have not yet been analyzed:

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5. One version of the CTS used in this study was tailored to elicit women’s reports of their victimization and the other was designed to elicit men’s accounts of their abusive behaviour. The CTS included in the female instrument, for example, was introduced as follows: We are particularly interested in learning more about your dating relationships. No matter how well a dating couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they’re in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways to settle their differences. Below is a list of some things that might have been done to you by your boyfriends and/or dating partners in these circumstances. Please circle the number which best represents your answer in each of the following situations. Please note the items are repeated twice. The first set is for the past 12 months, the second set covers all of your experiences since you left high school. **If you are or have been married, please note these questions refer *only to dating relationships*.**
  6. Two sets of these questions were included in the prevalence section of the CTS. The first set followed the first three violence items, and the other one followed the last six violence items which constitute what Straus et al. (1981) refer to as the “severe violence index.”

On items . . . what percentage of these times overall do you estimate that in doing these actions . . . you were primarily motivated by acting in self-defence, that is protecting yourself from immediate physical harm?  
you were trying to fight back in a situation where you were not the first to use these or similar tactics?  
you used these actions on your dating partners before they actually attacked you or threatened to attack you?\*

A slightly reworded version of Koss et al.'s (1987) Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) was employed to operationalize various forms of sexual assault. It covers a range of unwanted sexual experiences. Both the CTS and SES are widely used, and they are reliable and valid measures (Koss and Gidycz, 1985; Smith, 1987; Straus et al., 1981). The texts of all of the items used are presented in Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9, and different wording was used for male and female respondents.<sup>8</sup>

## Findings

### *The incidence and prevalence of sexual abuse*

The items used in the SES are presented in Tables 6 and 7. These measures range from unwanted sexual contact, to sexual coercion, attempted rape and rape. In this study, the SES global incidence rate for female victims was 27.8 percent. Approximately 11 percent of the males reported having victimized a female dating partner in this way in the past year. The prevalence figures are considerably higher, with 45.1 percent of the women stating that they had been victimized since leaving high school and 19.5 percent of the men reporting at least one abusive incident in the same time period. Within the margin of error,<sup>9</sup> except for the male prevalence figure, these results are similar to those reported in the pretest (DeKeseredy et al., 1992).

Caution, however, must be used in interpreting these figures since they represent a composite of several items which vary in both the amount of violence used and in whether they actually constitute a violation of the *Canadian Criminal Code*. Even so, all the items reflect experiences that many survivors identify as both traumatic and damaging (Kelly, 1988). Furthermore, using the SES allows us to replicate previous work and to compare Canadian results with American data.

It is difficult to compare the incidence findings with other Canadian studies presented in Table 1. For example, though Finkleman (1992) used the same measures and time period, he does not provide data on gender variations in victimization. Instead, he reports the total number of students (both men and women) who were sexually abused. Moreover, for male reports of their

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7. For each of these questions, respondents were asked to circle the percentage which best represented their answer.

8. Missing cases are excluded from these tables.

9. There is a 2 percent margin of error in these results at the 99 percent level.

**Table 6. Sexual abuse incidence rates.**

<i>Type of abuse</i>	<i>Men (N=1,307)</i>		<i>Women (N=1,835)</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
1. Have you given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?	7.8	95	18.2	318
2. Have you engaged in sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, supervisor, etc.) to make you?	.9	10	1.3	21
3. Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	1.1	13	3.3	54
4. Has a man attempted sexual intercourse (getting on top of you, attempting to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by threatening or using some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.), but intercourse did not occur?	.6	7	3.9	67
5. Has a man attempted sexual intercourse (getting on top of you, attempting to insert his penis) when you didn't want to because you were drunk or high, but intercourse did not occur?	2.5	29	6.6	121
6. Have you given in to sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?	4.8	55	11.9	198
7. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, supervisor, etc.) to make you?	.8	9	.5	8
8. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were drunk or high?	2.2	25	7.6	129
9. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	.7	8	2.0	34
10. Have you engaged in sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	.3	3	1.8	29

**Table 7. Sexual abuse prevalence rates**

<i>Type of abuse</i>	<i>Men (N=1,307)</i>		<i>Women (N=1,835)</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
1. Have you given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?	14.9	172	31.8	553
2. Have you engaged in sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, supervisor, etc.) to make you?	1.8	24	4.0	66
3. Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	2.2	25	9.4	154
4. Has a man attempted sexual intercourse (getting on top of you, attempting to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by threatening or using some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.), but intercourse did not occur?	1.6	19	8.5	151
5. Has a man attempted sexual intercourse (getting on top of you, attempting to insert his penis) when you didn't want to because you were drunk or high, but intercourse did not occur?	5.5	63	13.6	244
6. Have you given in to sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?	8.3	96	20.2	349
7. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, supervisor, etc.) to make you?	1.4	17	1.5	24
8. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were drunk or high?	4.7	55	14.6	257
9. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	1.5	18	6.6	112
10. Have you engaged in sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?	1.4	16	3.2	51

behaviour, there are no comparable statistics (that is figures based on the SES). DeKeseredy (1988) asked men whether they had threatened to use force or actually used force “to make a woman engage in sexual activities” in the past 12 months. This might have been narrowly defined by respondents to refer to actual or attempted sexual intercourse or to include forced fondling or petting. Because of these problems in interpretation, comparisons are meaningless.

Comparing prevalence findings is also problematic. For example, Elliot et al. (1992) used slightly different measures and combined male and female figures. Methodological differences also make it hard to compare our findings with those produced by Koss et al.’s (1987) national American study. Although these researchers used the same sexual abuse items to determine prevalence rates, they used a broader time period — since age 14.

Despite some methodological differences, the findings presented in Tables 6 and 7 are consistent with Koss et al.’s American national data. They show that male respondents were more likely to report using less severe forms of coercion to get women to engage in sexual activities. These included arguments and pressure, and the use of alcohol. Women’s reports concur with male responses in terms of the types of coercion used to engage in sexual activities. There are, however, large gender differences in reporting the incidence of abuse and the reporting gaps widen for the prevalence data.

Interpreting these reporting differences is a complex process. Researchers argue that socially desirable reporting is more common among perpetrators than victims (Arias and Beach, 1987; Dutton and Hemphill, 1992). The greatest differences<sup>10</sup> between men and women were on the most socially undesirable items: sex play, attempted intercourse, and sexual intercourse involving some degree of force. The findings indicate that women were seven to eight times more likely to report these behaviours than men when response differences were standardized using women’s figures as the base. This suggests that social desirability is probably shaping responses. However, the response differences on four other items were also large.

On these items women were 6 to 6.5 times more likely to have reported abuse than men. These items included: giving in to sex play or to sexual intercourse due to continual arguments and pressure and attempted sexual intercourse or actual sexual intercourse when you were too drunk or high to resist. These four items focus on the negotiations between men and women over sexual activity. The differences in reporting rates on these items, most of which are lower in social undesirability, suggest that there may be considerable miscommunication between men and women. The exact nature of this miscommunication cannot be

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10. The gap in reporting was calculated by subtracting the percentage of men who stated that they abused a date from the percentage of women who reported having been abused and then dividing this difference by the percentage of women reporting that type of abuse.

determined from these data. But, given the proposed changes to Canadian laws on consent and sexual assault, they suggest the need for further investigation.

*The incidence and prevalence of physical abuse*

The male physical abuse incidence figure of 13.7 percent approximates statistics reported in previous Canadian and American incidence studies which used similar methods (DeKeseredy, 1988; DeKeseredy et al., 1992; Makepeace, 1983). Though Table 8 shows that every type of physical violence was used by at least one respondent, less lethal forms of assault were reported more often. This is consistent with most of the earlier North American research (Sugarman and Hotaling, 1989). Expectations of socially desirable reporting are further supported when female incidence rates are calculated. These are higher than male figures with 22.3 percent of the female participants reporting victimization. Again, there are more reports of less lethal forms of abuse, and reporting differences are largest for the most socially undesirable variants of abuse.

Table 9 shows that there are also gender differences in responses to the physical abuse prevalence items. Almost 35 percent of the women reported having been physically assaulted and 17.8 percent of the men stated ever having used physical abuse since leaving high school. Both the male and female

**Table 8. Psychological and physical abuse incidence rates.**

<i>Type of Abuse</i>	<i>Men (N=1,307)</i>		<i>Women (N=1,835)</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Psychological</i>				
Insults or swearing	52.7	623	52.5	857
Put her (you) down in front of friends or family	18.9	233	30.7	491
Accused her (you) of having affairs or flirting with other men	29.3	350	37.2	614
Did or said something to spite her (you)	57.7	670	61.7	989
Threatened to hit or throw something at her (you)	6.1	71	10.6	174
Threw, smashed or kicked something	25.4	304	25.5	433
<i>Physical</i>				
Threw something at her (you)	3.5	40	5.1	85
Pushed, grabbed or shoved her (you)	11.7	132	19.6	319
Slapped her (you)	2.9	30	5.5	85
Kicked, bit, or hit her (you) with your (his) fist	1.7	16	3.9	61
Hit or tried to hit her (you) with something	1.9	20	3.3	54
Beat her (you) up	.9	7	1.4	21
Choked you (her)	1.0	10	2.1	32
Threatened her (you) with a knife or a gun	.9	9	.5	9
Used a knife or a gun on her (you)	1.0	8	.1	2

**Table 9. Psychological and physical abuse prevalence rates.**

<i>Type of Abuse</i>	<i>Men (N=1,307)</i>		<i>Women (N=1,835)</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Psychological</i>				
Insults or swearing	62.4	747	65.1	1105
Put her (you) down in front of friends or family	25.9	322	44.2	742
Accused her (you) of having affairs or flirting with other men	40.9	495	52.6	901
Did or said something to spite her (you)	65.2	773	72.2	1216
Threatened to hit or throw something at her (you)	8.0	97	20.6	346
Threw, smashed, or kicked something	30.6	373	37.3	652
<i>Physical</i>				
Threw something at her (you)	4.3	50	10.6	185
Pushed, grabbed or shoved her (you)	15.8	182	31.3	529
Slapped her (you)	4.9	53	11.1	186
Kicked, bit, or hit her (you) with your (his) fist	2.8	28	8.0	135
Hit or tried to hit her (you) with something	2.9	33	8.0	136
Beat her (you) up	1.0	8	3.9	63
Choked you (her)	1.0	9	4.6	80
Threatened her (you) with a knife or a gun	.9	9	2.4	41
Used a knife or a gun on her (you)	1.0	9	.5	8

prevalence figures are similar to the pretest results (DeKeseredy et al., 1992). But, the male figure is considerably lower than Barnes et al.'s (1991) rate (42 percent). This inconsistency probably reflects differences between the specific renditions of the CTS employed by the two studies. Barnes et al.'s version included a sexual assault item and several other items were distinct from those used in our modified version.

Tables 8 and 9 include some notable features. For example, on both the incidence and prevalence scales, men were more likely to indicate having used a weapon than women were to state having been subjected to this form of abuse. Moreover, Table 9 reveals that more men reported threatening a date with a weapon than women reported being threatened. These are considered socially undesirable acts and men's higher rates of reporting suggest that, not surprisingly, social desirability alone does not account for reporting.

#### *The incidence and prevalence of psychological abuse*

Similar accounts of psychological abuse were provided by both men and women. For example, the proportion of men who reported having been psychologically abusive is 74.1 percent and 79.1 percent of the female respondents indicated having been a victim of such mistreatment. As anticipated, the prevalence figures were higher at 86.2 percent for women and 80.8 percent for men.

The male incidence figure is higher than those reported by DeKeseredy (1988) and DeKeseredy et al. (1992). The women's incidence figure is also higher than the DeKeseredy et al. estimate. The male prevalence statistic is about 12 percent lower than that reported by Barnes et al. (92.6 percent). This difference probably reflects the use of different measures.

An examination of the psychological abuse items presented in Tables 8 and 9 indicates that there is considerable congruency in reporting. This suggests that there is a perception on the part of abusers that these occurrences are part of the "common currency" of dating relationships. This is particularly true of insults or swearing, throwing, smashing or kicking something, and doing something to spite a partner. There was less reporting agreement on threatening to throw something at her, putting her down in front of friends and family, and accusing her of having affairs or flirting with other men. These three items are less likely to be equal exchanges and are more likely to be unvaryingly threatening or psychologically damaging.

## **Conclusion**

Surveys on the extent of woman abuse in Canadian university/college dating relationships are in short supply. The few which have been conducted clearly demonstrate that many women are at great risk of being physically, sexually, and psychologically attacked in courtship. They also intimate that many male dating partners may be attempting to mirror the dynamics of patriarchal marriages in which men have superior power and privilege (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1993). However, since the data presented in these studies (see Table 1) are gleaned from nonprobability samples, they are only suggestive of the incidence and prevalence of woman abuse in the Canadian post-secondary student population at large. Such data are clearly necessary to "provide a surer footing than presently exists for the development of social policies and programs needed to ameliorate the problem" (Smith, 1987: 144).

In preparing to conduct this national study, substantial effort was devoted to considering the various measures used by researchers in this field in the past (Kelly and DeKeseredy, 1993). Our intention was to balance the need to replicate previous studies with the necessity of avoiding their methodological problems. The best available measures were selected and where necessary, modifications were made to address known difficulties. One of the major controversies in the woman abuse literature involves the use of composite scales to measure abuse. Such scales include the full range of potentially abusive items, that is psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Interpreting the data derived from these items is extremely problematic given the range of activities covered. There is, for example, considerable debate about whether certain items in the sub-scales constitute abuse. This paper has presented the abuse figures for sexual, physical, and psychological abuse separately. Consistent with existing research in this

area, composite measures (global incidence and prevalence figures) were computed but are not reported here since it is our position that they tend to be so large that they obscure and trivialize the more serious and less controversial abuse figures reported by the respondents.<sup>11</sup>

The results of this nationally representative sample survey provide more accurate and reliable data on the abuse of college and university women by male dating partners. The findings suggest that very serious forms of abuse are quite common in campus dating. A comparison of our global prevalence findings with those reviewed by Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) show that the problem of dating abuse is just as serious in Canada as it is in the U.S.

Although these figures are high, as is the case with all survey statistics on woman abuse, they should be read as underestimates for the following reasons. First, many people do not report incidents because of fear of reprisal, embarrassment, or because they perceive some acts as too trivial to mention. Second, some people forget abusive experiences, especially if they took place long ago and were relatively "minor" (Kennedy and Dutton, 1989; Smith, 1987). Third, because of social desirability factors, men are less likely than women to provide reliable accounts of their behaviour. Finally, many women may not want to recall the pain and suffering they endured in their dating relationships (Smith, 1987).

In order to advance a better understanding of woman abuse in post-secondary school dating relationships, and to both prevent and control it, more than just accurate incidence and prevalence data are required. We need to empirically discern the major "risk markers" (Hotaling and Sugarman, 1986) associated with assaults on female university/college students, such as level of intimacy, ethnicity, and educational status. This type of analysis will provide information on who is at the greatest risk of being abused or of being abusive. Such correlational research will also assist in the development of theories, such as the one offered at the beginning of this article.

Research on the links, if any, between psychological abuse and physical and sexual abuse is also necessary for providing us with more direct interactional warnings. For example, strong correlations between accusations of flirting or having affairs (jealousy) and later physical or sexual abuse could be used to warn people to "get help" or "get out" when confronted with such abusive situations.

Another important issue is the possible difference between men and women in their interpretations of consent for sexual activities. As noted above, reporting differences between men and women on the items about sexual negotiations or consent were large and very similar to the gaps between men and women in their reporting of the most socially undesirable activities. These preliminary findings

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11. The global figures were reported by the press based on a preliminary report to the funding agency and, as expected, a great deal of controversy developed. One consequence of this controversy was that the sexual and physical abuse figures were virtually ignored.

raise important questions of a social and legal nature regarding the interpretations that men and women have of consent within dating relationships. These bear directly on current discussions about whether consent has been given or one partner has simply complied because they felt pressure to do so or were unable to refuse — the “**no means no**” debate. Subsequent articles on the national survey will address this and other issues, such as the influence of familial patriarchy on male violence, the context, meanings, and motives assigned to dating violence; the influence of male peer group dynamics on abusive behaviour; and the effectiveness of various social support services for women.

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