Household and individual characteristics predicting violent conflict within couples in Ireland

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Background

- 1 in 5 couples in the US experience intimate partner violence (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 1998)
- Most of this violence is of moderate severity – pushing, grabbing, shoving (Makepeace, 1981, 1986)
- Studies showed a bidirectional relationship between depression and violence (Whisman, Uebelacker, & Weinstock, 2004)
- Drinking problems, poverty and low education were found to be related to violent conflict in couples
- Many studies on couple violence use crime data or data on college students => the GUI gives the opportunity to look at a general population

Gender differences

- ***Female gender role*** => women are more relationship-oriented (Markus & Oyserman, 1989) and more willing to self-disclose then men (Prager, 1989)
- ***Male gender role*** =>men are more likely to display anger (Kuebli &Fivush, 1992) and view interpersonal conflict in terms of competition (Gottman, 1994)
- Little is known about the differential effect of household characteristics (e.g. poverty, household size) on violent conflict reported by men and women

Research questions

- Do household characteristics have an equal effect on violent conflict reported by men and women (gender differences?)
- "***Partner effect***"=> do people report more violent conflict if their partners have certain characteristics?
- "***Actor effect***"=> do people report more violent conflict if they themselves have certain characteristics?

Sample

- Data from the primary and secondary caregivers of the 9-year olds in the GUI sample were used
- Households with a secondary caregiver were used for analyses: N=7576
- Single-parent households were excluded from this study

Methodological challenges

- Missing data;
- Data interdependence -> Cook & Kenny's (2005) model
- Actor-Partner Interdependence model (cross-lagged model -> SEM)

Multiple imputation

- Missing data in the DAS were imputed using multivariate imputation by chained equations (van Buuren, 2007)
- A multinomial logit imputation model involving 8 predictors (e.g. accommodation type, ethnicity, household type) was specified for each imputed variable
- We imputed the missing y ten times, so the imputed values: $y = (y_1 + \ldots + y_{10})/10$

Original and imputed variables

	N		Mean	Median	SD	Skewness
	Valid	Missing* (%)				
Women: Throw something at each other	**6208**	**1368 (18.10)**	**1.03**	**1.00**	**.22**	**11.04**
After imputation:	**7573**	**3**	**1.02**	**1.00**	**.20**	**11.69**
Men: Throw something at each other	**5746**	**1830 (24.20)**	**1.03**	**1.00**	**.24**	**11.27**
After imputation:	**7573**	**3**	**1.03**	**1.00**	**.26**	**9.26**
Women: Push hit or slap each other	**6213**	**1363 (18.10)**	**1.02**	**1.00**	**.22**	**12.23**
After imputation:	**7573**	**3**	**1.02**	**1.00**	**.20**	**12.93**
Men: Push hit or slap each other	**5739**	**1837 (24.20)**	**1.02**	**1.00**	**.23**	**13.68**
After imputation:	**7573**	**3**	**1.02**	**1.00**	**.20**	**14.83**

***Missing due to item omission or refusal to fill in the questionnaire**

Derived measures & recoding:

When you and your partner argue how often do you:

1. Shout or yell at each other (not included)
2. Throw something at each other (included)
3. Push, hit or slap each other (included)

Recoding:

5-point answering scale (Never/Always) => binary (Yes/No)

Violence index computed for men and women as a binary variable:

0- no violence ("No" in items 2 & 3)

1- violence reported ("Yes" in items 2, 3, or both)

Couples' violent conflict reported by men and women

			Men report		Total
			no violent behaviour	violence	
women report	no violent behaviour	Count	6497	517	7014
		% of Total	85.8	6.8	92.6
	violence	Count	461	97	558
		% of Total	6.1	1.3	7.4
Total		Count	6958	614	7572
		% of Total	91.9	8.1	100.0

Ns after imputing the missing data

Within-dyad correlation of the measure (Spearman's rho) = 0.11**

Coefficients in cross-lagged model (1): Household -> Violent conflict

Dependant variables:

Predictors:	Woman reports violence *Coeff. A*	Man reports violence *Coeff. B*	Difference between coefficients A and B (*p value*)
Relationship duration (years)	.01	-.03*	.013
Household poverty	.11**	.09**	NS
Number of bedrooms	-.08**	-.13**	.001
How many people in a household	.04**	.01	.032
Safe neighbourhood index	.03**	.03**	NS
Family moved from another country	.06**	.10**	.013
Study Child shows conduct problems (teacher report)	.03*	.04**	NS
Mental disorder in immediate family	.03*	.04**	NS
Married, biological parents of the Study Child	-.06**	-.07**	NS

*Data weighted: Wgt_9yr, *p<.05, **p<.001*

Coefficients in cross-lagged model (2):
Own and partner characteristics -> Violent conflict

Dependant variables:

Predictors:	**Woman reports violence**	**Man reports violence**
Primary education (woman)	**.03****	**.02**
Primary education (man)	**.02**	**.04****
Pints of beer per week (woman)	**.04***	**.07****
Pints of beer per week (man)	**.03***	**.04***
Depression score (woman)	**.04****	**.01**
Depression score (man, *imputed data*)	**.02***	**.05****

Significant differences between cross-lagged coefficients: ↔

*Data weighted: Wgt_9yr, *p<.05, **p<.001*

Coefficients in cross-lagged model (3):
Own and partner characteristics -> Violent conflict

Dependant variables:

Predictors:	Woman reports violence	Man reports violence
Work-home conflict (woman)	.01	.04**
Work-home conflict (man)	.05**	.06**
Jobless (woman)	.01	.01
Jobless (man)	.06**	.05**
Fair distribution of household tasks between you and partner (woman)	-.01	-.02
Fair distribution of household tasks between you and partner (man)	.00	.03*

Significant differences between cross-lagged coefficients: ↔

*Data weighted: Wgt_9yr, *p<.05, **p<.001*

Conclusions:
Household -> Violent conflict

- Stressors such as:
  - poverty,
  - living in an unsafe, run-down neighborhood,
  - problems with a study child,
  - mental disorder in the immediate family

  had the same *significant* impact on violent conflict reported by men and women
- If partners were married, biological parents of a study child, it was a *preventive* factor against violent conflict reported by both partners

Gender Differences
Household -> Violent conflict

- In the GUI sample, after imputing missing data more men (N=614) than women (N=558) reported violent conflict
- Reported conflict is asymmetrical: only in the case of 97 couples did *both partners* report violent conflict
- The longer the relationship lasts, the fewer instances of violent conflict reported by men (but not by women)
- The size of the house had a significantly stronger effect on men (the bigger number of bedrooms, the fewer instances of violent conflict reported by a man)
- The number of people in the household had a significant effect on women's reporting violent conflict (but not on men's) => more people, more conflict
- If the family moved from another country, it had a stronger effect on men's reporting violent conflict

Conclusions:
Actor-Partner effects

Actor effect:

- Own education and own depression are more important than partner's education and depression in predicting own reporting of violent conflict (for men and women)
- Man's work-home conflict and joblessness have an impact on his reporting of violent conflict; woman's work-home conflict and joblessness *does not* have an impact on her reporting of violent conflict
- Man's perception of the fairness of distribution of household tasks was *positively* related to his reporting of violent conflict

Partner effect:

- Woman's beer drinking had more impact on her partner reporting violent conflict than his own beer drinking
- Man's joblessness has more effect on his partner reporting violent conflict than her own joblessness
- Man's depression was a significant effect on his partner reporting violent conflict; woman's depression is *unrelated* to his partner reporting violent conflict

Limitations

- Measurement => only 2 items measuring violent conflict
- Missing data => in 2 items exceeded 20% of all responses
- Relations found in cross-lagged models are significant, yet rather weak
- Fit indices of the cross-lagged model rather modest (RMSEA = 0.089)

Policy implications

- Women's beer drinking (more than men's drinking) may increase couples' vulnerability to violent conflict => information campaign to increase awareness that women's alcohol problems even more than men's problems might be the reason for violent conflict within couples
- Men's stress related to joblessness and work-home conflict affects violent conflict => need for educational and support programs helping men to develop strategies of coping with stress