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# Intimate Partner Violence Within Law Enforcement Families

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## Abstract

Using data from the Baltimore Police Stress and Domestic Violence study, the authors examined how exposure to stressful events on the job affects law enforcement employees' physical aggression toward domestic partners, evaluating the role of negative emotions and authoritarian spillover in mediating the impact of such task-related stress. The authors consulted general strain theory and angry aggression theory to explain domestic violence in police families. Significant positive effects on physical aggression toward an intimate partner were found for variables measuring authoritarian spillover and negative emotions. However, these effects were different for different gender and racial groups.

## Keywords

intimate partner violence, authoritarian spillover, police families, general strain theory, angry aggression theory

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is frequently defined as abusive behavior by one partner that physically injures the other partner, or reasonably incites fear of such physical injury, and is pursued to gain or maintain power and control

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over the intimate partner (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 2005; Campbell et al., 2003; Catalano, 2006; Depres, n.d.). An intimate partner is a current or former spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or same-sex partner (Barnett et al.; Catalano; Depres). In IPV, it is commonplace for the abuser to control or change the behavior of the intimate partner through physical violence, coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation, and emotional, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse (Barnett et al.; Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.; Depres, n.d.). Though IPV occurs worldwide, the focus of this study is a small segment of the American population—law enforcement officers.

Within the adult married and cohabitating population in the United States, the prevalence of IPV through the 1990s was reported by different studies to range from 8% (Wilt & Olson, 1996) to 17% (Straus & Gelles, 1990) to 20% (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 1998). In the first decade of the 21st century, reports of nonfatal IPV may be dropping. Catalano (2006) indicated that in 2004 there were 2.6 such victimizations per 1,000 U.S. residents aged 12 or older—down from a 1993 rate of 5.8 per 1,000 residents. According to Catalano and other researchers, during 2004 approximately 627,400 nonfatal intimate partner victimizations were reported, with 76% directed at women (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.; Soler, 2007), and 1,159 women and 385 men were murdered by their intimate partners in 2004 (Soler, 2007). Moreover, IPV seems relatively widespread in select groups compared to more general populations. For example, two survey studies of police officers conducted in the 1990s found that 2 out of 5, or 40%, of police families had experienced IPV (Johnson, 1991b; Neidig, Russell, & Seng, 1992).

Whether the work is for the federal government, large metropolitan precincts, or small rural offices, and whether it protects dignitaries, borders, waterways, wildlife, or citizens, law enforcement is arguably one of the most stressful occupations of all (Brandl & Strohshine, 2003; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Police officers are confronted repeatedly with gruesome realities that most citizens will not encounter in a lifetime. Stressful and potentially life-threatening events officers experience may include the violent death of a patrol partner, the taking of a life in the line of duty, an arrest that turns violent, or the viewing of atrocious crime scenes.

As they attempt to address such incidents, police officers' hands are often tied by procedural guidelines, hierarchical bureaucracy, and a lack of administrative and public support, which puts officers at great risk of experiencing severe stress (Brandl & Strohshine, 2003; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Regularly unable to address the source of their stress directly, police personnel may transfer their response to that stress to their personal lives, which may result in deviant behavior toward family members, especially an intimate partner (Griffin & Bernard, 2003).

The very nature of both police training and police work promotes aggression, increasing the risk of excessive use of force on the job—and quite possibly off the job as well (D’Angelo, 2000; Neidig et al., 1992; Sgambelluri, 2000). For instance, police officers are trained to dominate physically and psychologically, through posturing and verbal forms of intimidation (Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005). These tactics can be used to gain control in all situations, including those at home. Physical and psychological domination is reinforced throughout a police officer’s career, making it difficult to leave the *job at the workplace* (Johnson et al., 2005; Sgambelluri, 2000). Law enforcement professionals commonly exhibit what is called the *authoritarian personality*.

Balch (1972) characterized this authoritarian personality as narrow-minded, violent, and suspicious, whereas Adorno (1950) pointed out that people with authoritarian personalities have little tolerance for those who do not submit to their authority—even when it is a domestic partner who resists. An authoritarian personality demands unquestioning obedience. Although this attitude may be necessary and effective on the law enforcement job, it easily conflicts with other roles outside the workplace, creating “negative spillover of occupational stress” onto an officer’s family life (Johnson, 2000, p. 108).

At work each day, physically aggressive behaviors may be appropriate, even vital, for police officers. Physical domination is a suitable strategy in the physically dangerous situations police enter daily. However, it becomes a maladaptive strategy when applied or tolerated with intimate partners or other family members in domestic situations lacking real danger (He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002; Stevens, 1999). Removed from the risks of police work, such domination represents spillover authoritarianism and angry aggression.

The likelihood that spilled-over authoritarianism in police families increases their risk of IPV has been infrequently studied. The study by Johnson et al. (2005) is one that did address the subcultural trait of authoritarianism, finding a significant correlation between authoritarianism and domestic violence within the families of male and female police officers alike. In addition, Griffin and Bernard employed angry aggression theory in an explanation of the correlation between authoritarianism and domestic violence within law enforcement families. Their study suggested that, due to the nature of policing, officers perceive threats more frequently than other individuals do and respond to them more aggressively than others tend to. According to angry aggression theory, this excessive perception of and response to threats becomes subcultural (Griffin & Bernard, 2003).

Further work-related stresses, such as exposure to conflict and violence, reinforce feelings of isolation and anger that law enforcement officers sometimes manifest in interpersonal violence against family members (Johnson, 2000;

Johnson et al., 2005; Neidig et al., 1992; Sgambelluri, 2000). Although it is not used specifically to explain domestic violence in law enforcement families, general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) complements angry aggression theory in elaborating social dynamics that link occupational stress and strain to criminal behavior. General strain theory posits three categories of strain deriving from negative relationships with others. The aspect of the theory most relevant to police officers, however, describes strain as the ongoing presentation of stressful, even life-threatening, events. Police officers exposed to these things may use violence in their direct response to the event, or they may couch violent impulses (i.e., physical aggression) in such negative states or emotions as resentment, frustration, and discontent (Agnew, 1992; Broidy, 2001; Liska & Messner, 1999; Mazerolle, Burton, Cullen, Evans, & Payne, 2000; Sharp, Terling-Watt, Atkins, Gilliam, & Sanders, 2001; Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 2002).

Employing the principles of angry aggression theory and general strain theory, the present research explored how stressful events on the job affected the likelihood that police officers would report using physical aggression against an intimate partner. The study incorporated spillover authoritarian attitudes and negative emotions as the social mechanisms that link stressful events to physical aggression and IPV. The study conceptualized officers' spillover authoritarianism as a maladaptive effort to cope—to reduce the strain resulting from exposure to task-related stress—in environments outside the workplace. The study also proposed that officers' negative emotions arising in response to stressful events could explain IPV in police families. General strain theory implies that negative emotions and authoritarian spillover should serve as affective indicators that mediate effects of stressful job-based encounters on police officers' physically aggressive behavior—here measured via self-reports.

## **Method**

### *Design and Sample*

The present research employed data generated from Gershon's survey study of police stress and domestic violence in Baltimore, Maryland, between 1997 and 1999. Gershon's instrument included questions on psychological and physical stress and likely stressors, perceived current stress level, mechanisms used to cope with stress, and health conditions—related to stress. Gershon originally studied the survey responses to understand stress-related domestic violence among police officers; the data have been used in empirical studies to link stress, burnout, and gender (Greshon, 2000; McCarty, Zhao, &

Garland, 2007). Questionnaires were filled out by 1,104 sworn, full-time law enforcement employees of Baltimore's municipal police department, and 1,104 (out of 2,500-plus such employees present at the 9 Baltimore precincts for either morning and/or evening roll calls) officers volunteered to participate in the survey, eliciting a 68% response rate. The published results of Gershon's study indicate significant relationships between work stress and intimate partner abuse (Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li, & Vlahov, 2009).

The present study hypothesized that police officers encountering stressful events on the job were likely to lose control at home and engage in physical aggression toward partners. The study also hypothesized that officers' spill-over authoritarian attitudes and negative emotions acquired in the workplace would mediate stress's effects on the occurrence of IPV.

## Measures

*Dependent variable.* The present study's dependent variable, self-reported physical aggression toward a domestic partner, was dichotomous and reflected each participant's yes-or-no answer to a question on whether he or she had ever lost control and become physically aggressive with an intimate partner (a spouse or significant other), for example, grabbing, pushing, or shoving that individual.

*Independent variables.* In order to measure task-related stressful events experienced by the participants, a 9-item index of theoretically related items was created. Law enforcement employees answered, indicating how strongly they were affected, emotionally, by each of the following: (a) making a violent arrest, (b) shooting a person in the line of duty, (c) being subjected to an internal investigation, (d) responding to a chemical spill, (e) responding to a bloody crime scene, (f) learning one knows a victim personally, (g) responding to a hostage situation, (h) attending a police funeral, and (i) being exposed to blood or body fluids as through a needle stick. Response choices were recoded as 0 (*never experienced*), 1 (*not at all*), 2 (*a little*), and 3 (*very much*). The index summed all items, and it demonstrated a moderate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79$ ). A previous study had employed all 9 items to derive its measure of critical incidents in policing (Gershon et al., 2009).

In addition, an 11-item index of negative emotions was created that represented the sum of a participant's responses to questions about whether he or she was ever (a) tired at work despite adequate sleep; (b) moody, irritable, or impatient over small job-related problems; (c) withdrawn, as a result of unremitting job demands on time and energy; (d) given to feelings of futility, negativity, or depression about work; (e) inefficient at work; (f) physically,

emotionally, or spiritually depleted; (g) less able to resist illness because of work; (h) less interested in pursuing fun activities because of work; (i) unable to care about problems and needs of members of the public; (j) unable (or less able than before) to concentrate at work; and (k) present at work only because required to be. *Response categories ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (always)*. To measure the participants' authoritarian spillover, Gershon (2000) asked them to indicate how strongly they agreed with 4 statements: "I feel like I need to take control of the people in my life"; "I catch myself treating my family the way I treat suspects"; "At home, I can never shake off the feeling of being a police officer"; "I expect to have the final say on how things are done in my household." Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Both indexes were reported to be adequately reliable; the negative emotions index had an alpha of .89, and the authoritarian spillover index had an alpha of .64.

**Control variables.** Control variables employed in the present study included gender, race, education level, length of employment as a police officer, and current police rank. These variables had been used in previous studies explaining domestic violence within law enforcement families (Johnson, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Neidig et al., 1992; Sgambelluri, 2000). Gender was dummy coded (0 = *female* and 1 = *male*); race was also dummy coded (0 = *nonwhite*, 1 = *White*). Education level reflected the highest level of study a respondent reported completing and was treated as a continuous variable: 1 (*high school*), 2 (*some college*), 3 (*college*), and 4 (*graduate school*). Length of employment as a police officer was treated as a continuous variable reflecting the respondent's report of years logged as a sworn employee of Baltimore's police department. Current rank was also treated as a continuous variable and categorized as follows: 1 (*officer trainee*), 2 (*officer*), 3 (*agent*), 4 (*detective*), 5 (*sergeant*), or 6 (*lieutenant or above*).

## Results

Men made up 86% of the survey respondents, and 64% of the respondents were White (see Table 1). Out of all respondents, 9% admitted losing control and becoming physically aggressive with an intimate partner. Of those who reported engaging in IPV, 28% were men and African American, 27% were women and African American, 41% were men and White, and 4% were women and White. As expected, significant positive correlations were found between three independent variables—experiencing stressful events, authoritarian spillover, and negative emotions—and the dependent variable, which was self-reported physical aggression toward an intimate partner. Furthermore,

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of All Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD	N
Male	1.00								0.86	0.35	1,100
White	0.26**	1.00							0.64	0.48	1,092
Education	-0.01	0.09**	1.00						2.18	0.73	1,094
Years in employment	0.10**	0.22**	0.17**	1.00					11.52	9.28	1,078
Rank	0.01	0.16**	0.36**	0.56**	1.00				2.84	1.41	1,100
Stress events	0.05	0.16**	0.14**	0.46**	0.40**	1.00			12.51	4.26	1,077
Spillover	0.09**	0.06*	-0.10**	0.04	0.03	0.22**	1.00		9.33	2.91	1,066
Emotions	0.00	0.12**	0.00	0.13**	0.08*	0.30**	0.43**	1.00	18.48	5.29	1,055
Domestic violence	-0.13**	-0.10**	-0.04	0.04	0.03	0.08*	0.15**	0.23**	0.09	0.28	874

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



correlation coefficients show that female and nonwhite respondents were likelier than male and White respondents to engage in physical aggression against an intimate partner. The highest correlation measure in our study ( $r = .56$ ) was found between years of employment and current rank. Because several of the variables included in the study exhibited relatively high levels of correlation, tolerance statistics were checked to disclose any collinearity of the independent variables in the multivariate data analysis context. Multicollinearity was not found to be a serious problem in this study.

Logistic regression was employed to explain police personnel's self-reported physical aggression toward intimate partners. Two-stage regression was conducted. The first model included the task-related stressful events index and the control variables, and the second model also incorporated the authoritarian spillover and negative emotions variables, evaluating their capability to mediate the effects of stressful events on respondents' physical aggression. Table 2 shows the final results. The final model's sample size, 793, was due to our inclusion in the regression analysis of only those questionnaires containing responses to all questions pertinent to the final model; only 79% of the officers actually responded to the question about their engagement in IPV.

At both stages of analysis, the gender and race variables were found to be significant. In the second-stage model, men were 60% less likely than women were, and White respondents were 59% less likely than nonwhite respondents were, to have been physically aggressive toward a partner. Most nonwhite respondents in the study were African American, with 355 of 396 nonwhite officers classifying themselves as African American. In the first-stage model, with the exception of gender and race, significant variables were limited to the task-related stressful events variable only, with each unit increase in stressful events linked to an 8% increase in likelihood of participation in IPV.

Including the negative emotions and authoritarian spillover variables in our Model 2 yielded mediation of the effects stressful events had on IPV. The coefficient of the stressful events variable diminished and became nonsignificant in the second-stage model. In addition, the authoritarian spillover and negative emotions variables clearly exerted strong impacts on the dependent variable. Results for the negative emotions and authoritarian spillover variables show a significant increase in likelihood of IPV accompanying each unit increase in authoritarian spillover and negative emotions. Each such increase in authoritarian spillover was linked to a 9% increase in IPV likelihood; each unit increase in negative emotions was associated with a 13% jump in IPV likelihood.

Gender and race's strong effects on self-reported physical aggression, as well as the unexpected direction of the link between gender and physical

**Table 2.** Logistic Regression Model Predicting Likelihood of Physical Aggression Toward a Domestic Partner

Variables	Stage 1			Stage 2		
	B	Odds ratio	95% CI	B	Odds ratio	95% CI
Male	-0.85	0.43	0.23-0.80	-0.91**	0.40	0.21-0.79
White	-0.73	0.48	0.28-0.82	-0.90**	0.41	0.23-0.71
Education	-0.26	0.77	0.53-1.12	-0.29	0.75	0.50-1.12
Years in employment	0.02	1.02	0.98-1.05	0.02	1.02	0.99-1.06
Rank	0.02	1.02	0.82-1.27	0.08	1.08	0.86-1.36
Stress events	0.08	1.08	1.02-1.15	0.00	1.00	0.94-1.07
Spillover	—	—	—	0.09*	1.09	1.01-1.19
Emotions	—	—	—	0.12**	1.13	1.08-1.18
Constant	-1.95**	1.43		-4.30**	0.01	
Model chi-square	24.59**			63.97**		
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.07			0.17		

Note: Directional tests were used for stress events, spillover, and emotions.

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

aggression, deserve special attention. To facilitate explaining physical aggression, we completed separate logistic regression models for the genders (male and female) and two racial groups (White and African American). Table 3 shows the results for the distinct models. For the male officers and White officers in this study, both authoritarian spillover and negative emotions accounted for admitted physical aggression toward an intimate partner; for the female officers and African American officers, however, authoritarian spillover did not significantly explain such self-reported aggression.

### Discussion, Study Limitations, and Conclusions

Using data collected from full-time law enforcement officers within the Baltimore city police department, the present study sought to understand whether and how exposure to task-related stressful events affects self-reported physical aggression toward a police officer’s intimate partner. Results overall confirmed the hypothesis that stressful events would generate positive effects on self-reported physical aggression and that authoritarian spillover and negative emotions associated with a police officer’s work would play mediating roles in IPV.

**Table 3.** Logistic Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Physical Aggression Toward a Domestic Partner for the Genders and Two Racial Groups

Variables	All Male Officers		All Female Officers		All White Officers		All African American Officers	
	B	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	B	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	B	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	B	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Male	—	—	—	—	-0.45	0.64 (0.17-2.32)	-1.00*	0.37 (0.16-0.87)
White	-0.74*	0.48 (0.25-0.91)	-1.55*	0.21 (0.05-0.97)				
Education	-0.27	0.76 (0.49-1.18)	-0.58	0.56 (0.18-1.76)	-0.58*	0.56 (0.32-0.98)	0.08	1.09 (0.58-2.06)
Years in employment	0.02	1.02 (0.98-1.06)	0.04	1.04 (0.90-1.20)	0.03	1.03 (0.99-1.08)	0.01	1.01 (0.94-1.09)
Rank	0.12	1.13 (0.88-1.44)	-0.04	0.96 (0.49-1.88)	0.17	1.18 (0.90-1.54)	-0.08	0.92 (0.58-1.48)
Stress events	0.01	1.01 (0.94-1.09)	-0.09	0.91 (0.74-1.13)	0.00	1.00 (0.91-1.09)	0.02	1.02 (0.92-1.14)
Spillover	0.13**	1.14 (1.04-1.25)	-0.05	0.95 (0.77-1.17)	0.12*	1.13 (1.01-1.25)	0.07	1.07 (0.95-1.22)
Emotions	0.09**	1.09 (1.04-1.15)	0.21**	1.23 (1.11-1.36)	0.11**	1.11 (1.05-1.18)	0.13**	1.14 (1.07-1.22)
Constant	-5.37**	0.00	-2.73	0.06	-5.36**	0.00	-4.66**	0.01
Model chi-square	38.98**		22.00**		31.01**		26.37	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.13		0.32		0.15		0.19	
Number of cases	693		100		531		230	

Note: Directional tests were used for stress events, spillover, and emotions.

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

Studies (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005; Neidig et al., 1992) have outlined some work-related stress factors that are related to domestic violence involving law enforcement families. No study until the present one, however, seems to have examined the social mechanism that links stress to such violence. Proposing negative emotions and authoritarian spillover as the mechanism, the present analysis was an initial attempt at closing the gap in the research.

Findings from the present study are consistent with general strain theory's assertion that stress produces negative affective states (emotions) that can trigger deviant behavior (Agnew, 1992). Similarly, Bernard's (1990) angry aggression theory, as employed in this study, suggests that the maladaptive strategy known as authoritarian spillover serves police personnel as a way to cope with task-related stress or channel it toward such targets as are immediately available. In our study, the mediating roles of authoritarian spillover and negative emotions may indicate that, among police officers, increased likelihood of IPV reflects their diminishing capacity to handle task-related stress and, correspondingly, increased negative emotions and authoritarian attitudes put up as a maladaptive effort to defuse stress. Moreover, because the task-related stress variable exerted only a small effect on physical aggression in our study, it appears that when authoritarian spillover and negative emotions are present to a high degree, apart from providing a mediating influence, they may become significant factors in domestic violence in police officers' homes.

Angry aggression theory addresses how spilled-over authoritarianism explains law enforcement personnel's indulgence of their angry emotional states outside the workplace, through physical aggression toward others (Griffin & Bernard, 2003). Our study found a relatively strong correlation between authoritarian spillover and negative emotions (see Table 1). The authoritarian spillover variable certainly enriched our measure of the negative emotions variable, as we did not directly measure anger via our negative emotions index, and as anger is central to general strain theory (Agnew 1992, 2006). By allowing themselves to react angrily to threats and danger experienced in daily work, police officers become likelier to adopt aggressive behavior at home, as well, to ease their negative affect (Agnew, 1992; Griffin & Bernard, 2003). In supplementing our index of negative emotions by acknowledging differential spillover of an authoritarianism that may well be unique to law enforcement professions, we introduced another application of general strain theory to criminology's law enforcement subdiscipline. The results demonstrate the usefulness of general strain and angry aggression theories for delineating social mechanisms that underlie domestic violence in law enforcement families.

Particularly interesting findings from our study concern race and gender. Consistent with the literature, Whites in the study were less likely than nonwhites

were to report engaging in intimate partner aggression (Caetano, Schafer, & Cunradi, 2001). In addition, female officers' data showed them to be more likely than male officers to report such behavior. This finding is at odds with an earlier finding—for the general population—that women are likelier than men to be the victims in IPV (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

To further examine our unexpected finding, we developed separate logistic regression models explaining IPV for different genders and racial groups. Results, shown in Table 3, suggest that differential social dynamics may explain the self-reported physical aggression of men versus women or of Whites versus African Americans. The negligible role in IPV played by authoritarian spillover and the powerful role played by negative emotions that we identified for female and African American officers is consistent with Johnson's assertion that female and African American officers are more likely to experience "emotional burnout," an exhaustion and emotional depletion attributed to work, than they were to experience "depersonalization," manifesting in impersonal, unsympathetic behavior toward the public (1991b, p. 38). Some female and African American officers who did not engage in authoritarian spillover as a coping mechanism nevertheless were physically aggressive at home, we found, and the behavior was attributable to accumulated negative feelings about their work.

Studies have indicated that female law enforcement officers' policing style is gentler, less aggressive than male officers' style (Johnson, 1991a). That the female officers were found to be so affected by negative emotions, in terms of their self-reports of physical aggression against intimate partners, may indicate a completely discrete (from their male counterparts) yet key channel leading to domestic violence. That we found a significant role for authoritarian spillover in male officers' intimate-partner aggression—and not in female officers'—implies that work-derived depersonalizing attitudes, frustration, and anger are likelier to spill over to the intimate partners of male police officers.

Our models for both male and female police officers showed that White officers, compared with the nonwhite (usually African American) officers, in the study were less likely to be physically aggressive at home. This result supports findings of previous studies of racial and ethnic differences in domestic violence (Caetano, Cunradi, Clark, & Schafer, 2000; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson, & Johnson, 2007). In our study, negative emotions significantly explained African American officers' IPV, although the effect of negative emotions on self-reported physical aggression was not as strong as among females. Female African American officers in our study were more likely to be physically aggressive at home than male African American officers were.

Among the White police officers, in contrast, physical aggression did appear to be significantly explained by authoritarian spillover, negative emotions, and education but was not significantly associated with gender. The White officers most likely to report engaging in IPV were those less educated. Such a negative relationship between education level and domestic violence was not unexpected (Rani & Bonu, 2009; Simister & Makowiec, 2008). Similarly, racial distinctions in factors explaining IPV among police officers were confirmed by our study.

Our additional analyses concerned with race and gender clearly call for further investigation of IPV carried out by police officers. Specifically, future studies should explore, by gender and racial group, the ways in which task-related stress—along with other work-derived attitudes and emotions—is transferred from the workplace to the home front (if it is). The majority of participants in our study, like the law enforcement population generally, were men; research truly aimed at understanding IPV among female police officers is yet to be conducted, but when it is, variables governing the gender–IPV relationship perhaps will be revealed. Our results imply that studying an adequate-size sample of female officers from various racial groups will help tease out the roles gender and race play in IPV in police families.

Our study had some potential limitations, namely, that IPV is underreported, that we used secondary data, and that less-than-ideal measures for task-related stress and IPV were available to us for data analysis. Most studies of domestic violence that rely on self-reports encounter underreporting, and this seems especially likely for law enforcement personnel who fear, even when anonymity is assured, that admitting their own or their colleagues' abusive behavior may jeopardize careers and livelihoods and break up families. The dearth of reported IPV incidents in this study's data is testimony to this limitation. Nevertheless, prior studies similar to this one have used self-report surveys and have been found to be reliable, as long as respondents were assured of confidentiality (Johnson et al., 2005). A possible counterpoint to assumed underreporting by police officers is the premise that officers are relatively unlikely to underreport abuse exactly because they are so often exposed to high levels of, and acceptance of, violence (Johnson, 1991b). Without collateral information about IPV obtained from respondents' intimate partners, the present study is also limited to dependence on self-reports of physical aggression. Whether the data for this study are actually under- or over-reported IPV, future inquiries into gender-based differential rates of off-reporting will be important for determining clearly whether female officers are likelier than male officers to report engaging in IPV, as our findings suggest.

The use of a secondary dataset also presents limitations. The sample for this study comprised solely of officers from the Baltimore police department; it thus did not consist of a cross-section of officers from various regions nationally. Though the Baltimore police department proved to be quite diverse demographically, this study's generalizability remains limited to metropolitan police departments of a size similar to Baltimore's. Although we did set out to examine IPV in police families, because we excluded families of other workers from our study, the implication is there that aggression spillover may not be unique to police officers. After all, workplace authoritarian attitudes and unpleasantness may be found across occupations (Williams & Alliger, 1994). That said, our focus on policing-specific stressful events as a major factor explaining IPV did provide a social context for understanding the aggression some police officers display toward their intimate partners.

In a final limitation on our study, to measure stress we summed responses to a group of survey items about police experiences that probably differ from each other qualitatively. Identical scores, then, may reflect very different experiences. This is a limitation that future studies might modify by having respondents rate how significant each experience seems to them. Our stress measure was limited to task-related stress only, a type inherent in policing and also in military work. It is inherent in each to such a degree that the law enforcement and military professions really stand apart from all other professions (Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005). Melzer (2002) confirmed this in his finding that men in physically violent occupations, exemplified by the military and police, are 43% more likely than men in nonviolent occupations to use violence against wives or cohabiting female partners.

Future research might also improve the IPV variable by incorporating multiple measures for verbal and emotional violence as well as physical. For our study, the theoretical reasoning supported taking IPV as the dependent variable. As a lifetime yes-no measure, however, IPV could not here preclude the possibility of partner-directed physical aggression that occurred before a police career and officers' initial experiences of phenomena providing our work-related variables begin. The temporal order suggested by our present work might be more fully established with future research involving longitudinal data. Despite its several limitations, our study's results have value in that they provide a glimpse into a little understood aspect of IPV—that involving police families.

Absent sound coping strategies, police officers' inability to confront the actual sources of task-related stress, they may exhibit spillover of authoritarian attitudes and negative emotions into their personal relationships, leading to aggression. To minimize task-related stressors' effects, police training

techniques might be altered to diminish authoritarianism and negative emotions and to foster adaptive coping strategies allowing stress to be managed. Moreover, law enforcement agencies might institute more thorough policies on IPV in employees' families. Ideally, there would be required annual evaluation of the stressors in particular police jobs, with attendant intervention as needed to develop personnel's coping skills (Sheehan & Van Hasselt, 2003).

Since IPV among police officers may involve differential factors or social dynamics for officers of different races and genders, stress management strategies and interventions should be sensitive to the specific needs and concerns of different groups (Cunradi, Caetano, Clark, & Schafer, 2000). For instance, for male officers, emphasis might be given to modifying authoritarian attitudes to diminish spillovers in the form of IPV. For African American and female officers, in turn, emphasis might be given to channeling work-related negative emotions away from domestic violence.

Whether one subscribes to general strain theory and/or angry aggression theory to understand domestic violence, domestic violence in police families is especially problematic for three reasons. First, police officers have access to, and are trained in the use of, lethal weapons. Second, law enforcement personnel are trained to control and dominate situations. And third, they are charged with enforcing domestic violence laws in the community (Gershon, 2000). These are compelling reasons that the existence of domestic violence in police families must be acknowledged throughout the ranks of law enforcement.

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