

## Chapter 2

# Tracing the Threads of the Web: The Epidemiology of Interconnections Among Forms of Violence and Victimization

Interconnections among types of violence are embodied in such well-known concepts as the “intergenerational transmission of violence” (Ehrensaft et al. 2003) and “criminal careers” (Blumstein et al. 1988). Some specific linkages have been the focus of considerable attention. For example, in psychology, the “spillover” of aggression from interparental to parent–child relationships has been well documented (Appel and Holden 1998), and in criminology, there long has been interest in identifying criminal “specialists” versus criminal “generalists” who commit multiple types of crimes (e.g., Wijkman et al. 2011). Diverse forms of violence are, however, even more closely linked than suggested by these lines of inquiry. The latest research shows that virtually all types of violence are interrelated, even seemingly quite different types such as child maltreatment and robbery (e.g., Finkelhor et al. 2009). Rather than a linear chain of transmission or a single link, these interrelationships radiate out in multiple directions; they connect across different forms of violence, endure throughout individual life spans, and extend even over generations. The primary purpose of this chapter is to delineate the various types of overlap that exist and to describe the known extent of the overlap, or co-occurrence, among forms of violence. We employ the term “violence” broadly to refer to a wide range of intentionally perpetrated harms. We include the major types that have been the focus of scholarly and institutional attention: conventional crimes such as assault and robbery, child maltreatment, intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual offenses, bullying and other forms of peer violence, and exposure to violence through witnessing violence in the community or in the home. In addition to more accurately documenting the nature of interpersonal violence, describing variation in the strength of particular connections is important for understanding etiology and developmental trajectories, and so we identify some of the stronger linkages that have so far been identified.

**Table 2.1** A co-occurrence framework for violence that integrates previous terminologies

Role: Involvement in violence		
Victim	Perpetrator	Both
<b>Single episode or emphasis on single type</b>		
<i>Mono-victim</i>	<i>Mono-perpetrator</i>	<i>Mono-perpetrator–victim</i>
<i>Also studied under the name of:</i>		
Acute	Specialists	Bully victim
Isolated		Mutual IPV
Single form exposed		
<b>Multiplicity: Patterns across types of violence</b>		
<i>Poly-victim</i>	<i>Poly-perpetrator</i>	<i>Poly-perpetrator–victim</i>
<i>Also studied under the name of:</i>		
Multiple type victim	Generalists	Delinquent victim
Multiple victim	Violent polymorphism	
Multiple crime-type victim		
Multiple form exposed		
Complex trauma		
<b>Repetitiveness: Patterns across time</b>		
<i>Repeat victim</i>	<i>Repeat perpetrator</i>	<i>Repeat perpetrator–victim</i>
<i>Also studied under the name of:</i>		
Repeat victim	Recidivist	Cycle of violence
Chronic	Habitual offender	Intergenerational transmission
Complex trauma	Reconviction	
	Revolving doors	
	Career criminal	

The Language of Co-occurrence

As noted above, many different terms have evolved to describe different types of co-occurrence. Some are fairly specific, such as “bully-victim” and “mutual IPV”, whereas others are broader, such as “habitual offender” or “career criminal” (See Table 2.1 for other examples). The terms used to represent particular associations are used almost exclusively by professionals in one discipline and consequently tend to promote compartmentalization rather than integration. Creating a common, internally consistent set of terms could serve to identify similar phenomena in different fields and facilitate communication across disciplines, but as far as we are aware, there have been no comprehensive efforts to create a systematic set of terms that could be used for all types of violence. In Table 2.1 we offer such a scheme; it utilizes different prefixes to designate multiple patterns of co-occurrence that can be used to describe victimization as well as perpetration, for adults as well as children, and across major forms of violence as well as across the lifespan.

First, we use the prefix “poly” to refer to the co-occurrence of different forms of violence. Thus, “polyvictimization,” a term first introduced by David Finkelhor, Heather Turner, and Dick Ormrod (2007), describes multiple types of

victimization (such as peer victimization and caregiver abuse). “Polyperpetration” involves committing multiple types of offenses (such as violence and property crime). We use “re” or “repeat” for the occurrence of the same type of violence over time. “Re-victimization” refers to repeated experiencing of one victimization type (such as multiple incidents of physical abuse) and “re-perpetration,” correspondingly, refers to repeated commission of one type of violence (such as multiple rapes). Single episodes can be more precisely specified by using the prefix “mono,” as in “mono-victimization” and “mono-perpetration.” Finally, we will adopt the term “perpetrator–victim” to refer to anyone who has been involved in violence in both roles, so this will include bully victims, delinquent victims, and mutual IPV, but will also include other combinations of perpetration and victimization in the life of a single individual.

## Gaps in Knowledge on Co-occurrence

Despite the long history of the study of some forms of co-occurrence, many gaps remain and violence scholarship has not yet fully integrated some of the key insights. We highlighted some of the advantages of a co-occurrence model in [Chap. 1](#), including a shift to recognizing that co-occurrence is the norm, not the exception, and the importance of developing an overarching framework to incorporate findings on diverse interrelationships. There are two main gaps in our understanding of co-occurrence. The first is misconceptions created by the fairly accidental way the study of co-occurrence has developed. For example, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the overlap of morphologically similar victimizations, even though the form of violence has not been established as a key source of linkages. For example, there has been a great deal of study on the overlap between child abuse and exposure to interparental domestic violence, but almost all of this has focused on one form of abuse, child physical abuse. National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) data indicate, however, that exposure to domestic violence is more closely linked to neglect and even sexual abuse than it is to physical abuse (Hamby et al. 2010). Similarly, NatSCEV data also indicate that although a past history of sexual victimization is associated with revictimization risk, other types of victimization also increase the risk of later sexual victimization (Finkelhor et al. 2011). The second gap, related to the first, is inattention to strong linkages across different forms of violence that do not “match.” For example, the link between physical assault and sexual assault is very strong (Finkelhor et al. 2009), but has received relatively little study.

Finally, despite the growing body of the literature on co-occurrence, there continues to be an incident-specific focus in many violence professions, perhaps especially law enforcement and health care. Although we take this up from an intervention perspective in [Chap. 6](#), regarding epidemiology we note that isolated incidents are the exception, not the rule. Perpetrators do not randomly select their targets, but engage in a complicated calculus of desirability and accessibility of the target that leads to some people perpetrating far more than others, and some people experiencing victimization far more than others. These cycles can be specific to one relationship,

such as student to student or parent to child, or they can be operate at higher-order levels such as neighborhoods or even countries. The study of the patterns themselves is common in research on some types of violence, such as criminal offending, and rare in others, such as IPV, where individuals involved in a single incident are often treated the same as those with chronic involvement. Bearing these limitations in mind, we now turn to an overview of the main patterns of co-occurrence.

## Patterns Across Different Types of Violence

One form of co-occurrence happens when an individual is victimized in multiple ways by multiple perpetrators. For example, a child might be abused in the home, bullied at school, and witness violence in their neighborhood. Some perpetrators are involved in multiple forms of violence too, as when individuals bully their peers and abuse their dating partners. Although the literature on co-occurrence is now large enough to offer some informed insights, surprisingly, for many forms of violence, linkages among different violence types have received relatively little study. For example, comparatively little is known about the overlap among different forms of adult victimization. Even the latest data under represent the true extent of co-occurrence because as yet there has been no comprehensive study of both victimization and perpetration. The causal and developmental pathways that contribute to these patterns of interconnection will be discussed in [Chaps. 3 and 4](#). Here, we present an overview of basic patterns.

### Poly-victimization: Co-occurrence Among Forms of Victimization

The vulnerabilities that expose a person to greater risk for one type of violence, such as unsafe neighborhoods or dysfunctional families, also increase the risks for many other types. Thus, co-occurrence is common for many forms of victimization.

*Youth.* Two of the largest studies on co-occurrence have focused on the interconnections among forms of youth victimization. The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV, Finkelhor et al. [2009](#)) and its smaller precursor, the Developmental Victimization Survey (Finkelhor et al. [2005](#)) are the largest US surveys devoted to youth victimization. They provide nationally representative data on numerous forms of youth victimization, including several forms of physical assault, sexual victimization, child maltreatment, and witnessing violence. They also include offenses, such as neglect and statutory rape, which are crimes only when perpetrated against minors.

Results from both surveys indicate that there is significant overlap across all major victimization categories, including physical assault, sexual victimization,

maltreatment, property crime, and exposure to violence. In NatSCEV, the average age-adjusted odds ratio (OR) for these overlaps was 2.7 for victimization occurring within the past year and 2.8 for lifetime victimization experiences. The strongest link was between physical victimization and sexual victimization. The risk of sexual victimization was 620 % higher (OR 6.2) for youth who had sustained at least one physical assault. The weakest link was between indirect exposure to violence and physical victimization. Although still a significantly elevated risk, youth who had been exposed to violence by knowing a victim, seeing the consequences (such as household burglary), or being told about an incident, without directly witnessing violence, were 40 % more likely to be physically assaulted than nonexposed youth (OR 1.4). For most types of violence, though, the experience of sustaining one form of victimization is associated with a doubling or tripling of the risk of any other form of victimization (Finkelhor et al. 2009). The Adverse Childhood Experiences study (Felitti et al. 1998), which involves retrospective reporting by adults, also supports the premise that many forms of youth victimization regularly co-occur.

*Adults.* Only recently has attention turned to the interrelationships among types of adult victimization. As outlined in more detail below, it is well known that some perpetrators commit more than one type of offense against adult victims. Probably, the best known case is IPV, which typically involves both psychological and physical aggression, and not infrequently involves sexual aggression and stalking by the intimate partner as well (Krebs et al. 2011; Straus et al. 1996). The most recent data reveal that these interconnections even operate on a daily level; in one study, physical IPV was 64 times more likely on a day when psychological IPV had occurred (Sullivan et al. 2012). More generally, a nationally representative survey of Latino women found that nearly two-thirds (63 %) of victimized women reported more than one type of victimization (Cuevas et al. 2010), with a mixed pattern of polyvictimization and revictimization being the most commonly reported pattern (multiple victimization types in childhood and/or adulthood with at least one type experienced more than once). A study of female IPV victims found that most had experienced other types of adversities, with more than half (58 %) experiencing physical assault by another family member and 42 % experiencing sexual assault by a family member (Graham-Bermann et al. 2011). As can be seen from these examples, most co-occurrence research on adult victimization takes a lifespan perspective, and more research is needed to understand how patterns of co-occurrence change across the trajectory of adulthood.

## **Poly-perpetration: Co-occurrence Among Forms of Perpetration**

The “careers” of both juvenile and adult criminals are often grouped into categories based on the co-occurrence across types of violence and over time. Among the general public, many informal references to criminals use mono-perpetrator

terms such as “burglar,” “murderer,” or “rapist.” But, especially for criminals whose careers are not limited to an adolescent delinquent period, poly-perpetration is very common. As the term implies, poly-perpetrators do not limit themselves to one type of perpetration, but commit, for example, both violent and property crimes, or both sexual and nonsexual offenses (Blokland and van Wijk 2008; Moffitt 1993).

The generalization of criminal behavior typically starts at a very young age. For example, in a Dutch study of teens arrested for a sexual offense, already more than one in four had also been arrested for a nonsexual offense. Within 10 years, nearly half had been arrested again for a nonsexual offense (Blokland and van Wijk 2008). Generalization of offending often implies persistence over time, as different types of offenses accumulate. Poly-perpetrators are a small proportion of the population but commit a high percentage of all crimes. For example, they comprised 7 % of one longitudinal study of a Philadelphia birth cohort, but those 7 % were responsible for 70 % of rape arrests (Tracy et al. 1990). Poly-perpetration is also common among women arrested for sexual offenses. More than a quarter (27 %) of sex offending women commit multiple nonsexual offenses as well, and more than half committed multiple sexual offenses (Wijkman et al. 2011).

## **Dual Involvement in Violence as Both Perpetrator and Victim**

Early research on violence almost universally classified individuals as either “perpetrators” or “victims”—and seldom both. Over the last two decades, however, researchers have found that many individuals are ensnared in dangerous situations or dangerous relationships as both perpetrators and victims. This type of co-occurrence has been most frequently examined in the fields of delinquency, bullying, and IPV (Lauritsen et al. 1991; Salmivalli and Nieminen 2002; Whitaker et al. 2007). Common terms to represent these interconnections include “delinquent-victims,” “bully-victims,” and, when a single dyad is involved, “mutual” or “reciprocal” violence, but we will apply the more general term of “perpetrator–victim.”

This is a controversial area. Ideal victims receive more sympathy than flawed victims—and any hint of violent behavior can spoil the image of a victim (Loseke 1992). It can be especially challenging to avoid victim blaming when recognizing the interconnections between perpetration and victimization. Likewise, the image of victimized perpetrators can also be controversial, because it can be seen by some as a way of excusing violent behavior. We do not mean to imply victim blaming, or to avoid accountability for one’s actions. Nonetheless, recognizing the interplay between victimization and perpetration is important for understanding violence and some studies suggest that perpetrator-victims are the largest group, larger than individuals who are predominantly perpetrators or predominantly victims (Cuevas et al. 2010). It also appears that perpetrator-victims may be at higher risk of injury than others (Whitaker et al. 2007). Methodologically, it is important

to be careful about labeling individuals based on one or two reports of minor violence. The literature on youth delinquency and bullying (e.g., Cuevas et al. 2007; Salmivalli and Nieminen 2002) tends to be more sensitive to this than the IPV literature, where a person who pushes their partner once or twice in response to frequent violence and the partner who repeatedly engages in aggression would be categorized the same way. Nuances become apparent when more careful classifications are used. For example, children who are primarily victims may engage in limited acts of aggression, but these acts are much more likely to be reactive to others' aggression, versus the more proactive aggression of bully victims and primary bullies (Salmivalli and Nieminen 2002).

More recent research suggests there may even be meaningful subgroups within the group of delinquent victims (Cuevas et al. 2010). Some fit stereotypical images of youth involved in many violent activities and who have high victimization rates, with many incidents of perpetration and victimization involving peers. Others appear to be maltreated youth who act out in adolescence. And some victimized children do not engage in violent behavior, but do commit property crimes or other offenses (Cuevas et al. 2007).

In the field of IPV, such nuances are largely absent. "Mutuality" or reciprocity, in the IPV field, is often defined in all-or-none terms. For example, the following two scenarios would be treated equivalently. In the first couple, both spouses yell and swear when angry, and occasionally push or hit their partner. In another couple, one spouse frequently hits his (or her) partner when angry and after months or even years of this, the partner hits back. In most IPV research, both of these couples would be treated as equivalent members of the same class. We find it highly problematic to merely denote the presence of any perpetration without considering the patterning of the behavior over time (within interactions and over the course of many interactions). To do so misses the opportunities to identify important subgroups and variations based on frequency and severity, as has been done so fruitfully in research on bullying and delinquency. As we will discuss in more detail in Chap. 5, using the insights from subdisciplines of violence research to advance knowledge in other areas is an important positive benefit of the co-occurrence framework.

## Patterns Over Time

Several longitudinal patterns have been identified. These include ongoing patterns of victimization, ongoing patterns of offending, and the link between childhood victimization and adult perpetration. The mechanisms thought to account for these patterns will be discussed in Chap. 4. Here, we will explore the strength of the associations over time. Patterns over time are not completely orthogonal to patterns across different types of violence, because except in war, riots, or other extreme circumstances, most poly-victimization and poly-perpetration will occur over a span of time. Still, research emphasizing patterns over time tends to emphasize

different elements, especially longer time periods that often extend across developmental periods, such as childhood to adolescence or youth to adulthood.

It is important to note that none of these longitudinal patterns apply to the whole population or even the subset involved in a particular form of violence. Childhood experiences do not doom a person to an adulthood of violence and victimization. Nonetheless, as with other risks and vulnerabilities, the circumstances that led to an initial violence exposure can create conditions of ongoing risks, and rates of revictimization and offending are higher for people with early childhood exposures to violence.

## **Revictimization: Ongoing Patterns of Victimization**

Revictimization most often refers to the repeated experience of a single form of victimization. Repeated sexual victimization, especially among females, has received the most attention (Noll and Grych 2011). Females who were sexually abused in childhood are two to three times more likely to be sexually assaulted in adulthood, compared to women with no childhood sexual abuse history (Barnes et al. 2009). In the National Intimate and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), more than a third (35 %) of women who had been raped in childhood were raped again in adulthood, versus an adult rape victimization rate of 14 % for women who were not raped as a child (Black et al. 2011). More generally, a childhood maltreatment history is associated with elevated risks for many adult victimizations, including physical assault, sexual assault, and stalking (Widom et al. 2008). These levels of revictimization only hint at true levels, though, because they focus on limited violence types.

## **Reperpetration: Ongoing Patterns of Offending**

Criminal careers are also studied as developmental trajectories, where some individuals who are involved in delinquent acts at relatively young ages go on to become more serious offenders as adults. It has been noted that aggression is one of the most stable personality characteristics, rivaling even the stability of intelligence (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1998). Aggressive behavior often emerges quite early and some children will be persistently aggressive throughout the span of childhood. These “life-course” repeat perpetrators account for the largest group of individuals who are violent in adulthood (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1998).

Violent behavior does have an equally well-known age-related trajectory, however, in that almost everyone becomes less aggressive over time and the highest rate of serious offending occurs during late adolescence and young adulthood. Adolescence has been called a “self-limiting disease” (Vaillant 1977/1995, p. 159) because of this strong tendency to outgrow the worst violent and self-destructive behavior. The high stability coefficients are largely due to the fact that, although



the absolute level of perpetration does decrease for the entire population over the span of development, the rank order of individuals tends to be highly stable. In other words, even though many highly aggressive individuals become less aggressive over time, they are still likely to be more aggressive than those who were consistently nonviolent from early childhood.

## **The Link Between Childhood Victimization and Adult Perpetration**

People who have been hurt by violence might seem the least likely perpetrators of all. It has long been known, however, that this is not always so. Perhaps surprisingly, perpetrators are more likely to have a victimization history than the general population. Many victims do not go on to become offenders, however. There are also well-established gender differences in these patterns. Males comprise about 25–35 % of childhood sexual abuse victims, but make up about 95 % of sex offenders (Jonson-Reid and Way 2001). As with all of this literature, these patterns are indicative of elevated risks, not of certainties at the individual level.

*Childhood Victimization History among Criminal Offenders.* Given the markedly deviant behavior shown by many criminals, it is understandable that a great deal of attention has been given to the question of why and how their criminal behavior emerged. Across all population groups, childhood victimization rates are disturbingly high in most countries, but research indicates that childhood victimization is particularly elevated among those who are arrested for crime (Wijkman et al. 2011). One important, well-known caveat about this literature is the potential for self-serving reports: criminals may seek leniency or sympathy by reporting adverse childhood experiences. Nevertheless, some prospective research has also shown that maltreated children are more likely to be arrested as adults than nonmaltreated children (Widom and White 1997). In the US, several studies have found that the majority of sex offenders and juvenile delinquents report a childhood history of sexual or physical abuse. Reports of neglect and abuse are as high as 90 % (Leibowitz et al. 2011).

*The Intergenerational Transmission of Family Violence.* Although “intergenerational transmission” could refer to many longitudinal patterns, in practice this most often refers to childhood victims of maltreatment or exposure to family violence who go on to offend, as adults, against their own spouses and children. There has been some debate about the strength of this interconnection, motivated in part by concern that interconnections are often treated as inevitabilities not only by the general public, but also sometimes by providers and researchers (Widom 1989). It has often been noted that the strength of the association appears very different depending on the sampling frame. Among samples of batterers or child abusers, a majority often report abuse in their families of origin (e.g., Murphy et al. 1993). Yet this is a relatively small percentage of the population, and looked at from the other perspective—the number of maltreated or exposed children—only a

minority go on to become perpetrators themselves (Widom 1989). Still, this is one of the strongest risk factors for perpetration. Sometimes the term “intergenerational transmission” also refers to the risk of being revictimized (see section on re-victimization). Taken together, these twin risks strongly indicate that early childhood exposure to violence leaves one vulnerable to multiple involvements with violence as an adult. More recent research suggests that exposure to interparental violence leaves one at risk of both later IPV perpetration and victimization, and that one’s partner’s exposure history also adds to this risk (Fritz et al. 2012).

## Particularly Strong Linkages Between Forms of Violence

Existing evidence suggests that some forms of violence are more closely related than others. Understanding relative patterns of association is essential for untangling why co-occurrence happens, as particularly strong linkages may suggest similar etiologies. Unfortunately, what can be said about stronger and weaker linkages is limited by our current knowledge base, which has, as noted earlier in the chapter, tended to focus on interconnections among morphologically similar offenses. A few studies have, however, assessed the strengths of multiple patterns of interconnection and begin to shed light on which interconnections are stronger than others (e.g., Hamby et al. 2012). In Table 2.2, we present a selected set of associations between several forms of victimization. They include associations that have been frequently studied as well as connections between types of victimization that have received little attention and may be surprising to many. As the Table 2.2 shows, different forms of violence in the home are especially strongly linked. These and other patterns are discussed in more detail in the sections below, but one key point we would like to highlight here is that there are many strong connections that have received comparatively little study that could help shed further light on the mechanisms and interventions we will be addressing in later chapters. As can be seen in Table 2.2, even seemingly disparate forms of violence show some significant degree of interconnection in community samples. Understanding why some interconnections are stronger and some are weaker will be an important piece of advancing our understanding of co-occurrence and even of violence more generally.

Definitive conclusions about the magnitude of these associations are difficult to draw, however, because they may vary in different samples. For example, Appel and Holden (1998) found that IPV and physical child maltreatment were more strongly related in clinical samples consisting either of women from battered women’s shelters or documented cases of abuse than in community samples. In general, problems of many types are likely to be more highly correlated in help seeking or law enforcement samples. Therefore, in order to provide a common reference point for the findings described below, we draw from studies utilizing community samples.

*Child maltreatment and exposure to partner violence.* Partner violence and child abuse share many common features, and it is not surprising that these phenomena often occur together (Bourassa 2007). Numerous studies indicate substantial overlap

**Table 2.2** Examples of interconnections among forms of victimization in representative community samples

Interconnection	Strength of association (OR)
<i>Well known, well-established interconnections</i>	
Exposure to IPV and child physical abuse	5.0 <sup>a</sup>
Exposure to IPV and teen dating violence victimization	3.8 <sup>a</sup>
Physical IPV and stalking by intimate partner	7.0 <sup>d</sup>
Physical IPV and sexual violence by intimate partner	2.4 <sup>d</sup>
<i>Strong but under-recognized interconnections</i>	
Exposure to IPV and all other forms of maltreatment	
Psychological abuse	4.3 <sup>a</sup>
Neglect	6.2 <sup>a</sup>
Sexual abuse by known adult	5.2 <sup>a</sup>
Custodial interference	9.2 <sup>a</sup>
Any physical assault (by any perpetrator) and any sexual victimization	6.2 <sup>b</sup>
Any witnessed violence and any sexual victimization	4.5 <sup>b</sup>
Teen dating victimization and internet harassment	4.3 <sup>c</sup>
Teen dating victimization and peer sexual harassment	5.3 <sup>c</sup>
<i>Weaker but still positive interconnections</i>	
Exposure to IPV and peer relational aggression	1.7 <sup>a</sup>
Exposure to IPV and exposure to community violence	2.1 <sup>a</sup>
Any property crime and any sexual victimization	3.2 <sup>b</sup>
Teen dating victimization and exposure to community violence	1.5 <sup>c</sup>
Psychological IPV and physical violence by nonpartner	2.7 <sup>d</sup>

*Note* OR = Odds ratio. The total number of possible interconnections is quite large and this table is not meant to be an exhaustive list. To date, most interconnections that have been studied have been found to be significantly positive. We focused on victimization because there are more nationally representative survey data available for victimization than perpetration (which is more often limited to official records or small convenience samples).

ORs for <sup>a</sup>, <sup>b</sup>, <sup>c</sup>, and <sup>d</sup> have been adjusted to approximate the true relative risk (in the case of <sup>d</sup>, that adjustment has been computed for this table). ORs for <sup>a</sup>, <sup>c</sup>, and <sup>d</sup> control for multiple demographics. ORs for <sup>b</sup> control for age.

<sup>a</sup>Hamby et al. (2010)

<sup>b</sup>Finkelhor et al. (2009)

<sup>c</sup>Hamby et al. (2012)

<sup>d</sup>Krebs et al. (2011)

between witnessing partner violence and child maltreatment (Appel and Holden 1998; Jouriles et al. 2008). In NatSCEV, the past year rate of physical abuse among children who had witnessed partner violence in the same year was 17.6 %. The life-time overlap was even higher, with nearly a third (31 %) of children who had witnessed partner violence also experiencing physical abuse (Hamby et al. 2010).

Most research on the co-occurrence of exposure to partner violence and child abuse has focused on a single form of maltreatment, child physical abuse.

Although the shared physical assault component may make this seem a natural choice, the NatSCEV data show that all types of maltreatment are elevated among child witnesses to partner violence. Across multiple forms of maltreatment, youth who witness partner violence have rates of maltreatment that are 300–900 % higher than those for other youth (Hamby et al. 2010). Over the course of a lifetime, more than half (56.8 %) of youth IPV witnesses were also maltreated. Looking at some particular forms of maltreatment, fully 72 % of all youth who had ever experienced custodial interference had also witnessed partner violence. More than 60 % of neglect victims and more than 70 % of victims of sexual abuse by a known adult had also witnessed partner violence.

*Teen dating violence.* Teen dating violence provides an example of a form of violence that is almost always studied in isolation from other types of violence. Existing data, however, suggest that this focus does not accurately reflect reality. As with other forms of violence, teen dating violence is typically only one form of involvement in violence. Indeed, in the NatSCEV, every single youth who reported teen dating victimization also reported at least one other form of victimization. Within this general finding of polyvictimization, however, was also strong evidence for differences in the strength of the interconnections. In particular, many different forms of sexual victimization are very closely related to teen dating violence. The rate of teen dating violence among victims of rape was 25 %, or one in four, compared to 6.1 % for nonvictims, or approximately 1 in 16. Also notably, teen dating violence was particularly associated with some adult-perpetrated sexual offenses. The association with statutory rape was the highest for all forms of victimization, with fully half (50 %) of all youth in sexual relationships with much older partners (5 or more years older) also reporting teen dating violence. More than one in four youth (28.6 %) who had experienced an unwanted exposure by an adult also reported being a victim of teen dating violence (Hamby et al. 2012). Family violence was also especially closely associated with teen dating violence. More than half of teen dating violence victims have a history of some form of child maltreatment, with 44 % reporting physical abuse by a caregiver. More than two out of three youth had witnessed an assault between other family members. Other research also supports the link between exposure to family violence and teen dating violence (Jouriles et al. 2012).

*Stronger links among forms of perpetration.* As with victimization, some forms of perpetration are more closely related than others. Research suggests that poly-perpetrators who primarily commit violent and property crimes are more likely to commit rape versus sexual offenses such as child molestation and exhibitionism, which were more common among mono-perpetrators of sexual offenses (Blokland and van Wijk 2008). A study of female sex offenders similarly found that non-contact sexual offenses, such as taking illegal photos of minors, were perpetrated almost exclusively by mono or repeat perpetrators of sexual crimes and did not occur in the arrest histories of poly-perpetrating women who also committed violent or property crimes (Wijkman et al. 2011). Other researchers have also shown that sex offenders who target adult women are more likely to be poly-perpetrators than sex offenders who target children (Lussier 2005).

## Gender and Co-occurrence

Determining whether these patterns are similar across key demographic subgroups is an important question not only for advancing a basic understanding of co-occurrence, but also for determining priorities for prevention and intervention. Gender has been studied more than any other sociodemographic characteristic, and is a topic of considerable debate in some disciplines. A co-occurrence approach to gender patterns in violence can inform these debates. Some services and institutions are also organized at least in part by gender, including shelters for battered women, batterers intervention programs, and jails, adding to the importance of accurately understanding how gender influences co-occurrence.

## Gender Patterns for Single Forms of Violence

In some fields there is near-universal consensus on the existence of gender differences in violent behavior, whereas in others it is a hotly contested issue. In the former category include most conventional crimes. There is virtually universal agreement that men commit more homicides, sexual assaults, and robberies than women. Gang involvement is widely acknowledged to be more common among men. Homicide, robberies, and sexual offenses have a male-to-female perpetration ratio of approximately 9:1, whereas for nonlethal physical assault, the ratio is approximately 3 or 4:1 (for reviews, see Hamby 2005, 2009). Further, all types of measures (e.g., self-report, crime statistics) find these patterns consistently. In the US, for example, the large National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), consistently finds this pattern for victim self-report, as do official records such as the Uniform Crime Report and the National Incident-Based Reporting System, which tracks the public's reports to the police, regardless of whether they lead to an arrest. Similar data sets from other countries are consistent with these findings. The ratio of male-to-female perpetration is similar for major violent crime categories even though self-report surveys usually produce higher estimates than official statistics, presumably because not all offenses are reported to authorities.

On the other hand, there is considerable debate about other types of violence, such as IPV and bullying. We develop these examples in some detail to show how the co-occurrence framework can enhance our understanding of specific forms of violence as well.

*IPV.* Many researchers commonly assert that “most” data support the assertion that females perpetrate as much, if not more, physical IPV than males; however, this is true for only one particular methodology: self-report using perpetrator-specific behavioral checklists, such as the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus et al. 1996) and the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (Wolfe et al. 2001). Other large, nationally representative, self-report surveys find more male than female perpetration, including the NISVS (NISVS; Black et al. 2011), the

National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000), and the NCVS. These data are consistent with reports to law enforcement, arrests, and homicide data, which also point to more male perpetration of IPV, although they do also all find evidence for some female perpetration. Furthermore, questions on witnessing violence between one's parents also show more male than female perpetration (Hamby et al. 2011a). Behavioral checklists could be more valid than all of these other methods, but as yet there are no data suggesting this.

The lack of consistency across measures is due to multiple factors (for more detailed reviews, see Hamby 2005, 2009). We highlight two here. First, much of the research using CTS-type checklists has been done with younger samples. Data from other methods, such as reports to law enforcement, show that boys and girls are more similar (although not equal) in rates of IPV perpetration than adult males and females (Snyder and McCurley 2008). Second, methods differ in the severity of violence that they are most sensitive to. Crime statistics tend to capture the more serious end of the violence continuum, whereas self-report questionnaires typically include many items assessing minor aggression. Measures that emphasize minor violence are more susceptible to false positives, which are behaviors that are physically forceful but do not meet the traditional definition of aggression (i.e., behavior intended to cause harm). These can include pushing, grabbing, and hitting that occurs while joking around, "wrestling," or even flirting, as well as other physical but mutually acceptable interactions. In most surveys, most self-reported violence is minor, and there is evidence that female perpetration rates are estimated with more false positives than males, because female perpetration is more often described as horseplay or joking around than male perpetration (e.g., Perry and Fromuth 2005). Further, this sort of physical horseplay is more typical of adolescents and young adults than older adults, making teen dating violence data even more difficult to interpret than adult IPV. False positives make it more challenging to distinguish "signal" from the "noise" in measures of violence, and no existing methodology accurately discriminates between acts that fall near the definitional borders of violence versus playful or other nonaggressive uses of physical force.

Overall, we are more confident in drawing conclusions from patterns that can be observed across multiple methodologies than those obtained by a single method. Applying this standard to existing data on physical IPV alone, the most scientifically defensible conclusions at this point are that: (a) males perpetrate more injurious violence than females; (b) gender differences are smaller for less violent forms of behavior; (c) rates of IPV are more similar for males and females in adolescence than in adulthood. More definitive conclusions about gender differences in the perpetration of milder forms of aggression must await more detailed and nuanced measurement of these types of violence.

The relationship between gender and violence becomes more clear when we broaden the focus from single forms of violence to interconnections between forms of violence. In the following sections, we show how greater attention to co-occurrence can further inform our understanding of gender and violence.

*Co-occurrence and IPV.* The seeming parity in male and female aggression is partly due to ignoring sexual violence between intimate partners. Sexual activity

is one of the key distinguishing features of intimate relationships, and assessments that omit violence in this important domain are inevitably incomplete. Men are much more likely to perpetrate both sexual and physical violence than are women, and so adult women are more likely to be IPV poly-victims than adult men.

In NISVS, the rate of co-occurring forms of IPV was only 8 % for adult male IPV victims, with almost all of that accounted for by men who experienced both physical violence and stalking. In contrast, more than a third (36 %) of female IPV victims reported sustaining more than one type of IPV victimization—a rate more than four times higher than the male rate of IPV poly-victimization. The most common pattern of co-occurrence for women was also physical violence and stalking, but more than a third (34.5 %) of the poly-victimized group had experienced all three types measured in that study, physical violence, stalking, and rape.

Co-occurrence has a marked impact on estimates of gender patterns. In NISVS (Black et al. 2011), physical IPV victimization was slightly higher for females, but not by a large margin: 28 % of men reported physical IPV victimization, versus 33 % of women. In other terms, physical IPV victimization was 16 % higher for women than men. If rape and stalking are included, however, the total prevalence rate was 25 % higher for women than men (36 % females; 29 % males). In another indicator that speaks to the false positive issue, if incidents were limited to those with significant psychological, physical, social, or work impacts, then the victimization rate for women was 191 % higher than it was for men (29 % of women vs. 10 % of men).

These patterns appear to be somewhat different for teen dating violence. Physical teen dating violence also highly co-occurs with many other forms of victimization, but these patterns of co-occurrence appear to be largely similar for boys and girls. Including sexual victimizations, however, does reduce seeming gender parity for teens as well, and focusing on incidents that were injurious or frightening eliminates it.

*Bullying and other peer aggression.* A focus on co-occurrence can also help illuminate other controversies in gender patterns for violence. It is commonly perceived that girls are more relationally aggressive than boys, although a recent meta analysis found no evidence for gender differences in peer relational aggression (Card et al. 2008). The co-occurrence of peer relational, verbal, and physical aggression is different for boys and girls, and this probably accounts for some common misperceptions about gender differences. Boys are much more likely to be poly-perpetrators of physical and relational aggression, including bullying through physical intimidation and harassment (taking lunch money, threatening, vandalizing lockers or belongings, etc.). Girls are more likely to be mono-perpetrators of just relational aggression (or mono-victims of relational aggression), which may contribute to the impression that the best exemplar of relational aggression is female behavior. A subset of girls also appear to follow a fairly gender-specific developmental trajectory, where their physical aggression decreases across the school years, as it does for most youth, but relational aggression increases (Coté et al. 2007). For boys, these two forms of aggression are more highly correlated.

These different patterns of co-occurrence combine with the different, gendered content of peer aggression. Boys often sexually harass other boys by impugning



their sexuality or verbally harass peers by questioning their adherence to the “boy code,” which involves living up to standards of emotional stoicism, personal honor, and enjoyment of physical force (Pollack 2006). Many measures of relational aggression, however, do not include items that assess these forms of aggression, and thus can give mistaken impressions of the peer climate for boys. Girls’ relational aggression often focuses on relationships themselves—who is liked, who is not. Although girls’ sexuality is often impugned too, girls are more typically expected to walk a narrow (if not nonexistent) line between being deemed too sexually naive or too sexually promiscuous. Of course, all of this content largely ignores the limited agency of adolescents or pre-adolescents to control or even understand these aspects of their behaviors or personality.

## Gender and Co-occurrence: The Big Picture

The patterns noted in both of these specific examples extend more broadly. Males are more likely to be poly-perpetrators for acts ranging from criminal offending to school aggression. The patterns are more variable for victimization. Evidence suggests that boys are more often poly-victims than girls (Turner et al. 2010), largely because of higher rates of exposure to community violence and more experiences of peer physical assault. Among youth, male-on-male violence is the most common pattern for a wide variety of offenses (Hamby et al. 2011b), and the most common pattern of a great deal of criminal offending, including homicide, is also male on male. Thus, this creates higher levels of not only of poly-perpetration but also poly-victimization. For other types of victimization, such as IPV, women are more likely to be poly-victims than men (Black et al. 2011).

Males also typically have different developmental trajectories of co-occurrence than females. Males who are victimized in early childhood are more likely to have dual involvement in violence as perpetrator-victims, while females are more likely to be revictimized. Some females perpetrate high rates of relational aggression without physical aggression, while physical and relational aggression tends to stay more closely linked for boys (Côté et al. 2007). Of course, exceptions to every pattern exist. There are substantial numbers of female poly-perpetrators, female perpetrator victims, and male repeat victims. A better understanding of how co-occurrence varies by gender offers promise as one avenue for advancing our understanding of how men and women are involved in violence.

## Conclusions

The existing epidemiology on co-occurrence among forms of violence indicates that extensive overlap is the norm, not the exception. Although many violence professionals are aware of particular linkages related to their area of specialty, there



needs to be greater recognition that the web of violence extends over time, across the lifespan and even through generations. Interconnections extend across settings and relationships. Much existing research has focused on the interconnections of seemingly similar types of violence, such as the overlap between child physical abuse and exposure to domestic violence, or an individual who was physically abused as a child turning into a parent perpetrator. The latest data, however, suggest that these morphological similarities do not create stronger linkages than other interconnections. Rather, these interconnections occur because the causal antecedents and developmental trajectories are similar for many forms of violence and victimization. For example, all forms of family violence are closely interrelated—not just different types of physical family violence—because deficits in emotion regulation and other key causes of violence can create multiple problems in the family context and can be passed across family members via social learning or other mechanisms. In the [Chap. 3](#), we synthesize existing knowledge on the etiology of the web of violence.

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