

**SEXUAL ASSAULT DURING AND AFTER
SEPARATION/DIVORCE:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

Final Report

(NIJ Grant # 2002-WG-BX-0004 9/1/02 to 1/1/04)

Submitted to:

Violence and Victimization Research Division
National Institute of Justice
810 Seventh St., NW
Washington, DC 20531
July 30, 2005
Revised: TBA

Principal Investigator:

Walter S. DeKeseredy, Ph.D.
Criminology, Justice & Policy Studies
University of Ontario Institute of Technology
Oshawa, Ontario
Canada L1H 7K4
Phone: (905) 721-3111, Ext. 3412
Fax: 905-721-3372
Email: walter.dekeseredy@uoit.ca

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS i

SUMMARY iii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

Purpose of the Study 1

Project Goals and Objectives 3

Conceptualization of Separation/Divorce Sexual Assault 5

Definition of Sexual Assault 7

Summary 9

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 11

Summary 15

CHAPTER 3: METHODS 16

Preparatory Research 17

Sample Selection and Recruitment 18

Interviewing Procedures 20

Summary 23

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 24

Types and Timing of Abuse 24

Characteristics of Men Who Sexually Assaulted their Ex-Partners 31

Consequences of Separation/Divorce Sexual Assault 41

Social Support 47

Summary 59

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS 62

New Directions in Empirical Work 62

New Directions in Theoretical Work 65

Policy Recommendations 69

New Directions in Reducing Separation/Divorce Sexual Assault

in Rural Communities 78

Conclusion 91

**APPENDIX A: SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT
SCREEN QUESTIONS** 94

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 102

REFERENCES 110

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research presented in this report could not have been done without the participation of 43 rural Ohio women who took the time and effort to answer highly sensitive questions about the types of pain and suffering they endured when they wanted to leave, were in the process of leaving, or when they left their marital/cohabiting partners. Their courage, strength, and support will always be remembered. I hope the results of this project will enhance their safety and well-being and contribute to the creation of effective policies aimed at curbing the brutal male behaviors vividly described in this report.

This study was supported by a grant provided by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) of the U.S. Department of Justice (grant # 2002-WG-BX-004). My grant monitors Katharine Darke and Leora Rosen are truly outstanding sources of support and guidance, and I greatly appreciate their kindness and patience. Others affiliated with NIJ's Violence and Victimization Division also provided me with encouragement and valuable advice, including Bernie Auchter, Karen Bachar, Catherine McNamee, and Angela Moore Parmley.

Indeed, this project is the product of a collective effort. Obviously, it could not be completed without the assistance provided by many men and women heavily involved in the ongoing and ever changing struggle to end woman abuse. People affiliated with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, the Athens County Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Ohio Coalition Against Sexual Assault, various social services based in Athens and other parts of rural Ohio (e.g., My Sister's Place), the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and other organizations played a key role in the developmental and data

gathering phases of this exploratory project. Many thanks also go to my energetic and deeply committed research assistants Megan Cameron, Danielle Fagen, Mandy Hall, Carolyn Joseph, and McKenzie Rogness. Note, too, that Dr. Judith Grant helped me come into contact with abuse survivors and made many other important contributions to various stages of this study, including patiently waiting for calls from potential interviewees and helping to train the research team.

The seeds of this research were actually sown in discussions held with Raquel Kennedy Bergen, Mary Koss, Claire Renzetti, and Karen Bachar. Hopefully, one day the five of us will be able to conduct the study we originally planned to do together. To be expected, given my 20 years of collaborative work with him, Martin D. Schwartz also played an instrumental role in the development and completion of the work described here. His help went, as it always does, beyond the call of duty. Moreover, Joseph Donnermeyer sensitized me to many important publications on rural criminology and rural sociology that are cited in this report. In addition to helping me enhance my knowledge of rural social scientific research, Joseph took much time away from his busy schedule to exchange ideas about topics addressed in this report.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Vice President for Research at Ohio University for financial assistance to craft my proposal and for other types of support necessary to conduct this study.

SUMMARY

Since the 1970s, social scientists have greatly enhanced an empirical and theoretical understanding of various types of woman abuse in ongoing heterosexual relationships. However, although we know that breaking up with a violent man greatly increases a woman's risk of experiencing lethal and non-lethal violence, relatively little empirical and theoretical attention has been paid to the victimization of women who want to leave, are in the process of leaving, or who have left their marital/cohabiting partners. Furthermore, the limited work that has been done on this topic focuses primarily on physical violence, such as beatings and homicide. Abuse, of course, is multidimensional in nature and a few studies show that women are also at high risk of being sexually assaulted during and after separation/divorce. Still, almost all of the research on this problem, regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative, was conducted in urban areas. Thus, the main objective of this report is to help fill two major research gaps by presenting the results of a qualitative, exploratory study of separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This study was specifically designed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Are survivors of separation/divorce sexual abuse also victims of physical and psychological abuse, or is sexual assault the only type of abuse they experience?
2. Is there evidence indicating that separation/divorce sexual assault is a major problem in rural communities?
3. Is sexual assault more frequent and severe during or after separation/divorce?

4. Is separation/divorce sexual assault multidimensional in nature? For example, do survivors of this abuse, like survivors of sexual assault in ongoing relationships, experience different types of forced sexual activity?
5. Based on survivors' point of view, what are the major characteristics of men who sexually assault their ex-partners?
6. What are the psychological, physical, and economic effects of separation/divorce sexual assault?
7. Based on survivors' perspectives, what types of social support and intervention strategies are most effective?
8. What new directions should be taken to develop and test explanatory models of separation/divorce sexual assault?
9. What are the implications for further qualitative and quantitative research on separation/divorce sexual assault?

In addition to trying to enhance a social scientific understanding of a problem that has garnered limited attention from the media, the scientific community, and the criminal justice system, the research team was equally concerned with generating policy-relevant data that can be used to tailor more effective prevention and social support services for a group of women who continue to suffer in silence. Too often, separation/divorce does not end abuse and thus it is necessary to develop policies and practices that meet the unique needs of women victimized by sexual violence during and after the process of leaving marital/cohabiting relationships.

A broad definition of separation/divorce guides this study. For example, a woman does not need to be legally tied to a man to experience sexual assault during or after

exiting a relationship. Further, many women cannot leave a relationship for a host of reasons but emotionally separate from their partners. Thus, here, I use the term separation/divorce to mean physically, legally, or emotionally exiting a marital/cohabiting relationship. Further, guided by empirical work done by Dr. Mary Koss and her colleagues in the late 1980s, the types of sexual assault described by 43 rural Ohio women was classified as follows:

- *Sexual Contact* includes sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting) arising from menacing verbal pressure, misuse of authority, threats of harm, or actual physical force.
- *Sexual Coercion* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority.
- *Attempted rape* includes attempted unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.
- *Rape* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Developed by Walter DeKeseredy, McKenzie Rogness, and Martin Schwartz, the integrated theoretical model that informs this study includes the following variables: societal patriarchy; male proprietariness; exiting; threats to masculinity and patriarchal control; patriarchal male peer support; and separation/divorce sexual assault. Referred to by these sociologists as a feminist/male peer support model, some empirical support for it

is presented in Chapter 4. Still, after carefully analyzing the results and reading more rural sociological and criminological literature, it is evident that further theoretical work needs to take in account factors such as rural social and economic transformations that have occurred since the end of the last century. Thus, in Chapter 5, a new theoretical model is offered, one that addresses this variable, as well as male peer support and rural challenges to masculine identity.

METHODS

As described in this report, researchers encounter many obstacles while conducting rural studies of woman abuse. However, some of these problems were overcome or minimized using a variety of methods. The first step was preparatory research. This involved several meetings, electronic mail exchanges, and in-depth telephone conversations with leading researchers in the field, local shelter staff, sexual assault advocates, police officers, mental health workers, and others with a vested interest in curbing separation/divorce sexual assault and other types of woman abuse. Then, techniques like those used by Dr. Lee Bowker approximately 24 years ago in Milwaukee were used to generate a sample. For example, an advertisement was placed twice in a free newspaper available throughout Athens, County, Ohio. Also, posters about the study were pinned up in public places, such as courthouses and were given to social service providers who came into contact with abused women.

In addition:

- Two local newspapers gave considerable coverage to the project.
- Ohio University sent out a press release to newspapers and other Ohio-based media.

- Three local radio stations and Ohio University's television station carried public service announcements about the study.
- The director of the local shelter and I appeared on a local television news show to discuss this project and broader issues related to it.
- The Ohio Domestic Violence Network and other agencies told interested parties (e.g., rural shelter workers) about the study and helped to recruit participants.
- Local shelter staff, a police department social worker, employees of the county sheriff's department, Planned Parenthood, Women's Center staff at a local two-year college, and employees of the local Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate Program informed possible respondents about the study.
- Ohio University sociologist Judith Grant told women who participated in her addiction study about this research.
- Index-like cards with the information provided in the recruiting poster were routinely placed on top of newspaper boxes inside stores and on sidewalks in Athens, Ohio.

From early March 2003 until early April 2004, two female research assistants carried cellular phones 24 hours a day to receive calls from women interested in participating in the study. Callers were told the purpose of the project and were then asked a series of screening questions to determine their eligibility to be interviewed. The main criteria were being 18 years of age or older and having ever had any type of unwanted sexual experience when they wanted to end, were trying to end, or after they had ended a relationship with a husband or live-in male partner. If they met the selection criteria, the women were invited to a semi-structured face-to-face interview at a time and place of

their choosing, and they were paid \$25.00 for their time. They were also given \$7.75 for travel expenses and an index card listing the locations and phone numbers of local support services for survivors.

Female research assistants tape-recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. Most of them took about 90 minutes and a total of 43 women participated in this study. Posters placed in public places attracted most of our respondents (n=27). Eight women called after exposure to ads or media stories about the study, and the same number were referred to us by individuals or organizations. Most respondents (n=30) lived in Athens County, Ohio, three lived in Hocking County, Ohio, one lived in Vinton County, Ohio, and nine lived in other rural parts of the state. The mean age of the sample was 35 and the mean income for 2002 was \$13,588. Sixty-five percent (n=28) had some type of post-secondary education and close to half of the participants were unemployed. Of the 25 who had been married, all got divorced or legally separated, but only five remarried. Most of the respondents also had children.

FINDINGS

The key findings are categorized under these headings: types and timing of abuse; characteristics of men who sexually assaulted their ex-partners; consequences of separation/divorce sexual assault; and social support.

Types and Timing of Abuse

- Only a few respondents experienced just one of the above forms of separation/divorce sexual assault, and virtually all experienced rape or attempted rape.

- Most (80%) of the women were victimized by two or more variants of other types of abuse, such as physical violence and the destruction of prized possessions.
- Nineteen percent of the respondents stated that their partners abused their children and one woman believes that her ex-partner raped her as a means of killing her unborn child.
- Seventy-four percent (n = 32) of the respondents said that they were sexually assaulted when they expressed a desire to leave their relationships. Forty-nine percent (n = 21) were sexually abused while they were trying to leave or while they were leaving and 33% (n = 14) were victimized after they left.
- Compared to cohabiting women (33%, n = 6), married women (47%, n = 12) were more likely to report being abused while still in the relationship, before expressing a desire to exit, trying to exit, or exiting their relationships. At the next stage, when the women reported that they wanted to leave their abusive relationship, 20 of the 25 married women (80%) stated that they were sexually assaulted, while 12 of the 18 cohabiting women (67%) stated that their assaults occurred at this point in time.

Characteristics of Men who Sexually Assaulted their Ex-Partners

- Sixty-seven percent (n = 29) of the interviewees reported on a variety of ways in which their partners' male peers perpetuated and legitimated separation/divorce sexual assault. Three methods in particular stand out: frequently drinking with male friends, informational support, and attachment to abusive peers.

- Seventy-nine percent of the sample said that their partners strongly believed that men should be in charge and control of domestic household settings.
- Regardless of whether they consumed it in groups, 65% of the sample's estranged partners viewed pornography, and it was reported to be involved in sexually abusive events experienced by 30% of the interviewees.
- More than half (58.14%) of the women said that male offenders had guns and some perpetrators even threatened to use them.
- Over 65% (n = 28) of the women interviewed said that their partners used illegal drugs and that their consumption of these substances contributed to abusive behaviors.

Consequences of Separation/Divorce Sexual Assault

- Women experienced a wide range of negative outcomes, including low self-esteem, fear, nightmares, and a myriad of physical health problems.
- All of the survivors interviewed developed a host of adverse post-assault psychological outcomes, such as depression, sexual aversion, and fear.
- Many respondents mentioned physical scars.
- For many interviewees, exiting a relationship was financially devastating.

Social Support

- Data uncovered by this study strongly suggest that if there are high levels of collective efficacy in the respondents' communities, they do not function to prevent and deter separation/divorce sexual assault. For example, most of the interviewees (84%) stated that women experiencing unwanted sex in their

community is a major problem and 81% reported that rape or sexual assault is also a serious problem.

- That 81% of the respondents stated that they personally know other women who were sexually assaulted provides further evidence that such victimization is a major problem in some rural Ohio communities and that little is being done to prevent it.
- Over half (58%) of the interviewees do not feel safe when they are at home.
- Eighty-four percent of the respondents stated that they could not count on their neighbors to help solve their personal problems.
- Sixty-seven percent of the sample did not get together with their neighbors in a typical week.
- Fifty-eight percent of the women turned to at least one friend for help, but most of their friends did not live near them. Further, 44% sought assistance from the police and 40% received help from a local shelter.
- The interviewees' voices reveal that formal and better intervention by state authorities is more important for them than focusing on collective efficacy at this point in time.
- Only one of the respondents who turned to at least one element of the criminal justice system for help stated that it was the best assistance she received.
- Most interviewees turned to several different sources of social support.
- Most interviews found their friends to be the best source of social support.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER EMPIRICAL, THEORETICAL, AND POLICY WORK

This study shows that exiting or trying to exit a marital/cohabiting relationship increases women's chances of being sexually assaulted, especially if they are connected to patriarchal or abusive men. However, there is still much that we do not know about separation/divorce sexual assault in rural and urban communities. Certainly, much more empirical and theoretical work is needed. Of course, it is also necessary to develop policies and practices that meet the unique needs of women who are terrorized by men who will not let them leave and men who they have left.

New Directions in Empirical Work

Regardless of whether separation/divorce sexual assault studies are conducted in rural or urban settings, data gathered from men are needed to more precisely determine the factors that motivate them to be abusive. Moreover, representative sample surveys of rural and urban populations would help determine the incidence and prevalence of separation/divorce sexual assault. Such rural research is undoubtedly difficult to do, given the methodological obstacles discussed in Chapter 3. Further, there are many other groups of men and women who need to be included in future research, such as those who are immigrants, living in public housing, have physical disabilities, and so on.

This is one of the first studies to apply collective efficacy theory to woman abuse in intimate, heterosexual relationships. Obviously, more research is needed, including studying the perceptions and experiences of rural women who are not abused. Another point to consider is that almost all studies of collective efficacy/social disorganization and crime use quantitative techniques, such analyses of census data. Nevertheless, many rural

social problems are not easy to study using such methods, which is perhaps one of the key reasons why so few researchers focus on woman abuse in rural areas. Further, quantitative methods alone cannot adequately describe the complexities of rural woman abuse and community responses to it. Thus, it is essential to continue using other methods to examine community characteristics that affect separation/divorce sexual assault and other forms of woman abuse. One suggestion is to specifically design a qualitative project that focuses exclusively on the topics of central concern to this report and that uses in-depth interviews and participant observations of community relations.

New Directions in Theoretical Work

Again, results described in Chapter 4 lend some support for the theoretical model presented in Chapter 2. Still, this perspective serves as a starting point for future theorizing and subsequent offerings need to take into account factors discussed previously. The rural masculinity crisis/male peer support model of separation/divorce sexual assault presented in Chapter 5 addresses this concern and hopefully it or other new theories will be tested in subsequent studies of separation/divorce sexual assault in rural communities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The most common policy recommendations made by the 43 respondents are education, creating awareness, listening to the voices of survivors, criminal justice reforms, and subsidized housing. Based on data derived from these women, my previous empirical work, and a review of the extant literature on woman abuse in rural communities, I suggest that these and the following other policies be implemented as soon as possible and throughout all rural U.S. communities:

- Travel subsidies.
- Job training and education.
- Increased funding for rural service providers.
- The development of and support for small, community-based businesses and small industrial districts.
- Community capacity building.

The policies proposed by 43 rural Ohio women and me are not the only effective solutions to problems experienced by survivors of separation/divorce sexual assault. Rather, they are key elements of much need community-based, collaborative efforts. Policy development must also be highly sensitive to the ways in which broader social forces contribute to the harms identified in this report.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Over the past 35 years there have been hundreds of North American studies of different forms of woman abuse (e.g., physical, sexual and psychological) in marital/cohabiting relationships (Brownridge & Halli, 2001), all showing that male-to-female victimization in these heterosexual unions is a major public health problem (Krishan, Hilbert, & Pase, 2001). What is to be done about this brutal ongoing threat to women's health and safety? Scores of people, including criminal justice officials, shelter workers and other practitioners, contend that the "most important weapon" women have in the battle to end their partners' abuse is to divorce or separate from them (Schwartz, 1988; Walker, Logan, Jordan, & Campbell, 2004). Although large numbers of women in abusive marital/cohabiting relationships continue to live in these "dangerous domains" for reasons beyond their control such as economic dependency (Johnson, 1996; Websdale & Johnson, 2005), most battered women eventually "flee the house of horrors" (Schwartz, 1989; Sev'er, 2002).¹ Still, for many targets of "intimate intrusions" (Stanko, 1985), separation or divorce alone does not solve the problem of woman abuse (Buzawa, Hotaling, Klein, & Byrne, 1999; DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, & Hall, 2006).

¹ Between 50 and 90 percent of battered women in the U.S. try to leave abusive relationships (Block, 2003; Davis, 1999; DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2003; Horn, 1992).

Many men do not leave their ex-partners alone and their “visits can be deadly” (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Campbell et al., 2003).² As Polk (2003, p. 134) reminds us, “[T]ime and time again the phrase ‘if I can’t have you , no one will’ echoes through the data on homicide in the context of sexual intimacy.” Women who exit or try to leave relationships are also at high risk of experiencing non-lethal violence (e.g., acts that do not result in death).³ Consider that Fleury, Sullivan and Bybee (2000) found that over one third of the 135 women who participated in their longitudinal study were assaulted by a male ex-partner during a two-year time period. Based on studies reviewed here and elsewhere (e.g., DeKeseredy, Rogness, & Schwartz, 2004), we can confidently conclude, then, that the risks of non-lethal violence and homicide are highest when women seek freedom from abusive men.

Sexual assaults also occur when women are wanting to end, planning to end, are trying to end, are in the process of ending, or have ended a relationship with a marital/cohabiting partner. However, less than a handful of North American studies have focused on these harms and most of the data on them are found in the small amount of feminist literature on what is variously termed marital rape, spousal rape, wife rape or sexual assault in marriage (DeKeseredy et al., 2004). Moreover, almost all of the limited empirical work on separation/divorce sexual assault, regardless of whether it is

² See Browne, Williams and Dutton (1999), DeKeseredy et al. (2004), Ellis and DeKeseredy (1997), Hardesty (2002) and Walker et al. (2004) for reviews of the extant social scientific literature on male-to-female homicide during separation/divorce.

³ A recent literature review reveals that separated women have 30 times the risk for non-lethal violence as married women and the risk for divorced women is nine times higher than that for married women (Brownridge, in press).

qualitative or quantitative, was done in urban areas, such as Boston and San Francisco (e.g., Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Kurz, 1995; Russell, 1990). Thus, the main objective of this report is to help fill two major research gaps by presenting the results of an exploratory study of separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To date, there are no adequate answers to the following questions of central concern to this study:

1. Are survivors of separation/divorce sexual abuse also victims of physical and psychological abuse, or is sexual assault the only type of abuse they experience?
2. Is there evidence indicating that separation/divorce sexual assault is a major problem in rural communities?
3. Is sexual assault more frequent and severe during or after separation/divorce?
4. Is separation/divorce sexual assault multidimensional in nature? For example, do survivors of this abuse, like survivors of sexual assault in ongoing relationships, experience different types of forced sexual activity, such as “sadistic,” “battering,” or “obsessive” rape (Bergen, 1996; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985)?
5. Based on survivors’ point of view, what are the major characteristics of men who sexually assault their ex-partners?
6. What are the psychological, physical, and economic effects of separation/divorce sexual assault?
7. Based on survivors’ perspectives, what types of social support and intervention strategies are most effective?

8. What directions should be taken to develop and test explanatory models of separation/divorce sexual assault?
9. What are the implications for further qualitative and quantitative research on separation/divorce sexual assault?

Methods described in Chapter 3 were used to answer these questions.

Nevertheless, this study is much more than an empirical enterprise. Of course, one of the major goals is to enhance a social scientific understanding of a problem that has garnered limited attention from the media, the scientific community, and the criminal justice system. However, the research team is equally concerned with generating policy-relevant data that can be used to tailor more effective prevention and social support services for a group of women who continue to suffer in silence. Again, too often, separation/divorce does not end abuse and thus it is necessary to develop policies and practices that meet the unique needs of women who are terrorized by sexual violence during and after the process of leaving marital/cohabiting relationships. As Bergen (2006, p. 6) discovered, “there is often a failure on behalf of others including police officers, religious advisors, battered women’s shelter advocates, and rape crisis counselors to provide adequate assistance.”

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RURAL

The first problem in any study of rural communities is to attempt to grasp the notion of what “rural” could mean. “Like concepts such as ‘truth,’ ‘beauty,’ or ‘justice,’ everyone knows the term rural, but non one can define it precisely” (Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells, 1994, p. 6). Further, as Websdale (1998, p. 40) reminds us, “Ultimately, the definition of rural communities is arbitrary and open to debate.” Still, following

DeKeseredy, Donnermeyer, Schwartz, Tunnell, and Hall (in press), I contend that four things are common in most, but not all criminological conceptualizations of places identified as rural. Although these characteristics are true to a certain extent, they must be considered with care as they also can serve to produce stereotypical images that suppress serious discussion of all types of crime and related issues in the rural context. First, rural places have, by definition, smaller populations and lower population densities. Second, people who live in rural areas are more likely to “know each other’s business, come into regular contact with each other, and share a larger core of values than is true of people in urban areas” (Websdale, 1995, p. 102). Third, today, rural communities are much less autonomous than before. For example, the standardization of education, communication, transportation, and economic modes of production has removed some of the unique parts of rural culture and narrowed the difference between rural and urban life styles (DeKeseredy et al., in press; Fisher, 1995; Krannich & Luloff, 2002; Ritzer, 2002). Moreover, rural areas are greatly influenced by external, cultural, economic and social forces, depending on their proximity to cities, industries with absentee ownership, tourism, and the development policies in nation-states (Donnermeyer, Barclay, & Jobes, 2006; Hobbs, 1995).

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SEPARATION/DIVORCE⁴

Can only couples that live apart be considered separated/divorced? Many surveys of marital rape such as Finkelhor and Yllo’s (1985) and the U.S. National Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS) (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), as well as surveys of nonsexual types of woman abuse, seem to define separation/divorce this way. This approach is problematic because it neglects assaults after women’s decisions and/or

⁴ This section includes modified sections of an article published previously (see DeKeseredy et al., 2006).

attempts to leave while they are locked in relationships (Mahoney, 1991; Ptacek, 1999). Many men have a “fanatical determination” to not let their spouses/live-in partners go and will use violence “to keep them in their place” (Russell, 1990). Another point to consider is that many women defy men’s patriarchal control by emotionally separating from them (DeKeseredy et al., 2004). *Emotional separation*, a major predictor of a permanent end to a relationship, is defined as a women’s denial or restriction of sexual relations and other intimate exchanges (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). Emotionally exiting a relationship can be just as dangerous as physically or legally exiting one because it, too, increases the likelihood of male violence and sexual abuse (DeKeseredy et al., 2006; Kayser, 1993; Kirkwood, 1993; Markman & Notarius, 1994; Russell, 1990). For example, of the 100 sexually abused women who participated in McFarlane and Malecha’s (2005) National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored study, 22% reported an emotional separation before the first time they were sexually assaulted.

Separation/divorce is not simply a function of proximity, and a woman does not have to be legally tied to a man to experience sexual or physical assault (Bergen, 1996). For example, Brownridge and Halli’s (2001) review of 14 studies: eight done in the U.S., five in Canada, and one in New Zealand, reveals “quite dramatic” differences in violence rates obtained from married persons and cohabitators. In fact, they found that typically, the rate of violence for the latter exceeds that of the former by two times, but the difference can be greater than four times. Cohabiting women are also more likely to experience more severe types of violence than their married counterparts. Further, Canadian national representative sample survey data show that many women are sexually abused by their common-law partners, and male cohabitators are more likely to sexually abuse their

partners than those in casual or serious dating relationships (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998a). As Campbell (1989, p. 336) points out, “a marriage license probably does not change the dynamics of sexual abuse within an ongoing intimate relationship....”

Male cohabitators are at higher risk of being sexually abusive than married men. For example, Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) found that 23% of the cohabiting women in their sample experienced forced sex, compared to 3% of married women. Note, too, 25% of the women who reported forced sex were legally separated/divorced. Thus, based on the above arguments and data presented elsewhere (e.g., DeKeseredy et al., 2004), here, the term separation/divorce is used to mean physically, legally, or emotionally exiting a marital/cohabiting relationship. This project focused on women-initiated separations/divorces because, as Sev'er (1997, p. 567) reminds us, “they are the decisions that challenge male hegemony the most.” I also use a broad definition of sexual assault because it, like the physical and psychological abuse of women, takes many shapes and forms.

DEFINITION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT⁵

There are major problems with narrow definitions of sexual assault that have been covered elsewhere (DeKeseredy, 2000). Unlike many, if not most studies of sexual assault, a broad definition is used here that is not restricted to acts of forced penetration. Many women experience a wide range of sexually abusive behaviors, such as assaults when they were drunk or high, or when they were unable to give consent (Bachar & Koss, 2001; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). Married and cohabiting women also experience

⁵ This section includes revised sections of articles published previously (see DeKeseredy et al., 2004, 2006).

other kinds of threats that can result in painful unwanted sex and “blackmail rapes.”

Consider what “Mrs. Brown” described to Russell (1990, p. 338). Just because there was no threat or actual use of force does not mean that her experience was not frightening or highly injurious, and she clearly labels what her first husband did as rape:

The worst raping occasion was in the morning I awoke in labor with my first child.

The hospital I was booked into was a thirty-minute drive away, and this being the first time I had undergone childbirth. I had no idea of how close I was to giving birth, or what was to happen to me next. I labored at home for a few hours until perhaps 11:00 a.m., and then said to my ex-husband that I thought we’d better go to the hospital.

The pains were acute and I was panicking that I would not be able to bear them. He looked at me, and said, “Oh, all right. But we’d better have a screw first, because it’ll be a week before you’re home again.” I couldn’t believe it, even of him. “Please, W., take me to the hospital,” I begged as another contraction stormed across my body.” “Not until we have a screw,” he insisted. I wept, I cried, I pleaded, but he wouldn’t budge. The pleading went on until midday, by which time I was frantic to get nursing help. He stood adamant with his arms crossed, a smirk on his face, and jiggling the car keys as a bribe. In the end I submitted. It took two minutes, then we dressed and drove to the hospital. The baby was born five hours later.

Most definitions also exclude unwanted sex “out of a sense of obligation” (Bergen, 1996), sexual relations stemming from ex-partners threats of fighting for sole custody of children, and other acts that do not involve the use of threats of force. Unfortunately, excluding the abusive behaviors identified here exacerbates the problem of underreporting and ultimately underestimates the extent of sexual assault (DeKeseredy et

al., 2004). Thus, guided by Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski's (1987, p. 166) conceptual and empirical work, below is how the research team classified the types of sexual assault described by 43 interviewees:

- *Sexual Contact* includes sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting) arising from menacing verbal pressure, misuse of authority, threats of harm, or actual physical force.
- *Sexual Coercion* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority.
- *Attempted rape* includes attempted unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.
- *Rape* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.

SUMMARY

Only a few social scientific areas on inquiry have moved as far and fast as the study of male-to-female physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in intimate heterosexual relationships. In fact, advances in theoretical and empirical work on this topic have even been faster paced than the major leaps in some of the physical sciences, such as computer science. For example, approximately 30 years ago, a comprehensive bibliography of North American sources on wife beating would fit on one index card (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002). But now, given the hundreds of journal articles and scores of books that address this and other forms of woman abuse, an interdisciplinary set

of abstracts, such as those included in *Violence & Abuse Abstracts: Current Literature in Interpersonal Violence*, is available and much needed. That the widely read and cited journal *Violence Against Women* is published monthly is another important statement about the extent of scholarly interest and concern about rape, stalking, and other forms of woman abuse.

We now have rich empirical information on the extent, distribution, sources, and outcomes of male-to-female victimization in a variety of relationships and social settings, such as marriage and dating. Further, many competing theories have been constructed and tested.⁶ Still, reading the extant literature on woman abuse makes it clear that we need more research on male-to-female sexual assaults during and after separation/divorce, especially those occurring in rural communities. A key objective of this exploratory study, then, was to generate semi-structured interview data about a form of sexual assault that we know little about. Note, too, that the selection of the rural research sites is a direct response to the National Institute of Justice's (2001, p. 6) call for "[m]ore research on community risk factors for sexual assault that vary across ethnic/racial populations and other distinct populations...." Like Ptacek's (1999, p. 39) study of battered women in the courtroom, in addition to providing answers to nine research questions, this project simultaneously helps move the "experiences of the most economically and politically marginalized women to the center of the analysis" and responds to scholarly requests to move beyond the "urban-exclusive orientation of criminology" (Donnermeyer et al., 2006, p. 199).

⁶ See Jasinski (2001) for a comprehensive review of the theoretical literature on woman abuse in heterosexual relationships.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK¹

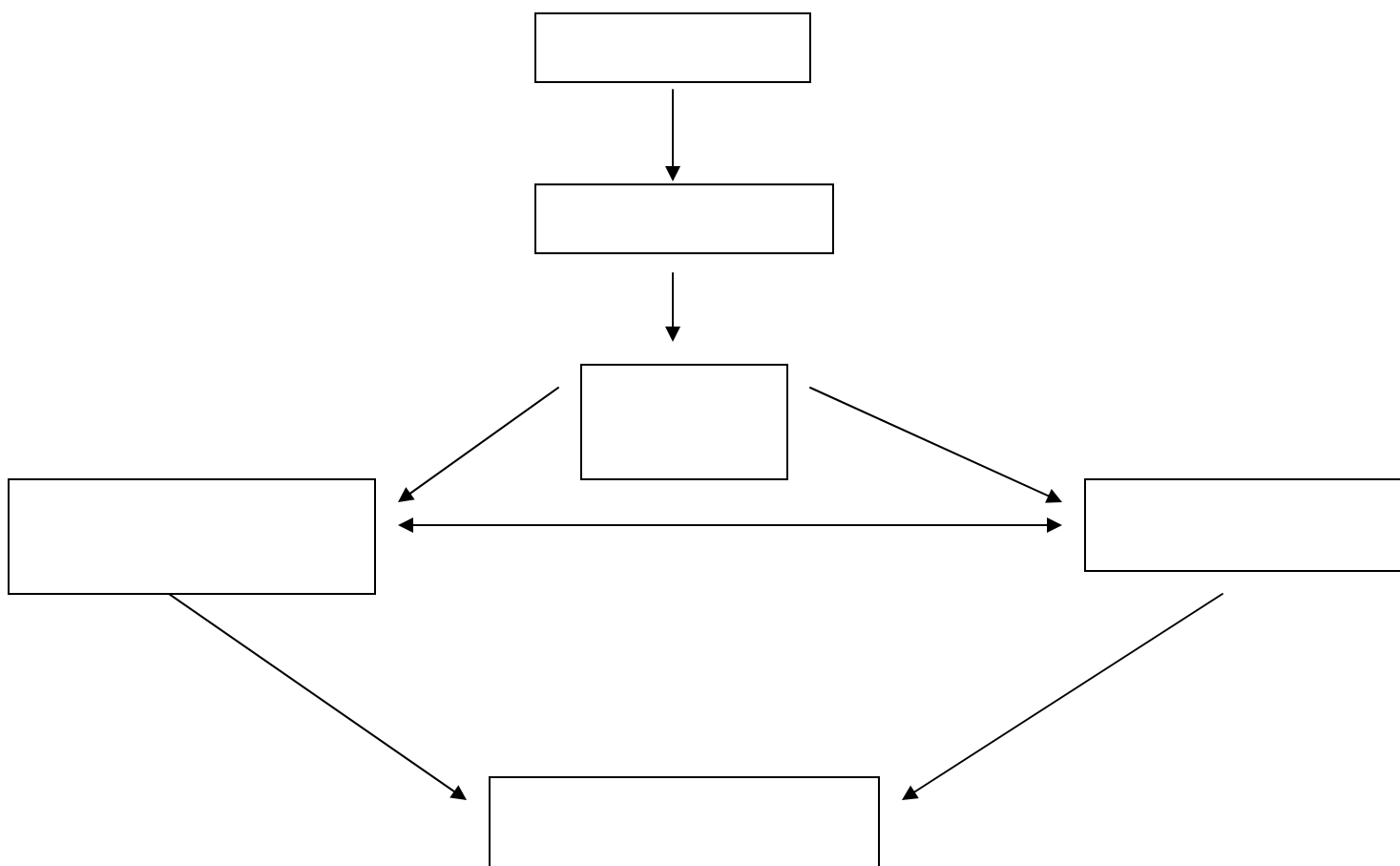
Why do men sexually assault women who want to leave them, try to leave them, or who have left them? Given the dearth of data on the motivations of men who engage in separation/divorce sexual assault, it is not surprising that until recently no theories were specifically developed to answer this question. Even the marital rape literature is essentially atheoretical because it is restricted to presenting women's opinions about why their partners assaulted them or to constructing typologies based on the information provided by female respondents (DeKeseredy et al., 2004; Mahoney & Williams, 1998). For example, Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) identified three types of rape: battering rape, force-only rape, and obsessive rape. Since these and other typologies of marital rape are reviewed elsewhere (see Bergen, 1996, 2006; Mahoney & Williams, 1998; Russell, 1990), it is beyond the scope of this report to repeat these summaries here.

The above observations should not be construed as an all-out indictment of this limited theoretical work. Certainly, marital rape researchers have identified several important risk factors (e.g., power, control, an adherence to the ideology of familial patriarchy), which is an important step toward constructing and testing theories of separation/divorce sexual assault, as well as other variants of woman abuse (Jasinski, 2001). In fact, some of the determinants mentioned by participants in marital rape studies done by Bergen (1996), Russell (1990), and others (e.g., Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985) are included in the theoretical model that informed this rural Ohio study. Described in Figure 2.1 and developed by DeKeseredy et al. (2004), this model is also guided by the

¹ This chapter includes revised sections of an article published previously by DeKeseredy et al. (2004).

theoretical literature on nonsexual forms of violence (e.g., beatings, homicide, etc.) that occur when women want to exit or have left a relationship.

FIGURE 2.1
A FEMINIST/MALE PEER SUPPORT MODEL OF
SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT



Central to all of this work is the role of patriarchal dominance and control, which is also a central theme in the marital rape literature (Bergen, 2006). For example, Rogness' (2003) integrated theory contends that macro-level factors like societal patriarchy work together with micro-level forces such as patriarchal male peer support to influence men to rape their marital/cohabiting partners. Informed by her perspective and

Jasinski's (2001) call for "acknowledging the existence of multiple risk factors" when doing theoretical work on woman abuse in general, societal patriarchy, "male proprietariness" (Wilson & Daly, 1992), and patriarchal male peer support are major components of the model presented in Figure 2.1.² Here, I briefly discuss these and other variables included in it.

Figure 2.1 situates separation/divorce within the larger context of societal patriarchy. North America is characterized by gross gender inequity (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). For example, in 33 U.S. states, under law, a man can be awarded conditional exemptions if he raped his wife (Bergen, 2006). Many more examples of patriarchal practices and discourses could easily be provided. Nevertheless, the key point to consider is that a constant such as societal patriarchy cannot explain a variable such as changes in the frequency and severity of male sexual assaults on women who want to or who have left them (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). In other words, if we live in a patriarchal society that promotes male proprietariness, why, then, do some men sexually assault during or after the exiting process, whereas most others do not? For instance, data generated by a number of researchers using patriarchal ideology scales of one kind or another indicate that there are variations in male proprietariness (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Smith, 1990), which is "the tendency [of men] to think of women as sexual and reproductive 'property' they can own and exchange" (Wilson & Daly, 1992, p. 85). Proprietariness refers to "not just the emotional force of [the male's] own feelings of entitlement but to a

² This model is also informed by perspectives offered by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993, 2002), Ellis and DeKeseredy (1997), and Wilson and Daly (1992).

more pervasive attitude [of ownership and control] toward social relationships [with intimate female partners]” (p. 85).

Many women resist or eventually will resist their spouse/cohabiting partners’ proprietariness in a variety of ways, such as arguing, protesting, and fighting back if they have been abused (Bergen, 1996; Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997; Sev’er, 2002; Websdale, 1998). There are also women, although the precise number is unknown, who defy men’s control by exiting or trying to exit a relationship and this may involve emotional separation, obtaining a separate residence, and/or starting or completing a legal separation/divorce. Regardless of how a woman does it, her attempt to exit or her successful departure from a sexist relationship challenges male proprietariness, but exiting alone, like single factors, cannot account for sexual assault. For example, many abusive patriarchal men have male friends with similar beliefs and values and these peers reinforce the notion that women’s exiting is a threat to a man’s masculinity (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002). Further, many members of patriarchal peer groups view wife beating, rape, and other forms of male-to-female victimization as legitimate and effective means of repairing “damaged patriarchal masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 1993; Raphael, 2001). Not only do these men verbally and publicly state that sexual assault and other forms of abuse are legitimate means of maintaining patriarchal authority and control, they also serve as role models because many of them physically, sexually, and psychologically harm their own intimate partners (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002).

In short, patriarchal male peer support contributes to the perception of damaged masculinity and motivates sexually abusive men to “lash out against the women...they can no longer control” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 214). Another point to consider is that if a

patriarchal man's peers see him as a failure with women because his partner wants to leave or has left him, he is likely to be ridiculed because he "can't control his woman." Hence, like many college men who rape women, he is likely to sexually assault her to regain status among his peers. Similar to other men who rape female strangers, acquaintances or dates, the sexual assaults committed by men during or after the process of separation/divorce may have much more to do with their need to sustain their status among their peers than either a need to satisfy their sexual desires or a longing to regain a loving relationship (Godenzi, Schwartz, & DeKeseredy, 2001).

SUMMARY

Figure 2.1 serves as a building block for future theoretical construction. Obviously, as uncovered by this study, there are other factors that contribute to separation/divorce sexual assault, such as male consumption of pornography and alcohol (Russell, 1990, 1998), formal and informal interventions (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997), everyday life-events stress (Hardesty, 2002), and rural social and economic transformations briefly described in Chapter 5. Still, of the limited theoretical work done so far, DeKeseredy et al.'s (2004) perspective seems the most promising. It is not a predictive model and it does isolate specific perpetrators; however, some of the data described in Chapter 4 provide empirical support for this integrated theory.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS¹

Answering the nine research questions listed in Chapter 1 is a daunting task, especially in rural communities characterized by geographic and social isolation (Dutton, Worrell, Terrell, Denaro, & Thompson, 2002; Krishnan, Hilbert, & VanLeeuwen, 2001; Websdale, 2005), inadequate (if any) public transportation (Lewis, 2003), the existence of a powerful “ol’ boys network” consisting of patriarchal criminal justice officials and some abusive men, and relatively low telephone subscription rates (Websdale, 1998). In rural sections of Ohio and other states, there is also a “prevailing acceptance of violence against women,” as well as community norms prohibiting survivors from publicly talking about their experiences and from seeking social support (Bogal-Allbritten & Daughaday, 1990; DeKeseredy et al., 2006; Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Logan, Stevenson, Evans, & Leukefeld, 2004). For example, one of the 43 women interviewed for this study said:

I don’t sit around and share. I keep it to myself. Um, I, I believe that’s part of my mental illness. I believe it takes a lot of it. But, I’m not one to sit around and talk about what’s happened.

Poverty is another factor precluding many rural women from coming into contact with those who can help them or will listen to their “atrocious tales” (Goffman, 1961). Unable to afford telephones, cars or to take taxis, they suffer in silence. In numerous cases, being economically disadvantaged is not simply the result of the inability to find

¹ This chapter includes revised sections of articles published previously by DeKeseredy and Joseph (2006), DeKeseredy et al. (2006), and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (in press).

work in a community plagued by joblessness. It is also a function of separation/divorce (Davis, 1999; Logan & Walker, 2004).

An even longer list of obstacles researchers encounter while conducting a rural study of separation/divorce sexual assault and other crimes could easily be provided. However, some of these problems can be overcome or minimized using methods employed in this study. It is to preparatory research that I turn to first.

PREPARATORY RESEARCH

To develop a study that effectively addresses the complexities of separation/divorce in rural Ohio communities, the research team included a “preparatory component of qualitative investigation” (MacLean, 1996). This involved several meetings, electronic mail exchanges, and in-depth telephone conversations with leading researchers in the field,² local shelter staff, sexual assault survivor advocates, police officers, mental health workers, and others with a vested interest in curbing the pain and suffering uncovered by this research. Not only did these people strongly support the study, but they also sensitized the research team to key issues not addressed in the extant social scientific literature on separation/divorce sexual assault, such as the influence of broader Ohio state politics. Moreover, they made several major contributions to the development of highly useful screening questions (see Appendix A) and a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix B). Further, they put us into contact with service providers and criminal justice officials throughout Ohio, such as those affiliated with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) and the Ohio Coalition Against

² Raquel Kennedy Bergen, Mary Koss, Karen Bachar, and Claire Renzetti devoted a substantial amount of time and effort to helping me develop this study.

Sexual Assault (OCASA). Practitioners also referred six of the 43 women who participated in this study. As Schechter (1988, p. 311) points out, activists and practitioners are experts on woman abuse and “can help researchers formulate sophisticated and intellectually rich questions.”

Following Schechter (1988) and other feminist scholars, the research team explicitly and publicly acknowledged that service providers are experts on woman abuse. Further, I routinely shared my findings with all of the practitioners who helped craft this study and I served on the Board of Directors of an Athens, Ohio Shelter. I also became an active member of the Athens County Coalition Against Sexual Assault during the data-gathering phase of the project and I am still a member of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network’s Board of Directors.

SAMPLE SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

Data on the relationship between separation/divorce and non-lethal forms of woman abuse (e.g., beatings) have been primarily derived from surveys. Simply identifying through statistical means that separated/divorced women report higher rates of violence than their married/cohabiting counterparts does not reveal whether abuse caused the termination of relationships or if it started during or after breakups (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1996). Still, it is fair to assume that the relationship between separation/divorce and woman abuse is more than a coincidence (Hardesty, 2002). However, to infer causality, alternative research methods are necessary. This is not to say that survey methods are not valuable means of answering the research questions listed in Chapter 1. The point, rather, is that to develop a richer understanding of these issues it is necessary to listen to

women's voices because it "may be the only way to describe a complex reality for which we have few names" (Mahoney, 1991, p. 41).

Again, researchers face many obstacles in their attempts to do face-to-face interviews with rural women and these same problems present themselves in any attempt to gain access in a telephone or self-report survey (Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 1996).

Therefore, techniques like those employed by Bowker (1983) in Milwaukee generated the sample. For example, the advertisement presented in Figure 3.1 was placed once a week during two different six-week periods in a free newspaper available throughout Athens County, Ohio. Also, posters about the study were pinned up in public places, such as courthouses, and were given to social service providers who come into contact with abused women.

FIGURE 3.1

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

Call for interested women of Athens, Hocking, and Vinton Counties
for participation in an Ohio University research project

Have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences while trying to leave your husband or male live-in partner?

Or, have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences after you left your husband or male live-in partner?

We would greatly appreciate your participation in a confidential interview. Your name will not be given to anyone.

We will pay you \$25.00 for your time and transportation costs. Also, we will talk to you at a time and location of your choosing.

If you would like to be interviewed, please call Mae at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or

Carolyn at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

In addition:

- Two local newspapers gave considerable coverage to the project.
- Ohio University sent out a press release to newspapers and other Ohio-based media.
- Three local radio stations and Ohio University's television station carried public service announcements about the study.
- The director of the local shelter and I appeared on a local television news show to discuss this project and broader issues related to it.
- The Ohio Domestic Violence Network and other agencies told interested parties (e.g., rural shelter workers) about the study and helped to recruit participants.
- Local shelter staff, a police department social worker, employees of the county sheriff's department, Planned Parenthood, Women's Center staff at a local two-year college, and employees of the local Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate Program informed possible respondents about the study.
- Ohio University sociologist Judith Grant told women who participated in her addiction study about the research.
- Index-like cards with the information provided in the recruiting poster were routinely placed on top of newspaper boxes inside stores and on sidewalks in Athens, Ohio.

INTERVIEWING PROCEDURES

With the assistance of Judith Grant, I trained the research assistants selected to conduct interviews with great care to ensure that they infuse a sense of “trust, safety, and intimacy” into the interviewing process (Brush, 1990; Russell, 1990; Smith, 1994).

Similar to the approach taken by Russell (1990) in the development of her marital rape survey, the training included “consciousness raising” about sexual assault and the “defining and desensitizing” of sexual words to make the interviewers as comfortable as possible with whatever language respondents might use (Smith, 1994). The local shelter staff and I also sensitized interviewers to the dominant norms and values of the people who reside in rural sections of Ohio.

Below are some concrete examples of the training techniques:³

- In-depth briefings on the nature and purpose of the study, the gender sensitive issues involved, and ways of handling potential emergency situations (e.g., respondent experiences traumatic memories).
- Having the interviewers engage in a series of mock interviews under the supervision of Judith Grant and me so that any difficulties could be identified and corrected.
- Discussions of appropriate non-verbal communication (e.g., non-judgmental body language) to be used in the interview situation.

From early March 2003 until early April 2004, two female research assistants carried cellular phones 24 hours a day to receive calls from women interested in participating in the study. Callers were told the purpose of the study and were then asked a series of screening questions to determine their eligibility to be interviewed. The main criteria were being 18 years of age or older and having ever had any type of unwanted sexual

³ These training techniques are similar to those used by researchers who conducted the first sweep of the Islington Crime Survey (Jones, MacLean, & Young, 1996), a British study that devoted considerable attention to physical and sexual assaults against women.

experience when they wanted to end, were trying to end, or after they had ended a relationship with a husband or live-in male partner. If they met the selection criteria, the women were invited to a semi-structured face-to-face interview at a time and place of their choosing, and they were paid \$25.00 for their time. They were also given \$7.75 for travel expenses and an index card listing the locations and phone numbers of local support services for survivors. Index or palm cards are much safer than sheets because they minimize the likelihood of abusive ex-partners and others (e.g., ex-partners' male friends) discovering that respondents shared their abusive experiences with others. Moreover, interviewees were invited to contact the research team at a later time if they had questions or concerns. Although the research team was deeply committed to generating rich qualitative data, it was equally, if not more, concerned with ensuring respondents' safety in communities where most residents know each other.

Six interviews were conducted over the phone, five were held off-campus, and the rest were done in an Ohio University office. Most of the participants who came to the campus did not disclose how they got there, but the research team assumed that friends or relatives drove them. Further, all of the participants did not disclose how they had access to telephones. It is reasonable to assume that they felt that revealing such information would jeopardize their safety.

Research assistants tape-recorded and transcribed the interviews. Most of them took about 90 minutes and a total of 43 women participated in this study. Posters placed in public places attracted most of our respondents ($n = 27$). Eight women called after exposure to ads or media stories about the study, and individuals or organizations referred eight other women to the research team. Most respondents ($n = 30$) lived in Athens

County, Ohio, three lived in Hocking County, Ohio, one lived in Vinton County, Ohio, and nine lived in other rural parts of the state. The mean age of the sample was 35 and the mean income for 2002 was \$13,588. Sixty-five percent (n = 28) had some type of post-secondary education and close to half of the participants were unemployed. Of the 25 who had been married, all got divorced or legally separated, but only five remarried. Most of our respondents also had children.

SUMMARY

Similar to what Bowker (1983) found when he tried to conduct a woman abuse study in Racine, Wisconsin, many rural Ohio women strongly adhere to privacy norms (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, in press) and have little faith that a promise of confidentiality will be guaranteed by survey researchers, especially those who are “outsiders” (e.g., people who are not from the community) (Lewis, 2003). For these and other reasons, alternative means of gathering data on rural separation/divorce sexual assault are necessary. Further, the methods selected for the study are by no means unorthodox. In fact, the sample selection techniques are similar to those used by Bowker (1983) to recruit Milwaukee women who have successfully “beaten wife-beating” and to procedures used by DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz, and Tomaszewski (2003) to recruit people to participate in their Canadian study of poverty and crime in public housing.

Certainly, methodological improvements are needed in future studies and Chapter 5 offers suggestions for further empirical work. I hope the data reported in Chapter 4 will motivate others to pursue these recommendations or use other approaches that may be just as good or better. Much more research needs to be done and the behaviors described in Chapter 4 constitute just the tip of the iceberg.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS¹

Based on their analysis of data from the first National Family Violence Survey, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1981, p. 32) argued that the “marriage license is a hitting license.” Their thesis includes two contentions: (1) marriage is a special institution that places women at high risk of being physically assaulted by their husbands and (2) married women are more likely to be beaten than unmarried women. If we accept Straus et al.’s argument, then the logical solution to wife abuse and other forms of male-to-female victimization is exiting (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). Stated in Chapter 1 and elsewhere (e.g., Logan & Walker, 2004), most women leave violent relationships. Nevertheless, data presented in this chapter support the widely accepted conclusion that, for many women, separation or divorce does not solve woman abuse. In fact, exiting can exacerbate this major social problem. What makes the findings presented in this chapter unique is that they reflect the abusive experiences of women who receive relatively little attention from the research community.

TYPES AND TIMING OF ABUSE

Chapter 1 lists the definitions of the four types of sexual assault used in this study. The number of respondents who ever experienced one or more of these behaviors is presented in Table 4.1. Only a few of the 43 respondents experienced just one of these forms of separation/divorce sexual assault, and virtually all experienced rape or attempted

¹ This chapter includes revised sections of materials published previously by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (in press) and DeKeseredy et al. (2006). All of the names of the women who participated in the study and who are quoted throughout this report have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

rape. As stated previously, “blackmail rapes” are not uncommon. For example, Tina wanted to leave her partner but was afraid of losing her children. Asked why her partner sexually assaulted, she replied:

Um, to punish me for leaving him. To punish me for getting pregnant, um, to punish me for embarrassing him and um, to control me.... And then something would happen and he would know it was getting close to the end of our relationship once again and he would start it. And the whole time I would be crying, but I couldn't cry loud enough because if his parents heard us he swore he would take our children away. I know he did this when he thought I was getting ready to leave and he knew that I couldn't live without my children.

Women who are the victims of intimate violence are rarely victimized only by sexual assault. Rather, they typically suffer from a variety of injurious male behaviors that include physical violence, psychological abuse, economic blackmail or abuse such as denying women money even if they earn wages, harm to animals or possessions to which they have attachments, or stalking behavior. Most (80%) of the women were victimized by two or more of these forms of abuse. The rates at which they reported are presented in Table 4.2, where each different type of abuse is counted once, but a single person can be counted in more than one category.

TABLE 4.1**SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVALENCE RATES (N = 43)**

TYPE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT	N	%
Sexual Contact	19	44
Sexual Coercion	32	74
Attempted Rape	8	18
Rape	35	81

Joan was one woman harmed by various types of abuse during the process of exiting her relationship:

Well, what happened was that he got drunk and wanted sex from me and I told him no. I said, “Stay away from me. I can’t stand you when you’re drinking. Get away from me. He started grabbing my butt, and playing with my legs, and trying to grab my boobs. And everything, anything to get what he wanted. And I told him, I kicked him in the leg and I told him, “Get away from me.” And then got into a fight over it and the he started throwing stuff at my face and I went to the phone and I said, “I’m gonna call your probation officer.” I says, “If you don’t leave me alone and you’ve been drinking, you’re acting like an ass. Leave me the hell alone.” And he wouldn’t. He unplugged the phone. I plugged it in, I plugged it, you know. It was back and forth. He unplugged, I plugged it in. He unplugged it, I plugged it in.... [W]hen he was trying to prevent me from getting the phone,

he stepped on my foot, which fractured the top of my foot. I was on crutches for two weeks.

TABLE 4.2

NONSEXUAL ABUSE PREVALENCE RATES (N = 43)

TYPE OF NONSEXUAL ABUSE	N	%
Physical Violence	36	84
Psychological Abuse	38	88
Economic Abuse	30	70
Abuse of Pets	5	12
Stalking	16	37
Destruction of Prized Possessions	22	51

Table 4.2 shows that most victims of separation/divorce sexual assault are also hurt by other highly injurious acts. Sometimes they are not the only ones injured by ex-partners. For example, 19% of the respondents stated that their partners abused their children and one woman believes that her ex-partner raped her as a means of killing her unborn child. Below is what Trina's ex-husband did to her daughter:

He came back October of the same year for a so-called emergency visitation, and he was able to take my daughter away from me for eight hours even though the DNA had never been proven. And, when my daughter finally came back, she had severe diaper rash, smelled like cigarettes and alcohol, and had bruises right, right on her thighs and on her wrists.

Some men did not hit their children or force them to have sex, but behaved in other ways that are sexually and psychologically abusive. Below is one example that involved the use of pornography shortly after this man realized that his wife was going to leave him:

I walked into him masturbating in front of my children to *Penthouse*.... There were naked pictures, well not naked, but pictures of me in a bra and underwear that he had stolen and had developed.

When is the most likely time for separation/divorce sexual assault to occur? As other studies discovered (e.g., Sev'er, 1997), it may be when a woman expresses a desire to leave a relationship. Seventy-four percent (n = 32) were sexually assaulted at that time. Forty-nine percent (n = 21) were sexually abused while they were trying to leave or while they were leaving and 33% (n = 14) were victimized after they left. Obviously, many of these women were victimized at two or more of these times.

It is hard to make hard comparisons from small numbers, there is no question that in this sample, formerly married women reported a higher rate of sexual assault at each stage than did cohabiting women. For example, compared to cohabiting women (33%, n = 6), married women (47%, n = 12) were more likely to report being abused while still in the relationship, before expressing a desire to exit, trying to exit, or exiting their relationships. At the next stage, when the women reported that they wanted to leave their abusive relationship, 20 of the 25 married women (80%) stated that they were sexually assaulted, while 12 of the 18 cohabiting women (67%) said that their assaults occurred at this point in time. These marital status variations data are obviously distinct from those uncovered by Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) and may be the result of married men perceiving greater threats to their sense of entitlement and a stronger adherence to the belief that their wives are their property (Bergen, 1996).

In sum, then, in response to the first four research questions listed in Chapter 1, many survivors of separation/divorce sexual assault experienced other forms of abuse

and separation/divorce sexual assault is multidimensional in nature. Moreover, the most likely time for sexual assault to occur is when a woman expresses a desire to exit a relationship. Since the above results were gleaned from a small biased sample, they cannot be generalized to the entire rural Ohio population. Still, these findings strongly suggest that separation/divorce sexual assault is a major social problem in rural parts of this state and these data challenge the notion of rural areas being at low risk for violent crime. Certainly criminologists who accept official statistics as valid have argued that there is less overall crime in rural areas, and that the greatest rural/urban difference is in violent crime. The difference is particularly striking in robbery rates (Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 1996).

Most studies depend on official statistics to support theories about the extent of rural crime. Unfortunately, under the best of circumstances official statistics are notoriously poor at gathering information on marital rape and domestic violence (DeKeseredy et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2000). Again, rural communities have characteristics that make it less likely that women will report such crimes, including the acceptance of stereotypical gender roles (Little, 2003), geographic and social isolation, such as from social services (Dutton et al., 2002; Krishnan et al., 2001; Logan, Walker, & Leukefeld, 2001), the absence of public transportation (Lewis, 2003), and a lack of economic opportunities. This lack of support and opportunity may not affect the ability of rural communities to reduce most types of crime, but it would actually act to increase interpersonal violence within the family (Osgood & Chambers, 2000). Websdale (1998) argues similarly that rural areas are characterized by social forces that have overall and generally kept violent crime to levels below those experienced in urban areas. However, his work is based on

the argument that the reason is rural patriarchal relations, including the existence of a powerful “ol’ boys network.” Websdale suggests that while there is a system of social practices that generally serve to dominate and oppress women, it operates differently in rural areas. “(T)he domination of women by men across cultures is a consistent international trend and if there is one unifying theme, one seemingly universal thread of patriarchy that inhabits most cultures, it is that of male violence” (1998, p. 48).

Thus, Gagne (1992) reported that in her study of Appalachian women that many of them were not only victimized, but were further convinced by their complete lack of support that they (at least temporarily) had no alternative but to put up with oppressive conditions. For example, women know that the local police can be friends with their abuser and may refuse to arrest on the grounds of friendship (Bell, 1989; Coorey, 1990). Others, following in Websdale’s (1998) path, argue that it is not these specific actions that combine to make conditions oppressive for these women, but that the very nature of rurality is based on male standards (Hogg & Carrington, 2006), making women generally invisible when decisions are made (Alston, 2003). A variety of studies “have demonstrated how male dominance and supremacy are displayed through symbolic leisure activities as well as more severe manifestations of control (sometimes violent)” (Little & Panelli, 2003, p. 283). Interpersonal violence for these men may be a form of proving both to themselves and others their essential masculinity and heterosexuality, at least as they define it (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2005). Further, there is a greater distrust of government in rural areas, which means that even when crimes such as marital rape occur the victim may be less likely to want the police involved than her urban counterpart (Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 1994). If rural areas are

characterized by less crime generally, but the crime that is seen is more likely to be against acquaintances and violent, and rural patriarchy serves to encourage and exacerbate men's feelings of control and power over women, then we would expect to find a high degree of physical and sexual assault against intimate partners in rural areas.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEN WHO SEXUALLY ASSAULTED THEIR EX-PARTNERS

Male Peer Support

Turning now to the fifth research question, one of the key risk factors identified in this study is patriarchal male peer support, which is defined as “attachments to male peers and the resources they provide which encourage and legitimate woman abuse” (DeKeseredy, 1990, p. 130). Except for Websdale's (1998) Kentucky study, no prior empirical attempt has been made to discern the existence, nature, and content of proabuse male social networks in rural U.S. communities. In fact, most male peer support research is quantitative and limited to explaining violence on college campuses (DeKeseredy et al., 2006; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).² Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, no study has thus far concentrated on whether male peer support contributes to sexual assault during or after the termination of any type of intimate relationship. Hence, this

² Some researchers have both used qualitative methods and left the college campus to study the relationship between male peer support and various types of woman abuse in urban areas of concentrated disadvantage (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 1995; Wilson, 1996). Sinclair (2002) found in a qualitative study that male peer support helped to explain woman abuse behavior among socially displaced youth in an eastern Ontario city. Further, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2002) offer a male peer support theory of woman abuse in public housing, but did not gather any data specifically on this topic.

study enhances a sociological understanding of the ways in which sexist male peer group dynamics perpetuate and legitimate the sexual abuse of separated/divorced rural women.

It is not surprising that male peer support was a constant theme among respondents, given that it is strongly associated with other types of woman abuse, such as date rape and wife beating (Bowker, 1983; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998a; 2002). For example, 67% (n = 29) of the interviewees reported on a variety of ways in which their partners' male peers perpetuated and legitimated separation/divorce sexual assault. Three methods in particular stand out: frequently drinking with male friends, informational support, and attachment to abusive peers. Informational support refers to the guidance and advice that influences men to sexually, physically, and psychologically abuse their female partners and attachment to abusive peers is defined as having male friends who also abuse women (DeKeseredy, 1988). These factors are identical to those found to be highly significant in predicting which men on college campuses will admit to being sexual predators (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998b; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001).

The first factor is *frequent drinking with friends*. Such drinking is often associated with the development of a particular kind of masculinity that objectifies women and endorses male behavior that can be physically and sexually violent (Campbell, 2000; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2005). While 77% (n = 33) of the women said that their former partners frequently drank alcohol,³ 63% (n = 27) said their partners

³ There is a strong relationship between offenders' alcohol consumption and intimate femicide (Sharps, Campbell, Cambell, Gary, & Webster, 2001, 2003). Intimate femicide is "the killing of females by male

spent large amounts of time with their male friends and most of the time spent together involved drinking alcohol. Further, as is the case with college men who sexually abuse women, “nights out drinking with the boys” were seen by many respondents as contexts that often supported patriarchal conversations about women and how to control them.⁴ As Susan reported:

Um, they’re basically like him. They sit around, talk about women and gossip. They’re the biggest gossips there ever was. But they sit around and brag how many times they get it and how they keep their women in line and you know just like crap, you know.

The social settings described by Susan and other respondents are also examples of the second factor of *informational support*, although these were not restricted to group drinking events. For example, one respondent’s abusive partner spent much time with his cousin, a man who “hated women” and who often called them “fuckin bitches” and “whore sluts.” Note, too, that although most of the participants did not explicitly label their partners’ peers as patriarchal, most of them are. As Lynn said, “And they just think women are their property and they can lay ‘em anytime they want to. That’s just their whole attitude about it.” Furthermore, 47% (n = 20) of the sample stated that they knew their partners’ friends also physically or sexually abused women, which indicates that *attachment to abusive peers* also contributes to separation/divorce assault. In fact, Betty

partners with whom they have, have had, or want to have, a sexual and/or emotional relationship” (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997, p. 592).

⁴ See Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) and Schwartz et al. (2001) for more detailed information on the relationship between all-male sexist conversations, alcohol consumption, and sexual assault on the college campus.

told us that *all* of her ex-partners' friends hit women or sexually assault them, and several women told us that they directly observed their partners' friends abusing female intimates. Jackie is one such participant: "I watched a friend of his who shoved a friend of mine up against a wall...and try to, you know, have his way with her."

A few perpetrators also enlisted the help of their friends to sexually abuse some of the 43 women. Such male peer support frequently involved forcing women to have sex with friends. This is what happened to Marie:

Well, him and his friend got me so wasted. They took turns with me and I remembered most of it, but, um, there was also drugs involved. Not as much on my behalf as theirs. I was just drunk. And I did remember most of it and the next morning I woke up feeling so dirty and so degraded and then it ended up getting around that I was the slut...And in my eyes that was rape due to the fact that I was so drunk. And I definitely didn't deserve that. And I was hurting. I was hurting the next day.

This incident is similar to what Sanday (1990) uncovered in her study of fraternity gang rape. In groups, some men do not rely on force to have sex with women, but rather use alcohol or drugs to "work a yes" out of them. In other words, some perpetrators, either alone or in a group, purposely get women so drunk that they cannot resist their advances, which is a form of felony forcible rape in Ohio and most other states. Although the incident described below by Carrie did not involve male peer support, it is another glaring example of using alcohol as a means of "working a yes out":

I agreed to meet with him to discuss visitation and child support for our daughter and I wanted to go to a public place after everything he had done because it

wasn't just sexual, it was mental, physical. And I showed up there. I had a couple of friends who were sitting throughout keeping an eye on me. Ordered the drink, got up to use the bathroom, drank my drink and that was pretty much the last thing I remembered until the next morning when I woke up with a killer headache and my daughter crying in her crib.... He was in bed next to me.... I had strangulation marks around my neck. I had marks around my wrists and an open wound on my face and he had obviously had sex.

A few women forced to have group sex were also beaten after going through brutal degradation ceremonies. This is what happened to Janet:

He ended up bringing someone into the relationship, which I didn't want, but he told me that if I didn't do it he would leave me. And I ended up staying with him. He was more into group sex and, and uh trying to be the big man. He wanted sex in a group thing or with his buddies or made me have sex with a friend of his. See one time he made me have sex with a friend of his for him to watch, and then he got mad and hit me afterwards. I mean he tied me up so I could watch him have sex with a 13-year-old girl. And then he ended up going to prison for it. So, I mean it was nasty.

Lorraine recalled this incident that occurred during the end of her relationship:

He wanted me to have sex with a few people. Okay, like I was telling you earlier, and I didn't want to.... And, uh, I finally did. And then I got beat for it because I did. I tried not to, but then when we did, I got beat.

Patriarchal Control

Seventy-nine percent of the sample said that their partners strongly believed that men should be in charge and control of domestic household settings. For example, Marie said that her ex-husband “wanted to be in control. He was in control for us, or you know I felt it.” Moreover, like Joan’s ex-husband, many of the interviewees’ partners isolated them to maintain control:

He didn’t allow me to socialize at all. My place was at home with the children and that’s where I was most of the time. The only thing I went out for was if they had a parent-teacher conference at school. I went for that. But no, I had no outside contact.

This is how another respondent’s partner treated her until she managed to leave him:

His favorite thing was, “If you are not going to be at work, you’re going to be here cooking and cleaning, doing laundry. And if I ever catch you sitting on your ass, I am going to beat the fuck out of you, you know.”

Most respondents stated that they were raped during or after separation/divorce because their partners wanted to show them “who was in charge.” Tanya was one of many interviewees who had a partner that was determined not to let her go:

He did it because I was his and he felt he could. And it was his way of letting me know that, ah, first of all, of letting me know that I was his. And secondly, letting me know that um, that I wasn’t safe anywhere. And I, when we were together, when he had forced me to go back together with him, ah, he, ah...raped me as another form of, of possession. And I think also as a reminder of what could

happen. And ultimately, at one point, I believed that he raped me as part of his means of killing my unborn child.

Nickie had similar experiences:

I was his property that he wanted to own me. And I was his. That's how he looked at it. I was his property and that's all that I felt I was to him, way just a lay, you know. But that's all he wanted me for was to satisfy himself.... He would deprive me. It was more of a mental torture, emotionally, mental torture than physical except in the sex it was physical. "You're mine and I'm gonna have you whether you want it or not. I want you." He was in control. And that's what it's all about with men like that. They have to be in control.

The fact that close to 80% of the men who abused their partners adhered to the ideology of familial and/or societal patriarchy may also partially explain why so many perpetrators had peers who were sexist or abusive. For example, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998a) uncovered a strong statistical relationship between Canadian college men's patriarchal attitudes and beliefs and their affiliations with male peers who perpetuate and legitimate physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in dating relationships. More specifically, these researchers found that Canadian college men who report abusing their girlfriends and dating partners are more likely than those who do not report abusive behavior to endorse an ideology of familial patriarchy. They also found that these men are even more likely to be abusive if male peers support their sexist ideology and injurious behaviors.