

Violence Within ≡ the Family

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Sharon D. Herzberger



S O C I A L P S Y C H O L O G Y S E R I E S

Violence Within the Family



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Violence Within the Family

Social Psychological Perspectives



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PREFACE

Pick up any newspaper and you can probably find a story about a case of family violence. One prominently featured case involved two brothers who killed their parents to escape from abuse (as the defense claimed) or to inherit their parents' estate (as the prosecution contended). Another story featured a wife who mutilated her husband allegedly after being raped. Less sensational stories, receiving only fleeting and local concern, can be found almost daily. Although we like to think of our home as a place of refuge and support, the stories remind us that the home can be dangerous and depressing for all too many people.

Perhaps one-fifth of all marriages are tainted by violence, and an equal number of parents may harm their children. Violence against elderly relatives is not well understood, but we are beginning to recognize it as a major social problem. And the most common form of family violence, receiving little attention and less sympathy, occurs between siblings. We do not even understand its impact.

Over the years there have been many books written on family violence. This book is different because it places the topic of family violence within the disciplinary perspectives of social psychology. Family violence is an ideal subject for the application of social psychological theory and research. It draws upon the familiar topics of aggression, attitude formation and change, self-perception, social cognition, gender roles, and group processes. In this book you will learn about the biological and social causes of aggression within families and its consequences. You also will study ways to prevent violence, as well as to treat it, and examine characteristics of families that facilitate or inhibit the use of aggression to solve conflicts.

Finally, the book investigates how society reacts to aggression against family members and how the reaction has changed over time and varies across groups.

The book provides an overview of research on child abuse, partner abuse, abuse against elderly relatives, and sibling violence, but it does not cover all types of violence. Its focus is on physical violence; sexual and emotional maltreatment are discussed occasionally, but only when relevant to the primary topic of physical abuse. This book addresses such questions of current interest as: Does a child who is abused grow up to become an abuser? Can anyone become an abuser, given the right circumstances? Why do victims of partner abuse stay with the perpetrator? Should we arrest perpetrators of family violence? What are the impediments to successful prosecution of crimes against family members? And, Why do people demean victims of family violence?

The book is intended for advanced undergraduate students in special topics classes or as an accompaniment to a text in an introductory social psychology course. But it is also designed to be read by intelligent laypeople who want to understand this difficult and widespread social problem.

I want to thank several people for their diligent help with this volume. First, I thank Trinity students, Kirsten Olson and Kristin Maki, who helped me to find interesting material to include in the book and who commented upon early drafts of each chapter. My secretary, Tracy Knight, provided invaluable editorial and organizational help. Reviewers, Robert Burgess of Pennsylvania State University, Irene Frieze of the University of Pittsburgh, and John Harvey of the University of Iowa made insightful suggestions on the first draft of the manuscript. I am most grateful, however, to my husband, David, for encouraging me throughout this process and to my parents, Marion and Robert Dickman, whose love and support during my childhood provided an environment so contrary to those featured in this book.

CHAPTER

1

The Incidence of Family Violence

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

What Do We Mean by “Family Violence”?

Rates of Family Violence

The Validity of Information
about Violence

Child Abuse

Spouse Abuse

Sibling Violence

Elderly Abuse

Multiple Forms of Violence in
the Family

**Violence in the Home versus
outside the Home**

**Universality of Violence against
Family Members**

Cross-Cultural Variations

Temporal Variations

Concluding Remarks

We are supposed to feel safe at home. Home should be where we are loved, protected, and restored after a day at work or school. For many people, however, the home is not a safe haven from the stresses of life. Instead, it is a dangerous place where mental, physical, or sexual suffering occurs, often on a regular basis.

This book explores physical violence within families from the perspectives offered by social psychology. Social psychologists are interested in the forces that affect our behavior in the social world. They study the influence individuals or groups have on other people

and how, in turn, the individual influences the surrounding environment. Social psychologists recognize that reality is in the eyes of the perceiver and that to understand a person's behavior or thoughts, we must understand how the individual interprets and evaluates the behaviors of others. Gordon Allport (1985) said this well: Social psychologists "attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (p. 3).

While scholars from other areas of psychology and from anthropology, sociology, and biology also study human interaction, social psychologists focus on the individual in relation to his or her various social groups. The groups examined by social psychologists range from small groups, such as dating partners or married couples, to large groups, such as religious organizations. Groups that can influence and be influenced by the individual may be formally connected, such as a family, or may be formed by haphazard circumstances, such as when people are together in an elevator that stops functioning.

In exploring family violence you will study the themes that have fascinated social psychologists for decades: attitudes, self- and other-perception, and how behavior develops and changes. You will investigate such questions as: What are the prevailing attitudes about violence in the home and how might these attitudes influence patterns of violence? How do victims perceive their own victimization, and do differences in self-perception relate to the consequences experienced by victims? What are the biological and learned origins of aggressive behavior and to what extent can these origins be overcome? How can we prevent violence in the family, and once it occurs how should society respond? Throughout this book you will study whether violence in the family can be explained by the same factors as violence outside the home. You will also address the special characteristics of families and family life that distinguish violence within the home from violence in other social groupings.

What Do We Mean by "Family Violence"?

Let us start our exploration of family violence with a definition of *violence*. A good definition helps us to distinguish violent from non-violent acts, or at least to describe points on a continuum from total nonviolence to extreme violence.

Violence can take many forms, from physical and sexual assault to emotional degradation. This book concentrates upon physical violence, with discussion of emotional and sexual abuse only in recognition of the fact that they often accompany physical harm.

Information that researchers have gleaned from studies of other forms of abuse are often relevant to understanding the causes and consequences of physical violence in families. Both emotional and sexual abuse, however, are well developed, independent research areas (Finkelhor, 1984; Garbarino, Guttman, & Seeley, 1987), and their inclusion would necessitate a discussion that is beyond the scope of this small volume. It is not the intent of this book to review the literature on all of the harmful activities of family members. Instead, it will combine a study of the well-investigated social psychological literature on aggression with the study of physical violence in the context of family relationships.

We also need to define *family* (Weis, 1989). This book concentrates upon violence among people who share kinship (i.e., they are related through birth or marriage) and who share a home. It does not address violence among dating partners or close friends, or even among distant relatives. By narrowing our topic, you will learn about the special dynamics of family interactions and how living together and sharing a relationship contribute to violent behavior.

Beyond this, deriving a suitable and generally accepted listing of specific acts that constitute *family violence* is difficult. One common definition concentrates on the parent's action and suggests that child abuse refers to an intentional use of force aimed at injuring or damaging the child. This definition seems reasonable, but we might also consider the consequences of the act and the circumstances surrounding the victimization (Weis, 1989). For example, knowing that a parent hit a child with a stick and did so intentionally may not be sufficiently informative to warrant a label of abuse. If the parent hit a child on clothed buttocks, some may not regard this as abuse. However, knowing that the stick left welts would be more likely to prompt the abuse label. Of course, the perpetrator's aim, whether the victim ducks, or how the victim falls affects the degree of injury (Gelles & Cornell, 1985). Thus, consequences by themselves cannot be used to define abuse.

The defining characteristics of abuse within families also depend upon one's perspective. Since spanking is an intentional use of force, it may be seen as abuse according to some definitions; in this case most parents could be labeled abusers (cf. Garbarino, 1989b). Some injurious behaviors stem from beneficial intent. Consider the Vietnamese-American parents who bruise their child's body by rubbing it with coins to cure minor illnesses (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985). The parents intend no injury; in fact, they want to aid the child. Although the procedure leaves no permanent physical damage and causes no emotional trauma, some might call this violence. And how

should we react to parents who have their infant boys circumcised or who pierce their infant daughter's ears (cf. Garbarino, 1989b)?

The definition of child abuse that will guide discussions in this book is one proposed by Garbarino (1989b), who recognizes that child abuse is a socially defined phenomenon:

Child maltreatment can be defined as acts of omission or commission by a parent or guardian that are judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate and damaging. (p. 220)

Garbarino encourages us to consider the analogy between a fever and child abuse. An elevated body temperature indicates infection that must be treated, just as child abuse signifies an underlying problem within the family. And, just as the fever by itself may not be dangerous and is rarely the real problem, physical violence toward a child may indicate an impaired family relationship that ultimately may produce lasting emotional damage. Acts of violence against children may be seen as a sign of an ill-functioning family; accordingly, attention to more than just the violence is needed for us to understand the derivation of the violence and the means of correction.

Similar reasoning applies to efforts to define violence against other family members. "Intent to harm" is part of most definitions of spouse abuse, but intentions are notoriously difficult to assess. For this reason many people concentrate on the actual behavior involved, such as kicking, hitting, pushing, or threatening to harm (Straus, 1979b). Consistent with the community standards criterion that is useful in defining child abuse, notions about "acceptable" behavior between partners are used in definitions of spouse assault. However, whereas community standards often exclude minor acts of violence against children (e.g., spanking, slapping) from the category of "child abuse," community standards promote the inclusion of such acts under the definition of "spouse abuse." Even relatively mild physical violence between adult partners is usually regarded as nonnormative and unacceptable (cf. Hotaling & Straus, 1989), not only because of the pain involved, but because the use of violence may alter the balance of power between partners and create a sense of inequality in the victim (Frieze & Browne, 1989). In our society we are generally unconcerned about children's feelings of inequality in relation to their parents; therefore, parental behaviors that promote inequality are not in and of themselves seen as abusive.

Even though the act itself may be the primary defining characteristic of spouse abuse, some suggest that it is helpful to know the

force used to carry out the act, how frequently the act occurred, and how many different acts are “clustered together” in one event (Frieze & Browne, 1989). These characteristics help to determine the severity of the abuse. “Both the repetition of violent acts and a clustering of types of acts within a single incident increase the potential for injury, as victims are overwhelmed by the rapidity of events and are unable to recover in time to protect themselves from the next blow” (Browne, 1987, p. 69).

Arguments over definitions do not have trivial consequences. Estimates of the incidence of family violence vary widely depending upon the definition chosen, leading us either to see violence as a major or relatively minor public health concern. Weis (1989) notes, for example, that varying definitions have led to estimates ranging from 1 percent to 30 percent of all children in the United States suffering from physical abuse. Let us take a look at the various estimates of family violence and how they are derived.

Rates of Family Violence

Although it is impossible to define precisely what is meant by family violence, we can estimate its occurrence using various indices. However, we also need to discuss the problems that arise when we try to measure the incidence of violence.

The Validity of Information about Violence

The statistics on family violence only estimate the rate of this phenomenon and, as later chapters will attest, they dramatically underestimate the true incidence of maltreatment. Figures based upon official statistics gathered from the police or social service agencies are faulty because some unknown number of cases of abuse are not reported to authorities (see Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966, for a discussion of the problems associated with the use of archival data). Physicians, psychologists, teachers, and to a lesser extent ministers and school nurses decline to report confirmed cases of abuse, preferring to work with the family themselves (Garbarino, 1988). Also, even when a case secures the attention of authorities, the evidence may not be sufficient to substantiate the allegations (e.g., some states substantiate only 5 percent of the allegations through the perpetrator’s admission or through a conviction; Garbarino, 1988). Furthermore, suspicions against white, middle-class individuals and against mothers are often dismissed (cf. Herzberger, 1988; Garbarino,

1988), signifying that not only will official statistics underestimate the rate of family violence, but will do so disproportionately among some groups.

Written surveys or interviews conducted with a sample of the population also have drawbacks. Characteristics of the interviewer, such as warmth or ability to establish rapport, strongly influence the amount and type of information disclosed by the respondent (Groth-Marnat, 1990). Some people who are contacted may not agree to participate in the project, and we cannot know precisely whether those who do participate are similar to those who do not participate in their experience with maltreatment. People who choose to participate also may deny the truth about their involvement in violent relationships, or, while not actually lying, may interpret questions in a manner that allows them to put their “best foot forward” and to underplay their negative characteristics (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Arias and Beach (1987), for example, found that husbands’ and wives’ willingness to admit to violence against their spouse was related to their tendency to place themselves in a socially desirable light. People who had such a tendency were more likely to deny being aggressive. Once they admitted to being violent, however, the tendency to respond in socially desirable ways did not affect disclosures about how seriously or how frequently they abused a spouse.

Although men may underreport their own victimization by a spouse (Szinovacz, 1983), in general we may feel more confident about reports of violence by victims than by perpetrators (Arias & Beach, 1987). For example, Riggs, Murphy, and O’Leary (1989) asked college students to rate how likely it is that they would report their own or their partner’s positive and negative activities. While no differences were found in expected reports about positive behaviors, Figure 1.1 shows substantial differences in expected reports about the use of physical violence. As measured by items on the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979b), students expected that they would be less likely to report their own violent behavior than their partner’s, especially as the behavior becomes more serious.

Another problem with surveys or interviews is that they cannot be used with all people. The involvement of young children as victims or perpetrators is usually measured by speaking to parents, not by questioning the children themselves. Parents, of course, may not be privy to all instances of violence involving children or may not want to disclose their knowledge of these events.

Another way of trying to gather information about family violence includes the use of uninvolved informants (cf. Weis, 1989).

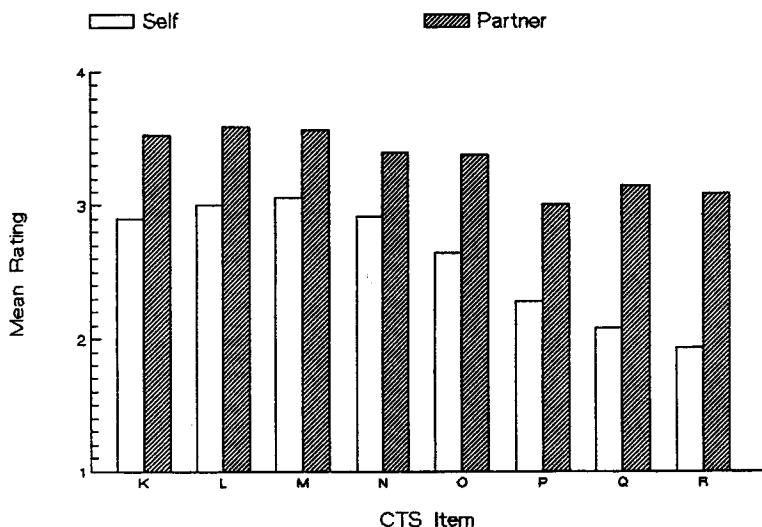


FIGURE 1.1

Mean likelihood to report CTS physical aggression items: self versus partner reports

Note: K = threw something; L = pushed, grabbed, or shoved; M = slapped; N = kicked, bit, or hit with a fist; O = hit or tried to hit with something; P = beat up; Q = threatened with a knife or gun; R = used a knife or gun.

Source: Riggs, D. S., Murphy, C. M., & O'Leary, K. D. (1989). Intentional falsification in reports of interpartner aggression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4, p. 226. Copyright 1989, Sage Publications, Inc., Newbury Park, CA. Reprinted by permission.

Gil (1970), for example, found that few people admit to injuring their own child, but many report on injuries inflicted on neighboring children by their parents. Furthermore, when children are questioned about fights between their mother and father, estimates of the rate of spouse abuse exceed rates estimated from official statistics (Weis, 1989).

Research on family violence also depends extensively on retrospective designs, in which people are asked to recall their involvement in abusive situations and to identify key information about the abuse. Adults, for example, may be asked to recall their childhood experience with or witnessing of violence by a parent. Such designs are fraught with the potential for error (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). People dramatically err in estimating the frequency of past events and have difficulty gauging the timeframe in which events occurred. Unless demarcated by a salient occurrence (e.g., the year in which a relative died or a child was born), we often mistake when behaviors,

such as abuse, began and when they ended. Furthermore, the meaning of events changes over time and people may not recall accurately their feelings and perceptions as they experience the abuse.

Child Abuse

Now that we have some appreciation for the limitations of research in this area, let us examine statistics from some of the most valid research. One survey (Burgdorf, 1980) collected data from schools, hospitals, social service agencies, as well as from the police and court system, in a randomly selected sample of twenty-six counties in ten states. Analysis of these *known* cases of violence suggests that at least one out of one hundred children is maltreated each year through physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or through neglect of their physical, educational, or emotional well-being. About one-third of these children suffer from physical abuse. Table 1.1 shows the judged severity of the forms of maltreatment, along with the ages and percentage of children experiencing each form.

Another survey (American Humane Association, 1987), again using cases that were verified by social service agencies, shows that official maltreatment rates may reach as high as three per one hundred children. While not all cases of child maltreatment involve parents or other relatives as perpetrators, the American Humane Association (cf. Garbarino, 1989b) estimates that 83 percent of the cases of physical injury involve parents; only 12 percent of physical injury cases involve people not related to the child.

As noted above, another way to estimate the incidence of child abuse is to randomly survey the general public. When we do so, we find much higher rates of child abuse. Straus and Gelles (1986) conducted one such national survey through the use of phone interviews with a randomly selected sample of adults in two-parent households. The interviewers questioned the parents about their involvement with various forms of violence using the Conflict Tactics Survey (Straus, 1979b). The parent was recorded as having engaged in "child assault" if the child about whom they were questioned was kicked, bit, hit with a fist, hit with an object, beaten up, threatened with use of a knife or gun, or actually shot or stabbed. Of the 2,688 parents interviewed, fully 18 percent admitted to assaulting a child during the past year.

These figures are undoubtedly underestimates, given that some parents falsely deny their involvement in assault. Also, many families have more than one child, and the relationship between the parent

TABLE 1.1 Severity of Maltreatment-Related Injury or Impairment by Form of Maltreatment and Age of Child: Estimated Percentage Distributions by Severity Category

Form of Maltreatment and Age of Child	Severity of Injury or Impairment		
	<i>Fatal</i>	<i>Serious</i>	<i>Moderate</i>
Form of maltreatment:			
Physical assault	72	14	40
Sexual exploitation	1	5	3
Emotional abuse	0	16	22
Physical neglect	28	36	9
Educational neglect	0	19	34
Emotional neglect	0	34	1
Age of child:			
0-2	49	16	5
3-5	25	7	9
6-8	2	17	18
9-11	0	19	18
12-14	1	14	23
15-17	23	27	27

Note: Percentages may sum to more than 100 since a child may have experienced more than one form of maltreatment at a given level of severity.

Source: Burgdorf, K. (1980). *Recognition and reporting of child maltreatment: Findings from the National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect* (p. 50). Washington, D.C.: National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

and only one child was examined. Finally, children who might be at greatest risk of abuse, those in single-parent homes and those under 3 years of age, were not included in the survey. For these reasons, even more children may be exposed to parental violence than are indicated through survey or interview methods such as these.

Both sons and daughters are victims of family violence. While girls are three to four times as likely to be the target of sexual abuse than boys, most evidence suggests that boys tend to be physically maltreated more often (cf. Finkelhor, 1984; Garbarino, 1989b; Gelles, 1979; Hartman & Burgess, 1989). Gelles (1979), however, suggests that the most serious forms of violence are directed equally to sons and daughters, and Burgdorf's (1980) results show that daughters are more likely to be the victims of physical assault during adolescence.

Reliable figures are unavailable on whether mothers or fathers are more likely to physically assault the children under their care (cf. Pagelow, 1984; Weis, 1989). Some reports (Burgdorf, 1980; Gelles, 1979) suggest that mothers, who often spend more time with their children, are more likely to assault them. This conclusion contrasts with the figures showing that men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual abuse of children (Finkelhor, 1984) and points to the importance of studying the problems inherent in parenting to understand physical child abuse.

Spouse Abuse

Straus and Gelles (1986) also interviewed family members about their involvement in spousal assault. Because, unlike with children, spouses do not have the legal right to hit each other, the authors counted as "assault" both minor forms of violence (e.g., hitting, slapping, throwing things at the spouse) and the more serious forms that had also been counted as child assault (e.g., kicking, punching). Eighteen percent of those surveyed reported that they had employed assaultive conflict tactics toward a spouse within the last year. An earlier study (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) revealed that 28 percent of a nationwide sample of adults had experienced at least one incident of spouse abuse during their current relationship. (See Box 1.1 for a severe example of spouse and child abuse.)

Which partner is most likely to be aggressive? Contrary to popular opinion, some reports suggest that women and men are about equally likely to aggress against a partner. In the Straus et al. (1980) nationwide survey, 49 percent of the people who admitted to being involved in a violent relationship reported mutual physical violence between partners, 27 percent reported male violence, and 24 percent reported female violence.

However, estimates of gender differences in spouse abuse vary according to the source of the information (cf. Frieze & Browne, 1989). Battered men are less likely to seek help from social service agencies or the police, except following severe injury (cf. McNeely & Mann, 1990). Thus, surveys of individuals rather than social service agency records result in a more even picture of abuse by men and women.

More importantly, perhaps, estimates vary with the definition of abuse. Repeated and severe violence is more likely to be perpetrated by men, with four times as many husbands killing wives as wives killing husbands (cf. Bograd, 1990; Sigler, 1989). The inclusion of

BOX 1.1

A few years ago in New York City a severe example of spouse and child abuse rose to national attention. Hedda Nussbaum and Joel Steinberg were arrested for the murder of their adopted daughter, Lisa. Charges were dropped against Hedda Nussbaum when her systematic and brutal victimization by Joel Steinberg became known. *Newsweek* (Hackett, McKillop, & Wang, 1988) presented a detailed account of the trial testimony, which is summarized here.

On the day that Lisa was killed, Steinberg became angry at Nussbaum and their daughter for not drinking enough water, and he made them eat hot pepper. Steinberg, who often took Lisa to business appointments at restaurants, started to get ready for a meeting. Lisa questioned her mother about whether her father would let her go along. Nussbaum suggested that she ask him. A few minutes later Steinberg brought Lisa to Nussbaum, holding her limp body. Nussbaum testified:

"And I said, 'What happened?' He said, 'What's the difference what happened? This is your child. Hasn't this gone far enough?' " Nussbaum later explained that Steinberg said he was angry at Lisa for staring at him. "He said, 'I knocked her down and she didn't want to get up again. This staring business had gotten to be too much'." Steinberg put Lisa on the bathroom floor and got ready to go out. (pp. 57-58)

Nussbaum tried to arouse her daughter, but Steinberg told her to "relax, go with her." Then he left for his appointment. Nussbaum was asked why she did not call for help and she said that Steinberg had:

"healing powers." . . . "I looked at the phone and I started thinking, 'Should I call 911 or . . . a pediatrician?' And I said, 'No, Joel said he would take care of her . . . ' And I didn't want to show disloyalty or distrust for him. So I didn't call." Lisa died three days later. (p. 58)

Steinberg, a criminal lawyer, and Nussbaum, a children's book editor, lived together for two years before Steinberg began to assault Nussbaum seriously. According to the *Newsweek* account, it was in 1978 when Nussbaum first went to the hospital.

(continued on next page)

BOX 1.1 (Continued)

While she initially told the truth about the beating, she later asked the doctor not to record who hit her. As happens frequently in cases of spouse abuse (Walker, 1984), Steinberg was affectionate when she returned home. Then, three years later, he ruptured her spleen.

Over the next six years, Nussbaum says Steinberg broke her knee, broke her ribs, choked her hard enough to damage her vocal cords, burned her body with a propane torch, hit her hands, feet and sexual organs with a broomstick, urinated on her, forced her to sleep while handcuffed to a chinning bar. . . . (pp. 60–61)

Throughout this time neighbors suspected the abuse and once even called in the police. A teacher reported suspected child abuse to school officials. Doctors also wondered about the injuries. Somehow, though, no one intervened to stop the abuse or to conduct an investigation.

“threats” and other mild forms of violence in the definition produces more equal estimates of the rates of violence by women and men. Also, violent acts by women more often than similar acts by men are in retaliation for the violence of a partner (cf. Frieze & Browne, 1989; Sigler, 1989). Studies that do not separate provocative from retaliatory violence confuse the picture. For example, Browne and Williams (1989) found that the decline between 1976 and 1984 in the number of husbands murdered by women correlated with the development of social support and legal services available to women who needed to leave abusive partners. With such services, women may not resort to such dire actions.

Sibling Violence

You may be surprised to see a heading for sibling violence in this listing. If so, you are similar to the vast majority of professionals and parents who pay little attention to aggression between siblings. Most people regard sibling violence as so common that it is a “normal” part of growing up in a family (Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Pagelow,

BOX 1.2

Tooley (1980) describes a case of serious sibling aggression of a middle child named Allen:

Allen reacted with obvious terror to the presence of his eight-year-old brother and to the threat of his three-year-old sister to "hit him with a sock." Allen was referred to Children's Psychiatric Hospital for inpatient treatment. The mother, Mrs. J, recounted without much evident concern that over a period of a year the older boy had: tried to drown Allen in the bathtub; pushed him down the stairs; cut his head to the degree that he required a dozen stitches to close the wound; and had set fire to the family home. In the last instance, which was never fully clarified by the parents, Allen had been trapped in his bedroom and had to be rescued by firemen "with hoses and axes." (p. 28)

1989). But just because it is common does not mean it should be ignored. Tooley (1980), in Box 1.2, describes a particularly troubling case of sibling violence.

Straus et al. (1980) reported that sibling violence *is* the most common form of violence in families. Fully 82 percent of parents surveyed reported aggression among their offspring; two-thirds of parents reported that their teenage children hit a brother or sister on average nineteen times a year. Families with boys report more violence than families of boys and girls or just girls. Another study (Roscoe, Goodwin, & Kennedy, 1987), which gathered information directly from seventh graders, found even higher rates of violence; 88 percent of the boys and 94 percent of the girls reported being victims of sibling violence during the last year, and 85 percent of the boys and 96 percent of the girls reported being perpetrators. Although more similarities than differences emerged in the types of violence experienced by boys and girls, boys both suffered from and perpetrated more serious forms of violence (see Table 1.2).

Elderly Abuse

Violence against parents by young children or by adolescents is rarer than other forms of family violence, and when present in a family is usually a response by the child to a consistent pattern of violent parenting (cf. Hotelling & Straus, 1989). However, when the parents are