Assessing the Offending Activity of Criminal Domestic Violence Suspects: Offense Specialization, Escalation, and De-Escalation Evidence from the Spouse Assault Replication Program

ALEX R. PIQUERO, PhD^a
ROBERT BRAME, PhD^b
JEFFREY FAGAN, PhD^c
TERRIE E. MOFFITT, PhD^{d,e}

SYNOPSIS

Objective. Over the past quarter century, intimate partner violence research has occupied an increasingly important position in the research agenda of criminology, public policy, and public health. Yet, a number of questions about the criminal careers of domestic violence offenders remain unresolved. This study attempts to determine (1) the extent to which criminal domestic violence offenders specialize in violence, and (2) whether the severity of an offender's attacks against the same victim increase, decrease, or stay about the same over time.

Methods. Data from the Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP) are used to address two questions corresponding to different features of the criminal careers of domestic violence offenders.

Results. The specialization analysis reveals that the majority of domestic violence offenders with prior official criminal records have been involved in nonviolent forms of criminal behavior in addition to domestic violence. The escalation analysis identifies groups of escalators and de-escalators as well as individuals who engage in stable low-level aggression and stable high-level aggression.

Conclusions. Few SARP domestic violence offenders have been specializing exclusively in violence. There is also a heterogeneous mix of offenders who escalate and de-escalate the severity of their attacks over the short-term follow-up periods. Few studies have presented data consistent with the present study's findings. A longitudinal analysis of the criminal careers of domestic violence offender subtypes is critical for future research.

^aDepartment of Criminology, Law & Society, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

^bDepartment of Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

^cSchools of Law and Public Health, Columbia University, New York, NY

^dDepartment of Psychology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI

^eInstitute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, London, UK

Address correspondence to: Alex R. Piquero, Univ. of Florida, Dept. of Criminology, Law & Society, P.O. Box 115950, 201 Walker Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611-5950; tel. 352-392-1025, ext. 213; e-mail <apiquero@ufl.edu>.

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Although considerable effort has been devoted to research on intimate partner violence in recent years,¹⁻⁶ knowledge about the criminal careers of domestic violence offenders remains limited. This is largely because researchers interested in partner and domestic violence have operated under the assumption that partner/domestic batterers specialize in that particular offense to the neglect of all others, and that many batterers escalate in their offending activity from less to more serious crimes.^{7,8} Further, little progress has been made in understanding other features of the criminal careers of domestic violence offenders, such as the mix of offenses in which they are involved and the progression of offense seriousness against the people they victimize.^{9,10} Limited research indicates that partner abusers do not specialize but engage in violence against non-partners as well as a variety of nonviolent crimes,¹¹ that careers in marital and stranger violence tend to converge as violence in either domain becomes more frequent and serious,² and that marital violence escalates in frequency and severity over time.^{7,8,12} In short, the conclusion drawn from this research seems to support varied career trajectories of escalation in marital violence, with some research indicating that marital violence may be episodic, with lengthy intervals of nonviolence interrupted by shorter periods of intensive violence.¹³

At the same time, there have been few efforts to integrate the empirical literature on aggression within families with other perspectives on violence because of the “bifurcation between the fields of domestic violence research and criminology,”¹⁴ and to the extent that there is significant overlap, the establishment of linkages between intimate partner violence and criminal behavior more generally remains a “critical gap.”² Moreover, since most theory and research into partner abuse has remained separate from theory and research into crime, attention from questions about associations between partner abuse and crime have been diverted.¹⁴

In this article, we integrate the study of the criminal career dimensions of specialization and escalation into the study of domestic violence. Information on this front is important insofar as it could determine whether a general proclivity toward criminal violence (that includes nonviolent crime as well) instead of a criminal record consisting solely of violent incidents is the important correlate of domestic violence offenses. Such information is pertinent to both theory and policy. For example, if domestic violence represents one of several forms of violence in an offender’s career, then this would suggest a more general theory of violence as well as a particular set of prevention/intervention strategies.

But, if offenders engage in domestic violence to the exclusion of all other forms of crime and/or violence, then this would suggest a more crime-specific theory as well as a more unique set of prevention/intervention efforts.¹⁵ On this score, some researchers have argued that it may be misleading to discuss patterns of escalation in domestic violence for the population as a whole. For families experiencing “common couple violence” there is apparently very little evidence of escalation. On the other hand, victims of more serious and persistent violence, or “patriarchal terrorism,” apparently experience the brunt of escalation. This suggests that patterns of escalation may differ across the population, and implies that it may be necessary to disaggregate patterns of offense mix and escalation.¹⁶

We build upon prior research and follow the suggestion that researchers integrate issues related to both family violence and criminal careers. Specifically, we use data on the offending activities of spouse assault suspects participating in the Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP), a series of six field experiments carried out from 1981 to 1991 by six police departments. These experiments were designed to test empirically whether arrests deterred subsequent violence better than less formal alternatives.¹⁷ We examine: (1) the extent to which offenders exhibit a specialized proclivity toward violence (specialization), and (2) the extent to which attack severity escalates, de-escalates, or stays about the same over time (escalation). It is important to note that the escalation portion of this study is not about switching partners or about switching from domestic partners to strangers, or continuity of domestic violence across different partners; instead, it is about escalation/de-escalation within domestic violence.

We believe it is useful to document the mix of offenses that occur within intimate relationships and to investigate whether offenders will exhibit escalation or de-escalation in the seriousness of their offenses against the same victim. Distinctions among escalators and non-escalators may prove useful in guiding development of theoretical models designed to account for domestic violence. The larger issue is that there may be heterogeneity among domestic batterers such that a typology of domestic batterers is relevant,¹⁸ and an investigation into the kinds of characteristics that help unpack the heterogeneity within domestic batterers will advance knowledge in this area.¹⁶ Additionally, the extent to which offenders escalate into more serious crimes over time may prove useful for informing policy deliberations. To the extent that careers in marital violence escalate in seriousness with offenders moving to increasingly more serious marital violence as they

proceed from one arrest to another, then crime control strategies that are effective in interrupting the normal progress of martial violence careers would be especially beneficial in reducing subsequent serious crimes. We view this research as a useful step in strengthening the knowledge base necessary for sound development of theory and policy.

METHODS

The SARP was originally designed to replicate the Minneapolis domestic violence experiment.¹⁹ In the Minneapolis study, repeat domestic violence rates for cases where the offender was arrested were compared to cases where the police responded informally. They found that arresting domestic violence suspects led to a lower risk of repeat domestic violence. Replications were initiated in six other cities in geographically diverse regions around the United States, including Atlanta, Charlotte, Colorado Springs, Miami-Dade, Milwaukee, and Omaha.¹⁷ The Atlanta project was never completed. The implementation and findings associated with the SARP studies may be found elsewhere.²⁰ Here, three summary conclusions are presented. First, there has been a mixture of deterrence, null, and escalation effects from arrest in the individual sites.⁶ Second, the effects of arrest vary by the marital and employment status of suspects.⁶ Third, pooled data analysis suggests modest reduction in subsequent offenses targeting the original victim that is attributable to arrest.¹⁷

Two particular aspects of the SARP data are important for our purposes. First, the data contain information on arrest activity prior to the incident in which the offender entered the experiment, i.e., the presenting incident. These data allow us to examine whether individuals entering the experiments exhibit specialization in violence. Second, the data contain detailed information from victim interviews on the nature of the violence occurring at the presenting incident as well as the violence occurring at subsequent points in time after the presenting incident. With these data, we will examine the extent to which the severity of offenders' attacks against the same victim increases, decreases, or stays about the same.

We will discuss the results for each of our two research questions separately for each of the sites. We begin with a discussion of the specialization question using official arrest data from Charlotte, Colorado Springs, Milwaukee, and Omaha. We were unable to locate detailed information on prior arrest records of the domestic violence suspects in the Miami-Dade study so it is not included in this part of the study. Next, we examine the escalation issue using victim interview data

from Charlotte, Miami-Dade, Milwaukee, and Omaha. The interviews in Colorado Springs were conducted differently than the interviews in the other sites. To maintain comparability, we elected not to include the Colorado Springs interview data in our analysis. In each case, we present proportions documenting specialization, escalation, and de-escalation levels in the data. We also provide 95% Bayesian probability intervals around these proportions. (A technical appendix detailing the basis for the calculations is available upon request from the authors.)

RESULTS

Specialization analyses

The Charlotte data used for this analysis are based on data from 650 unique suspects that entered the experiment from August 1987 to June 1989. These data are from state records only, and cover the five years prior to the reporting incident. There were 36 cases where the same suspect entered the experiment twice (for a total of 686 cases); we focus exclusively on the 650 unique suspects (see the first row of Table 1). A frequency count of the number of arrests for: (1) assault, (2) other violent crimes, (3) property crimes, and (4) other types of crime are included. The first two categories were summed to create a measure of the number of arrests for violence; the third and fourth categories were summed to create a measure of the number of arrests for nonviolence.

Next, each individual's offense history was examined to determine whether there were any prior arrests. This effort revealed that 111 (17.1%) of the 650 suspects had at least one prior arrest. The majority (86) of these 111 individuals had been arrested exclusively for property or other offenses, while only 25 had been arrested for violence. Out of these 25 cases, 11 suspects had been arrested for both violent and nonviolent offenses in the past. The remaining 14 cases represent the population of violent specialists, as they had been arrested exclusively for violent offenses in the past. Thus, our estimate of the prevalence of specialized violence in Charlotte is given by $s_v = 14/111 = 12.6\%$. The overwhelming majority of offenders with a prior arrest record in Charlotte has been involved in nonviolent offending activity in addition to the violence that brought them into the experiment.

The arrest data from Colorado Springs were obtained from a file that documents the pre-experiment arrest history for each of the suspects. Cases were enrolled from March 1987 to April 1989. A total of 1,548 cases were in the file, but 22 of these cases had duplicate suspect identification numbers. After deleting the 22

Table 1. Summary of specialization results by site

Site	N	N _p	N _p /N	n _v	n _v '	s _v	s _{vL}	s _{vH}
Charlotte	650	111	0.171	14	97	0.126	0.077	0.200
Colorado Springs	1,525	624	0.409	41	583	0.066	0.048	0.087
Milwaukee	1,124	657	0.585	154	503	0.234	0.203	0.268
Omaha #1	577	363	0.629	16	347	0.044	0.027	0.070
Omaha #2	577	463	0.802	64	399	0.138	0.109	0.172

NOTE: Omaha #1 refers to officially recorded charges prior to presenting incident. Omaha #2 refers to charges both before and after the presenting incident.

N = analysis sample size

N_p = number of individuals with arrest record

N_p/N = proportion of sample with arrest record

n_v = number of violent specialists

n_v' = N_p - n_v

s_v = n_v/N_p

s_{vL} = lower bound of 95% posterior probability interval

s_{vH} = upper bound of 95% posterior probability interval

duplicates, one additional case that was missing some of the arrest information was deleted. This produced an analysis file with 1,525 unique suspects. The file contained frequency information on the number of counts charged for each of a wide variety of offense categories including felony assault, felony sexual assault, robbery, burglary, arson, narcotics, third-degree assault, alcohol, menacing, harassment, false imprisonment, misdemeanor sexual assault, fighting, and other. Domestic counts of these same offenses were also collected. Here, we treated felony assault, felony sexual assault, robbery, third-degree assault, false imprisonment, misdemeanor sexual assault, and fighting as violent offenses. We defined all other categories as nonviolent. Analysis of the prior record data (second row of Table 1) identified 624 individuals (40.9% of 1,525) with at least one prior arrest. Among these 624 individuals, only 41 (6.6%) could be characterized as violent specialists, i.e., all prior arrests were for violent offenses.

The Milwaukee study enrolled 1,200 eligible domestic assault cases from 1987 to 1989. Some of the cases involved suspects who made repeat appearances in the study. After deleting the duplicate records of multiple appearance suspects and one case with some missing offense information, we were left with 1,124 unique suspects. Information about the prior arrest records for each of the suspects was summarized in frequency count form. Thus, for each individual, information about the total number of prior arrests for theft, domestic violence, drug offenses, all other violent offenses, and all other offenses were available. We classified domestic violence and all other violent offenses

as violence and we treated all the other categories as nonviolent. The third row of Table 1 summarizes the results.

The data revealed that 467 suspects had no prior record, while the remaining 657 (58.5%) had at least one prior arrest. Nearly half of these suspects (307; 46.7%) had records exhibiting involvement in both violent and nonviolent offending; another 196 suspects (29.8%) had records comprised entirely of nonviolent offenses. The final 154 cases (s_v=23.4%) represent the population of violent specialists in Milwaukee.

A total of 621 cases entered the Omaha experiment from March 1986 to September 1987, but 44 of these cases were generated by repeat instances of criminal domestic violence. The twelve-month criminal history file contains data on 577 unique suspects and the exact dates of each arrest. The criminal history file was merged with a police report file so the date of each arrest could be compared with the presenting incident date. Some of the arrests reported occurred after the presenting incident. It turns out that the results change somewhat depending on whether we include the arrests occurring after the presenting incident.

Considering only those arrests occurring before the presenting incident, 363 individuals had at least one arrest, while the remaining 214 individuals did not. Among the 363 suspects with a prior arrest record, 217 individuals had been arrested for nonviolent offenses only and 130 individuals had been arrested for both violent and nonviolent offenses. The remaining 16 individuals had been arrested exclusively for violent offenses in the past. Therefore, the estimated prevalence of

violence specialization is $s_v = 16/363 = 4.4\%$. Using only those arrests occurring before the presenting incident date, this is the lowest estimate we have seen in the SARP data (fourth row of Table 1).

It is straightforward to estimate violence specialization prevalence including the full arrest history up to and including the year after the presenting incident, so we conducted a second analysis to study this distribution. After including these additional arrests, we found that 463 individuals had experienced at least one arrest, while 114 individuals had not. Within the population of arrested individuals, 147 (31.7%) had been arrested exclusively for nonviolent offenses, and 252 (54.4%) individuals had been arrested for both violent and nonviolent offenses. The remaining 64 individuals had been arrested exclusively for violent offenses producing a violence specialization prevalence of $s_v = 64/463 = 13.8\%$. Although there is an increased level of violent specialization in this second analysis, it is also true that the overwhelming majority of suspects do not exhibit specialized violent offending in their arrest records in either of the two Omaha analyses (row 5, Table 1).

For each presentation, the Figure presents a graphical portrayal of the posterior distribution of specialization parameter by site.

We now turn to the victim interview data to study escalation and de-escalation in the severity of attacks against the same victim after the presenting incident. In each of the sites, efforts were made to interview victims about the level of injury they experienced during the presenting incident. Victims were also interviewed about the level of injury experienced in new assaults occurring between the presenting incident and the time of the interviews. Attempts were made to contact victims for an initial interview and a follow-up interview (except in Omaha, where there were two follow-up interviews—6 and 12 months after the presenting incident). Because the interviews in Colorado Springs were conducted differently than those in the other sites, they are not analyzed here. Table 2 presents the escalation analyses and Table 3 presents the de-escalation analyses.

In Charlotte, initial interviews were targeted for a one-month follow-up period and were obtained from 419 victims (61% of the 686 eligible cases) while six-month interviews were obtained for 324 victims (47% of the 686 eligible cases). A total of 415 victims provided injury information on the initial interview, and 320 victims provided injury information on the six-month interview. Our initial focus is on questions that were asked about the presenting incident. Each

Figure. Full posterior distribution of specialization parameter by site

Table 2. Summary of escalation results by site

Site/interview	N_i'	N_{ii}'	N_{ii}'/N_i'	n_e	n_e'	e	e_L	e_H
Charlotte (I)	196	26	0.133	18	8	0.692	0.498	0.834
Charlotte (6)	148	43	0.291	36	7	0.837	0.699	0.918
Miami-Dade (I)	191	12	0.063	2	10	0.167	0.050	0.454
Miami-Dade (6)	117	23	0.197	7	16	0.304	0.156	0.511
Milwaukee (I)	170	47	0.276	3	44	0.064	0.023	0.171
Milwaukee (6)	142	62	0.437	22	40	0.355	0.247	0.479
Omaha (6)	103	51	0.495	20	31	0.392	0.270	0.529
Omaha (12)	99	60	0.606	26	34	0.433	0.315	0.559

I = initial interview

6 = six-month interview

12 = 12-month interview

 N_i' = number of interviewed victims without injury at presenting incident N_{ii}' = number of individuals in N_i' victimized between presenting incident and interview N_{ii}'/N_i' = proportion of N_i' with new victimization between presenting incident and interview n_e = number of victims reporting an injury after presenting incident (escalations) $n_e' = N_{i1}' - n_e$ (number of stable non-injury victims) $e = n_e/N_{i1}'$ (escalation parameter) e_L = lower bound of 95% posterior probability interval for e e_H = upper bound of 95% posterior probability interval for e

victim was asked whether they: (1) were hit on the head and blacked out or knocked out, (2) had any broken bones or teeth, (3) had any scratches or bruises, (4) were shot with a gun, and (5) were cut with a knife. Victims who answered "yes" to any of these questions were coded as having experienced an injury at the presenting incident. The analysis shows that 219 of 415 victims (52.7%) reported being injured in at least one of these ways at the presenting incident; the remaining 196 victims reported none of these injuries at the presenting incident.

The initial interview also asked about new attacks during the period between the presenting incident and the initial interview. Victims who reported experiencing new attacks were asked about the first incident of violence, the most recent incident, and the most serious interim incident if there was at least one occurrence of interim violence between the first and most recent incidents. The injury questions asked about the presenting incident were also asked about repeat incidents. Of the 196 victims who experienced no injury at the presenting incident, 26 (13.3%) went on to experience a new attack before the initial interview while the other 170 did not. For this group of 26 victims, we estimate the probability of experiencing at least one of the above-listed injuries as $e = 18/26 = 0.692$.

The six-month interview asked victims about new victimizations since the initial interview. It asked about the first and most recent victimization as well

as about interim victimization between the first and most recent victimizations. The injury questions on the six-month interview are the same as those used in the initial interview. Our analysis of the six-month interview data includes only those individuals participating in the six-month interview, but injury questions from both the initial and the six-month interview were used to classify individuals as having been injured in a new attack by the time of the six-month interview. So, an individual who is characterized as being a victim of injury escalation at the initial interview was characterized as a victim of injury escalation through the six-month interview, even if no additional injuries were reported on the six-month interview. Individuals who did not complete the six-month interview were not included in the analysis regardless of their injury status at the initial interview.

Of the 320 individuals who provided information about injury through the six-month interview, 172 (53.8%) reported experiencing an injury at the presenting incident. The remaining 148 reported no injury at the presenting incident. Among those victims who were not injured at the presenting incident, 43 (29.1%) reported experiencing a new attack between the presenting incident and the six-month interview. Within this group of repeat victims who experienced no injury at the presenting incident, we estimate the probability of injury, which, for this group, is the probability of escalation, by $e = 36/43 = 0.837$.

We now turn to an analysis of de-escalation within the group of 219 victims who reported experiencing an injury in their presenting incident victimization on the initial interview. The initial interview data reveal that 52 (23.7%) of these individuals experienced a new attack by the time of the initial interview. Within this group of repeat victims, 45 (86.5%) went on to be injured again, while seven were not injured again and are, therefore, classified as experiencing de-escalation. Thus, the de-escalation parameter estimate within this population is $d = 7/52 = 0.135$.

At the six-month interview, our base population for studying de-escalation was the 172 individuals who experienced an injury at the presenting incident and participated in the six-month interview. Within this group of victims, 77 individuals reported at least one new victimization between the presenting incident and the six-month interview. In this population, we estimate the proportion of individuals who are not injured, i.e., the estimated probability of de-escalation. The data indicate that six out of the 77 victims in this group were not injured, so the estimated de-escalation probability is $d = 6/77 = 0.078$. Taken together with the escalation findings, the weight of the evidence suggests that new attacks have a relatively high likelihood of being accompanied by new injury to the victim.

The Miami-Dade study enrolled 907 eligible cases from August 1987 to January 1989. Documentation

associated with the data files indicates that initial interviews were completed with 595 victims and six-month interviews were completed with 395 victims. When we merged the initial interview and six-month interview files, 607 unique cases were identified. Twelve of these 607 cases had information from the six-month interview but no information from an initial interview. Deleting these observations (plus one additional observation that had missing data on the gateway victimization question on the initial interview) left us with an initial interview database comprised of 594 victims. After deleting individuals who appeared in the initial interview database but not in the six-month interview database plus one additional person with missing information on the six-month victimization gateway question, we were left with a six-month database comprised of 371 victims.

At the initial interview, victims were asked questions about the presenting incident including the level of injury experienced as a result of that incident. Injury items included: (1) loss of consciousness (blackout), (2) internal injuries, (3) gunshot wound, (4) knife wound, (5) eye or teeth injury, (6) broken bones/dislocated joints, (7) concussion or bump on head, (8) serious cuts, bruises or burns, and (9) minor cuts, scratches/bruises. Of the 594 victims interviewed, 403 (67.8%) reported having received at least one of these injuries; the remaining 191 (32.2%) victims reported receiving none of these injuries.

Table 3. Summary of de-escalation results by site

Site/interview	N_i	N_{ii}	N_{ii}/N_i	n_d	n_d'	d	d_L	d_H
Charlotte (I)	219	52	0.237	7	45	0.135	0.067	0.253
Charlotte (6)	172	77	0.448	6	71	0.078	0.037	0.160
Miami-Dade (I)	403	72	0.179	30	42	0.417	0.309	0.532
Miami-Dade (6)	254	75	0.295	33	42	0.440	0.333	0.552
Milwaukee (I)	530	126	0.238	91	35	0.722	0.646	0.799
Milwaukee (6)	457	212	0.464	81	131	0.382	0.319	0.449
Omaha (6)	335	202	0.603	115	87	0.569	0.500	0.635
Omaha (12)	317	221	0.697	111	110	0.502	0.436	0.567

I = initial interview

6 = six-month interview

12 = 12-month interview

N_i = number of interviewed victims with injury at presenting incident

N_{ii} = number of individuals in N_i victimized between presenting incident and interview

N_{ii}/N_i = proportion of N_i with new victimization between presenting incident and interview

n_d = number of victims reporting no injury after presenting incident (de-escalations)

$n_d' = N_{ii} - n_d$ (number of stable injury victims)

$d = n_d/N_{ii}$ (de-escalation parameter)

d_L = lower bound of 95% posterior probability interval for d

d_H = upper bound of 95% posterior probability interval for d

The initial interview also asked victims about attacks between the presenting incident and the interview. Detailed information about the first two attacks was solicited including information about injuries experienced by the victim. The items used on the injury scale above were also used to characterize injuries for subsequent attacks.

With regard to escalation, of the 191 victims reporting no injury at the presenting incident, 12 reported at least one new attack before the initial interview; thus, the prevalence of revictimization within this population was 6.3%. Our focus in this analysis is on how many of the 12 victims reported an injury on the initial interview; such cases are construed as escalations because they move from a no-injury status at the presenting incident to an injury status on the initial interview. The analysis reveals that two of these twelve individuals reported an injury, yielding $e = 2/12 = 0.167$.

At the six-month follow-up, victims were asked detailed questions about the first incident of violence that occurred between the initial and the six-month interviews. The injury scale used above was also used on the six-month interview. Within the population of 371 respondents, 117 victims reported no injury at the presenting incident. Within this group, 23 victims (19.7%) reported at least one new attack by the six-month interview. Out of these 23 victims, seven reported experiencing an injury implying an escalation estimate of $e = 7/23 = 0.304$.

With regard to de-escalation, at the initial interview, 403 out of the 594 victims (67.8%) reported experiencing at least one of the above-named injuries at the presenting incident. Our analysis identifies this population as the set of individuals who could potentially experience de-escalation. Within this population of 403 victims, 72 (17.9%) reported at least one new attack by the initial interview. Our analysis reveals that 30 of these victims did not experience an injury, while the remaining 42 did. Thus, the initial interview-based de-escalation estimate is $d = 30/72 = 0.417$.

Analysis of the six-month interview data revealed that 254 of the 371 victims (68.5%) reported an injury as a result of the presenting incident. Combining information from the initial and six-month interviews, 75 of these victims reported a new attack between the presenting incident and the follow-up interview. Among these 75 victims, 33 reported no injury as a result of new attacks; the other 42 reported at least one new injury. This implies an estimated de-escalation probability of $d = 33/75 = 0.440$.

The Milwaukee project did not attempt to conduct an initial interview with all victims; in fact, 25% of

victims were not interviewed until six months after the presenting incident. The data documentation states that a total of 705 initial interviews were conducted from the 1,200 eligible domestic battery incidents. Our inquiry into the initial interview database revealed five individuals with missing information on the injury questions associated with the presenting incident. Our initial interview analysis database was comprised of the remaining 700 victims and our six-month interview database was comprised of the subset of 599 of these 700 victims who went on to participate in the six-month interview. The initial interview queried victims about new attacks after the police response (different sets of questions for informal treatment and arrested cases), and then about the first and most recent attacks (not including a reunion incident if one occurred). At the six-month interview, victims were asked about the first and most recent attacks following the presenting incident. At the presenting incident and the follow-up incidents, victims were asked about the following injuries: (1) internal injuries; (2) scratches, cuts, bruises; (3) concussion; (4) broken bones/teeth; (5) knife wound; and (6) gunshot wound.

At this initial interview, 170 (24.3%) victims reported receiving no injury at the presenting incident. The remaining 530 (75.7%) victims reported receiving at least one of the above injuries at the presenting incident. The 170 victims reporting no injury at the presenting incident constitute our population at risk of injury escalation. A total of 47 individuals reported experiencing a new victimization by the time of the initial interview, but only three of these new attacks was accompanied by an injury, yielding an escalation estimate of $e = 3/47 = 0.064$.

At the six-month interview, the 599 participants were divided into two groups: (1) the 457 victims who reported an injury due to the presenting incident, and (2) the 142 victims who reported no injury due to the presenting incident. The group of 142 is the population at risk of escalation. The analysis identified 62 individuals who reported a new victimization between the presenting incident and the six-month interview. An examination of the injury data indicated that the proportion of these 62 victims who reported an injury was $e = 22/62 = 0.355$.

As noted above, 530 (75.7% of 700) victims reporting an injury at the presenting incident were identified. Among these 530 victims, 126 (23.8%) reported a new attack between the presenting incident and the initial interview. The de-escalation parameter estimate for this population is the proportion of these 126 victims who report receiving no injury in a follow-up attack.

That estimate is given by $d = 91/126 = 0.722$. When we consider the six-month interview, however, this estimate drops considerably.

The six-month interview followed up 599 victims, of whom 457 (76.3%) reported an injury from the above list at the presenting incident. Nearly half of these victims (212; 46.4%) reported being revictimized between the presenting incident and the six-month interview. Within this group of repeat victims, 81 reported experiencing no injury as a result of their repeat victimization; our de-escalation estimate is given by $d = 81/212 = 0.382$. This result implies that the majority of the repeat victims were, in fact, experiencing new injuries.

The Omaha protocol included three interviews for each victim agreeing to participate. The initial interview ($n=477$), targeted for one week after the presenting incident asked detailed questions about that incident including whether they experienced each of the following injuries: (1) bruised/scratched, (2) cut/bleeding, (3) unconscious, (4) broken bones, and (5) head injuries. Interviews conducted approximately six months ($n=438$) and one year ($n=416$) after the presenting incident asked questions about attacks occurring after the presenting incident. The six-month interview asked detailed questions about each of the first three incidents after the presenting incident and the one-year interview asked detailed questions about each of the first three incidents occurring after the six-month interview. The follow-up interviews asked slightly different questions about injuries than the initial one-week interview: (1) bruised/scratched, (2) cut, (3) knocked/choked unconscious, and (4) teeth/eyes/ears injured.

Using information provided by the $n=438$ six-month interview respondents, we found that 335 (76.5%) reported they had been injured at the presenting incident while the other 103 said they had not been injured at the presenting incident. Nearly half (51) of the 103 non-injured victims went on to experience a new attack before the six-month interview. Analysis of the injury data at the six-month interview revealed that 20 of these 51 victims experienced one or more of the above-listed injuries yielding an estimated escalation prevalence of $e = 20/51 = 0.392$.

At the one-year interview, 99 non-injured presenting incident victims remained, and 60 (60.6%) of these victims had gone on to experience a new victimization between the presenting incident and the one-year interview. Out of these 60 victims, 26 went on to experience an injury; this implies that the probability of escalation within this group is $e = 26/60 = 0.433$. So, nearly half of the Omaha victims who were not injured at the

presenting incident went on to experience an injury if they encountered additional assaults.

The majority of the Omaha respondents reported an injury at the presenting incident (335 at the six-month interview and 317 at the one-year interview). Analysis of the six-month and one-year follow-up data revealed that the majority of the respondents experienced at least one new attack (202 at the six-month interview and 221 at the one-year interview). In both interviews, about half of the respondents experiencing a new attack reported an injury and about half did not ($d = 115/202 = 0.569$ at the six-month interview and $d = 111/221 = 0.502$ at the one-year interview). De-escalation and stable injury victimization were approximately equally prevalent outcomes for those who experienced new victimizations.

DISCUSSION

We asked two basic criminal career questions that have escaped the research literature in domestic violence: (1) To what extent do domestic violence offenders exhibit a specialized tendency to engage exclusively in violent criminal behavior? (2) How prevalent are escalation and de-escalation in the seriousness of attacks by an offender against the same victim in a longitudinal sequence of criminal domestic violence?

Regarding specialization, the official record data indicates that few SARP domestic violence offenders have been specializing exclusively in violence. We were certainly able to identify many offenders with violence in their official criminal histories, but the overwhelming majority of these individuals also committed nonviolent offenses. On the question of escalation and de-escalation in the seriousness of domestic violence, the victim interview data indicates that there is a heterogeneous mix of offenders who escalate and de-escalate the severity of their attacks over the relatively short-term follow-up periods. The exception site for both escalation and de-escalation was Charlotte, where tendencies of offenders to escalate the severity of attacks in low injury presenting cases were pronounced and tendencies of offenders to de-escalate the severity of attacks in high injury presenting cases were virtually nonexistent.

These results contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, there have been very few efforts to integrate criminal careers and domestic violence issues in a longitudinal design, and even fewer studies have examined whether offenders differ over time in their proclivity toward specialization and escalation in domestic violence. The results of our analysis question some of the classic views that escalation in domestic

violence is the norm.^{7,8} In sum, few studies have presented data consistent with the present study's findings: not all men escalate their domestic violence, but it may be that the men who are the most severely violent initially are the most likely to continue their violence over time.²¹ A longitudinal analysis of the criminal careers of domestic violence offender subtypes appears to be a critical piece of future research.

Several limitations should be noted. The first is an exclusive focus on official records to study the question of specialization. More effort needs to be devoted to research on specialization through the use of offender and victim interviews. Second, the interview information is plagued by an inability to know how the results would have changed if rates of missing data had been lower. Response rates of interview-based studies of criminal domestic violence victims are low and item measurement properties are not well understood. It is plausible that non-interviewed victims have a different victimization experience than interviewed victims.²² A third limitation has to do with our focus on comparatively less serious forms of domestic violence. This is based on the case selection criteria for the SARP studies, which focused primarily on cases where the police maintain discretion about how to respond to the case. For more injurious criminal domestic violence cases, the police are required by law to arrest and such cases were systematically excluded from the SARP. The criminal careers of felony domestic violence offenders might look quite different from those we examined in this study. Fourth, the site-specific data forced us to employ different definitions of injury. This may affect the comparisons across sites with regard to the criminal career parameters studied. Finally, the SARP was designed to measure the short-term impact of arrest on the behavior of domestic violence offenders. Going forward, it will be useful to trace the mix and progression of domestic violence offenders' criminal careers over longer follow-up periods using a variety of different data sources.

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