

Characteristics and Context of Women Probationers and Parolees Who Engage in Violence

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Although the violence of women in prison has been studied, very little is known about the violence of women who are supervised in the community. Thus we carried out research to describe the nature of violence and the characteristics of the women who use violence for a sample of women on probation and parole.

The Nature of Women's Violence

For 396 women who were supervised in the community, we used qualitative analyses of 75 detailed descriptions of their violent actions to understand the range and types of violence they committed.

Findings

Women's violent acts were most often assaults on people who were not intimate partners. Women assaulted others to protect themselves or others, out of anger, and to right a perceived injustice. The second most common type of violent act was for assaults of an intimate partner, often but not always in self-defense. Third most common were robberies, in most cases committed with other people for material gain. The nature of violence differed for women on probation and for those on parole. Women on probation were more likely to describe assaults of someone other than an intimate partner, and women on parole more often described robberies.

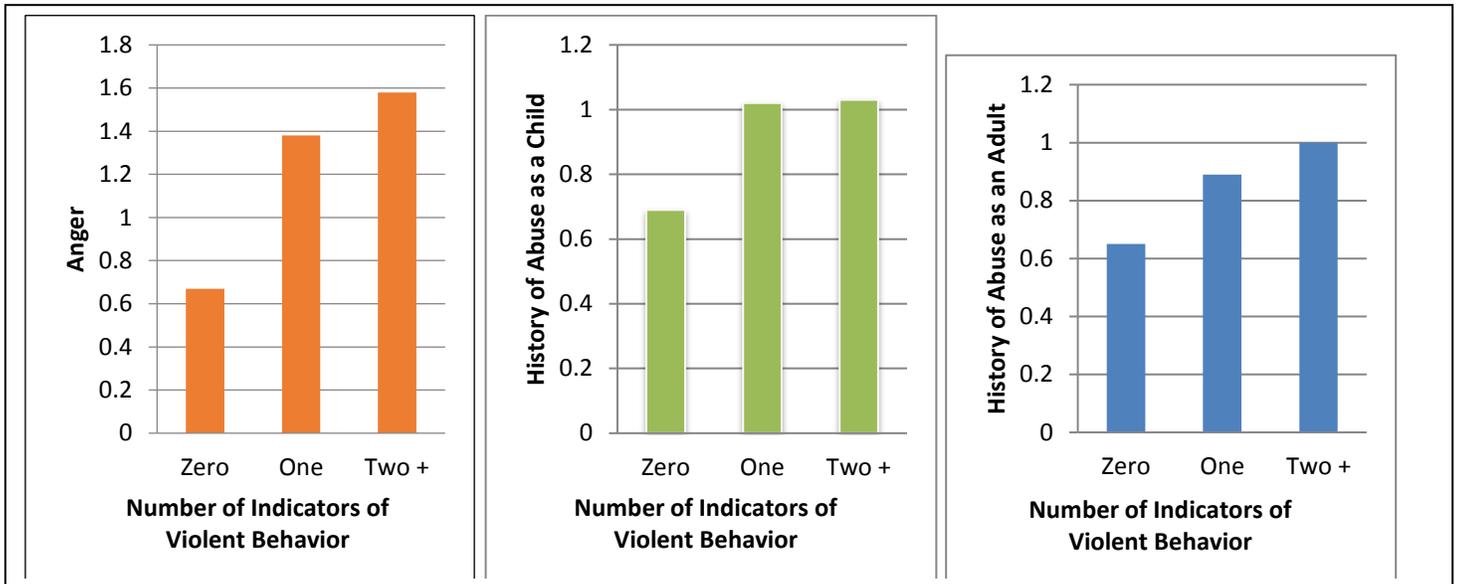
Characteristics of Women who Use Violence

For all 396 women supervised in the community we used quantitative analysis to address the following questions:

- Do histories of abuse, mental health, anger, and antisocial attitudes differ for women who do, and do not have histories of violence?
- Does anger explain the connection between abuse history and women's violence? In other words, are the data consistent with a model that suggests that women who have more of a drug abuse history lead to anger, which in turn explains women's violence?

Findings

Overall we found a number of differences between women who had no indicators of violent behavior and women who had either one or more than one indicator of violence. The strongest difference between women who displayed and did not display violence was for difficulties with anger and hostility such that women who had zero indicators of violence reported significantly lower anger. Histories of child abuse and abuse as an adult were also related to violence. These findings are presented in graphs below.



In addition, a history of abuse as an adult and anger explained the degree to which women used violence beyond what could be explained by other variables, including history of child abuse, psychosis symptoms, depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, antisocial attitude, crime in the neighborhood, and age. Anger seemed to be especially important, because it explained much of the connection between women’s history of abuse and their use of violence.

Anger and history of abuse were not only related to each other, but also to mental health problems and current substance abuse.

Recommendations

- Practitioners who work with women on probation and parole should recognize the wide variety of reasons that women use violence.
- Interventions to reduce women’s use of violence should address anger and its correlates.
- The interconnections among anger, violence, abuse history, mental illness, and substance abuse support the design of interventions to reduce women’s violence that address a wide variety of needs rather than just one particular need, such as anger or anger management.