

Abusive Partners and Ex-Partners

Understanding the Effects of Relationship to the Abuser on Women's Well-Being

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This study examined how being abused by a current partner versus an ex-partner might affect psychological well-being and social support in a community sample of 398 women, half of whom had experienced abuse in the past 6 months. The impact of emotional and physical abuse was influenced by partner status, with emotional abuse being more detrimental to women abused by current partners and physical abuse being more detrimental to women abused by ex-partners. Emotional support was negatively related to depression in women abused by current partners, whereas practical support was negatively related to depression in women abused by ex-partners. The implications for interventions with abused women are discussed.

Keywords: *domestic violence; emotional abuse; physical abuse; social support*

Although a great deal of research has examined the ramifications of physical and emotional abuse on the well-being of women, no studies to date have examined the independent effects of being abused by a current partner versus an ex-partner. The partner status distinction is important; research indicates that physical abuse may escalate after the relationship has ended (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995) and that emotional abuse may escalate following a separation (Sev'er, 1997). In both cases, the abusive partner may feel a loss of control and may try to reassert that control by becoming more abusive. However, although research indicates that there may be different consequences of emotional versus physical abuse (O'Leary, 1999), no studies have examined how relationship to the abuser may affect women's well-being in the context of both physical and emotional abuse.

In addition, research indicates that positive social support plays an important role in ameliorating the negative consequences that result from being abused (Kaslow et al., 1998; Thompson et al., 2000) and helping women gain access to resources that may help them protect themselves from abuse (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002; Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). However, no studies examining social support for women in abusive relationships have examined what effect women's relationships to their abusers might have on their social support needs. For example, women being abused by current partners might have a greater need for emotional support (e.g., empathy and encouragement), whereas women being abused by ex-partners might have greater need for practical support (e.g., help with legal action, housing, or employment). Therefore, the current study examined the effects of emotional and practical social support on the well-being of women with abusive partners and ex-partners.

Background

Domestic violence is a pervasive social and public health problem; estimates indicate that between 21% and 34% of all women will experience some form of abuse from an intimate partner during their lifetime (J. C. Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Koss, 1990). Psychological symptoms are as prevalent as physical symptoms in physically abused women; women who have been battered tend to be more depressed, have increased anxiety, and have increased suicide attempts (J. C. Campbell, Kub, Belknap, & Templin, 1997; J. C. Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; R. Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995; Gelles & Harrop, 1989; Hilberman & Munson, 1977; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Sandin, 1997; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986; Lutembacher, 2000; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Sato & Heiby, 1992; Sutherland, Bybee, & Sullivan, 1998; Thompson, Kaslow, Short, & Wyckoff, 2002). One study found that women in abusive relationships did not have any mental disorders prior to the current abusive relationship, suggesting that psychological symptoms can be attributed to the abuse (Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum, 2001).

In contrast to physical abuse, emotional abuse can be both overt and covert. Examples include isolating a woman from her family and friends, acting jealous and possessive, making her fearful, and making her feel crazy (Bancroft, 2002; Marshall, 1996, 1999). Emotional abuse also has serious psychological consequences (J. C. Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997), including depressive symptoms (M. A. Dutton, Goodman, & Bennett, 1999; Katz & Arias, 1999; Marshall, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999), stress (M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Marshall, 1999), trauma symptoms (Arias & Pape, 1999), and self-esteem problems (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990). Although O'Leary (1999) suggested that the effects of emotional abuse are often more damaging than those of physical abuse, research findings on the differential impact of physical abuse and emotional abuse have been equivocal (J. C. Campbell et al., 1997; M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Marshall, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999).

Partner Status and Abuse

Because research indicates that physical and emotional abuse may escalate following the end of a relationship, it is important to examine the implication of being abused by a current partner versus an ex-partner. However, researchers have yet to examine the psychological implications of being abused by a current partner as opposed to an ex-partner. Some researchers have limited their participants to women who were being abused by either a current partner (Abbott, Johnson, Koziol-McLain, & Lowenstein, 1995) or a former partner (D. G. Dutton & Painter, 1993; Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000). However, the majority of research involves participants who may be in or out of an abusive relationship, but the partner status is not examined (e.g., Honeycutt, Marshall, & Weston, 2001; Roberts, 1987; M. A. Rodriguez, McLoughlin, Nah, & Campbell, 2001).

The lack of delineation of partner status is a concern given that some researchers argue that there are qualitatively different patterns of abuse when women are abused by current versus former partners (Brownridge & Halli, 2001, 2002) and that the abuse itself may be different (Kurz, 1996). The available research suggests that abuse increases after the relationship ends (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; J. C. Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998), indicating that "leaving the relationship and ending the violence are independent" (J. C. Campbell et al., 1998, p. 750). Leaving the relationship may threaten the batterer's control over his partner, and thus he may increase violence or use different violent methods to regain control (Sev'er, 1997).

To date, no research has examined the effects of a woman's relationship to her abuser on her well-being, despite research findings that indicate that it is important to consider both whether or not a woman is currently in the abusive relationship and her history of abuse in past relationships (Bogat, Levendosky, Theran, von Eye, & Davidson, 2003). Even researchers who have acknowledged that not all of the women in their studies were abused by a current partner did not examine partner status and its relationship to psychological well-being (J. C. Campbell & Soeken, 1999).

Partner Status and Social Support

Relationship status also affects the social support of women experiencing domestic violence. In one study, battered women who were legally married received more social support than did women who were not (Goodkind et al., 2003). Therefore, it is likely that abuse by a current versus an ex-partner might influence the social support the abused woman receives and needs.

Social support can act as a protective factor against the appraisal of stress and the physical and psychological health problems caused by stress. Social support can be perceived as a source of resistance against illness, including stress-related illness (Quick, Horn, & Quick, 1986). Because women in abusive relationships are typically socially isolated by their abusers (Follingstad et al., 1990; Forte, Franks, Forte, &

Rigsby, 1996; Rynerson & Fishel, 1993), social support can help ameliorate their isolation. In addition, positive social support from friends and family might influence a woman in an abusive relationship to seek social services or other help (Bowker, 1984).

Research indicates that women in abusive relationships have less emotional and practical support than women not in abusive relationships (Barnett, Martinez, & Keyson, 1996; Levendosky et al., 2004). In addition, for women in abusive relationships, positive social support is related to positive well-being (Goodkind et al., 2003; Kemp, Green, Hovanitz, & Rawlings, 1995; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Tan, Basta, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995).

One theory of social support, the main effect model, maintains that social support has a beneficial effect regardless of level and amount of experienced stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This model has been verified in numerous research studies with general populations (Bell, LeRoy, & Stephenson, 1982; Duckitt & Broll, 1982; Mitchell, Billings, & Moos, 1982) and in some studies with women in abusive relationships (Kemp et al., 1995; E. Rodriguez, Lasch, Chandra, & Lee, 2001; Thompson et al., 2000). These studies of battered women included women recruited from shelters, a national survey sample, and women seeking medical care, respectively.

Another theory of social support, the buffering model, suggests that social support functions as a moderator that is most effective under high levels of stress. Researchers have demonstrated that social support moderates depressive symptomatology and stress appraisal in the general population (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Felsten, 1991; Felsten & Wilcox, 1992; Flannery & Wieman, 1989); several studies of women in abusive relationships have also found moderating effects (M. A. Dutton, Hohnecker, Halle, & Burghardt, 1994; Kaslow et al., 1998; Mitchell & Hodson, 1986). These studies of battered women used non-representative samples (a forensic sample, women seeking health care, and a small shelter sample, respectively), making it difficult to generalize the results, especially given that buffering effects may be dependent on the population studied (Turner & Turner, 1999).

Domains of social support include emotional and practical assistance. Emotional support is composed of two distinct types: social companionship, or belongingness, which is spending time with others in an informal way and being part of a social network (Cohen & Wills, 1985; M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Flannery & Wieman, 1989; Wellman & Wortley, 1990), and emotional support, which involves behavior that reflects empathy and understanding (Bailey, Wolfe, & Wolfe, 1994). Practical support involves providing tangible assistance, such as child care (Wellman & Wortley, 1990; Wills, 1985) or financial support (Wellman & Wortley, 1990).

Different forms of social support have particular mechanisms for decreasing stress. Research indicates that socioemotional types of social support (i.e., social companionship and emotional support) are more effective in reducing depressive symptoms than are more tangible means of social support, such as practical assistance or financial

support (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Israel & Antonucci, 1987; Taylor & Dakof, 1988; Tutty, Bidgood, & Rothery, 1993). Possibly, stressful experiences elicit coping requirements that are best met by socioemotional types of support. Cohen and Wills (1985) postulated that the buffering model was most effective when the coping needs were met by the type of social support offered. Although tangible support emphasizes the availability of external resources, socioemotional types of support emphasize the recipient's internal feelings and how she is viewed by others (Cohen & McKay, 1984).

However, most studies examining social support with women experiencing intimate partner violence have not examined the differential effects of emotional and practical support and have instead examined the effects of a composite construct of social support (Kaslow et al., 1998; Thompson et al., 2000). This makes it difficult to ascertain which types of support would be most helpful for women experiencing domestic violence. In addition, the type of support that is most helpful for women may vary depending on the relationship to the abuser, especially given the different types of abuse that may be experienced. For example, women being abused by an ex-partner might benefit most from practical support, such as legal assistance to fight custody battles, rather than emotional support.

Rationale and Hypotheses

Domestic violence negatively affects women's well-being, whereas social support positively affects well-being (Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). However, there has been no research to date on how women's relationships to their abusers might differentially affect (a) their well-being, (b) the effects of emotional abuse and physical abuse, and (c) the impact of different types of social support on women's psychological well-being. This study, then, examined specifically how being abused by a current partner versus an ex-partner would affect well-being and if emotional abuse or physical abuse would be more detrimental to well-being depending on relationship status.

It was hypothesized that women who had been abused (regardless of the type of abuse) would report less satisfaction with social support and more stress appraisal and depressive symptomatology in their lives than women who had not been abused in the prior six months. In addition, for abused women, it was hypothesized that emotional abuse would account for more variance in stress appraisal and depressive symptomatology than would physical abuse. And finally, it was hypothesized that there would be main effects and moderating effects for social support between physical and emotional abuse and well-being. It was expected that partner status and social support would differentially relate to women's well-being. Specifically, it was expected that emotional support would be more beneficial to women with abusive partners, whereas practical assistance would be more beneficial to women with abusive ex-partners.

Method

Participants

A total of 398 women were recruited to participate in the current study. Recruitment was designed to obtain a sample that represented relatively equal distributions of low-income not abused, low-income abused, middle-income not abused, and middle-income abused women. The primary method of recruitment was through newspaper advertisements. Four different advertisements were placed in three local newspapers from August 1996 through June 1997. Each of the advertisements was designed to recruit 1 of 4 specific profiles, described above, for each wave of recruitment. Women called the Women's Health Study office, where they were screened for eligibility, which was determined by the desired participant profile. Once women were determined to be eligible, an in-person interview was scheduled.

More than half of the women in the study identified themselves as White or Caucasian (70%), 17% as Black or African American, 6% as multiple ethnicity, 5% as Hispanic or Latina, 1% as Asian-Pacific, and 1% as Native American. The mean age of women in the study was 34 years old (range = 17 to 54). The majority of women (81%) had at least some high school education; 69% of women were currently employed, and 85% had been employed in the past 6 months. The mean monthly income was \$2,042 (range = 0 to \$8,667, *Mdn* = \$1,500). As expected, because of recruitment criteria, 52% ($n = 205$) of the women interviewed had been physically abused by an intimate partner or ex-partner in the prior 6 months.

Abused and nonabused women differed on several demographic variables (see Table 1). Women who had experienced abuse were significantly younger (although the age difference was less than 3 years), were less likely to have a college education, were less likely to be employed in the past 6 months, and were less likely to be currently employed than were the nonabused women. Abused women were less likely to be married and living with their spouse or divorced from a spouse; they were more likely to be separated from a spouse, living with a girlfriend or boyfriend, or not living with a girlfriend or boyfriend. Abused women had significantly less monthly income than did nonabused women ($M = \$1,477$ vs. $M = \$2,647$, respectively). They were also more likely to be African American or Latina, but this was confounded by income or poverty status.

Measures

Physical abuse. Physical abuse was defined as any incident in the past 6 months during which the woman was physically harmed by an intimate partner or ex-partner. The relationship was considered intimate if the participant indicated that the partner was or had been at least a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Physical abuse was assessed by a modified version of Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), which contains

Table 1
Demographics of Participants

	Abused Women (%)	Nonabused Women (%)	Total Sample (%)
Ethnic background**			
African American	22.8	10.4	16.4
Caucasian	62.1	78.8	70.7
Latina	6.8	3.1	4.8
Asian-Pacific	1.0	1.0	1.0
Native American	0.5	1.0	.8
Other	6.8	5.7	6.3
Age***			
Mean age	32.89	35.64	34.22
Educational level***			
High school graduate or less	29.1	8.8	19.2
Some college or trade school	61.1	47.7	54.5
Bachelor's degree	6.9	30.1	18.2
Post-Bachelor's degree	2.9	13.5	8.1
Employed in past 6 months**			
Yes	81.1	88.6	84.6
Currently employed***			
Yes	74.3	89.5	82.1
Relationship status***			
Married, living together	17.5	38.9	28.0
Married, separated	13.6	4.1	9.2
Divorced	12.6	18.1	15.3
Girlfriend or boyfriend living together	15.0	6.2	10.9
Girlfriend or boyfriend not living together	16.5	10.9	13.7
Dating, not girlfriend or boyfriend	4.4	3.6	4.1
Not currently dating anyone	15.5	16.6	16.3
Other	4.9	1.5	2.5
Income***			
Monthly income (<i>M</i>)	\$1,476	\$2,647	\$2,051
Monthly income (<i>Mdn</i>)	\$1,200	\$2,400	\$1,500
People supported by income			
Average number of people	2.81	2.79	2.80
Number of children			
Average number of children	1.91	1.68	1.80

Note: *N* = 396.

p* < .05. *p* < .001.

13 items. The modified scale eliminated the verbal abuse items and separated composite items (e.g., partitioned a question asking about pushing, grabbing, or shoving into two distinct items). Participants rated the frequency of the physical abuse on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*more than four times a week*). The frequency of

abuse scale score was created by taking the sum score across the items. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .92, and possible total scores ranged from 0 to 65.

Emotional abuse. Emotional abuse was defined as any act in which the participant was emotionally hurt or harmed by an intimate partner or ex-partner in the past 6 months. It was measured with a shortened (21-item) version of the 33-item Index of Psychological Abuse (IPA; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999; Sullivan, Parisian, & Davidson, 1991). Questions pertained to common forms of emotional abuse such as isolation, harassment, ridicule, and controlling behavior. Participants rated their experiences of psychological abuse on a 4-point scale that ranged from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*often*). The scale score was calculated as the mean frequency with which participants experienced the different forms of emotional abuse. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .93, and possible total scores ranged from 0 to 126.

Social support. The social support scale used was a modified version of Bogat, Chin, Sabbath, and Schwartz's (1983) Adult's Social Support Questionnaire. The scale contained 11 items that measured the participant's amount and quality of social support across five domains: companionship, emotional support, practical assistance, financial assistance, and advice and information. Participants rated their feelings about the quantity and quality of social support they received from friends and family on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*extremely pleased*) to 7 (*terrible*). A factor analysis supported the use of two social support scale scores, emotional support (i.e., companionship and emotional support) and practical support (i.e., practical assistance and financial assistance). The advice and information items did not load on either factor and were dropped from the analyses. The scale score for each of the two social support subscales was obtained by summing the quantity and quality scores across relevant domains. The coefficient alpha for both emotional support and practical support was .86, with possible scores for each subscale ranging from 4 to 28.

Stress. The Life Event Checklist (Reischl, Eby, & Ramanathan, 1992) is a 50-item list of stressful life events (e.g., intimate relationships, family, finances, work, school, and legal issues). Participants were asked if the stressful event occurred within the past 6 months and then indicated, on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all stressful*) to 4 (*extremely stressful*), how stressful it was for them. The scale score equals the sum stressfulness rating across endorsed items. The coefficient alpha for this scale, .77, was expected to be moderately low because the various stressful life events in a person's life need not be related. Possible total scores for the stress scale ranged from 0 to 200.

Depression. The Center for Epidemiological Studies–Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977) is a 20-item scale that measures the extent to which participants experienced symptoms of depression during the past week; participants rated each symptom on

a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*rarely or never*) to 3 (*most or all of the time*). The scale score equals the sum symptom rating of endorsed items. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .93, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 60.

Procedure

Trained female interviewers met the participant at either her home or at the local American Red Cross office. After the participant signed an informed consent, the interviewer administered the interview, which lasted approximately 90 minutes (range = 1.0 to 4.5 hours). On completing the interview, the participant was paid \$30.00 and given a sheet detailing community resources.

Results

Women were considered abused if they had endorsed at least one item from both the CTS and IPA scales. Again, as expected by the recruitment strategy, 255 women were in the abused category, if they had experienced physical abuse in the previous 6 months, and 193 women were in the nonabused category. Of women who experienced physical abuse in the past 6 months, 48% ($n = 98$) were physically abused by an ex-partner, 51% ($n = 105$) were physically abused by a current partner, and 1% ($n = 2$) were abused by both an ex-partner and a current partner. The two women who were abused by both ex- and current partners were excluded from the specific analyses comparing ex-partner and current partner abuse. In addition, 333 (84%) of the women in the study experienced some form of emotional abuse in the past 6 months.

Preliminary analyses on all of the women in the study revealed several significant relationships among variables (see Table 2). All of the variables were significantly correlated with each other, except that ex-partner emotional abuse was not correlated with depressive symptomatology and neither emotional nor practical support was correlated with ex-partner emotional abuse, current partner physical abuse, or ex-partner physical abuse.

To test part of the first hypothesis, that women who had been abused (regardless of the type of abuse) would be less satisfied with their social support than women who had not been abused in the past 6 months, 2 one-way analyses of covariance were conducted with abuse status as the independent variable and emotional support and practical support as the dependent variables, controlling for education, income, and ethnicity. Abused women were significantly more dissatisfied with their emotional support ($M = 13.13$ vs. $M = 11.16$), $F(1, 396) = 11.64, p < .001$, and their practical support ($M = 14.43$ vs. $M = 12.17$), $F(1, 396) = 12.73, p < .001$, than were nonabused women. Higher scores indicate greater dissatisfaction with support.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was then performed to examine whether relationship status affected satisfaction with emotional and practical social

Table 2
Correlation Table

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Depressive symptomatology	1.00							
Stress	.51***	1.00						
Current partner emotional abuse	.39***	.39***	1.00					
Ex-partner emotional abuse	.19	.33***	—	1.00				
Current partner physical abuse	.32***	.31***	.65***	—	1.00			
Ex-partner physical abuse	.37***	.37***	—	.66***	—	1.00		
Emotional support	.37***	.27***	.25**	-.10	.18	.04	1.00	
Practical support	.38***	.37***	.21**	.02	.08	-.02	.59***	1.00

** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

support. Women who experienced abuse by current partners were significantly more dissatisfied with both emotional support ($M = 14.33$ vs. $M = 12.69$), $F(1, 202) = 4.56$, $p < .05$, and practical support ($M = 15.78$ vs. $M = 13.99$), $F(1, 202) = 3.82$, $p = .05$, than were women who had experienced abuse by ex-partners. A similar MANOVA was performed to examine whether relationship status predicted frequency of physical and emotional abuse. There was no difference in frequency of physical abuse for women abused by partners versus ex-partners ($F = 2.77$, ns). However, women who were abused by ex-partners experienced a higher frequency of emotional abuse ($M = 29.38$ vs. $M = 25.15$), $F(1, 202) = 6.98$, $p < .05$.

We then tested whether abused women would report higher stress and depression than nonabused women. One-way analyses of variance were conducted with abuse status as the independent variable and stress appraisal and depressive symptomatology as the dependent variables. Results for both stress appraisal and depressive symptomatology were significant, $F(1, 396) = 90.52$, $F(1, 396) = 64.65$, respectively, indicating that abused women reported more stress appraisal ($M = 28.71$ vs. $M = 15.30$) and depressive symptomatology ($M = 27.74$ vs. $M = 17.25$) than did nonabused women. However, there was no difference in levels of stress appraisal ($F = 0.95$, ns) and depressive symptomatology ($F = 0.02$, ns) for women battered by current partners versus ex-partners.

To test the hypothesis that emotional abuse would predict additional variance in stress appraisal and depressive symptomatology after the effects of physical abuse were controlled, eight regression analyses were run (see Table 3). For women being abused by current partners, emotional abuse did contribute significantly to variance in stress appraisal after controlling for physical abuse. There was also a trend for emotional abuse to contribute more variance to depression after controlling for physical abuse ($\beta = .21$, $t = 1.71$, $p = .09$). Physical abuse contributed significantly to variance in depressive symptomatology after controlling for emotional abuse, suggesting that emotional abuse and physical abuse each independently contributed significantly to depressive symptomatology. However, for women being abused by ex-partners,

Table 3
Regression Analyses for Emotional Abuse and Physical Abuse
for Predictors of Stress Appraisal and Depressive Symptomatology

Variable	Stress—Current Partner				Stress—Ex-Partner			
	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β
Physical abuse entered first								
Step 1: Physical abuse	.11	.11	13.24***	.34***	.13	.13	14.05***	.36***
Step 2: Physical abuse				.14				.25**
Emotional abuse	.16	.05	5.83**	.29**	.14	.02	1.63	.16
Emotional abuse entered first								
Step 1: Emotional abuse	.15	.15	18.25***	.39***	.11	.11	11.47***	.33***
Step 2: Emotional abuse				.29**				.16
Physical abuse	.16	.01	1.38	.14	.14	.04	3.95**	.25**
	Depression—Current Partner				Depression—Ex-Partner			
	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β
Physical abuse entered first								
Step 1: Physical abuse	.16	.16	19.98***	.40***	.12	.12	12.73***	.34***
Step 2: Physical abuse				.27**				.34**
Emotional abuse	.19	.03	2.94*	.21*	.12	.00	.00	.01
Emotional abuse entered first								
Step 1: Emotional abuse	.15	.15	17.65***	.38***	.05	.05	5.35**	.23**
Step 2: Emotional abuse				.21*				.01
Physical abuse	.19	.04	4.97**	.27**	.12	.07	6.93**	.34**

p* < .10. *p* < .05. ****p* < .001.

emotional abuse did not significantly contribute to either stress appraisal or depressive symptomatology after controlling for physical abuse.

To test the hypothesis that social support would moderate the relationship between abuse and psychological well-being, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) criteria for testing moderating effects were used. Four different multiple regression analyses were used for current partner abuse, and four were used for ex-partner abuse. In each regression equation, one of the two abuse variables (emotional or physical) was entered in the first step, the social support variables were entered in the second step (emotional and practical), and the product between the abuse variable and each of the support variables was entered last.

Neither emotional nor practical support moderated the effects of emotional or physical abuse on stress appraisal, regardless of whether the abuse was perpetrated by current or ex-partners (see Tables 4 and 5). Similarly, social support did not moderate the effects of abuse on depression (see Tables 6 and 7). However, for women being emotionally abused, emotional support was related to less depression for women with abusive partners and ex-partners (see Table 6).

Table 4
Regression Analyses for Emotional Social Support and Practical Social Support as Moderators of Emotional Abuse and Stress

Variable	Stress—Current Partner				Stress—Ex-Partner			
	R^2	ΔR^2	F for $R^2\Delta$	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F for $R^2\Delta$	β
Step 1: Emotional abuse	.15	.15	18.25***	.39***	.11	.11	11.47***	.33***
Step 2: Emotional support	.18	.03	1.80	.11	.14	.04	1.90	.02
Practical support				.09				.17
Step 3: Abuse \times Emotional Support Interaction	.20	.02	1.45	.19	.16	.02	1.00	-.18
Abuse \times Practical Support Interaction				-.18				.16

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

Table 5
Regression Analyses for Emotional Social Support and Practical Social Support as Moderators of Physical Abuse and Stress

Variable	Stress—Current Partner				Stress—Ex-Partner			
	R^2	ΔR^2	F for $R^2\Delta$	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F for $R^2\Delta$	β
Step 1: Physical abuse	.11	.11	13.24***	.34***	.13	.13	14.05***	.36***
Step 2: Emotional support	.15	.04	2.28	.13	.17	.04	2.30	-.07
Practical support				.09				.24
Step 3: Abuse \times Emotional Support Interaction	.16	.01	.68	-.02	.17	.00	.19	.02
Abuse \times Practical Support Interaction				-.12				-.07

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

For women being physically abused, social support differentially affected depression, depending on relationship status. For women being physically abused by an ex-partner, practical support was related to less depression, and for women being physically abused by a current partner, emotional support was related to less depression (see Table 7).

Discussion

Consistent with prior research, the current study confirmed that women in abusive relationships are more dissatisfied with their social support than are women not in

Table 6
Regression Analyses for Emotional Social Support and Practical Social Support as Moderators of Emotional Abuse and Depression

Variable	Depression—Current Partner				Depression—Ex-Partner			
	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β
Step 1: Emotional abuse	.15	.15	17.65***	.38***	.05	.05	5.35**	.23**
Step 2: Emotional support	.23	.09	5.60**	.22**	.21	.16	9.22***	.25**
Practical support				.12				.20*
Step 3: Abuse \times Emotional Support Interaction	.25	.01	.92	.09	.25	.04	2.47*	-.24*
Abuse \times Practical Support Interaction				.05				.05

p* < .10. *p* < .05. ****p* < .001.

Table 7
Regression Analyses for Emotional Social Support and Practical Social Support as Moderators of Physical Abuse and Depression

Variable	Depression—Current Partner				Depression—Ex-Partner			
	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> for <i>R</i> ² Δ	β
Emotional support								
Step 1: Physical abuse	.16	.16	19.98***	.40***	.12	.12	12.73***	.35***
Step 2: Emotional support	.25	.09	6.03**	.23**	.26	.14	8.89***	.17
Practical support				.12				.25**
Step 3: Abuse \times Emotional Support Interaction	.26	.00	.28	-.01	.31	.05	3.39**	-.09
Abuse \times Practical Support Interaction				.07				-.16

p* < .10. *p* < .05. ****p* < .001.

abusive relationships (Barnett et al., 1996; Levendosky et al., 2004; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Tan et al., 1995). We also found that women who experienced abuse by a current partner were more dissatisfied with their social support than were women who experienced abuse by an ex-partner. Interestingly, the groups did not differ on frequency of physical abuse, so these differences can most likely be attributed to the woman’s relationship status to her abuser. There are a number of plausible explanations for this finding. First, once a woman leaves her partner, she may be more likely to receive social support from friends and family who are relieved that she left the abuser. Second, a woman’s supporters may be less fearful of the repercussions of providing support once the relationship has terminated (Goodkind et al., 2003; Riger,

Raja, & Camacho, 2002). Third, once the relationship has terminated, a woman is less likely to be socially isolated by her abuser and thus has more access to her supporters.

Not surprisingly, women who had been physically abused in the past 6 months reported higher stress appraisal and depression than did women who had not been abused in the past 6 months. Stress and depression levels did not differ, however, between women physically abused by current partners and those physically abused by ex-partners. Thus, the presence and intensity of physical abuse is related to psychological well-being, regardless of whether the abuse is perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner.

Emotional abuse, on the other hand, affected stress appraisal and depression differently for women abused by current versus former partners. Although women who were abused by ex-partners experienced more emotional abuse than did women who were abused by current partners, this emotional abuse was a better predictor of well-being for women abused by current partners. For women abused by ex-partners, physical abuse predicted stress and depression more than did emotional abuse. However, for women abused by current partners, emotional abuse was a better predictor of stress than was physical abuse. In addition, emotional abuse and physical abuse by current partners contributed independently to depression.

The latter finding is consistent with some previous research (Sackett & Saunders, 1999). However, prior research that found that emotional abuse was a better predictor of depressive symptomatology than was physical abuse (M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Marshall, 1999) would have benefited from delineating partner status. It may be that after the relationship has ended, the controlling aspects of the emotional abuse cease to have as much impact as the physical abuse, whereas when the relationship is ongoing, both emotional and physical abuse influence psychological well-being. In addition, aspects of emotional abuse, such as ridicule and insults, are likely more painful in the context of an ongoing relationship.

These findings support research that indicates that emotional abuse has serious detrimental effects on women's well-being. For the women abused by current partners, emotional abuse was as important or more important than physical abuse in predicting depression and stress appraisal. In addition, research indicates that physical abuse is almost always preceded by emotional abuse (O'Leary, 1999). Thus, it is important that prevention and intervention efforts focus on the impact of emotional abuse as well as physical abuse.

Surprisingly, the current study did not find main effects for the impact of social support on stress appraisal. Given the low correlations between stress appraisal and the social support variables, there does not appear to be a strong relationship between stress appraisal and social support. It may be that stress is such an immediate response to trauma, as opposed to depression, that social support is unable to have an impact. For example, for abused women, the most experienced event was "increased arguments with partner." Following this stressful event, stress appraisal may occur so quickly that support is unable to directly affect the appraisal. It could also be that the cumulative effects of other stressors, such as needing money to pay

rent or being involved in legal action, are not as conducive to being affected by social support.

For women experiencing emotional abuse, regardless of relationship status, emotional support reduced depression. This suggests that interventions for women in abusive relationships should focus on the kind of support that is most helpful for them. Thus, it seems that in the context of emotional abuse, emotional support is most helpful in protecting against depressive symptomatology.

For women experiencing physical abuse, however, there was a differential impact of social support on depression. Emotional support reduced depression for women who were being physically abused by current partners, whereas practical support reduced depression for women who were being physically abused by ex-partners. Thus, these results suggest that the type of social support that helps the most is dependent on the relationship status with the abusive partner. Furthermore, these results suggest that women who are being physically abused by current partners are in need of understanding and emotional support. This is congruent with other research on social support that found that women who were currently in abusive relationships were frustrated with their social support and wanted empathy more than practical help (El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah, Folen, & Frye, 2001).

The results also suggest that women who have left the relationship yet still experience abuse by ex-partners are more in need of resources and assistance, perhaps in an effort to further distance themselves from the abusive ex-partner. J. C. Campbell and colleagues (1998) noted that financial independence was important for making the transition toward leaving an abuser. In addition, they found that women took financial actions, such as giving up child support, to sever the relationship ties. Women who have been battered are also overrepresented on welfare rolls (Brush, 1999; Tolman & Rosen, 2001). This suggests that many women who have left abusers may be in need of financial support. Finally, as previously mentioned, there may be different components of abuse following a separation. Sevrer's (1997) model described postrelationship violence as a means for the abuser to gain control (corroborated by J. C. Campbell et al.'s, 1998, empirical work), and one of the means of doing so was economic abuse.

The hypothesized buffering model of social support was not supported. Rather, the direct effects model of social support, which stipulates that social support is helpful regardless of the level of abuse, was supported. This has been corroborated in previous research studies (Aneshensel & Stone, 1982; Bell et al., 1982; Kemp et al., 1995; Koeske & Koeske, 1990; Power, 1988) and with researchers who have found consistent support for direct effects (Mitchell et al., 1982). One researcher noted that despite the "inherent attractiveness of the buffering model" (Terry, 1989, p. 170), it was likely that social support had direct effects on well-being.

Because this study's findings are based on data from a large community sample, it is likely that these results would generalize to populations similar to it. There are, however, limitations of this study. A cross-sectional design was used. A longitudinal

study would allow for the study of the effects of social support on psychological well-being over time and allow the researcher to examine how changing resources in a woman's life might affect her well-being and quality of social support. In addition, with a longitudinal study, the effects of emotional and physical abuse could be examined over time as partner status may change. Thus, future research should continue to focus on community samples, given the generalizability of these samples. In addition, research should continue to focus on understanding the interaction of women's relationship status to the batterer with the types of social support that can most positively affect her psychological well-being. The current study furthers our understanding of how partner status may affect the type of support needed by women and confirms the serious detrimental effects of emotional abuse on well-being.

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