

# Women with multiple violent partners more likely to have endured childhood trauma, psychological abuse

15 November 2016, by Jared Wadley

While there is abundant research on violently abusive relationships, it does not delve into the background of each individual involved, according to University of Michigan researchers.

A new U-M study found that some factors, such as a history of [childhood sexual abuse](#), having been held hostage, tortured or being in a current relationship that involves psychological abuse are all associated with [women's](#) exposure to multiple violent intimate partners.

Intimate partner [violence](#)—which includes physical and sexual violence and threats, stalking and coercive tactics—is a problem that affects up to one in three women in the United States, with huge social and financial repercussions, according to the study.

Lead author Sara Stein, a U-M doctoral student in social work and clinical science, along with colleagues analyzed several variables such as trauma history, mental health concerns and demographic factors.

"We wanted to understand the social and individual level mechanisms that may be associated with women's exposure to multiple intimate violent partners," Stein said.

The study involved 164 women from Michigan, Ohio, Texas and Ontario in domestic violence situations, with 35 percent of the women reporting multiple violent partners. About 70 percent were single, divorced or separated at the time of the interviews, and 43 percent spent time in a [domestic violence](#) shelter.

Respondents answered questions about specific violence instances, such as being punched or hit, as well as sustaining a broken bone from a fight

with a partner.

Women in the study experienced an average of at least 12 incidents of one type of psychological violence over the last year and four episodes of one form of both physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner.

Nearly 44 percent of the women reported childhood sexual abuse. Women reported high levels of post-traumatic stress and depressive symptoms.

When factoring in race, African-American and white women had significantly more violent partners than their Latina counterparts in the study. A woman's age, education level, income and history of [mental health](#) and physical abuse were not associated with the number of violent partners.

The researchers noted that a greater understanding of the factors that might contribute to women's risk of engaging with multiple violent intimate partners may help lead to more effective intervention methods.

The study's co-authors were Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, associate professor of [social work](#); doctoral students Maria Galano and Hannah Clark; and Sandra Graham-Bermann, professor of psychology and psychiatry.

The findings appear in the current issue of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

**More information:** The Social and Individual Characteristics of Women Associated With Engagement With Multiple Intimate Violent Partners: [DOI: 10.1177/0886260516676477](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516676477)

Provided by University of Michigan

APA citation: Women with multiple violent partners more likely to have endured childhood trauma, psychological abuse (2016, November 15) retrieved 10 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-women-multiple-violent-partners-childhood.html>

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