Applying Mixed Methods Design to Dynamics of Intimate Partner Violence

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: The overall purpose of the study was to use complexity science to gain a deeper understanding of the nonlinear day-to-day dynamics of intimate partner violence (IPV), with implications for clinical interventions.

Problem: In the United States, one in four women have experienced severe abuse from their intimate partners (Black et al., 2011). Each year, this translates into approximately 550,000 injuries requiring medical attention, costing nearly $4.1 billion for direct medical and mental health services (National Center for Injury Prevention & Control, 2003). However, little research has examined the complexity of daily patterns of IPV behavior in real time, in the context of the changing family environment. This study offers a unique contribution to IPV research in being the first to employ complexity science to investigate the aforementioned patterns.

Methods: Research assistants enrolled 200 women in moderately violent intimate relationships and asked them to report on their relationships every day for 12 weeks. Participants telephoned an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System daily, and reported to the study team weekly. They also completed quantitative baseline and end-of-study surveys. 42 participants completed qualitative end-of-study interviews to describe their relationship and the impact of the study on their lives.
Results: Of 200 enrollees, 145 women provided enough data for nonlinear analyses, averaging 63.5 daily reports of 84 possible. Participants submitted 9,201 daily reports, documenting partner’s verbal or physical aggression on 39.4% of days, and their own aggression on 23.1%.

Conclusions/Implications: Although our intent was to conduct an observational study, our investigation functioned as an intervention. Many women considered their weekly check-ins to be therapeutic, and referred to our research associate as their “counselor.” Additionally, participation in the study influenced 80 women to seek additional counseling or legal assistance. The qualitative component of our mixed methods design not only enriched our quantitative findings, but served as an outlet to an otherwise insular population.

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