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05.04.03/1-4720

Development of the Severity of Violence Against Women Scales

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In response to the need for more sensitive assessment instruments, scales were developed applicable to the evaluation of male violence against women. Two versions of the Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAWS) were developed. On 10-point scales, college females (N = 707) rated how serious, aggressive, abusive, violent, and threatening it would be if a man carried out each of 46 acts with a woman. The mean of each act across ratings was calculated and submitted to factor analysis. Nine factors represented symbolic violence: threats of mild, moderate, and serious violence; actual mild, minor, moderate, and serious violence; and sexual violence. Community women (N = 208) rated the acts on seriousness, aggressiveness, and abusiveness. All factors were unidimensional. Second-order factor analysis confirmed the existence of two broader dimensions representing physically threatening acts and actual violence. Ratings of the amount of physical and emotional harm provided the weightings for future research with student (SVAWS-S) and adult (SVAWS) samples.

KEY WORDS: abuse; assessment; dating violence; marital violence; conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers in both the dating and marital violence literatures have called for improved evaluation (Finkelhor, 1988; Gondolf, 1987; Sugarman and Hotaling, 1989; Yllo, 1989). Recently, Weis (1989) reviewed theoretical, methodological, and operational shortcomings in the field of family violence. He convincingly argued that these problems limit the possibility of expanding our knowledge. In his view, the critical elements in a measure of violence are that

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