

Thousands of women each year initiate the process of obtaining a restraining order against a violent partner. Although many women request an emergency restraining order, many fail to return to obtain a final 1-year order. The present study examined factors associated with completion of this process. Sixty-five women who initiated the process of securing a restraining order against a male partner participated in the study. Participants completed an interview, self-report measures, and were followed up to determine final restraining order status. Less than half of the women who initiated the process obtained final orders. Women who indicated an attachment to the abusive partner were less likely to complete the process. Perceived threat to the women facilitated persistence with the process; however, when the threat involved her children, women were less likely to persist. Understanding factors influencing persistence in help seeking, especially attachment and threat, is a crucial step toward enhancing interventions to facilitate efforts toward violence-free lives.

Factors Associated With Completion of the Restraining Order Process in Female Victims of Partner Violence

LORI A. ZOELLNER

NORAH C. FEENY

JENNIFER ALVAREZ

CHRISTINA WATLINGTON

MELANIE L. O'NEILL

University of Pennsylvania

RUTH ZAGER

Thomas Jefferson University

EDNA B. FOA

University of Pennsylvania

Women are more likely to be severely assaulted or killed by a male partner than by other perpetrators (Bachman & Saltzman, 1994; Browne & Williams,

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1993). Indeed, in the United States, more than 2 million women are severely assaulted (e.g., kicked, bitten, hit with a fist) each year by their partners. Furthermore, approximately 30% of marriages can be described as physically aggressive (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Despite these alarming statistics, remedies for partner violence have been elusive. Studies have consistently demonstrated that interventions focusing on self-regulation of the batterer's behavior offer only modest hope in reducing violence (Gondolf, 1997; Lindquist, Telch, & Taylor, 1984). Moreover, although many battered women eventually leave abusive partners (e.g., Strube, 1988), women's first attempts are often unsuccessful (Campbell, Miller, Cardwell, & Belknap, 1994; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Okun, 1986; Schwartz, 1988; Strube & Barbour, 1984). Indeed, the average battered woman makes up to five attempts to leave her partner before she actually ends the abusive relationship (Okun, 1986). Furthermore, leaving itself does not ensure the end of violence. Even after leaving, partner violence may continue in the form of stalking, threats, and physical assault (Campbell, Rose, Kulb, & Daphne, 1998; Kurz, 1996; Sullivan, Campbell, Angelique, Eby, & Davidson, 1994; Wilson, Johnson, & Daly, 1995).

Over the past two decades, a wide range of legal sanctions (e.g., mandatory arrest, restraining orders) and social interventions (e.g., battered women's shelters) have been initiated to assist battered women. Along with these developments are accounts of battered women as active agents in terminating violence (e.g., Bowker, 1986; Campbell et al., 1998; Gondolf, 1988). Many battered women are highly motivated to take action to curtail the violence, but these efforts may be hampered by a variety of factors. A number of theories have been proposed to understand both psychological and environmental factors that play a role in the continuation of abusive relationships, including attachment theory (cf. traumatic bonding, Dutton & Painter, 1993), learned helplessness theory (Walker, 1984), survivor theory (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988), social exchange theories (cf. Strube, 1988), Stockholm Hostage Syndrome (cf. Graham, Rawlings, & Rimini, 1988), and investment models (cf. Rusbult, 1993). In particular, traumatic bonding theory (Dutton & Painter, 1993) suggests that strong emotional attachment to the batterer is formed both from power imbalances and intermittent good-bad treatment. This theory postulates that when a woman finally leaves an abusive relationship, her immediate level of fear may decrease and her attachment to her abuser will again manifest itself. At this time, the woman is particularly vul-

nerable to returning to her abuser (Dutton & Painter, 1993). In this theory, fear may propel a woman to leave an abusive partner, but attachment may be related to her return. Similarly, DeMaris and Swinford (1996) suggest that fear motivates a woman to take action to stop the abuse and is therefore somewhat beneficial. However, they also suggest that excessive fear may inhibit actions by a woman to stop the abuse, even though it may be in her best effort to do so. Thus, both attachment and fear may play important roles in influencing a woman's ability to extricate herself from the abusive relationship.

One of the primary interventions aimed at facilitating a battered woman's ability to end partner violence is obtaining a protection from abuse order. Typically, obtaining a court order of protection is a two-step process. In the state of Pennsylvania, an emergency or *ex parte* hearing is the first step of the process. At this hearing, the victim is usually granted a short-term restraining order that does not require the abuser be notified of the legal process. The more difficult aspect of obtaining a final restraining order is that the woman must return to court to obtain a more permanent order (about 10 days later). This occurs after a notice of the second hearing has been served to the abuser. In Pennsylvania, the woman typically files the notice with the local police district. Thus, obtaining a restraining order tends to be a long and somewhat complicated process.

Each year, thousands of women seek legal sanctions in the form of arrest, restraining order, or prosecution to curtail partner violence (e.g., more than 10,000 protection orders were filed in Philadelphia in 1996). A number of researchers have examined women's reasons for obtaining restraining orders. One of the main reasons battered women report that they obtained restraining orders was that they were "tired of the abuse" (Fischer & Rose, 1995). Indeed, the majority of women (75%) stated that they viewed the protection order as a last resort after other sources of seeking help had failed. With respect to the effectiveness of restraining orders, most women reported satisfaction with the results of police and legal support (Hofeller, 1982) and felt the decision to obtain a restraining order was a good one (Horton, Simonidis, & Simonidis, 1987). Furthermore, several studies have reported a relatively high compliance with restraining orders by the batterer (e.g., Chaudhuri & Daly, 1992; Meloy, Cowett, Parker, Hofland, & Friedland, 1997). Although some studies show that restraining orders can be helpful (e.g., Jaffe, Wolfe, Telford, & Austin, 1986), partners who are unemployed or have a history of prior arrests are not likely to be deterred by the threat of arrest (Sherman, Smith, Schmidt, & Rogan, 1992). Moreover, some have found that restraining orders sometimes increase violence (Baker, 1997) or precede homicide (Morton, Runyan, Moracco, & Butts, 1998). Thus, due to

fear of retaliation and lack of perceived utility, battered women may be deterred from using this protection from abuse process.

The study of battered women seeking legal help for partner violence affords a unique opportunity to study mechanisms associated with the persistence in such help seeking. Several considerations led us to choose this population: First, these women are highly motivated to change their violent relationships; second, despite this motivation, approximately 50% of women do not persist with these efforts (i.e., they drop charges); third, they represent a severely assaulted sample (Gelles, 1974; Kantor & Straus, 1990); and fourth, they are more likely to vary in demographics than are the more frequently studied women from domestic abuse shelters, thus allowing for greater generalization. A primary goal of the present study was to examine factors associated with battered women's persistence in obtaining protection from abuse orders. Identifying factors that influence the success of women's efforts to end partner violence is a crucial step toward strengthening existing interventions and developing new strategies that support the women's own initiatives.

Although factors associated with completion of the restraining order process have not been systematically studied, factors associated with the decision to leave an abusive partner have. Demographic factors such as economic independence (Aguirre, 1985), greater resources (Gelles, 1976), higher education (Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988), and employment (Strube & Barbour, 1984) have been found related to not returning to an abusive partner. Abusive relationship characteristics (i.e., severity and frequency of violence) have also been found to be associated with the decision to leave an abusive partner (Gelles, 1976). Furthermore, Strube and Barbour (1984) found that women who thought that their partner could change or that still loved their partner were more likely to remain with their abusive assailant. Despite such research, it remains unclear what factors are most important in this decision-making process. In his review of the literature, Strube (1988) commented that there are mixed findings regarding what factors are related to the decision to leave an abusive relationship. In the present study, we extended this line of research to examine the factors associated with the completion of the restraining order process. We hypothesized that demographic variables such as economic viability (i.e., higher income, more education, employment), age, and marital status would be related to completion of the restraining order process. We also hypothesized that severity of abuse (e.g., severity of current episode, use of a weapon, involvement of her kids) would be related to completion of the restraining order process. Attachment to the abusive partner was hypothesized to be negatively related to completion of the restraining order process. In regard to a woman's perception of threat (e.g.,

threat to self or children, perception of danger), we hypothesized that fear would also be related to completion of the restraining order process. Finally, we examined the interviewer's ability to predict whether a woman would follow through with the restraining order process. We hypothesized that interviewers would be reasonably accurate predictors, integrating the information from the in-person interview and self-reports.

METHOD

Participants

Sixty-five women who were in the process of requesting a restraining order against a male partner were interviewed and completed self-reports on the day they sought an emergency restraining order. This study was conducted in cooperation with the Philadelphia Family Court Domestic Violence Unit (DVU).

To examine the representativeness of our interview sample, we obtained final restraining order status for 56 matched controls. These women were also in the process of requesting a restraining order but were not interviewed for this study. They were matched on the date that they requested a restraining order and on age (within 5 years). Information regarding other variables such as socioeconomic status and number of children was not available for this matched sample. Women were excluded from the study if they were pursuing a restraining order against a child, parent, or if they were illiterate in English.

Participants were on average 31.23 years old ($SD = 8.15$ years). Fifty-seven percent of the participants were African American, 12% Hispanic, and 31% Caucasian. Thirty percent reported having a partial high school education, 48% having a high school diploma, and 22% having some college. Household income was reported to be \$10,000 or less for 72% of the participants, between \$10,000 and \$30,000 for 20%, and more than \$30,000 for only 8%. Sixty percent of the participants reported being unemployed, 31% being employed on a full-time basis, and 9% being employed on a part-time basis. Thirty-seven percent of the participants reported receiving welfare.

The average duration of the relationship with their abusive partner was 4.33 years ($SD = 4.58$ years). Twenty-two percent of the participants were married, and overall, twenty-seven percent of the women reported currently living with their abusive partner. Only 5% of the participants had no children.

Measures

Partner Violence Interview (PVI). The PVI (Foa, Zager, Zoellner, Feeny, & Watlington, 1999) is a semistructured interview that contains questions about demographic information, relationship status with batterer, severity/frequency of the partner violence, relationship characteristics, perception of threat, and prior help-seeking behavior. These variables are explained in detail below. The duration of the interview was approximately 60 minutes.

Severity of abuse. Severity of abuse was calculated using 10 items (e.g., punched, kicked, shoved, used weapon), with each item scored as 0 (no) or 1 (yes) and summed to compute a total score, with a higher score indicating more severe abuse. These 10 items were derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979). To further capture severity, participants were also asked three yes/no questions about the most recent episode of abuse: (a) whether they had been injured physically, (b) whether a child witnessed the episode, and (c) whether a weapon (e.g., gun, knife) was used. Each question was scored dichotomously: 1 (yes) or 2 (no). Participants were asked about the most recent episode of abuse, and if this was not the worst episode of abuse, the same questions were asked again about the worst episode.

Attachment to the partner. Two questions specifically examined the participants' perceptions of the abusive relationship: "Do you still love your partner?" and "Do you want him back if he would change?" Each question was scored dichotomously: 1 (yes) or 2 (no).

Perception of threat. Perception of threat was assessed regarding the participant's perception of threat to herself and to her children. The questions "Has your partner ever threatened to kill you?" and "Has your partner ever threatened to kill your children?" were each scored dichotomously: 1 (yes) or 2 (no). Perception of danger to self and children were also assessed. Interviewers asked participants to rate how much they believed that they or their children were in danger on a 5-point scale, ranging from 0 (*not in danger*) to 4 (*completely certain will be killed or injured*).

Spouse-Specific Fear Measure (SSFM). The SSFM (O'Leary & Curley, 1986) was used to assess participants' perceived threat by their partner on a 1 to 7 scale, with higher scores indicating more perceived threat. Cronbach's alpha for this measure is .89.

Restraining order status. All participants were granted emergency ex parte orders. Final restraining order status was determined based on DVU records for each participant's case disposition. Four main outcomes were recorded following the initial temporary order: either the final order was given, dismissed, withdrawn, or denied. A *given* restraining order referred to cases where a 1-year restraining order was issued following a hearing. *Dismissed* referred to cases where the woman failed to appear for the hearing 10 days later. *Withdrawn* referred to cases where the woman asked the court to withdraw her request for a 1-year protection order. *Denied* referred to situations where the case was heard by a judge who ruled that there was not enough evidence, or threat, for a restraining order to be issued. For the main analyses in the present study, restraining order status was examined as a dichotomous variable as either obtained or not obtained.

Interviewer rating of likelihood to complete the restraining order process. After completing each interview, the interviewers rated their perception on a scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 10 (*very likely*) of the likelihood that the participant would return for the final order.

Procedure

During the process of obtaining a restraining order, female victims of partner violence were interviewed at the DVU. Eligible participants were informed of the study, and if interested in participation, were assessed the same day. Very few women declined to participate. All participants were assessed using a structured interview and a series of self-report questionnaires. The assessment sessions lasted approximately 1.5 hours and were conducted by trained interviewers. Participants were not compensated for participation. The final restraining order status of each participant was later obtained via the court database. Our sample of matched controls was obtained also through the court database; these women were not directly contacted.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Assault characteristics. During the most recent episode of abuse, 64% of participants reported being pushed or shoved, 28% being hit, 6% having a

gun or knife used against them, and 48% reported being threatened in such a way that they believed that their life was in danger. A substantial majority (81%) reported that the most recent episode of abuse was not the first episode of abuse. Only 36% reported that the most recent episode was the worst. Finally, almost all of the participants (89%) reported that this event prompted them to seek a restraining order.

Restraining order status. We were able to obtain final restraining order status on 56 (86%) of the women initially interviewed. We did not have adequate identifying information to track the remaining 9 women through the court database. Overall, 63% ($n = 35$) failed to secure a 1-year restraining order, either withdrawing their request (5%), having their request dismissed for failure to prosecute (55%), or having their request denied (2%). Thus, with the exception of 1 woman, all of the restraining orders were not obtained due to action or inaction on the part of the woman initially seeking the order, as opposed to a court decision that the order requests did not have merit. The remaining 37% ($n = 21$) obtained the final protection from abuse order.

To examine the representativeness of our current sample, we compared restraining order status in our sample with matched controls. For the matched controls, 55% ($n = 31$) failed to secure a 1-year restraining order for failure to prosecute. The remaining 45% ($n = 25$) obtained the final protection from abuse order. There was no difference in obtaining a 1-year restraining order between women interviewed and women who were not interviewed, suggesting that our interviewed sample was indeed representative.

Demographic Factors and Final Restraining Order Status

We first examined our hypothesis that demographic factors, particularly, economic independence, would be related to final restraining order status (1 = not completed, 2 = completed). Using Pearson point-biserial correlations, the age of the woman and the length of the relationship with the abusive partner were not related to final restraining order status. Using chi-square analyses, women's marital status (1 = married/living together, 2 = not married/not living together) and ethnicity (1 = Caucasian, 2 = non-Caucasian) were not found to be related to final restraining order status. Furthermore, using a Spearman rank-correlation coefficient, a woman's educational level was not found to be related to final restraining order status. Finally, there was a trend toward participants who had a job being more likely to obtain a final restraining order, $\chi^2(n = 56) = 2.98, p = .08$, with 74% of the women who were unemployed not obtaining a final restraining order.

Severity of Abuse and Final Restraining Order Status

Next, we examined our hypothesis that severity of abuse would be related to completion of the restraining order process. First, we examined characteristics of the most current episode of abuse. Using a point-biserial correlation, severity of the current episode (women who received a restraining order, $M = 12.19$, $SD = 1.21$; those who did not, $M = 12.26$, $SD = 1.46$) was not related to final restraining order status. Chi-square analyses revealed that if a weapon was present (43% received a restraining order; 57% did not), if the woman was physically hurt during the incident (38% received a restraining order; 62% did not), and if her children had witnessed the incident (26% received a restraining order; 74% did not) were also not related to final restraining order status.

In addition, we investigated how general characteristics of the abusive relationship might relate to a woman's final restraining order status. Whether a woman had ever sought medical attention as a result of the abuse (30% received a restraining order; 70% did not) and the history of a weapon being involved in the abuse (45% received a restraining order; 55% did not) were not related to final restraining order status.

Attachment and Final Restraining Order Status

Next, attachment to the abusive partner was examined. There was a trend suggesting that if a woman still loved her partner, she was less likely to obtain a final restraining order, $\chi^2(n = 46) = 3.28$, $p = .07$. Furthermore, if a woman wanted her partner back if he changed, she was also less likely to obtain a final order, $\chi^2(n = 51) = 4.43$, $p < .05$.

As can be seen in Figure 1, both still loving her partner and wanting him back if he changed showed similar patterns of results. Interestingly, 100% of women who did not want their partner back if he changed obtained a final restraining order; none of the women who wanted their partner back if he changed obtained a final order.

Perception of Threat and Final Restraining Order Status

To examine our hypothesis that perception of threat would also be related to completion of the restraining order process, we examined both presence of life threat and perceived danger to herself and her children. Prior threats from the partner to kill her were related to whether she obtained a final order, $\chi^2(n =$

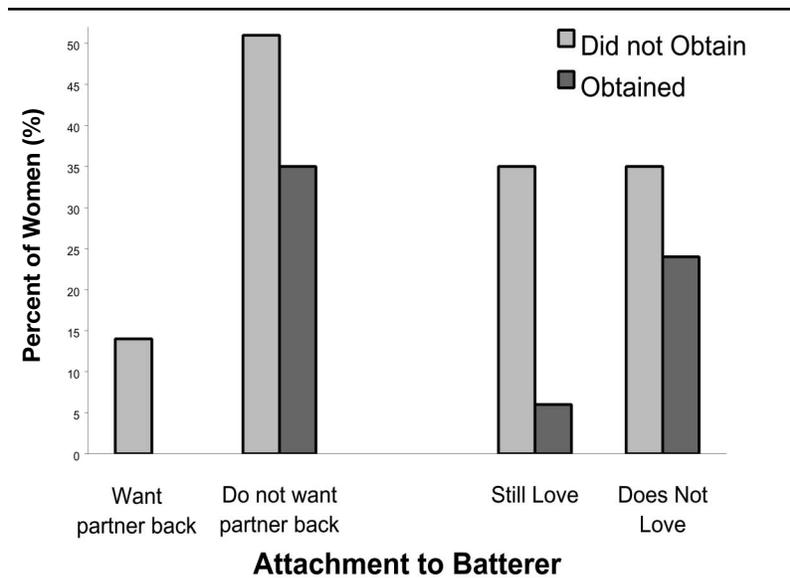


Figure 1: Attachment to Batterer and Final Restraining Order Status

50) = 3.98, $p < .05$. Similarly, there was a trend suggesting threats to her children were also related to whether she obtained a final order, $\chi^2(n = 43) = 3.12$, $p = .08$.

As can be seen in Figure 2, life threat to herself and her children showed different patterns of results. Interestingly, lack of threat to herself seemed to deter women from completing the restraining order process, with only 14% of women whose lives were not threatened obtaining a final restraining order. In stark contrast, presence of threat to children seemed to deter women from completing the restraining order process, with 85% of women whose children were threatened not obtaining a final order.

When asked whether they were currently in danger, women generally indicated that they believed that it "seemed likely that they would be killed or injured" ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.30$). However, they reported that it was less likely that their children would be killed or injured (i.e., "it might be a possibility," $M = .80$, $SD = 1.12$). Women's belief that they or their children were in danger was not related to final restraining order status.

For a subset of our sample ($n = 29$), participants completed the SSFM. Fear of her partner was related to decreased likelihood to complete the restraining order process ($r_{pb} = -.42$, $p < .05$).

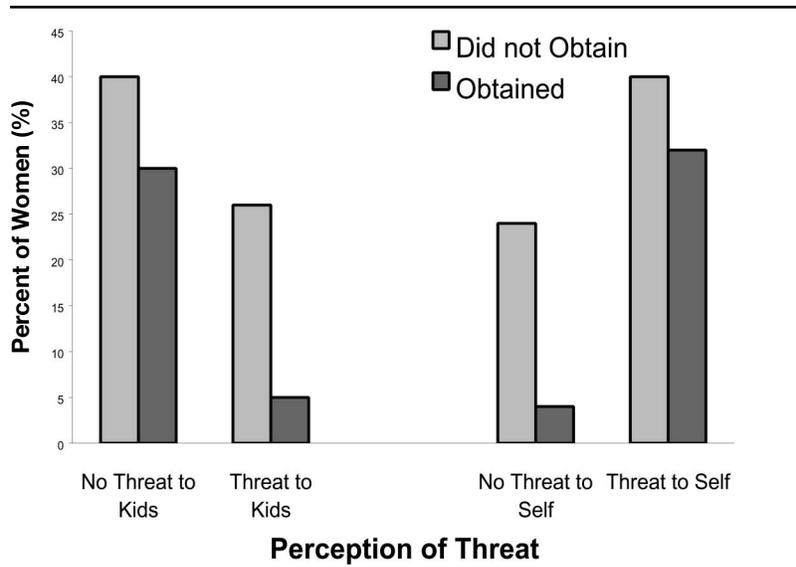


Figure 2: Perception of Threat and Final Restraining Order Status

Interviewer Ratings of Likelihood to Complete the Restraining Order Process

Finally, we examined interviewer ratings regarding a woman’s likelihood to complete the restraining order process. In general, interviewers were poor at predicting final restraining order status ($r_{pb} = .15, p = .40$).

Prediction of Obtaining a Final Restraining Order¹

A direct logistic regression analysis was performed on final restraining order status as the outcome and the five main factors related to restraining order status (employment status, threat to self, threat to children, wanting the partner back if he changes, and still loving partner) as predictors. A test of the full model with all five predictors against a constant-only model was statistically reliable, $\chi^2(5, n = 36) = 12.93, p < .05$, indicating that the predictors, as a set, reliably distinguished between women who obtained and did not obtain a final restraining order. Overall, prediction was 75%, with correct prediction of 88% of the women not obtaining the final restraining order and 50% of the women obtaining the final restraining order. Thus, prediction of who would

not obtain a restraining order was better than those who would. Using likelihood-ratio statistics, both threat to self, $\chi^2(1) = 3.97, p < .05$, and wanting the partner back if he changed $\chi^2(1) = 4.53, p < .05$, reliably predicted restraining order status. However, no participants who wanted their partner back if he changed obtained a final restraining order. Thus, one cell was empty, and parameter estimates tended toward infinity. We, therefore, ran another model without this variable being included.

A model run without wanting the partner back if he changed showed a trend toward being reliably different from the constant-only model, $\chi^2(4, n = 38) = 9.46, p = .05$. Overall, prediction was 74%, with correct prediction of 85% of the women not obtaining the final restraining order and 50% of the women obtaining the final restraining order. Again, prediction of who would not obtain a restraining order was better than prediction of those who would. Using likelihood-ratio statistics, both threat to self, $\chi^2(1) = 4.02, p < .05$, and still loving the partner $\chi^2(1) = 4.79, p < .05$, reliably predicted restraining order status. This suggests that wanting the partner back if he changed was not the only reliable predictor of restraining order status. Table 1 shows regression coefficients and odds ratios for each of the four remaining predictors.

DISCUSSION

Less than half of the women who initiated the restraining order process actually obtained final orders. Indeed, comparisons with a matched sample suggested that our interviewed sample was representative of the women who seek help from the court. Regardless of the debate regarding the efficacy of restraining orders (Harrell & Smith, 1996), if such orders are conceptualized as a primary intervention aimed at facilitating a battered woman's ability to end partner violence, the low number of women who persist is of utmost concern. Indeed, these women do make an initial attempt to seek help, but for some reason, do not continue with the process. This is consistent with findings that women's attempts to leave abusive relationships are often unsuccessful (e.g., Campbell et al., 1994; Strube & Barbour, 1984) and that most battered women make multiple attempts to leave their partners before successfully ending the abusive relationship (Okun, 1986). Ultimately, however, in addition to examining factors associated with a woman's persistence, we must also carefully examine the feasibility of the process itself. Such a process necessitates that women visit court twice, and many times wait several hours to complete interviews and paperwork. For those women who are fear-

TABLE 1: Logistic Regression Analysis of Obtaining a Final Restraining Order as a Function of Employment, Attachment to the Batterer, and Perception of Threat

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Wald Test (z ratio)</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Employment	0.55	0.46	1.74
Still love	1.77	4.13*	5.86*
Threat to self	2.12	2.99*	8.34*
Threat to child	1.37	1.94	3.94
Constant	-0.97	1.44	

NOTE: All variables were dichotomous (for employment and threat to self: 0 = no, 1 = yes; for still love and threat to child: 0 = yes, 1 = no).

**p* < .05.

ful, stalked by their partners, or are taking time off from their jobs, these factors may make completing the process very difficult.

Two main factors emerged as important in understanding who obtains a final restraining order: perception of threat and attachment. The combination of threat and attachment factors was able to correctly classify 88% of the women who did not obtain a final restraining order. Interestingly, predicting who would actually obtain a final restraining order was more difficult. The role of both attachment and threat are discussed below.

Attachment to the batterer appears to be an important factor in determining women's persistence in the restraining order process. Women who reported loving their partner or believing the partner was able to change were less likely to obtain an order. Notably, every woman who did not want her partner back if he changed obtained a final restraining order; none of the women who wanted their partner back if he changed obtained a final order. These findings are consistent with other research, which suggests that women who thought their partner could change or who still loved their partner were more likely to remain with their abusive assailant (Pagelow, 1981; Strube & Barbour, 1984). These women may still hope that the relationship will work out, or may be more emotionally dependent on, or committed to, the relationship. Interestingly, battered women's emotional dependency on their male partners has been found to be related to increased violence in the relationship (Kalmuss & Straus, 1990). It has also been found that many women's abusive partners attempt to convince them to stay in the relationship (Schutte et al., 1988) and it may be those women who still have positive feelings toward the batterer that are more swayed by such appeals.

Perception of threat also emerged as an important predictor. Women whose partners had threatened to kill them were more likely to complete the

process than those who had never been so severely threatened. Indeed, prior life threat appears to be a factor that propels women to protect themselves. However, a different pattern of results emerged with regard to threats the batterer made to her children. Those women whose abusive partners made threats to her children were more likely to be deterred from completing the restraining order process. Theoretically, this relationship could be curvilinear in that some fear or threat may propel women to secure an order whereas severe fear may actually inhibit women from completing the process. Fear, or risk, may be too great to persist in protection efforts when children have been threatened. Perhaps women who are highly fearful of their partners are deterred due to a very realistic fear of retaliation. Consistent with this notion, Baker (1997) found that restraining orders can sometimes increase violence. Severe fear of one's assailant may also hinder women's ability to persist in seeking help from the legal system and possibly from other community resources (DeMaris & Swinford, 1996). As threat and fear escalate, women's perceptions of alternatives may become increasingly restricted.

We were surprised to find that demographic factors such as education and age were not related to women's persistence in the restraining order process; however, there was a trend for women who were employed to be more likely to follow through. These results are slightly in contrast to findings that factors such as availability of economic resources (Aguirre, 1985; Gelles, 1976), higher education (Schutte et al., 1988), and employment (Strube & Barbour, 1984) are relevant to the decision to stay or leave an abusive partner. Unfortunately, our sample was somewhat homogenous in regard to education and economic status and as a result, we may not have had an adequate range to be able to fully explore this relationship. Thus, our lack of findings should not be interpreted as a lack of relationship between economic viability and persistence in the restraining order process. However, the demographics of this sample are similar to those seen in typical domestic violence shelter samples (e.g., Gondolf, 1988; Okun, 1986; Pagelow, 1981; Sullivan et al., 1994), indicating they are representative of women who are seeking help to end the violence in their lives.

Contrary to previous findings (e.g., Gelles, 1976), assault characteristics such as severity of abuse, seeking medical attention, and history of weapon involvement were unrelated to completion of the restraining order process. It may be the fear that women experience and their perception of threat, rather than objective severity of the assault itself, that determine completion of the restraining order process. Our finding that for the majority of women (64%) the incident that prompted them to seek an order of protection was not objectively the most severe incident of abuse they had suffered provides some ini-

tial support for this hypothesis. However, standardized measures and replication of the current findings are needed before any conclusions can be drawn.

It is of note that interviewer ratings of women's likelihood to complete the restraining order process were very weakly related to actual restraining order outcome. Despite the fact that the interviewers had considerable information about these women and their abuse histories, they were not able to accurately predict whether the women would return for the final order. This is consistent with a body of literature regarding the complexity of predicting behavior (Dawes, Faust, & Meehl, 1989). In addition, this may also speak to the complexity of the decision-making process around ending a violent relationship. As noted by others (e.g., Loseke & Cahill, 1984), terminating any type of intimate relationship is difficult, and the decision to terminate a violent intimate relationship is often complicated by emotional, legal, financial, and familial ties.

Understanding these factors, especially threat and attachment, is a crucial step toward beginning to develop interventions to facilitate women leading violence-free lives. Future studies should use standardized measures of physical abuse with larger samples and extend follow-up periods to explore factors that relate to success in continued help seeking. Our results suggest that the fear and threat that a partner is perceived to pose as well as attachment to the partner are quite relevant to the lack of persistence with the restraining order process. These potentially important variables have been understudied. Future research should further refine the conceptualization and measurement of these factors so that we can begin to understand how they influence help-seeking behavior, and indirectly, violence.

On a practical note, routine assessment of both attachment and threat may help identify women who are not going to follow through with the restraining order process. Our finding that women who were more attached to the abusive partner were less likely to persist in help seeking is consistent with Dutton and Painter's (1993) conceptualization of traumatic bonding. As they suggest, those in a position to help should prepare women for the possibility that when fear subsides, positive memories and emotions about the partner may emerge. They should help the women remember the negative aspects of the relationship and the possible negative outcomes associated with continuing the relationship. In addition, realistic appraisal of threat is important. DeMaris and Swinford (1996) suggest that those in a position to help should encourage a realistic conceptualization of the threat presented by the partner. With that information, interventions that take real threat into account and provide for safety could be facilitated. Similarly, DeMaris and Swinford suggested that helping women identify irrational fears and encouraging them

to take control however possible in their situation may be beneficial. Ultimately, these practical strategies may help increase the number of women who not only file for a temporary restraining order, but also follow through with the difficult process of ending an abusive relationship.

NOTE

1. We would like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their suggestion of this section of the article.

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Lori A. Zoellner, Ph.D., assistant professor of clinical psychology in psychiatry at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1997. Her clinical experience is in cognitive behavioral treatment of anxiety disorders. Her research interests are experimental psychopathology, with a specific interest in memory dysfunction associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Norah C. Feeny, Ph.D., is an instructor of clinical psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, and serves as director of the Rape and Crime Victims/Trauma Survivors Program at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety. Dr. Feeny received her Ph.D. in clinical developmental psychology from Bryn Mawr College in 1998. Her clinical interests include evaluation and treatment of anxiety disorders in children and adults. Her research interests are primarily in the area of the development, maintenance, and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Jennifer Alvarez received a B.A. with honors in psychology from Syracuse University in May 1998. Since July 1998, Jennifer has worked as a research assistant at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety, formerly part of MCP Hahnemann University, now part of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. She will attend the University of Pennsylvania in the fall 2000 to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology.

Christina Watlington received her B.A. in psychology from Franklin and Marshall College in 1997 and then worked for 2 years as a research assistant at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety. She is currently a graduate student in the clinical psychology Ph.D. program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Melanie L. O'Neill is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at MCP Hahnemann University and a senior behavioral scientist at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine. Her research interests

include the assessment of violence risk, domestic violence, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychopathy.

Ruth Zager, M.D., is the clinical professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University. Dr. Zager has worked extensively with the domestic violence organizations in the city of Philadelphia.

Edna B. Foa, Ph.D., professor of clinical psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, director of the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety, is an internationally renowned authority on the psychopathology and treatment of anxiety. Her research aiming at delineating etiological frameworks and targeted treatment has been highly influential and she is currently one of the leading experts in the areas of post-traumatic stress disorders.