

Assessment of Family Violence

A CLINICAL AND LEGAL SOURCEBOOK

Edited by

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Series Preface

This series of books is addressed to behavioral scientists interested in the nature of human personality. Its scope should prove pertinent to personality theorists and researchers as well as to clinicians concerned with applying an understanding of personality processes to the amelioration of emotional difficulties in living. To this end, the series provides a scholarly integration of theoretical formulations, empirical data, and practical recommendations.

Six major aspects of studying and learning about human personality can be designated: personality theory, personality structure and dynamics, personality development, personality assessment, personality change, and personality adjustment. In exploring these aspects of personality, the books in the series discuss a number of distinct but related subject areas: the nature and implications of various theories of personality; personality characteristics that account for consistencies and variations in human behavior; the emergence of personality processes in children and adolescents; the use of interviewing and testing procedures to evaluate individual differences in personality; efforts to modify personality styles through psychotherapy, counseling, behavior therapy, and other methods of influence; and patterns of abnormal personality functioning that impair individual competence.

IRVING B. WEINER

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Preface

Research on family violence is only now coming into its own. The theoretical work of the 1970s provided a framework for understanding the multidetermined nature of abuse and neglect. Ecological models, in which social, cultural, interactional, individual, and situational factors were posited to interact and converge to bring about family violence, led in turn to an increase of interest in clinical assessment and treatment. The 1980s brought increasingly more sophisticated and ambitious epidemiological research, which documented the widespread prevalence of child abuse and neglect, spouse battering, elder mistreatment, and psychological abuse. This, too, fueled the development and evaluation of interventions for both victims and perpetrators. Now, with over a decade of research available, it is time to take stock, and examine the strategies and measures that are important in the assessment of family violence, both in terms of treatment planning and legal requirements. The purpose of this book is to examine those issues faced by clinicians in the assessment of the varied forms of family violence, and to establish current standards of practice in the field.

Assessment of Family Violence: A Clinical and Legal Sourcebook is divided into four sections. Part One, General Issues, begins with an overview of assessment issues in family violence, followed by four chapters on clinical or legal issues encountered in the assessment of family violence involving children and adults. Part Two, Epidemiology, presents two chapters on the epidemiology of family violence directed toward children and adults. Part Three, Types of Family Violence, consists of chapters on the assessment of different forms of maltreatment, including child abuse and neglect, incest in young children, extrafamilial child sexual abuse, spouse battering, elder abuse and neglect, psychological abuse of children, and psychological abuse of adults. Part Four, Special Issues, encompasses chapters on recently recognized areas of concern, such as child witnesses of family violence, adolescent perpetrators of incest, and adult survivors of sexual abuse. Chapters in Parts Three and Four are written in parallel formats utilizing the following headings: introduction, description of the problem, assessment approaches, legal considerations, case illustration, and summary.

We acknowledge the support and assistance provided by a number of individuals. Foremost, we thank the eminent contributors for sharing their expertise. Our editor at John Wiley & Sons, Herb Reich, was instrumental in expanding the scope of the book, and we are grateful for his efforts throughout the publishing process. Finally, we extend our appreciation to those who assisted us at various stages of compiling this volume: Mary Ann Frederick, Mary Jo Horgan, Ann Huber, Jenifer McKelvey, Mary H. Newell, and Mary Trefelner.

ROBERT T. AMMERMAN
MICHEL HERSEN

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
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PART ONE

General Issues

CHAPTER 1

Current Issues in the Assessment of Family Violence

ROBERT T. AMMERMAN and MICHEL HERSEN

INTRODUCTION

Even by conservative estimates, family violence is endemic in society. Although not a new problem, only recently has family violence been subjected to empirical scrutiny. However, determining accurate prevalence and incidence rates of abuse and neglect is extremely difficult, due largely to the fact that domestic mistreatment is a private event, rarely open to public observation. Further impediments to accurate epidemiological research on family violence include (1) failure to arrive at consensus definitions of the different forms of maltreatment, and (2) methodological limitations of the data gathering strategies that are typically employed (see Herrenkohl, 1990). Nevertheless, official reporting agencies and population surveys reveal the pervasiveness of family violence. For example, there were over two million reports of child abuse (physical and sexual) and neglect in 1986 (American Humane Association, 1988). It is likely, however, that the official reporting statistics may underestimate the true incidence of child maltreatment. Spouse battering is also widespread, estimated to occur in up to two million households per year (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

Recent investigations have focused on previously overlooked victims of domestic violence, such as child and adult targets of psychological abuse, child witnesses of spouse battering, and ritually abused children. Epidemiological data on these forms of mistreatment are scant, although it is widely viewed that psychological or emotional abuse (Brassard, Hart, & Hardy, 1991) and child witnessing of interparental violence (Rosenberg & Giberon, 1991) are relatively common. Finally, the maltreatment of elderly family members also occurs at alarming rates. One study estimated that up to one million elderly persons are mistreated each year (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

Equally impressive are data documenting the prevalence of mistreatment in clinic populations. Retrospective studies of psychiatrically hospitalized patients reveal that between 40 and 70% have experienced abuse and/or