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SPOUSAL VIOLENCE AFTER MARITAL SEPARATION

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Highlights

- According to the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, 28% of women and 22% of men who had been in contact with a previous spouse in the five years prior to the survey had experienced some type of violence by that partner, either while living together or after separation.
- Marital separation does not necessarily mark the end of a violent relationship. Forty percent of women and 32% of men with a former violent marriage or common-law relationship reported that violence occurred after the couple separated.
- Most of those who reported violence after separation stated that the assaults became more severe or began after separation. In 37% of cases the assaults did not increase in severity, in 24% the violence became more serious, and in 39% of cases the violence first began after the separation.
- Both women and men were more likely to have contact with the police when violence occurred after separation as compared with other cases of spousal violence, but men were only about half as likely as women to report these incidents to the police (55% of women compared with 30% of men).
- Children are frequently the unintended observers of violence between spouses. Among those cases where violence occurred after separation, children were witnesses to at least one violent occurrence in 50% of cases.
- Women made up 77% of criminal harassment victims reported to police in 1999. Current or former husbands and boyfriends were offenders in about half of these incidents.
- Women have a heightened risk of homicide after marital separation. Between 1991 and 1999, separated women were killed by estranged partners at a rate of 39 per million couples. In comparison, an average of 26 women per million couples were killed by current common-law partners, and 5 women per million couples were killed by current husbands. Risk of spousal homicide was lower on average for men, and men were at greater risk of homicide by a current common-law spouse than an ex-spouse. An average of 12 men per million couples were killed by a current common-law partner, 2 men per million couples were killed by an ex-partner, and 1 man per million couples was killed by a current marital partner.
- Men who killed an ex-partner were most often motivated by jealousy (44%), while arguments or quarrels (41%) most frequently motivated women.
- Estranged husbands were twice as likely as current husbands to have multiple victims. When marital relationships were still intact at the time of spousal homicides, children were the most likely victims other than the spouse. In estranged marriages, the victim's new partner was the most frequent third party victim.

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