



# Dyadic concordance and discordance in family violence: A powerful and practical approach to research and practice<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This article describes *Dyadic Concordance Types* (DCTs) to classify cases into *Male-Only*, *Female-Only*, and *Both* aggressed categories, and a reference category of *Neither*. Evidence from 32 nations is summarized on the percent of couples in each DCT. It indicates that across all nations, sample types, and gender of respondent, and regardless of whether the aggression was physical, psychological, or sexual, aggression in a family dyadic relationship was most often by both members of the dyad. When there was a sole perpetrator, although there was more variation in the percent in each DCT, the results tended to show a similar percent of Male-Only and Female-Only perpetration. Studies cited show that DCTs provide information that is beyond that obtained by analyses of the individual-level variables used to identify the DCTs. This reflects the family systems theory principle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Statistically, it is analogous to the additional variance explained by use of interaction terms in a causal model. The Discussion suggests that identifying DCTs can enhance research, theories, and services for victims and offenders. These enhancements can be achieved if identification of the DCTs of the cases becomes a default starting point for research and practice concerned with family aggression.

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## 1. Introduction

The overall objective of this article is to describe and summarize research on a simple and powerful conceptual and methodological approach to understanding aggression and violence in family relationships. The approach centers on what will be called *Dyadic Concordance Types* (DCTS). In its generic form, DCTS classify family dyads such as couples, siblings, and parent–child pairs into whether both aggressed or only one partner aggressed and if only one, which one. Because of the importance of gender in family relationships, the DCTS used for this article identify *Male-only*, *Female-only* and *Both*.

If data on perpetration of aggression is being analyzed, the DCTS identify whether the male or female partner was the sole perpetrator, or both aggressed. If data on victimization is analyzed, DCTS are labeled to identify whether the male or female partner was the sole victim or both were victims. One of the merits of DCTS is that, regardless of whether data on perpetration or victimization is used, DCTS provide information on both perpetration and victimization and therefore can help further understanding of the interrelation of perpetration and victimization (Jennings, Park, Tomsich, Gover, & Akers, 2011).

Although primary attention in this article is on physical assault perpetration, examples are also given of DCTS for other types of aggressive behavior such as psychological aggression and sexual coercion, and corporal punishment by parents.

### 1.1. Questions addressed

- 1 What is the theoretical basis for DCTS?
- 2 What percent of couples in many nations have been found to be in the *Male-only*, *Female-only*, or *Both* DCTS for physical assault and other aggressive behaviors?

- 3 How can almost every researcher and case worker *easily* identify the DCTS of the cases they are working with?
- 4 How consistent are DCTS across reports by men and women, married and dating couples, and nations.
- 5 Do DCTS enhance understanding of the causes and effects of intra-family aggression?
- 6 What are the implications for research, prevention and treatment of intra-family aggression?

## 2. Theoretical basis of dyadic concordance types

The most general theoretical basis for DCTS is the assumption that violent relationships are not a homogeneous phenomenon (Cantos & O'Leary, 2014; Dutton, 2010; Felson, 2002; Hamel, 2014; Straus, 1990; Stuart, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary to identify ways in which PV differs in ways that are theoretically and practically salient. The second theoretical assumption is that aggression in a relationship is a *dyadic* phenomenon. Therefore, what each partner in a couple relationship (or in a parent–child relationship, what child does as well as what the parent does) is crucial for understanding, preventing, and treating aggression in relationships. These are long-standing theoretical principles, most prominently in family systems theory. Many social scientists and human service providers probably agree on them. Despite that, research and treatment based on recognizing the dyadic nature of PV seem to be rare. Instead the focus tends to be on an identified aggressor or victim, with little or no attention to the behavior of the other member of the dyad. DCTS provide a mode of conceptualizing and analyzing aggression and violence in family relationships that incorporates the dyadic nature of family violence.

Just as DCTS inherently help bridge the gap between victimization and perpetration of family violence, DCTS can also help deal with gap between those who give primary attention to male perpetration and female victimization and those who focus on the partner violence as a

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