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Therapist Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence: A Replication of Harway and Hansen's Study after More than a Decade

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ABSTRACT. More than a decade ago, Hansen, Harway, and Cervantes (1991) and Harway and Hansen (1993) examined mental health providers' ability to accurately perceive violence within couples presenting for therapy and to intervene in a manner that reduces risk. Alarming, 40% of

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therapists sampled failed to identify the presence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and none predicted lethality. Over a decade later, the present replication of Harway and colleagues' study was completed with the expectation that today's therapists are better prepared to identify IPV within a clinical vignette. Results show that therapists have indeed improved their ability to identify IPV. However, only one therapist accurately predicted lethality in the present study. Implications concerning IPV training for therapists are discussed.

KEYWORDS. Intimate partner violence, therapist opinion, competency, training, lethality, assessment, crisis intervention

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as violence committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, or current or former boyfriend or girlfriend toward the other partner either currently or formerly in an intimate relationship (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). IPV is also commonly referred to as domestic violence, battering, and spousal abuse, and occurs among both heterosexual and same-sex couples (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Although the literature finds that both women and men are victims and perpetrators of IPV, research indicates that women are overwhelmingly more likely than men to suffer physical and psychological injuries, as well as death, at the hands of a male intimate partner (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). One of the largest and most recent population surveys in the United States, the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), yielded results indicating that women are 22.5 times more likely to be raped than men, 8.2 times more likely to be stalked, and 2.9 times more likely to be physically assaulted by an intimate partner than men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

The number of IPV research publications has drastically increased over the past 20 years (National Institute of Justice & Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Attention to this area of study has most likely been triggered by the general realization that IPV is pervasive and crosses ethnic, racial, age, sexual orientation, religious, and socioeconomic lines (District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.). As a result, much more is known about this societal problem (e.g., McCloskey & Grigsby, 2005; Rathus & Feindler, 2004). Increased information concerning the prevalence and incidence of IPV, the dynamics of IPV and impact on child witnesses, therapeutic interventions based on feminist theory,