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## **Most Men Re-offend, Says Study of Battering – Longest Look to Date Paints a Darker Picture**

**By Carolyn Y. Johnson, Boston Globe Staff**

[Quincy, MA] – The majority of men arraigned in a domestic violence crime a decade ago in Quincy District Court re-abused an intimate partner over the following 10 years, according to a study built on years of research that challenges conventional wisdom about the behavior of male batterers.

The study is the first of its kind to follow a group for so long, many researchers said, and contradicts the prevailing view among researchers that, regardless of the intervention they receive, most men do not abuse their partners again.

“It basically is a warning that this behavior is a lot more intractable and serious than I think we’ve realized in the past,” said Andrew Klein, a former probation officer in the court who coauthored the study. “It’s not going to go away on its own... and we’re fooling ourselves if we think we’re going to end this behavior without a much more aggressive and consistent response.”

Klein followed the court and criminal records of 342 men, ranging from 17 to 66 years old, who were arraigned in Quincy District Court in 1995 and 1996 on a domestic violence crime. While the records showed that only a third of the men re-abused domestic partners within a year, over the next decade more than half were arrested again for domestic abuse or violating restraining orders, or had new restraining orders taken out against them.

“What this has added is another eight years of data that most of us do not have,” said Christopher Maxwell, associate professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, who has been studying domestic violence for 15 years. “I’m not questioning” the study; “I’m questioning myself now more. I’ve written regularly that regardless of what we do to people, the majority of people do not reoffend. This study calls that into question.”

Researchers cautioned that the study could not single-handedly reverse entrenched ideas about abusers’ odds of reoffending. But it is expected to generate further research and longer-term monitoring to see if the finding holds true among other offenders and

in other criminal justice systems. The study, funded by the National Institute of Justice, also builds on a larger base of research that has begun to question the effectiveness of intervention programs.

The study itself has no way of measuring the success of a specific type of intervention. After arraignment, the men received anything from probation, including a 50-week batterer intervention program, to having their case dismissed to jail time.

However, to Klein, the data clearly demonstrate that, on the whole, the variety of interventions that are currently used are simply not doing the job – including his own profession.

“As a former probation officer, it’s kind of depressing,” Klein said. “What this research is suggesting is these guys are similar to what we found on certain sex offenders, who never stop.”

He also pointed out that re-arrest and court records are a conservative measure of abuse, since studies have shown that victims do not report all incidents to police.

US Representative William Delahunt, who set up a domestic violence program in 1978 as Norfolk County district attorney, said he hoped to reopen a national discussion on batterers and treatment.

“We have to at least persevere, in terms of reconfiguring new approaches, creating new strategies that improve the recidivism rate,” Delahunt said. “It’s time to take a good look at the issue of domestic violence 30 years later.”

Other researchers said the study would have to be replicated and carefully evaluated.

Edward Gondolf, research director at the Mid-Atlantic Addiction Training Institute at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, has done research specifically focusing on men who went through a batterers’ intervention program in four cities.

His study examined victims’ reports and arrest records to conclude that nearly half of the men in the study abused their partners again over the following four years. But Gondolf also noted that the violence tapered off significantly. At the end of four years, 90 percent of the men had not re-assaulted a partner in the previous year.

“We went in with... the ‘scared straight’ assumption. After going to court, being sent to this batterers’ program... the guy would come in, smile, and sit on their hands and play pretty until they got out of the program,” Gondolf said.

“What seems to happen is it takes some time, first of all, for men... to put on the brakes.”

David Adams, codirector of the batterers’ intervention program Emerge, which is based in Cambridge, said that the longer men are in the program, the better they seem to do. He found Klein’s numbers surprising.

About a quarter of all men seem to be repeat offenders who return again and again – not over half, he said.

“It’s very similar to substance abuse – rarely are they just in a substance abuse treatment program once,” Adams said. “It is kind of a lifelong issue.”

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