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Returning to Abusive Relationships: Related and Predictive Factors

Rachel Leanne Swadley

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**RETURNING TO ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS:
RELATED AND PREDICTIVE FACTORS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Psychology

By

Rachel L. Swadley

May 2017

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RETURNING TO ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS: RELATED AND PREDICTIVE FACTORS

Psychology

Missouri State University, May 2017

Master of Science

Rachel L. Swadley

ABSTRACT

Domestic violence and interpersonal abuse affects one-third of women and can have extreme negative consequences on the victim's psychological and physical health and well-being. Recently, the related area of a victim's choice to return to an abusive relationship has been studied more thoroughly, although the body of literature in this area is still relatively small and only provides limited evidence for factors predicting return to abuse. The current research examined the possible risk factors of victims of interpersonal violence in leaving and returning to abusive situations. 40 participants were recruited from a domestic violence shelter and completed a questionnaire packet containing a demographic questionnaire and scales on social support, relationship commitment, posttraumatic stress disorder symptomology, economic dependence, return to abuse, and interpersonal abuse severity. Two simultaneous multiple regression analyses revealed that economic abuse, injury due to abuse, and sexual coercion were predictive of leaving abusive situations, and economic abuse and sexual coercion were predictive of return to abuse. Results indicate that economic abuse and sexual coercion are consistent predictors of leaving and returning to abusive situations.

KEYWORDS: domestic violence, interpersonal violence, return to abuse, leaving abusive situations, PTSD, social support, economic dependence

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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INTRODUCTION

Relationships are an integral part of the human experience, and the quality of relationships can play a large role in an individual's well-being and functioning. Although individuals can and do form relationships with family members and friends, much emphasis is placed on the relationships people form with romantic partners. Connections can range from casual "hook-ups" to long lasting marriages, and they are usually associated with positive emotions and experiences. What happens, however, when these relationships become turbulent and abusive? What are the factors that influence an individual's decision to physically, sexually, or psychologically abuse another person? Why do some victims choose to stay in these relationships? The literature is ample on domestic violence and interpersonal abuse, and yet one third of women will still experience abuse or violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Edwards, Gidycz, & Murphy, 2011; Clements, Sabourin, & Spiby, 2004). This issue has wide reaching implications, not only for the well-being of these survivors, but also for the health of communities as a whole.

Survivors of domestic violence often experience higher levels of mental health related issues, injuries, and physical ailments than the general population (Handsel, 2007). These individuals will often have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as headaches, chronic pain, and unwanted pregnancies (Handsel, 2007). Additionally, survivors of interpersonal violence (IPV) often rely more on governmental assistance, as aid with buying groceries and paying rent are some of the only ways they can support themselves and their children after leaving an

abusive relationship. Without this assistance, they face homelessness or may feel there is no other option but to return to their abusers (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005). These additional consequences of IPV that fall on victims are not only detrimental to their psychological and physical health and well-being, but they also demonstrate the wide reaching consequences into communities as a whole.

By looking at possible risk and vulnerability factors that are linked to domestic violence and interpersonal abuse, individuals with these factors can be targeted by programs that teach these women to notice signs of abuse. The women who are already in these relationships, however, will often enter these relationships again and again, despite seeing signs of abuse early (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991). This repetition leads to questions about why women choose to stay in violent and abusive relationships, why they are vulnerable to multiple violent relationships, and how they may be able to break away from this pattern. Frisch and MacKenzie (1991) estimated that IPV victims who have left their abusers may return at a rate of up to 50 percent. Handsel (2007) indicated that before leaving abusive partners permanently, IPV victims will often attempt to leave between 5-7 times on average. Bybee and Sullivan (2005) reported that, from a sample of IPV victims who left a shelter, between 37.4 percent and 48.7 percent experienced later abuse. This abuse occurred across a timeframe of 24 months with the highest levels of reported abuse occurring 0-6 months after exiting the shelter and the lowest levels of abuse occurring 18-24 months after exiting the shelter. One subset of their sample did receive continued treatment even after leaving the shelter; however, the levels of revictimization at a three-year follow-up remained equivalent. These data indicate that

despite shelter involvement and the provision of community resources, revictimization of IPV victims is still a prevalent problem.

Domestic violence and IPV have been studied rather extensively, with a study by Follingstad and Bush (2014) finding 2,042 studies since 1997 that included *intimate partner violence* in the title. This study did not include other search terms, however, such as domestic violence or abusive relationships. The bulk of studies include topics such as predictive factors of IPV, psychological and physical outcomes for IPV, and even factors related to the abusers. For example, Aguirre (1985) and Bornstein (2006) investigated the role of economic dependency in relation to IPV. These studies found that individuals with a higher economic dependence on their abuser, such as the abuser being the sole financial provider in the relationship, are at a greater risk of remaining in the abusive relationship or returning to the abusive relationship (Aguirre, 1985; Bornstein, 2006). Another study, conducted by Bybee and Sullivan (2005), found that social support including practical help and listening to the victim's personal matters decreased the risk of returning to an abusive relationship. Strube and Barbour (1983) and Edwards, Gidycz, and Murphy (2011) investigated the level of commitment that IPV victims experience as well as if they see viable alternatives to the abusive relationships and found that the factors are related to whether or not the victim decides to stay in the relationship. An additional example is provided by McFarlane, Pennings, Symes, Maddoux, and Paulson (2014) who concluded that mental health, and more specifically PTSD symptoms, were linked to the risk of returning to an abuser. This study also investigated the roles of demographic variables on return to abuse, including level of education and age. The examples provided

illustrate only a small portion of body of literature on IPV, but they also reflect some of the most studied variables in relation to IPV and return to abuse.

Despite the extensive research on IPV, relatively little research has been directed towards the close to 50 percent of women who return to abusive relationships (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991). Many of the studies that have focused on return to abusive situations, such as those conducted by Bybee and Sullivan (2005) and McFarlane et al. (2014), rely on the previous research from studies of IPV to predict if victims will return to abusive situations. Because of this previous research, these studies often incorporate many factors associated with IPV to determine if they are also related to returning to abusive situations. Often these studies focus on specific samples, such as women with children and women who are still married to their abusers. Alternatively, researchers focus on one factor that may be related to return to abuse. Future research is needed that can be more generalizable to different populations of IPV victims, as well as research that determines the best predictors of return to abuse from among the many factors that have been found to be moderately related.

Research in this area will be beneficial in providing services for and treating individuals who have survived domestic violence and abuse. If these individuals understand how different factors are involved, then they may be able to address concerns as they arise. If service providers, such as domestic violence shelters and caseworkers, better understand these survivors then they will be able to provide more efficient help and support. Future treatment or counseling for these survivors will be able to focus on the thought patterns and behaviors associated with why these individuals return to abusive

relationships. By focusing on these factors, domestic violence survivors may be able to leave the cycle of abuse permanently.

The Role of Dependency in IPV

The concept of dependency, or relying on others for physical or psychological needs, has been largely studied in relation to IPV and domestic violence. Bornstein (2006) argued that there is a greater chance for mistreatment or exploitation with higher levels of dependence on another person for physical needs or emotional support. This author also indicated that more reliance on the abuser can lead to more tolerance of the abuse by the IPV victim. While economic dependence has been largely studied, Bornstein (2006) suggested that it is much more complex than once thought with different types of economic dependence predicting differential outcomes. He investigated how both objective and subjective measures of economic and emotional dependence are related to risk of victimization. Subjective information was collected through interviews, while objective measures included questions about reliance on another person for income and to have emotional needs met.

Bornstein's results demonstrated medium correlations between dependence and risk of abuse, with economic dependence being more strongly correlated to risk of abuse than emotional dependence. Additionally, the objective measures of dependency had stronger correlations with risk of abuse than subjective measures, indicating that IPV victims may not be fully aware of their level of dependency on another person. Overall, medium to large effect sizes demonstrated that not only are economic dependence and risk of abuse correlated, but this may actually account for a large proportion of variance

in why women are at risk for abuse. Bornstein also reported that economic dependence may play a role in why women would return to abusers after having left the situation. He indicated that while this data supports the role of economic dependence, it is possible that abuse may be the cause of economic dependence, as abusers may take control of the victim's finances or prevent her from obtaining a job.

Other studies, such as the one conducted by Bybee and Sullivan (2005), also investigated the role of dependence in relation to IPV. This study included questions about employment and economic support when predicting revictimization of IPV victims three years after leaving a shelter. Bybee and Sullivan reported that because 58 percent of the victims could not support their families or themselves, they felt imprisoned in the abusive situation. Bybee and Sullivan concluded by indicating that IPV victims were at lower risk of revictimization if they were employed in the previous year.

Strube and Barbour (1983) also investigated the role of dependence, but their study emphasized the factor of dependence in relations to stay/leave decisions in abusive relationships. The authors indicated that for IPV victims, unemployment rates are high and taking care of children is often prioritized before outside employment. Strube and Barbour reported that higher economic dependence is directly related to severe violence in marital relationships, and these authors also argue that this finding is often due to a higher tolerance for the abuse because of the economic dependence. Results indicated that women who cite economic dependence as a reason for staying in an abusive relationship were less likely to leave the abusive relationship.

Studies conducted by Aguirre (1985) Sonis and Langer (2008), and Enander and Holmberg (2008) also reported economic dependence as one of the largest factors

contributing to predicting why IPV victims stay in abusive relationships. Aguirre reported that source of income was the only significant predictor of why married women returned to their abusive husbands. He indicated that of the women who relied on the abuser for the only source of income, 84 percent had intentions to return to the abusive relationship. Sonis and Langer associated economic dependence with survival, and suggest that the dependence decreases the victim's opportunity to seek help or leave the relationship. Enander and Holmberg (2008) reported that access to external resources plays a larger role in victim's stay/leave decisions than more subjective factors. Additionally, the authors argued that the most powerful predictors of whether a woman will stay in an abusive relationship are income variables.

It is clear that economic dependence often contributes to many different aspects of IPV including stay/leave decisions and risk of abuse. This variable has even received some attention in the area of revictimization and return to abuse. Some authors have deemed this factor a leading predictor of whether or not an IPV victim will stay in an abusive situation. Therefore, this variable should receive further attention in studies focusing on return to abuse.

The Investment Model and IPV

A theory explaining the reasons why people stay in relationships, termed the interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) has been applied widely to relationship factors of interest including domestic violence and IPV. This theory considers the way in which individuals weigh the costs and benefits of relationships in order to make stay/leave decisions (Edwards, Gidycz, & Murphy, 2011). Using this theory, the

investment model was created to interpret how individuals' cost/benefit analyses of relationships leads to differences in commitment. Commitment is then related to if the individuals decides to remain in or terminate the relationship. This model includes four factors – commitment, relationship satisfaction, perceived alternatives, and relationship investment – with commitment being a function of the other three factors.

Strube and Barbour (1983) explained how the level of commitment to the abusive relationship can affect the decision to leave that relationship. These authors suggested that variables of depression, low self-esteem, guilt, and shame all contribute to an IPV victim taking full responsibility for making the relationship work. Strube and Barbour indicated that this responsibility is indicative of a high level of commitment to the relationship, but it leads the victim to blame herself when the relationship fails. They also suggested that this high level of self-blame may lead to the IPV victim being less likely to leave the relationship because of a higher tolerance of abuse. Additionally, the authors indicated that the victims may strongly believe that their abusive partners will change and that the relationship can be saved because of their high level of commitment – leading to a recurrent pattern of returning to these abusive situations.

While Strube and Barbour (1983) focused more on the commitment factor in the investment model, Borstein (2006) considered the perceived alternatives aspect of the investment model. He explained that victims of IPV may view their abusive relationships as having rewards that other relationships may not provide. While this focus may appear contradictory to some, the perception of alternatives is based on subjective evaluation and not on objective standards. IPV victims may not perceive the economic assistance or the love they feel as something that can be obtained in other relationships.

Edwards et al. (2011) reported a strong relationship between the interdependence model and domestic violence. The authors investigated stay/leave decisions of college students in abusive relationships using three different models including the investment model. Using path analysis, they found that these models and their subsequent variables showed interacts in predicting stay/leave decisions in college students' abusive relationships. Specifically, the researchers found that stay/leave decisions were directly correlated with psychological distress, relationship satisfaction, and commitment. The researchers also found that psychological distress, self-esteem, and avoidance coping were all strongly correlated with various factors in the investment model. Edwards et al. also discovered that childhood abuse was directly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Another finding was that three factors of the investment model, relationship investment, relationship satisfaction, and quality of alternatives, were correlated with each other, commitment and stay/leave decisions.

This study by Edwards et al. (2011) not only demonstrates the relationship between the investment model and the decision to stay in abusive relationships, but it also suggests the importance of how this model is related to other factors involved in domestic violence and IPV literature such as psychological distress and self-esteem. Complexity in predicting any variable related to domestic violence and IPV is a common theme in the literature.

Other studies, including the ones conducted by Handsel (2007) and Enander and Holmberg (2008), discuss the important role of the investment model in relation to stay/leave decisions. Handsel (2007) noted how IPV victims may justify their decisions to stay in the abusive relationship by considering how much they have invested in the

relationship. These investments may include variables such as the children of the victim, the love the victim feels for the abuser, social networks, or monetary factors. Enander and Holmberg (2008) suggested that victims may feel so committed to the relationship, and feel it will change, that they maintain the relationship.

Studies on the investment model indicate the important role it plays in the maintenance of abusive relationships. While research has not yet been conducted on its relation to return to abuse, it is likely that the more committed a victim is to the abusive relationship, the more likely she will be to return to the relationship even after she has made an attempt to leave that relationship. Additionally, the roles of perceived alternatives, satisfaction, and investment likely play a role in the decision a victim makes to return to an abusive partner. This model should be investigated in studies on return to abuse to determine if it plays a role or how much of a role it may play.

Social Support and IPV

While it is widely accepted that social interaction is a necessary and beneficial aspect of the human experience, the role of the support system can play an even larger role in psychological health and well-being. Due to the powerful effects that a strong support system can have on an individual, or even the effects of a negative support system, this variable has been extensively investigated in the area of domestic violence and IPV. Bybee and Sullivan (2005) reported that the isolation of a victim from her social support system is a common tactic used by abusive partners. As a result, a strong support system can be a protective factor against abuse and even revictimization. Bybee and Sullivan indicated one of the influences of a weak support systems as being an increased

risk of suicide, but the authors also highlighted that some of the protective factors of a strong support system are a higher quality of life and lower levels of depression. The authors indicated that some of the reasons that social support might be a protective factor are the emotional support, practical assistance, and information that they provide. By aiding the victim in ways such as researching how to receive a restraining order or providing the victim with a safe place to sleep, the support network can assist the victim in making the decision to leave the abusive relationship and not return.

While Bybee and Sullivan (2005) discussed the risk and protective factors related to social support, Follingstad and Rogers (2012) explain social perceptions of IPV victims. The authors indicated that IPV victims are often treated in a negative manner such as being avoided or blamed for their abusive situations. Individuals in victim's social networks might also try to exert control on the victim's life to get her out of the abusive situation or they may become ambivalent towards the victim. Follingstad and Rogers suggested that individuals in the victim's social network may recognize that the victim needs support but are uncomfortable with the level of abuse they are experiencing.

Crane and Constantine (2003) related the social support of IPV victims to other outcome variables such as depression and coping. The authors reported that the victim's appraisal of the abusive situation as stressful is affected by social support. Additionally, social support was found to be related to self-esteem which may impact the victim's ability to believe that she has the power to leave the abusive situation. Crane and Constantine also emphasized that the stigma of abuse can be reduced through supportive statements to IPV victims. These victims may also experience healing from supportive statements, and a strong social support system can influence factors such as feelings of

being understood, increasing their desire to live, and shaping their choices to leave an abusive situation.

A study by Handsel (2007) also comments on the social perceptions of IPV victims, while studies by McLeod, Hays, and Chang (2010) and Sonis and Langer (2008) discussed how social support is related to IPV. Handsel (2007) indicated that there are many negative stereotypes associated with returning to an abusive situation. The author reported that victims who return to their abuser have been labeled sexually perverse, inadequate, and responsible for the continuation of abuse. Other social perceptions include characterizing the victims as immature and masochistic. As IPV victims already often experience negative evaluations from their abusers, it not unlikely that further negative comments and beliefs about victims can further increase negative outcomes. McLeod et al. (2010) reported that IPV victims identify social support as one of the most preferable personal resources. Sonis and Langer (2008) further confirmed the evidence supporting the role of social support in an increased risk of IPV. These studies demonstrate the large role that social support can play not only in preventing abuse and interpersonal violence, but also serving a resource to aid in recovery from abuse. Further research needs to be conducted, however, in how this factor influences the rate of return to abusive situations.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and IPV

While mental health has been found to be heavily influenced by IPV, mental health has also been demonstrated to be a predictive factor of later revictimization of IPV victims (Kuijpers, van der Knaap, & Winkel, 2012). Mueleners, Lee, and Handrie (2009)

reported that individuals who have experienced abuse and violence were more likely to suffer from mental illness, and individuals with a mental illness were more likely to experience victimization. Using hospitalization records, the authors investigated the co-occurrence of mental illness and hospitalization due to interpersonal violence. During a time frame of fourteen years, 25,427 victims of IPV were admitted for abuse related injuries, and all of these individuals had at some point experienced mental illness. While it is often difficult to determine causality when investigating variables of such a complex nature, some level of temporal precedence was established for most individuals in this study, as some individuals were admitted first for mental health concerns and then for abuse related injuries. Others were admitted first with abuse related injuries and then for mental illness. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate the commonality of the co-occurrence of mental health related issues and IPV.

A study by Cavanaugh, Martins, Petras, and Campbell (2013) investigated how different patterns of mental illness occur in groups of individuals with differing levels of IPV. The authors caution researchers who view abuse and IPV as homogenous, reporting that different types and levels of IPV can lead to different outcomes and concerns. Cavanaugh et al. argued that individuals who experience IPV also experience greater levels of mental illness, and more types of IPV is associated with an even greater risk of mental illness. In this study, the authors found distinct patterns of mental disorders based on groups of individuals experiencing differential IPV. Specifically, the researchers found that the group who had the highest and most diverse forms of IPV had the greatest odds of having a mental disorder including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a substance use disorder. Cavanaugh et al. related this result to treatment intervention,

indicating that based on differential experiences of interpersonal violence the victims might be more vulnerable to different disorders and require different treatment interventions.

While Cavanaugh et al. (2013) only briefly considered PTSD as a stand-alone variable, Kuijpers, van der Knaap, and Winkel (2012) studied this factor considerably in relation to IPV and abuse. Because of the probability of experiencing a traumatic event during the course of an abusive relationship, an estimate based on previous studies indicates that between 31 to 84 percent of women who have experienced IPV met the criteria for PTSD. Kuijpers et al. also emphasized that PTSD can be both a consequence of IPV and a possible risk factor for IPV. The results of this study indicated that PTSD is a predictor of revictimization, however, only one cluster of PTSD symptoms was significantly predictive. While symptoms of avoidance, numbing, and arousal did not predict revictimization, symptoms of re-experiencing was predictive. This finding may indicate that different symptoms can predict different factors related to IPV, if they are allowed to be broken down into symptom clusters. An interesting finding by Cavanaugh et al. focused on the role of the perpetration of IPV by the victims themselves. The authors reported that higher levels of IPV perpetration by the victims was predictive of higher levels of IPV revictimization. Cavanaugh et al. reasoned that as a result of continuously re-experiencing their traumatic event(s), the victims may become violent and display angry outbursts against their partners. These events would then put them at further risk for future victimization by the abuser. Cavanaugh et al. conclude by describing how individuals experiencing abuse and violence on a consistent basis may

not just be re-experience the traumatic event in their thoughts and feelings, but may actually be re-experiencing the abuse in real life settings.

Other studies, such as the ones conducted by Sonis and Langer (2008) and McFarlane et al. (2014), have also discussed the importance of PTSD in relation to IPV. Sonis and Langer reported that PTSD symptoms during a baseline measurement increased the odds of IPV at a follow-up time period. McFarlane et al. included the measurement of PTSD symptoms when designing a measure with the potential to predict the return to abusive situations. Studies such as these demonstrate the importance of the inclusion of this variable when predicting IPV, revictimization, and return to abuse. Measurement of this variable is especially important due to its dual role as both a predictor of IPV and a consequence of repeated abuse.

Demographic Variables and IPV

As previously discussed, factors such as economic dependency, the level of investment in the relationship, social support, and PTSD related symptoms have all been linked to IPV in different ways. Many of these same studies have also found demographic variables to be related to IPV. These demographic variables of importance range from race to level of education, and can be a significant determinant of risk for IPV and even return to abuse. Bornstein (2006) indicated that questions on whether victims had alternative housing opportunities, access to resources other than income, and young children living with them, could be predictive of IPV and tolerance of IPV. Frisch and MacKenzie (1991) reported that chronically abused women were more likely to be unemployed, to have never received counseling, and to have a lower level of education

than women who experienced IPV for a shorter period of time. A study by Follingstad and Rogers (2012) investigated differences between women who experienced differing amounts of IPV. This study found that individuals who experienced more abuse were also in the abusive relationship four years longer than the individuals who experienced less abuse, indicating that the length of the abusive relationship is related to the amount of IPV. Studies such as these demonstrate how even basic information about a victim can be predictive of higher levels of IPV.

Other studies have also investigated the roles of demographic variables in relation to IPV, although these factors are typically not the focus of the study. Sonis and Langer (2008) reported several of these demographic variables to be predictive of returning to abusive situations. They included socioeconomic status, the presence of children in the relationship, the length of the relationship, and even court involvement. Sonis and Langer found that both a Latina ethnicity and the number of attempts made to leave the abuser were predictive of the occurrence of IPV and the severity of that IPV. Pregnancy in the year prior to when victims were interviewed was associated with both an increase in the odds of experiencing IPV and in predicting recurrent IPV. A study by McLeod et al. (2010) reported that when women are in multiple oppressed groups, such as having a lower socioeconomic status and belonging to a minority group, they are at a higher risk of harm in IPV situation. McLeod et al. explain that this may be due to disadvantaged social positions such as a lack of access to resources and power differentials. Based on results from this study, victims express that the barriers to leaving an abusive relationship include a lack of financial resources, education and vocation opportunities, childcare, housing, and transportation. Crane and Constantine (2003) report that minority groups

experience higher rates of IPV than White individuals. Specifically, the authors report that Black women experience 35% more IPV incidents than White women.

While demographic variables often appear unimportant to the concept of interest, in IPV literature the demographic variables play a large role in the prediction of the severity of IPV and the recurrence of IPV. Racial minorities with less education and an inadequate access to resources appear to be at the highest risk for IPV. These statistics are essential information when conducting screenings for IPV in community health settings. By acknowledging these factors, researchers can obtain a more complete perspective on the predictive factors of IPV.

Return to Abuse

While interpersonal violence and domestic violence have been largely studied and a wide body of literature has been developed, there has been relatively little focus on why approximately 50 percent of IPV victims will return to the abusive situation (Frisch & Mackenzie, 1991). This high percentage demonstrates the importance of examining this situation, as higher levels of abuse can lead to increases in mental illness, physical complications, and a reliance on governmental assistance and community resources. In recent years, several studies examined contributing factors of return to abuse.

Aguirre (1985) conducted a study investigating why married women leave domestic violence shelters and return to their abusive husbands. This study considered the factors of childhood neglect, the severity and frequency of abuse, and the number of resources available. Data were collected across a time frame of eight months. Results of the study indicated that the victim's income was the only significant predictor of

returning to the abusive husband. While this study used existing data on factors related to IPV to provide a starting point for all other literature on return to abuse, it focused on a very specified sample – married women – that may not be applicable to the current IPV population.

Bybee and Sullivan (2005) also investigated the concept of return to abuse, however, their study incorporated a prospective design. Bybee and Sullivan utilized a sample that had already been studied for a two year time span in order to observe the effects of advocate intervention after victims leave shelters. They compared the victims scores on measures of levels of previous abuse, quality of life, social support, and access to community resources at two- and three-year time points. Results suggested that having experienced abuse six-months prior, experiencing difficulties with the welfare system, and not being able to access resources were all associated with a higher risk of abuse at the three-year follow-up. Protective factors included employment and a high quality of life at the second year follow-up, as well as having a social network that provided resources. Because this study was longitudinal, it was able to establish baseline data for how victims score on measures of social support and quality of life, and then track how changes in scores over time relate to return to abuse.

Handsel (2007) studied how the factors of risk-taking, perceived control, and optimistic bias are related to remaining with an abusive partner or returning to an abusive situation. Specifically, Handsel investigated what the victim perceived her odds of returning to her abuser would be. He administered several surveys to IPV victims across several different shelters and found few variables related to the victims' perceived odds of return to abuse. This result may indicate that victims do not have accurate perceptions

of their own odds of returning to an abusive situation. While Handsel introduced several variables not yet studied in the return to abuse literature, it was found that, at least for this sample and outcome measure, these variables are unrelated to return to abuse.

A study on recurrent interpersonal violence was conducted by Sonis and Langer (2008) with a focus on risk and protective factors. Sonis and Langer utilized a longitudinal design that included a sample of low-income IPV victims, and the aim of the study was to identify factors that differentiated the women who experienced only one IPV incident versus recurrent IPV. Sonis and Langer identified women who were seeking help from health care from medical sites and had experienced IPV in the year prior. The researchers then conducted a follow up interview 3-23 months later and administered questions on a number of factors including age, education, ethnicity, marital status, children, and the number of abusive partners in the year prior. Results indicated that ethnicity, pregnancy in the year prior, attempts to leave the partner, and frequency of IPV in the previous year were all predictive of the odds or severity of IPV during the follow up. While this study provided important information regarding predictors of returning to an abusive situation during a follow up period, predictors were limited to qualitative data from interviews or singular questions about demographic variables.

Finally, a study conducted by McFarlane et al. (2014) investigated the factors that should be included on an assessment tool created to predict return to abusive situations for women with children. McFarlane et al. followed a sample of IPV victims with children across 24 months and administered a set of surveys every four months. The authors then assessed which of the measures best predicted return to abuse and included those questions on a new risk assessment measure. McFarlane et al. found the most

predictive factors to be the victim's age, level of education, sexual abuse score, community agency use, length of relationship with abusive partner, emotional support, PTSD symptoms, and physical health. This risk assessment tool provides valuable information regarding the types of factors that may predict return to abuse, however it is not generalizable to populations outside of IPV victims with children.

Overall, the current literature on return to abuse provides essential information on the many variables that may put IPV victims at risk for revictimization and influence them to return to abusive situation. These studies often use the existing body of research on the overarching theme of IPV, to theorize what variables also influence return to abuse. Consistent limitations with the current literature, however, include a lack of generalizability and the use of different variables in each study. Additionally, the longitudinal studies measured return to abuse through the use of interviews or by administering a questionnaire on the severity of abuse at different time points. The retrospective designs have also either utilized interviews or have asked IPV victims if they anticipated returning to their abuser. A questionnaire measuring past return to abusive relationships has not yet been created. A more comprehensive study investigating which of these predictive variables may contribute more to a victim's choice to return to an abuser through the use of a questionnaire measuring past return to abuse, may contribute significantly to the existing body of literature.

Summary and Hypotheses

Domestic violence and interpersonal abuse affects one-third of women and can have extreme negative consequences on the victim's psychological and physical health

and well-being (Edwards et al., 2011; Clements et al., 2004; Handsel, 2007).

Additionally, the consequences of IPV have a wide impact due to the need for many victims to rely on government assistance and community resources when attempting to leave these abusive situations (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005). Domestic violence and IPV has been studied extensively with themes focusing on the consequences of IPV, the predictors of IPV and IPV severity, factors that protect against IPV, and even revictimization. Some of the most common factors linked to IPV include the roles of dependency (Bornstein, 2006), investment in the abusive relationship (Edwards et al., 2011), mental health (Sonis & Langer, 2008), social support (Clements et al., 2004), and demographic variables such as race and level of education (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991).

Recently, the related area of a victim's choice to return to an abusive relationship has been studied more thoroughly, although the body of literature in this area is still relatively small and only provides limited evidence for factors predicting return to abuse. Further study of this area is essential, as one-half of all women who leave an abusive situation will later return to that abusive partner (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991). Existing research includes several longitudinal studies that suggest factors predictive of return to abuse, as well as several cross-sectional studies that investigate risk and protective factors. Often these studies are specific to small populations, though, such as married women or women with children (Aguirre, 1985; McFarlane et al., 2014).

New studies are needed that are more generalizable to larger populations of IPV victims and are more practically applied in community settings. Therefore, the current study will build on existing research by determining which factors related to return to abusive situations are most predictive in a more general sample of IPV victims. Based on

the literature cited, economic dependency, relationship investment, PTSD symptoms, social support, and demographic variables will be included in this study. Results of this study should be applicable to IPV community resources such as domestic violence shelters where the most predictive measures can be used as screening tools to inform victims of their risk of return. Treatment and intervention services could be individualized based on a victim's personal risk factors.

The current study will use measures of social support, economic dependency, investment, PTSD symptomology, IPV severity, and demographic variables to predict leaving abusive situations and return to abuse through a multiple regression analysis. In order to mirror previous studies in IPV literature, a model predicting leaving abusive situations was included, however, the primary interest of the study focused on returning to abusive situations. As this study is cross-sectional, return to abuse will be defined as the victim's return to abuse across past abusive relationships. It is hypothesized that social support will be negatively related to return to abuse, while PTSD symptomology, economic dependency, IPV severity, and investment in the relationship will be positively related to return to abuse. It is hypothesized that social support will be positively related to leaving abusive situations, while PTSD symptomology, economic dependency, IPV severity, and investment in the relationship will be negatively related to leaving abusive situations.

It is also hypothesized that level of education, membership in a minority group, and length of the abusive relationship will be predictive of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse. Finally, it was hypothesized that victim employment during the abusive relationship and marital status would be predictive of leaving abusive situations and

return to abuse. Based on the cited literature, it is predicted that economic dependence will be the greatest predictor of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from a domestic violence shelter in the Midwest. Participants were current residents indicating they recently left an abusive situation. In total, 40 participants were recruited through the domestic violence shelter. One participant did not report any demographic information. The majority of participants were female ($N = 38$), and the one reported male participant was excluded from analyses in order to prevent possible outlier effects. Participant ages ranged from 23 years to 62 years ($M = 37.90$, $SD = 10.15$). The majority of participants (94%) identified as not Hispanic or Latino. Of the 37 participants who reported their racial background, 8% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 8% identified as Black or African American, and 83% identified as White. For reported level of education, 15 participants reported having a high school degree or less, and 23 participants reported obtaining more than a high school level of education. When reporting marital status, 12 participants reported being divorced, 16 married, 10 single, and 1 widowed. Participants received incentives for their participation including points with which they could purchase clothing or accessories and entrance into several gift card drawings.

Measures

Economic Dependence. As no current survey was found to measure economic dependence, a set of items were administered that objectively measured the victim's financial dependence on her abuser. These questions were adapted from previous studies

of economic dependence and IPV. Items included questions such as the victim's contribution to income, the abuser's contribution to income, the victim's governmental support in the form of welfare, and if the victim has a job outside of the home. This measure included two components. The first was a ratio of the victim's income to the abuser's income, and it objectively measured the victim's dependence on the abuser for income. Higher ratios indicate that the victim is contributing as much or more to the financial situation of the couple. The second portion of the questionnaire included Likert-type items that assessed the victim's perception of her dependence on her abuser for financial support. Higher numbers indicate that the victim perceives herself to be completely dependent on her abuser for financial support. While previous studies have relied on a single question, this survey was designed to provide a meaningful number describing economic dependence. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's Alpha) found the four items contributing to the Likert total to be .65.

The Investment Model. The Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) was used to assess the four factors of investment. This scale is comprised of four subscales including satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment, and commitment. The total number of items included on the scale was 37, with 10 items on the satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment scales and 7 items on the commitment scale. Fifteen of the items are Likert-type on a four-point scale ranging from "Don't Agree At All" to "Agree Completely," and 22 items are Likert-type on a nine-point scale ranging from "Do Not Agree At All" to "Agree Completely." Total scores are based on the sum of items and can be calculated for all 37 items or for each subscale. Higher scores indicate a higher level of investment in the relationship. For the current sample, the

Cronbach's Alpha value was .91 for the total score. The Satisfaction subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .94. The Quality of Alternatives subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .89. The Investment subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .85, and the Commitment subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .87.

Social Support. Social Support was measured by the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL, Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). This scale includes four components of social support – tangible support, belonging support, self-esteem support, and appraisal support. Participants are asked to indicate how true a statement is for them. The ISEL is comprised of 40 Likert-type items on a four-point scale ranging from “definitely true” to “definitely false.” Twenty of the items are reverse coded and each subscale includes 10 items. Sums of scores are calculated for the ISEL total score and subscale total scores. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social support. Cronbach's Alpha for the total scores of the current sample was .95. Cronbach's Alpha values for the subscales were .88 for the Appraisal subscale, .87 for the Tangible subscale, .78 for the Self-Esteem subscale, and .86 for the Belonging subscale.

PTSD Symptoms. The PTSD Checklist for *DSM-5* (Civilian Version) was used to assess PTSD symptoms. This scale includes 20 items based on the *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria for PTSD, and participants are asked to indicate how much a symptom has been affecting them on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Extremely.” A total score for the scale is calculated by summing the scores on each item with higher scores being indicative of a higher number of PTSD and PTSD symptom severity. The current study found Cronbach's alpha to be .90 for the total score.

IPV Severity. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) was used to assess the severity of the victims' last abusive relationship. This measure included questions on negotiation, physical assault, sexual coercion, injury, and psychological abuse. This measure is considered the most widely used measure of IPV severity. The CTS2 contains total scores for both the victim and perpetrator in each of these areas, as well as providing lifetime prevalence scores and severity scores. All CTS2 questionnaires were scored in accordance with the CTS2 scoring manual (Straus, Hamby, & Warren, 2003). For the purpose of this study, only CTS2 total scores for victim injury, and perpetrator physical assault, sexual coercion, and psychological aggression were utilized. Cronbach's Alpha for the psychological aggression scale was .71. For the physical assault scale, Cronbach's Alpha was .86. Cronbach's Alpha for sexual coercion was .90, and Cronbach's Alpha for injury due to abuse was .74.

Leaving Abusive Situations and Return to Abuse. Because no survey measuring return to abusive situations exists, a new survey was created. This survey included items that measure the number of abusive relationships, the time between abusive relationships, the rate of return to abusive partners, and the attempts to leave abusive partners. Two open-ended questions assessed the rate of attempting to leave the relationship and the rate of return to the abusive partner. The questions were converted into a ratio with number higher than one indicating that the victim was leaving the relationship more than she was returning to the relationship. A number equal to one indicated that the victim left the relationship and returned to the relationship an equal

number of times. If a victim scores between a 1 and a 2, a lower number will indicate that the victim has left and returned to the abusive relationship more times.

Another set of questions asked the victims to indicate how often they left the relationship or returned to the relationship in a Likert-type format ranging from less than ten times a year to more than once a week, which helped to categorize the victims' answers into a range that may be more meaningful. The totals of the two questions assessing the rate of leaving an abusive relationship through a Likert-type format were summed to define leaving abusive situations. The totals of the two questions assessing return to abuse through a Likert-type format were summed to define return to abuse. As only two questions were used to obtain both total scores, reliability estimates were not calculated for these scales. While previous studies have either assessed return to abuse longitudinally or they have asked what victims perceive their odds of return to be, this measure assessed past return to abuse.

Demographics. A demographics questionnaire was used in order to gain information on the participants' current relationship status and other factors such as socioeconomic status, marital status, number of children, and ethnicity.

Procedure

After permission was received from the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (6/21/2016, #16-0426) and the local domestic violence shelter, participants were recruited across a six-month time frame. Packets were created containing the surveys, demographics questionnaires, informed consent sheets, and debriefing forms, along with thorough and clear directions. All questionnaires and surveys were placed in

random order to reduce possible testing effects. Packets were administered to participants during one hour sessions at the shelter, in order for the researcher to address the questions of the participants.

Analytical Procedure

All analyses were performed in *R*. After data screening, two simultaneous multiple regression analyses were performed in order to observe which measures contribute significantly to predicting leaving abusive situations and return to abuse. Correlation analyses were utilized to determine which subscales were most highly correlated with leaving abusive situations and return to abuse and should be included in the regression models. This pre-screening procedure helped determine most predictive variable from each overall phenomenon (i.e. IPV included four subscales), while controlling for multicollinearity and suppression. The small sample size dictated using a smaller number of predictors, otherwise an inappropriate perfect fit would be found.

Predictor variables for the first regression model were social support, commitment, economic dependence, PTSD symptoms, injury due to abuse, and sexual coercion, with leaving abusive situations as the dependent variable. Predictor variables for the second regression model were the same as in the first regression model, but return to abuse was used as the predicted variable. Due to missing data, ratios for economic dependence and leaving and return to abuse were not utilized for this study. Likert totals on these scales were the values included in all analyses. One-way ANOVAs were utilized to observe differences in leaving abusive situations and return to abuse for race and marital status. A *t*-test was used to determine differences in leaving abusive situations and

return to abuse for victim employment during the abusive relationship. Finally, correlation analyses were utilized to determine correlations between level of education and length of the abusive relationship with leaving abusive relationships and return to abuse.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

Participants reported staying in a domestic violence shelter between 1-10 times and 2.67 times on average ($SD = 2.14$). Participants reported experiencing from 1 to 10 abusive relationships, with the average being 3.08 ($SD = 2.10$). Participants reported the average length of abusive relationships to be 7.18 years ($SD = 7.05$) and the range was from 6 months to 28 years. According to participants, the abuse occurred 24 months into the abusive relationship ($SD = 46.48$), with a wide range of 0-240 months. Out of the 32 participants who reported their frequency of return, only two participants reported leaving their abusive situation and not returning. Participants reported returning to their abusive situation 5.94 times on average ($SD = 9.08$).

Data Screening

Missing data was imputed for rows with less than five percent of missing data. Due to a small sample size, outliers were not removed from the data set. Data appeared to meet the assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, homogeneity, and homoscedasticity. While data were not linear, few outliers were observed. Correlations between all predictor variables included in the regression models yielded values below .68 for all variables, indicating low probability of suppression in the regression models. Means, standard deviations, and ranges for each questionnaire are provided in Table 1.

Correlation Analyses

A correlation analysis was conducted for the four subscales and total scores on the Investment Model Scale, leaving abusive situations totals, and return to abuse totals. The commitment subscale fit best with previous research on IPV and appeared to be highly correlated with both leaving abusive situations and return to abuse, and as a result, this subscale was included as the measure of commitment to the abusive relationship in both regression models. A correlation analysis was also conducted for the four subscales and the total scores of the ISEL, leaving abusive situations totals, and return to abuse totals. All correlations were small, so the ISEL total score was chosen as the predictor to include in both regression analyses. A final correlation analysis was conducted to determine which subscales on the CTS2 were most correlated with leaving abusive situations and return to abuse. As both victim injury due to abuse and perpetrator sexual coercion were highly correlated with leaving abusive situations and return to abuse, both of these subscales were chosen to include in the regression models. Table 2 provides correlations values for all three analyses.

Regression Analyses

Model One. The first regression model predicting leaving abusive relationships was significant ($R^2 = 0.485$, $F(6, 27) = 4.244$, $p = .004$). Economic abuse ($\beta = -0.136$, $p = .004$), injury due to abuse ($\beta = -0.024$, $p = .007$), and sexual coercion ($\beta = 0.012$, $p = .023$) were significantly predictive of leaving an abusive relationship. Model values are provided in Table 3.

Model Two. The regression model predicting returning to abusive situations was not statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.350$, $F(6, 24) = 2.15$, $p = .084$), but included a very large effect size. It is important to note that economic abuse ($\beta = -0.157$, $p = .020$) and sexual coercion ($\beta = 0.019$, $p = .045$) were significantly predictive of return to abuse. Model values are provided in Table 4.

Demographic Analyses

Race. Due to small sample sizes, there were only three participants who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native and three participants who identified as Black or African American. As a result, there was no variance within American Indian or Alaska Native return to abuse scores. Mean and standard deviation values are provided in Table 5.

Marital Status. Two one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to test for differences in leaving abusive situations and return to abuse depending on marital status (Married, Divorced, and Single). Because only one individual reported being widowed, this individual was not included in the analysis. There was not a significant effect of marital status on leaving abusive situations, $F(2, 29) = 1.49$, $p = .242$, $R^2 = .093$. There was also not a significant effect of marital status on return to abuse, $F(2, 26) = 2.16$, $p = .136$, $R^2 = .142$. Mean and standard deviation values are provided in Table 5.

Employment. Two independent t -tests were conducted to observe differences in leaving abusive situations and return to abuse depending on if the individual was employed during the abusive relationship. On average, individuals who were not employed during the abusive relationship ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.92$) had higher rates of

leaving the relationship than individuals who were employed during the abusive relationship ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.19$). This difference was not significant, $t(32) = 1.96$, $p = .059$, $d = 0.71$. On average, individuals who were not employed during the abusive relationship ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 2.13$) had higher rates of returning to the abusive relationship than individuals who were employed during the abusive relationship ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 2.00$), however, this difference was not significant as well, $t(29) = 0.21$, $p = .833$, $d = 0.08$.

Level of Education. Level of education was coded from 1 (Less Than a High School Degree) to 7 (More Than a Bachelor's Degree) and correlational analyses were performed between this variable, leaving abusive situations, and return to abuse. Results revealed a moderate negative correlation between level of education and leaving abusive situations ($r = -.25$, $p = .160$) and a small negative correlation between level of education and return to abuse ($r = -.17$, $p = .385$).

Length of the Abusive Relationship. Correlation analyses were performed between the length of the participant's last abusive relationship, leaving abusive situations, and return to abuse. A moderate negative correlation was found between length of the abusive relationship and leaving the abusive situation ($r = -.34$, $p = .058$). Additionally, a moderate negative correlation was found between length of the abusive relationship and return to abuse ($r = -.37$, $p = .046$).

DISCUSSION

Regression Models

Model one. Overall, model one was significant with the predictors of social support, commitment, economic dependence, PTSD symptomology, injury due to abuse, and sexual coercion accounting for 48.5% of the variance in leaving abusive situations. While economic abuse and injury due to abuse were significantly negatively associated with leaving abusive situations, sexual coercion was significantly positively associated with leaving abusive situations. This may indicate that victims are more likely to remain in abusive situations when they are dependent on their abuser for financial security or they are fearful that attempting to leave would lead to further injury. Sexual coercion, however, may induce such extreme trauma that it pushes victims to leave their abuser. Sexual coercion may also represent a different type of abuse or abuser characteristic that leads to different leaving decisions. It should be noted that although economic abuse, injury due to abuse, and sexual coercion are all significantly predictive of leaving abusive situations, Beta values are relatively small. Small Beta values may represent that these variables determine only small changes in leaving decisions, or that the sample size was too small to accurately determine the effect that these variables had on leaving abusive situations.

Model Two. Model two was not significant, although it is still important to note that the model accounted for 35% of the variance in returning to abusive situations. Economic abuse was significantly negatively associated with return to abuse and sexual coercion was positively associated with return to abuse. While economic abuse predicted

fewer leaving behaviors, it also appears to predict fewer return behaviors. This may indicate that individuals who experience more economic abuse choose not to return at a higher rate than victims who experience less economic abuse. An alternative perspective, however, is that individuals who experience higher rates of economic abuse are more likely to remain in the abusive relationship, and therefore have fewer opportunities to return to the relationship. Sexual coercion was significantly positively associated with return to abuse, reflecting that individuals who experience sexual coercion may have higher rates of return to abuse. Based on the positive associations with leaving abusive situations, individuals may have higher opportunities to return to abusive relationships due to their higher rates of leaving these abusive relationships. Similarly to the first regression model, even significant predictors had small Beta values suggesting small effects or reflecting a small sample size.

Demographic Variable Analyses

Results revealed no differences in return to abuse or leaving abusive situations depending on marital status or employment during the abusive relationship. Due to small sample sizes, no analyses could be performed to determine differences in leaving abusive situations or return to abuse based on membership in a minority group. After education was coded as continuous, a moderate negative correlation was found between level of education and leaving abusive situations. A small negative correlation was found between level of education and return to abuse. Participants with higher levels of education may have lower rates of leaving abusive situations but also have lower levels of return. The length of the abusive relationship was found to be moderately negatively correlated with

leaving abusive situations and return to abuse. Participants with longer abusive relationships also have lower rates of leaving abusive relationships but lower rates of return to abuse.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis that social support would be negatively related to return to abuse, while PTSD symptomology, economic dependency, IPV severity, and investment in the relationship would be positively related to return to abuse was partially supported. Social support, commitment, and PTSD symptomology were not predictive of return to abuse. Higher levels of sexual coercion, which is a measure of IPV severity, was positively predictive of return to abuse. Economic abuse and injury due to abuse were negatively predictive of return to abuse, however. The second hypothesis that social support would be positively related to leaving abusive situations, while PTSD symptomology, economic dependency, IPV severity, and investment in the relationship would be negatively related to leaving abusive situations was also partially supported. Social support, commitment, and PTSD symptomology were not predictive of leaving abusive situations. While sexual coercion was positively correlated with leaving abusive situations, economic dependence was negatively correlated with leaving abusive situations.

The hypothesis that level of education, membership in a minority group, and length of the abusive relationship would be predictive of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse was partially supported. Level of education was moderately associated with leaving abusive situations, and there was a small correlation between level of

education and return to abuse. The length of the abusive relationship was also moderately associated with return to abuse and leaving abusive situations. No analyses could be performed to determine differences in leaving abusive situations or return to abuse based on membership in a minority group. The final hypothesis that victim employment during the abusive relationship and marital status would be predictive of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse was not supported. No differences in leaving abusive situations or return to abuse occurred due to differences in marital status or employment during the abusive relationship. Additionally, economic dependence did appear to be the greatest predictor of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse, as this variable displayed the highest *b* values and highest levels of statistical significance.

Implications

Studying domestic violence is a complex process, as numerous factors are involved in a perpetrator's decision to inflict abuse, and a victim's decision to stay in, leave, or return to that abusive situation. Previous research examining return to abuse, has found several factors to be related to this variable including social support, economic dependence, ethnicity, and the number of attempts to leave the abusive situation (Aguirre, 1985; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; McFarlane et al., 2014; Sonis & Langer, 2008). This past research utilized longitudinal designs or focused on very specific populations within IPV, leaving a gap in the literature. The current study was designed to be generalizable to a larger population of IPV victims, as well as to develop tools that would be beneficial for future cross-sectional designs.

The results of the current study reflected the complexity of this issue, as they did not support findings of previous literature on return to abuse. While Bybee and Sullivan (2005) found social support to be influential in a victim's decision to return to an abusive situation, this variable had no impact on return to abuse or leaving abusive situations in the current study. Some differences may be due to methodological variations. Bybee and Sullivan utilized a longitudinal design that allowed them to measure social support after the victims had left the shelter. Social support may not have been a significant predictor for the current study, due to the fact that past social support and past return to abuse were being measured and some data may have been lost due to difficulties with recall and recall accuracy. Similarly, McFarlane et al. (2014) found PTSD symptomology to be predictive of return to abuse, while the current study found no effects for PTSD symptomology. Other results, however, closely mirrored McFarlane et al.'s research, with level of education, sexual abuse, and length of the relationship all being highly associated with return to abuse.

An important aspect to consider is whether the decision to leave an abusive situation and the decision to return to an abusive situation function independently from each other, or are inextricably intertwined. The results indicated that economic dependence is negatively associated with leaving abusive situations. Does this indicate that individuals with higher levels of economic abuse stay in the abusive relationship longer and therefore leave less, or does it indicate that individuals with higher economic dependence leave early in the relationship and do not return? While similar variables predicted both leaving abusive relationships and return to abuse, it is still unknown

whether these variables represent a cycle where higher attempts to leave are always followed by high rate of return.

Limitations

The largest limitation for the current study was related to sample size. Despite collecting data once a week across a six-month time frame, only 40 participants were recruited. Additionally, many participants did not complete each questionnaire fully, leading to moderate levels of missing data. Participants often appeared to have low levels of motivation to complete the surveys, and several participants appeared hurried in their test-taking approach. Participants often had difficulty interpreting questions on the surveys, and frequently asked the researcher for explanation. As many participants had a high school level of education or less, the reading level equivalency of the questionnaires may have been too high for the participants. A reading level analysis was not performed on the questionnaires and surveys, however. Many participants verbally explained their responses to the researcher because they felt the question did not allow for full explanation of their situation, and several participants wished to talk to the researcher in further detail about their current situation. Two participants revealed that their most recent abusive situation involved a family member and a co-worker, rather than an intimate partner. Because of the high level of potential benefit to the participants through the gift card drawings and points as incentives, no participant was excluded from participating in the study.

Another limitation is the accuracy of the information gathered through the self-report questionnaire. Participants may have been hesitant to respond honestly due to the

highly personal nature of the questions, despite the confidentiality guaranteed to the participants. Many participants displayed an emotional reaction when answering several of the questionnaires. All participants were reminded they could discontinue at any time.

As no previous studies used questionnaires on economic dependence or past return to abuse, these questionnaires were created for the purpose of this study. Two different scoring methods were created for each questionnaire, however, the ratio scoring methods contained too much missing data to be used in analyses. The Likert total scores for the economic dependence questionnaire produced a Chronbach's Alpha value of .65, which indicates moderate reliability. This value may have been influenced, however, by the low number of items (4) included in the totals. The Likert total scores for the return to abuse and leaving abusive situations questionnaire only contained two items each, so a reliability analysis was not performed on these total scores. It is therefore unknown if these questionnaires are considered valid and reliable measures of economic dependence, return to abuse, and leaving abusive situations. The high correlations with other variables that have been associated with IPV in previous literature, indicate that they do measure what they are intended to measure. Future studies including these measure are needed to further determine their reliability and validity.

Future Directions

While the current current study begins the process of bridging the gap in the literature on returning to abusive relationships, much more research related to return to abuse is needed. In the current study, 93.8% of the participants reported having returned to an abusive partner at least once, indicating that this is a prevalent issue that should be

addressed through research and the application of research. Future studies should continue to investigate the factors that influence a victim's decision to leave an abusive situation and later return to that abusive situation. Additionally, studies should focus on differentiating between victims who have experienced multiple abusive relationships and those who return to the same abusive relationships. A combination of longitudinal studies and cross-sectional research would provide the most comprehensive investigation of factors related to return to abuse. Further development of economic dependence and return to abuse questionnaires are highly important for the continuation of this research.

CONCLUSION

The current study indicated that economic dependence and sexual coercion may be consistent predictors of leaving abusive situations and return to abuse, while other variables may be more limited to specific samples of IPV victims. The research in this area is complex, however, and requires further exploration until reliable predictors of return to abuse across multiple settings are identified. As return to abuse has only recently been studied, it is still unknown how return to abuse relates to stay/leave decisions or experiencing multiple abusive relationships. Domestic violence shelters and community programs designed to provide support for IPV victims, would highly benefit from knowing which factors make a victim more likely to return to abuse. Targeted interventions aimed at these factors may lower help victims refrain from returning to dangerous abusive situations.

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for all Questionnaires

Variable	M	SD	Range
Economic Dependence	16.64	6.44	4-28
CTS2			
Negotiation Self	93.57	36.66	12-150
Negotiation Partner	45.05	36.98	0-150
Psychological Aggression Self	70.05	49.86	0-190
Psychological Aggression Partner	110.86	59.05	0-200
Physical Assault Self	30.30	42.81	0-205
Physical Assault Partner	115.86	78.66	0-275
Injury Self	44.54	35.48	0-150
Injury Partner	10.62	18.31	0-95
Sexual Coercion Self	10.57	28.34	0-155
Sexual Coercion Partner	54.68	56.94	0-175
Investment Model Scale			
Satisfaction	9.58	12.94	0-49
Quality of Alternatives	23.74	15.82	0-53
Commitment	21.53	13.34	0-52
Investment	28.05	14.75	0-55
Total	87.03	38.98	0-162
ISEL			
Tangible	19.64	7.77	1-30
Appraisal	14.72	8.09	1-30
Belonging	15.56	7.67	1-30
Self-esteem	14.43	6.40	5-30
Total	66.68	25.95	24-114
PCL-5	54.62	14.15	24-80
Leaving Abusive Situations	3.38	1.52	2-7
Return to Abuse	4.32	2.01	2-9

Note. CTS2 = Revised Conflict Tactics Scale; ISEL = Interpersonal Support Evaluation List; PCL5 = PTSD Checklist for *DSM-5* (Civilian Version).

Table 2. Correlations Among Questionnaires, Leaving Abusive Situations, and Return to Abuse

Scale	Leaving Abusive Situations	Return to Abuse
Investment Model Scale		
Satisfaction	-.35	-.20
Quality of Alternatives	-.03	.02
Investment	-.47	-.41
Commitment	-.43	-.32
Total Scores	-.44	-.30
ISEL		
Tangible	-.05	-.01
Belonging	-.00	.03
Self-Esteem	.03	.04
Appraisal	-.01	-.09
Total Scores	-.02	.00
CST2		
Victim Injury	-.06	.04
Perpetrator Physical Assault	-.10	.09
Perpetrator Psychological Aggression	-.24	.05
Perpetrator Sexual Coercion	.21	.21

Note: ISEL = Interpersonal Support Evaluation List; CSTS2 = Revised Conflict Tactics Scale.

Table 3. Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Leaving Abusive Situations

Variable	<i>b</i>	Standard Error <i>b</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	<i>Pr</i> ²
PCL5	0.02	0.02	0.966	.343	0.035
Commitment	-0.03	0.02	-1.745	.093	0.105
ISEL	-0.01	< 0.01	-0.658	.516	0.016
Economic Dependence	-0.14	0.04	-3.106	.005**	0.271
Victim Injury	-0.02	< 0.01	-2.906	.007**	0.245
Perpetrator Sexual Coercion	0.01	< 0.01	2.342	.027*	0.174

Note. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. PCL5 = PTSD Checklist for *DSM*-5 (Civilian Version); ISEL = Interpersonal Support Evaluation List.

Table 4. Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Return to Abuse

Variable	<i>b</i>	Standard Error <i>b</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	<i>Pr</i> ²
PCL5	0.04	0.03	1.356	.188	0.074
Commitment	-0.03	0.03	-0.987	.334	0.041
ISEL	-0.01	0.01	-0.862	.398	0.031
Economic Dependence	-0.16	0.06	-2.501	.020*	0.214
Victim Injury	-0.03	0.01	-1.814	.083	0.125
Perpetrator Sexual Coercion	0.02	< 0.01	2.077	.049*	0.158

Note. **p* < .05. PCL5 = PTSD Checklist for *DSM-5* (Civilian Version); ISEL = Interpersonal Support Evaluation List.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Leaving Abusive Situations and Return to Abuse as Function of Race and Marital Status

Variable	Leaving Abusive Situations		Return to Abuse		
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>n</i>
Race					
American Indian or Native American	4.00	2.83	9.00	NA	3
Black or African	3.00	1.41	6.50	0.71	3
White	3.30	1.46	4.00	1.80	30
Marital Status					
Divorced	3.50	1.27	4.44	1.74	12
Married	2.86	1.46	3.50	1.78	15
Single	4.00	1.93	5.38	2.50	10