

Conflict Tactics – European Results

Introduction

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was first devised by Professors Murray Straus and Richard Gelles in the USA in the 1970's (Straus and Gelles, 1974) as a means of measuring what aggressive acts occurred between intimate partners. It asked about verbal, symbolic and physical acts of aggression either as committed by an individual against their partner or as victimisation experienced by an individual from a partner. It has been extensively used in over 30 years of research in either form, although more so as victimisation than perpetration, as this is seen as more reliable, particularly for the more serious acts of physical aggression.

There are now very many papers in the academic literature which have used this scale; either the original or later modified and updated version (CTS2), and these have been applied to dating, cohabiting or married populations. However, the vast majority of these studies are reported for North American samples, many of which are student dating samples. Far fewer studies have been conducted using the CTS in countries outside of North America, although there are good examples (eg. UK, Carrado et al, 1996).

With the growing recognition that CTS studies give an accurate picture of normative conflict within intimate dyads, international recognition has led to researchers from other countries outside of America wanting to co-operate with Murray Straus. This allowed Murray Straus to publish a study of Conflict Tactics within dating populations across 32 nations in 2008 (Straus, 2008). Contained within this data are results for 11 European countries (Greece, Netherlands, Romania, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Lithuania, Great Britain, and Portugal), which has allowed a comparison amongst this European group and is of interest to commentators and interested parties in the UK.

The following is a digest of those results from Straus, M.A. (2008) *Children and Youth Sciences Review* 30, 252-275.

The complete study was based upon a convenience sample of 13,601 students, about 71.5% women and 28.5% men, at 68 universities in 32 countries, who completed the CTS2. Findings revealed that almost a third of students assaulted their dating partners in a 12-month period. In terms of initiation, mutual aggression accounted for 68.6% of physical violence, while women initiated violence 21.4% of the time and men initiated violence 9.9% of the time.

Results presented below are for the eleven European countries studied only.

Table 1: Minor and Severe acts of Aggression on CTS

Country	Minor			Severe		
	Males	Females	%	Males	Females	%
Greece	38.5	25.5	66	17.6	13.9	79
Netherlands	31.3	31.8	101	8.3	4.5	54
Romania	29.2	32.2	110	8.7	10.8	124
Belgium	28.9	34.7	120	7.2	11.6	161
Switzerland	26.7	24.2	90	6.9	5.4	78
Hungary	26.5	21.0	79	12.2	10.5	86
G. Britain	24.6	39.7	161	7.0	15.6	222
Germany	24.0	27.9	116	6.1	7.7	126
Lithuania	22.3	39.3	176	4.5	10.5	233
Sweden	18.8	17.7	94	1.3	2.0	153
Portugal	14.2	17.8	125	5.3	5.0	94

Table 1 gives the extracted results for minor and severe acts of aggression occurring in a single year according to the CTS country by country. Each result is a % of the population sampled responding as committing the acts that make up either the minor or severe series of acts on the CTS2 scale. The % is expressed as female-to-male figures for both minor and severe acts of aggression committed.

Tables 2A and 2B: Unilateral and Bilateral acts of Aggression on CTS

(A) Minor acts of aggression

Country	Male Only	Female Only	Bilateral	Ratio F/M
Gt Britain	4.2	19.2	76.5	4.6
Lithuania	5.6	23.5	70.7	4.2
Belgium	11.2	19.8	68.8	1.8
Romania	6.9	25.5	67.4	3.7
Netherlands	4.6	24.2	71.0	5.3
Greece	26.2	16.2	57.5	0.6
Germany	12.4	24.8	62.7	2.0
Switzerland	9.4	25.8	64.7	2.7
Hungary	12.5	17.5	70.0	1.4
Sweden	11.8	28.4	59.7	2.4
Portugal	13.6	22.7	63.6	1.7

(B) Severe acts of aggression on CTS

Country	Male Only	Female Only	Bilateral	Ratio F/M
Greece	24.3	17.0	58.5	0.7
Gt Britain	11.2	28.1	60.5	2.5
Hungary	15.7	42.1	42.1	2.7
Belgium	18.3	33.3	48.2	1.8
Romania	21.2	36.3	42.2	1.7
Lithuania	15.1	36.3	48.4	2.4
Germany	17.3	28.2	54.3	1.6
Switzerland	9.5	28.5	61.9	3.0
Portugal	21.7	8.7	69.5	0.4
Netherlands	8.7	43.4	47.8	5.0
Sweden	37.5	37.5	25.0	1.0

Tables 2A and 2B present the results itemised as to whether the acts were committed by only one partner (male or female) or were committed by both partners, and presented for either the minor series of acts (Table 2A) or the severe series of acts (Table 2B). The ratio F/M is ratio of female only/male only for each table.

Analysis

Looking at Table 1 above, it is apparent, when the percentages of males and females committing acts of aggression as either 'severe' or 'minor' acts are expressed as a percentage female-to-male of one another, that in four countries for minor aggressive acts (Greece, Switzerland, Hungary and Sweden) and five countries for severe acts (Greece, Netherlands, Switzerland, Hungary and Portugal), the percentage of male assaults on female partners is a higher figure than female assaults on male partners, and hence the percentage female-to-male is below 100%. In the remaining seven countries for minor assaults and six countries for severe assaults, the percentage of female assaults on male partners is higher, such that the female-to-male ratio is above 100% in each case, reaching over 200% for Great Britain (222%) and Lithuania (233%) in the case of severe assaults.

Tables 2A and 2B show results broken down on the basis of whether assaults were committed by males only, females only, or were bilateral with both partners committing either a minor assault on each other or a severe assault on each other. The figures for such bilateral assaults fall with the expected levels as found by other CTS research, for instance in America, at around the 50-70% level. For minor assaults, Great Britain had the highest percentage of bilateral assaults at 76.5% and Greece the lowest at 57.5%. (Table 2A).

The variations in percentages of couples committing bilateral assaults obviously will impact on the percentages of only males or only females who committed assaults on their partner, such that whilst Great Britain had the lowest percentage of males committing a minor assault on a female partner that did not assault them (4.6%), Greece had the highest percentage of males committing a minor assault on a female partner that did not assault them (26.2).

The notable feature of Table 2A is, however, that when the percentages of females assaulting a male partner that did not assault them are viewed, they are all, with the exception of Greece (0.6), higher such that the ratio female-to-male ranges from 1.4 (Hungary) to 5.3 (Netherlands). In other words, across these European results, between 1.5 to 5 times as many men suffered a minor assault from a female partner that they have not assaulted, than women from men they have not assaulted.

Generally, the same pattern remains true when severe assaults are examined. (Table 2B). Greece (0.7) and Portugal (0.4) were the only countries in which male severe assaults on non-assaultative female partners were greater than the level of female assaults. In this table, however, Sweden is of interest as here a rather low percentage of bilateral assaults (25%) is mirrored by an equal and high level of both severe male assaults and severe female assaults (37.5% for both sexes). Otherwise, the ratio of female-to-male severe assaults indicates that between 1.7 to 5 times as many men suffer assaults from a female partner who they did not assault. Women in the Netherlands have the highest propensity (43.4%) to make severe assaults on their non-assaultative menfolk, whilst Dutch men are the least likely to severely assault a non-assaultative female partner. The fact that bilateral assaults in the Netherlands are also towards the lower end of the range recorded, also probably shows that Dutch men are less likely to respond with severe aggressive acts even when experiencing such acts from a female partner.

Concluding Remarks

The extent to which assaults between intimate partners have been an object of public and governmental concern varies widely across countries and this is true even within Europe. Hence, it would be expected that initial attempts to undertake normative population surveys, even amongst university students as in this study, will find widely differing results. However, by focusing upon university students who are usually in their late teens to early twenties, the study is, of course, on the one hand sampling from the age range in which acts of aggression are generally high, but also from a population in which dating relationships, rather than necessarily co-habiting or married relationships, predominate. So it is not at all certain how these results would translate to an older sample and a sample with high levels of co-habitation or marriage. What can be said, however, is that generally rates of assaultative behaviour are less in older groups than in the young as in this sample, and there is some evidence that men in particular are less assaultative in committed relationships, possibly recognising that such behaviour will have destabilising effects on the relationship (Carrado et al, 1996).

Taken as results for a student population, however, these results show considerable disparities across Europe, with the exception that the one generalisation that can be made is the rather uncomfortable one that in most countries, both for minor and severe acts of aggression, females are more aggressive than males towards their partners.

Greece stands out as a notable exception to this, as for both for minor and severe acts, Greek men are more assaultative than their female partners. Given that Greece and Portugal are the only Southern European countries included in the study (Portugese men have a high rate of severe assaults), it is a speculation that this reflects something of a cultural phenomenon compared with more northerly countries (eg. Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Lithuania and Switzerland), and the relative lack of concern about domestic assaults in these southern cultures in which there are strong traditions of family and keeping the family together.

References

- Straus, M. A. (2008). Dominance and symmetry in partner violence by male and female university students in 32 nations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 252-275.
- Carrado M., George M.J., Loxam E., Jones L., Templar D. (1996) Aggression in British Heterosexual Relationships. *Aggressive Behaviour* 22, 401-415