

**Divorce/separation  
and physical partner aggression  
controlling for alcohol use:  
A multinational gender perspective**

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## ABSTRACT

Research in North America has found an increased risk of victimization from intimate partner violence (IPV) among divorced or separated women. To examine whether this increased risk applies to other countries and to men as well as women, we conducted logistic regression of survey data from the GENACIS (GENder Alcohol and Culture: An International Study) project to explore the relationship between physical aggression by and towards a partner and being divorced/separated for men and women aged 18 to 59 from 14 countries (Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, India, Peru, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay). Some consistent patterns were found across countries after controlling for alcohol drinking pattern and age. Divorced/separated women were more likely than never married women (across all countries) and more likely than married and cohabiting women (across most countries) to have reported being the victim of physical aggression by a partner. These patterns were consistent with reports by male aggressors for most countries. Less consistent patterns were found for male victims and female aggressors, although increased risk of aggression by a partner was shown for divorced/separated men compared to never married men in most countries and compared to married or cohabiting men in some but not all countries. Overall, the findings suggest that while leaving a relationship is associated with increased risk of IPV for women in North American, leaving a marriage or common law relationship may actually reduce risk of partner aggression in some countries.

# BACKGROUND

- Research in Canada and the United States has found that divorced and separated women are at higher risk of aggression by a partner than are married women.<sup>1</sup>
- Possible explanations:
  - Women leave a relationship because of abuse and the partner continues to be aggressive after the separation.
  - Men become aggressive only after the woman leaves.
  - Divorced and separated persons have riskier lifestyles, e.g., more likely to engage in heavy drinking compared with married persons.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Fleury, et al 2000, Johnson & Sacco, 1995, Dekeseredy, Rogness Schwartz, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2005, Wilson & Daly, 1993.

<sup>2</sup>Walker, et al, 2004.

# ISSUES

Little is known about:

- Risk for divorced/separated compared with married women in countries other than Canada and USA.
- Whether divorced/separated men are also at increased risk of partner aggression.
- Risk for divorced/separated compared with cohabiting.
- Risk for divorced/separated compared with never married.
- Whether lifestyle factors (e.g. alcohol use) may account for higher rates of partner aggression among divorced/separated vs other marital statuses.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## Divorced/separated vs married women and men:

1. Are divorced/separated *women* at higher risk of aggression by a partner compared with *married* women in countries other than Canada and the United States according to reports by female victims and male aggressors?
2. Are divorced/separated *men* also at higher risk of aggression compared with married men according to reports by male victims and female aggressors?
3. Can different rates among divorced/separated versus married individuals be attributed at least in part to *alcohol consumption*?

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Divorced/separated vs. cohabiting and never married:

1. Are divorced/separated men and women at higher risk of aggression by a partner compared with *cohabiting* men and women?
2. At higher risk than *never married* men and women?
3. Can different rates among divorced/separated versus cohabiting and never married individuals be attributed at least in part to *alcohol consumption*?

## METHODS

The GENACIS project (GENder Alcohol and Culture: an International Study) is a large international collaboration involving more than thirty countries to improve knowledge regarding the influence of social and cultural variation on gender differences in alcohol consumption and problems. Surveys were administered to men and women in each country (except the United States where only women were included) using a common core set of questions covering a number of areas related to alcohol consumption and consequences including partner violence.

TABLE 1: Sample characteristics for countries included in analyses and percent divorced/separated, married, cohabiting and never married for men and women by country

Country	Year	Survey Mode	Sampling Frame	Regions sampled	Age Range <sup>a</sup>	Sample Size <sup>b</sup> Men/ Women	N's included in analyses <sup>b</sup> Men/ Women	Divorced/ married/ cohabiting/ never married/ widowed <sup>b,c</sup> Men	Divorced/ married/ cohabiting/ never married/ widowed <sup>b,c</sup> Women
Argentina	2003	face-face household	regional	City and province of Buenos Aires	18-65	402 598	397 569	9.5 38.6 13.9 36.8 1.2	12.7 45.8 17.1 19.6 4.8
Belize	2005	Face-face household	national		18-98	1911 2074	1866 1951	2.7 42.7 21.2 31.0 2.4	3.8 40.5 21.6 28.2 5.9
Brazil	2006-07	Face-face household	regional	Metropolitan São Paulo	18-97	904 <sup>b</sup> 1179 <sup>b</sup>	885 1065	4.8 48.2 16.8 28.1 2.1	8.2 41.6 16.5 23.9 9.7
Canada	2004	telephone CATI	national		18-76	5991 <sup>b</sup> 8072 <sup>b</sup>	5850 7477	9.8 48.9 12.6 26.6 2.1	13.7 48.0 12.1 19.3 6.9
Costa Rica	2003	Face-face household	regional	Greater Metropolitan area	18-92	416 857	408 804	5.5 43.5 13.5 35.6 1.9	10.5 46.7 12.6 24.0 6.2
Czech Republic	2002	face-face	national		18-64	1244 1282	1078 1113	11.3 50.5 6.8 29.2 2.2	14.0 54.2 6.5 22.2 3.1
India	2003	face-face	regional	state of Karnataka in southern India	16-82	1508 1471	1417 1293	0.4 60.5 0.1 37.8 1.2	2.9 79.4 0.6 10.0 7.1
Nicaragua	2005	Face-face household	regional	Cities of Bluefields, Esteli, Juigalpa, Leon & Rivas	15-87	614 1416	609 1378	3.1 32.3 27.2 36.6 0.8	4.3 32.9 28.0 32.1 2.7
Nigeria	2003	face-face household	regional	Middlebelt and South South	17-87	1114 956	997 835	1.9 72.4 2.3 21.7 1.7	3.8 68.7 2.4 16.5 8.5
Peru	2005	Face-face household	regional	Cities of Ayacucho, Lima	18-64	516 1015	515 985	2.3 30.6 25.6 41.3 0.2	9.9 34.2 25.2 27.8 2.9
Uganda	2003	face-face household	regional	Kabale, Tororo, Lira, Wasio	18-84	729 739	672 668	4.6 53.7 4.9 35.5 1.3	7.8 53.2 5.9 24.5 8.6
United Kingdom	2000	face-face and CAPI	national		18-90	963 1038	742 756	9.8 46.3 13.6 29.5 0.8	13.6 53.5 10.9 19.9 2.1
United States (women only)	2001	72% face-face and 28% telephone	national		21-94	no men 1126	no men 954		16.0 54.7 11.1 17.3 0.9
Uruguay	2004	face-face	national		18-65	376 624	369 581	8.8 44.7 13.0 31.6 1.9	15.8 44.4 12.7 20.2 6.9

<sup>a</sup>Analyses included ages 18 to 59 only

<sup>b</sup>Weighted for Brazil and Canada

<sup>c</sup>Ages 18 to 59 only; "Divorced" includes divorced and separated; Widowed excluded from further analyses

# MEASURES

## Two Dichotomous Outcome Measures:

- Whether *PHYSICAL AGGRESSION BY A PARTNER* (“victims”)
  - Whether *PHYSICAL AGGRESSION TOWARD A PARTNER* (“aggressors”)
- in the PAST TWO YEARS

Based on questions that asked respondent for the most physically aggressive thing done to them/by them; excluding aggression involving same sex partner

## Categorical Independent Measure (current marital status):

- *DIVORCED/SEPARATED* vs *NEVER MARRIED*  
*COHABITING*  
*MARRIED*

## Alcohol measures used as control variables:

- Whether respondent *DRANK ALCOHOL* in the past 12 months
- *NUMBER OF DAYS* in the past 12 months on which the respondent drank alcohol (less than once a month, 1-3 times a month, 1-2 days a week, 3-4 days a week, 5-7 days a week coded as 6, 24, 78, 182 and 312 days a week)
- Usual *NUMBER OF DRINKS* consumed when drank alcohol in past 12 months (less than 1 to 1 =1 drink, 30 or more drinks = 30 drinks)

# ANALYSES

## Within country comparisons:

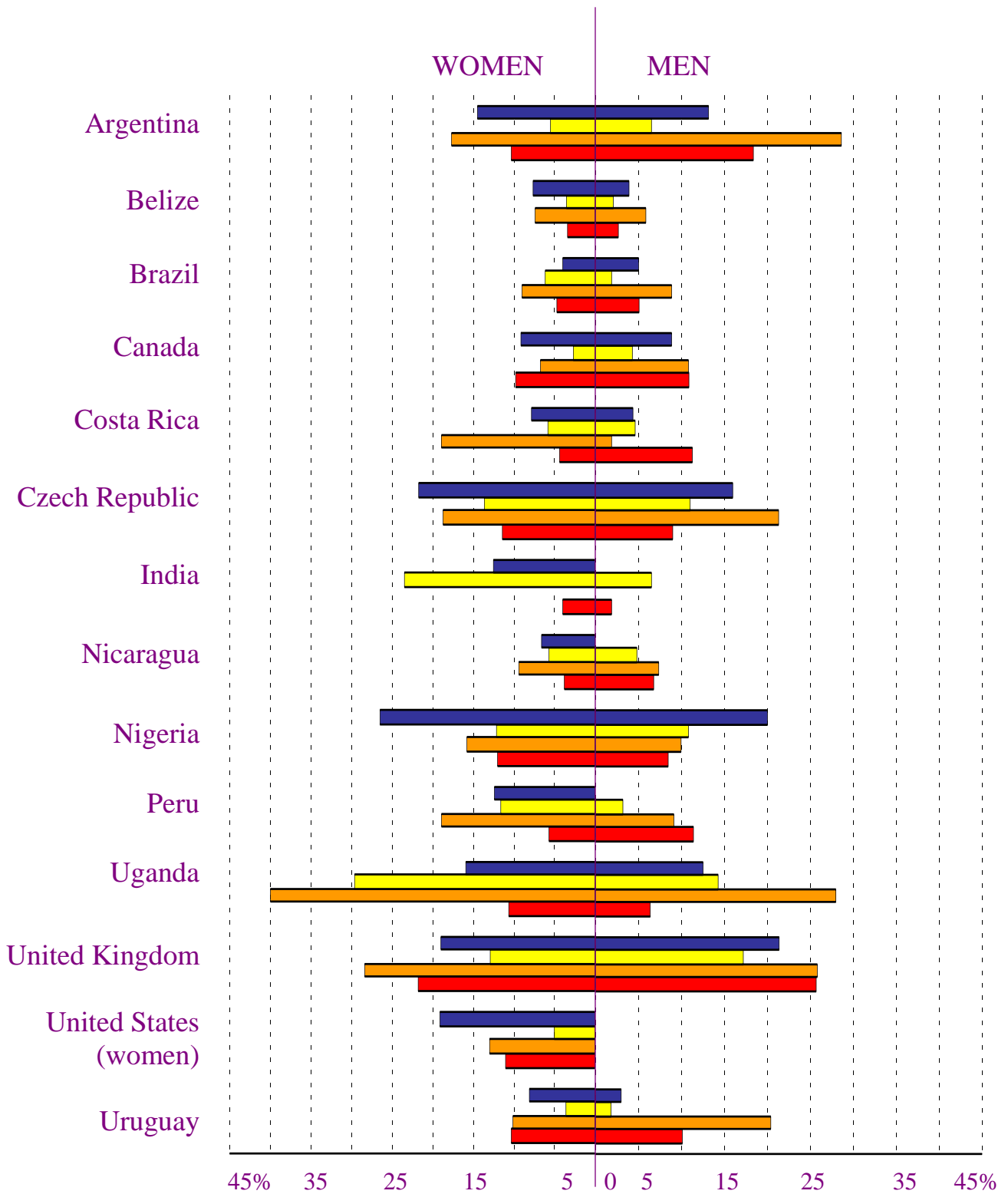
- The percent of men and women reporting aggression by a partner (victims) and aggression toward a partner (aggressor) were examined for each country.
- Significant differences in odds ratios from logistic regression of victimization and perpetration on marital status and age separately for men and women were examined for each country.
- Odds ratios of gender interaction terms (gender X marital status) were also examined using logistic regression on the whole sample for each country.
- The effect of adding drinking status (whether the respondent was a drinker or abstainer) was added to the models.
- Within country differences for drinkers only were also examined using logistic regression controlling for age and then controlling for frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption.

## Cross country comparisons:

- Statistically significant odds ratios ( $p < .05$ ) were considered as well as consistent patterns in odds ratios across countries (whether or not significant) to identify meaningful relationships across countries (Rothman, 2002).

## Percent of men and women reporting aggression by a partner (“victims”) by marital status

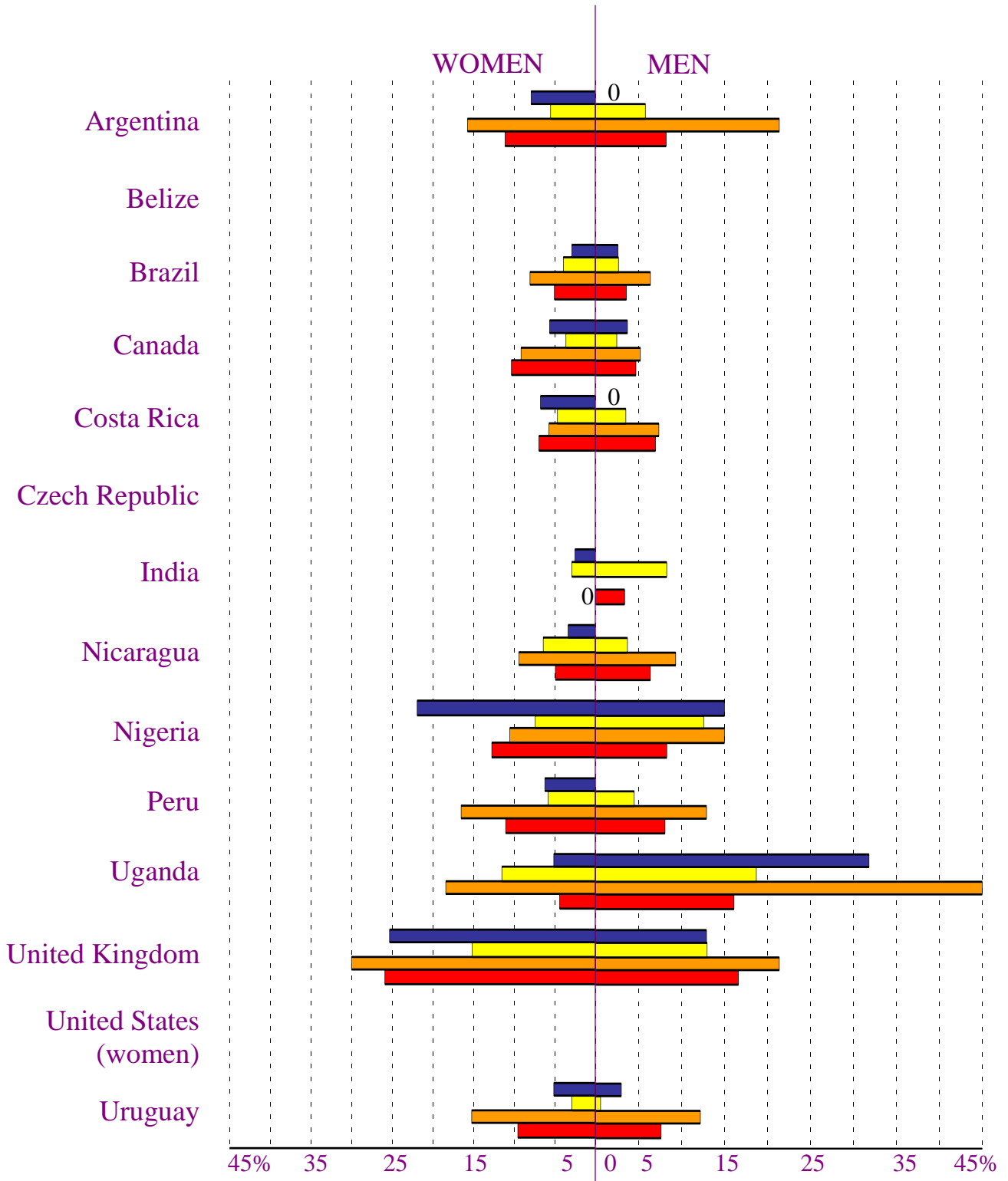
Divorced/separated ■ Married ■ Cohabiting ■ Never married ■



The following were excluded because n<20: India divorced/separated men and cohabiting men and women, Nicaragua divorced/separated men; Peru divorced/separated men

## Percent of men and women reporting aggression *toward* a partner (“aggressors”) by marital status

Divorced/separated ■ Married ■ Cohabiting ■ Never married ■



The following were excluded because n<20: India divorced/separated men and cohabiting men and women, Nicaragua divorced/separated men; Peru divorced/separated men

Divorced/separated were at highest risk in only a few countries, but these raw percentages do not control for age.

**TABLE 2: PHYSICAL PARTNER AGGRESSION TOWARD WOMEN:**  
**Odds ratios from logistic regression controlling for age**  
 (odds ratios for age and constant not shown)

Divorced/ separated vs:	<u>Victims (Women)</u>			<u>Aggressors (Men)</u>		
	<u>Married</u>	<u>Cohabiting</u>	<u>Never married</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Cohabiting</u>	<u>Never married</u>
Argentina	.32**	.87	.35*	-- <sup>b</sup>	-- <sup>b</sup>	-- <sup>b</sup>
Belize	.36*	.68	.30*	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	1.40	1.61	.80	.99	1.57	.58
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.23***	.38***	.47***	.58	.82	.53*
Costa Rica	.72	2.13	.38	--	--	--
Czech Republic	.55**	.69	.34**	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	2.05	--	.23*	--	--	--
Nicaragua	.61	.91	.33	--	--	--
Nigeria	.40*	--	.43	.82	1.00	.52
Peru	.97	.87	.16***	--	--	--
Uganda	1.96	2.76	.43	.49	1.81	.43
United Kingdom	.64	1.1	.71	.86	.97	.59
United States	.22***	.41*	.31**	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	.31*	.49	.46	.14	1.07	.26

\* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>a</sup>Data were weighted for Brazil and Canada; <sup>b</sup>Logistic regression not possible because zero divorced/separated men in Argentina reported aggression toward a partner

<sup>c</sup>Respondents were not asked question; -- Not enough cases to allow comparisons

**TABLE 3: PHYSICAL PARTNER AGGRESSION TOWARD MEN:**  
**Odds ratios from logistic regression controlling for age**  
 (odds ratios for age and constant not shown)

Divorced/ separated vs:	<u>Victims (Men)</u>			<u>Aggressors (Women)</u>		
	<u>Married</u>	<u>Cohabiting</u>	<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Cohabiting</u>	<u>Never married</u>
Argentina	.43	1.21	.34	.68	1.20	.48
Belize	.39	.90	.34	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	.57	2.57	1.08	1.02	1.47	.68
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.41 <sup>***</sup>	.70	.48 <sup>**</sup>	.52 <sup>**</sup>	.73	.61 <sup>*</sup>
Costa Rica	1.13	.33	1.76	.57	.49	.44
Czech Republic	.63	1.21	.38 <sup>**</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	--	--	--	1.13	--	-- <sup>b</sup>
Nicaragua	--	--	--	1.62	2.19	1.06
Nigeria	.48	.47	.42	.29 <sup>**</sup>	--	.58
Peru	--	--	--	1.19	2.14	.97
Uganda	1.13	3.01	.66	2.58	5.10	1.16
United Kingdom	.60	.54	.44 <sup>*</sup>	.54 <sup>*</sup>	.74	.56
United States	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	3.42	.48	.85	.49	1.02	.50

\* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>a</sup>Data were weighted for Brazil and Canada; <sup>b</sup>Not included in logistic regression because zero never married women in India reported being aggressive toward a partner

<sup>c</sup>Respondents were not asked question; -- Not enough cases to allow comparisons

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. married women:

1. Are divorced/separated women at higher risk of aggression by a partner compared with married women across countries and cultures other than Canada and the United States as reported by female victims and male aggressors?

***DIVORCED/SEPARATED WOMEN AT HIGHER RISK THAN MARRIED WOMEN (i.e. ODDS RATIOS <1) IN MOST COUNTRIES EXCEPT BRAZIL, INDIA AND UGANDA.***

Columns 1 and 4 from Table 2:

	<b>Victims (Women)</b>	<b>Aggressors (Men)</b>
Argentina	.32**	-- <sup>b</sup>
Belize	.36*	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	1.40	.99
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.23***	.58
Costa Rica	.72	--
Czech Republic	.55**	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	2.05	--
Nicaragua	.61	--
Nigeria	.40*	.82
Peru	.97	--
Uganda	1.96	.49
United Kingdom	.64	.86
United States	.22***	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	.31*	.14

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Counselling and other services for divorced and separated women should include assessment, intervention and treatment for partner aggression.
- Leaving a relationship might be protective for women in some countries (e.g. India) where wife assault is widely considered acceptable.
- Thus community and social support might be needed in some countries to help women leave relationships that are abusive.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. married men:

2. Are divorced/separated men also at higher risk of aggression compared with married men according to reports by male victims and female aggressors?

***DIVORCED/SEPARATED MEN AT HIGHER RISK THAN MARRIED MEN IN ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF COUNTRIES ACCORDING TO MALE VICTIMS. NO CLEAR PATTERN OF INCREASED RISK ACCORDING TO REPORTS BY FEMALE AGGRESSORS.***

Columns 1 and 4 from Table 3:

	<b>Victims (Men)</b>	<b>Aggressors (Women)</b>
Argentina	.43	.68
Belize	.39	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	.57	1.02
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.41 <sup>***</sup>	.52 <sup>**</sup>
Costa Rica	1.13	.57
Czech Republic	.63	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	--	1.13
Nicaragua	--	1.62
Nigeria	.48	.29 <sup>**</sup>
Peru	--	1.19
Uganda	1.13	2.58
United Kingdom	.60	.54 <sup>*</sup>
United States	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	3.42	.49

➤ Results for gender by marital status interactions show only one significant difference between men and women within these countries. In Canada increased risk of aggression *by* partner for divorced/separated compared to married was greater for women than for men ( $p=.030$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

➤ Similar to divorced/separated women, the risk for divorced/separated men might also be higher than for married men in some countries, suggesting that couples are generally at increased risk of violence after separation in many countries.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. married:

3. Can different rates among divorced/separated versus married individuals be attributed at least in part to *alcohol consumption*?

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## **CONTROLLING FOR ALCOHOL HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON ODDS RATIOS FOR MARRIED (VS DIVORCED/SEPARATED).**

### Results controlling for age and:

#### 1) Whether drank alcohol in past 12 months:

(Drinkers experienced more partner aggression than non-drinkers in most countries (i.e. odds ratios were  $>1$  in most countries)).

##### **Men:**

- Canada victims odds ratio .41\*\*\* became .58 (not significant)
- Canada aggressors odds ratio .58 (not significant) became .40\*\*\*

##### **Women:**

- no change in odds ratios for victims or aggressors

#### 2) Number of days & Usual number of drinks for drinkers only:

(Positive relationship between frequency & quantity and partner aggression in most countries (i.e. odds ratios were  $>1$ )).

##### **Men:**

- no change in odds ratios for victims or aggressors

##### **Women:**

- Czech Republic victims odds ratio .54\* became .65 (not significant)

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## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

➤ The difference in risk of physical partner aggression for divorced/separated men and women compared to that for married men and women does not appear to be accounted for by higher alcohol consumption among divorced/separated persons in most countries with the possible exception of men in Canada and women drinkers in the Czech Republic.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. cohabiting:

1. Are divorced/separated men and women at higher risk of aggression by a partner compared with cohabiting persons?

***THERE IS NO CLEAR PATTERN ACROSS COUNTRIES FOR INCREASED RISK OF DIVORCED/SEPARATED VERSUS COHABITING INDIVIDUALS, WITH BRAZIL AND UGANDA SHOWING A CONSISTENT PATTERN OF INCREASED RISK FOR COHABITING, CANADA SHOWING A PATTERN OF INCREASED RISK FOR DIVORCED/SEPARATED AND OTHER COUNTRIES SHOWING NO PATTERN.***

Columns 2 and 5 from Table 2 and Table 3:

	Aggression toward women		Aggression toward men	
	Victims (Women)	Aggressors (Men)	Victims (Men)	Aggressors (Women)
Argentina	.87	-- <sup>b</sup>	1.21	1.20
Belize	.68	-- <sup>c</sup>	.90	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	1.61	1.57	2.57	1.47
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.38***	.82	.70	.73
Costa Rica	2.13	--	.33	.49
Czech Republic	.69	-- <sup>c</sup>	1.21	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	--	--	--	--
Nicaragua	.91	--	--	2.19
Nigeria	--	1.00	.47	--
Peru	.87	--	--	2.14
Uganda	2.76	1.81	3.01	5.10
United Kingdom	1.10	.97	.54	.74
United States	.41*	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	.49	1.07	.48	1.02

➤ Only one significant gender by marital status interaction was found. In Canada the increased risk of aggression *by* partner for divorced/separated compared to cohabiting was greater for women than for men (p=.028).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. never married:

2. Are divorced/separated men and women at higher risk of aggression by a partner compared with never married persons?

***DIVORCED/SEPARATED WOMEN (IN ALL COUNTRIES) AND MEN (IN MOST COUNTRIES) ARE AT HIGHER RISK OF PARTNER AGGRESSION THAN ARE NEVER MARRIED WOMEN AND MEN.***

Columns 3 and 6 from Table 2 and Table 3:

	Aggression toward women		Aggression toward men	
	Victims (Women)	Aggressors (Men)	Victims (Men)	Aggressors (Women)
Argentina	.35*	-- <sup>b</sup>	.34	.48
Belize	.30*	-- <sup>c</sup>	.34	-- <sup>c</sup>
Brazil <sup>a</sup>	.80	.58	1.08	.68
Canada <sup>a</sup>	.47***	.53*	.48**	.61*
Costa Rica	.38	--	1.76	.44
Czech Republic	.34**	-- <sup>c</sup>	.38**	-- <sup>c</sup>
India	.23*	--	--	-- <sup>b</sup>
Nicaragua	.33	--	--	1.06
Nigeria	.43	.52	.42	.58
Peru	.16***	--	--	.97
Uganda	.43	.43	.66	1.16
United Kingdom	.71	.59	.44*	.56
United States	.31**	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>	-- <sup>c</sup>
Uruguay	.46	.26	.85	.50

➤ No gender interaction terms were significant.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

### Divorced/separated vs. cohabiting and never married:

3. Can different rates among divorced/separated versus *cohabiting* and *never married* individuals be attributed at least in part to *alcohol consumption*?

### **CONTROLLING FOR ALCOHOL HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON ODDS RATIOS FOR COHABITING AND NEVER MARRIED (VS DIVORCED/SEPARATED).**

#### Results controlling for age and:

#### Whether drank alcohol in past 12 months:

##### **Men:**

- Canada *never married* victims odds ratio .48\*\* became .53 (not significant)

##### **Women:**

- no change in odds ratios for victims or aggressors

#### Number of days & Usual number of drinks for drinkers only:

##### **Men:**

- no change in odds ratios for victims or aggressors

##### **Women:**

- Brazil *cohabiting* victims odds ratio 1.40 (not significant) became .91 (not significant)

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

➤ A relationship between marital status and physical partner aggression was evident after controlling for alcohol use across most countries.

➤ In some countries cohabiting individuals were at higher risk than divorced/separated (especially among males) after controlling for alcohol use suggesting that other factors including cultural differences with respect to legal and normative aspects of marriage and cohabiting need to be examined further in terms of their contribution to risk.

➤ In almost all countries, divorced/separated men and women were at greater risk than never married after controlling for age and alcohol use suggesting that relationship issues might be more relevant than risky lifestyle factors such as drinking.

## LIMITATIONS

- Sample sizes in some countries were not sufficient to allow for examination of gender differences in *severity* of partner aggression which might have revealed differences between divorced/separated men and women.
- Lack of power might account for within-country relationships being non-significant in some of these analyses.
- Using a common questionnaire allowed for comparison to be made across countries however it is possible that the interpretation of the questions by respondents might have differed by country.
- Other factors such as employment status, income, education and social support were not controlled for in these analyses and might account for at least some of the differences within marital status groups.

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