The experiences of women who survived an attempt on their lives by an intimate partner represented a wide spectrum of previous violence and control issues in the relationship


**Q** What are the experiences and perceptions of women who survived an attempt on their lives by an intimate partner?

**DESIGN**
Qualitative study done in conjunction with an 11 city case–control study.

**SETTING**
6 US cities (Baltimore, Maryland; Tampa, Florida; Portland, Oregon; Houston, Texas; Witchita, Kansas; and Kansas City, Missouri).

**PARTICIPANTS**
30 women who were 17–54 years of age (47% European American, 43% African-American, 10% Latino or other), had survived a serious attempt on their lives by a current or ex-intimate partner, and were living apart from the perpetrator in a safe environment. Each case was designated as “closed” by the police (arrest made or adjudication).

**METHODS**
Women participated in 30–90 minute, audiotaped, semistructured interviews about their relationship with the perpetrator, activities and events preceding the homicide attempt, the event itself, changes since the event, and interactions with helpers (eg, healthcare workers, police, and counsellors). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed by thematic analysis.

**MAIN FINDINGS**
20 women had a history of physical or sexual abuse by the perpetrator, 5 described episodes of minor violence, and 5 had no prior history of abuse. Power and control issues were prominent in most relationships; 25 women described examples of stalking, extreme jealousy, physical limitations, or threats of violence. Intensity of control varied from constant romantic gestures (later interpreted as checking up on the victim) to women being prisoners in their own homes.

Women’s stories represented a wide spectrum of abuse, defined by the severity of violence and control. At the severe end, women and others were aware of the extreme danger, but were unable to obtain adequate protection. At the low end, it may have been impossible to predict the potential for lethality. The experiences of most women fell somewhere in the middle of the continuum, where despite clues of danger, few discussed the potential risk with service providers.

14 women expressed surprise about the attack. One woman said “I didn’t realize what big trouble I was in until I was to the point of where I thought I was going to die.”

For 22 women, the attack occurred around the time of a substantial change in their relationship with the perpetrator. Often, women were trying to leave the relationship. Their reasons were usually unrelated to violence, but rather focused on money, drug or alcohol use, infidelity, possessiveness, or a combination thereof. In 4 instances, men initiated the separation, but became violent when the women began seeing other people or refused to take them back; in 3 instances, the men apparently left the relationship for new partners and/or financial gain.

**CONCLUSIONS**
The experiences of women who survived an attempt on their lives by an intimate partner represented a wide spectrum of abuse, defined by the severity of violence and control issues. Most relationships involved a history of abuse and power and control issues.