Report: Women also use violence

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Staff Writer

LAFAYETTE — A controversial report that claims women use violence in relationships more often than men is drawing fire from local domestic violence experts.

Mother Jones, a pro-feminist magazine, reported in its May/June issue that women interviewed by University of Wisconsin psychology professor Terrie Moffitt reported using violence in their relationships more often than men.

"I totally disagree," said Sis Broussard, St. Martin Parish outreach coordinator with Safety Net for Abused Persons. "Nowhere do I find research that indicates women use more violence than men."

Moffitt found that some women, like men, are just more prone to violence, either by nature or circumstance. A summary of her findings is expected to be published by the U.S. Justice Department.

"You have to define what they call violence. A woman slapping a man on the arm is classified the same as a man throwing a woman across the room or hitting her with his fist," said Tom Stagg, executive director of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Lafayette. "How much damage can these women do to these men, really?"

Rene Pogue, instructor in the LSU school of social work, said a domestic abuser is one who initiates violence to control or dominate a partner. Moffitt may have found that women in long-term abusive relationships simply learned to fight back, she said.

"It would be really hard to convince me that someone with staples along the back of her head was equally as violent as the batterer," said Laura Hebert, executive director of Faith House shelter for abused women in Lafayette. "I do believe that women will use aggression in a relationship, but I also believe it's a result of self-defense."

Recent statistics indicate 98 percent of all battering is perpetrated by men and only 2 percent by women, Hebert said.

Billi Lacombe, legal advocate for Faith House, said she rarely encounters women who are as aggressive or abusive than men.

"It does happen, but it's rare," she said.

Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Department booking sheets for May indicate that approximately 24 percent of all arrests in the county were for domestic violence.

*Out of the 89 total, 18 were arrested together for assaulting each other.

SOURCE: Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Department

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Thomas Knapp/The Advertiser
Women

89 people were arrested on various domestic violence charges, most for simple battery. About 73 percent (65) were men and 27 percent (24) were women.

Of those, 18 could be tentatively identified as couples, either sharing an address or last name. In one case, both the man and woman were arrested on charges of aggravated assault using knives, while the woman faced an additional charge of simple battery.

Laws require police to arrest either or both parties involved in domestic violence if they have sustained offensive injuries like bruised knuckles, said David Yarbrough, USL assistant professor of child and family studies.

Fifteen of the arrested women, or 17 percent, appeared to be lone domestic violence per-
petrators, the arrest report indicate. They include a 37-year-old woman arrested for aggravated battery and a 32-year-old charged with aggravated assault.

“When a woman has had all she’s going to take and she decides to fight back, a lot of time they fight to kill,” Pogue said. “They can’t beat him up. All they can do to control the situation is kill him.”

“If it’s retaliatory, the woman often picks up a knife,” Yarbrough said.

Moffitt’s findings are no groundbreaking, Yarbrough said. Researchers have long found men and women “have a very similar rate of violence in relationships. The difference is who gets hurt.”

Stagg, whose agency has counseled 1,700 men since 1999 and a few hundred women, said most of the women are not abusers.

“She may have reacted with violence, like slapping, but what he did to her is usually much more severe,” he explained.