

Miller- Perrin et al. 2018.

First few pages have been removed.

VMIR = Violence and Maltreatment in Intimate Relationships.

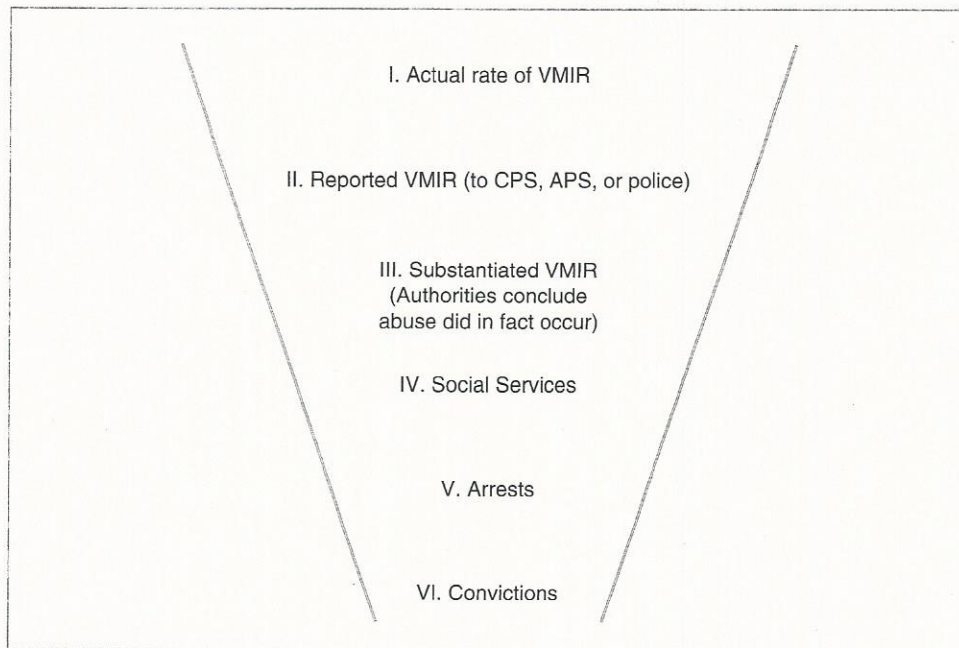
Measurement Issues: The Funnel Metaphor

Social phenomena are inherently difficult to study. We don't really know the percentage of high school students who have tried alcohol, for example. We only know how many *tell us* they have done so. However, because alcohol use is relatively easy to operationalize, and it is not an overly sensitive topic (since most teens do it), if we read that a national survey has found that 80 percent of 12th graders have consumed alcohol at some point in their lives we can trust that the estimate is reasonably accurate.

With VMIR, however, the issues are much more complex. To demonstrate the problems associated with measuring crimes and other deviant behaviors, criminologists sometimes use the metaphor of a funnel. Figure 2.1 illustrates what this funnel might look like with respect to VMIR. Keep in mind that while the funnel metaphor applies to all forms of VMIR, the specifics encountered along the way vary with each specific type of VMIR. The discussion that follows, therefore, details the general issues that apply to all forms of VMIR.

At the top of the funnel sits the actual amount of VMIR present within society (Level I). This is an unknowable number and can only be estimated with surveys. Level II represents the cases that are actually reported to official agents of social control. This would include reports made to Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS), and/or law enforcement. Level III represents cases that, upon investigation, are determined to have occurred. For example, if a concerned neighbor calls CPS to report a case of child neglect, authorities must investigate. If CPS determines that a preponderance of evidence suggests that the abuse did in fact occur, the case is said to be *substantiated*. Typically, approximately one-fifth of the children investigated are found to be victims of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2017). In cases reported as a crime, law enforcement authorities must essentially do the same thing. If a wife reports to law enforcement that she has been raped by her husband, police must decide whether there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the rape did in fact occur. At Level IV the funnel narrows even further as authorities must decide how to proceed. In the case of child maltreatment, the assumption is that the state will mandate services (e.g., counseling for the parents, foster care for the child, permanent removal of the child). In reality, however, CPS intervenes in only approximately two-thirds of substantiated cases (U.S. DHHS, 2017). At Levels V and VI the funnel narrows even more, as a small number of cases move through the criminal justice system.

Figure 2.1 Problems in Estimating the Amount of VMIR:
The VMIR Funnel



The funneling metaphor is helpful as we turn our attention to specific data sources and survey instruments that are commonly used to study VMIR. Each source examines a different level in the funnel. **Self-report surveys** (Level I) are mail, phone, or face-to-face surveys of the general public concerning VMIR. Self-report surveys can be **perpetration surveys** or **victimization surveys**. Adult partners, for example, can be asked whether they have hit their partner (perpetration), or whether their partner has hit them (victim). Parents can be asked whether they have hit their children (perpetration), or whether they were hit as children (victim). There are many unavoidable methodological problems associated with perpetration and victimization surveys. First, the concepts that we study (e.g., “maltreatment,” “sexual abuse,” “rape,” “intimate violence”) must be operationalized (i.e., transformed into an actual question). Second, adults who are asked to recall childhood victimization may have memory lapses and distortions. One of the most contentious debates about child sexual abuse, for example, is the question of whether adults can recover previously **repressed memories** of childhood victimization. Some question the accuracy of these recovered memories, suggesting that false memories are easily constructed (e.g., see Patihis, Ho, Tingen, Lilienfeld, & Loftus, 2014). Third, and equally problematic, victims who are currently in abusive relationships may be afraid to answer honestly, especially if they are still living with the abuser. Another issue is that

perpetrators may perceive their own violence as justified and therefore not reportable. Or, of course, they might simply lie about their behavior.

Level II and Level III are two different levels of *official statistics* compiled by formal agents of social control. This would include, for example, the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), both of which are discussed in the next section of this chapter. Recall from Chapter 1 that the gap between the *actual* rate and the officially recorded rate is termed the *dark figure*. In our funnel, this represents the difference between Level I (actual rate of VMIR) and Level II (reported VMIR) or the difference between Level I and Level III (substantiated VMIR). Since VMIR has a very large dark figure, official statistics must be interpreted with a degree of caution. An increase or decrease in a particular form of VMIR could reflect a change in the actual behavior, a change in the reporting of that behavior, or both.

Let us consider a hypothetical example. Imagine that we have reliable official statistics and self-report on marital rape from 100 years ago. How would we expect these data to compare to present-day rates? The official rate of marital rape 100 years ago was zero, since marital rape was not a crime in 1918. So, obviously, current official statistics would suggest the rate has gone up. However, with the criminalization of marital rape, along with increased awareness, we would expect that the actual rates would have declined. In this case we would simply conclude the obvious: increased awareness has driven up official rates and driven down self-report rates. The point is that self-report statistics and official statistics provide very different information, reminding us that questions of prevalence will always be difficult to answer.

Important Data Sets and Self-Report Survey Instruments

There are several data sources and survey instruments that attempt to track and estimate the occurrence of VMIR in society. These sources are described below as they relate to the measurement funnel described above, as well as in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Uniform Crime Report (UCR)

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program is a nationwide effort by the FBI to collect and report crimes, number of arrests, and persons arrested. These official statistics (Levels II, III, V, and VI from Figure 2.1) are published annually in the *Uniform Crime Report (UCR)*, the most important and commonly cited crime data in the United States.

Because most of the violence and maltreatment discussed in this book are not typically reported as crimes, the UCR is of limited value in the study of VMIR. However, for the most serious forms of violence the UCR is an invaluable resource. Consider, for example, what the UCR can tell us about intimate homicide. Overall, women are, when compared to men, unlikely to be victims of homicide. Only about 25 percent of homicide victims are female. However, when women are killed, they are especially likely to have been killed by a male intimate (which the UCR defines as husbands, ex-husbands,

boyfriends, or ex-boyfriends). According to the UCR, each year approximately 40 percent of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). Less than 5 percent of male homicide victims are killed by an intimate. However, these data do not, and cannot, tell the entire story. Think about it. Not every homicide case is solved. In fact, in approximately 40 percent of homicides each year, the victim-offender relationship is unknown when the UCR is published for that year. Since no doubt *some* of these unknowns are intimates, we can reasonably assume that the actual percentage of female homicide victims who are killed by intimates is well above 40 percent. Perhaps it is closer to 50 percent? If the reader accepts this estimate as reasonable, we could reasonably conclude this: when a woman is murdered, there is an approximately 50–50 chance that she has been killed by an intimate.

National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a

federally sponsored data system that collects information on child maltreatment from

corrections, child welfare, and health care systems.

NCANDS is a

semi-annual survey of child maltreatment cases reported to child protective services (CPS) in

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) states that the source of

child maltreatment reported, description of the relationship of perpetrators to victims, CPS response time, and services provided.

caseloads, and the relationship of perpetrators to victims, CPS response time, and services provided.

caseloads, and the relationship of perpetrators to victims, CPS response time, and services provided.

National Incidence Studies (NIS)

The National Incidence Studies (NIS) are unique in that they actually sit between Level I and Level II on our funnel (Figure 2.1). These are surveys of professionals who are mandated to report cases of child maltreatment to CPS and provide estimates of the incidence of child maltreatment. The logic behind the NIS is that mandated professionals do not always report suspected cases of child maltreatment. The fact must be taken into consideration in determining the incidence of child maltreatment. Professionals may fail to report, for a variety of reasons (e.g., they may be overwhelmed, they may not have the necessary training, or they may not trust the CPS or the legal system). The NIS is a survey of professionals who are mandated to report cases of child maltreatment to CPS and provide estimates of the incidence of child maltreatment. The logic behind the NIS is that mandated professionals do not always report suspected cases of child maltreatment. The fact must be taken into consideration in determining the incidence of child maltreatment. Professionals may fail to report, for a variety of reasons (e.g., they may be overwhelmed, they may not have the necessary training, or they may not trust the CPS or the legal system).

The NIS is a survey of professionals who are mandated to report cases of child maltreatment to CPS and provide estimates of the incidence of child maltreatment. The logic behind the NIS is that mandated professionals do not always report suspected cases of child maltreatment. The fact must be taken into consideration in determining the incidence of child maltreatment. Professionals may fail to report, for a variety of reasons (e.g., they may be overwhelmed, they may not have the necessary training, or they may not trust the CPS or the legal system).

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

in agencies that report child maltreatment to CPS, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations. In 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010, 10,000 professionals were selected. These professionals were observed as lookouts for child abuse and neglect. Researchers then extrapolated from the reports filed by these professionals to create national estimates of child maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010). There have been four NIS studies published—in 1981, 1988, 1996, and 2010.

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is a semiannual victim survey (Level I from Figure 2.1) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice. The NCVS has been conducted since 1973 and is the primary source of information in the United States on the characteristics of criminal victimization.

Approximately 90,000 households and 160,000 individuals are interviewed every six months for three consecutive years. Respondents are asked about a variety of victimizations during the previous six months, including sexual and physical assaults. Children under the age of 12 are not interviewed, so the NCVS is not especially useful in the study of child maltreatment. However, because respondents are asked if and how they are connected to the offender, the NCVS is a valuable source of information on adult IPV (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).

There are two significant limitations with the NCVS as a measure of IPV. First, because the respondent is typically home for the interview (interviews are over the phone or face-to-face in the home), they may not always feel free to openly discuss intimate violence. How many women, for example, are going to openly discuss their husband's abuse if he is in the next room watching television? Second, the NCVS is introduced to respondents as a *crime* survey. The survey actually begins, "I am going to read some examples that will give you an idea of the kinds of crimes the study covers" (Bachman, 2015, p. 24). The concern is that a respondent who is primed in this way will immediately begin to think of acts he or she perceives to be a crime. A woman who has a very narrow understanding of rape and sexual assault, or who may not realize that a husband can rape his wife, may not respond affirmatively to questions on sexual assault, even if she has had experiences that would satisfy legal definitions of rape (Bachman, 2015). Despite the limitation, since the NCVS provides biannual data on crime victimization, it is a very important source of data on IPV.

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) is a victimization survey (Level I from Figure 2.1) that measures adult respondents' recollections about physical violence and sexual assault experienced by the respondent. It is an ongoing, nationally representative victimization phone survey of approximately 18,000 adult men and women that assesses the past 12 months as well as lifetime rates for violence and maltreatment.

In the NISVS, researchers make a more conscious effort to avoid preconceptions of what terms like *crime*, or *violence*, or *rape* might mean to a respondent. As discussed above, for example, since the National Crime Victimization (NCVS) is a "crime survey," responses will be influenced by respondent perceptions of what is and is not a crime. In contrast, the NISVS introduces the topics of violence and sexual assault as a "health concern," which is a much less imposing and threatening approach to

measuring sensitive and misunderstood topics like rape. In addition, unlike earlier measures of sexual assault, the NISVS includes measures of sexual contact where consent was compromised by drugs or alcohol. The preamble reads (NISVS, 2014, p. 3):

Sometimes sex happens when a person is unable to consent to it or stop it from happening because they were drunk, high, drugged, or passed out from alcohol, or medications. This can include times when they voluntarily consumed alcohol or drugs or they were given drugs or alcohol without their knowledge or consent.

When you were drunk, high, or passed out and were unable to consent, how many people ever . . .

The survey then goes on to ask the respondent about several sex acts. For example, how many people have ever “had vaginal sex with you?” or “made you perform oral sex?”

Another strength of the NISVS is that it measures maltreatment that has not typically been studied in national surveys, including sexual violence other than rape, psychological coercion, control of reproductive/sexual health, and stalking. (Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013)

Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; CTS2; CTSPC)

The **Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS)**, originally created by Murray Straus (1979), are the most historically significant and widely used scales in self-reported intimate violence (Level I from Figure 2.1). The CTS are based on the assumption that conflict is an inevitable part of intimate interactions. Introducing the questionnaire in this way “normalizes” conflict in hopes that respondents will speak more freely and honestly about the “tactics” they use to resolve intimate conflict. The CTS use several questions to measure three categories of conflict resolution: reasoning/negotiation (e.g., “suggested a compromise to a disagreement”), verbal/psychological aggression (e.g., “shouted or yelled at my partner”), and physical aggression (e.g., “kicked my partner”). In 1996, Straus and his colleagues introduced the CTS2, a revised version that includes additional items and new scales for physical injury (e.g., “had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner”) and sexual coercion (e.g., “used force to make my partner have sex”) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996).

The original CTS was designed to measure marital or dating violence, but it could be altered to measure child maltreatment by changing the reference from “your partner” to a specific child. Eventually Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, and Runyan (1998) created a modified version of the CTS specifically to measure child maltreatment: the **Parent–Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTSPC)**. Like the CTS, the CTSPC normalizes conflict in a preamble that acknowledges that children often engage in wrongful or disobedient behavior that might make parents angry. Three conflict tactics are measured in the CTSPC: nonviolent responses (e.g., “explained why something was wrong”), psychological aggression responses (e.g., “swore or cursed at your child”),

and physical aggression responses that measure everything from corporal punishment (e.g., "hit your child on the bottom with something like a belt, hairbrush, a stick, or some other hard object") to extreme forms of child maltreatment (e.g., "grabbed your child around the neck and choked him or her"). The CTSPC also includes a series of optional supplemental questions designed to measure weekly discipline (including more measures of corporal punishment), neglect, and sexual abuse.

It is worth noting that the Conflict Tactics Scales, especially the two versions that measure intimate partner violence (CTS and CTS2), have been somewhat controversial. Critics maintain that because the CTS merely counts violent acts, it ignores the context and consequences of those acts. In doing so, it underestimates the consequences of intimate partner violence for women (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998).

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) and the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ)

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) uses the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ) to measure exposure to a wide variety of childhood victimization, including conventional crime, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, sexual assault, and witnessing an indirect victimization. It was defined specifically to measure the *polyvictimization* of children (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, Hamby, & Kracke, 2015). As discussed in Chapter 1, child maltreatment research is often fragmented, with studies focusing on the measurement of one specific form of child maltreatment. In reality, of course, there is considerable overlap between the various forms of child maltreatment. If we read, for example, that 10 percent of children are physically abused and 10 percent are neglected, we cannot conclude that 20 percent of children are victims of physical abuse or neglect, because it is likely that a high percentage experienced both abuse and neglect.

The JVQ not only measures the most serious forms of direct childhood victimization but also a wide variety of indirect forms of exposure (e.g., witnessing fights in and outside the home, hearing gunfire) as well as relatively common forms of victimization, including bullying and teasing. The NatSCEV has been conducted 3 times, in 2008 (NatSCEV I), 2011 (NatSCEV II), and 2014 (NatSCEV III; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015).

Methodological Issues: Conducting Better Research

During the 1980s, editors of major social science journals were asked why they seemed unwilling to publish research on intimate violence. They responded that they would like to publish more but that the research they had seen generally did not meet minimal standards of scientific rigor (Rosenbaum, 1988). Researchers interested in VMIR, therefore, were faced with two alternatives: either improve the quality of their research or find alternative outlets. In many respects, the past years have seen both alternatives occur.

Today, numerous journals are devoted specifically to VMIR (e.g., *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal*, *Child Maltreatment*, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, *Journal of Family Violence*, *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, *Violence Against Women*).

Methodological rigor has also increased, and dramatically so. The federal government, for one, has become active in collecting, funding, and disseminating important data. And increasingly the top social science and medical journals are publishing VMIR research. For example, the Widom, Czaja, and DuMont (2015) research on intergenerational transmission, as discussed previously in this chapter, was published in *Science*, one of the most prestigious journals in the world.

Despite improvements, however, research on VMIR can never be perfect. There will always be tensions associated with the study of a topic so emotional and personal (see Box 2.1). Additionally, there are many methodological hurdles that stand in the way of full understanding. In the following sections, we consider several of these problems.

Box 2.1 Is Impartial Empiricism in the Study of Intimate Violence Possible?

The scientific method, we are told, is supposed to be "value-free." Empiricists report what they see, not what they hope to see. Given the passions that many bring to the study of VMIR, however, a truly value-free approach is likely impossible—nor, frankly, is it desirable. Many professionals in the field want to make the world a safer place for victims and do not want their research and writing to be completely void of that passion. At the same time, however, one must be careful not to discard the scientific method in favor of an advocacy-driven approach to knowledge. How do we, and how should we, balance advocacy and research? (See Perrin & Miller-Perrin, 2011, for a more detailed discussion of the ideas presented in this section.)

We would argue that advocacy, absent scientific objectivity, is inherently problematic and may do more harm than good. To consider why, we must briefly revisit the social constructionist perspective on social problems, as discussed in Chapter 1. Social conditions become social problems when claims makers successfully define them as such. Claims makers may employ many strategies for raising awareness, including the use—and sometimes misuse—of statistical facts and dramatic rhetoric. Because social conditions essentially compete for attention, claims makers will inevitably be drawn to larger numbers and the dramatic rhetoric (Best, 2001).

Why is this a potential problem? Consider the debate between Dianna Russell and Neil Gilbert. Gilbert (1997) is critical of Russell's (1984) claim that 54 percent of children are victims of sexual abuse. This estimate from Russell, Gilbert argues, is an exaggerated "advocacy statistic." In fairness, Russell is clear that the 54 percent figure is based on a very broad definition of sexual abuse that includes unwanted kisses and nongenital sexual touching as well as exposure to exhibitionism (Russell & Bolen, 2000). However, it is also fair to remind the reader that Russell, like advocates more generally, likely assumes that broad definitions and large numbers will further her cause.

(Continued)

(Continued)

The potential problem, as we see it, is that if the public *perceives* that advocacy is driving the findings that we social scientists report, that we manipulate or misuse data to support certain causes, or that we make claims beyond what the data can justify, public confidence in our claims may be undermined. It is easy for the public to dismiss our claims about particular issues if they perceive that the claims are ideologically motivated. And having dismissed the claims, it is easy for the public to dismiss the issues themselves.

Furthermore, if everyone is a victim of abuse, do the terms *victim* and *abuse* not lose their meaning? If marital pushing and shoving is abuse, then many marital couples have engaged in "abusive" behavior. If spanking is child abuse, then almost all children are "victims of abuse." If sibling pushing or hitting is abusive, then almost all siblings are victims or perpetrators or both. In each of these scenarios, the meaning of the terms *victim* and *abuse* have been diluted. However inappropriate and indefensible these relatively minor forms of violence and maltreatment are, they should be clearly distinguished from more serious and damaging forms of VMIR. Giving a child an occasional swat on the bottom may not be good or effective, and we might want to advocate that society not accept these behaviors, but do they constitute *abuse*? Certainly, we must acknowledge that the effects of spanking are minor compared with severe assault. If our advocacy leads us to claim otherwise and our attention is diverted from more serious forms of abuse, then we may do more harm than good.

The notion of *value-free inquiry* can be traced to the very beginnings of the social sciences. Sociologist Max Weber (1949) reasoned that if values influence research, the findings will be rejected and the discipline discredited. But Weber also reminds us that topics we choose, and the ways we approach these topics, are always "value relevant."

There can be no purely objective scientific analysis of society. We cannot be, nor should we be, completely value-free. It simply is not possible. Yet we must be careful. If our advocacy commitments lead to poor scholarship and shoddy research then we may win a battle here and there, but we may be less likely to win the war.

STOP



Negotiated Definitions

Even at this early stage, the reader may have grown tired of hearing about this problem, so our apologies for bringing this up one more time. But it is very important to remember that the behaviors we categorize as abuse will always be debated and negotiated. They will never be, and can never be, objectively defined. The definitional criteria deemed important vary from one audience to the next and from one generation to the next.

The problem, at least in part, is that we want our facts delivered neatly and succinctly (see Best, 2001). Yet there are very few neat and succinct facts in the study of VMIR. Consider as an example these two sentences that appear in the opening paragraph of a recent study (Leve, Khurana, & Reich, 2015, p. 1429): "Official statistics from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control [2014] indicate that the rate of victimization in the United States is as high as 9.2 children per 1,000 children.