

How do women fend off domestic violence?

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Stephanie Paterson is a professor in the Concordia University Department of Political Science, member of the Centre for Research in Human Development and a fellow at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute. Credit: Concordia University

For many women in violent relationships, leaving is not an option. Yet a woman's arsenal of defenses for resisting violence critically depends on her position within the family and community, according to new research from Concordia University published in the journal *Review of Radical Political Economics*.

"Women's resistance is often conceptualized only as exit, which is problematic," says study author Stephanie Paterson, a professor in the Concordia University Department of Political Science and member of the Centre for Research in Human Development. "We know that violence increases upon separation. Focusing on exit obscures the experiences of women who are unwilling and/or unable to leave," says

Paterson, who is also a fellow at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Canada's pioneering college in the field of women's studies.

Paterson's study found that, contrary to popular theory, wealth is not a guaranteed escape from an abusive relationship. It's just one of many factors that can help a woman resist violence. Those factors can be tangible, such as access to a caring personal network. They can be intangible, such as her partner's [perception](#) of her resources, and his perception of her role within the family. If a partner perceives a woman as being in a strong position to resist, he's more likely to reconsider being violent towards her.

How battered women can push back

Paterson's study examines the different options faced by battered women – from placating an abuser to threatening to exit – and how these options can influence subsequent violence. The notion that women have some bargaining power in cases of domestic abuse, she argues, forces society to reconsider the dynamics of violence and expands the options for victims of such abuse.

For women's negotiation tactics to be effective, however, much has to change in society at both the household and public policy levels. "Not only must we provide women with adequate material resources," says Paterson, "we must also address and challenge the origins of authority within families."

"Enabling resistance is not about making women accountable, but rather challenging the state to create systems in which effective [resistance](#) is possible," she continues. "Only then will [violence](#) against [women](#) cease."

More information: *Review of Radical Political Economics* study: [rrp.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... /13/0486613410391392](http://rrp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../13/0486613410391392)

Provided by Concordia University

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