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Original Citation

Walker, Julia and Gavin, Helen (2011) Interpretations of domestic violence: defining intimate partner abuse. In: The 12th Conference of the International Academy of Investigative Psychology. Crime, Criminalistics & Criminal Psychology: New Directions in Investigative Behavioural Science, 31st March-2nd April 2011, Amsterdam.

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INTERPRETATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: DEFINING INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE

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Domestic Violence (DV) is a global phenomenon affecting entire societies directly and indirectly; yet, after decades of research no single definition describes this phenomenon satisfactorily. Current official and unofficial definitions of DV have a tendency to intersect with other types of violence, obscuring understanding and creating ambiguity. This can impact on the reliability and validity of research and create shortfalls in policies and practices aimed at tackling DV. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to examine characteristics of DV, by deconstructing contemporary definitions, in order to establish a framework that can be adopted to assist in the development of a universal definition that is unambiguous and applicable comparatively across gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, religion and socioeconomic status. In order to accomplish this, the multitude of terminologies used synonymously with DV will be discussed to determine the most applicable term together with implications for policy, practice and future research.

Introduction

Victims, and children exposed to DV are the most directly affected, often experiencing long term pathological problems, such as anxiety and depression, as a result of their exposure. A large proportion of the costs incurred through DV are subsidized by public monies, demonstrating the indirect impact of DV on the wider society. The estimated annual cost of DV services such as policing, shelters, legal aid, counselling, health care, social services and rehabilitation of offenders in 2008 was £15.7 billion in England and Wales (AGO, 2009); AU\$13.6 billion in Australia (Australian Government, 2009), and estimates for America showed US\$37 billion expenditure in 2007 (NCADV, 2007).

Contemporary acknowledgement of DV was brought to the public's attention by the women's movement in the 1960s; originally referring to it as 'wife beating', feminists proposed that patriarchal ideologies were responsible for the oppression of women, especially within the domicile, where women were being subjected to all manner of

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abuse from their husbands; not just physical assaults, but also psychological, emotional, verbal, sexual and financial/economic abuse.

Decades of research have expanded our knowledge of DV, identifying the occurrence of DV within all manner of relationships, whether heterosexual or same-sex; perpetrated by both men and women worldwide, whether in western or developing countries across race, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, DV is still recognised by the majority as a gendered phenomenon occurring in heterosexual relationships, with service providers and legislators neglecting to incorporate adequate provisions for unacknowledged victims such as heterosexual men and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals (NCAVP, 2008). Conversely, even when policies and legislations do incorporate same-sex individuals, service providers often fail to offer appropriate provisions for them (Broken Rainbow, 2011).

As for the abuse of men by women in intimate partner relationships, there is still an on-going debate as to: whether it exists; to what extent it exists; and whether the detrimental effects experienced by female victims are applicable to men. Feminists argue that women only act in self-defence or retaliation; masculine disciplines argue that women are responsible for DV more frequently than men; LGBT disciplines rarely recognise abuse of men by women in heterosexual relationships; while 'bias free' disciplines (those that do not conform to philosophies advocating gender or sexuality) suggest that between 25-50% of victims of DV are indeed men abused by their female intimate partner (Williams et al, 2008).

One reason for the lack of acknowledgement to the extent of DV is its definition; official definitions are operational, in other words they are employed in the development of policies, services, and legislations that protect and serve victims and aggressors. Current official and unofficial definitions of DV have a tendency to intersect with other types of violence, as well as either omitting vital elements or

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inserting extraneous factors obscuring understanding and creating ambiguity.

Therefore, by deconstructing the most commonly used definitions, a framework can be established for developing a more integrated definition that is unambiguous and applicable comparatively across gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, religion and socioeconomic status

Domestic Violence

Not every country has a legal definition of DV, and with the exception of the UK and the US, the majority of countries [westernised and developing] that do actually have a definition, identify with the United Nations (UN) gendered definition

" any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (Bott et al, 2004)

Due to the gender bias implications of the UN definition and having already established that DV is not a gendered problem, but a social problem, this paper focuses on the UK and the US definitions. However, the issues to be discussed are evident within the UN definition. Therefore, this paper is not dismissing definitions within other countries, rather concentrating on broader definitions in order to determine a framework that can be applicable to all and implemented globally.

The current official definition of DV in England proposed by the UK Home Office and adopted by DV service providers across England and Wales including Refuge, Women's Aid, and the NHS is as follows:

"Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality"

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Additionally, they propose

“This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour based violence', female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage” (Home Office, 2010)

In America the US Department of Justice’s definition of DV offers a much broader description:

“A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner”

They go on to describe DV as

“Physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating” (USDOJ, 2011)

In order for a definition to be operational, it needs to address all issues relevant to the phenomenon. The above definitions have identified with several factors including prevalence, age, motivation, methods of abuse and relationship status. As such each of these will be addressed in turn to establish their applicability within the definition. However, the aforementioned definitions are not as comprehensive as they first appear. Therefore, further definitions are analysed in an attempt to identify all components, in order to provide a more holistic framework of DV.

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Prevalence

There are immediate differences evident within the above definitions; the UK definition identifies 'any' incident of behaviour while the US definition identifies a 'pattern' of behaviour. Empirical research has established that DV does indeed progress in a cyclical pattern, intensifying over time with victims enduring an average of 35 incidents of DV before seeking help or leaving the relationship (Croydon, 2011; Moser, 2007b). However, there is always an initial incident and the cycle may not be recognised as a pattern if such incidences do not occur periodically. Therefore, any definition that identifies with '*a pattern of behaviour*' appears to deny the relevance of initial incidences. As such any incident of violence should be recognised; after all the sooner DV is recognised and services accessed the risk of repeat victimisation (Daems, 2005) and recidivism can be minimised (Lin et al, 2009).

Results of the British Crime Survey (BCS: Coleman et al, 2007) report that 1 in 4 heterosexual women; 1 in 4 men and women in LGBT communities and 1 in 6 heterosexual men are declared victims of DV, indicating that 25% of women and 17% of men are victims of DV at some point in their lives. In the US, the National Centre for Victims of Crime and the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programmes reported similar rates of DV for gay and heterosexual couples (Pink News, 2010). Therefore, it can be established that female involvement in DV is not always as the oppressed. Examining the prevalence of reciprocation of violence within intimate partner relationships, Whitaker et al (2007) found violence to occur within 24% of all relationships; they report that in almost 50% of such relationships the violence was reciprocated and in non-reciprocal incidences the woman was the aggressor in 70% of cases.

Age

While the US government does not apply age restrictions in their definition, acknowledging intimate partners whether married, cohabiting or dating, the UK definition identifies DV as concerning 'adults'. The term 'adult' is identified by the

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Home Office as representing people over 18 years of age. However, there is recognition that abuse can occur at any age and there is a section for young people in the 'rights of domestic abuse victims' (Directgov, 2011). Applying the term 'adult' minimises the prevalence of DV within younger people's relationships and could be conceived as not relevant to them (Barter et al, 2009).

Therefore, the term 'adult' could be omitted from the definition; this is particularly relevant when considering that the majority of empirical research shows that intimate partner abuse is most prevalent among younger generations. For example research conducted by Barter et al (2009) found teenage intimate partner violence to be just as prevalent as in adult relationships, with similar negative outcomes reported. They found the age most at risk to be 15-24 in women and 16-24 in men. Moreover, a cross cultural study conducted by the World Health Organisation (2005) identified the age most at risk for women to be 15-19 years. Conversely, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV: 2007) reports that women aged between 20-24 are most at risk of DV, though participants are all over 16, which may represent bias in the results.

Recognising that DV occurs in younger peoples intimate relationships is of the utmost importance. Barter et al (2009) found that, while young men in heterosexual relationships reported minimal ill effects as a result of their abuse, young men in same-sex relationships reported the same detrimental effects of abuse as their female counterparts. Considering that victimisation in one relationship has shown to enhance future victimisation, providing services to younger generations could minimise the risk of recidivism.

Motivation

While the UK definition does not depict any motivating factors for DV, the US definition states "*to gain or maintain power and control*". There is an abundance of empirical research typifying the use of power and control by perpetrators of DV.

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Moser (2007a) suggests that the aggressor's lack of self-esteem compels him or her to control others in an effort to overcome his or her own inadequacies and insecurities. Employing a disempowerment perspective, McKenry et al (2006) propose that individual personality characteristics elevate the risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence. They suggest that individuals who subscribe to masculine stereotypes are more prone to violence against their intimate partners, personifying abusers as male or 'butch', thereby conforming to stereotypical assumptions of DV as gendered behaviour. Conversely, it could be argued that men are morally socialised to be protective of women, thereby invalidating theories of masculinity in relation to DV. Therefore, one needs to consider whether the social construction of gender and sexuality impacts on perceptions of DV, inhibiting acceptance of DV by women and within LGBT relationships.

Methods of abuse

Identifying threatening, violent and abusive behaviours, both the UK and US definitions acknowledge that DV is not limited to physical violence; non-physical violence is often as destructive as physical violence with some suggesting that prolonged exposure to psychological and emotional abuse often has a greater impact on victim's well-being than physical abuse (Gavin, 2011)

Both definitions catalogue the variety of violent behaviours employed by aggressors, identifying psychological, physical, sexual, financial/economic and emotional abuse. However, neither refers to verbal abuse; while verbal abuse is often identified as an element of emotional or psychological abuse, it can be argued that continual subjection to degrading oral exchanges over time results in victims accepting that they are stupid, ugly, useless, worthless or other humiliating insults is a major factor of DV. Furthermore, verbal abuse often precedes physical assaults and should be recognised singularly and in its own right.

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Examining factors of interpersonal violence within lesbian relationships, Eaton et al (2008) showed that verbal harassment occurred in 50% of reported cases.

Additionally, according to the General Social Survey (GSS: Doherty & Berglund, 2008) name calling and verbal “put downs” are the most common form of emotional abuse.

Highlighting the detrimental effects of verbal abuse is a recent court ruling: a woman was refused housing after claiming her husband was verbally abusive towards her. Even though he had never physically harmed her, she felt fearful for her own safety and the safety of her child; consequently, the court ruled “*physical abuse is not the only meaning of the word 'violence'*” acknowledging that verbal abuse constitutes DV and ordering the council to rethink their decision (Cumber, 2011). This precedent serves to reinforce the gravity of harm verbal abuse can cause victims of DV.

Relationship status

The UK definition identifies the relationship between aggressor and victim as “*adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members*”. It identifies family members as those in a variety of familial relationships (NHS, 2011). The US definition identifies only “*intimate partners*”. Conventionally recognised by researchers, service providers and lay persons as abusive behaviours employed by one individual over another within current or pre-existing intimate partner relationships, the addition of ‘family members’ within the UK definition creates ambiguity and overlaps with family violence.

The UK definition also adds “*This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour based violence', female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage*” to their definition. While unacceptable practices within western society, FGM, forced marriages and honour based violence fall outside the remit of traditional perceptions of DV. As such, these practices should be recognised in their own right rather than as an appendage of DV.

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Bogard (1990) refers to 'wife abuse' as "*use of physical force used by a man against his intimate cohabiting partner*" (Yllö & Bogard, 1990: 12). However, it has now been established that DV does not exist only in heterosexual cohabiting relationships and directed towards the female partner, or consisting of only physical abuse.

Nevertheless, genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killing are forms of abuse traditionally recognised as being directed at women. Some authors argue that this is indicative of the heavy influence feminists have over DV policies and research. It is worth noting that references to male genital mutilation or other cultural practices that are specific to males are conspicuously absent.

However, the UK definition does acknowledge pre-existing relationships. Research has shown that termination of a relationship not only increases the risk of injury but may also act as a trigger that initiates violence (Coleman et al, 2007; WHO, 2005). On the other hand, much of the existing data was retrieved from female victims of DV; therefore, in order to determine a more holistic picture, future research should be conducted to establish whether there is an increased risk of violence after separation for men and LGBT individuals.

Inclusiveness

The UK applies the definition "*regardless of gender or sexuality*" suggesting that men and women of heterosexual or same-sex denomination can be responsible for [or subjected to] acts of violence within intimate partner relationships. The US definition extends this by stating "*regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender*", attempting to identify with cultural and religious communities as well as gender and sexuality. However, the use of 'regardless of' may be more indicative of an end note, something that needs to be acknowledged, but receives minimal attention, inadvertently ignoring the identified populations and continuing the unrelenting myth that heterosexual men are the aggressors and heterosexual women the oppressed in DV situations.

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Evidencing the universal magnitude of DV, the World Health Organization (WHO: Garcia-Moreno & Watts, 2011) shows prevalence rates of between 13-26% for 'violence against women' by intimate partners in over 90 countries. Although taking a gender and sexuality based approach, the WHO's figures do highlight the extent of the problem.

Identifying the extent of DV more clearly than the obscure 'regardless of' the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) identify with cultural and socioeconomic differences by proposing it "*crosses all ethnic, racial and socio-economic lines*"

"A pattern of coercive and controlling behaviors and tactics used by one person over another to gain power and control. This may include verbal abuse, financial abuse, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Domestic violence occurs in heterosexual, as well as same-sex partnerships, and crosses all ethnic, racial and socio-economic lines" (EOPSS, 2010)

Socioeconomic status

Though identifying with the previously omitted 'verbal abuse' the EOPSS omits psychological abuse. While psychological and emotional abuse are often used interchangeably. Bradley-Berry (2000) shows distinctions exist, in that emotional abuse consists of humiliation and degradation whereby victims feel worthless, incapable, undeserving and unloved, and psychological abuse employs abusive and threatening behaviours employed to induce fear in the victim. Therefore, it is proposed that the definition should identify with both separately.

They do however refer to "*heterosexual, as well as same-sex partnerships*" in addition to broadening the scope of DV to include all '*socioeconomic lines*'. While commonly perceived as occurring almost exclusively within lower class communities Johnson (2008) suggests that the most severe acts of DV are actually perpetuated

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within upper class communities. Johnson implies that the more highly educated individuals within upper class communities are furtive; not only less visible to the police but also more adept at manipulation. According to Johnson, the prevalence of DV in lower class communities is not motivated by power and control, rather a consequence of stress cultivated by their specific situations, such as poverty and substance abuse. This is not to suggest that such incidences are any less severe, merely that DV differs across social class as well as gender, sexuality, culture and religion. This indicates the need for a definition that is both sensitive and comprehensive.

Stalking

Violence against women online resources (Vavor: 2010) add further behavioural issues to their definition by acknowledging stalking

“A pattern of coercive behaviour that is used by one person to gain power and control over another. It may include the use of physical and sexual violence, verbal and emotional abuse, stalking and economic abuse. Sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation may also occur” (Vavor: 2010)

In the Home Office Statistical bulletin 2005/06, stalking was reported as the most frequently occurring element of intimate partner violence, with 28% of women and 17% of men aged 16 and over being victimised in the previous 12 months (Coleman et al, 2007). Examining the extent of violence against women by their intimate partners, the World Health Organisation (WHO: 2005) found higher rates of violence against women who had separated from their partners. This implies that stalking an intimate partner indicates escalating levels of violence.

Coercion

Unlike the previous definitions, the EOPSS and Vavor refer to coercive tactics;

Barter et al (2009) show coercive control to be highly prevalent within young person's relationships. They report that boys use coercive tactics more often than girls, employing modern technologies such as mobile phones and the internet to monitor their partner's movements and isolating them from their peers, effectively reducing their support networks. However, Johnson's (2008) identification of differing types of DV only evidences coercive tactics within relationships whereby 'intimate terrorism' exist. This suggests that not all DV situations are a result of coercive control. However, in light of technological advances and modern communication modalities, these methods of coercive control would benefit from delineation in DV definitions.

Disability

None of the aforementioned definitions refers to disability. In fact, little research exists regarding DV within intimate partner relationships in which one or both partners are disabled. However, there is some suggestion that disabled individuals are at higher risk of intimate partner violence. Coleman et al (2007) report that having a limiting illness or disability increases the risk of intimate partner violence equally for men and women, with the exception of stalking. Nevertheless, there seems to be very little research addressing this issue, possibly explaining the lack of acknowledgement in statutory definitions.

Children

Children directly or indirectly exposed to DV have been shown to suffer similar consequences as the victim, referred to as 'vicarious victimisation' Doherty and Berglund (2008) report that, after neglect, exposure to DV is the most common form of child maltreatment. Defining DV as "*violent acts between intimate partners*" Kolar and Davey (2007) put estimates of children exposed to DV at over three million annually in America alone. They identify that, as a result of exposure, children experience behavioural, psychological and developmental problems and suggest that children should be screened for DV exposure at regular intervals as a method of

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child protection. It should also be noted that childhood exposure to DV is shown to be highly correlated with Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN), particularly child physical and sexual abuse (Herrenkohl et al, 2008; Tajima, 2002).

Terminology

In general when discussing DV, research and policy refer to abusive exchanges between two people, who are or have been in an intimate relationship with each other. It is not only definitions of DV that are obscure, but the term itself. 'Domestic' traditionally refers to the home and marriage (Geddes & Grosset, 2002), identifying a relationship that neglects non-married and non-cohabiting couples, as well as omitting same sex partnerships. Furthermore, 'violence' is often interpreted to signify physically aggressive acts. This neglects the many other elements identified as frequently occurring during the life course of DV, for example in their definition of DV, Women's Aid state "*domestic violence may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently 'violent'*" (Women's Aid, 2007).

The Revised Code of Washington's (RCW) definition of DV emphasizes 'violence', but offers nothing else descriptive of the complexities of DV

"Physical harm, bodily injury, assault, the infliction of fear of imminent physical harm, sexual assault, or stalking" (Knebes, 2001)

However, it does identify why some terms used synonymously with DV refer to 'abuse' rather than 'violence'; often the term 'violence' is associated with physical harm. O'Moore (2001) proposes that definitions of violence are perplexing and need to be extended to include less overt behaviours than physical force. Psychological abuse, unlike physical abuse leaves no visible scars or bruises making it harder to detect, yet the mental scars can last a lifetime (Gavin, 2011; Doherty & Berglund, 2008). Veteran police officer Watkins (2005) testifies that domestic violence is not a 'tight term'. A specialist in DV investigations, Watkins asserts that police responding

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to domestic disturbances may encounter partners, parents, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, extended family members, even non-traditional household settings such as roommates and private staff.

To alleviate this definitional dilemma, numerous researchers have used alternative terms synonymous to DV, such as Inter-Personal Violence (IPV), Inter-Personal Aggression (IPA), maternal abuse, marital violence, spousal abuse, relationship violence and domestic abuse. Additionally, abusive relationships in which couples are not cohabiting are often referred to as 'dating violence'; a term more commonly used to describe young/teenage couples (Barter et al, 2009). However, a search of the World Wide Web for any of the terms used synonymously with DV continually directs browsers to 'domestic violence'. Here in lies the problem, definitions of such phenomena' not only offer description, they enforce legislation, inform public opinion and are utilized by DV charitable and statutory organizations as part of their framework for examining the service requirements of victims and perpetrators.

Therefore, in order to prevent future confusion it is proposed that the term 'Intimate Partner Abuse' (IPA) is adopted for the new integrated and holistic definition.

'Intimate Partner' clearly identifies a relationship between victim and aggressor, while 'Abuse' is indicative of threatening behaviours and violence.

It is proposed that Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) be defined as

“Any incident of coercive or controlling behaviours and strategies used by either a man or woman to gain power and control over their current or pre-existing intimate partner, whether of a heterosexual or same-sex nature. Incidents may include physical, psychological, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial or economic threat, abuse or violence including social isolation and stalking. Intimate partner abuse occurs across age, ability, culture, ethnicity,

race, religion, and socioeconomic status whether married, cohabiting or dating”.

It should also be noted that

“Children become secondary victims when directly or indirectly exposed to such incidences and are liable to suffer the same detrimental effects as the primary victim”

Implications for research, policy and practice

While methods of victimisation are comparatively similar across gender, sexuality, culture and religion, such individuals may be victimised further because of their orientation, beliefs, and racial or ethnic origins. For example a common threat used by women against their male intimate partner is ‘never seeing the children again’ (Barber, 2008); a common threat for LGBT individuals is to ‘out’ them to family and friends (Aardvarc, 2011); ethnic minorities are commonly told by their abusers that they will be deported or that their family honour will be in jeopardy (Chinese community centre, 2007); while religious individuals are told that they are being punished for their sins (EDVP, 2011). Each of these hidden victims requires services that are empathic to their concerns, though much research is required to access exactly what those needs are.

Feminist activism raised public awareness about the extent and impact of violence against women, contributing greatly to research, policy and practice. Therefore one of the main aims is to raise public awareness by identifying with all victims and aggressors as well as exploration of the similarities and differences within such relationships.

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Research

There is an urgent need to assess the requirements of hidden victims of IPA; this includes heterosexual men; LGBT individuals, members of ethnic minorities, religious individuals, young people, and people with disabilities. Although such individuals are apparently victimised in similar ways to heterosexual women, the limited research available suggests that their experiences are very different and are compounded by social ignorance, which increases their isolation and effectively allows the continuation of their abuse.

Services available to such individuals need to be identified, together with determining what changes are required and how they should be implemented. For example, currently women's help lines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, while help lines for men and LGBT individuals are only provided approximately 4 hours a day, 2/3 days a week [not including the weekend].

Furthermore, research is required to determine how perpetrators of IPA, whether heterosexual women, LGBT individuals, people of ethnic minorities, religious individuals, young people and people with disabilities are treated; do so called 'batterer' treatment programmes have provisions for such diversity?

While there is growing evidence of the impact of psychological and emotional abuse on IPA victims, the vast majority of research focuses on heterosexual women's accounts with none, addressing the impact of psychological and emotional abuse within IPA, on men. Therefore, research is required to assess men's experiences of psychological and emotional abuse.

Furthermore, in order to understand IPA across different relationships we need to establish whether women and men differ in their methods of abuse. If so, does this also differ more across sexuality, for example is the abusive method between men and women different to that within a same-sex relationship? Moreover, what impact

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does IPA within different relationships have on children, for example do exposed children's (social and emotional) developmental outcomes depend on the sex of the aggressor, and do children witnessing IPA in LGBT relationships have similar outcomes to children exposed to IPA in heterosexual relationships?

There is a need to develop more reliable and valid scales that are reflective of the various relationship types to ensure that a holistic and all encompassing population is empirically explored, rather than assuming that victims and aggressors are homogeneous. By determining the similarities and differences across all relationship types and victim characteristics, more accurate measures can be developed that provide reliability and validity, as well as being applicable worldwide.

The two key factors that need to be addressed in order to raise awareness to the extent of IPA are firstly, that men and women are equally capable of being responsible for abuse. Secondly, violence can occur in any form of intimate relationship. Therefore, research is required to determine why IPA is symbolised by gender based ideologies. For example does the social construction of gender and sexuality impact on perceptions of IPA, thereby inhibiting acceptance of IPA executed by women and within LGBT relationships?

Policy

Heavily influenced by feminist ideologies government and public policies are tailored to prevent 'violence against women' by men. As such much of the public's money is donated to resources for battered women, which in turn sees hidden victims not being acknowledged adequately by service providers. Therefore, it is imperative that government and public policies adopt a bias free approach so that resources and services available to female victims of IPA are made available to all victims.

Research has indicated that the majority of male victims of IPA are reluctant to report their abuse. Social acceptance of their abuse and designated resources for such

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men may encourage more men to come forward and access services which can provide the required support to help them in abusive situations.

Practice

National and international awareness campaigns are required that reach every corner of the world. This not only exposes the extent of the problem but also enables victims to identify abusive situations.

Renowned national and international organisations active in DV prevention could refrain from using gendered terminologies such as 'violence against women', and 'male violence'. Such terminologies are effective in maintaining perceptions of 'gendered violence'.

Further training would enable service providers to address the specific needs of all victims without bias or ridicule.

Conclusion

One major concern surrounding DV is the lack of acknowledgement of female perpetration, whether in heterosexual or same sex relationships. Many definitions advocate gender-based ideologies, promoting heterosexual women as sole victims. Furthermore, gender-neutral definitions, while not identifying heterosexual women as the only victims, could be clearer in their description rather than adding 'regardless of gender or sexuality' as an end note. The use of such definitions across DV organisations and within legislation grossly disadvantages unrecognised victims, hindering their access to services that are predominantly aimed at heterosexual women, serving to maintain their situations. Therefore, the clarity of such definitions is of utmost importance.

In order to make a difference to peoples' lives there is a need to understand the complexities of the situations they are facing. Adopting the term 'Intimate Partner

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Violence' (IPA) and providing a holistic definition that is unambiguous and applicable comparatively across gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, culture, religion and socioeconomic status gives the phenomenon clarity by identifying the issues to be addressed and recognising who the victims and aggressors are.

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