J Fam Viol (2016) 31:959–966
DOI 10.1007/s10896-016-9881-4

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Where Do We Go from here?: Examining Intimate Partner Violence by Bringing Male Victims, Female Perpetrators, and Psychological Sciences into the Fold

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Published online: 4 October 2016

Abstract Gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV) has come to light in research, stirring much controversy. Historically, there has been resistance toward re-conceptualizing the problem from a psychology-informed framework, rather than from functional sociological discourse. Issues in examining IPV, with consideration of typologies, male victimization, and female perpetration, are discussed. Reporting, outcomes, revictimization, and perceptions of male victims and female perpetrators are addressed. An argument is offered for increased focus on psychological science, including theory and data from clinical, couple, and family systems disciplines, in addressing partner violence. A framework is provided for integrated, effective, and accurate approaches to IPV in discourse, policy, and service.

Keywords Gender symmetry · Intimate partner violence · IPV · Male victims · Female perpetration · Revictimization · Public perception · Batterer treatment

An expanding base of quantitative evidence suggests comparable rates of IPV perpetration between genders (Cho 2012; Black et al. 2011; Archer 2000). Several studies have indicated higher perpetration rates by females than males when IPV was unilateral, as well as greater use of violence by females than males in bilateral IPV (Whitaker et al. 2007; Williams & Frieze 2005). The majority of IPV occurrences are bilateral, (Hamberger 2005) and one in five males, as well as one in five females, report unilateral victimization (Kar & O'Leary 2010). Recognition and study of battered males has existed since the 1960s, but such research has been overwhelmingly ignored (Corbally 2015). Despite growing focus on male victims, the paucity of research and action remains disproportionately vast, relative to the focus on female victims (Tsui, Cheung, & Leung 2012a, b).

Contrary to theories that implicate socioculturally prescribed patriarchy as the primary requisite to IPV, an overwhelming majority of males endorse respectful views toward women. Males are in fact less accepting than females of men using retaliatory violence in response to women's use of violence (Edelen et al. 2009). Studies indicate a normative value, widespread across numerous populations, that under no circumstances is it acceptable for males to use violence against females (Felson & Feld 2009). This value holds steady even with respect to male self-defense from a female partner's violence (Scarduzio, Carlyle, Harris, & Savage 2016).

This article discusses issues associated with a widespread perspective that minimizes male victimization, female perpetration, and bilateral IPV. Consideration is given to IPV typologies, perceptions of male victims and female perpetrators, reporting and outcomes, revictimization, and psychological factors. Recommendations for policy, research, and service are offered, including a three-pillar framework, shown in Fig. 1, for enhancing current approaches to, and informing understandings of, IPV in heterosexual relationships.

Typology: Balancing Contexts

Males and females have been shown to engage in similar levels of situational and reactive violence (Cho 2012).

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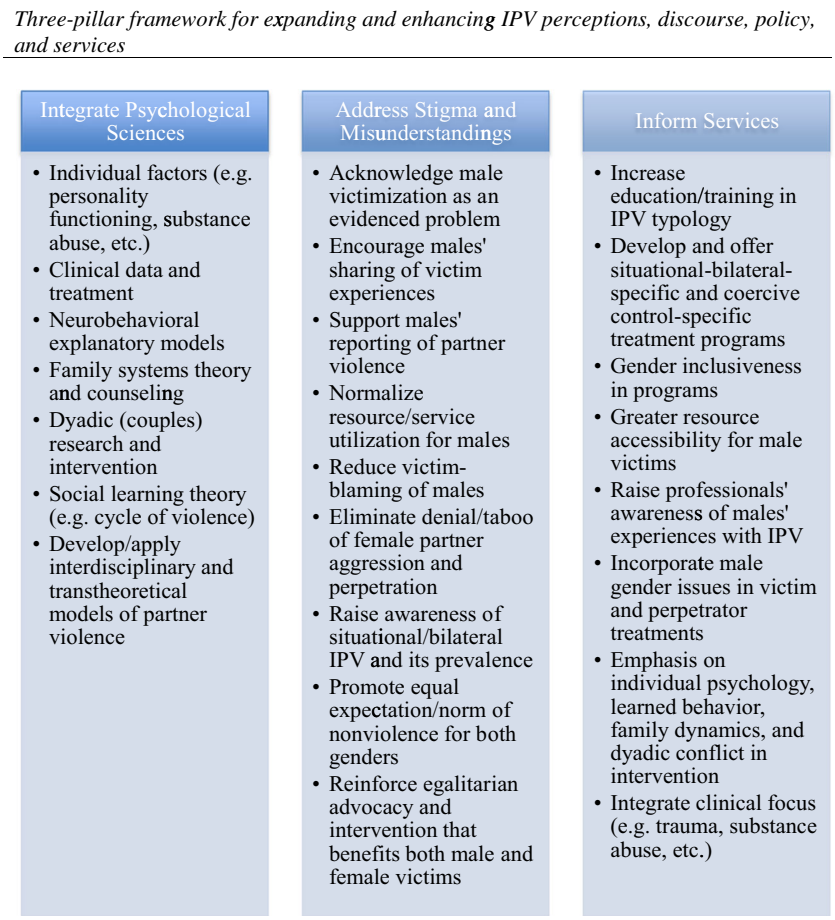

Fig. 1 Three-pillar framework for expanding and enhancing IPV perceptions, discourse, policy, and services

Situational couple violence has traditionally suited the family violence model of IPV rather than the feminist model (Dutton & Nicholls 2005). The feminist model of IPV tends to be reflected in cases of coercive control violence, formerly known as intimate terrorism, and violent resistance thereof (Ali & Naylor 2013). Both models have important explanatory power in different dyadic patterns, though the differences in these subtypes appear to generate divisiveness in approaches to IPV.

Coercive control cases, wherein the sole perpetrator uses domination tactics and repeated injurious violence, are far less frequent than cases of bilateral situational violence (Kelly & Johnson 2008). Males more frequently perpetrate coercive control violence, although females have also been shown to perpetrate this type of violence upon males (Hines & Douglas 2010). Partners are less likely to see themselves as needing help when violence is mutual, thus the pattern often endures, harming both parties. Partners in situational violence regularly seek less intensive services and exhibit lower resource utilization than partners who sustain coercive control violence (Leone, Lape, & Xu 2014). Increased focus, particularly in legislation, law enforcement, personnel training, education, resource and service provision, and treatment, must be placed on the more common variety, which involves contextualized factors beyond patriarchy. However, the expanded focus must not minimize emphasis on coercive control that is primarily used against, and results in greater injury to, women (Felson & Outlaw 2007).

Perceptions of Female-To-Male IPV

Female-to-male IPV is widely viewed as less frequent, less problematic, and less consequential than male-to-female IPV, despite evidence that contradicts gender asymmetry (Felson & Feld 2009). Both males and females are less likely to attribute responsibility to female perpetrators than to male perpetrators (Rhatigan, Stewart, & Moore 2011), as well as more likely to favor reporting of male perpetration than female perpetration (Sorenson & Taylor 2005). Additionally, male injury is not seen as equally probable, notwithstanding evidence that male injury occurs only slightly less than female injury (Archer 2000). Consequently, witnesses may be less likely to intervene or alert authorities when a female strikes a male partner than when a male strikes a female partner.

Females and males, including male victims, are more permissive and minimizing of female use of violence in relationships. For males, this may be potentially due to chivalrous

beliefs and reinforced ideas of male conduct in heterosexual relationships (Robertson & Murachver 2009). Bidirectional IPV is the most common form, yet female acts of violence are viewed as more acceptable and having greater substantiation, or explanatory factors, than those of males (Carlyle, Scarduzio, & Slater 2014; Stewart et al. 2012). Overall, males receive greater blame and dispositional attribution for similar acts.

Female-To-Male IPV in Media

Depictions of female-perpetrated IPV in heterosexual relationships, as well as real-life occurrences, are often recognized as humorous, including by males (Cook 2009). Although male victims are more likely than female victims to laugh at a partner's abusive acts (Hamberger & Guse 2002), male victims may use humor as a self-protective mechanism reflective of denial, minimization, and resisting vulnerability (Cook 2009). Take, for instance, the quintessential example of an open-handed strike to a male's face. Such an action may be laughed at, or alternatively, assumptions may be made about the male's behavior. "He must be a 'pig'." "He must have done something to provoke her." (Scarduzio et al. 2016). "Maybe she was just defending herself." (Male Victims as Domestic Violence 2007) These common responses reflect tacit acceptance of behavior that would be admonished if the partners' genders were switched. Portrayals of female-perpetrated violence against males frequently represent the men as unfaithful or abusive (Carlyle et al. 2014).

Female aggressors are less likely to have criminal records and more likely to have their violent behavior regarded as atypical (Poon, Dawson, & Morton 2014). Female perpetrators of violence defy many stereotypes of females, thus media entities may seek to restore public perceptions of gender stereotypes by highlighting the abnormality of female perpetration (Carlyle et al. 2014). This is exampled by media's depictions of female aggressors as remorseful, having acted with accomplices, and as being mentally unstable (Carlyle et al. 2014). The popular disposition toward viewing females as de-facto victims, and as having lesser culpability than males, hinders the process of effectively addressing IPV.

Reporting and Outcomes for Male Victims

It is widely substantiated and understood that male victims report at a low rate (Dutton & Nicholls 2005). Female victims are four times more likely than male victims to report (Brown 2004). Female-perpetrated abuse is less likely to be seen by male victims, and by many populations, as a crime (Dutton & Nicholls 2005). Other individuals who witness, suspect, or are aware of IPV often report on the male's behalf, which results in greater likelihood that the female will be charged, compared to when the male victim reports (Poon et al. 2014).

Legal and law enforcement outcomes reflect bias against male victims and lenience toward female perpetrators. Shernock and Russel (2012) highlighted several studies that revealed males were significantly more likely than females to be arrested, charged, and convicted. In a study conducted by Brown (2004), men's assertions of self-defense are far less likely than women's to be believed by law enforcement. Brown (2004) also found that conviction rates are more than three times higher for males charged with partner assault crimes than for females charged with partner assault crimes. In cases involving no injuries, men were 16 times more likely to be charged (Brown 2004). In cases involving male injury, women were arrested 62 % of the time, compared to 91.1 % of males arrested in cases involving female injury (Brown 2004).

Basile (2005) found that sex was the best predictor of restraining order issuance, as well as of severity of restrictions, with male plaintiffs far less likely to receive protection and female perpetrators likely to receive lesser severity of restrictions. Muftic and Bouffard (2007) also found that gender predicted protective order issuance. According to Muller, Desmarais, and Hamel's (2009) findings, only one male for every 13 females is granted a domestic violence restraining order against a partner of the opposite sex when sample sizes are matched and cases involve low severity of alleged abuse. These inequities reflect gender-based discrimination propagated by an enduring and limited portrayal of IPV in heterosexual relationships.

Victim Blaming and Revictimization all over again

Educational, outreach-based, social marketing, and public media campaign methods have demonstrated positive impacts on the awareness of violence against women, as well as on the prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes (Flood 2005–2006; Whitaker et al. 2006; Donovan & Vlais, 2005). Enactment of criminal justice policies targeting IPV has also been shown to alter victim-blaming attitudes toward women (Salazar, Baker, Price, & Carlin 2003). Feld and Felson (2008) found normative protection of women from violence against males, even for females who violate stereotyped gender roles. "She provoked it" and "She deserved it" are statements that are being increasingly reproached as public awareness of IPV issues grows. The belief that "There is no excuse to hit a woman", as well as condemning attitudes toward males who use violence against females, has been observed as a widespread norm in American culture (Felson & Feld 2009). Approval of male violence in response to female unfaithfulness has declined substantially since the late 1960s, (Straus, Kaufman Kantor, & Moore 1997). However, permissibility of females' use of violence in response to male infidelity and

other undesirable behaviors has not declined over the same period (Straus et al. 1997).

In male victims' experiences, gendered stigmatization is a looming hardship (Tsui et al. 2010). Multiple sets of expectations of males, including those of chivalry, non-violence toward women, invulnerability, imperturbability, and self-preservation, create conditions for heterosexual male victims of partner violence to almost invariably violate conceptions of maleness in both gender and relational domains (Eckstein & Cherry 2015). A heterosexual male's victimization in itself may be seen as a deviation from masculine gender guidelines, thus may be met with attitudes of confusion or blame toward male victims (Muller et al. 2009). For instance, "Why/how would you let her do that?" A comparative study proposed that male victims receive greater negative stigma attributions than do female victims (Eckstein 2009). Sylaska and Walters (2014) found that in response to vignette depictions of IPV, males received greater attributions of victim responsibility by both males and females in a sample of college students. Additionally, both males and females were more likely to view the IPV situation as less serious and to ignore the situation when the victim was male (Sylaska & Walters 2014).

For many male victims who reported abuse, they themselves were seen and treated as primary aggressors, even when violence was not mutual (Douglas & Hines 2011). In many instances, law enforcement and legal entities failed or refused to act (Douglas & Hines 2011). Help-seeking males were met with scarce resources, refusal from aid programs, and negative experiences (Douglas & Hines 2011). Male victims disclosed that female perpetration was viewed as a joke (Douglas & Hines 2011). Refusal to arrest, charge, seek penalty, or remove the perpetrator was thematic in many cases (Douglas & Hines 2011). Some males were arrested and or removed from the home without sufficient evidence of male-to-female violence (Douglas & Hines 2011). Despite widespread consciousness of struggles faced by female victims who report, male victims' struggles are common and unnoticed (Shuler 2010).

The Psychological Reality behind a Sociologically Explained Problem

Traditionally, literature and theoretical positions suggest patriarchy is the foremost factor that cultivates conditions for IPV (Straus 2006; Ali & Naylor 2013). Although patriarchy is a societal problem, research at the micro-level has indicated a relatively equal role of control motivators underlying both male and female perpetration (Cho 2012; Kernsmith 2005). Female perpetrators are more likely than males to report initiation, more likely to use a weapon, and more likely to use internalizing attributions when explaining their uses of violence (Poon et al. 2014; Whitaker 2014; Cho 2012). Most commonly, lost temper, desire to express negative emotions, jealousy, tough guise, desire for control, retaliation, self-defense, or desire to punish one's partner are reasons given by females for behaving violently (Whitaker 2014; Caldwell, Swan, Allen, Sullivan, & Snow 2009; Bair-Merritt et al. 2010). These motives are both psychological and relational by nature, thus occurring on the micro level, rather than sociological and occurring on the macro level.

Research has supported the "cycle of violence" theory, which posits witnessing aggressive behavior and violent means of addressing conflict increases the likelihood of IPV involvement and, in turn, continued intergenerational transmission of violent behavioral patterns in dyadic and family systems (Cannon, Bonomi, Anderson, & Rivara 2009; Ehrensaft et al. 2003). Child treatment is significantly predictive of IPV perpetration in adulthood (White & Widom 2003), and with greater predictive strength for females than for males (Gomez 2011). Attitudes toward IPV are largely shaped by experiences in the family system of origin (Copp et al. 2016). Interparental modeling of violence is significantly associated with perpetration of partner abuse, even for those who witness interparental violence during the transition into adulthood (Black, Sussman, & Unger 2010). Social learning and family system variables have been shown to interact with and have effects on IPV, mediated by psychological and dyadic variables (White & Widom 2003). These factors are critical in the psychosocial intervention and prevention of IPV, for both males and females, victims and perpetrators.

Males are more frequently seen as characteristically aggressive and as demonstrating abusive behaviors in a stable fashion over time (Stewart et al. 2012). Violent acts by women are predominately described in literature as non-dispositional, thus unstable and situation-contingent (Stewart et al. 2012). Much of the past and present discourse has cited females' use of violence in heterosexual partnerships as being primarily in response to victimization by males (Swan & Snow 2006). However, evidence indicates that only a small minority of females who use violence against a male partner act in self-defense (Kernsmith 2005). Frequent motivators include passion, infidelity, money, and argument (Carlyle et al. 2014; Kernsmith 2005). Overall, the link between personality and use of IPV among female abusers has been strongly demonstrated (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2005; Moffitt et al. 2001). Psychological characteristics found in male batterers, including emotional dysregulation, jealousy, anxious and insecure attachment styles, controlling behaviors, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and poor self-control, are also found in female batterers (Shorey, Brasfield, Febres, & Stuart 2011; Moffitt et al. 2001). Psychopathologies including mood disorders, posttraumatic stress, anger mismanagement, personality disorder or disturbance, and substance use disorders can impede the emotional and behavioral control of romantic partners and

are among the most frequently cited issues among female perpetrators of IPV (Melander, Noel, & Tyler 2010; Dowd & Leisring 2008; Stuart et al. 2006; Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb, & Fowler 2005; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt 2004).

Most literature and policy-level discourse on IPV has been linked to a sociopolitical framework. Functional sociological perspectives largely suggest patriarchal forces underlie the core of IPV (Cannon, Lauve-Moon, & Buttell 2015). As the research base produces evidence to support psychological phenomenology and etiology of IPV, dissemination and action must follow accordingly. As a public health issue, psychological, dyadic, and family system factors are central to accurate study and efficacious intervention (Dutton & Corvo 2006).

IPV through a New Lens

It would seem that egalitarian and feminist discourse would endorse a zero tolerance perspective on all forms of IPV. However, understandably, a genderless conceptualization and approach would deprive the human sciences and the public of several dynamic details of the problem, and thus solutions. Without treating gender as a variable, the problem becomes amorphous. Issues associated with abusive male dominance over female partners must never be ignored. Likewise, the plight of victimized males ought not be neglected or shrouded.

Many consequences of IPV impact both genders. For example, male and female victims have been shown to experience equivalent severity of IPV-correlated depression, anxiety, and somatization symptoms (Prospero 2007). It is also well substantiated that each gender sustains unique problems in comparison to their counterparts. For instance, coercive control violence has historically been primarily perpetrated against females, and females are more likely than males to receive greater physical injury due to IPV (Myhill 2015). Male victims are more likely to be seen as perpetrators, be turned away by resource providers, and receive the majority of responsibility attributions for abuse (Sylaska & Walters 2014; Brown 2004). Viewing IPV as a zero sum game, in which one gender's plight is advocated at the expense or neglect of the other's, obstructs solutions. Partner violence must be addressed from a pragmatic and humanist platform, upon which all suffering is a matter of concern and targeted with resolution.

Interests and wellbeing of both genders must be equally acknowledged but with consideration of uniqueness. By recognizing all victims' adversities as significant, we will cultivate enhanced appreciation for each gender's experiences and foster more efficacious policies and accessible resources. More gender-specific, yet simultaneously gender-inclusive, prevention, education, training, and treatment programs must be developed and piloted. This means embracing all IPV-relevant causes, despite gender, yet also acting on awareness of gender-specific experiences.

A call is warranted for increased education and training germane to male victimization in IPV, as well as bilateral situational violence, among professionals and direct service providers (Tsui et al. 2010). Public consciousness regarding bilateral partner violence and male victimization in heterosexual relationships must be raised (Williams,Ghandour, & Kub 2008). This may begin with familiar means of outreach, social campaigning, and education that have been advantageous in raising awareness of violence against women. Strides in research, awareness, and action for female victims and male perpetrators progressed thanks to gender-specific focus. For the benefit of all affected by this health threat, whether male, female, victims, initiators, or bidirectional agents, female perpetrators and male victims must be brought into the fold.

Informing Perpetrator Treatment

Evidence to date suggests interventions such as perpetrator treatment programs are quite ineffective (Babcock et al. 2004) and primarily focus on coercive control-type violence, insufficiently addressing female-to-male violence, including initiated, mutual, and retaliatory types (Straus 2014). Lack of emphasis on both partners' violent behavior, as well as experiences of abused males, undermines the nature of problems and hinders change (Whitaker et al. 2006).

Male and female partners are at higher risk of injury when mutual violence occurs (Whitaker et al. 2007). Accordingly, increased recognition of female perpetration of IPV would provide opportunity to highlight the risk of injury to female perpetrators and male victims, as well as the increased likelihood for female initiators to also become victims (Whitaker et al. 2007). Addressing bilateral violence, the most common form of IPV, is critical to intervention for the majority of couples affected by the problem (Dutton & Corvo 2006). Conflict resolution, emotion regulation, and communication styles must be cornerstones of IPV treatment. Gender-inclusive programs, such as proposed by Hamel (2014), employ interventions at the relational level, with both partners present, as opposed to the traditional single-partner format. Such approaches may hold greater promise for reducing bilateral violence.

Female perpetrators, like male perpetrators, are a heterogeneous population. Treatment protocols and curriculum should begin to reflect evidence-based typologies of female abusers. Generally violent women, as opposed to partner-only violent women, report more symptoms of trauma, are more likely to have been socialized to believe the use of violence is an acceptable conflict resolution tool, and are more likely to use instrumental violence as a means of control (Babcock, Miller,

& Siard 2003). The distinctions in attributes and behavioral patterns between partner-only violent and generally violent females reflect just one dimension of emerging typologies.

Programs should reflect data on both perpetration and victimization from female and male samples, rather than solely victimization, in order to address the dyadic, family system, and psychological dimensions of IPV relevant to treatment and prevention. Establishment of secure attachments, focus on social learning with respect to conflict resolution, and enhancement of emotional regulation are key facets to treatment. Additionally, adjunctive and integrated treatments for substance abuse and trauma have been shown to increase efficacy of IPV intervention (Stover, Meadows, & Kaufman 2009). These considerations stem from a base of evidence that indicates many overlapping psychosocial and behavioral risk factors for IPV involvement between genders.

Conclusion

Moving forward, a call is warranted for greater service accessibility, enhanced continuity between advocacy resources, and dedicated resources for male victims. The void of training and education pertaining to victimization of males must be filled with dissemination of evidence-based knowledge and competencies. The taboo of female perpetration must be set aside to make way for greater understanding of couple violence and informed action that benefits both genders. Public service, outreach, and media must begin presenting and acting in accordance with the full picture of IPV, and give concentration to contextualized typologies, instead of preserving a narrow and insufficiently representative narrative of the problem.

The relevance and complexity of gender for both perpetrators and victims, female and male, must be recognized in order for progress to impact all. Additional research is needed to examine perceptions of and responses to male victims and female perpetrators. All IPV subtypes must be considered in interdisciplinary efforts, with due attention afforded to all relevant factors, in order to address problems of the majority of couples with IPV issues and needs associated with patriarchal and non-patriarchal violence. Policy makers and justice officials must seek to balance gender symmetry and asymmetry in partner violence subtypes, acknowledging that patriarchy is critical in some but not all forms of partner violence.

In summary, the arguments contained in this article can be represented in a three-pillar framework, as seen in Fig. 1, with each primary goal comprised of multiple objectives. IPV-related psychological sciences, including those of neurobehavioral, clinical, dyadic (couples), and family systems disciplines, must be integrated into discourse, policy, study, and service on a larger scale than ever before. This is necessary for mitigating obstructive stigma, as well as the propagation of misinformation and incomplete information, regarding perpetration and victimization. Psychological science is also critical for effectiveness of IPV treatment programs and other services.

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