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Ending the Stigma of Male Domestic Violence Victims: Judgement Measures & Interviews

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Abstract. This protocol details a mixed methods approach to investigating public perceptions of male domestic violence and abuse (DVA) victims. Study one uses a quantitative methodology to investigate public perceptions of male, relative to female victims of DVA, with and without a '*justification*' being present for the abuse. Study two presents a novel comparative thematic analysis to explore different perceptions of DVA victims between males who have and those who have not self-identified as ever being in a DVA relationship.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Abuse, Perception, Protocol.

Introduction

Historically, the domestic violence and abuse (DVA) literature focuses on the experiences and treatment of female victims (Cook, 2009), which overlooks the scope and range of DVA (e.g., physical, sexual, and psychological) on males. In 2019/20, 3.6% of males reported DVA (Brooks, 2021), however, these figures likely mask the impact of potential barriers for males to report abuse. Such barriers can include personal deterrents (Hogan, 2016) and a lack of knowledge and awareness across males who may not realise they are being abused or have support available (Hine et al., 2020). There have been inconsistencies when males have reported the DVA, and despite some males reporting good experiences (Douglas & Hines, 2011), a larger proportion still report disbelief, injustice, and accusations (Hines et al., 2007). Negative experiences when males have reported DVA appear to be a consequence of a lack of awareness and appropriate training from professionals, whereby they do not feel equipped to deal with gender differences (Hogan et al., 2012). Additionally, an overall lack of understanding from the public has led to the belief that female perpetrated DVA is not as dangerous and only occurs as a form of self-defense (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Defrancisco et al., 2014) which prevents many males reporting the DVA (Hine et al., 2020). Based on the current literature, there is a clear need for contemporary research investigating public opinions of male, relative to female victims to reduce the stigmas and encourage males to report DVA without fear of shame, embarrassment, and revictimisation.

Purpose

The objectives of the present study are to examine differences in the public perceptions of male, relative to female victims of DVA as a function of the presence of a so-called '*justification*' of said abuse, and to qualitatively compare perceptions of male DVA victims from the position of male victims and non-victims using novel comparative thematic analysis procedures.

Objectives

1. Explore the impact that victim sex has on judgements of victims of DVA.
2. Delineate the impact that the inclusion of a '*justification*' (i.e., infidelity) has on judgements of victims of DVA.
3. Explore the impact that past victimisation has on the aforementioned experimental differences.
4. Qualitatively compare perceptions of male DVA victims from the position of male victims and non-victims.

Duration of the Study

Enrolment and data collection for the study is estimated to take approximately two months to complete. For each participant, study one is

expected to take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and study two is estimated to take between 45-60 minutes to complete.

Methods

Study Design

For study one, approximately 245 participants will complete a questionnaire at a single time point, which tasks them with making judgements (agreement with statements) on one of four vignettes depicting a scenario of domestic violence that differ as a function of victim sex (i.e., male, female) and with or without the inclusion of a '*justification*' for the abuse in the form of the presence of infidelity. Demographics (i.e., age and sex) and an optional self-report disclosure of whether they consider themselves to have ever been a victim of DVA will be obtained online using survey software Qualtrics.

For study two, ten participants will partake in online semi-structured interviews designed to explore their perceptions of male DVA victims, including the consequences of abuse, reasons for underreporting, and experiences when reporting the abuse. Participants will differ between whether they consider themselves to have ever been a victim of DVA or not, and themes of each set of interviews will be compared using novel comparative thematic analysis procedures.

Study Population, Selection Criteria, and Sample Size Justification

All participants will provide informed consent via Qualtrics before completion of the survey and/or the interview. Requirements for study one include being over the age of 18 years, living in the UK (to control for variation in legislation), and holding a sufficient understanding of the English language to accurately understand and response to the study vignettes. In addition to the above, the participants in study two will also have to be male (to achieve this study's objectives).

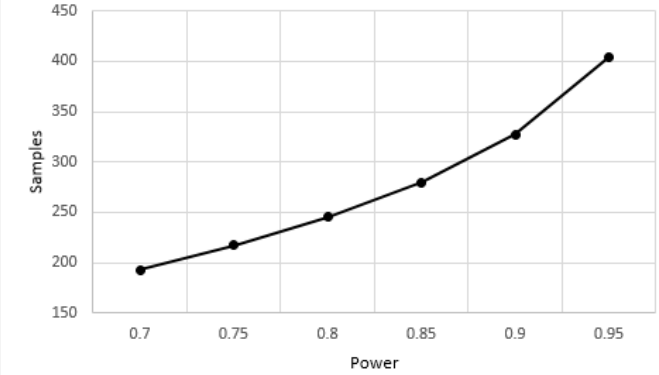
For study one, an a priori power analysis using G*Power (version 3.1) indicated a sample of 245 participants were required to ensure 80% power and to ensure observed effects are of practical importance. The range of sample sizes as a function of power and a visualization thereof are featured in Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively.

For study two, to reach data saturation, a total of ten participants will be obtained to coincide with similar studies in this field (Hine et al., 2020; Hogan et al., 2012).

Table 1. *Power analysis across power levels*

	Power (1 - β)					
	0.70	0.75	0.80	0.85	0.90	0.95
Sample Size	193	217	245	280	327	404

Figure 1.
Visualizations of power analysis across power levels



Recruitment Method

For study one, participants will be recruited through social media, the Mankind website (https://www.mankind.org.uk) as well as programme pages and in-house recruitment schemes at the University of Derby. This allows for a diverse group of individuals, varying in age, gender and victimisation to coincide with covariates. Male participants will be given the option (using sex-targeted question functionality within the Qualtrics survey software) to provide an email address if they want to learn more about and/or take part in study two. Participants will not be compensated for their time.

Data Collection and Study Schedule

Data will be collected at a single time point with all data expected to be collected within a period of two months. Participants will first be provided with study information and asked to affirm their consent prior to participation (this will be achieved through an online survey and via button press). For study one, participants will then be asked to provide a unique identification code (comprised of the last 3 digits of their telephone number and the last 3 letters of their name) in case of data withdrawal, and demographic questions (i.e., age and sex). Subsequent pages will contain one of four scenarios depicting a short narrative (i.e., a vignette) featuring DVA followed by judgement measures using a vignette-response judgement scale adapted from Bothamley and Tully (2018). For study two, participants will be provided with study information and asked to affirm

their consent prior to taking part in an online interview lasting up to 60 minutes in length. To allow for anonymity, participants will not be required to have their cameras turned on during the interviews, though they can if they wish. After both study one and study two, participants will be asked to re-affirm their consent in line with BPS guidance for internet mediated research (BPS, 2021) and will be provided with debrief information. Participants will be informed they have 14 days to withdraw their data by providing their unique ID code. Data will be maintained for a minimum of 7 years in line with GDPR guidance, but participants will be informed that in line with common practices for open and replicable science, data might be kept indefinitely in a fully anonymised form. All identifiable data will be removed, as will all data held within Qualtrics survey software after it has been downloaded and securely backed up on the institution's OneDrive cloud system. Where necessary, quotes used will be paraphrased if they include any data which is deemed to be traceable to any given participant. Should participants wish to withdraw their data during participation or within 14 days following participation, this data will also be permanently destroyed, although consent forms will be kept for auditing reasons.

Expected Outcomes

For study one, four hypotheses are present. Firstly, the research team expects participants to provide more supporting judgements of female DVA victims compared to males. Secondly, it is hypothesized that participants will provide harsher judgements for both genders when there is the inclusion of a '*justification'*. Next, it is expected that participants will have harsher judgements towards males when there is a *'justification'*. Finally, it is hypothesized that females and those with past victimisation will produce more supportive judgements of male and female victims.

For study two, the research team expects males to present similar opinions to those presented by professionals, namely, a lack of knowledge surrounding support available for male DVA victims (Hogan et al., 2012). It is expected that this lack of knowledge will extend to male DVA victims but with the addition of uncertainty regarding whether their own abuse warrants support as previous research states male victims have a hard time recognising DVA when it is not of a physical nature (Hines & Douglas, 2011).

Adverse Events (AEs)

There is no expectation of any adverse effects on participants as a result of this study. However, the research team acknowledges that this research involves sensitive topics. As such, participants will be advised of the nature of this study prior to participation and will be advised to consider whether they take part or not based on this. Moreover, both prior to and after participation, participants will be signposted to appropriate helplines and services (e.g., Askmarc (https://www.mankind.org.uk) and MIND (https://www.mind.org.uk)). These services are both UK-focused, and so

the research team suggests readers select suitable services that reflect their region when conducting research using this protocol.

Withdrawals

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at several time points throughout the study. Participants can withdraw from study one during participation (by closing their web browser or not re-consenting at the end) or after taking part in the study by emailing the primary researcher using their unique ID code. Participation in this study will be automatically terminated (via Qualtrics) should they decline to give consent. For study two, participants will be asked at the beginning and end of interviews if they consent for their data to be used and will be informed of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview or up to 14 days post-interview. They can also opt to omit any of the data they have provided from the analysis. Importantly, participants will not be expected or asked to provide a reason for withdrawal to remove any barriers for them doing so.

Handling of Participant Withdrawal

As previously stated, participants can withdraw at any time during the study or up to 14 days following participation. Participants who withdraw from the study will not be replaced providing the study sample does not fall under the requirements to ensure statistical power.

Premature Termination or Suspension of Study

If there is a sufficient and reasonable cause, the study may be terminated or suspended. In such instances, the primary researcher will notify the University of Derby, College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care Research Ethics Committee providing an explanation for this action, such as the identification of AEs. The study may continue once the research team and research ethics committee are satisfied that any concerns have been addressed.

Statistical Analysis Plan

All analyses for this study have been determined a priori. For study one, after cleaning the final dataset and checking parametric assumptions with conducting an ANCOVA, we will report descriptive statistics, as well as bivariate correlations between participant age and sex, as well as history of DVA victimisation (0 = no, 1 = yes), and aggregated judgement score. Next, a 2x2 between group ANCOVA will be conducted whereby the first IV is victim sex (male, female), the second IV is presence of a '*justification*' within the vignette (no infidelity, infidelity), the covariate is whether the participant considers themselves to have ever been a victim of DVA (0 = no, 1 = yes), and the DV is judgement score. We will calculate effect sizes and publish an open data set for scrutiny and replication.

Qualitative Analysis

For study two, comparative deductive thematic analysis will be conducted comparing perceptions of male DVA victims from the position of male victims and non-victims. An epistemological perspective of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962) will be adopted as participants will respond to questions based on what they have learnt through social interactions and their interpretation and understanding of the interaction (as a victim, from other victims, or general observations made within society). By definition, following data coding, preconceived themes will be developed prior to immersion in the dataset from the online interviews, informed by theory and existing research. The two groups of interviewees (male victims of DVA and male non-victims of DVA; n = 10) will be directly compared to one another drawing from the six-step thematic analysis process defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), inspired by the work of Keenan et al. (2021). The diverging and converging themes between the two groups will be compared under the overarching theme of justification, in conjunction with the quantitative arm of the research.

Assessment of Safety

This study will follow the standard definition of AEs and report any AEs to the University of Derby, College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care Research Ethics Committee for up to 14 days after the final participant has completed the study. Should any AEs be identified, the primary research will assign a level of severity to it and assess the likelihood that the AE is due to study protocols. A risk assessment was completed prior to ethical approval, no risks were moderate or severe. Psychological distress to participants was identified as a possible risk, but it was deemed mild given the measures put in place prior to participation. Measures include informing participants of the study's nature and giving them the opportunity to withdraw, and signposting participants to relevant services.

Data Monitoring

The study will abide by the standards and requirements advised by the University of Derby, Good Clinical Practice, GDPR, and British Psychological Society. Due to data collection being anonymous, it will not be possible to follow-up on incomplete data or verify the accuracy of the data provided. However, the information provided to participants prior to participation aims to prevent error by providing clear instructions and a ‘request response’ function to encourage participants to complete all sections of the questionnaire; to comply with ethical guidelines, participants can skip questions if they do not wish to answer.

Data Handling and Record Keeping

For study one, data will be collected and maintained on Qualtrics until the required sample size has been achieved. Data will then be exported to an SPSS file format, backed-up, and deleted from Qualtrics. No

identifying data will be obtained from participants and unique ID codes will be permanently deleted 14 days after the final participant completes the study. Anonymised data will be used for analysis.

For study two, participants email addresses will be stored on OneDrive separately from transcripts and deleted 14 days following participation. Participants will be allocated pseudonyms so that they are not identifiable from their responses during the publication process.

Research Ethics Committee

The protocol, associated documents, questionnaire, and interview questions will be submitted to the University of Derby, College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care Research Ethics Committee for review, feedback, and approval. Approval is required prior to any participation. Any amendments to the protocol will be subject to further review and approval by the ethics committee before any changes are implemented. Given data is anonymous, any data collected prior to such amendments will be treated in accordance with the procedures for which consent was obtained.

Consent Process

After being provided with information about the study via Qualtrics (including inclusion criteria, process of withdrawal, data management, and contact details of the research team and services), participants will be provided with a consent form. Participants must affirm their consent to continue, if they fail to consent, Qualtrics will end their participation and thank them for their time. Participants will not be expected to sign, date, or provide any identifiable information. Following participation, participants will be asked to re-consent to abide by guidelines set by the BPS (2021). For study two, verbal consent will be obtained prior to and after interview questions.

Protocol Deviation

Any protocol deviations from the ethically approved study will be reported to the University of Derby, College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care Research Ethics Committee in writing at the first available opportunity. Protocol deviations may be a consequence of the research team or participants; however, deviations are unlikely given the nature of the study.

Publication and Data Sharing Policy

The research team intends to publish the findings of this study in written and verbal form. The research team may also use the findings of this study as a guide for future research. At all stages, participants will remain anonymous and unique ID codes (study one) and email addresses (study two) will be deleted 14 days after the last participant has completed the study.

Study Personnel and Roles

Table 2 documents the members of the research team and their responsibilities throughout this project.

Table 2

Outline of research team personnel, role, and responsibilities

Personnel	Role	Responsibilities
Paige Ambrozewicz	Primary Researcher	Study design; data collection; data analysis; manuscript writing
Courtney Hammond	Researcher	Study two data analysis; manuscript editing
Dr Dean Fido	Principle Investigator	Supervision and mentoring; data analysis; manuscript writing

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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