‘But she can’t really hurt him though, can she?’: Investigating variations in judgements towards domestic violence scenarios varying by perpetrator and victim gender, and type of abuse

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What does Domestic Violence look like?
Background

• “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

  • Psychological
  • Physical
  • Sexual
  • Financial
  • Emotional”

Background

• ONS CSEW Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences 2014/15
  • 27.1% of women (4.5m) and 13.2% (2.2m) of men say they have been a victim of domestic abuse since they were 16
  • 1/4 women and 1/6 men will suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime
  • Year ending March 2015 1.3 million women (8.2%) and 600,000 men (4%) had experienced domestic abuse
  • 1.1m women and 500k men suffered partner abuse during this time period
Background

• **Person schemas**
  • Best friend

• **Role schemas**
  • Police officer

• **Scripts**
  • Events

• **Self-schemas**
  • About yourself
Background

• Sandra Bem, 1981
  • Networks of information regarding gender
  • Own-sex and Other-sex schemas
  • Information comes from a number of sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculinity (Men)</th>
<th>Femininity (Women)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Non-Aggressive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Interdependent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Passive</td>
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<td>Stoic &amp; Unemotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>Caring/Nurturing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexually Dominant</td>
<td>Sexually Submissive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perpetrators</td>
<td>Victims</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions & Experiences

• Dr. Anna Shum-Pearce – Clinical Psychologist – University of Auckland, NZ (2015)
  • Interviewed 9 male victims of domestic abuse
    • Invisibility
    • Not viewed as a serious issue
    • Real men don’t seek help
    • Risk as being labelled as the abuser
    • Pretend to be OK
    • Lack of social support
Perceptions & Experiences

- Dr. Anna Shum-Pearce – Clinical Psychologist – University of Auckland, NZ
  - Focus Groups with 19 young adults
    - **Men as powerful**
      - In control of the situation
      - Allowing it
      - Can’t be manipulated
      - Could leave easily
    - **Women as incapable of harm**
  
- Lack of support from social network and services (Tsui et al, 2010; Tsui, 2014)
Perceptions & Experiences

- Dr. Jessica McCarrick – Teeside University (2016)
  - Guilty Until Proven Innocent
  - Masculine Identity
  - The Pressure Cooker: Negative Psychological Impact
  - Light at the End of the Tunnel
Perceptions & Experiences

• Male victims report poor satisfaction with care from officers (Buzawa & Austin, 1993)

• Female perpetrators are more likely to receive lower sentences or have their cases dismissed (Henning & Feder, 2005)

• Male victims are more likely to be blamed for their victimization than female victims (Stewart & Maddren, 1997)

• Male victims believe that officers won’t be able to help to a greater extent than female ones (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013)

• Prejudice against men is extreme, and has link to underreporting (George, 2007), and more men being put into the system if counter charges are made

• The same actions are judged as actionable when performed by men as opposed to women (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005)

• Male victims are sometimes completely ignore by police and other services (George & Yarwood, 2004)

• Lack of funding for male services (Pizzey, 2000)
Perceptions & Experiences

  - Severity
  - Resolution
  - Action by Police
  - Responsibility
  - Sentencing

  - Just as common in these relationships
  - Chronically misunderstood
  - Chronically under investigated (heterosexism)
  - Influenced by Gendered Beliefs
  - Perceived as less serious
Perceptions & Experiences

• Lack of research exploring perceptions based on the type of abuse

• Capezza & Arriaga, 2008
  • More negative perceptions of abuse involving physical as opposed to psychological aggression

• This is surprising considering the serious impact of psychological aggression (Corker et al., 2002; Johnson, 1995) and that emotional abuse is more difficult to cope with (Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991)

• Furthermore, studies suggest that tolerance and acceptance of psychological then allows for physical abuse to develop (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008)

• Even less is known about financial abuse...
The Present Study

• Aimed to examine the influence of abuse type and perpetrator-victim pairing on judgements of domestic abuse

• H1: Physical abuse would be judged differently to psychological and financial abuse across all questions

• H2: Scenarios involving male perpetrators and female victims (M-F) would be judged differently to those involving female perpetrators and male victims (F-M) and homosexual pairings (M-M and F-F)

• Interactions between factors would also be examined
Methods

• Design
  • Two independent variables – Abuse Type (Physical, Psychological/Emotional, Financial), Scenario (M-M, M-F, F-M, F-F)
  • Twenty-three dependent variables - Questions on seriousness, humour, reponsibility etc.

• Participants
  • 242 undergraduates ($M = 22.84$, min = 18, max = 54, 137 women)
  • 102 were third-year undergraduates
  • 53 (21% reported previous history of abuse)
  • 63% were White, 19% were Black
Methods

• Materials
  • Vignettes were created depicting an incident of domestic violence
  • These varied on perpetrator gender, victim gender, and type of abuse

• Please read the following account of a dispute involving a romantically involved couple, Tom, a 26-year old male, and Anna, a 26-year old female. They have been together for approximately two years. They both weigh roughly 11 stone, are both around 5 foot 10 inches tall, and both have full-time jobs.

• One night, Anna returns home late after stopping off at a local bar after work and drinking with friends. Tom is suspicious of Anna, and begins yelling at her and accusing her of being unfaithful. Anna says that Tom is being stupid, that she hasn’t been unfaithful, and that she is tired and wants to go to bed. Tom insists that they continue to talk, again accusing Anna of being more interested in her friends than in him. As the argument escalates, Anna decides she has had enough and goes to leave the room. Tom grabs Anna by the shoulder to stop her leaving. Anna pushes Tom off and heads for the bedroom. Tom grabs Anna again, and holds her tightly enough on the arms to leave bruises. When Anna struggles, Tom pushes Anna violently into the door frame of the bedroom. Anna hits her face on the door frame and stumbles into the bedroom. Anna shuts the door, and Tom stays in the main room.

• Please now answer the questions below to the best of your ability.
Methods

- Questions
  - Seriousness
  - Humorous
  - Overhead – Likely to intervene
  - How much help should police give
  - Sorry for victim
  - Sorry for perpetrator
  - Responsibility – victim and perpetrator
  - Reasonability of action – victim and perpetrator
  - Justified in action – victim and perpetrator

- Capable of serious injury
- Seriousness of injury
- Aggression of victim and perpetrator in daily life
- Closeness of couple
- Couple stay together
- Future domestic problem
- Future perpetrator and victim abuse in new relationships
- Severity of punishment
- Also - appropriateness of intervention
Results

• Very few!

• Seriousness
  • Borderline significance ($p = .56$) for Scenario
  • 5.09 (M-F) and 4.94 (F-F) vs. 4.57 (M-M) and 4.48 (F-M)

• Overheard
  • Abuse Type ($p < 0.05$)
  • 4.09 (Physical) vs. 3.63 (Psychological) and 3.41 (Financial)

• Police Help
  • Abuse Type ($p < 0.001$)
  • 3.62 (Physical) vs. 2.73 (Psychological) and 2.91 (Financial)
Results

• Capable Harm
  • Abuse Type (p < 0.001)
  • 5.58 (Physical) vs. 4.58 (Psychological) and 4.69 (Financial)

• Seriousness of Injury
  • Abuse Type (p < 0.001)
  • 4.37 (Physical) vs. 3.77 (Psychological) and 3.30 (Financial)

• Appropriateness of Intervention by police
  • p < 0.001
  • 6.16 (M-F) vs. 6.04 (M-M), 6.03 (F-M), 6.00 (F-F)
Discussion

• Whilst some results suggest differences in judgements of scenarios involving different gender perpetrators and victims (seriousness)

• Differences were mainly found for type of abuse

• Therefore doesn’t support previous work on gender

• But does support previous work on type of abuse
Discussion

• This could suggest a change in attitudes towards domestic violence occurring towards traditionally ‘overlooked’ victims

• Could this be a result of increased public discourse, advocacy work, awareness campaigns?

• However, this is largely not supported by colloquial evidence from practitioners etc.

• Attitude change is usually not this quick, especially when intertwined with such deeply ingrained gender beliefs
Discussion

**Limitations**

- Undergraduate population
- Large proportion of third years – many from psychology course with options such as Gender Psychology and Violent Relationships
- 20% of sample reported experiencing previous abuse
- Higher numbers of participants may strengthen some results
- Similar pitfalls to other studies of this nature – presents abuse as one-time, with distinct victim and perpetrator
Conclusion

• Results from this study suggest that abuse type is more influential than the gender of perpetrator or victim in influencing judgements of DV

• This is surprising, and further research is needed to confirm these findings and explore this area further

• Important considerations include representative samples, accurate presentation of abuse, and larger sample sizes

• Further mixed-methods work is also called for
Thank you! Any Questions?

• **Ben.Hine@uwl.ac.uk**

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