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ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE ON MALE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse, battering or intimate partner violence occurs between people in an intimate relationship. Domestic violence against men can take many forms, including emotional, sexual and physical abuse, and threats of abuse. The fact that males can be the victims of domestic violence is increasingly recognized as a topic worthy of scholarly and social scrutiny. Females may engage in both emotional and physical abuse of their male partners. This article evaluated the empirical research that examined the impact of intimate partner violence on male victims from a conflict theoretical perspective.

Keywords: Intimate Partner, Male victims, Emotional and physical abuse.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic or intimate partner violence has been the ugly side of every relationship all over the world and the United States in particular. In the early 1970s, the issue of domestic violence against women was brought to the attention of the general public and the criminal justice system in the United States by various feminist groups through protests to register their displeasure and to seek for protection from the law (Carney, Buttell, and Dutton, 2007). Given the fact that a vast majority of those who report incidents of domestic violence are women, men have also been found to be victims of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. However, the criminal justice system has continued to limit and ignore incidents of male victims of intimate partner violence for the simple fact that the motives for intimate partner violence against men by women may differ from those of abuse against women by men, and that women suffer more severe pain and injuries than men (Menard, Anderson, and Godboldt, 2009). It is important to know that intimate partner violence against a man or a woman has consequences and impacts that should warrant attention from the criminal justice system. When we ignore male victims of intimate partner violence, we ignore their children, who continue to be damaged by witnessing the violence irrespective of how severe it is (Barber, 2008). The focus of this paper is to discuss and examine male victims of intimate partner violence experiences from a theoretical point of view,

as well as evaluate its impact through the lenses of empirical researches.

Male Victim's Experience

For too long, incidents of intimate partner violence have been framed exclusively as female issues (Hines, 2007). Male victims are often overlooked (Hines, 2007). A 2007 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that men account for about 15 % of the victims of intimate partner violence (Maiuro and Eberle, 2008). The report also noted that each year, approximately 1,181 women and 329 men are victims of intimate partner violence and homicides in the United States. Menard *et al*, (2009) noted that about 3.8 women and 1.3 men per 1,000 are victims of intimate partner violence each year, costing tax payers approximately \$5.8 billion to prosecute offenders, shelter victims, pay hospital cost for reported injuries, for prison maintenance, and phone calls (hotlines) for both men and women victims. In time past, intimate partner violence was seen as a personal and family affairs rather than a social problem that could be resolved amicably prompting police departments to treat these disturbances with less seriousness (West, 2008). The reverse is the case today as domestic violence against partners is seen not only as a social problem but also as a crime (Allen-Collinson, 2009). It is important to note that victims of intimate partner violence, whether male or female, are reluctant to report their abuses to law enforcement agency due to the humiliation, embarrassment, and culpability associated with the abuse in

the society (Graham-Kevan, 2007). Moreover, few men report their abuses to the police because of fear of disbelief and lack of a support system, couple with the fact that violence towards women has been ignored for too long. And so when male victims claim they are being abused, the society finds it hard to believe and address it as a serious issue. In addition to the above reasons, men, even when they are violated and hit by women partners in front of others can often hide their abuse by saying they would never retaliate or hit a woman. Another reason why male victims of intimate partner violence will not report such abuse to the police authority is the fact that because many crime studies are done over the telephone where male victims are less likely to respond like their female counterpart when told they are responding to a crime survey, especially, since intimate partner violence have made women more aware of this problem as a crime (Hirschel, Buzawa, Pattavina, and Faggiani, 2007). The experiences of male victims of domestic abuse know no bound. The likelihood of the police to arrest a man than a woman when responding to a domestic dispute call, coupled with lobbying by women's group, and the police training manuals bias that always refers to the victim as "she" or "her" and the offender as "he" or "him" contribute to why male victims do not report such abuses (Hines, Brown, and Dunning, 2007).

Perhaps, the following introduction from a leading domestic violence website will lend credence to the gender bias of the criminal justice system, media, and the society have for male victims of domestic violence:

Do you think your husband or boyfriend is abusive?, or you are suspecting that someone you know is in an abusive relationship, review the red flags of domestic violence and abuse listed in this article. Domestic or spousal abuse, occurs when one person in a marriage or an intimate relationship tries to dominate and control the other person. An abuser doesn't "play fair". He uses fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear you down and gain complete power over you. He may threaten and hurt you, or hurt those around you. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is called domestic violence.

Explicit in the article above is the continuous usage of gender biased language "He" that sees the perpetrators of domestic violence as men and victims as women, another reason why male intimate partners in a domestic violence fail to report the abuse to law enforcement agency. Other reason for the underreporting of intimate partner violence against male victims has to do with the fact that in the event of any abuse, male victims prefer not to press formal charges against his female assailant. Many male victims would rather handle the issue privately without involving law enforcement or social services agencies because once the incident becomes public knowledge, the victim could face mockery and ridicule from other male relatives, friends, co-workers, especially in a culture where male masculinity and machismo is emphasized and strongly valued (Archer and Benson, 2008). The final other experiences of male victims of domestic and intimate partner violence for not reporting the incident to the police authority has to do with the fact that in many domestic violence situations, the responding police officers are often mandated by law to arrest at least one of the combatants. One

of the criteria for the arrest or who gets arrested is the presence of physical injuries. In most cases involving domestic violence against men, the female perpetrator may actually have more physical injuries than the male victim. The implication of this is that the male victim gets arrested and charged as the aggressor even when the woman is the actual aggressor (Hines, Douglass, and Mahmood, 2010). A woman may injure a man as a result of taking defensive measures, but they are rarely viewed by law enforcement officers as the instigators or aggressors (Catalano, 2007). Oftentimes the officers will determine the incident involved mutual combat, but the male will still be removed from the home in order to restore order in the home.

It is entirely possible that incidents of domestic violence against men may be higher than raw statistics would suggest, but this would still suggest only 20% or so of all acts of domestic violence have been committed against men (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). Social position that men have within the society is one of the premise the police is basing their responses on to intimate partner violence. For example, a study by Hines *et al.* (2007) found that police have threatened 47 % of male victims of intimate partner violence with arrest. The study also found that the police ignored 35 % of male victims and that 21 % were actually arrested in place of the female offenders. This is due to the belief that a woman could not have and cannot be the aggressor in any intimate partner violence because it is assumed that the man must have initiated the process of attacking the woman and the woman acting in self-defense, further complicating the experiences of male victims of intimate partner violence (Campbell, 2007).

Theoretical Perspectives

A plethora of research and huge debate has been generated by the study of intimate partner violence (Hines *et al.*, 2011; West, 2008; Akers and Sellers, 2009). Social ideology and attitudes towards research in this area have undergone significant change in recent years. Currently, three main theoretical perspectives, i.e., Akers and Sellers (2009) Social learning theory, the Family violence theory perspectives, and the Feminist theory perspectives can be used to explain the many sociological phenomena and literatures surrounding the dominance of intimate partner violence. According to Akers and Sellers (2009) Social learning theory, domestic violence is not connected to a chemical imbalance, nor can it be blamed totally on alcohol, drugs, depression, or a host of other similar characteristics. Those who have witnessed domestic violence in the past are likely to be involved in future acts of domestic violence. The first concept of Akers and Sellers (2009) Social learning theory has to do with differential association, a process whereby one is exposed to normative definitions unfavorable or favorable to law abiding or illegal behavior (Ghahari, Mazandarani, Khalilian and Zarghami, 2008). The second concept explains how an individual develops his or her own meanings to a specific behavior. Third concept is the differential reinforcement which is refers to as the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments that follow or are consequences of behavior. The fourth and final concept in Akers and Sellers (2009) Social learning theory is imitation, referred to as the engagement in behavior after the observation of similar behavior in others, are relevant in explaining

domestic and intimate partner violence. Prior exposure to violence is important in understanding offenders or victim's social learning processes. West (2008) supports this view. West (2008) conducted a study to assess a family's history of violence. She concluded that prior exposure to violence such as living in a high crime areas may elevate the effects of a crisis, including intimate partner violence.

The second theoretical perspective that is relevant in explaining domestic violence is the Family Violence Theory (West, 2010). Advocates of the family violence perspectives are of the view that both men and women can be both perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence (Hines, 2007; Bonomi, 2007). Family violence theorists believe that intimate partner violence is seen to occur in individuals who grew up in families where inter-parental violence and child abuse is the order of the day, resulting in the acceptance and tolerance of violence in the family (Muftic, Bouffard, and Bouffard, 2007). Using the Conflict Tactical Scale (CTS), a self-report inventory that measures the frequency and presence of aggressive behaviors to measure intimate partner violence, family violence researchers argued that many family conflicts, including the intimate partner violence results from an individual's need to maintain, obtain, and control a relationship. The report adds that the motivating factors underlying the abuser's behavior is the power and control he or she is able to exert over their partners or members of the family (Byrne, 2010). The threats, use of force, and violent behaviors from the aggressor is meant to prevent the victim or the less powerful partner from engaging in behaviors that the controlling individual does not want, while at the same time establishing a demand for desirable behaviors to occur (Muftic *et al*, 2007; West, 2010). This is why supporters of the family violence perspectives have argued for an increased resource for male victims of intimate partner violence and the prevention of female perpetrated violence against intimate partners.

The third theoretical perspective used in explaining intimate partner violence is the Feminist theory. Supporters of the feminist perspective based their arguments on the fact that intimate partner violence is gendered related and should be approached as a social problem for women (Hines, 2007). The four common strains postulated by feminist theorists for understanding intimate partner violence are that; intimate partner abuse is predictable, normal, and a common occurrence in the family; that women's experiences are often seen as inferior because of the dominance and influences of men in all aspects of their lives; that men, as the dominant class have access to both material and symbolic resources, thereby seeing women as devalued and inferior; and finally that the feminist perspective is dedicated to the advocacy for women (Dutton, 2007). Feminists' theorists and researchers are primarily interested in exposing gender inequalities, empowering women, and advocating social change (Ackard, 2007). The feminist perspective of intimate partner violence view sexism and female inequality in a male dominated society as the root cause of intimate partner violence against males (Dutton, 2007). In contrast, to explaining why some partners are violent and controlling, others are controlled by fears of punishment, as well their desire to keep their family intact as the reason for their non-violent approach to their partners (Ackard, 2007). In

addition, men who value attachment to their homes work, and community may view the threat of arrest for intimate partner abuse as a significant reason from engaging in such behavior (Hines, 2007).

Empirical Research on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Male Victims

Intimate partner violence (IPV), which includes psychological, physical, and sexual maltreatment of one partner against another, is a national health and social problem affecting thousands of individuals and families yearly (Center for Disease Control, 2007). Slowly and gradually been taken into consideration by scholars, the justice system, and the public at large is the impact of intimate partner violence on male victims. Empirical researches abound to support how Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has impacted male victims of intimate partner violence (Catalano, 2007; Hines, 2007; Hines and Douglass, 2011). In their empirical research titled "Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Men Who Sustain Intimate Partner Violence," Denise Hines, a research assistant at Clark University and Emily Douglass, also an assistant researcher at Bridgewater State University, conducted a research, the first to link Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to men who seek help after being abused by their female partners. Hines and Douglass (2010) looked at two independent sample groups of 822 men between the ages of 18 and 59. The first sample was composed of 302 men who had sought professional help after being battered and abused by their female partners whom the authors called "intimate terrorism." The second sample composed of 520 men that were randomly recruited in a national phone survey in which they were asked about their relationships. Findings from the study showed that 16 % of the victims agreed they had sustained minor acts of psychological and physical abuse during arguments with their female partners. The authors' referred to this type of abuse as "common couple violence (CCV). A link was established between abuse and post-traumatic stress symptoms in both groups of men by the researchers.

Basile (2005) examined court responses to similar intimate partner violence allegations made by both female and male victims. The study compared and contrasted court responses to these allegations across gender boundaries. He hypothesized that the courts are not immune from social norms and that despite having neutral language within the law, the law responds differently to male and female requests for protection. Findings from the study showed that in one court setting, male victims of intimate partner violence were not given the same protection as female victims of intimate partner violence. Basile (2005) concluded that the male victim of intimate partner violence was treated unfairly even though both male and female plaintiffs were victimized equally by their opposite gender defendants. In a similar study, Henning, Renauer, and Holdford (2006) had result similar to those of Basile (2005) within their study. They found that almost one-half (47 %) of the cases involving women arrest for domestic violence against a male intimate partner was rejected by prosecutors, and another 16 % had been dismissed by a judge. Factors such as defendant's prior criminal arrests, victim injury, use of weapons and most important, the type of arrest, all affected prosecutor's decisions in these cases. The result

also showed that female defendants arrested for offending against a male intimate partner were treated more leniently than male defendants arrested for intimate partner offenses involving other types of relationship.

The utilization of victim precipitation in understanding the contextual features of police response and intimate partner violence was examined by (Muftie *et al.*, 2007). The researchers found a nexus between the perpetrators, incident characteristics, the intimate partner violence victim, and victim precipitation using bivariate cross tabs as all of the variables within the study are categorical. The study revealed that few characteristics had significance that is related to victim precipitation. They also compared male and female intimate partner violence arrestees and found significant differences in measuring prior domestic violence towards an intimate partner. The researchers agreed with the self – defence argument of why a female perpetrator would abuse their male intimate partner. Finally, Carney, Buttell, and Dutton (2007) research found a Law Enforcement Protection legislation that allowed police who respond to intimate partner violence calls to arrest the abuser and press charges themselves resulting in a substantial increase in the number of intimate partner violence arrests and convictions. This legislation has resulted in a significant number of women being arrested and prosecuted for domestic violence offenses, a situation that was not the original intent of the legislation.

Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Male Victims

Men who are victimized in a violent relationship can have multiple problems that are a direct result of such abuse (Catalano, 2007). Some possible impacts of intimate partner violence on male victims are; control, dependency, and isolation. Others include guilt, shame, helplessness, hopelessness, despair, and responsibility (Ackard, 2007; Barber, 2008 and Campbell, 2007). Low self-esteem, health and economic impact, as well as loss of jobs, and impact on children who are exposed to the violence are some of the other impacts of intimate partner violence on male victims (Hines and Douglass, 2010; McDonald, Jouriles, Tart, and Minze, 2009; Dutton, 2007).

Types of Violence in Intimate Relationships

Intimate partner violence types have been categorized into four; as intimate terrorism, situational couple violence, violent resistance, and mutual violence control (Hines and Douglas, 2011).

Intimate Terrorism: Intimate terrorism is a type of domestic violence and abuse in which one partner seeks to control the other by inflicting terror through physical violence, as well as through manipulation, intimidation, isolation, and ongoing psychological abuse (Hines and Douglas, 2011). The typology of intimate partner terrorism as postulated by Johnson, cited in (Hines and Douglas, 2007) portrays men as the perpetrators of domestic violence. In contrast, research predating Johnson's claim demonstrates that women also engage in intimate terrorism at a rate too higher than Johnson to have ignored (see Graham-Kevan, 2007). Research has also found that 60% of men and 59 % of women in a nationwide Canadian study were

victims of intimate terrorism (Hines, Brown and Dunning, 2007).

Situational Couple Violence: This is the most common type of domestic violence in that it occurs every day between the intimate partners in the form of heated arguments in which one partner escalates the incident into a violent one by using physical force (Archer and Benson, 2008). Situational couple violence can range from mere argument to severe and life threatening situations.

Violent Resistant: The term used to describe what happens when the victim of intimate terrorism retaliates against the primary aggressor is violent resistant (Johnson, 2005). Interestingly, this response to domestic violence contradicts the theory of learned helplessness in Battered Women's Syndrome (Johnson, 2005).

Mutual Violent Control: According to Johnson (2005) mutual violent control comes into play when both partners in the intimate relationship struggle to control each other with each exerting similar amount of violence on each other in an ongoing struggle. According to Hines *et al.* (2010), in intimate partner violence, 50 % comes from husbands and the other 50 % comes from the wives.

Women's Motivation for Battering Men

It has been consistently shown in researches that women are motivated differently than men to commit acts of violence (Hines, 2007). According to Hines (2007) women have claimed to engage in domestic violence against men for the following reasons; self-defense, retaliation, expression of anger, coercion, control, and power. Another motivation for committing violence against men is to prevent men from abusing them again in the future.

Self-Defense Motivation: Self –defense motive is the most common explanation for why women engage in violence against their male partners. It constitutes fighting back at the abuser to defend one's self from psychological and physical harm. A study by Kernsmith (2006) analyzed the differences between female and male motivation for using violence in their relationships in order to understand gender differences. Finding revealed that for females' partners, it is self-defense against their partners in order to get back at them for past abuses. For males, violence against their partners is motivated by control. Similarly, a 2007 statistics from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates a high report of women who took protective action by physically attacking their abusive partners or by verbally attacking them.

Power and Control Motivation: Recent research points to the fact though women have been known to control their partners emotionally (Hines, 2007); there are many studies that demonstrate that women can commit physical assault against their partners as a means to control as well (Hines, Brown, and Dunning, 2007). A study conducted by Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men revealed that 95 % of victimized men who called the helpline indicated that they have suffered control from their partners (Hines, *et al.*, 2007). The one hundred and ninety male callers from across the nation used in this study admitted to have been physically abused in order to control

and render them powerless. According to the study, the primary type of control experienced by men was in the form threats such as threatening to take away their children and to call the police falsely represented 77.6 % of the sample (Hines *et al* 2007). The second type of control that men experienced in the study was emotional control. About 74.1 % of the sample reported that they were constantly humiliated and ridiculed in front of others by their partners. The third type of control experienced by the callers as reported in the study was intimidation. About 63.3% indicated that they were intimidated by the fact that their partners would show them weapons and destroy their belongings (Hines *et al*, 2007).

Criminal Justice System's Response and Unfairness to Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

The criminal Justice system response to intimate partner violence is a relatively recent phenomenon (Byrne, 2010). The justice system began to pay attention to the issue of intimate partner violence as they affect women in the early 1970s (Byrne, 2010). The system in general believed that domestic violence is a family affair that can be better resolved by the partners themselves or their families. As a result, the issue was not taken seriously. The issue of battered men was worse as it barely received attention from the justice system and scholars (Byrne, 2010). However, in the course of time, new laws began to be made to deal with the increasing cases of domestic abuses across the nation (Dutton, 2007). Even though there are laws for domestic violence, police officers and judges still rely on their discretion when they know that a relationship exists between the offender and the victim (Hines and Douglas, 2011). The justice system in the United States has operated under patriarchal ideologies since its inception, thus, impacting the way the system treats domestic violence (Dutton, 2007). Policies, legislation, bureaucratic process, and treatment programs for domestic violence have been crafted under the notion that men are the aggressors in a domestic violence (West, 2010). A gender disparity sentencing towards battered men report published in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Justice revealed that men might be unfairly treated by the justice system as they go to trial when they are convicted for murdering their spouse in a domestic violence incident (West, 2010). In time past, males were given harsher and disproportionate longer prison sentencing than females when convicted of killing a spouse resulting in an average sentence of 17.5 years in prison for killing of wives in comparison to an average of 6.2 years in prison for women who killed their husbands (Hines, 2007). Moreover, a woman's chance of going to prison for killing her husband was significantly less than the likelihood of a man going to prison for killing his wife because female offender were more likely to have their cases dismissed, were more likely to be acquitted, and, if convicted were more likely to be sentenced to probation (West, 2008).

Discussions and Policy Implications

This paper explored male victims of intimate partner violence, their experiences with their female aggressors, as well as the unfairness of the society and the justice system towards them. The paper also examined some empirical researches of the impact of intimate partner violence on male victims and some of the reasons women batter men. It is obvious that gender stereotypes have created real gender differences in the ways in

which victims of domestic violence are treated by society and the justice system, including the police, attorneys, and jurors. To this end, changing current practices by the system and implementing better training with the most up to date research in regards to men victimization can prevent practitioners of the justice system from being influenced by gender stereotypes when deciding who the batterer might be. The system should create a sense of fairness towards all victims of domestic violence regardless of their gender so that they can be given equal support. The system must enforce existing arrests laws equally and justly to men and women perpetrators and must equally assist victims of both sexes.

One way for the system to start changing its current practices would be to develop and implement an effective test that measures the level of gender stereotype that current and prospective police officers and jurors have. Presently, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI) are now been used to help screen out police recruits whose psychological profiles suggests that they are not well suited for police jobs (Fradella, 2006). More recently, a police specific instrument named the Officer at Risks Examination was developed to specifically identify violence prone officers (Fradella, 2006). In addition to these psychological tests, prospective police officers should be required to take a gender stereotypes test to measure the likelihood of being influenced by gender stereotypes when they are presented with domestic violence case scenarios. The improvement of the quality of treatment towards all victims of domestic violence is another way the criminal justice system can ensure equity and fairness. In addition, police department should educate and inform their officers about domestic violence. A study by Townsend *et al*, (2005) revealed that out of 2,203 police departments, only 4 % had information available to the community about intimate partner violence.

Police departments can change this by increasing domestic violence awareness to both men and women so that citizens of both sexes can have a better understanding of domestic violence victims. Another way is for the justice system to reduce the number of offenders who go to jail and instead, require them to attend intervention programs. Finally, a situation where only female victims receive assistance and intervention from the government through Violence Against Women Act is no longer tenable. So far, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the United States Department of Justice, and Center for Disease Control have refused to address the problem of male victims. The VAWA has only funded studies that study men as perpetrators and women as victims (Straus, 2006). This should not be the case. Both genders should be equally funded.

Future Research

The battered Women's Syndrome Defense should be an area of interest in future research. This defense has been commonly used by female defendants charged with violence against men, especially in homicides cases. There is a significant doubt about the validity and reliability of the psychological research underlying the defense (Swan, 2008). If the Battered Women's Syndrome Defense is to remain viable, then future research needs to refine the theory so that it is better empirically supported.

Conclusion

This paper examined the experiences of male victims of intimate partner violence. Several studies have revealed that men experience significant psychological symptoms as a result of intimate partner violence (Hines and Douglass, 2011; Swan, 2008). A link has been established between intimate partner violence and PTSD (Hines et al, 2007). Although scholarly studies are in conflict with regard to whether men and women perpetuate acts of intimate partner violence at similar rates, yet the evidence can be explained, in part, by a number of factors, most especially gender biases that are deeply engrained in the minds of police officers, judges, jurors, researchers, and agencies that fund their studies (Hines et al, 2007). Overall, gender stereotyping at all levels has had a negative impact on battered men (Hines and Douglass, 2011). This paper, after a careful review of the relevant literature documenting these effects concludes that male victims of intimate partner violence receive little or no protection from the justice system.

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