



Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence in the United States: An Examination of the Review of Literature through the Critical Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

Male victims of intimate partner violence have become an issue of concern within United States of America. Research has found that approximately 3.8 women and 1.3 men per 1,000 are victims of intimate partner violence each year. Even though collaborative professions to criminal justice such as nursing, social work, counseling, and psychology have began to discuss male victims of intimate partner violence; scholars within criminal justice have conducted limited empirical research, which has revealed the need for further studies by criminologists. This article examines the review of literature concerning the male victims of domestic violence by their female intimate partners.

Key Words: Intimate partner violence; Domestic violence; Male victims; Female perpetrator; Dual arrests.

Introduction

Domestic violence or intimate partner violence has been an ugly scourge in American society for many years. In the 1970s, various feminist groups brought domestic violence into the general conversation of America and through many protests into the criminal justice system (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; Dutton, 2007; and Minaker & Snider, 2006). For this reason, the vast majority of individuals who report incidents of domestic violence are women; however, men have also been found to be victims of intimate partner violence (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2006; Frieze, 2005; Lowenstein, 2005; Schrofie, 2004; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008). Unfortunately, intimate partner violence policy has constituted limits to the male victims of this crime. The criminal justice system continues to ignore issues arising from this steadily growing problem. In this article, the male victim's experience has been described through the conflict theoretical perspective, as the experience in relation to American society and its criminal justice system. This article examines this problem through a review of literature.

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In addition, the past and present policies of the American criminal justice system are also analyzed.

Male Victim's Experience

Male victims of intimate partner violence have become a serious issue in the United States. According to Ménard, Anderson, and Godboldt (2008), approximately 3.8 women and 1.3 men per 1,000 are victims of intimate partner violence each year. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007) noted that each year approximately 1,181 women and 329 men are victims of intimate partner homicides. Even though the numbers are not as high for men as for women, these victims cannot be ignored. The cost of intimate partner violence has been assessed to exceed \$5.8 billion (Menard, et al., 2008). These costs consist of such things as police cost to domestic violence disputes, court cost to prosecute, shelters (mainly for women victims), hotlines for both men and women, mandated treatment programs, hospital cost for reported injuries, and prison maintenance. Homicides caused through intimate partner violence and the financial costs of intimate partner violence have caused the criminal justice system to change its responses to this type of crime. This change is in conflict with the societal perspective of how victims of intimate partner violence are viewed in turn of assistance from police; the court system, and support services for victims and perpetrators.

Domestic violence, in the past, has been seen as a personal rather than a social problem. According to Lowenstein (2005), the past patriarchal society has led to the inequality of women's points of view about social problems such as domestic violence. Earlier, police departments viewed these disturbances as family squabbles and not as violence against an individual. Therefore, these disturbances were not treated with the same seriousness as an assault on a total stranger.

Today, domestic violence is viewed as a serious social problem and a crime. The debate is between those who perceive domestic violence only to battered women (Johnson, 2005) or battered men (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; Stwan, et al., 2008). This societal conflict has resulted in the argument that, if males are victims of domestic violence, then it is due to the self-defense of women being abused (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007) also noted that intimate partner violence has been categorized into two distinctive research categories; one, which are common couple violence described by population-based studies and other is patriarchal terrorism described through studies of battered women. Because of the feminist movements, women have been strongly recognized as victims of domestic violence. There is still discrimination on male victims in intimate partner violence cases.

The victimization of men by their women partners is a serious social problem and it is largely ignored by the society. A part of America's social norm reveals that men are the stronger and more dominating gender who does not allow women to dominate. Consequently, male victims do not freely admit being victims of intimate partner violence at the hands of females (Barber, 2008). As a result, these same male victims do not seek professional assistance (Barber, 2008). The informal social control has shaped the thinking of American society about who abuses whom within society; therefore, informal social control is highly influential in how society reacts to various situations within the family and the community as a whole.

General Public's Perception

Steinmetz's (1978) empirical study found that males are as likely to be victims of intimate partner violence as women (cited in Johnson, 2005). This concept is in conflict with the feminist concept of intimate partner violence and had called to question the social control of gender and patriarchy. As a result, men who report abuse from an intimate partner are viewed as cowards. Extremely embarrassed by this predicament, male victims are afraid of being laughed at or scorned.

Due to embarrassment, male victims do not approach professional services. Swan, et al. (2008) noted two studies that examined the psychological aggression and physical violence of women, concluded that, "women use higher levels of moderate physical violence than their partners used against them and about the same level of severe physical violence," (p. 306). Male victims of intimate partner violence may experience broken limbs, stab wounds, teeth marks, deep scratches and lacerations, inappropriate comments, fear and intimidation, and emotional aggression (Barber, 2008). Consequently, these male victims may refuse physical examination by nurses, particularly female nurses or seek the support of health professionals and services (Barber, 2008).

Sorenson and Taylor (2005), examined empirical studies that found that male to female aggression was more callously assessed than female to male aggression. Men's violence against intimate female partners is considered more serious than women's violence against intimate male partners. As a result, many men fear that seeking help would label them as aggressor, especially if they defend themselves. This double standard view in society has resulted in many male victims not seeking the assistance of law enforcement as well.

Police Perceptions

Victims of abuse, whether male or female, always remain underreported of their abuse to the police due to the embarrassment and culpability associated with the abuse in the society. According to Allen-Collinson (2009), few men report their abuse to police due to the fear of disbelief and support services provided. Sarantakos (2004) found that women often threaten their male victims with the fact that they will report them as having assaulted themselves, if the police are called. This affects the statistics of the male victims of intimate partner violence. The exact number of male victims could not be calculated because of under reporting of male victims in cases of intimate partner violence.

Formal social control exists through legal agents within the criminal justice system. Mostly the response of police to intimate partner violence has been based upon the social position that the men have within the society. According to George and Yarwood (2004), police have threatened 47% of male victims of intimate partner violence with arrest. George and Yarwood also found that the police ignored 35% of male victims and 21% were actually arrested instead of the female perpetrators. This is due to the disbelief that a woman could not have been the perpetrator of this type of crime and the male must be intimidating the woman to the point that the woman is attacking in self-defense.

Miller (2005) found that the current criminal justice system in America refers to the victim and the offender dichotomy. Miller noted in a study conducted by Hirschel and Buzawa (2002) argued that criminal justice officials do not see intimate partner violence incidents as ongoing abusive relationships, but one-time situations involving an offender and a victim. Such an approach, according to Miller, prohibits the exploration of the contextual framework surrounding the actual incident, including the use of self-defense to a history of ongoing abuse at the hand of an intimate partner. Miller argues that female

perpetrators of intimate violence only commit this type of violence in self-defense. Many researchers agree with this argument (Bouffard, & Bouffard, 2007; George & Yarwood, 2004; Miller, 2005; Muftic').

Female Perpetrators

The social power structure of America is argued to be supporting the culture of male domination. According to Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007), "this societal power structure is reflected in interpersonal relationships, and men misuse the power they have in their relationships because they have been socialized to believe they have the right to control women, even through violent means,"(p. 63). This philosophy of thought has led to the difficulty of believing whether females were even capable of being perpetrators of intimate partner violence and whether females were acting in self-defense from their attackers (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007).

Intimate partner violence perpetrated by females has different perspectives. According to Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007), "One reason that male victims of severe intimate partner violence by women have been ignored in the typology is that they have rarely, if ever, been systematically studied," (p. 64). Of the few grassroots efforts to study male victims of intimate partner violence, none is as well organized or widespread as the shelter movement, which allowed research on battered women based upon the feminist perspective that the problem of intimate partner violence is due to the patriarchal structure of the American society (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). The researchers also noted that many researchers deny that such males exist or if they do exist, the extent to which women victimize men does not represent a significant social problem (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007).

Several studies have found that male victims of intimate partner violence have steadily increased, although the numbers of victims are not always equal to women. According to Carney, Buttell, and Dutton (2007), women offenders constitute the fastest growing segment of the criminal justice system in America. The National Institute of Justice also estimates that the increase in the incarceration rate for women is double that of men (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; Ferraro & Moe, 2003; Mullings, Hartley, & Marquart, 2004). Carney, Buttell, and Dutton argued that the criminal justice system has been lenient toward female perpetrators and that women are now more consistently being referred to batterer intervention programs.

Some researchers have found that female perpetrators have a history of experiencing violence by their male partners. According to Swan, et al. (2008), 90% of women involved within the criminal justice system had reported violence within their relationships. Swan, et al. (2008), noted that women and men report the perpetration of physical aggression at similar rates; however, it is still believed that women are more likely to be injured in a domestic violence situation. Phelan et al., (2005) found in a study of men and women seeking emergency room care, only 39% of the men received injury from an intimate partner. Frieze (2005) has argued that because men are usually larger and stronger than their female partners are, they are more likely to injure the female through relatively low-level violence such as slapping or pushing.

Female perpetrators are now being arrested for the crime of intimate partner violence. According to Henning, Renauer, and Holdford (2006), there has been a substantial increase in females being arrested for intimate partner violence. Women now account for a quarter of arrests for this crime (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006). As a result, the

criminal justice system has had to refocus on both women and men perpetrators of this crime. Society's ongoing debate on female use of aggression and possible gender favoritism within the criminal justice system has begun to be noted within the criminological research.

Research on Male Victims

Taking into account the large amount of empirical investigations conducted in the area of domestic violence; very few studies have examined male victims of intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, scholars in the field of criminal justice have been relatively silent on this subject, with most empirical research published from non-criminal justice scholarly journals about the criminal justice system. Graham-Kevan (2007) argued, "The scholarly neglect of this topic has limited our overall understanding of violence in intimate relationships," (p. 3). It is very difficult to get male victims of intimate partner violence to come forward due to the societal stigma that might be placed on them (Graham-Kevan, 2007). Male victims have a fear of the stigma. No man wants to be considered as weak. As a result, like many crimes of intimate partner violence that has women victims, men are as equally or even more silent about this crime.

The Police and Male Victims

Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007) study found that male victims experienced physical abuse from their female partners, and a substantial minority feared their wives' violence and stalking. Hines, Brown, and Dunning also noted that 90% experienced controlling behaviors, and several men reported frustrating experiences with the criminal justice system. The men within the study reported that their female abusers had a history of trauma, alcohol/drug problems, mental illness, and have homicidal and suicidal tendencies.

Menard, Anderson, and Godboldt (2009) found that many jurisdictions had adopted a policy of either mandatory or preferred arrest when responding to calls regarding domestic violence incidents. This was a result of civil suits being filed against police departments for a failure to respond in arresting the female perpetrator (Menard, Anderson, & Godboldt, 2009). The study examined both men and women by perusing attorney files of 600 cases and analyzed the factors that affect intimate partner violence in both men and women in the year 2000.

The concept of mandatory and dual arrest laws are contributing factors to the increase of female perpetrators. Over the past 20 years, there has been a widespread implementation of mandatory and dual arrest laws within states (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006). These laws require or strongly encourage that an arrest should be made when an assault has occurred between intimate partners. An apparent factor in the overall increase for both male and female intimate partner violence arrests over the past two decades is the widespread implementation of mandatory/preferred arrest laws (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006). According to Henning, Renauer, and Holdford (2006), these laws either promote or require that an arrest is made when an assault has occurred between intimate partners. Explanations for the disproportionate rise in female arrests remain more controversial (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006). Some researchers attribute the increase to a backlash by police officers who are upset over the loss of their discretionary powers because of mandatory arrest (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006). Whereas, previously these officers might have just arrested the male, they might now

prefer to dually arrest the couple (i.e., arrest of both the male and female) and leave it up to the court to determine, who is responsible for the crime.

Wilson and Jasinski (2004) explain: “Domestic violence victims who called the police themselves will be more satisfied with the police response than victims who did not call the police,” (p. 241). This is due to the mandatory laws and treatment requires for perpetrators of intimate partner violence and domestic violence in general to have now been implemented within various States. According to Maiuro and Eberle (2008), “development of standards for treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence has continued to proliferate with a significant increase in the number of states having standards or guidelines,” (p.147). These standards have allowed overloaded court systems

Du Plat-Jones (2006) has found that male victims of domestic violence experience stabbings; knocked out teeth; injuries to the genitals; and verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse. Etter and Birzer (2007) study describe the characteristics of those defendants who have been accused of domestic abuse in a PFA order that had been issued by the court. The setting for this research was Sedgwick County Kansas (Etter & Birzer, 2007). Wichita, Kansas is the county seat and has a metropolis population of over 500,000 (Etter & Birzer, 2007). The community was selected for two primary reasons; (1) the researchers had access to protection from abuse orders and domestic violence data, and (2) Sedgwick County is the largest urban area in the state, thus this area reports more domestic violence arrests than all other communities, which made for an adequate sample of defendants. However, it would have been more beneficial to examine data that pertained specifically to the accused female perpetrators. For example, future research should examine whether female perpetrators were the actual aggressor or simply a mutual combatant. Many state laws are written in a manner that allow for the arrests of both parties involvement in a domestic violence incident, even if one party struck or fought back in defense. According to Etter and Birzer (2007), a self-defense could explain some of the incidents of female arrests for intimate partner violence. Moreover, if females are arrested as mutual combatants simply for striking back in a defensive manner, then the data regarding female batterers is suspicious (Etter & Birzer, 2007).

Limited research has been conducted on the influences of dual arrest. Houry, et al., (2006) has found that police officers who have a personal history of violence within their own personal relationships or negative attitudes that are related to intimate partner violence vary in their responses to intimate partner violence victims. However, these researchers also argue that the same police officers did not vary in arresting abusers or in their ability to mediate the situation compared to officers without a personal history of violence when posed hypothetical scenarios (Houry, et al., 2006). On the contrary, police officers would not respond the same to a scenario in a real life situation. The researchers also made likely of fact that men could be victims of intimate partner violence; but argued that there is an increase of intimate partner violence female arrests within our society.

More women involved in intimate partner violence are being arrested because of mandatory arrest laws. Henning and Feder (2004) noted that the recent increase of women arrested for intimate partner violence has called to question the concept and the implementation of pro-arrest policies, the intimate partner aggression of both genders, and the supervision of female offenders of intimation partner violence. A comparison of demographic characteristics, criminal history variables, and previous intimate partner violence in men ($n = 5,578$) and women ($n = 1,126$) arrested for domestic assault against an intimate partner had been examined (Henning & Feder, 2004). The study concluded

that female perpetrators are less likely to have a history that warranted concern regarding the possibility for future violence, than male perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

Female perpetrators are more likely to use weapons towards their male victims. Even though the study did not prove that female perpetrators were more violent overall than male perpetrators in intimate partner violence incidents, it was proved that female perpetrators are more likely to use a weapon during altercations (Henning & Feder, 2004). Use of weapons may be reason for the increase of females being arrested for intimate partner violence, as law enforcement officers would definitely be interested to remove the partner that is the most visible threat at the time of the violent incident.

Muftic', et al., (2007) examined the utility of victim precipitation in understanding the contextual features of intimate partner violence and police response. They found the relationship between the perpetrator, the intimate partner violence victim, and incident characteristics 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. The study also compared male and female intimate partner violence arrestees and found significant differences in measuring prior domestic violence toward an intimate partner. The researchers noted that female partners, with male arrestees with the case, were less likely to have a history of intimate violence (4.8%) compared to male partners of female arrestees (19.4%). As a result, the researchers similarly agreed with the self-defense argument of why a female perpetrator would abuse their male intimate partner.

Hirschel, et al. (2007) found that the recent increase in female arrests also might signify a shift away from traditional definitions of intimate partner violence as a male perpetrated offense. Holtzworth-Munroe (2005) examined some research studies that asserted that women use some forms of physical aggression at rates equivalent to men in intimate relationships. Holtzworth-Munroe (2005) criticized some of the studies for failing to consider the consequences of the aggression. As a result, the findings have fueled an intense argument among family violence scholars regarding women's use of violence and its seriousness. Holtzworth-Munroe (2005) argued that abused women sometimes use knives, guns, or other weapons during these confrontations to equalize the power imbalance of their male intimate partner. Thus, police officers arriving on the scene may be confronted with a woman who appears to be the primary aggressor because the female victim is armed and/or the male perpetrator has more readily identifiable injuries (Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005).

Holtzworth-Munroe (2005) also found that female victims may be injured via strangulation and which was not as visible to the officers, whereas the defensive wounds the female victim inflicted on her intimate partner were easily observed. Hirschel, et al. (2007) argued that preceding to mandatory/preferred arrest laws; officers may have been reluctant to make an arrest in cases like these due to uncertainty about the identity of the primary perpetrator. Now, with the new legislation, they may feel increased pressure to make an arrest, thereby contributing to the higher proportion of arrests involving women (Hirschel, et al., 2007).

The Courts and Male Victims

Brown (2004) studied the equated severity of assaults committed by male and female perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Using intimate partner violence case files from the police and prosecutor's office, Brown noted that 617 cases were complaints with

neither party charged; both men and women were charged in 118 cases; men were charged in 2,044 cases, and women were charged in 155 cases. Injuries made no distinction of who was charged with a crime, with 52.5% of female perpetrators versus 60.2% of male perpetrators, causing an injury to the victim. The arrested women in the study were considerably higher to have used a weapon such as a blunt instrument or a knife rather than the men arrested. In addition, Brown (2004) found that the women in the study were more equally to have used weapons and caused injuries, and to have received charges that are more serious. This finding is similar to Swan, et al. (2008). Brown (2004) also noted that women perpetrators were more than twice as likely to have been charged with aggravated assault or assault with a weapon. However, self-defense arguments by men tended to be disbelieved by police. Women who were prosecuted tended to have inflicted higher levels of injury against their victim than prosecuted men and, as with arrested women, were more likely than men to have used weapons. In severe injury cases, 71.4 % of men and 22.2 % of women were found guilty (Swan, et al., (2008).

Basile (2005) examined the responses of the court to similar intimate partner violence allegations made by both male and female victims. The study compared and contrasted court responses to these allegations across gender boundaries. Basile (2005) hypothesized that the courts are not immune from social norms and that despite having neutral language within the law; the law still exhibits a different response to male versus female requests for protection. The results of the study found that in this one court setting, male victims of intimate partner violence were not afforded the same protections as female victims of intimate partner violence. Basile (2005) concluded that this inequality happened even though both male and female plaintiffs were victimized equally by their opposite gender defendants. A low percentage of women found guilty if intimate partner violence has been due to the male victim unwillingness to testify against them in court. Basile (2005) also found that over 50% of male victims of intimate partner violence refused to testify and female perpetrators with severe injuries had their charges withdrawn 77.8% of the time. This pattern was reversed for woman victims; the more seriously injured, the more likely they were to testify.

In a similar study, Henning and Renauer (2005) had similar results within their study. Henning and Renauer (2005) found that almost one-half (47%) of the cases involving women arrest for domestic violence against a male intimate partner were rejected by prosecutors, and another 16% had been dismissed by a judge. Legal factors, such as a defendant's prior criminal arrests, use of a weapon, victim injury, and, most important, the type of arrest (dual vs. single arrest), all affected prosecutors' decisions in these cases. Female defendants arrested for offending against a male intimate partner were treated more leniently than male defendants or women arrested for domestic offenses involving other types of relationship.

Other empirical studies have confirmed that society has little sympathy for the male victims of intimate partner violence (Barber, 2008; Du Plat-Jones, 2006; Henning & Feder, 2004). In Sorenson and Taylor's (2005) study, a random-digit dialed survey was used to examine 3,769 adult participants within the Los Angeles, California area. The study presented five vignettes, which were experimentally manipulated. Sorenson and Taylor (2005) examined the characteristics of the victim, assailant, and the incident. The vignette variables and the participants' characteristics were examined using a multivariate log regression (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). This study's results revealed that the participant's characteristics were unrelated to their judgment about female violence against

their male intimate partners compared to male violence against their female intimate partners. The participants were more sympathetic and took background factors about the victim into account whether the violence was justified toward the victim.

Carney, Buttell, and Dutton's (2007) research found that the Law Enforcement Protection legislation that allowed police who responded to domestic violence calls, to arrest the abuser and press charges themselves, resulted 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 (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; Martin, 1997). The arrests of women had not been the initial intent of this mandatory arrest legislation (Swan & Snow, 2002). The increase of women in court-mandated treatment programs has had an impact on the intimate partner violence debate within the United States (Carlsten, 2002; Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007).

Conclusion

Male victims of intimate partner violence are secluded victims in our society. The increase of female perpetrators of intimate partner violence could be a rise in female aggression due to gang association. Even though collaborative professions to criminal justice such as nursing, social work, counseling, and psychology have begun to discuss about the male victims of intimate partner violence, scholars within criminal justice have conducted limited empirical research. The scholars in the field of criminal justice must actively research the reason for this rise in violence by the women. Empirical research needs to be conducted on police training of handling cases involving male victims. Community policing techniques such as public education campaigns and community meetings are needed to inform citizens about domestic violence, including intimate partner violence and the public expectation from law enforcement agencies. Federal funding should be given for further study is needed to examine the impact of dual arrest and intimate partner violence when it comes, especially, to male victims. Mandatory sentencing laws or better training of judges on male victims of intimate partner violence should be given in order to be fair in the sentencing of both male and female perpetrators.

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