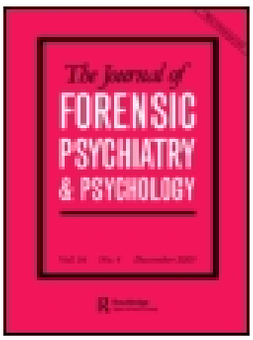

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# 'It's deemed unmanly': men's experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV)

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated male victims' experiences of female-perpetrated intimate partner violence (IPV). Seven participants were interviewed and the data were analysed using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Four essential themes were revealed. (1) Participants identified themselves as victims of abuse (experiencing physical and multiple forms of abuse). (2) They felt they were victims of controlling abuse (through the use of children and isolation). (3) Respondents experienced manipulation through gendered stereotypes of abuse. (4) They felt it was different because they were men. The participants within this study were often deeply affected by the abuse they had experienced. Previous research has found male abusers use societal structures and norms to enable their abuse. The participants in this study felt that their female abusers were equally adept doing this, although the mechanisms were different. Further research should look at the processes by which abusers of either gender control and abuse their victims.

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**KEYWORDS** Female-perpetrated intimate partner violence (IPV); interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); partner abuse; gendered stereotypes of abuse; societal expectations of masculinity

## Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is recognised as a significant public health concern. However, the debate around whether violence perpetrated against men has the same meaning and impact as that perpetrated against women is vociferous (see Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010; Johnson, 2011). This paper examines that question through an analysis of the experiences of seven male victims of female-perpetrated IPV.

There is general agreement that isolated incidents have a different impact from a systematic pattern of abuse. The most damaging forms of abuse are

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those that affect victims through a *variety* of means. The most commonly cited pattern involves isolation, intimidation, coercion/threats, use of children, victim blaming, and emotional and financial abuse. This pattern of behaviour reduces the ability of the victim to behave autonomously and supports and facilitates further abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Johnson's (2008) typology identifies this pattern of abuse as 'intimate terrorism'. The potency of the term is designed to reflect the victims' level of fear, as well as the perpetrators' desire for control. However, not all forms of IPV reflect this desire. For example, violence within a relationship may be triggered by skill deficits or inappropriate conflict resolution strategies. These may be demonstrated by one partner (situational violence) or both (common couple conflict). Many researchers feel that a gendered analysis is essential in order to understand the complexities of IPV. For example, it is argued that men's desire to have control over women is the result of social, cultural and institutional norms that socialise men to behave this way (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). It is these forces which explain why women are more likely to be victims of 'intimate terrorism'. In contrast, it is argued men are more likely to be the victims of common couple conflict or violent resistance (when the controlled partner fights back) (Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2006).

Alternative perspectives argue that this position is damaging to our understanding of IPV (Dutton et al., 2010). Narratives about males experiencing female-perpetrated abuse are sometimes considered 'forbidden' or 'unbelievable' (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Corbally, 2015) even as an increasing body of work shows that that men can be victims of IPV (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Fiebert, 2014). This includes abuse that causes severe injuries (Nowinski & Bowen, 2012) as well as that which reflects 'intimate terrorism' (Hines & Douglas, 2010).

Most research shows that female perpetrators of IPV engage in behaviours similar to male abusers. However, there are differences that relate to gender roles (McHugh, Rakowski, & Swiderski, 2013). Self-defence by a male victim is likely to be highly stigmatised, and this knowledge appears to play a role in female-perpetrated abuse strategies (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Female abusers sometimes goad their victim into retaliation in order to involve the legal system (Gadd, Farrall, Dallimore, & Lombard, 2003; Hines, Douglas, & Berger, 2014), and even where abuse has not occurred, false accusations may be used to control male victims (Tilbrook, Allan, & Dear, 2010).

The literature about men's internalised experiences of abuse is particularly underdeveloped (Corbally, 2015). The available literature tends to apply a specific, predetermined and theoretical framework to men's accounts. For example, Durfee (2011) applied hegemonic masculinity-informed narrative analysis to protection order petitions, and Eckstein (2010) reported that men's accounts of their abuse reflected a narrative of 'hegemonic/complicit masculinity'. She found that although the men in her study disliked the application of the term

'victim' to describe themselves, they felt this was an accurate description of their treatment by society and its systems (such as the courts).

Corbally (2015) used biographical analysis to explore the narrative strategies used by men to describe their experiences of IPV. She found that participants reported both secondary and primary (or direct) victimisation. The direct abuse included behaviours such as physical assaults and threats to children. The secondary abuse was initiated by the female perpetrator (for example, through false reports) but enacted through others (such as the police). Within the accounts, three main narratives were present. These included 'the good husband narrative' and 'the abuse narrative;' however, the most predominant was 'the fatherhood narrative'. The men reported a sense of a lost and stolen fatherhood as a result of both primary and secondary abuse.

The current study adds to the limited literature about male victims' experiences of female-initiated IPV by exploring how victims *make sense of their experiences*. We did not wish to impose an existing framework upon what the men said; rather, we applied interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA: Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999) in order to subjectively interpret the experiences of the participants and capture what was significant to them.



## Method

### *Design*

This study adopted a semi-structured interview methodology. There was an emphasis on capturing information about the participants' lived (subjective) experience in line with the focus of IPA. The interview schedule used the technique of funnelling to facilitate disclosure. General open-ended questions were initially asked before questions about more sensitive issues were raised.

The questions were used as a flexible guide to assist the researcher toward a structured conversation. Questions included those about the background to the abusive relationship, the abuse experienced, the consequences of the abuse and the level of perceived support available. Participants were invited to reflect upon their experience (e.g. How did you feel? Why did you think that happened?). Importance was placed on listening to the participants and exploring areas of interest that arose from their free narrative responses.

### *Participants*

The research sample included seven participants, all of whom had previously been in a self-defined abusive relationship. Participation was not restricted by length of the abusive relationship or the extent of abuse experienced. Table 1 provides relationship information. Participants were not asked to disclose demographic information (such as age or occupation).

**Table 1.** Participant relationship information.

| Participant number | Length of relationship | Time since relationship ended |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | approx 10 years | 8 months |
| 2 | 9 years | 6 years |
| 3 | 13 years | 2 years, 6 months |
| 4 | 3 years | 14 years |
| 5 | 10 years | 18 months |
| 6 | 7 years | 3 years |
| 7 | 3 years | 12 years |

## *Ethical considerations*

Active steps were taken to ensure that participants were fully informed about the study including research goals and the anticipated future use of the data. Participants were assured of confidentiality. The only participants who met the eligibility criteria were those who (1) initiated contact with the research team, (2) were no longer in an abusive relationship, (3) had realistic expectations of the research process (e.g. they understood that counselling and expert advice could not be provided by the researcher) and (4) did not demonstrate signs of distress at the time of contact. A clear protocol outlined the actions the researcher should take if participants became distressed any stage of the research process from initial contact through to post-interview. Names, dates and locations were omitted from the transcripts to preserve confidentially.

## *Procedure*

Following formal ethical approval from the University's School of Psychology, project details were posted on the websites of UK-based organisations supporting male victims of IPV. All individuals who contacted the second author during the data collection period, and who met the eligibility criteria, were offered interviews. Initially, the study was designed to include face-to-face interviews. However, respondents informed the second author (who conducted the interviews) of their strong preference for telephone interviews. While telephone interviews reduce the potential richness of the data, it was considered important to ensure respondents felt comfortable. Therefore the research methodology was adapted. All of the respondents in the study were offered and accepted the option of telephone interviews. The telephone interviews were conducted in a quiet and secure environment with the calls digitally recorded. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and provided with the contact details of support organisations. Six of the interviews were 90 min in length; one was 60 min in duration.

## *Analysis strategy*

The scripts were transcribed verbatim (including pauses, fillers, emphasis and non-verbal indictors such as laughing) from the audio recordings using the

Jefferson system. They were analysed using IPA. The primary aim of IPA is to gain an insight into how individuals make sense of their own personal world using an ideographic (individual) and hermeneutic (interpretative) approach. This is a dynamic process whereby the researcher actively seeks to explore and understand the participants' experience. It is both inductive (meaning being constructed from the data) and deductive (that is, the researcher reflects upon how constructions may endorse, modify or challenge existing theory) (Eatough & Smith, 2006).

Transcripts were analysed separately to ensure that individual details of the experiences were not lost. This allowed for the possibility that victims may have experienced the abuse in conceptually different ways. Transcripts were read and reread several times and preliminary interpretations and notes of interest were recorded. Elements that contributed towards the identification of subthemes included: (1) words or phrases that were emphasised or repeated, (2) instances where the participants compared their experiences with those of others and (3) elements that appeared to be central to how the respondents portrayed their experiences. These subthemes were then refined and clustered into superordinate groups that reflected conceptually meaningful constructs. Finally the clusters and subthemes were assigned a descriptive label.

The analysis process was iterative. Clusters and subthemes were continually refined, and the data reconsidered until the final analysis was settled upon. Sharing the initial analysis with other experienced IPA researchers, who were unfamiliar with the IPV literature, assisted in refining the analysis process. This multiplicity of perspectives was helpful in avoiding bias through the imposition of existing theoretical structures. The first author has a long-standing interest in researching IPV. In her clinical experience (in working with perpetrators and survivors) she finds Johnson's (2008) typology to be helpful. Both authors feel that violence perpetrated by women can have the same impact as that perpetrated by men. However, they were mindful of the debate about this area when conducting and writing up the analysis.

The first author undertook the IPA process. The second author and an independent reviewer conducted an 'independent audit' (Smith, 1996) of the final analysis. The aim of this process was not to establish inter-rater reliability. Rather, it allowed for comment on the appropriateness of the analysis in terms of neutrality, dependability and confirmability (see Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

## Results

Four superordinate themes were identified within this study. These, the relevant subthemes, and the number of individuals who reflected the theme within their interview are illustrated in Table 2 and discussed below.

**Table 2.** Superordinate clusters, subordinate themes, narrative examples and frequency.

| Superordinate cluster | Subordinate theme | Short narrative example | Number of participants contributing to this theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| I was abused | I suffered multiple forms of abuse | I certainly experienced verbal, physical and emotional abuse (participant 7) | 7 |
| | I was physically hurt | If I didn't agree … it would be met with extreme violence (participant 2) | 6 |
| Feeling controlled | Controlled through children | I didn't see [the children] until I said I wouldn't press charges (participant 5) | 5 |
| | Feeling isolated | She didn't want to socialise – she didn't want *me* to either (participant 4) | 4 |
| Deceived through gendered stereotypes of abuse | She deceived me about previous abuse | She told me it was because her ex-partner was abusive to her, and I believed her (participant 3) | 4 |
| | She lied to others about me abusing her | I was in tears outside and she was the one who called the police saying I was being abusive to her (participant 3) | 5 |
| It was different because I was a man | It is unmanly to be a victim of domestic abuse | How can this happen? Is he a weedy character? (participant 2) | 5 |
| | I didn't get the help I needed because I am a man | The police didn't want to know (participant 7) | 7 |



## *Superordinate cluster 1: I was abused*

Here the presentations of abuse presented are not framed within wider notions of control or gender. Rather the themes reflect the respondents identifying themselves as victims of a sustained pattern of abuse within their intimate relationships.

### *Subordinate theme: I suffered multiple forms of abuse*

None of the participants experienced the abuse as a series of single isolated incidents – they emphasised a pattern of abuse, which had occurred across time.

> I certainly suffered verbal abuse, you know, of various nature, swearing, shouting, literally screaming, you know. The physical abuse was also things like the spitting, biting, punching, kicking. She put a knee in my testicles one day with the obvious intention of trying to really hurt me. She bit me on the face, she scratched me with her nails, on the face, on my arms. Then there was the emotional abuse and basically things like financial abuse. (Participant 7)

All participants spoke about the impact that the sustained abuse had upon their well-being. The sense of desperation, which resulted from the extended nature of the abuse (and associated mental health concerns), is illustrated below, as are the contrasting methods by which respondents tried to cope with the pervasiveness of the abuse.

> I was just walking on egg shells the whole time, desperate not to do something that might annoy her and cause her to shout at me … when she went off to work in the morning then I could relax, but I would feel tense around the time she was coming back around half past five. (Participant 4)

> I had almost given up. She had worn me down so much at one stage I felt as though 'just please someone just take me away; I want to just curl up in a corner' and, well I used to go into the back of the garden and just sit behind the shed in tears. (Participant 3)

### *Subordinate theme: I was physically hurt*

This theme emerged as distinct from the participants' experience of multiple forms of abuse. Physical abuse did not occur in isolation and was experienced at different levels of severity across the sample. It included examples of severe violence. It is perhaps the severity of the abuse that made this theme salient for some. The quotes below illustrate the impact of the abuse, but also the gender neutral positioning of these statements. Within these quotes the pronoun could easily be changed without losing impact or detracting from the meaning. It is as though the respondents are decontextualising the abuse; the gender of the perpetrator is deliberately marginalised so that the abuse can be the focus.

> We are talking about absolutely extremely aggressive [violence] you know, attack on my face with deep cuts. I've had to have plastic surgery on my skin. (Participant 5)

> I had scratches on my arm that were still oozing blood where she had scratched me. I had teeth marks on my face and my arms where she had bitten me. (Participant 7)

Whilst emphasising the physical nature of the abuse, the respondents' emotional reaction was marginalised in their descriptions. The emphasis was on what had happened to them and what they did in response, not how they *felt* about the physical abuse.

> She was screaming and shouting at me and pushed me to get a response and I said 'let's go and talk quietly about this, please stop shouting at me'. At times I have been on my knees begging her to stop, but it just fuelled her to continue, so yeah she pushed me down the stairs and I stumbled back and hit the wall behind me, and she followed me down. (Participant 3)

One respondent was clear that the reason for the physical abuse was to provoke a reaction with the aim of obtaining official intervention.

> When she hit me she hit me in the stomach and ribs again so that there wasn't any evidence of it, and when she was standing there she was sticking her face right in my face spitting her words, wanting me to push her or anything. And

> she would goad me saying 'go on, go on, you know you want to do it, go on, just push me.' wanting me to react to her so that she could get the police and get me arrested. (Participant 3)

This quote shows the respondent feeling he was being provoked to respond physically, but it also shows that his response was something that he (as a victim) had control over. In this regard he did not feel controlled. This was in contrast to the concepts captured in the second cluster.

### *Superordinate cluster 2: feeling controlled*

Control was an aspect which pervaded all the respondents' interpretations of their abuse. For many of them, this was the prism through which they interpreted the perpetrator's behaviour.

> Just control freakery … there is no question that she thought she could completely control me, that I wouldn't be able to resist her and she could then abuse me as and when she wanted and there wouldn't be any escape for it. She was completely power hungry. (Participant 4)

> She started, kind of started, to control me and you know it really was about control; like a hostile takeover. (Participant 7)

One of the most salient mechanisms by which the participants felt they were being controlled was through the use of children.

### *Subordinate theme – controlled through children*

This was evident in a variety of different aspects. For some respondents, it was the effect of physical violence targeted upon the children (directly or indirectly) that caused the most concern.

> She would hit me when driving and the children were in the back, in the back seat and she would slap me around the head in front of the children … [I would] say 'you can have a fight with me when we get home but please let's not have a fight in front of the children'. (Participant 6)

> When she poured boiling water on (my son), she said '[it was my fault] because of the shape of the kitchen'. (Participant 5)

The fear and anxiety that the participants felt in regard to their children (including potential loss) engendered a sense of hopelessness within a number of participants. Sometimes this resulted in them feeling trapped within the relationship.

> She then started screaming and shouting at me and she grabbed my son in front of me and said 'you're never going to see him again' and started punching me and then started kicking to try and get towards me. (Participant 1)

> So I would walk away and go upstairs and watch the telly or something like that but, like I say, I had to stay in and around the house to try and protect my son. (Participant 2)

> I was trapped in the relationship that I couldn't get out of because of my kids. She had said to me 'this is a promise, and this is not a threat, this is a promise you will never see your kids again'. (Participant 3)

Some respondents felt that the abuser had become pregnant as means of exerting control. The respondents' interpretation was that the pregnancy was not the result of accident or oversight, but a consequence of deceit or manipulation, which reflected a pattern of abuse.

> My wife was on contraception, it wasn't planned. I got the feeling that because I was looking to end the relationship, that was her way of controlling. (Participant 3)

Once children were present, the respondents felt that they had a lifetime attachment to the relationship. This served to both reduce their options for leaving and facilitated a means of further control.

### *Subordinate theme – feeling isolated*

Behaviour which served to reduce the respondents' social networks (and access to support) was seen as a means of controlling the victims' behaviour. This also increased their stress. In some cases this isolation was facilitated through physical abuse. In others the mechanisms for creating isolation were subtler. The respondents described how the isolation was both facilitated by, and facilitative of, other forms of abuse.

> **I:** How did she feel about you spending time with other people?
>
> **P:** She hated it, yeah she really hated it and she said I will not. I mean we're not talking about a hit were talking about ten, twenty, thirty serious hits. (Participant 5)

> … [I] didn't know what to do. Anyone I called she would say to my children 'oh he is calling that b.i.t.c.h' and it would just be a friend. Any opportunity she could to goad me and push me. The other thing she did was call all my friends and slowly went progressively through all my friends making allegations about this, that, and the next thing that I had done. She went through my phone and called every single female on my phone. I work with a group and suddenly she was making accusations that I was sleeping with all my female friends. I had issues with their husbands coming along and challenging me and basically she destroyed every friendship that I had – complete social isolation. (Participant 3)

> You know she was insanely jealous of anything, even other peoples' wives, even people who had been friends before she and I got together … the next tactic she used then was to try to alienate me from my parents, my brother and sister and family. (Participant 7)

## *Superordinate cluster 3: deceived through gendered stereotypes of abuse*

The behaviours described within the two clusters above did not *rely* upon cultural or social conceptualisations of gender. However, gender (a cultural

construction which ascribes values, behaviours and expectations to a given biological sex) was a key aspect within the other two clusters.

In particular, the men described how their abusive partners utilised widely held gendered stereotypes of abuse (male perpetrator/female victim) as a means of facilitating and furthering partner abuse. In some instances, this related to conceptualisations about IPV the respondents held at the start of their own victimisation.

### *Subordinate theme: she deceived me about her previous abuse*

Some of the participants initially excused their partner's (abusive) behaviour. However, as the abuse continued this view changed to the belief they had been deceived. They felt that that their initial assumptions had been based upon a deliberate misrepresentation.

> She told me that her previous husband was abusive and awful to her. I have since spoken to her first husband. He said [the] same things happened [to him]. (Participant 2)

> She has done the same thing with her ex-partner. She told me it was because her ex-partner was abusive to her, and I believed her. (Participant 3)

### *Subordinate theme – she lied to others about me abusing her*

Just under half of the sample spoke about how they felt the abuser used existing stereotypes of partner abuse to control and isolate them. In particular this related to false allegations of abuse to external parties (e.g. mothers of other children, sports coaches and police). This strategy had power because of the willingness of such individuals to believe the allegations.

> I remember having met some of her friends from work a couple of them used to give me really funny looks, and I said [to myself] 'why, oh you're just imagining it.' But even in the early stages of the relationship she was already spreading malicious gossip about me and like she had with the first husband and the previous boyfriend. (Participant 2)

> She said to the swim teacher than I was an alcoholic, to the staff there that I [was] abusing the children and you know I've never hurt anybody in my life. And all things she said I was arrested for – disorderly behaviour, I mean one thing after another – and this nanny said, 'look, in the beginning I believed her, I was scared of you'. (Participant 5)

The impact of the false allegations appeared to be perceived more acutely when this affected wider relationships within the community. This was especially pertinent when associated with children and the role of being a father.

> The domestic abuse [was] psychological and emotional. (She) has basically gone through all my daughter's friends and turned them against me. She has gone to the school and turned them against me, removed my name off the emergency list at my daughters' school. I am actually the chairman of the PTA, the school has actually now asked me to step down as chairman. (Participant 3)

> [I was] Absolutely terrified of her and I still am, because she has the capacity of destroying everything that I have worked for destroying my relationship about my children, you know, spreading lies about me. (Participant 5)

### *Superordinate cluster 4: it was different because I was a man*

This cluster reflected social expectations of masculinity and how these interacted with the respondent's status as a victim. Participants spoke about a number of negative associations with male victimisation. For example, they felt that their options for coping with the abuse were limited by social expectations. They also felt that wider social views and stereotypes impacted upon their experiences and increased their victimisation.

#### *Subordinate theme – it is unmanly to be a victim of domestic abuse*

In some cases, the respondents reflected the view that wider society did not fully endorse the idea that men (physically able, strong and 'manly') could be victims of female-perpetrated IPV.

> [It is] deemed unmanly to say I'm a victim of domestic violence … how can that happen. Is he a little weedy character that allows himself to get bullied? (Participant 2)

> I mean it's this mistaken idea that, oh well, a man who is sort of two metres tall and a hundred and forty kilos, how can he possibly be abused by a woman a quarter of his size? (Participant 4)

For one respondent his lack of physical retaliation was contrasted to the perceived reactions of a 'real man'. His (non-violent) response was not endorsed and his experience was invalidated.

> Interestingly her mother had phoned me up and said 'be a man, don't phone the police, just beat her until she agrees with you.' That was surprising to hear, be a real man, deal with it properly. (Participant 6)

#### *Subordinate theme – I didn't get the help I needed because I am a man*

This theme reflects the participant's perception that because they were men, they were not treated seriously. Two of the respondents reported that they had on occasions found the police supportive. However, all of the respondents experienced occasions when they felt the authorities were prejudiced against them because of their gender.

> They didn't record anything I'd said, even when we requested the records from the police [about] the seven occasions I'd reported her for breaking into my home, for attempting to run me over, for hitting me and pushing me down the stairs, and none of it was reported … and the frustration was the police did nothing to help. (Participant 3)

Even when the respondents felt that the police treated the abuse seriously, there was a perception that more could, or should, have been done. The contrast with

services provided to women is not made explicit, but hinted at, in the following quote.

> Yes the police did arrive, they did take me seriously, they did follow up etcetera etcetera but there was no, you know there was no, offer of on-going [support] to have a talk to the support line. They said what I had to do was call my lawyer up. (Participant 5)

## Discussion and reflection

There is a strongly contested debate around the notion of female-perpetrated IPV. This may contribute to narratives of male victimisation being considered 'forbidden' or 'unbelievable' by academics, practitioners and male victims themselves (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Corbally, 2015). However, in line with other work in this area (Douglas & Hines, 2011), the respondents in this study experienced a range of abusive behaviours. Physical abuse was a particularly salient theme. This may reflect the severity of the abuse encountered by the respondents (see also Nowinski & Bowen, 2012). As with the work of other researchers in this area (Corbally, 2015; Durfee, 2011; Eckstein, 2010), it was noticeable that the respondents did not discuss their emotional reactions to the physical abuse, preferring instead to focus on a description of events. This was in sharp contrast to their discussion of the role of children within the abuse. In line with Corbally's (2015) findings, the impact of the abuse on, and through, the children appeared to affect the respondents deeply. Children offer a particularly effective mechanism by which the abuser could control the victim both during and after the relationship. The notion that female perpetrators may deliberately conceive children in order to facilitate control of the relationship has not previously been reported in the literature.

The validity of a gendered notion of IPV has been much debated within the literature. Frequently, gender-based conceptualisations are contrasted with those referred to as gender-neutral. However, the results from this study show the role of gender, as well as wider societal expectations of masculinity, does need to be considered by researchers and practitioners. Such factors directly affected the participants' experiences. For example, the widely held stereotype of a male-perpetrator/female victim resulted in the male victims in this study being further victimised. This occurred through a failure to validate their experiences, increasing social isolation and damage to their role as a father. As observed by Corbally (2015), a traditionally gendered based view of IPV facilitates secondary victimisation of male victims through the responses of structures such as schools, the police and courts.

### *Limitations*

The central concern of IPA is to capture and analyse the subjective experiences of the respondents. Potential bias during this process is a particular issue of

concern (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Despite the absence of pre-determined criteria, there is a risk that the researcher may impose a framework onto the data. In this case, the researchers were aware of the debate around gendered definitions of abuse and the notion of 'intimate terrorism'. In order to increase the neutrality of their work, they shared the analysis with experienced IPA researchers during the process as per the suggestions of Morse et al. (2002). This allowed for correction of some sources of bias; however, it is the nature of hermeneutic constructivism that some may remain.

The recruitment of participants may have introduced another source of bias. For ethical reasons, participants were recruited via support groups. It is therefore possible that the respondents' accounts were influenced by narratives they had been exposed to following the abuse (such as those related to power and control).



## Conclusion

Most of the IPV research has focused upon violence against women. This study does not call for a reduction in such work. However, the findings from this study suggest male victimisation is a serious issue and one that warrants attention. The male victims in this sample were deeply affected by their experience of abuse. In addition to the direct abuse, the respondents experienced societal and cultural forces which deepened their experiences of victimisation. A lack of support for male victims was fuelled by the societal expectations of masculinity and stigma surrounding male victimisation. Practitioners and academics should direct their attention towards better understanding those mechanisms used by IPV perpetrators in relation to both direct and secondary victimisation. Rather than gender neutral, we call for a 'gender sensitive' approach to future research which combines different theoretical perspectives. The psychological and medical literature contributes information about notions of control and differing forms of IPV. However, sociological research about gender within society, not just within an abuse framework, contributes to our understanding of how the abuse is experienced by male victims.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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