



## Partner violence against heterosexual and gay men: Prevalence and correlates

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### ABSTRACT

Female victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) have been the focus of a substantial amount of research. However, the subject of male victims of IPV remains a controversial topic, and one which has been comparatively neglected within the literature, despite some findings suggesting that men are victimized by intimate partners at an equivalent, or even higher rate than women. This paper reviews the literature on male victims of IPV, both within opposite and same-gender relationships, focusing on the prevalence and correlates of IPV, as well as exploring the relationship between IPV and ethnicity. According to the literature reviewed, the prevalence of female perpetrated IPV against heterosexual male victims ranges from 0.2% to 93%, homosexual male victimization ranges between 1.8% and 93.7%, and heterosexual female victimization ranges between 1.3% and 86% depending on the type of IPV included, whether the reference period includes the past 12 months, or lifetime experience, and the method used to assess IPV. These data indicate that victimization is as much an issue for men as it is for women. In addition, it appears that men of certain ethnicities may be more at risk than others. Finally, the empirical literature which examines the correlates of male victimization indicates that male victims in heterosexual and gay relationships share many correlates. Unfortunately however, methodological weaknesses in the available literature and a lack of research in some areas restrict the extent to which conclusions can be drawn, and findings generalized. Recommendations for future research are made.

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## 1. Introduction

Domestic violence is defined by the [Home Office \(n.d.\)](#) as “threatening behavior, violence or abuse between adults who are, or have been in a relationship, or between family members” and “can affect anybody, regardless of their gender or sexuality”. The Home Office also states that the abuse can be “psychological, physical, sexual or emotional”. Intimate partner violence (IPV) involves the same behavior and violence, but excludes violence between family members other than within past or current romantic relationships ([Finney, 2004, p. 1](#)). Until relatively recently, IPV has been conceptualized as an issue exclusively for women ([Dobash & Dobash, 2004](#)). However, there is now a growing body of evidence which suggests that men are not just the perpetrators, but also the victims of IPV ([Archer, 2000](#); [Goldberg & Tomlanovich, 1984](#); [Steinmetz, 1977](#); [Willis & Porche, 2003](#)). It has been demonstrated that women perpetrate violence (both physical and verbal), both in a wider context, and within intimate relationships ([Archer, 2000](#); [Richardson, 2005](#); [Steen & Hunskaar, 2004](#)).

This view of women as aggressors, rather than nurturers, is often counter-intuitive, and contradicts prevailing societal norms ([Richardson, 2005](#)). Historically, men who have been classified as ‘victims’, particularly at the hands of women, have been publicly humiliated and chastised ([George, 2002, p.125](#)). Violence perpetrated by women is often seen as more acceptable than that perpetrated by men ([Simon et al., 2001](#)), and as reflecting self-defense. However although women’s violence towards men is generally less injurious ([Archer, 2000](#); [Dobash & Dobash, 2004](#)) (namely due to the comparatively greater size and strength of men), women have been found to cause severe injuries to men ([Ananthakrishnan, Alagappan, & Riyat, 2006](#); [Felson & Cares, 2005](#)), and many motivations for this violence, besides self-defense have been reported, including control and anger ([Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991](#); [Weizmann-Henelius, Viemero, & Eronen, 2003](#)).

Despite these findings, attitudes towards male victims of IPV have been found to be far less sympathetic than those towards female victims ([Seelau, Seelau, & Poorman, 2003](#); [Sorenson & Taylor, 2005](#)). [Carlson and Worden \(2005\)](#) found that participants were more likely to judge men’s violent behavior as representing IPV, and as being illegal, than women’s. Research has also suggested that participants view scenarios involving same-gender IPV as less believable, and less serious ([Poorman, Seelau, & Seelau, 2003](#)) than those involving opposite-gender couples.

The controversial topic of gender and IPV has caused a divide within the literature, between “family violence” researchers, and “feminist” researchers ([Kurz, 1989, p.490](#)); the first of whom believe that men are as likely (or even more likely) to be victims of IPV as women, and the second advocating that women are the undisputable victims of this type of abuse. Findings of family violence researchers have suggested that male victimization is approximately equivalent to that of female victimization ([Hamel, 2007](#)). For example, [Straus and Gelles \(1986\)](#) found that similar proportions of wives engaged

in violence as their male counterparts (12.1 and 11.3% respectively), and that more wives than husbands engaged in severe violence (4.39 and 3% respectively). Additionally, [Straus \(2008\)](#) found that 24.4% and 7.6% of males, and 31.6% and 10.6% of females had engaged in a minor and severe physical assault against a partner respectively. In a seminal meta-analysis of the literature, [Archer \(2000\)](#) also found that women were significantly more likely to use physical aggression within their relationship, although men were more likely to cause injury. Other studies have reported higher rates of physical violence perpetrated by women than men ([Rouse, Breen, & Howell, 1988](#)), or equivalent rates across genders ([Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001](#)). Despite this empirical evidence, some maintain that the majority of victims of IPV are, in fact, women ([Berk, Beck, Loseke, & Rauma, 1983](#); [Dobash & Dobash, 2004](#); [Mirrlees-Black, 1999](#); [Schwartz, 1987](#); [Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a, 2000b](#)). Indeed, [Tjaden and Thoennes \(2000a\)](#) found that 22.1% of women and 7.4% of men had experienced physical assault at the hands of a partner.

In terms of explaining these discrepancies, it has been suggested that methodological differences can account for the differences in findings ([Johnson, 2005](#)). Family violence researchers routinely use some form of the self-report Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) ([Straus, 1979, 1990a](#); [Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996](#)), which measures perpetration and victimization in the form of physical, psychological violence and sexual coercion, the injuries caused, and negotiation behaviors used ([Straus et al., 1996, pp.284–288](#)). However, this scale has been criticized for not taking into account such issues as intention, context, and meaning ([Dobash & Dobash, 2004](#); [Kurz, 1989, pp.494–495](#)). In contrast, Feminist researchers routinely utilize crime victimization surveys, and clinical samples from hospitals, shelters, courts and other agencies ([Bowen, 2011](#); [Johnson, 2006](#)). However, this may be equally problematic, as crime victimization surveys frame questions about IPV in the context of a crime, which may inadvertently exclude some male victims, who do not classify or report their abuse as such ([Kimmel, 2002, pp. 1337–1338](#)). Additionally, the use of this agency data is not necessarily representative, and is likely to characterize the more severe cases of IPV, and under represent male victims ([Straus, 1990b](#)), for whom there is more limited support, coupled with societal norms which discourage men from help-seeking ([Addis & Mahalik, 2003](#); [Hines & Douglas, 2009](#)).

It has been suggested by [Johnson \(2006, pp.1004–1006\)](#) that these two different methodologies identify distinct types of abuse. Johnson suggests that “intimate terrorism” (p. 1006) (characterized by violence and control on the part of one partner, and possibly violence, but not control on the part of the other), usually perpetrated by men, is measured preferentially by using crime data and agency samples. Conversely, “situational couple violence” (p.1006) (which can be reciprocal, but does not include controlling behaviors) is predominantly identified in other surveys ([Johnson, 2006, p.1010](#)). Therefore, the suggestion is that men may be equal victims of “situational couple violence” (p.1006), with women also demonstrating “violent resistance” (p.1006) (characterized by violent behavior resisting the

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