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CONCEPTUALISING FEMALE PERPETRATED VIOLENCE TOWARDS INTIMATE MALE PARTNERS: A DELPHI STUDY OF EXPERT'S VIEWS.

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Introduction

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) has largely been considered a gendered crime, that is, that men are the perpetrators and women the victims (Hamel, 2009).
- However this belief has been challenged by the emergence of numerous research studies suggesting males as well as female may be victims of intimate partner violence.
- Despite increasing acknowledgement that males can also be victimised, compared to the extensive literature on male perpetrated intimate partner abuse the literature on female perpetrated violence towards male partners is exceptionally scarce (Dutton, Nicholls & Spidel, 2005).
- What is evident from the research that does exist is that there is a lack of discussion and consensus in regards to the causal explanations specific to this type of female violence.
- The present study aimed to address this by exploring the ways in which local experts in the field of family and domestic violence conceptualise female perpetrated violence towards intimate male partners. The following research questions were explored:

1) What explicit or implicit theoretical frameworks guide expert work with female victims of male perpetrated domestic violence?
2) How, if at all, do the experts draw upon these theories and key concepts to conceptualise female perpetrated violence toward intimate male partners?
3) Can these theories be applied in the same way across the two genders in regards to the practical implications?

Research Design

Delphi Methodology

- A qualitative technique employing a series of interviews interspersed with controlled feedback, in order to gain a consensus of opinion from a group of experts (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004).

The present study involved a sample of ten local experts from within the field of family and domestic violence.

For the purpose of the study experts were considered 'local' if they work within the Perth Metropolitan Area in Western Australia.

In order to be representative of the field as a whole the participants were recruited from different sectors within the field including women's refuges, community based services, police, policy and legal divisions.

Research Design

Recruitment

- Local experts in the field of family and domestic violence were identified through literature searches and media reports.
- Additional participants were recruited via “snowballing”.

Procedure

- Participants were required to complete a brief questionnaire providing occupational details, and to take part in two rounds of interviews.
- These were semi-structured and guided by interview schedules comprising of several open-ended questions.
- The first round interviews were followed by a period of several weeks during which the interviews were transcribed, analysed and a new schedule constructed.
- The results and responses collated from the first round were then presented to the participants in the second.
- Participants were contacted via email in order to conduct member checking of the second round interviews before the data underwent a thematic analysis.

Preliminary Findings

Round 1 Interviews

An immediate consensus emerged in the first round as to what theoretical constructs best describe domestic violence in general. These were:

1) The Feminist Framework
2) Lenore Walker's Cycle of Violence
3) Power and Control Wheel
4) Michael Johnson's Patriarchal Terrorism vs. Common Couple Violence

When asked "how, if at all do you draw upon these theories to explain female perpetrated violence against intimate male partners" the general consensus was that these theories could not explain the violence.

In addition, there was acknowledgement that male victims do exist however the participants argued they are extremely rare, and that they themselves have never come across a true victim.

Preliminary Findings

Round 2 Interviews

In the second round interviews the participants were provided with a hypothetical scenario of a female perpetrating domestic abuse against her male partner. This scenario contained the classic dynamics of a typical domestic violence relationship. Participants were shown this scenario in order to provide them with some context of a “rare” but entirely possible situation and to examine how they would conceptualise and respond to this.

The consensus emerging from the second round interviews was that some, but not all aspects of the theories discussed in the first round could be applied to this scenario. Those that could were power and control and the cycle of violence.

Conclusions

The present study was successful in highlighting how local experts in the field of family and domestic violence conceptualize female perpetrated violence towards intimate male partners.

Implications and future directions involve:

- Current theories of domestic violence are unable to comprehensively explain female perpetrated violence against intimate male partners.
- Effective services for both male victims and female perpetrators of domestic violence cannot be constructed until there is a robust theoretical foundation upon which to base these services.
- Further research is needed in order to create a framework that is able to explain this phenomenon.

Possible limitations include:

- A third round of interviews may have provided a bit more clarity to the current findings, however some questions have had to be left unanswered due to time contraints.

References

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