

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A GENDER-BASED ISSUE?

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been widely examined through a framework that is based on male-perpetrated violence against women. However, recent studies, including a study published in the Journal, have initiated focus on female perpetration of IPV against male partners.¹⁻³ The majority of such studies have not identified a framework for understanding this phenomenon. Given that a framework is needed for further progress in this arena, I defend a framework that recognizes IPV as a form of gender-based violence.

Existing research on this topic demonstrates that IPV became recognized initially as a critical threat to the health of society because of the severity of consequences among female victims^{1,3-8} and the high prevalence of male-perpetrated IPV victimization among women in the United States and abroad.^{4,9} By contrast, no evidence has demonstrated that female-perpetrated violence against male partners has been a threat to the health of populations of men. Additionally, studies that have compared the prevalence of female- and male-perpetrated violence against partners have had various limitations—namely, that male-perpetrated violence against female partners is highly stigmatized and likely underreported and not comparable to violence perpetrated by women against their male partners. Further, unlike male-perpetrated IPV against female partners, which has been linked to assertion of male control and is likely rooted in gender inequalities,¹⁰ female-perpetrated violence against intimate male partners has often been

documented to be more likely a result of self-defense or poor conflict management in relationships.³ With the exception of self-defense, female perpetration of violence against male partners is likely more closely related to other forms of non-gender specific unhealthy relationship behavior and is not likely a major concern for the field of public health.

Such recent focus on female IPV perpetration may be a result of IPV measures that have often been limited to items assessing only physical violence (often including measures such as “hitting or slapping” a partner); such items lack specificity to capture other core elements of IPV (e.g., control, patterning of abuse, intimidation). In future studies, IPV may need to be better distinguished by using data measures and interpretation that parallel an adopted framework, preferably a framework that considers IPV within the scope of gender-based violence. ■

Elizabeth Reed, ScD

About the Author

The author is with the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, Yale University School of Public Health, New Haven, Conn.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Elizabeth Reed, ScD, Yale University School of Public Health, Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, 135 College St, Suite 200, New Haven, CT 06510 (e-mail: elizabeth.reed@yale.edu).

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