

Mapping the Self Representations of Men who have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence

Family abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV) impacts men, women, and children leading them to have a negative view of themselves. This negative self-construal affects future decision making and family interaction. While the effects of domestic violence on women and children have been recognized, the effects on fathers who have been victims of IPV have been understudied.

Traditional constructs of masculinity within Euro-American cultures frequently normalize risk-taking, neglect self-care, embrace independence and self-reliance, mandate stoicism, and suppress emotions (Buitenbos, 2012; Foster & Kelly, 2012). Since internal self-representation impacts on how we interpret and engage with the world around us (Robertson, 2017; Seth, 2021), and since the experience of IPV would negate some of these attributes of masculinity such as independence and self-reliance while accentuating other attributes such as neglect of self and stoicism, it would be reasonable to expect that the experience of IPV would differentially impact the self-construal and subsequent male behaviour. This study will generate empirical data on how IPV affects male victims' internal narratives and perceptions of self providing insights into the psychological processes and changes these individuals undergo. This study will be guided by the following specific research questions:

- How do males who have experienced IPV manifest that experience in their internal self-representations?
- What do males who have experienced IPV recall was different about their selves prior to this experience; that is, how have they changed subsequent to the IPV experience?
- Where difference is noted between the self of a IPV male victim and a remembered prior self, are the changes framed as a new development or as the uncovering of something that was always true but previously unknown?

Theoretical Framework: This research explores how male self-construal is impacted by IPV using the concept of the self developed by LH Robertson (2020) as a kind of self-defining mind map. Self-construal is shaped by various factors and is necessary for consciousness. Threats to the self can lead to extreme behaviors and affect coping abilities (Christopher et al., 2010; Lightsey et al., 2014). The self is influenced by biological, psychological, and cultural factors. IPV threats can lead to extreme behaviors and diminished self-efficacy (Martel et al., 2021). The self can be visualized through "memetic self-mapping" and these visualizations applied to male victims of IPV will provides insights into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impacts of IPV of their experiences.

In answering these research questions, this research will use a conceptualization of the self and process of mapping the self developed by the Principal Investigator. In this conceptualization, the self is pictured as a self-referencing theory consisting of units of culture. Roberson (2020) has argued that such a self is necessary for consciousness. Threats to this self can lead to extreme behaviours and affect coping abilities (Christopher et al., 2010; Lightsey et al., 2014) with diminished self-efficacy (Martel et al., 2021). The study will create two dimensional maps of the selves of male victims of IPV providing insights into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural impacts of their experiences.

Methodology: Maps of the selves of a sample of 30 men who have experienced IPV will be developed using a qualitative method developed by the Principal Investigator for research into the self. Retrospective questions will assist in developing insight into how the experience of IPV have impacted their self-construal thus offering insights into the unique psychological impacts of IPV on men.

This study will contribute to our understanding of how IPV affects the self of men who have experienced this phenomenon. It will, therefore, be of interests to those involved in the study of family violence and to those outside the academic community interested in providing services to men. More generally, the process of mapping the self use here will be of interest to those researchers interested in studying developmental and environmental impacts on the self.