

Who's to blame? Effects of Perpetrator Gender and Victim Confrontation on Perceptions of Blame

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Introduction

Domestic violence: assaultive behaviors that a person will use against a romantic partner, family member, or living partner

Research found that "Ordinary" violence, including slapping, shoving, and throwing things at a partner, was symmetrical across gender.

A study analyzing factors influencing the acceptability of dating violence found that people perceived male violence as less acceptable, more injurious, and more likely to be in need of criminal attention than female violence.

People viewed the perpetrator in confrontational domestic violence situations to be less at fault than perpetrators in non-confrontational situations.

Question/Hypothesis

Why are there disproportionate perceptions of violence between genders?

Primary Hypothesis: Participants will rate levels of attribution of blame and responsibility lower for female perpetrators than they will for male perpetrators.

Secondary Hypothesis: Participants will rate levels of attributions of blame and responsibility lower for the perpetrator in vignettes that portray confrontation than in vignettes that portray non-confrontational situation.

Method

We recruited participants through a convenience sample through Facebook and the Psychology department. Surveys were distributed via Qualtrics.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes describing a mild domestic violence scene.

Measured participants reaction of blame and responsibility on an 11-point questionnaire. Example question: "The Perpetrator deserves to be blamed for the violent acts".

Items on the scale were recoded/summed for each participant to create a single score used in analysis.

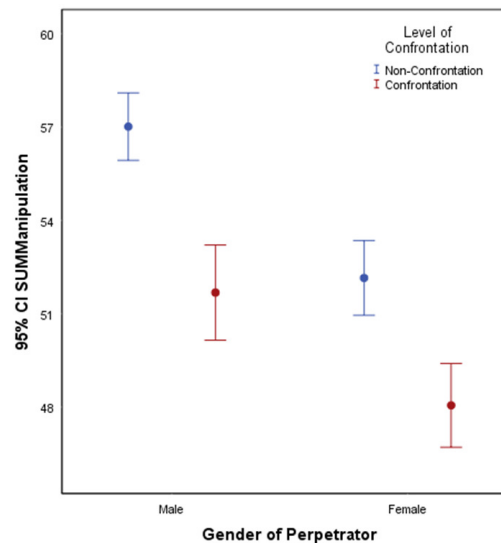
288 participants analyzed out of 360 measured. 60 males and 228 females. 27 participants have been domestically abused. 182 knew someone who has been domestically abused.

Vignette Example

You are returning home from a full day of classes when you notice your neighbors at their front door. In the past, you have heard a lot of screaming and yelling coming from their apartment, so you wait and listen. You overhear the boyfriend, Robert, telling his girlfriend that some guy called for her and hung up before he could take a message. He then asks who the guy might have been. Maria says, "I'm not sure. It might have been someone from class today." He yells, "Drop the attitude! Tell me who the guy on the phone was or you'll be really sorry." You then witness Robert slap his girlfriend. Maria responds by holding her cheek, wincing in pain. Robert then yells, "You think that stings...Next time it'll really hurt!"

*Male/Non-Confrontation variables

Perception of Blame Results



Resources

- No More: Together We Can End Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault
- The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- The Bolton Refuge House located in Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Variables

True-Independent Variable: the gender of the perpetrator in vignettes presented to the participant.

True-Independent Variable: the presence or absence of confrontation by the victim prior to violence.

Dependent variable: derived from a previous study conducted by Rhatigan et al. It was a measure of attributions of blame and responsibility using an 11-item scale resembling the Relationship Attribution Measure.

Results

Results were coded using a 6 point Likert scale and summed to create a single score for each participant.

An Analysis of Variance was used to measure the main effect of the independent variables.

Sex of perpetrator: $F(1, 283) = 42.25$, $MSE = 30.58$, $p < .001$ with $\eta_p^2 = .13$.

Level of confrontation: $F(1, 283) = 52.13$, $MSE = 30.28$, $p < .001$ with $\eta_p^2 = .15$.

Discussion

Results indicated that participants perceived male perpetrators to be more at fault than female perpetrators. Participants also perceived the perpetrator to be less at fault when the victim displayed confrontational behavior prior to the violence.

Research indicates that a lack of knowledge of victim blaming is more likely to cause society to engage in victim blaming. Results may contribute to the pool of knowledge and decrease victim blaming.

Future research: including perceptions of blame as a function of participant gender.

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