

Men's Experiences of the UK Criminal Justice System Following Female Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence

### Abstract

The current study aimed to explore men's experience of the UK Criminal Justice System (CJS) following female-perpetrated intimate partner violence (IPV). Unstructured face-to-face and Skype interviews were conducted with six men aged between 40-65 years.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Due to the method of analysis and the sensitive nature of the research, the researcher engaged in a process of reflexivity.

Four main themes were identified, including 'Guilty until Proven Innocent: Victim Cast as Perpetrator'; 'Masculine Identity'; 'Psychological Impact' and 'Light at the End of the Tunnel'. Themes were discussed and illustrated with direct quotes drawn from the transcripts. Directions for future research, criminal justice interventions and therapeutic interventions were discussed.

*Keywords:* domestic abuse, domestic violence, family violence, intimate partner abuse, intimate partner violence, intimate terrorism, male victims, female perpetrators

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is defined as physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy. IPV can vary in frequency and severity. It occurs on a continuum, ranging from one hit that may or may not impact the victim to chronic, severe battering (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). This definition involves abuse ranging from psychological or emotional abuse, threats of physical or sexual violence, actual physical violence and actual sexual violence (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon & Shelley, 2002).

Johnson and Leone (2005) made a distinction between 'situational couple violence', entailing occasional outbursts of violence by both partners which does not stem from a need to control, and 'intimate terrorism', where people exert their dominance and terrorise their partners. Johnson and Leone (2005) concluded that those who experienced 'intimate terrorism' were attacked more frequently, more likely to be injured, more likely to experience post-traumatic stress, use painkillers and miss work more often than those involved in 'situational couple violence'. However, this study was based upon samples drawn from women's shelters and the National Violence against Women Survey respectively, thus these results do not reflect the experiences of men, and may not encompass a balanced, gender-informed perspective. A gender informed approach refers to a movement away from the traditional feminist perspective of domestic violence, and towards a societal view which addresses the potential for both men and women to be victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, with both having the potential to inflict abuse and coercive control within intimate relationships. A gender-informed perspective can thus allow for the experiences and needs of both men and women to be acknowledged and met. Throughout the historical discourse, men have been socialized to hide their problems (Goldberg, 1979; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Dutton and White (2013) make reference to the stereotype connoted by 'domestic violence' of a bullying, domineering man who intimidates and assaults a non-violent female victim. Furthermore, McNeely, Cook, and Torres (2001) refer to the disbelief

that men can be victims of IPV, as men are, on average, bigger, stronger and more skilled at fighting than women. As men are generally stronger than women, they appear to be less vulnerable to violence perpetrated by a female partner (George, 1994).

Gender biases have been found to affect people's perceptions of the severity of IPV. One study found that acts were more likely to be perceived as psychologically or physically abusive by the general public if they were executed by men (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Additionally, research has highlighted that this gender bias is also true of psychologists, with husband's behaviors being judged as more psychologically abusive and more severe than wives' use of the same actions (Follingstad, DeHart & Green, 2004).

Gender stereotyping is a dominant force within male socialisation and minimises the likelihood of men seeking help (Goldberg, 1979; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Furthermore, stereotypes associated with men can deter them from coming forward as a victim of female-perpetrated abuse due to the stigma attached (Steinmetz, 1980; Cook, 2009).

Dutton and Nicholls (2005) identified a gender paradigm within the literature whereby IPV is viewed unanimously as male-perpetrated abuse towards helpless female victims. A reason for this focus could be based upon sample selection (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005), with many of the studies drawing their sample from shelters for female victims, court-mandated male perpetrator programmes and imprisoned male perpetrators (e.g. Baird, 2000; Waldrop & Resick, 2004), as well as the influence of aforementioned gender role stereotypes. According to Dutton and Nicholls (2005), the tendency within domestic violence research to protect the rights of women has predominated scientific accuracy, with an over reliance on value-laden theories which influence the data collection, analysis and reporting of research.

IPV perpetrated towards men was first publicized by Steinmetz (1977a), who reported high rates of family violence, concluding that men and women have equal potential for violence within

relationships. This claim was widely criticized (Straton, 1994; Minaker & Snider, 2006) and researchers argued that the movement towards equality will negatively impact upon government funding for services for women. Steinmetz (1978) also highlighted the impact of stigma, which, although undoubtedly affects both men and women, is further heightened for men due to the aforementioned socially prescribed gender norms.

Men who have experienced IPV have been shown to suffer from psychological distress such as PTSD (Hines, 2007). Coker et al. (2002) reported that female victims were more likely than men to report poor physical and mental health and suggested that many physical symptoms reported by women in this study are similar to symptoms of depression and anxiety. However, Martin, Neighbors, and Griffith (2013) suggested that men experience depression differently, due to societal ideas of masculinity conflicting with traditional symptoms of depression such as sadness and crying. They argue that male experiences of depression may manifest with symptoms not currently included in the diagnostic criteria.

Research using samples of men from help-seeking populations has found that men experience violence and coercive control from their female partners (Hines et al., 2007; Carmo, Grams & Magalhães, 2011; Hines & Douglas, 2010), which challenges the assertion that females are the only victims of 'intimate terrorism'. Qualitative research which examined the experiences of counselors working with male victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse (Hogan et al., 2012) found there was a lack of recognition within society that men can also experience domestic abuse. In conclusion, research findings displaying females can be both victims and perpetrators of IPV contest many formerly held understandings of the phenomenon (McHugh & Hanson-Frieze, 2006).

Hester (2009) reported that the majority of IPV perpetrators recorded by the police in North East England were male and victims were predominantly female. Official statistics based on crimes

recorded by the police in 2011 to 2012 (Office of National Statistics, 2013) which included a self-report module based on IPV, found that women were more likely to have experienced IPV. However, Steinmetz (1977b) highlighted that the criminal context of such surveys discourages men from reporting their experiences of physical assault by a female perpetrator, due to it being experienced as emasculating. Dutton and White (2013) also refer to the issue of under-reporting of IPV by male victims; due to the aforementioned socialization of men which reduces the likelihood of men seeking help (Goldberg, 1979).

Evidence from the UK Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (Mankind Initiative, 2013) displays a marked discrepancy between the number of male and female convictions of IPV. In 2012-2013 there was 3, 231 convictions of female perpetrators, in comparison to 49, 289 convictions of male perpetrators. At face value, these findings align with the traditional feminist view of domestic violence. However, the evidence presented in the current literature review displays female-perpetrated IPV towards men tends to go under-reported (Steinmetz, 1978) and research displays equivalent levels of IPV between men and women (Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014).

George (2007) argued that the prejudice against male victims is extreme and has led to under reporting by the police, with more men being put into the Criminal Justice System (CJS) if counter charges are made against them. Cook (2009) reported that in some cases, men's calls to police during an episode of partner violence were not responded to. In other cases, men were ridiculed by the police or wrongly arrested as the primary perpetrator. Furthermore, research has displayed the influence of gender stereotypes amongst the general public and psychologists (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Follingstad, DeHart and Green, 2004). Thus it is likely that CJS professionals are also influenced by these gender biases. However, the report based upon the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted in the U.S. (Black et al., 2011) offers a balanced perspective of IPV, highlighting the prevalence and impact for both men and

women. This reflects a movement away from traditional feminist views of IPV and towards a more gender-informed perspective.

### **Rationale**

Qualitative methods can promote a better understanding of the context of IPV and provide much needed insights; however, there has been a dearth of men's narratives in the research literature (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Some qualitative research has been conducted into men's experiences which highlighted experiences of men being beaten, sleep-deprived, controlled and manipulated (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Migliaccio (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with men who reported psychological effects of the abuse, including suicidal thoughts, disassociation and avoidance. This study also identified external factors which hinder men's ability to escape from the abusive relationship, namely, the police. These qualitative studies show the beginnings of a more detailed understanding of men's experiences.

Research findings are contradictory which is indicative of the complexity of IPV. The majority of the research is based upon quantitative studies and meta-analyses of empirical research, which have been criticised for methodological issues (Nazroo, 1995), inconsistent use of terminology, disparities with reporting and recording, issues with the construction of official statistics, and decontextualization of abuse (Allen-Collinson, 2009). The few qualitative studies of this area have begun to build a more detailed understanding of the experiences of male victims. The current study aims to build upon the qualitative aspect of men's experiences of female-perpetrated IPV within the United Kingdom, which at present is lacking within the literature base.

## Methodology

### Design

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of men who had lived through female-perpetrated IPV and had subsequent contact with the CJS. Given the sensitive nature of the research, a qualitative method was considered to offer a richer way of exploring these issues. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design was chosen in order to gain a rich detailed understanding of the men's experiences. An 'unstructured' approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009) was used, allowing for a deep exploration of unanticipated and unexpected findings. In the current study the participants were asked the following core question:

*'Please tell me about your experiences with the Criminal Justice System due to the intimate partner violence that you've experienced'*

This unstructured technique allowed the researcher to go with the flow of the interview and fully explore the participant's experiences.

### Participants

Six participants were interviewed, using a self-selected sampling technique. In order to fit the criteria for the study, the participants had to be male and above the age of eighteen. They had to have experienced female-perpetrated IPV and had subsequent involvement with the CJS.

Two participants were recruited through word of mouth advertising at a charitable agency involved in supporting male victims and were interviewed face-to-face. The remaining participants were recruited via advertisements placed on a website for men who have experienced IPV. As participants were located across the UK, interviews were conducted online via Skype in a confidential setting. Participants were allocated pseudonyms referred to throughout the study, namely Henry, Martin, David, Robert, Lee and Chris.

## **Procedure**

Two weeks prior to the interview participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent sheet. For the face to face interviews arrangements were made to meet at a mutually convenient time. For those participating in Skype interviews a mutually convenient time and date was agreed for the interview to take place online. Signed consent forms were collected via e-mail prior to the Skype interviews commencing and were collected by hand before the face to face interviews. The interviews followed the 'unstructured' approach outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) and lasted approximately one hour.

## **Analysis**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and ascribed line numbers before being analysed using IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher engaged in a double hermeneutic in the analysis process, by attempting to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith et al, 2009). Meaning is central within IPA analysis, and constructing this meaning involves engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript (Smith and Osborn, 2003). The researcher followed the method suggested by Smith et al. (2009) whereby the researcher fully immersed herself into the original data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. Each transcript was annotated thoroughly and the researcher entered into a reflexive and interpretative process with the interview transcripts. Transcribed interviews were annotated individually with exploratory comments regarding the participants experience and perceptions (Smith et al. 2009). Three different levels of exploratory comments were employed, including descriptive, linguistic and conceptual (Smith et al, 2009), which allowed the researcher to engage with the content, language and underlying meanings of the transcripts. The researcher continued to annotate the transcribed interviews until themes begin to emerge which recurred throughout the text. The researcher then used abstraction (Smith et al., 2009) whereby similar emergent themes

were grouped together in order to develop main themes. This analysis process was repeated until all main themes and sub-themes were identified. In order to ensure trustworthiness of data researcher triangulation was undertaken by collaborating with another researcher for possible interpretations of the transcripts. The researchers both read the same transcripts and arrived at similar interpretations, which allowed development of the themes.

## **Results**

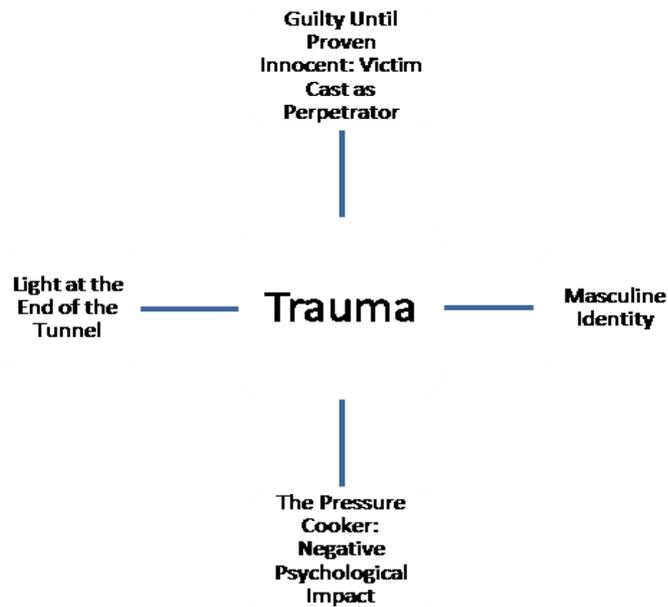
Four main themes were identified:

- Guilty till Proven Innocent: Victim cast as Perpetrator
- Masculine Identity
- The Pressure Cooker: Negative Psychological Impact
- Light at the End of the Tunnel

An umbrella theme of 'trauma' ran throughout the interviews, which appeared to stem directly from the abuse perpetrated by their female partners, but was affected by their contact with the CJS.

Trauma has been defined as an experience which leads to 'involuntary and radical change of a person's internal life', 'emotional, social, and eventually moral dysfunction because of its intensive devastating, uncontrollable, profound, and long-lasting impact on all internal dimensions of the person's life' and 'restlessness, grief, frustration, and paranoid and hostile feeling toward the harsh, unbearable, and threatening outside world' (Martens, 2005, p.116).

**Figure 1.**



The main themes are illustrated in figure 1 and shall be discussed alongside the sub-themes, using quotes from participants to support the themes.

**Main Theme 1: Guilty Until Proven Innocent: Victim Cast As Perpetrator.**

**Figure 2.**

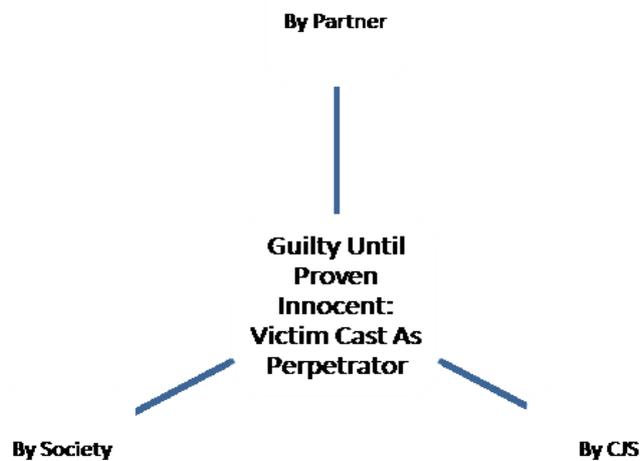


Figure 2 represents the main theme of 'Guilty until Proven Innocent: Victim cast as Perpetrator' and sub themes including 'By Partner', 'By CJS' and 'By Society'. This theme developed from a narrative in which the men reflected upon their experiences of being treated like a perpetrator, despite being the victim, and their experiences not being listened to or believed.

**Sub-theme: By Partner.**

Participants referred often to the accusations of IPV made by their partner towards them, despite this dynamic being the inverse of the truth. Chris described his experiences of his partner making claims about him being psychologically abusive towards her.

*"She was calling the police on me, erm, you know, claiming that I was unhinged and that I was harassing her, you know she was getting threats"* (Chris)

Some of the men tried to think of reasons or theories to explain why their partner was trying to accuse them of being the perpetrator when they were actually the victim.

*"I then suspected that she was doing, the reason she was doing things to me was for an alternative motive and that was because she was having an affair with a work colleague [right] and she was wanting me to basically break down so she could move me out the house to move her partner back in"* (Lee)

**Sub-theme: By CJS.**

There was a feeling of being unfairly treated by the CJS and treat like a guilty perpetrator. This sub-theme highlighted that the treatment by the CJS can heighten the victimisation of the men, but also adds to the confusion they feel of being treated like a perpetrator. David refers to his anger towards the establishment and the police and feels

the way he was treated was unfair. The fact that David refers to himself as the perpetrator is reflective of his confusion over his role as victim or perpetrator.

*"I've got a lot of anger towards the establishment as well and the police [yeah] and I think the police, like the way they deal with perpetrators in domestic situations is not right, because they're not, they're not fair"* (David)

Martin speaks of the web of lies he feels he is caught up in, with the law being on the side of his ex-partner.

*"I just feel like I'm caught up in a web of lies you know, with the law, the law on her side, because they haven't looked into the rest of it, because there's two sides to every story isn't there"* (Martin)

Henry also referred to a positive experience with the CJS which offered reassurance.

*"That was quite helpful actually. I mean I realized as well that he was the officer that questioned me, who was trying to prompt me for sort of information he needed [mm] during the questioning, well once we got some way through it. Ah, so I was quite reassured about that."* (Henry)

**Sub-theme: By Society.**

Participants' spoke of being considered as a perpetrator by society as a whole, or their own beliefs that people would not believe their experiences.

*"Well, to have a whole country not believe what you're saying is ah, a great weight on someone's shoulders even though you can prove what you're saying"*  
(Lee)

Lee also described a vivid image of banging his head against a brick wall, connoting the frustration he feels at not being believed and being cast as the perpetrator.

*“The picture on the, on the cover of my book, I’m sorry to keep referring to my book, but that is my life work at the moment, is a man banging his head against a brick wall [and that’s...] and that’s precisely what it is.” (Lee)*

Interestingly, Henry refers to a supportive friend who validated his experiences, which allowed him a sense of psychological strength when he was subsequently arrested.

*“Had I not spent most of the day that I was arrested with a close friend who was able to identify my wife’s behavior and advise me, I would have been in a psychologically weak situation when arrested.” (Henry)*

## **Main Theme 2: Masculine Identity.**

**Figure 3.**

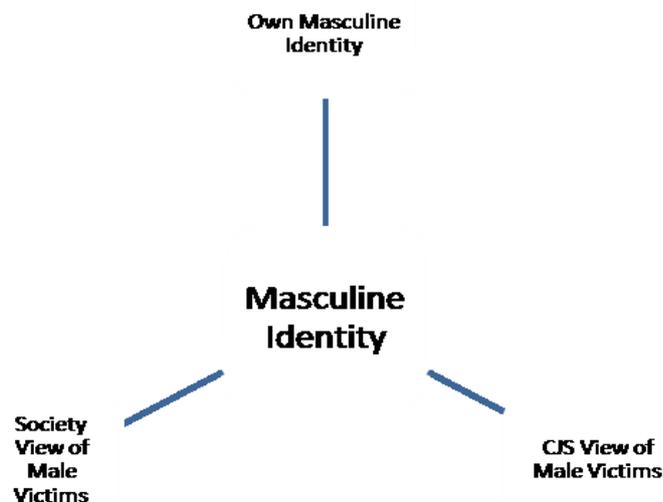


Figure 3 represents the main theme of ‘Masculine Identity’ and sub-themes including ‘Own Masculine Identity’, ‘CJS View of Gender’ and ‘Society View of Male Victims’. This

theme developed from a narrative of how the men view their own gender and how their masculine gender identity impacts on their experiences, as well as their perceptions of how the CJS professionals and society as a whole view male victims of IPV.

**Sub-theme: Own Masculine Identity.**

The men spoke about their physicality and strength in reference to being a victim of female-perpetrated IPV.

Martin highlights the small physical size of his ex-partner in comparison to his own size and his reference to the 'bat out of hell' appears to illustrate the shock he felt when his partner perpetrated violence.

*"I'm quite a big bloke yeah and she's, she's not big, she's an average sized woman, she's about, must be 5'3 or something ... but, when she goes she just turns into a monster ... she just comes at you like a bat out of hell, it's really quite scary". (Martin)*

Some of the men described suffering from an element of loss of their masculine identity, particularly in reference to their physical appearance and their perception of being 'tough'.

*"the circumstances surrounding the ending the relationship sort of really magnified, for me anyway, magnified that, although I considered myself somewhat of a tough cookie, it didn't prevent me from ending up in therapy" (Chris)*

**Sub-theme: CJS View of Male Victims.**

The men spoke about experiences of not being believed by the police and wider CJS. There appeared to be a real sense of injustice, with men speaking of disparities in treatment by the CJS based on the fact they are men. Chris refers to the 'black and white' attitude of the police

and some of the men made reference to changes which need to be made within CJS in order to improve the situation for male victims and change people's perceptions.

*"They're very black and white these guys [mm]. Erm, and I personally got the impression that, if you're male, you're a perpetrator, if you're female, you're a victim"* (Chris)

*"The headquarters of the DV unit has a massive billboard outside its building, 'he's a big hit with the ladies' and it's a man standing over a woman, hitting the woman".* (Lee)

### **Society View of Male Victims.**

The men spoke about a feeling of inequality between the genders within society, with the sense that men are treated unfairly due to societal beliefs around gender roles.

Robert experienced the influence of society's beliefs around gender roles, which seemed to immobilise him from seeking further help and lead him to retreat into an isolative state.

*"You couldn't just stand up and say 'I am a battered husband' because battered husbands didn't exist. Battered women did, but battered men ... nobody believed it."* (Robert)

Lee goes further into his experiences of society's view of men who have experienced IPV, adding that his experience is of being segregated by society.

*"I can now fully understand how Afro-Caribbean people felt in the 50s and 60s when they first arrived in the UK. They were treated like pariahs, they were segregated and that's how it feels."* (Lee)

### **Main Theme 3: The Pressure Cooker: Negative Psychological Impact**

**Figure 4.**

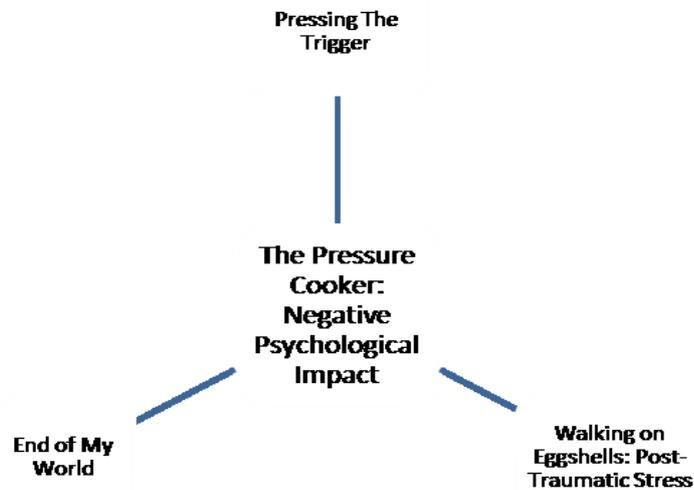


Figure 4 represents the main theme of ‘The Pressure Cooker: Negative Psychological Impact’ and sub-themes including ‘Pressing the Trigger’, ‘Walking on Eggshells: Post-Traumatic Stress’ and ‘End of My World’. This theme developed from the overarching accounts of psychological distress experienced by the men in the study as a result of their experiences of IPV.

**Sub-theme: Pressing the Trigger.**

Participants spoke about their feelings of anger, towards their abusive partners and the CJS. However the intensity of this emotion seemed to equate more to ‘rage’ than anger, and some of the men made reference to a trigger point, with some feeling that they could have become the perpetrators themselves due to the intensity of this emotion. It is possible that the experience of rage was a symptom of depression for the men in the current study, with previous research showing depression manifests itself differently in men, such as through anger or aggression, due to masculinity norms which view sadness as a vulnerability and socially unacceptable (Addis, 2008; Martin et al., 2013). When the societal expectations and

the gender norms for men are taken into account, it appears that the rage experienced by the men is a manifestation of the emotional pain they have due to their experiences of IPV.

The men referred to a point or trigger in which the anger takes over and they react.

*“She pressed my trigger didn't she and I flipped” (David)*

Some of the men referred to the intensity of the rage as so high that it could have potentially lead them to being the perpetrators of violence. These feelings of rage were expressed towards both their ex-partners and the police.

*“I wanted to get out and kill them [yeah] because ... I just hated it” (David)*

*“It very nearly did end up that it was me that was delivering the violence” (Chris)*

#### **Sub-theme: Walking on Eggshells: Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms.**

The DSM-5 (APA, 2013) attributes several symptoms to a diagnosis of PTSD. In the current study, the men spoke of several aspects of their experience which could be attributable to the symptoms described within the DSM-5.

Henry's experience is indicative of the symptom described in the DSM-5 of recurrent, distressing dreams which relates to the traumatic event.

*“I had a nightmare [mm] the police were actually after me and tried to pin a very serious crime on me [mm] I think it was murder and they found something, they dug something up” (Henry)*

The men also described their difficulties with sleep when living through their experiences of IPV.

*“a nurse diagnosed me with something called acute sleep deprivation and I told my wife that and she would still prevent actively, the following day, preventing me sleeping” (Henry)*

The men's experiences were also in line with the 'persistent negative emotional state' outlined in the DSM-5.

*“one of the other things I found out I was getting depressed on a regular basis. Erm, I still suffer from depression now” (Chris)*

Lee also referred to his suicidal thoughts in relation to his experiences of partner violence, which highlights the association between PTSD and suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts.

*“I have contemplated suicide” (Lee)*

Some men described a diminished interest or participation in significant activities as a result of their experiences, indicating a symptom of PTSD.

*“it's been three years now since I, I eventually got out the house but, them three years I might as well have gone to jail, because I've lived in a house and I very rarely go out now.” (Lee)*

Henry and Martin both describe experiences of hyper vigilance, where they have been in a heightened state of anxiety. Henry spoke about this in reference to his fears of the police coming after him whereas Martin spoke about this when referring to the control he was under by his abusive partner. This highlights the 'parallel processes' between feeling threatened at home and by the CJS.

*“If a police car was driving up my street, I was wary about where they were going [mm] whether they were following me” (Henry)*

*"I was basically walking on eggshells, you know, you know that sort of that thing, you know it's going to happen but you just don't know quite when"* (Martin)

### **Sub-theme: End of my World**

In the interviews the men referred to losses which they have experienced as a result of the IPV. A dominant aspect of the losses was that of isolation, inasmuch as the abuse they lived through has led them to avoid future relationships.

David spoke about losing friendships due to a direct consequence of the controlling behaviors of his abusive partner.

*"I lost my friends, seeing them regularly, being able to chill with them, relax with them, talk to them."* (David)

Lee referred to a loss in his cognitive capacities to concentrate; this appears to be a result of the trauma he has lived through. Lee also spoke proudly of his previous career, signifying a profound loss now that he feels unable to carry on in his professional role.

*"Now, if someone puts the slightest bit of pressure on me I give up the job and walk away. I can't take pressure. I can't encompass any type of long thought, something that needs to be concentrated on, I can't cope with that anymore."* (Lee)

### **Main Theme 4: Light at the End of the Tunnel.**

#### **Figure 5.**

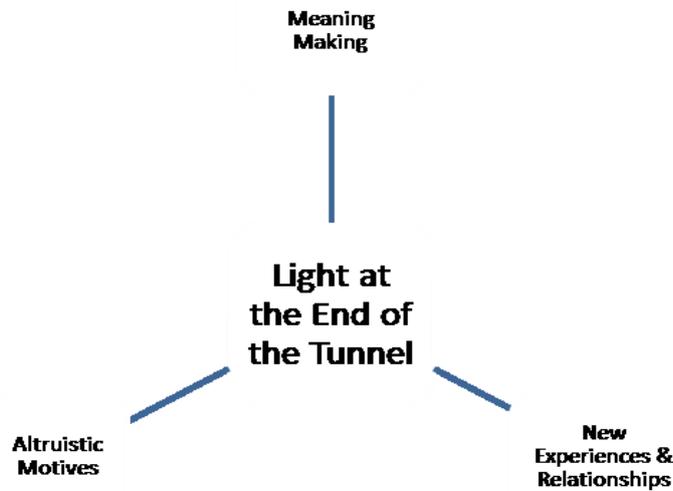


Figure 5 represents the main theme of ‘Light at the End of the Tunnel’ and sub-themes including ‘Meaning Making’, ‘New Experiences and Relationships’ and ‘Altruistic Motives’. This main theme relates to the concept of post-traumatic growth, which refers to positive psychological changes experienced as a result of a highly traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

**Sub-theme: Meaning Making.**

The sub-theme of meaning making developed from recognizing a narrative within the interviews of the men attempting to make sense of their experiences and derive meaning from what they had been through. Some of the men referred to deriving meaning from educating themselves about relationships and human behavior. This appeared to serve the purpose of working through the confusion of being cast as the perpetrator due to their gender role in society.

*“Having done some research myself about relationships and how they should be healthy relationships, that’s not how it is you know. People should have their own separate lives, but still have time together” (David)*

*"The only conclusion I can come to is that she did fit the profile of a narcissist personality"* (Chris)

David likens his experiences to a story in the Bible of Samson and Delilah which appears to help manage his confusion over whether he was the victim or the perpetrator. Spirituality and religious beliefs may offer a framework for individuals to reassess traumatic situations as less of a threat and more of a challenge, providing a narrative that positive outcomes can emerge from suffering (Aldwin, 1994).

*"Delilah wants to control Samson and ... because Samson is this warrior who's able to defeat all these soldiers, but, she manipulates Samson ... and then he loses his strength ... that's what I felt like in the sense of my analogy, in the sense that she took away my ... strength, my freedom, my expression of myself, she took away me and then, I became very isolated, very withdrawn"* (David)

Robert sums up the meaning he has derived from his experiences. His use of the term 'survivor' connotes a sense of empowerment and acceptance.

*"I'm fine, I'm a survivor"* (Robert)

### **Sub-theme: New Experiences & Relationships.**

'New Experiences and Relationships' developed from an association which a number of the men made between living through the abuse and the subsequent aftermath with the CJS with the formation of new relationships and trying new experiences.

Chris explains the process he went through in striving for new possibilities and challenges, which represents his attempt to reconstruct his shattered sense of self (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996).

*"I did get on with my life, did various things. I went and climbed Kilimanjaro ... ah, that was an adventure I was having. Ah, I think it was probably part of trying to prove that I wasn't all the things that she claimed I was"* (Chris)

Martin uses the analogy of seeing light at the end of the tunnel to describe his experiences of IPV and the CJS.

*"I can see light at the end of the tunnel and life is looking up at the moment so, I'm happy where I am [that sounds good] and I've met some nice friends round here and ... life's on the up"* (Martin)

Some of the men described new relationships which they formed since living through their abusive relationships.

*"Well I got my life back just over three years ago. I happened to be in the right place at the right time and met somebody who's genuinely warm and caring"* (Robert).

### **Sub-theme: Altruistic Motives.**

Vulnerability after a traumatic event has been linked to an increase in compassion, empathy and altruism (Salter & Stallard, 2004). In the current study the men inclined towards a specific kind of altruism, that of trying to help other men living through IPV.

Chris refers to one of the reasons he wanted to share his experiences in the research process being to contribute something positive to men going through similar experiences.

*"I think by us having this conversation, er, what, what would be nice I suppose and I suppose it's more or less impossible that I could contribute something"*

*positive to somebody else that has been going through similar experiences”*

(Chris)

Following his experiences, Lee wrote and published a book, with the intention of educating other men in similar circumstances.

*“I’ve now published that book in the vain hope that other men will read this”*

(Lee)

### **Discussion**

The study of IPV has, in the main, been dominated by researching female victims and male perpetrators. The present study has provided an insight into men’s retrospective lived experience of the CJS following female-perpetrated IPV, in order to begin to address the needs of this under-researched population. The psychological impact of IPV for the men in current study appeared to be perpetuated by their experiences of not being believed or being treated like the guilty perpetrator by the CJS professionals, thus becoming further traumatized by the system. These experiences seems to be intrinsically linked to the prevailing gender stereotypes which affect society as a whole, thus it is not surprising that those professionals within the CJS are also influenced. Where the men in the study had had a positive experience of the police or had received support and belief elsewhere, this appeared to provide a sense of psychological strength, highlighting the value that a more gender informed perspective can have.

The men in the current study had experiences of being dismissed or ignored, with police focusing only on the ‘criminal’ side of it and ignoring psychological abuse. This echoes the depth of research which fails to account for male victims or minimises their experiences. Perhaps it is out of fear that by opening up to the experiences of male victims of

IPV then female victims will once again become oppressed and voiceless. However this does not have to be the case, and the more recognition that IPV affects women and men, the more services and attitudes to victims and perpetrators can be improved.

Whilst the current study offered a unique exploration of men's experience of the CJS following female-perpetrated IPV which extended previous quantitative studies and research based upon female victims, it is not without its limitations, which future research may be able to address.

One potential limitation of the current study is the lack of representativeness and small sample size used. Official statistics published by the Office for National Statistics and Home Office analysts (Office for National Statistics, 2013) displayed that younger men were more likely to have experienced IPV than older men. However, in the current study the men were all within the age range 40-65, which limits the representativeness of the study. As the men in the current study were all recruited via services for male victims, this may suggest that younger men are not accessing or are not aware of these services. Indeed, previous studies have displayed that older victims are more likely to report IPV (MacDonald, 2001) and draw upon police help (Tarling & Morris, 2010). Perhaps the life experience and maturity that age brings has allowed the men in the current study to feel more confident in accessing help and talking about their experiences. The age-range within the current study may be perceived as a limitation in that it does not capture a broader range of experiences. However, Brocki and Wearden (2006) suggest that IPA research does not aspire to achieve a representative sample in terms of either population or probability. Furthermore, it has been argued that qualitative research seeks to provide in-depth analyses of a small group's experiences rather than representative samples and that knowledge is derived through a series of small-scale but detailed studies (Touroni & Coyle, 2002). Thus the conclusions drawn are

specific to the particular group and generalisations must be approached with caution (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran & Beail, 1997).

A further potential limitation of the current study is the retrospective nature of the research, with the men recalling their experiences of IPV from their previous relationships. In some cases these experiences were more than ten years ago, whilst others experiences were more recently, within the past year. The retrospective nature of the research may have been affected by cognitive bias and the memories recalled by the men may have been altered over time due to this. Furthermore, due to the controversial nature of the topic, the men may have been affected by social desirability bias. However, this does not take away the fact that this is how the men have made sense of their experiences and it is important to note that 'our being in the world is always perspectival, always temporal, and always 'in-relation-to' something' (Smith et al, 2009, p.18). Thus, it is the interpretation of the men's meaning-making which is the key to phenomenological enquiry and as an IPA researcher, it is important to stay with the 'sense making' and not move towards veracity (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, the men in the current study appeared to provide an open account of their feelings of rage, suggesting they felt comfortable enough to disclose experiences which may not be viewed as 'socially desirable'.

It is also acknowledged that the sample used in this study was self-selected, thus the experiences may not reflect all male victims who have had contact with the CJS, but only those who sought help. Other men who did not seek out such resources may have responded differently and highlighted other issues or experiences which have not been covered in the current study.

Another point worth mentioning is the use of Skype, which was necessary due to difficulties accessing men willing to come forward about their experiences. The experience of

using Skype felt different to the face-to-face interviews in that it took longer to develop a rapport with the men. However, the men did settle into telling their story and engaged well in the process. Further research using Skype as a tool for interviews may benefit from developing a rapport with participants prior to the interview; in order to ease any discomfort they may feel in telling their story to a person they have not met face to face.

The findings of the current study revealed the importance of developing more services which are accessible to men, in order to receive necessary support tailored to their emotional and psychological needs. The current study has revealed the psychological impact of IPV for men, which has the added pressure of the societal expectations of masculinity and IPV stereotypes. Services tailored to male victims would allow a space for men to explore and release their feelings of rage and loss and work through their post-traumatic stress in a safe, containing therapeutic environment. Services may also be enhanced by including group interventions overseen by a skilled professional, such as a psychologist or counselor, where men can share their experiences and thus lower their sense of isolation and stigmatization. In order for such services to develop and expand, the issue of IPV towards men needs to be made more public in order for services to be provided with funding. By providing such services, it is likely that male victims will be less likely to remain in the abusive relationship and thus less police intervention will be needed. In some circumstances, where the couple involved are both abusive to each other but are motivated to change, it may be helpful to provide therapeutic interventions tailored towards the couple. The finding of altruistic motives for the men in the current study may also be an important factor to think about when developing services to support men. Peer support groups in such services may be helpful to provide the men with necessary support, as well as providing them with a sense of meaning and fulfil their altruistic needs to help others who are suffering.

The current study highlighted the impact of gender stereotypes in CJS interventions for IPV. In the current study there appeared to be a continuum, with some of the men experiencing severe physical 'manhandling' by the police and others not being accused of perpetration, but referring to the attitude of the police of having no empathy and no willingness to listen to the men's experiences of partner violence. When there was a positive experience of a police member, one who offered advice about local support services for example, this appeared to help reduce the psychological impact of being arrested under false charges. Based on these findings it seems necessary to set up psycho-educational workshops for CJS professionals in order to provide an understanding of the emotional experience of male victims and encourage a more balanced, gender-informed perspective of IPV.

Just as increasing research around violence against women has led to a developing awareness of the magnitude of this epidemic (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002); the same must be done for violence against men. On reflection of current research limitations, it would be helpful to gain an understanding of the experiences of younger men. Recently there has been an advertising campaign launched by the Home Office aimed at raising awareness of teenage domestic violence, with the victims advertised as female. Thus, it may be helpful to conduct research into teenage male victim's experiences in order to raise awareness of this side too. Another area for possible future research would be to measure the attitudes of CJS professionals towards male victims. It may also be helpful to gain a qualitative understanding of police's experiences of IPV situations, in order to tailor psycho-educational interventions to the experiences of the couples and professionals involved. Other future directions for research may investigate the influence that childhood has on entering abusive relationships. The psychodynamic perspective may offer an insight as to why men and women repeat patterns of relationships, which may provide a perspective that is less entrenched in gender stereotypes.

The current study has identified the experience of posttraumatic growth in male survivors of IPV. A more detailed investigation into this area may be useful in order to deepen the understanding of men's experiences and provide insight into what may help to facilitate posttraumatic growth with this specific population. A more in-depth understanding of how men interpret the strengths which facilitated their recovery can help professionals gain a comprehensive viewpoint of the many dimensions of healing from IPV.

In sum, the current research supports the statement that IPV is indeed a human issue and not a gender issue (McNeely, Cook & Torres, 2001) and has the potential to traumatize the victims involved, regardless of gender. In order to begin to change the treatment of male victims the current stereotypes ingrained within society need to be challenged by conducting further research and raising awareness of this issue. As a final note, the current study does not aim to place blame with the professionals within the CJS, but one of understanding that everyone is affected by the stereotypes embedded within society about gender and IPV, and awareness of this needs to be promoted in order to begin to change this mind-set, particularly for those professionals directly involved in IPV situations.

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