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Systematic Review of Female Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence and their Treatment.

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has received increasing attention over recent years, both in the media and in research (Randle & Graham, 2011). IPV can be an attempt to have power and control over a partner in an intimate relationship (Bowen, 2009), and its effects are far reaching (Cho & Wilke, 2010). The majority of research has investigated male perpetrators with the literature on female perpetrators being somewhat limited (Carney, Buttell & Dutton, 2007). Criminal justice agencies have largely been educated about male perpetrators of IPV (Henning & Feder, 2004), and as a result it is unclear whether treatment options for female perpetrators are effective. This systematic review investigated the effectiveness of the current treatment options for female perpetrators of IPV and the characteristics of this specialist population. This review revealed that there is not enough research on female perpetrators of IPV. The results indicate the effectiveness of treatment programs for female offenders of IPV is varied at best. It was also revealed that female perpetrators tend to have some similarities to their male counterparts, but there were also differences. Implications for future research and the development of treatment programs for partner aggressive women are discussed.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, domestic violence, female perpetrators, treatment outcomes, personality characteristics, systematic review, literature review

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a subject which has received increasing attention over recent years, both in the media and in research (Randle & Graham, 2011). It is a global issue which is of significant interest to both health professionals and the Criminal Justice System (Nayback-Beebe & Yoder, 2012), and is costly and debilitating to society as a whole (Caldwell, Swan & Woodbrown, 2012). Victims of IPV often suffer from physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Hines & Douglas, 2011). This abuse can range from punching and kicking (Jaffe & Schub, 2011) to financial abuse and stalking (Grose & Cabrera, 2011). In very basic terms, IPV can be an attempt to have power and control over a partner in an intimate relationship; however, it can also be reactionary and expressive in nature (Bowen, 2009). This indicates that IPV could be a much more complex issue than previously thought. In terms of impact, abusive intimate relationships are damaging not only to the partner who suffers directly from the abuse, but also to the family and children who witness the abuse (Grose & Cabrera, 2011). Despite this far-reaching effect, IPV is generally underreported (Cho & Wilke, 2010). This is even more obvious when considering female-to-male IPV (Emery, 2010).

Female Perpetrators of IPV

The majority of research into IPV has investigated male-to-female violence and the literature on female-to-male violence is somewhat limited (Carney, Buttell & Dutton, 2007). However, women are increasingly being arrested for IPV (Henning & Feder, 2004), which would suggest it is not a solely male-perpetrated crime (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). The disproportionate amount of research conducted with male offenders of IPV could be explained by the fact that male perpetrated IPV is reported to the police more frequently than female perpetrated IPV (Emery, 2010). This issue also has relevance in the treatment of IPV offenders. Criminal justice agencies have largely been educated about male perpetrators of IPV rather than female perpetrators (Henning & Feder, 2004). As a result of this, female offenders of IPV are predominantly referred to treatment programs designed for male offenders of the crime (Carney et al., 2007).

The treatment options that are currently available, specifically for partner aggressive women, are limited (Henning, Jones & Holdford, 2005). The majority of interventions are designed with male offenders in mind, and are developed from the feminist perspective of IPV (Graham-Kevan, 2007). This feminist perspective defines IPV in terms of men needing to have control and power over their female partners (Bates, Graham-Kevan, Bolam & Thornton, in press). The primary model for this type of treatment program is the Duluth

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Model, which states that men perpetrate IPV as a result of a patriarchal ideology (Pence & Paymar, 1993). This form of treatment, and the theoretical perspective behind it, tends to exclude IPV in same-sex relationships, relationships involving transgender individuals, and female-to-male IPV (Morin, 2014). Despite this issue there is actually inconclusive evidence that these programs work for their intended population (Babcock, Green & Robie, 2004). Therefore, for the purpose of this review, it is important that the application of these traditional treatment programs to female IPV offenders is investigated further (Henning et al., 2005).

Aim of the Current Review

Systematic reviews are a way of synthesising evidence from previous research using rigorous methods of appraisal (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004), and are reported to the same standard as high quality research reports (Cooper, 2010). In terms of IPV, systematic reviews have been conducted in areas such as: effects of IPV training (Zaher, Keogh & Ratnapalan, 2014), factors associated with violence against women (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015), IPV and pregnancy (Shah & Shah, 2010), services for victims of IPV (Robinson & Spilsbury, 2008; Bair-Merritt et al., 2014), prevalence of violence against women (Alhabib, Nur & Jones, 2010), and IPV and mental disorders (Trevillion, Oram, Feder & Howard, 2012). However, systematic reviews have not had a focus on female perpetrators of IPV until recently (Pornari, Dixon & Humphreys, 2013; Costa et al., 2015), and there is a distinct lack of systematic reviews on the effectiveness of treatment for these partner aggressive women.

The current systematic review investigated the effectiveness of the current treatment options for female perpetrators of IPV. As there is a lack of clarity in the effectiveness of treatment for partner aggressive women, this review further examined the characteristics of this specialist population. The overall aim of reviewing these two areas of female perpetrated IPV was to increase knowledge of female perpetrators and to inform the development and provision of support and treatment for these women.

Method

Search Strategy

All articles were found using Quest in June 2015. Example search terms include “female perpetrators of domestic violence” and “treatment for female offenders of domestic violence”. These terms were used in order to identify research that had investigated either treatment for, or the characteristics of, female perpetrators of IPV. Papers were required to be

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published journal articles written in the English language. Once identified, the articles were then grouped based on whether they had investigated treatment or characteristics of female perpetrators. In terms of the articles that addressed treatment for female perpetrators of IPV, ten were initially identified. However, two were removed as they were literature reviews which did not look specifically at treatment outcomes for female perpetrators. When identifying the articles that examined the characteristics of female perpetrators of IPV, nine articles were found.

Inclusion Criteria

Research inclusion was limited to peer reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2015. Regarding studies that had investigated treatment programs female IPV perpetrators, research was only selected if women were included in the sample and if it had specifically looked at the effectiveness of a treatment program. In terms of research that looked at the characteristics of this population, papers were included if women were part of the sample and if they examined some aspect of this specialist population (e.g. personality, medical or criminal history, social situation). Due to the paucity of research in this area, more stringent inclusion criteria could not be applied.

Analytic Strategy

Articles concerning the treatment of female perpetrators of IPV were reviewed first to ascertain the utility of current treatment approaches. Based on the findings of this part of the review, articles examining the characteristics of female perpetrators of IPV were then analysed to identify possible areas for improvement for treatment programs. The articles were reviewed in a critical manner, with a view to inform future practice and treatment when working with this specialist population. The papers were evaluated in regard to study design (data source, follow-up assessment, sample size and characteristics), treatment characteristics (intervention type, exposure period, outcomes), findings (initial results, authors interpretation), and strengths and limitations of the research. The current review employed qualitative data analysis because of the heterogeneity of study designs, outcome measures and construct definitions, precluding a quantitative synthesis.

Results

In total eight articles were selected for review in relation to the effectiveness of treatment programs for female perpetrators of IPV (See Table 1; Buttell, 2002; Babcock, Canady,

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Senior & Eckhardt, 2005; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2006; Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2009; Gover, Jennings, Davis, Tomsich & Tewsbury, 2011; Woodin, Sotskova & O'Leary, 2012; Walker, 2013) and nine were selected to review the characteristics associated with this unique population (See Table 2; Henning & Feder, 2004; Dowd, Leisring & Rosenbaum, 2005; Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb & Fowler, 2005; Goldenson, Geffner, Foster & Clipson, 2007; Seamans, Rubin & Stabb, 2007; Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Simmons, Lehmann & Cobb, 2008; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan & Snow, 2008; Goldenson, Spidel, Greaves & Dutton, 2009).

Treatment Success for Female Perpetrators of IPV

Sample

In terms of the gender of the samples used, the majority of the studies employed a completely female sample (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2006; Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2009; Walker, 2013). Two studies used a mixture of female and male perpetrators in their sample (Babcock, Canady, Senior & Eckhardt, 2005; Gover, Jennings, Davis, Tomsich & Tewsbury, 2011), and one study recruited couples from a community setting (Woodin, Sotskova & O'Leary, 2012). The studies that included both men and women were included in the review as research using a completely female sample was difficult to locate.

Regarding whether participants were court-mandated to treatment, Tutty et al. (2009) compared mandated and non-mandated participants, Buttell (2002) only looked at mandated participants, and Tutty et al.'s (2006) sample was only made up of non-mandated participants. Only three of the studies made comparisons between treatment completers and non-completers (Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty et al., 2006; Gover et al., 2011). Two of the studies made the decision to include non-violent control groups within their research (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005). Finally, half of the studies selected employed female perpetrators of IPV who were taking part in treatment programs originally designed for male perpetrators (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009).

Methodology

All of the studies selected used primary data except for one (Carney & Buttell, 2005), which collected secondary data originally obtained by program facilitators. Only one study (Walker, 2013) utilised a qualitative methodology by conducting semi-structured interviews.

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The rest used a quantitative methodology employing multiple measures. Out of the quantitative studies, four used a pre- and post-treatment design (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty et al., 2009; Woodin et al., 2012), and one used a pre-, mid-, and post-treatment design (Tutty et al., 2006). Out of the eight studies reviewed four specifically measured either a reduction in aggression or a reduction in partner abuse (Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009; Woodin et al., 2012). All of the studies collected extensive demographic data on their participants, perhaps because little is known about this particular population. However, only one study actually measured recidivism rates after treatment (Buttell, 2002).

Findings

This part of the review revealed that many of the treatment programs provided for female offenders of IPV were originally developed for male perpetrators (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009). On closer inspection it was revealed that these interventions do not appear to have any effect on these partner aggressive women (Buttell, 2002; Carney & Buttell, 2005). The ineffectiveness of current treatment options for partner aggressive women is perhaps unsurprising when considering the disagreement around the effect of gender on IPV perpetration. Two studies (Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009) revealed that the Responsible Choices for Women program has shown promising initial results, however, this program has been adapted from one designed for men. It should be noted that Tutty et al. (2009) found that the program can improve some variables (e.g. depression, non-physical abuse against partner), but it was discovered that women's self-esteem actually worsened. Additionally, Carney and Buttell (2005) discovered that treatment increased interpersonal dependency, rather than decreasing it. When looking at what is effective for female perpetrators of IPV the literature is limited.

Table 1

Treatment for Female Perpetrators Studies

Study	Sample	Methodology	Findings	Strengths & Limitations
Tutty et al. (2006)	*64 women *42 treatment completers and 22 non-completers *None were mandated to treatment *All began the Responsible Choices for Women group	*Employed a within-group pre-, mid-, post-test design Measures: *The Abuse of Partner Scales *The Index of Self-Esteem *The Index of Marital Satisfaction *The Generalised Contentment Scale *The Index of Family Relations *The Index of Clinical Stress *The Adult Self-Expression Scale *The Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Locus of Control *The Sex-Roles Ideology Scale Short Form	*Women reported improvements on variables: non-physical abuse of partner, self-esteem, general contentment, clinical stress and adult self-expression. *The two variables with the least improvement were marital satisfaction and family relations.	Strengths: *Good initial evaluation of this group treatment *Good basis for further research in this area *Highlights the paucity of research into treatment for female offenders Limitations: *Not easy to distinguish between women who acted in self-defence and those that were sole perpetrators *Treatment program was designed for male offenders *Small sample group *Program was short term, so must be cautious about expectations for change.
Walker (2013)	*Seven women aged 23 to 49 *All were unemployed and living in rented accommodation in a socially	*The participants took part in semi-structured interviews lasting about 45 minutes in 2009	*Three themes were extracted from the data: program as a learning context, program as a source for	Strengths: *Qualitative design enabled collection of rich data

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	deprived area *All had children who had witnessed their violence against their partners	*Closed questions were used for demographic information * The study utilised descriptive phenomenology	learning self-control, program as a turning point *The women talked about the treatment in a positive way *It was clear that these women benefitted from this treatment program and took coping skills away from it	*Gained knowledge of the experience of taking part in this treatment program Limitations: *Sample may have been limited in terms of race and number *Social desirability could have had an effect on the results
Tutty et al. (2009)	*The sample consisted of 261 women in total *42% of these women were mandated to treatment *All women took part in the Responsible Choices for Women Group	*The study used a between group design with pre-test and post-test assessment *Mandated and non-mandated women were compared on treatment outcomes and characteristics Measures: *The Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 *The Personality Assessment Screener *The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment – Domestic Violence *The Abuse of Partner Scales *The Partner Abuse Scales *The Generalised Contentment Scale *The Index of Clinical Stress *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Index	*No differences on treatment outcomes between mandated and non-mandated women *Improvements at post-test on five variables: depression, clinical stress, non-physical abuse of partner, partner non-physical abuse of the woman, and partner physical abuse of the woman *Self-esteem actually worsened significantly after treatment *Physical abuse against partner scores increased, but not significantly	Strengths: *Compared mandated and non-mandated women *Used a comprehensive set of measures Limitations: *Difficult to ascertain how many participant were used due to reporting style *No control group *Treatment program was designed for male offenders *The program is relatively short, so should be cautious with long-term expectations

		*The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Test Short Form		
Gover et al. (2011)	*Sample was 4095 IPV offenders who had completed the Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board Client Data Collection Form between 2004 and 2006 *19% were women *79% took part in group treatment, with the rest completing alternative modalities *Only 9% had previous success in IPV treatment	*The Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board Client Data Collection Form was used to collect: demographic data, legal history, offence information, case information, treatment information for current offence, victim advocacy information, and discharge information	*Women who were older, employed, and living with their partner were more likely to complete treatment *Being on probation decreased likelihood of treatment completion for women *None of the treatment variables (first time offender, prior success, group counselling) had an effect on treatment completion for women	Strengths: *Looked at differences between male and female offenders in relation to treatment completion Limitations: *Study was only exploratory in nature *Gender split of participants was very unequal *Only looked at treatment completion, rather than treatment effectiveness
Babcock et al. (2005)	*Sample consisted of 52 women and 68 men who were taking part in an IPV treatment program	*Data was collected directly from participants and from their intake questionnaires Measures: *The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment – Domestic Violence *The Processes of Change Scale *The Conflict Tactics Scale *The Emotional Abuse Scale	*Women more readily admitted to the use of IPV, but there were no gender differences in stage of change when entering treatment *There were no gender differences in relationship-focused processes of change (reliance on social support) *Women were more likely to substitute non-violent alternative behaviours	Strengths: *Specifically looked at stages of change and readiness to change in both male and female offenders Limitations: *Sample size was small, therefore non-significant results may have been due to lack of statistical power *Only a preliminary study, longitudinal study should be conducted to confirm results

Woodin et al. (2012)	<p>*The sample was made up of 25 couples from Stony Brook University, Long Island</p> <p>*Each couple had experienced at least one act of aggression by either partner</p> <p>*The average relationship length was 24.72 months</p>	<p>*Couples had a two hour session to assess partner aggression and to take part in a conjoint semi-structured interview about their relationship (motivational intervention)</p> <p>*Feedback sessions were then scheduled within several weeks</p> <p>*Participants then completed follow-up questionnaires two, six, and nine months after the feedback session</p> <p>*The Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity Code: Version 2.0 was used to assess therapists behaviour</p> <p>*The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale was used to assess aggression perpetration</p>	<p>*Higher levels of therapist empathy were related to greater aggression reduction in women, but not men</p> <p>*Higher reflection to question ratios was related to greater aggression reduction in both men and women</p> <p>*A higher percentage of open-ended questions were related to greater aggression reduction in women, but not men</p> <p>*Therapist behaviours did not predict follow-up completion rates</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>*Used couples therapy, rather than individual therapy</p> <p>*One of the first studies to look into gender differences in the effectiveness of motivational interviewing</p> <p>Limitations:</p> <p>*Relatively small sample size</p> <p>*Was restricted to university students, who may not be representative of IPV population</p>
Buttelt (2002)	<p>*The participants were 102 women beginning their treatment for IPV offences</p> <p>*Participants had to have been arrested and court-ordered into treatment</p> <p>*Used a non-equivalent control group</p>	<p>*Data was collected by administering a demographic information questionnaire and the Defining Issues Test pre-treatment and post-treatment</p> <p>*Arrest records were monitored for two years after successful completion of the program</p>	<p>*At pre-treatment offenders had significantly lower moral reasoning scores than the control group</p> <p>*At post-treatment there was no significant change in moral reasoning scores between pre- and post-treatment</p> <p>*Among treatment completers, 52% had been re-arrested for an IPV</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>*Sizable sample to compensate for drop-out rates</p> <p>*Measured recidivism for treatment completers</p> <p>*Used a non-equivalent control group</p> <p>Limitations:</p> <p>* Treatment program was</p>

			offence within two years	designed for male offenders
				*Participants drawn from a predominantly rural, Southern state in USA
				*Use of numerous <i>t</i> -tests could have increased the error rate
Carney & Buttell (2005)	*Sample consisted of 75 women taking part in a 16 week IPV treatment program *There were 39 treatment completers and 36 drop-outs *25 women with no history of IPV were recruited as a nonviolent control group	*The study was a secondary analysis of data collected by the Bay Oaks Professional Associates in Alabama *The organisation anonymised the data and then allowed researchers access to it Measures: *Demographic questionnaire *The Interpersonal Dependency Inventory *The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale	*The offenders scored significantly higher on interpersonal dependency than the control group *For offenders, interpersonal dependency scores were significantly higher at post-treatment than they were at pre-treatment	Strengths: *Used a community control group of nonviolent participants *Highlighted the importance of attachment theory Limitations: *Used secondary data * Treatment program was designed for male offenders *Employed a sample from a rural, Southern state in USA *Only representative to the women taking part in this treatment program *Did not investigate recidivism post-treatment

Walker (2013) investigated British women's experiences of treatment and found that, overall, they had a positive experience. The women also said that learning coping skills, self-control, and relaxation techniques was beneficial (Walker, 2013). Learning coping skills in this way was also supported by Babcock et al. (2005). It should be noted that this study, and others that were reviewed, did not measure recidivism in relation to treatment success. The review also found that some factors (e.g. living with a partner and not being under the influence at the time of the offence) predicted treatment completion (Gover et al., 2011), but being mandated or non-mandated to treatment had no effect on treatment outcomes (Tutty et al., 2009). In terms of treatment delivery, women seemed to benefit more than men from therapist empathy and open-ended questions (Woodin et al., 2012). It is clear from this part of the review that some aspects are beneficial for female perpetrators of IPV but current treatment options are not suitable. Research into how female perpetrators of IPV are treated needs to increase in order to gain an accurate picture of how effective current options are.

Characteristics of Female Perpetrators of IPV

Sample

Three of the selected papers were literature reviews, and therefore did not have a sample (Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan & Snow, 2008; Goldenson, Spidel, Greaves & Dutton, 2009); three studies had completely female samples (Dowd, Leisring & Rosenbaum, 2005; Goldenson, Geffner, Foster & Clipson, 2007; Seamans, Rubin & Stabb, 2007); and three studies compared men and women (Henning & Feder, 2004; Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb & Fowler, 2005; Simmons, Lehmann & Cobb, 2008). Of the studies that compared men and women, two had ensured that their male participants were matched to their female participants in terms of demographic characteristics (Simmons et al., 2005; Simmons et al., 2008).

In terms of whether participants had been court-mandated to treatment, two studies specifically stated they had only included mandated participants (Simmons et al., 2005; Simmons et al., 2008) and one had compared mandated and non-mandated participants (Dowd et al., 2005). In addition, Seamans et al. (2007) had looked at both court-mandated and child protection services mandated participants, and Goldenson et al. (2007) compared an offender group with a clinical group.

Methodology

In terms of methodology, three of the studies were literature reviews (Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Goldenson et al., 2009); however none of them stated how they had selected articles for review. Of the remaining studies, one used a qualitative methodology (Seamans et al., 2007), and employed structured interviews to collect data. The rest used a quantitative methodology utilising various measures of personality traits, trauma, partner abuse, and mental disorders. Two of the quantitative studies used secondary data, one from treatment intake information (Simmons et al., 2005), and one from criminal justice agency information (Henning & Feder, 2004). The three main quantitative studies collected primary data from their participants (Dowd et al., 2005; Goldenson et al., 2007; Simmons et al., 2008). Finally all studies that analysed data collected extensive demographic information from participants. Again, this is perhaps because little is known about female perpetrators of IPV.

Table 2

Characteristics of Female Perpetrators of IPV Studies

Study	Sample	Methodology	Findings	Strengths & Limitations
Seamans et al. (2007)	<p>*The sample consisted of 13 female perpetrators of IPV</p> <p>*They were either court referred or were referred by the CPS to treatment</p>	<p>*This was a qualitative study using structured interviews</p> <p>*The interview schedule included open-ended and flexible questions designed to gain detailed information</p> <p>*Was conducted from the feminist perspective in order to empower the participants</p>	<p>*Ten themes were identified: childhood abuse, prior partner violence, current partner violence, retaliation for emotional abuse, violence and children, asking for help and not getting it and the mandatory arrest policy, power and control, violence motivated by the need to be heard, reaching the breaking point, PTSD and dissociative states</p> <p>*There were similarities between male and female perpetrators, but also differences</p> <p>*Most of the women were victims as well as perpetrators of IPV</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>*Qualitative study which elicited detailed information about women’s experiences</p> <p>Limitations:</p> <p>*Relied on the feminist perspective, so may be biased</p> <p>*Does not investigate women who are violent for other reasons, other than retaliation and self-defence</p>
Dowd et al. (2005)	<p>*The sample was 107 heterosexual partner aggressive women taking part in anger management treatment</p> <p>*56 were court-mandated and 51 were not court-mandated</p>	<p>*Data were taken from intake reports over a four year period</p> <p>*Demographic, behavioural, legal, and health information was collected</p> <p>Measures:</p> <p>*The Conflict Tactics Scale</p>	<p>*The data presented describe a heterogeneous population, with some important shared characteristics</p> <p>*A large majority of the women had experienced disturbances in</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>*Good overview of demographic data for female IPV offenders</p> <p>*Substantial sample size, including equal numbers of mandated and non-mandated</p>

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		*The Hollingshead Four Factor Index *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4 th Edition	social support systems both as a child and as an adult *They grew up in unstable environments without suitable role models to demonstrate socially acceptable boundary setting, conflict resolution skills, and effective coping strategies *The effects of substance abuse, unstable mood, , and trauma symptomology will result in lowered aggression management	participants Limitations: * Treatment program was designed for male offenders *Social desirability could be an issue as data was mainly self-report *Sample was a convenience group, and may not be representative
Simmons et al. (2005)	*The participants were 78 men and 78 women who were court-ordered to the Diversion Program (in Texas) between 1999 and 2005 *The female sample was the total number of women on the program *The male participants were matched to the female participants on ethnicity, age, and income	*This was a quantitative study using secondary data *The Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III was administered as part of the participant’s intake onto the program *Consent was gained from the participants to release the information for use in the research	*A high proportion of women showed evidence of personality traits in three areas: compulsive, histrionic, and narcissistic *Although men had evidence for these traits, women demonstrated them at a higher level * Significant differences were found between men and women on all of these traits, with women showing higher levels *There was also a significant difference found between men and women on the dependent	Strengths: *Measured a wide range of personality traits *Compared both male and female perpetrators Limitations: *Used secondary data *Use of multiple t-tests in statistical analysis could have increased the error rate *Only measured personality traits, cannot say whether participants had personality disorders

			personality trait, with men scoring higher than women	
Goldenson et al. (2007)	*The sample consisted of 33 women mandated to an IPV treatment program (offender group) and 32 women receiving psychological treatment (clinical group)	*The study was quantitative in nature and compared the two groups. Measures: *The Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised *The Trauma Symptom Inventory *The Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III	*The offender group had significantly higher scores than the clinical group on both attachment-related anxiety and attachment related avoidance *The offender group also had significantly higher trauma scores than the clinical group *The offender group had significantly higher scores than the clinical group on the following personality traits: borderline, antisocial, and dependent	Strengths: *Highlighted individual needs of female offenders *Used a clinical comparison group Limitations: *Small sample size which might affect the generalisability of the results *Measures used were solely self-report, so social desirability could be an issue
Simmons et al. (2008)	*The participants were 78 men and 78 women who were court-ordered to the Diversion Program (in Texas) between 1999 and 2004 *The female sample was the total amount of women on the program *The male participants were matched to the female participants on ethnicity, age, and income	Measures: *The Spousal Assault Risk Assessment *The Propensity for Abusiveness Scale *The Attitudes about Marriage Index *The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment-Domestic Violence	*Women were more likely to have prior arrests and be unemployed *Men were more likely to have a restraining order at the time of arrest *Women have significantly more abusive personality characteristics than men *Women also scored significantly	Strengths: *Looked at readiness to change and attitudes towards using violence *Compared male and female perpetrators Limitations: *Not all measures have had validity tested when used with female perpetrators

			higher on three of the subscales: attachment, trauma, and maternal warmth and rejection	*Use of multiple <i>t</i> -tests could have increased the error rate
			*Women supported a significantly higher level of acceptable violence usage than men	
			*Men were significantly more inclined to maintain nonviolence in their relationships than women	
Goldenson et al. (2009)	N/A (Literature Review)	*The method of selecting literature was not specified	*Women’s reasons for perpetrating partner aggression are not limited to self-defence	Strengths: *Looked at factors that are associated female perpetrated IPV
			*Control can be a factor in female perpetrated IPV	*Gives suggestions for how to improve treatment for female offenders
			*There may be different subtypes of partner aggressive women	Limitations:
			*Attachment security, trauma, and borderline, antisocial, narcissistic traits are factors associated with female perpetrated IPV	*Method of selecting literature for the review was not specified
				*Very brief review which lacked detail
Dowd & Leisring (2008)	N/A (Literature Review)	*The method of selecting literature was not specified	*History of victimisation, substance misuse, low levels of education, and high unemployment rates are often reported by female perpetrators of IPV	Strengths: *Looked at both characteristics of female offenders and potential components for future interventions
				Limitations:

			*Childhood emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, interparental aggression, parental substance misuse, and disrupted attachments are also typically found in the histories of partner aggressive women	*Method of selecting literature for the review was not specified
			*When in treatment, high rates of anxiety and mood disorders, suicide attempts, and head injuries have been found in female perpetrators of IPV	
Henning & Feder (2004)	*The sample consisted of 5578 men and 1126 women arrested for assaulting a partner of the opposite sex	*The research used secondary data from victim reports and criminal justice agencies *Demographic and offence related information was collected from the cases	*Female offenders were more likely to be unemployed at the time of the offence *Female perpetrators were more likely to have used a weapon during the offence * More male arrestees had used substances directly before the offence * It was reported that male arrestees had engaged in more serious physical abuse against their partner before the index offence	Strengths: *Looked at gender differences between male and female offenders using a large amount of case files *Covers a wide range of demographic and offence related characteristics Limitations: *Used secondary data *Does not account for unreported IPV

			<p>* The police were more likely to have responded to previous domestic violence incidents in the homes of male offenders</p> <p>* There was no difference in total psychological abuse between male and female offenders</p> <p>*Male offenders were more than twice as likely to have prior arrests for partner aggression.</p> <p>*Male offenders reported more substance abuse problems than female offenders.</p> <p>*No gender differences were found for juvenile arrests or exposure to violence at home as a child</p>	
Swan et al. (2008)	N/A (Literature Review)	*The method of selecting literature was not specified	<p>*A larger amount of men perpetrate sexually coercive behaviours against their partners in comparison to women</p> <p>*Men and women tend to use equal amounts of psychological aggression against their partners</p> <p>*Some forms of coercive control are equally likely to be used by</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>*Gave a good overview of female offenders and their needs</p> <p>Limitations:</p> <p>*Specific method for selecting the literature for the review was not specified</p> <p>*Different sections of the review could have been more detailed , to</p>

men and women	provide more insight
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*The majority of partner aggressive women have also been a victim of violence from their partners

*Partner aggressive women commonly report that they use violence to defend themselves from their partner

*Some women are violent towards their partner to protect their children

*Childhood trauma rates are high in women who use violence

*The prevalence of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and posttraumatic stress disorder are high in women who commit IPV

Findings

The overarching theme from this review was that male and female perpetrators of IPV have similarities, but they also have fundamental differences (Henning & Feder, 2004; Simmons et al., 2005; Seamans et al., 2007; Simmons et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008). This further supports the notion of gender specific treatment for IPV perpetration. There was a high prevalence of trauma symptoms in these women, from current or historical abuse (Dowd et al., 2005; Goldenson et al., 2007; Seamans et al., 2007; Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Simmons et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Goldenson et al., 2009). Another common characteristic was emotional dysregulation or loss of control, leading to aggression (e.g. Goldenson et al., 2007). In addition, substance misuse, unstable mood, attachment issues, and interpersonal dependency were common themes (Henning & Feder, 2004; Dowd et al., 2005; Simmons et al., 2005; Goldenson et al., 2007; Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Simmons et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Goldenson et al., 2009). These factors were all found to be highly prevalent in women who perpetrated IPV.

One of the most important findings from this review is that a large majority of female perpetrators of IPV are also victims, either currently or in the past (Seamans et al., 2007; Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Goldenson et al., 2009). It was suggested that treatment specific to women is more likely to be successful (Seamans et al., 2007; Swan et al., 2008), and that female perpetrators of IPV should be referred to community services for education, employment, parenting and housing as issues in these areas can be related to offending (Dowd et al., 2005; Goldenson et al., 2009). The wide range of factors that are associated with women perpetrating IPV perhaps explains why their treatment is often unsuccessful.

Discussion

This systematic review has revealed that there is a lack of research around the characteristics and treatment of female perpetrators of IPV (Emery, 2010). In addition, there also appears to be a dearth of perpetrator treatment programs specifically designed for female offenders of IPV. The results of the articles reviewed here indicate the effectiveness of treatment programs for female offenders of IPV is varied at best, and the support available is insufficient. The majority of the studies selected used treatment programs that were originally designed for male offenders of IPV (Buttall, 2002; Carney & Buttall, 2005; Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009), which could explain why they do not seem to be particularly effective for this

population. It is important to note that some aspects of treatment were beneficial to female perpetrators (Tutty et al., 2006; Tutty et al., 2009), especially some of the coping skills they are taught (Babcock et al., 2005; Walker, 2013). However, some studies found that some aspects of female perpetrators behaviour were actually worsened with treatment: interpersonal dependency (Carney & Buttell, 2005), and self-esteem (Tutty et al., 2009). Considering the paucity of research conducted on female perpetrators, it is surprising that recidivism is very rarely measured (Buttell, 2002). This would be a relatively simple method to incorporate into the evaluation of treatment programs.

One explanation for the ineffectiveness of treatment for female perpetrators, and why male programs tend to be adapted for women, could be the fact that treatment options in the UK and the USA tend to be from a feminist psychoeducational perspective (Barner & Carney, 2011). Unfortunately, regardless of whether or not this method works for women, there is actually inconclusive evidence that they are even effective for male perpetrators of IPV (Graham-Kevan, 2007). This is further exacerbated when there appears to be a lack of agreement on gender issues within IPV perpetration in general (Barner & Carney, 2011).

In terms of the characteristics displayed by female perpetrators of IPV, they tend to have some similarities to their male counterparts, but there was also evidence of differences. The most common characteristics that female perpetrators tended to display were trauma, substance misuse, emotional dysregulation, mood disorders, and attachment and dependency issues (Henning & Feder, 2004; Dowd et al., 2005; Simmons et al., 2005; Goldenson et al., 2007; Dowd & Leisring, 2008; Simmons et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Goldenson et al., 2009). However, one of the most important results of this section of the systematic review was the discovery that a large majority of the women involved in these studies were also victims of IPV as well as perpetrators (e.g. Swan et al., 2008). Female perpetrators needs may exceed the needs of male perpetrators and may require referrals for depression, PTSD, substance misuse, and parenting skills (Goldenson et al., 2009). This wide range of issues is perhaps another explanation for why their treatment is often unsuccessful.

Limitations

As with any piece of research, this systematic review has limitations. Firstly, the review only included published works. While this may ensure the quality of articles, it also excludes any unpublished work in this research area. This is an issue, as the inclusion of unpublished research could have affected both the results and the conclusions of this systematic review (Cooper, 2010). Secondly, because of the paucity of research on female perpetrators of IPV,

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research method was not controlled for in the search strategy. Therefore, the comparison of quantitative research, qualitative research, and literature reviews may not give an accurate representation of the subject matter. However, the heterogeneity of study designs was the reason a qualitative analysis was chosen, rather than a quantitative analysis.

Future Directions

The findings of this systematic review raise important implications for the provision of treatment for partner aggressive women. The current support and treatment available is insufficient, and in terms of female perpetrators, not fit for purpose (Graham-Kevan, 2007). In addition, a wide range of issues experienced by female perpetrators has been identified within this review. It is possible that by addressing these underlying concerns first, such as trauma, emotional dysregulation, and attachment (Goldenson et al., 2007), the effectiveness of treatment could be improved. This in turn could reduce reoffending rates in female perpetrators. Further research needs to be conducted to confirm whether the results gained from this systematic review are an accurate representation of the treatment and characteristics of female perpetrators of IPV. If this is the case then treatment programs specifically for partner aggressive women need to be developed, with their unique and complex needs in mind.

Conclusion

The critical conclusion that arises from this systematic review is that female perpetrators of IPV are greatly under researched. This is both in terms of their characteristics as a population and their treatment options (Emery, 2010). The effectiveness of treatment and support for this specialist population is varied at best, with most programs being designed for male perpetrators (Tutty et al., 2009). In addition to this, the review revealed that female perpetrators share some similarities with their male counterparts, but there are also differences. One important factor that resulted from this part of the review is that partner aggressive women are often victims of IPV as well as being perpetrators (Swan et al., 2008). Further research into female perpetrators of IPV and their treatment is essential in order to fully understand their needs and to provide adequate support for this overlooked population.

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