

How Domestic Abuse Occurs in Male Same-Sex Relationships

Daniel J. Varela

Southern Adventist University

Statement of the Problem

The literature review is going to focus on how domestic abuse occurs in male same-sex relationships. The research being presented in this paper has been narrowed down to focus on gay men in relationships. The case studies that were conducted within each empirical article were completed within the Western World, including Europe and the United States of America. There were limitations that analyzed all races including African American, White, and Asian. Most participants that were part of the case studies were adults ages 18 and up.

The topic is important to consider because 1 in 4 same-sex couples experience domestic abuse (womens shelter). Twenty-six percent of gay men experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime (search stat). Compared to female victims, male to male domestic violence was perceived as less serious and more justified (Erickson, Jonnson, Langille, & Walsh, 2017). Men are perceived to be more blamable than female victims due to traditional gender role attitudes and histories of intimate partner violence (Erickson, Jonnson, Langille, & Walsh, 2017).

Personally, I have been affected by some form of male-male domestic abuse. I was dating someone who was the same age as me. I would have never thought that he would have treated me as he did. My ex-partner treated me in a way that made me question my sanity. He would call me names such as crazy, stupid, and incompetent frequently. His mood would change abruptly and would become silent over the little things. I was in denial about how he was treating me because every time I would try to confront him about his actions, he would play the victim and blame me for his behavior. There was a time where I thought that maybe I did deserve his treatment. But finally, after a couple of months, I broke it off with him and blocked him from every social media platform. I did not want to accept the fact that I was a victim of a

psychological and emotional form of domestic abuse. Eventually, I decided to take the opportunity to research how domestic abuse occurs in male-male relationships.

According to the sample of 136 men in same-sex relationships forty-eight percent reported violence that was close to death by their partner; eighty-seven percent believed they would be severely wounded during the violent altercation; about seventy percent thought they would not survive near-lethal violence by their intimate partner (Loveland, & Raghavan, 2014).

There were primary reasons men reported feeling fear for their lives during physical abuse. Thirty-six percent were afraid for their life because a weapon was involved in the abuse. Twenty-three percent reported fear due to the abuse being physical (Loveland, & Raghavan, 2014). About six percent mentioned the partners size and strength, and a threat to kill to cause apprehension. Two percent of these men said they were restrained to staying with their partner and that their partner would “snap” out of the ordinary (Loveland, & Raghavan, 2014).

Problem Exploration

Domestic abuse within male same-sex relationships was found to be influenced by power control factors. Sources of power control included gender roles, sexual positioning, inequalities and internalized homophobia (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015). It is important to note that substance abuse was also an influential factor to intimate partner violence (Wu, E et., 2015).

Gender roles. Gender Role Stereotypes influenced how men in same-sex relationships dealt with domestic abuse (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016). In a study sample made up of 117 culturally diverse gay and bisexual men, researchers found that those who were in same-sex domestic abuse relationships obtained higher levels of masculine behaviors and practiced traditional masculine norms. (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016). Men who suppressed vulnerability and hostile behaviors such as

aggressiveness were highly predicted to commit physical violence amongst their partner. (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016).

Ideas of masculinity and femininity influenced how men who have sex with other men determine which partner would take on certain roles within the relationship. Many of the men held traditional and somewhat patriarchal views about gender roles (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015). Traditional views of female and male roles was seen when men described femininity as being what women are expected to stereotypically act in society such as being “soft spoken” (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015). Masculinity was described as “taking care” of the other partner and acting how a man is expected to stereotypically act in society.

According to one of the study samples, nearly 43 percent of the participants were both perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse in their relationships. On average, over the course of a year, these men found themselves perpetrating and being victims of acts of violence (Oringer, & Samuelson, 2011).

Due to the nature of how heteronormative gender-roles are in society, men in same-sex relationships can find it conflicting figuring out who will take on the leadership role. When both men attempt to take on the leadership role then the conflict could contribute to intimate partner violence (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016).

Sexual positioning. Sexual behaviors determined power dynamics that could be similarly compared to stereotypical heteronormative gender-roles. Couples who “bottom” or take a receptive role while partaking in anal intercourse, describe their position as having less control (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015). Individuals who took on the active or “top” position during anal intercourse, were seen as what would be described as a traditional male role in the relationship.

Inequalities. Researchers found that inequalities amongst male couples was related to violence due to inequalities leading to differences in power, which then caused abuse and other forms of violence to arise (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016). Types of inequalities include differences in 'outness' about sexual identity, schooling achieved, socioeconomic class, and past relationship experiences (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015). Perpetrators of domestic abuse will use power imbalances to attack their victims whether it be physically, psychologically, or emotionally (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016).

Internalized homophobia. Participants in a study conducted for the analyzation of male-male emotional intimate partner violence described internalized homophobia as an antecedent to emotional violence (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016). Partners who had thoughts of shame because of same-sex behavior felt anxious and resentment in their relationship. The self-guilt then lead to emotional altercations. These altercations were found especially when one partner was self-accepting (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016). Internalized homophobia was found to contribute to higher quantity of problems in relationships, the aptitude of maintaining longstanding relationships, and an overall poorer relationship quality (Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015).

Substance abuse. Research was drawn from a study that involved HIV-positive, black same-sex couples to examine if alcohol consumption or any other illicit substance use was associated with domestic abuse. Twenty-four couples reported perpetrating and experiencing intimate partner violence (Wu, E et., 2015). Thirty-eight percent of participants experienced domestic abuse in their relationships (Wu, E et., 2015).

In regards to substance abuse: sixty-four percent of participants were heavy drinkers, eighty-nine percent consumed marijuana, seventy-seven percent partook in methamphetamines,

sixty-five percent used powdered cocaine, fifty-eight percent used rock/crack cocaine, and fourteen percent did heroin (Wu, E et., 2015).

Heavy alcohol consumption and methamphetamine use were associated with the domestic abuse these male same-sex relationships endured (Wu, E et., 2015). The rates of intimate partner violence amongst, black men who have sex with other men exceeds, in general, the rates of domestic violence in heterosexual relationships (Wu, E et., 2015).

Factors of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse was portrayed as the most threatening form of domestic violence. Multiple behaviors which contribute to emotional violence include verbal aggression, controlling behaviors, and discrimination. Overt ways emotional intimate partner violence was presented in male same-sex relationships include name-calling, controlling victim's actions, enforced social isolation, making threats, and coercive acts.

Dominant and controlling behaviors that were seen in the perpetrator were described as originating from a desire to control their partners (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016). These behaviors frequently appeared as threat-making, stalking, and community separation. Men explained that the abusers controlling behaviors eventually influenced victims into making detrimental decisions, such as attending to the stalking tendencies of the perpetrators by unintentionally isolating themselves due to leaving their social activities (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016).

Gaps in the literature. There was ample information found to answer the research question. Although, I found that most case studies conducted were limited due to the number of participants involved. This could put into question the ways individuals integrate identities. However, most articles had similar results regarding how homosexual individuals reconcile sexuality and Christian identities.

Theoretical Perspective

A theory from the textbook that helps explain the research question is Kohlberg's level 3 stage 6 of moral development. The Postconventional Level describes moral conscience development that goes beyond what others say (Zastro & Kirst-Ashman, 2016). During this phase, the person develops the ability to accept that he is in a same-sex relationship despite what heterosexist societal attitudes he encounters. However, internalized homophobia could trigger domestic abuse making the individual revert to Kohlberg's Level 2 stage 3 which signifies that his behavior is governed by conforming to social expectations (Zastro & Kirst-Ashman, 2016).

Conclusions

Findings. What can be done as a social workers: focus on interventions that address the structural power imbalances that can occur in same-sex male relationships Wu, E et., 2015).

Doing additional research that examines violence in same-sex male relationships Wu, E et., 2015).

Create Interventions that address homophobic stigma and aim to redefine male gender roles in same-sex relationships as more balanced rather than relying on dominant and submissive roles Wu, E et., 2015).

What can be done to address the issue: additional research that further examines the lived experiences of intimate partner violence in same-sex male relationships is necessary to understand how the stresses of gender role conflict and the stress of living in a heteronormative society may contribute to intimate partner violence among gay and bisexual men.

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