

“We’re Not Victims”: Deconstructing Narratives of Female Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

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Presentation:

- Literature
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Key points and findings
- Discussion and conclusions
- Future research
- Acknowledgements and questions



LITERATURE – AN OVERVIEW

- Statistics: police reported victims of major assault
 - US – 22.3% women & 14% men (www.cdc.gov)
 - Canada – 6,838 women & 5,868 men (www.statcan.gc.ca)
- Two competing paradigms:
 - feminist or violence-against-women
 - family violence perspective



RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How do women experience intimate partner violence as perpetrators of violence against their male partners?
- What are the motives, meanings, and justifications given by the women in their subjective narratives?
- How do these women's explanations for the acts of violence they commit against their intimate male partners contest or reinforce dominant sociocultural gender norms?



Methodology: Qualitative

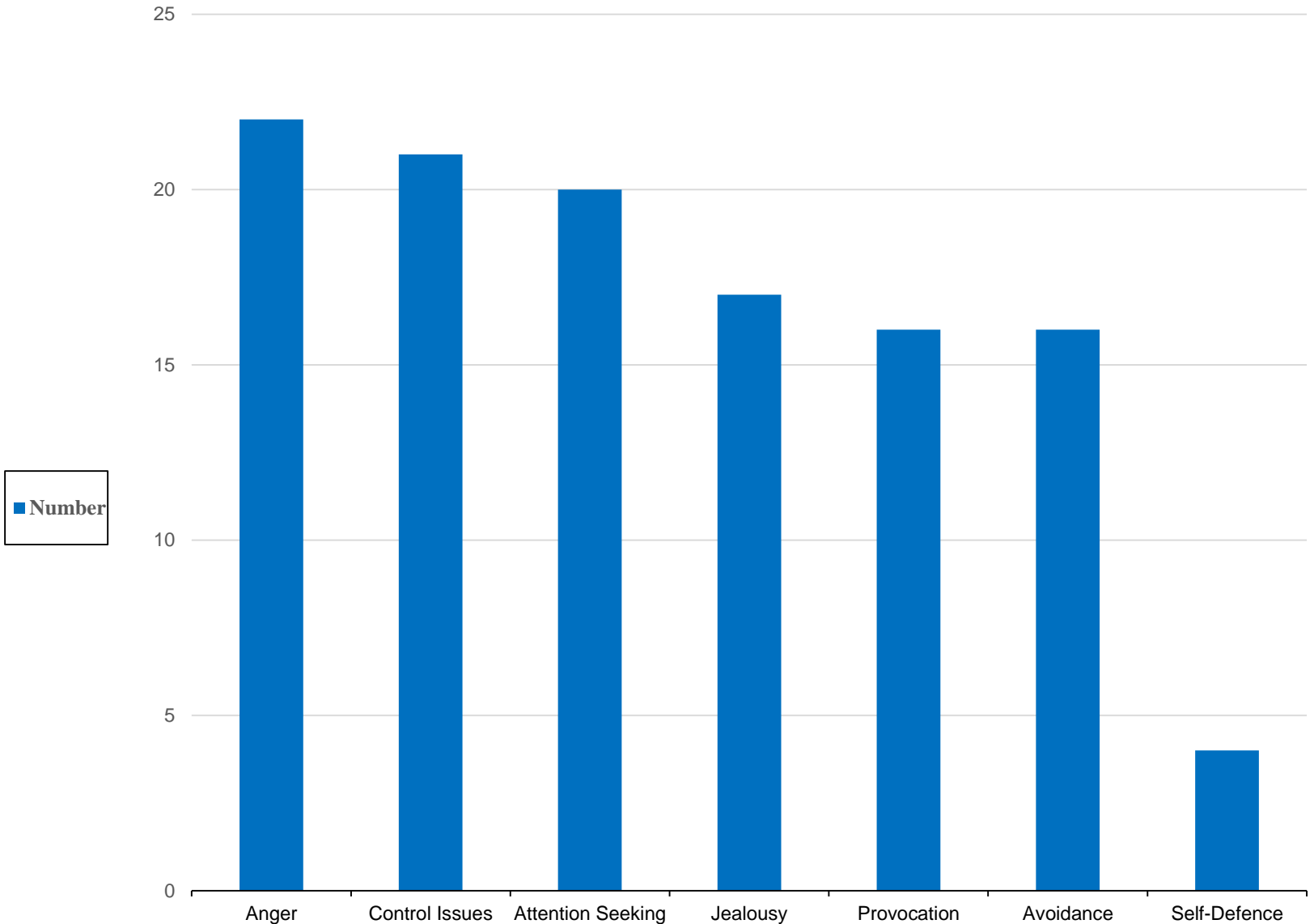
- **Data collection:** Feminist principles. Reflexive and aware of power differentials.
 - **in-depth interviews** - 23 participants from Breaking free, FDAAP groups and Mom's house
 - **participant observation**- support group meetings and Mom's House
- **Data analysis**
 - transcribing and coding data
 - analysis
- **Ethical concerns**
 - consent
 - safety



DATA SAMPLE

- 26 In-depth semi-structured interviews
- Aged 19-57, low socioeconomic group
- 4 were generally violent
- 24 experienced childhood trauma
- 17 male partners non-violent
- 11 male partners fearful
- 10 male partners sought medical attention for injuries

MOTIVATION FOR VIOLENCE



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ANGER

- I get so angry that I literally see red, I go deaf. I literally don't even hear myself, I would flip out, get very angry and by then my temper snaps. I start beating him up after that. Nobody tells me what to do. He would push me but never hit me. Just little pushes because I don't yell from afar, I'm in your face. When people start saying something to me, I go from 0-10 in a heart beat. I start clenching my fists then I start hitting. I have fractured my hand from punching him in the head.

CONTROL

- I would start fights, I'd be looking through their phone for anything. If they're not saying *I love you*, I'll pressure them. If I'm not having enough sex, I'll pressure them for sex so I can get my needs met. If they're not taking care of the baby when I want them to or helping me out with what I need, you know, I'll blow up...I would take off sometimes, I'd start a fight and start yelling, chump, piece of shit, spoilt baby, bitch. I'll go and punch him, punch his TV to break it, break stuff, throw something. I forced sex you know. I would pressure...this is hard...I don't know... I would want it and I would get angry. I would cause a fight and sometimes he's just say no but I'd do that anyway. Even if I didn't reach the satisfaction, I'd get the satisfaction of knowing that they were being intimate with me when I wanted it.



JEALOUSY

- there was this girl and jealousy came into the picture. I did not know how to handle jealousy. I took it out on him. I tied his arms up, I poured boiling water on him. I was just like on fire, mad. I wasn't taught properly how to have decent relationships. That day I was charged with my first crime...but I felt betrayed. I was trying to teach him a valuable lesson that there are women out there who do not deserve to be deceived...I don't care if they are sluts or bitches, we don't deserve to be treated like this.



SELF DEFENSE

- 4 participants justified violence as self defense
- 8 were victims of violence in previous relationship – now aggressors
- Primary explanation for violence by women – self-defense – not supported
- Reductive
- Self-defense/retaliation - fuzzy



GENDER

- Gender is the most significant and pervasive organizing principles of society and profoundly structures our understanding of violence
- I have always worn the pants in the family so I feel like I take the male role, even with sex and demanding sex then turn over. I keep the money and control the money. So I don't know, I have always controlled...Shouldn't be there [violence] and as a woman I don't feel like I should be so aggressive. Women should be fancy and not cuss but I do all that. I cuss like a logger but I wear make up. I know a lot of women who cuss and hit and get angry...boys can come on aggressive, why not girls?



FINDINGS

- participants embody stereotypical “passive” character
- negotiate femininity situationally
- when women or girls are violent, they are not “just acting like men” but resorting to violence as an authentic and legitimate aspect of their femininity; “bad girl” femininity (Messerschmidt 2002)
- women’s violence is minimized and denied
- controlling and coercive behaviours



Conclusions:

- Predominant motives for violence for violence by women and men are similar – pay attention to broader structural influences
- Policy and definitions set out for intervention should be more inclusive – women perpetrators and male victims
- Extend gender-inclusive language into public lexicon – challenge cultural stereotypes
- Address coercive control by women



Discussion:

- 22 of the women experienced or witnessed abuse as children
- Exposure to violence as a causal risk or factor in the perpetration of IPV
- Women's narratives – “we're not victims”



FUTURE RESEARCH

- Qualitative studies with couples
- Address childhood trauma for all perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence regardless of gender
- Study treatment outcomes



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