

Does perpetrator gender influence attitudes towards intimate partner violence (IPV)? Examining the relationship between male-perpetrated and female-perpetrated IPV attitudes among a sample of UK young adults

Ethan Conroy, Dominic Willmott, Anthony Murphy and B. Kennath Widanaralalage

Abstract

Purpose – Understanding of the role that attitudes and beliefs may play on the judgments people make about intimate partner violence (IPV) is becoming increasingly important, notably in the context of the criminal justice process and in recognising IPV as a public health issue. This study aims to investigate the importance of several established factors predictive of attitudes towards male-perpetrated IPV, which have never previously been explored in relation to female-perpetrated IPV.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 295 young adults (18–28) from across the UK completed an online survey (M Age = 23.82) comprised of four established psychometric inventories; the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale, Satisfaction with Life scale, Attitudes Towards Female Dating Violence scale and newly developed Modern Adolescent Dating Violence Attitudes (MADVA) scale, alongside a suite of associated demographic factors.

Findings – Results derived from a multiple linear regression indicates that three types of attitudes towards male-perpetrated violence against women (physical, sexual, and psychological abuse offline), were significant predictors of attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV, along with gender and ethnicity. Self-esteem, satisfaction with life, age and education among those surveyed were not associated with attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV.

Practical implications – The results have important implications in developing educational programmes for those who have committed IPV offences, as well as teaching young people about the nature of partner abuse.

Originality/value – The results suggest that those who endorse attitudes supportive of male-perpetrated IPV in offline environments, also endorse violence-supportive beliefs towards female-perpetrated IPV. In effect, violence-supportive attitudes are held irrespective of the sex of the perpetrator. However, this may differ in terms of how individuals view online types of abuse, where these attitudes appear to be processed differentially to offline attitudes.

Keywords Sexual abuse, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Female offenders, Physical abuse, Psychological abuse, Violence supportive attitudes

Paper type Research paper

Ethan Conroy is based at the Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK. Dominic Willmott is based at the Department of Criminology and Social Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK. Anthony Murphy is based at the Department of Psychology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK. B. Kennath Widanaralalage is based at the School of Social Sciences (Psychology), University of Westminster, London, UK.

Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also referred to as domestic abuse, partner violence, and dating violence and abuse, can be broadly defined as any form of violence or abuse perpetrated by a person against a current or former intimate partner (Debowska *et al.*, 2019). IPV is widely acknowledged as prevalent throughout the world and consists of a

range of physical, verbal, emotional, psychological and/or sexually abusive acts [World Health Organization (WHO), 2012]. Indeed, IPV is reported to be the third highest cause of death globally among people aged 15–44 [World Health Organization (WHO), 2010] and while both men and women experience variants of IPV, prevalence data pertaining to recorded crimes suggest women are those most likely to experience (and report) abuse by an intimate partner [Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019]. Although ONS prevalence data appear low, with 8% of women, and 4% of men reporting prior experiences of IPV, these figures amount to more than eight million people in England and Wales alone and are undoubtedly impacted by vast underreporting (Sowersby *et al.*, 2022).

The consequences of IPV experiences are also well established. Prolonged and often co-occurring forms of abuse have serious and wide-ranging effects on victim's lives, even years after the abuse has stopped (Hulley *et al.*, 2022; Kirkman *et al.*, 2021; Lilley *et al.*, 2023a, 2023b; Sharratt *et al.*, 2022). Research indicates that IPV incidents vastly increased during the coronavirus pandemic and the mental health consequences for victims forced to remain indoors with their perpetrators, are found to be severe and enduring (Ali *et al.*, 2021a). Male victims experience significant post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, suicidal ideations and attempts (Dufort *et al.*, 2015; Randle and Graham, 2011). Female victims also report significant consequences upon their mental health, including depression, anxiety, sleep and personality disorder symptomatology (Boduszek *et al.*, 2019; Kirkman *et al.*, 2021; Levendosky *et al.*, 2012). Evidence also indicates the consequences of IPV extend beyond those directly victimised, with children exposed to violence also at an increased risk of a range of adverse outcomes including difficulties forming and maintaining secure attachments and adult relationships, alongside developing violent-supportive attitudes and behaviours (Debowska *et al.*, 2018; Filkin *et al.*, 2022; Levendosky *et al.*, 2012).

IPV attitudes

In conceptualising IPV as a public health concern (NICE, 2016), it is important to consider the attitudes held by the public towards partner-violence, not least because members of the public comprise those asked to render legal judgments in such cases when serving as jurors. Whilst vast research means much is known about public attitudes towards male-on-female perpetrated IPV (Ali *et al.*, 2021b; Debowska *et al.*, 2019; Stefanska *et al.*, 2021; Taylor *et al.*, 2017; Yasegnal, 2023), much less has focused on female-perpetrated IPV. Indeed, prevalence data and attitudinal insights concerning male victims of IPV globally, are scarce. As such, there exists a lack of evidence surrounding how IPV attitudes perpetrated by male versus female offenders compare worldwide. Even within the UK, where reported IPV prevalence is similar between females (8%) and males (4%) (ONS, 2019), previous research has failed to examine whether a relationship exists between public attitudes surrounding male-on-female and female-on-male partner violence. This is particularly important given that such public attitudes underpin victims help-seeking behaviours, bystander intervention tendencies, mental-health and justice professionals' response to incidents, and broader societal exclusion based on perspectives of "true" victimhood (Bates and Taylor, 2019).

IPV attitudes and self-concept

Attitudes are often motivated and explained by our sense of self and self-concept (Willmott *et al.*, 2018). Self-esteem, for example, is characterised by an individual's feelings and beliefs about oneself, ranging from extremely negative (i.e. shame, despair) to extremely positive (i.e. pride, triumphant). Self-esteem has also been shown to predict satisfaction within intimate relationships (Orth and Robins, 2014), with low self-esteem associated with an increased likelihood of physical violence towards oneself and intimate partners (Papadakaki *et al.*, 2009). With self-esteem and general life satisfaction associated with a

number of negative behavioural outcomes, emotions and feelings a negative sense of self may contribute to externalising, violent behaviours and attitudes (Silverstone and Salsali, 2003). Indeed, low self-esteem has been shown to predict endorsement of problematic attitudes supportive of coercive-controlling behaviours (Lawal *et al.*, 2019). Whilst limited in scope, evidence appears to indicate that for some, low self-esteem may influence perceptions and behavioural tendencies directed towards intimate partners. While embryonic in nature, further research is clearly warranted to better understand whether one's self-esteem and general life-satisfaction may be associated with attitudes held towards IPV.

IPV attitudes and socio-demographics

Past research has established the importance of socio-demographic characteristics in the endorsement of violence-supportive attitudes. Gender, age, ethnicity, and education have been associated with such beliefs. Men are routinely found to express more problematic attitudes (Tran *et al.*, 2016; Wang, 2016), although some studies have shown that women also endorse IPV supportive beliefs (Khawaja *et al.*, 2008; Sayem *et al.*, 2012). However, research has typically focussed on male-to female IPV, highlighting the need for further examination of how gender may be associated with female-on-male IPV attitudes. Age has also been highlighted as an important determinant of such attitudes, however with mixed results. While some studies indicate younger respondents express more problematic IPV supporting beliefs, others suggest older participants are those most likely to endorse such beliefs (Lawal *et al.*, 2019; Tran *et al.*, 2016). Limited research however has examined the role of age in female-perpetrated IPV attitudes. Education and ethnicity are also shown to be important determinants of male-on-female IPV attitudes in some prior studies (Lawoko, 2008; Sayem *et al.*, 2012). Evidence suggests that low educational attainment is associated with more problematic IPV attitudes (Wang, 2016), however other studies failed to find any such effects of education and ethnicity when considered across multiple regions (Tran *et al.*, 2016). With mixed evidence and limited studies examining the role of socio-demographic characteristics upon attitudes towards female-on-male IPV perpetration, further research is needed to address this gap.

Current study

Given the lack of research examining the prevalence and co-occurrence of IPV attitude variants among young people from the UK, the current study seeks to address this gap. Moreover, as most existing research in this area focuses on male-on-female partner violence scenarios, this study sought to examine attitudes towards alternative IPV circumstances where the gender of the abusive and victimised parties vary. This study investigates how the endorsement of attitudes that are either supportive or rejecting of male perpetrated IPV, co-exist or differ from those towards female-perpetrated partner violence, whilst examining the role of psychosocial characteristics previously associated with male-perpetrated IPV beliefs. Therefore, the main aim of the current study is to explore the relationship between demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity, education), psychological perceptions towards oneself (satisfaction with life, self-esteem) and male-perpetrated adolescent dating violence attitude variants (sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse and coercive control – online versus offline) upon attitudes towards female-perpetrated intimate partner violence in a cross-sectional sample of young adults from the UK.

Materials and methods

Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional design where participants took part in an online questionnaire consisting of a series of self-report measures and socio-demographic

questions assessing age, gender, ethnicity, education, self-esteem, satisfaction with life and six attitudinal variants of male-perpetrated IPV (as conceptualised by the Modern Adolescent Dating Violence Attitudes [MADVA] scale below). Attitude towards female-perpetrated IPV was the outcome variable in this study.

Sample

Participants were recruited using opportunity sampling procedures whereby a weblink to the survey hosted on the Qualtrics data collection platform was advertised on social media platforms, online forums and an internal research participation platform at the host institution. Sample size calculations using [Tabachnick et al. \(2007\)](#) formula for correlational designs [$50 + (8 \times \text{number of predictors})$] indicated a minimum of 146 participants were required. In total, 295 participants were recruited to take part. Participant age ranged from 18 to 28 ($M = 23.82$; $SD = 3.36$), was predominately female (238; 80.7%), with a minority of male respondents taking part (57; 19.3%). Regarding ethnicity, 224 (75.9%) participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian and 71 (24.1%) reported having Black African and Black Caribbean heritage, South East Asian or from another minority ethnic group. Whilst the authors recognise that each of these ethnic groupings have unique cultures and traditions, due to low individual group representation, they were merged into one “BAME” (Black, Asian and minority ethnic group) category to allow for comparison against the Caucasian participant grouping. For level of education, 78 participants (26.4%) self-reported their highest qualification as below a university bachelor’s degree, while 217 (73.6%) reported their highest qualification as a university bachelor’s degree or above.

Measures

Attitudes Towards Female Dating Violence Scale (AFDV; [Price et al., 1999](#)) contains 37 items relating to female-perpetrated dating violence attitudes. The scale consists of three sub-scales, with 13 items relating to Psychological Violence (AFDV-Psych), 12 items relating to Physical Violence (AFDV-Phys) and 12 items relating to Sexual Violence (AFDV-Sex). These statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) where higher scores indicate greater endorsement of problematic beliefs of each IPV attitude. Psychometric validation of this tool indicates that sub-scale scores can be reliably combined to create an overall AFDV scale score where total scores range from 37 to 185. Cronbach’s alpha analysis indicates good overall internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

MADVA ([Kirkman et al., 2023](#)) is a 48-item scenario-based attitudinal measurement scale concerned with male-perpetrated adolescent dating violence on female victims. The multidimensional scale is comprised of six sub-scales, each containing eight items; relating to sexual abuse offline (SA:OFF), sexual abuse online (SA:ON), physical abuse offline (PHY:OFF), psychological abuse offline (PSY:OFF), psychological abuse online (PSY:ON) and coercive controlling behaviours offline (CCB:OFF). All scale items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Higher scores in each distinct sub-scale indicate greater endorsement of problematic attitudes related to each factor. Cronbach’s alpha scores indicate good internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$ and above) across all six factors.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; [Rosenberg, 1965](#)) contains 10 items relating to general positive and negative feelings an individual holds towards themselves. Scored on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree to 4 = Strongly disagree) scores range from 10 to 40 with higher scores indicating reduced self-esteem ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; [Diener et al., 1985](#)) is a unidimensional measure containing five items related to an individual’s satisfaction with their life. Scored using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree) scores range from 5

to 35. Lower total scores indicate reduced satisfaction with life, while higher scores indicate increased satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Study procedure

Upon clicking the survey weblink, participants were presented with an information sheet that outlined the purpose of the study. Contact details of the research team and free and impartial support service information were also provided to participants prior to taking part, affording them the opportunity to access support services or ask questions regardless of whether they took part. Participants were asked to provide informed consent through completion of an online consent form, before taking part. Here participants were specifically made aware of their rights to withdraw at any point during or after the study (prior to analysis onset). Next, participants were presented with the study questionnaire containing demographic questions, the SWLS, the Self-Esteem Scale, the MADVA and the AFDV. The questionnaire took between 15 and 25 minutes to complete. Upon completion, a debrief reiterating the rationale of the study and withdrawal procedures was provided, along with free and impartial contact information for victim support organisations and the research team. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the School Research Ethics Committee at the host institution.

Results

Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations for continuous study variables including age, satisfaction with life scores, self-esteem scores and IPV attitude scale scores are presented in Table 1. Pearson correlations between all study variables are presented in Table 2. Descriptive data display mean participant age was 23.82 (SD = 3.36) and low to moderate scores for all MADVA and AFDV attitudinal scale scores. Correlational analyses display moderate to strong significant positive associations between all AFDV and MADVA sub-scales indicating a correlation between attitudes towards female-perpetrated and female-victimised partner violence within the current sample.

Group differences in female-perpetrated IPV attitudes

To investigate whether attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV may vary based upon demographic group differences in gender, ethnicity and education, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted. Analysis revealed a significant difference between male and female respondents and between Caucasian and BAME participants in AFDV scores. Specifically,

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for continuous study variables ($n = 295$)

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Age	23.82	3.36	10.00	18.00	28.00
Life satisfact	22.61	6.23	30.00	5.00	35.00
Self esteem	22.17	5.51	30.00	10.00	40.00
SA Off	10.77	4.12	18.00	8.00	26.00
SA On	10.74	3.90	20.00	8.00	28.00
PHY Off	10.92	4.04	21.00	8.00	29.00
PSY Off	10.43	3.82	20.00	8.00	28.00
PSY On	10.38	3.95	23.00	8.00	31.00
CCB Off	10.91	4.26	20.00	8.00	28.00
AFDV-TS	64.37	18.37	81.00	37.00	118.00

Notes: MADVA sub-scale = sexual abuse offline (SA:OFF), sexual abuse online (SA:ON), physical abuse offline (PHY:OFF), psychological abuse offline (PSY:OFF), psychological abuse online (PSY:ON) and coercive controlling behaviours offline (CCB:OFF); Attitudes Towards Female Dating Violence Scale – Total Score (AFDV-TS)

Source: Table by authors

Table 2 Pearson's correlations between study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Age	1														
2. Gender	0.15**	1													
3. Ethnicity	0.18**	0.05	1												
4. Education	0.03	0.02	-0.1	1											
5. Life Satis	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.23**	1										
6. Self-esteem	-0.23**	-0.13*	0.05	-0.17**	-0.6**	1									
7. SA offline	-0.02	0.25**	-0.33**	0.11*	0.07	-0.09	1								
8. SA online	-0.03	0.16**	-0.32**	0.16**	0.05	-0.08	0.85**	1							
9. PHY offline	0.00	0.15**	-0.29**	0.11*	0.04	-0.05	0.8**	0.84**	1						
10. PSY offline	-0.01	0.18**	-0.3**	0.08	0.07	-0.08	0.78**	0.79**	0.78**	1					
11. PSY online	0.02	0.16**	-0.31**	0.04	0.01	-0.05	0.79**	0.81**	0.81**	0.88**	1				
12. CCB offline	-0.03	0.2**	-0.34**	0.03	0.08	-0.1*	0.77**	0.77**	0.77**	0.78**	0.81**	1			
13. AFDV-Psych	0.04	0.21**	-0.23**	0.07	0.03	-0.03	0.54**	0.53**	0.55**	0.52**	0.49**	0.51**	1		
14. AFDV-Phys	0.00	0.32**	-0.29**	0.13*	0.03	-0.05	0.59**	0.56**	0.66**	0.56**	0.53**	0.49**	0.7**	1	
15. AFDV-Sex	0.05	0.3**	-0.37**	0.09	0.12*	-0.12*	0.73**	0.67**	0.65**	0.66**	0.65**	0.68**	0.63**	0.7**	1

Notes: MADVA sub-scale = sexual abuse offline (SA:OFF), sexual abuse online (SA:ON), physical abuse offline (PHY:OFF), psychological abuse offline (PSY:OFF), psychological abuse online (PSY:ON) and coercive controlling behaviours offline (CCB:OFF); Female-Perpetrated Psychological Violence (AFDV-Psych), Female-Perpetrated Physical Violence (AFDV-Phys); Female-Perpetrated Sexual Violence (AFDV-Sex); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Table by authors

men and BAME participants exhibited significantly higher AFDV scores than their female and Caucasian counterparts (Table 3). No significant differences were observed based upon level of education.

Psycho-social and attitudinal correlates of female-perpetrated IPV attitudes

Multiple regression assumption testing (multicollinearity, independence of errors, absence of outliers, homoscedasticity and linearity of data) were all examined and satisfied prior to analyses. Linear regression modelled the effects of age, gender, ethnicity, education, satisfaction with life, self-esteem, and attitudes towards sexual abuse offline, sexual abuse online, physical abuse offline, psychological abuse offline, psychological abuse online and controlling behaviours offline scores, as predictors of attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV (Table 4). Analysis revealed the model significantly explained 60% of the variance in attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV, $F(12, 262) = 32.63$, $p < 0.001$ and indicated gender, ethnicity, attitudes towards sexual abuse offline, physical abuse offline and psychological abuse offline, were all significant predictors of female-perpetrated IPV attitudes. Of these variables, attitudes towards physical abuse were the biggest contributor ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), followed by sexual abuse offline attitudes ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.004$),

Table 3 Group differences in attitudes towards female dating violence (AFDV) scores by demographic

Scale	Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t	Cohen's d
AFDV	Gender	Male	75.53	17.58	5.358***	0.79
		Female	61.44	17.39		
	Ethnicity	Caucasian	60.89	16.08	-5.225***	0.74
		BAME	74.63	20.78		
	Education	Below degree	61.73	16.54	1.474	0.20
		Degree or above	65.14	18.83		

Notes: AFDV = Attitudes towards female dating violence total score; BAME = Black, Asian, minority ethnic; Below degree = Highest qualification is below a university bachelor's degree; Degree or above = qualified to university bachelor's degree level or above; *** = $p < 0.001$

Source: Table by authors

Table 4 Multiple linear regression analysis of 12 predictor variables association with female-perpetrated IPV attitude scores (AFDV-TS)

	R ²	B	β	SE	CI (95%)
Model	0.6**				
Age		0.13	0.07	0.08	-0.03/-0.29
Gender		7.86	0.17**	1.95	4.03/11.69
Ethnicity		-5.53	-0.13*	1.85	-9.17/-1.90
Education		-0.25	-0.01	1.7	-3.60/3.11
Satisfact life		0.09	0.03	0.15	-0.20/0.39
Self-esteem		0.23	0.07	0.17	-0.10/0.57
SA offline		1.07	0.24*	0.37	0.34/1.80
SA online		0.09	0.02	0.42	-0.75/0.92
PHY offline		1.7	0.38**	0.38	0.95/2.44
PSY offline		1.03	0.22*	0.43	0.19/1.87
PSY online		-0.74	-0.16	0.46	-1.63/0.16
CCB offline		0.12	0.03	0.33	-0.52/0.76

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

Source: Table by authors

psychological abuse offline attitudes ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.02$), gender ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$) and ethnicity ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.003$).

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between demographic, psychological and attitudinal characteristics upon a sample of UK young adults' attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV. Findings indicate that several factors were important determinants of attitudes towards such female-perpetrated abuse, including perceptions towards what constitutes physical, psychological and sexual abuse within adolescent dating relationships, in offline environments. Interestingly, a clear relationship was observed between the three variants of adolescent dating violence (concerned with male-on-female perpetrated IPV) and attitudes supportive of partner violence perpetrated by females. Problematic attitudes towards male-perpetrated abuse within offline environments were important predictors of problematic attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV, whereas attitudes concerned within partner abuse perpetrated online, were not associated with such female-perpetrated IPV beliefs. The finding that attitudes towards online abuse appear not to co-exist alongside problematic offline attitudes, support findings obtained in two recent studies among UK (Kirkman *et al.*, 2023) and Australian populations (McLachlan and Harris, 2022). Taken together such findings appear to suggest that online abuse towards intimate partners is considered less serious than similar abusive acts perpetrated in offline spaces and relationships; or at least endorsed differently by different groups. However, the association between male and female perpetrated IPV beliefs appears to indicate that victim and perpetrator gender is not important in the context of those who express such views. This provides early evidence among UK young people of a direct, co-existing relationship between attitudes held towards male-perpetrated and female perpetrated IPV attitudes.

Concerning demographics, participant gender and ethnicity were found to be significant predictors of attitudes held towards female-perpetrated IPV. Males and those who self-reported their ethnicity as Black, Asian or another minority ethnic group, expressed more attitudes that were more accepting of female-perpetrated IPV than their female and Caucasian counterparts. These findings accord with those obtained in a wealth of previous research (Tran *et al.*, 2016; Wang, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, recent studies report men and boys are more likely to endorse problematic violence-supportive attitudes (Debowska *et al.*, 2021; Sowersby *et al.*, 2022) and hold beliefs which expressly doubt the veracity of abusive victim claims (Lilley *et al.*, 2023a; Smith *et al.*, 2022). This may be due in

part to a historically sizeable asymmetry in perpetrators of IPV within the UK [Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019], where men are most often reported to be the perpetrators and women most often those victimised, so men may be more accepting of females committing similar types of abuse.

Whilst the role of ethnicity in violence-supportive attitudes has been less clear in past research, one recent study obtained some evidence that BAME mock-jurors expressed more problematic views towards rape and were less likely to convict an alleged abusive male defendant, than their Caucasian counterparts (Lilley *et al.*, 2023b). However, an important note of causation in this study, much like the present research, is that participants from minority ethnic backgrounds were underrepresented in the data sets. Furthermore, whilst BAME participant groupings allow for some form of comparison based on ethnicity, the merging of diverse racial groups is problematic given the wide-ranging customs and traditions that are artificially amalgamated. Whilst age and education appear to have had little association with attitudes towards female perpetrated IPV in the current study, a relationship previously well evidenced in past research (Wang, 2016; Sayem *et al.*, 2012; Lawoko, 2008), this is likely the product of limited age range (18–28) and lack of educational heterogeneity. Moreover, whilst there is a proportional difference in educational attainment within the current sample, it is likely that many of those who reported their highest qualification being below a university degree, may have been enrolled but simply had not yet completed their university qualification. Future research should seek to more readily capture such a subtlety regarding current academic study.

Finally, neither self-esteem nor satisfaction with life were important determinants of female-perpetrated IPV attitudes in the current study, despite some evidence to the contrary relating to male IPV perpetration attitudes in past research (Lawal *et al.*, 2019; Papadakaki *et al.*, 2009). One explanation for this may be the lack of variability in self-perceptions within the current sample where mean and standard deviation scores indicate most participants score moderately overall. Future research should seek to re-examine the importance of such self-concept constructs among a larger and more representative sample of young UK adults.

Study implications

There are several important implications emerging from this study, though perhaps that which is most important concerns evidence of problematic attitudes among some UK young people, supportive of varying forms of partner violence within adolescent and adult intimate relationships. As such there is a clear need for further development and implementation of educational interventions among children, adolescents and young people living in the UK. Whilst many programmes focused on sex-and-relationship education currently exist within UK schools and further-higher educational institutions (e.g. colleges and universities), the current findings suggest problematic beliefs undoubtedly persist among some young people. One solution may be more rigorous, formal assessments and/or targeted interventions based upon the current findings. For example, those which would require adolescent boys and young men to undertake and meaningfully engage with anti-violence interventions designed with debunking myths and stereotypes which surround the acceptance of violent attitudes and behaviours within intimate relationships. Whilst further research is needed among UK young people to identify those most at risk of endorsing such problematic beliefs, given the well-established causal link between IPV attitudes and subsequent behavioural tendencies (Kirkman *et al.*, 2023), more intensive, substantive interventions early on among at risk young people have clear long-term benefits in reducing future IPV.

Limitations and future research

There were several limitations within the current study. Firstly, a cross-sectional design was used to identify relationships between the variables, limiting our ability to identify and dissect the underlying causal mechanisms that give meaning to how such relationships develop and persist.

Future research which attempts to assess co-occurring IPV attitudes and associated psychosocial characteristics should seek to make use of more sophisticated experimental designs, where scales like the newly developed MADVA inventory (Kirkman *et al.*, 2023) are completed at multiple time points (pre- and post-intervention to assess sustained change) and across different participant groups (experimental versus control groups). This would assist in the acquisition of a more causal and evaluative evidence base from which IPV attitudinal change can be readily assessed. Secondly, due to the self-report nature of the data collected there are inevitable concerns surrounding social desirability bias and demand characteristics. Given the sensitive nature of the study focus and questions, attitudes reported may not fully reflect the extent of what some participants felt. However, as participants were not directly targeted and were self-selecting, alongside being reminded of their anonymity throughout, some confidence can be placed in the responses obtained in comparison to laboratory-based face-to-face survey data collection. There are also several notable limitations with the sample obtained including the disproportionate representation of female and Caucasian participants, as well as the general homogeneity of the participant group. These inevitable issues are often grounded in cross-sectional survey-based studies and future research should seek to adopt stratified sampling procedures within both anonymised cross-sectional and experimental designs, where criteria such as gender, ethnicity, social economic status and geographic region are controlled for.

Conclusion

Despite the aforementioned limitations, this study builds on existing literature in several important ways and provides new evidence concerning the co-existing nature of attitudes towards male-on-female partner violence and female-perpetrated IPV. This study makes use of the newly developed MADVA scale, where partner abuse attitudes are assessed separately in online and offline environments, and where different types of abuse are assessed as distinct predictors of more generalised IPV attitudes, alongside psychosocial characteristics. With evidence that attitudes towards physical, psychological and sexual abuse within offline environments are significantly associated with attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV, and gender and ethnicity also identified as important correlates, this study concludes that future research must prioritise the development and robust evaluation of targeted educational interventions among children and young people. In this way, these findings provide a strong foundation from which future cross-sectional and experimental research may be based. Where successful interventions are evidenced in their ability to reduce problematic and violence supportive IPV attitudes among children and young people, the hope is that rates of partner violence will begin to decline. Whilst the long-term nature of the aforementioned objective is no easy task, a more immediate benefit of this and future research among diverse groups, is that it allows for a stronger basis from which IPV attitudes can be understood and ultimately addressed.

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Corresponding author

Dominic Willmott can be contacted at: d.willmott@lboro.ac.uk

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