

Sex Differences in Victimization from Low Intensity Intimate Partner Aggression in South Sudan

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate sex differences in victimisation from low intensity forms of intimate partner aggression in South Sudan. A questionnaire was filled in by 420 respondents (302 females and 118 males) in two cities in South Sudan. The mean age was 22.5 years (*SD* 8.4) for women and 25.6 years (*SD* 7.8). Victimization from intimate partner aggression was measured with the Victim Version of the Direct Indirect Aggression Scales (DIAS-Adult; Österman & Björkqvist, 2009) which includes six scales measuring verbal and nonverbal aggression, direct and indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, and economic aggression. The results showed that males had been significantly more victimised from physical and verbal aggression than females. A tendency was also found for males to be more victimised from nonverbal aggression and direct aggressive social manipulation. No sex differences were found regarding victimisation from indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, or economic aggression. Males had significantly more often been bit, hit, had their belongings damaged, scratched, spit at, and shoved by their female partner. Males had also been significantly more often subjected to quarrels, to being told nasty or hurtful words, and to being yelled at by their female partner. No sex difference was found for being interrupted when talking, been called bad names, or having been angrily nagged at by their partner. For females, age correlated positively with victimisation, while for males, the correlations were mostly negative. As far as more severe forms of violence are concerned, males have generally been found to be more aggressive against their partner than vice versa; the impact of male aggression has also usually been found to be more severe. The fact that males in domestic settings are also victimised by their spouses, although to less severe forms of aggression, has received much less attention.

Keywords: intimate partner aggression, low intensity aggression, victimisation, South Sudan

Introduction

Intimate partner aggression (IPA) has been studied extensively. Criminal records of serious aggressive acts, including homicide, show that women more often than men are the victims and men the perpetrators (Grech & Burgess, 2011). It has been found that 35% of women worldwide have experienced IPA (WHO, 2103). Less severe, low intensity forms of intimate partner aggression, on the other hand, have been studied to a much lesser degree. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to examine sex differences in victimisation from low intensity forms of intimate partner aggression.

The cost of domestic violence is high to society, it has been estimated that interpersonal disputes are more costly than warfare in terms of both lives lost and money spent (Hoeffler & Fearon, 2014). Roughly nine people are killed in interpersonal disputes for every one person who dies in a civil war. But domestic violence, as reported to authorities and calculated by researchers is just the tip of the iceberg. It is usually the outcome of a long sequence of milder

forms of aggression, like insults, shouting, and slapping between partners. The cost of these types of IPA is close to impossible to estimate.

Definition

Intimate partner violence has been defined as one or more acts of physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former partner. It includes acts of different severity, ranging from being slapped to having been assaulted with a weapon (WHO, 2013). There is still no clear-cut demarcation line between low intensity (less severe) and high intensity forms of IPA. A possible categorisation could be that if the aggression is so severe that it is punishable by law, then it should be regarded as high intensity.

Trends in Research

In the 1960s and 70s, women were still considered so unaggressive that researchers found no point in studying female aggression (Buss, 1961; Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977; Olweus, 1978). In the 1980s, it was becoming clear that a distinction between quantity and quality of aggression was necessary for the understanding of sex differences in aggression (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Hyde 1984). Following this development, in the 1990s, researchers in the field realised that physical forms of aggression until then had been overemphasised on behalf of other forms typical of females, like e.g. indirect aggression. A condensed chronological description of trends in the research on sex differences in aggression can be found in Björkqvist and Österman (in press).

Research on sex differences in IPA is at the moment going through a similar development. Two conflicting viewpoints can be discerned, referred to by Archer (in press) as symmetry and asymmetry theory. The asymmetry theory is based on traditional gender stereotypes, and it suggests that males in intimate partner relationships are more aggressive against their female partners than the other way around, i.e. there is an asymmetry between the sexes as far as IPA is concerned (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). This clearly seems to be the case if we use criminal records for an assessment of the matter (Grech & Burgess, 2011). Symmetry theory, again, suggests that males and females in an intimate relationship at an average are mutually and equally aggressive, and that aggressive interactions tend to escalate and de-escalate with the two combatants giving and taking roughly equally much to each other. Evidence for this viewpoint was first found by Straus and his colleagues (e.g. Feld & Straus, 1989; Straus, 1979, 1999; Straus & Gelles, 1992; Straus & Sweet, 1992), but similar findings have been made by others (e.g. Robertson & Murachver, 2007; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005). Notably, these researchers have conducted community based studies using questionnaires for obtaining their data.

To reconcile these two views, Archer (in press) suggested a revised symmetry theory. According to him, symmetry holds as far as low intensity (less severe) forms of IPA are concerned. However, if and when the aggression escalates to more severe aggression, when physical injury is inflicted, then males are more often perpetrators and females victims. Archer (in press) thought that symmetry would hold only in developed, Western type societies. In less developed, more patriarchal societies, he believed an asymmetric relationship would exist also as far as low intensity IPA is concerned.

In a study comparing low intensity IPA in Mexico and Finland (Österman, Toldos, & Björkqvist, 2014), using the same method of measurement of IPA as in the present study, DIAS-Adult (Österman & Björkqvist, 2009), it was actually found that there was a gender asymmetry in the opposite direction regarding low intensity (less severe) forms of IPA: males scored significantly *higher* than females on being *victimised* by their partner from physical and nonverbal aggression. In the same vein, females scored significantly higher on being *perpetrators* of physical, verbal, nonverbal, and indirect socially manipulative aggression against their partner. In another study using DIAS-Adult, carried out in Ghana (Darko, Björkqvist, & Österman, submitted), it was also found that males scored significantly higher than females on victimisation from less severe forms of physical, indirect and nonverbal aggression inflicted on them by their female partner.

About South Sudan

South Sudan is the youngest country on the planet; it became independent in 2011 (Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2005). High levels of gender-based violence have been documented in the country (Scott et al., 2013). Today, in the aftermath of war, both men and women are commonly practicing physical aggression (Tankink & Richters, 2007). Furthermore, domestic violence has been found to force children out from their homes and starting to sleep in the streets (Ndoromo, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2017).

It has been suggested that the main reason for the high levels of aggressive behaviour in South Sudan is that, during the war, most people remained without an education (Deng, 2003). During the war, people witnessed killing of their relatives, torture, and rape, people fighting at home due to limited resources, and relatives killing each other (Paardekooper, De Jong, & Hermanns, 1999). As a result, many are psychologically affected (Gorsevski, Kasischke, Dempewolf, Loboda, & Grossmann, 2012).

Due to the lack of statistics, there is limited knowledge about the prevalence of intimate partner aggression in South Sudan. Like in other similar cultures, it is still considered a shame for a man to be beaten by his wife (Douglas & Mohn, 2014). Consequently, males are probably less likely than females to report being victimised from IPA.

Aim of the Study

Studies exploring IPA have often focused on men as perpetrators and women as victims. In the present study, IPA was investigated with both women and men as potential victims and perpetrators. If it is correct, as Archer (in press) suggests, that males perpetrate not only more high intensity but also more low intensity IPA than females in patriarchal, developing countries, then females should be expected to be victimised to a higher extent than males. However, Darko et al. (submitted) did not find this to be the case in their study conducted in Ghana. If the present study provides similar findings as those by Darko and his colleagues, then the revised symmetry theory needs to be revised once more, and the conclusion should be made that symmetry regarding low intensity IPA might hold also in African countries.

Method

Sample

A paper-and-pencil questionnaire was filled in by 302 females and 118 males in the cities of Juba and Yei in South Sudan. The mean age was 22.5 years (*SD* 8.4) for women, and 25.6 years (*SD* 7.8) for males, the age difference was significant [$t_{(407)} = 3.42, p = .001$]. Accordingly, age was kept as a covariate in the analyses. The age range was between 14 and 60 years of age.

Instrument

Victimisation from intimate partner aggression was assessed with the victim version of the Direct Indirect Aggression Scales for Adults (DIAS-Adult; Österman & Björkqvist, 2009), consisting of seven scales measuring victimisation from physical aggression, verbal aggression, nonverbal aggression, direct aggressive social manipulation, indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, and economic aggression were. Cronbach's Alphas and individual items of the scales are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Single Items and Cronbach's Alphas of the Seven Scales Measuring Victimisation from Intimate Partner Aggression (DIAS-Adult, Österman & Björkqvist, 2009), in 420 Respondents from South Sudan

Physical Aggression 9 items, $\alpha = .82$	My partner has a) hit me, b) locked me in, c) locked me out, d) shoved me, e) bit me, f) scratched me, g) spit at me, h) thrown objects, i) damaged something that was mine
Direct Verbal Aggression 7 items, $\alpha = .85$	a) threatened to hurt me, b) yelled at me, c) quarreled with me, d) purposely said nasty or hurting things to me, e) called me bad names, f) interrupted me when I was talking, g) angrily nagged at me
Nonverbal Aggression 8 items, $\alpha = .89$	a) refused to talk to me, b) refused to look at me, c) refused to touch me, d) put on a sulky face, e) slammed doors, f) refused to sleep in the same bed as me, g) left the room in a demonstrative manner when I came in, h) made nasty faces or gestures behind my back
Direct Aggressive Social Manipulation 5 items, $\alpha = .85$	a) threatened to leave me, b) purposely provoked a quarrel with me, c) omitted doing things that (s)he usually does for both of us (e.g. household work), or done them less well, d) been ironic towards me, e) been contemptuous towards me
Indirect Aggressive Social Manipulation 5 items, $\alpha = .83$	a) spoken badly about me to someone else, b) tried to influence someone, such as children or relatives, to dislike me, c) ridiculed me in my absence, d) tried to exclude me from social situations, e) tried to make me feel guilty
Cyber Aggression 4 items, $\alpha = .82$	a) written angry text messages to me, b) written angry e-mails to me, c) written nasty text messages about me to somebody else, d) written nasty e-mails about me to someone else
Economic Aggression 2 items, $\alpha = .76$	a) not let me know details about our household economy, b) not allowed me to use money that belongs to both of us

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

Procedure

The study was endorsed by University of Juba. Research permission was given by the local authorities in Juba and Yei. Respondents were reached through the Women's Union in both cities, and through its members' neighbours and acquaintances.

Results

Correlations between the Scales in the Study

For females, all the scales correlated with all other scales at the $p < .001$ -level (Table 2). The same was the case for males, except for the correlation between the scale for victimisation from direct aggressive social manipulation and victimisation from cyber aggression ($p = .008$).

Table 2: Correlations between the Scales of the Study. Females ($N = 282$) in the Lower Part, and Males ($N = 113$) in the Upper Part of the Table

Victimisation from	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Physical aggression		.60 ***	.54 ***	.50 ***	.62 ***	.38 ***	.48 ***
2. Verbal aggression	.72 ***		.67 ***	.79 ***	.71 ***	.40 ***	.47 ***
3. Nonverbal aggression	.66 ***	.73 ***		.55 ***	.61 ***	.42 ***	.40 ***
4. Direct aggressive social manipulation	.70 ***	.78 ***	.79 ***		.68 ***	.25 **	.35 ***
5. Indirect aggressive social manipulation	.66 ***	.75 ***	.75 ***	.77 ***		.44 ***	.52 ***
6. Cyber aggression	.33 ***	.40 ***	.51 ***	.42 ***	.49 ***		.40 ***
7. Economic aggression	.59 ***	.59 ***	.69 ***	.68 ***	.66 ***	.43 ***	

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Victimisation from Intimate Partner Aggression and Age

For females, age correlated positively with all except one (cyber aggression) of the seven scales measuring victimisation from intimate partner aggression (Table 3). In the case of males, age correlated negatively with victimisation from physical aggression, indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, and economic aggression. A tendency was also found for a negative correlation between age and victimisation from verbal aggression. Victimisation from nonverbal aggression and direct aggressive social manipulation did not correlate with age for males.

Table 3: Correlations between Age and the Seven Scales of Victimisation from Intimate Partner Aggression

Victimisation from	Age	
	Females	Males
Physical aggression	.26 ***	-.37 ***
Verbal aggression	.22 ***	-.18 †
Nonverbal aggression	.28 ***	ns
Direct aggressive social manipulation	.32 ***	ns
Indirect aggressive social manipulation	.24 ***	-.20 *
Cyber aggression	ns	-.26 **
Economic aggression	.27 ***	-.31 ***

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$; † $p \leq .10$

Sex Differences in Victimisation from Intimate Partner Aggression

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out with sex as independent variable and seven types of victimisation from intimate partner aggression as dependent variables, and age as a covariate. The results are presented

in Table 4 and Fig. 1. The multivariate analysis was significant. The univariate analyses showed that males were significantly more victimised from physical and verbal aggression than females. A tendency was also found for males to be more victimised from nonverbal aggression and direct aggressive social manipulation. No sex differences were found for victimisation from indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, and economic aggression.

Table 4: Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Sex as Independent Variable, and Seven Types of Intimate Partner Aggression as Dependent Variables, and Age as a Covariate ($N = 352$)

	F	df	p	η_p^2	Group with Higher Mean
Effect of Sex					
Multivariate Analysis	2.96	7, 343	.005	.057	
Univariate Analyses					
Physical aggression	9.24	1, 349	.003	.026	Males
Verbal aggression	4.46	"	.035	.013	Males
Nonverbal aggression	3.19	"	.075	.009	(Males)
Direct aggressive social manipulation	3.54	"	.061	.010	(Males)
Indirect aggressive social manipulation	1.03	"	ns	.003	-
Cyber aggression	1.77	"	ns	.005	-
Economic aggression	0.03	"	ns	.000	-

Victimisation from Physical and Verbal Intimate Partner Aggression: Single Items

When the single items measuring victimisation from physical aggression were analysed with multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), it was found that males were significantly more victimised than females on six of the nine items (Fig. 2). The multivariate test was significant for sex [$F_{(9, 410)} = 3.02, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .062$]. The univariate analyses showed that males significantly more often had been bit [$F_{(1, 418)} = 11.68, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .027$], hit [$F_{(1, 418)} = 5.63, p = .018, \eta_p^2 = .013$], had their belongings damaged [$F_{(1, 418)} = 6.78, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .016$], scratched [$F_{(1, 418)} = 8.57, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .020$], spit at [$F_{(1, 418)} = 6.17, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .015$], and shoved [$F_{(1, 418)} = 13.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .032$]. No sex difference was found for being locked in, locked out, or thrown objects at.

When the single items measuring victimisation from verbal aggression were analysed with multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), it was found that males were significantly more victimised than females in the case of three of the seven items (Fig. 3). The multivariate test was significant for sex [$F_{(7, 412)} = 3.47, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .056$]. Males had been significantly more often subjected to quarrels [$F_{(1, 418)} = 13.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .032$], to purposely being told nasty or hurting things [$F_{(1, 418)} = 7.57, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .018$], and to being yelled at [$F_{(1, 418)} = 7.57, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .018$]. A tendency was also found for males to have been more often threatened to be hurt by their partner [$F_{(1, 418)} = 2.94, p = .087, \eta_p^2 = .007$]. No sex differences were found for being interrupted when talking, been called bad names, or having been angrily nagged at by the partner.

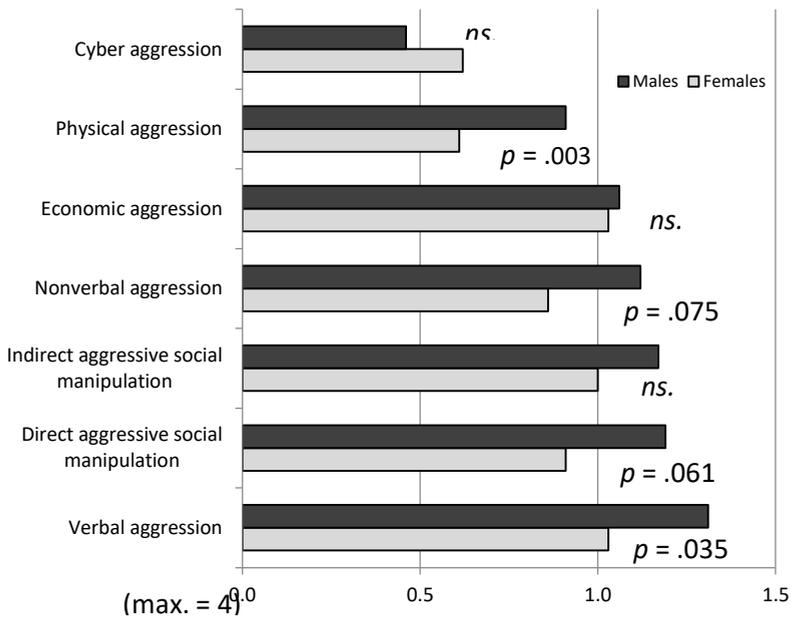


Figure 1. Victimization from seven types of intimate partner aggression, differences between females and males (N = 352).

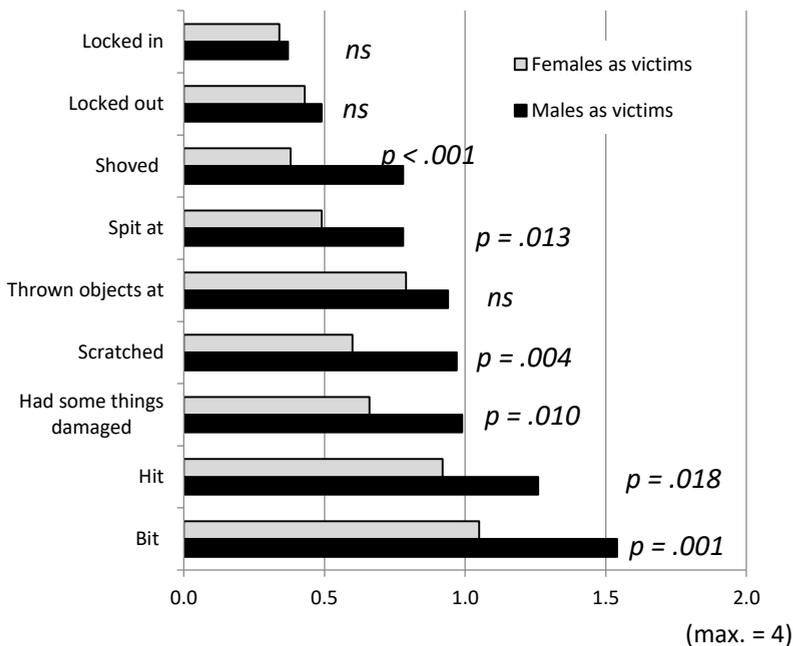


Figure 2. Mean values for females and males on victimisation from nine types of physical aggression by the partner (N = 330).

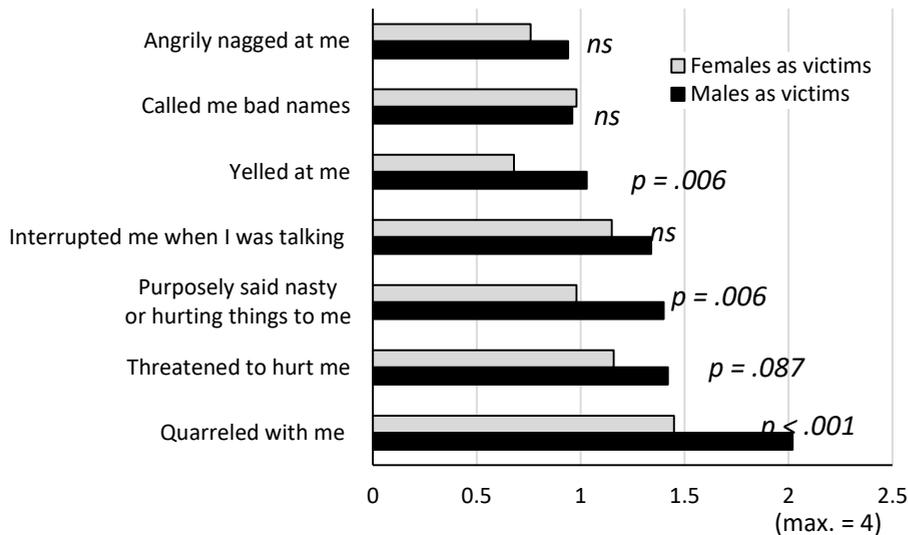


Figure 3. Mean values for females and males on victimisation from seven types of verbal aggression by the partner ($N = 330$).

Discussion

This is the third study utilising DIAS-Adult (Österman & Björkqvist, 2009) for the measurement of IPA; it has previously been used with samples from Mexico, Finland, and Ghana (Österman et al., 2014; Darko et al., submitted). The results are all in the same direction: they do not support the traditional view, the gender asymmetry theory, at least as far as low intensity (less severe) forms of IPA are concerned. If anything, males were more victimised than females, on several of the subscales.

The males of the present study had been significantly more often victimised from physical and verbal aggression. A tendency was also found for males to be more victimised from nonverbal aggression and direct aggressive social manipulation. No sex differences were found regarding victimisation from indirect aggressive social manipulation, cyber aggression, or economic aggression. With regard to individual items from the scale of physical aggression, males had significantly more often been bit, hit, had their belongings damaged, scratched, spit at, and shoved by their female partner. With regard to individual items from the scale of verbal aggression, males had been significantly more often subjected to quarrels, to being told nasty or hurtful words, and to being yelled at by their female partner.

Until now, it has been thought that gender symmetry regarding less severe IPA would exist only in modern, Western countries where patriarchal values are on the decline. The findings of this study refutes this notion; at least in two African countries, Ghana and South Sudan, males are as much victimised from low intensity IPA as their female partners, and as far as some subscales are concerned, they were even more often victimised than their partners.

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