

HARD TO TELL

PILOT STUDY

Narrative Identity and Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to pilot a method of interviewing male survivors of female perpetrated domestic abuse, to better understand how they talk about and make sense of their experiences, and incorporate them within their Narrative Identity.

This pilot and wider Hard to Tell study is part of research at the UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families to inform how we enable and support victims to understand and talk about their experiences. Overall this pilot indicated that the passing of time and the presence of direct therapeutic support is relevant to how men

“I feel a lot of that’s come on the way I am now because of the way I was treated as a child.”

Why is this study important?

Research in the field of Narrative Identity Theory shows that how people talk about their experiences and tell their stories is important. Some ways of telling stories are linked to positive well-being, and others are linked with poorer mental health outcomes (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Phillippe, & Houle, 2016).

Stereotypes of men as strong and invulnerable, and the widespread understanding of domestic abuse by men against women, can act as Master Narratives (McLean et al. 2017) causing male victims to feel their experiences are transgressive, or taboo. This can stop them from talking about their abuse

Abuse that is not talked about can continue for longer, increasing the risk of harm and fatality. Children who see and hear abuse between their parents are at greater risk of harm and are more likely to enter abusive relationships when they

Key Finding

Men’s masculine identity was frequently a target for attack, as their partners attempted to shame and humiliate them by insulting or questioning their sexuality or masculinity.

Key Finding

Men felt that their masculine identity meant they could not be victims, and that they would be ridiculed or not believed if they spoke of it.

“...it’s just a society thing. Men are the alphas. Men can’t be hurt. Men can’t be victims.”

Key Finding

Those who had children, felt their identity as a father prevented them from leaving the abusive relationship.

How do Male victims of female perpetrated intimate partner abuse incorporate their experiences within their Narrative Identity?

“I’ve never regarded myself as a victim, more of a survivor really.”

Key Finding

Childhood experiences (either their own or their abusive partner’s) were frequently talked about when explaining their adult experiences of

Key Finding

The ‘victim-self’ was rejected through assertions of agency, omission of biographical chapters, and the positioning of a former self as a different person to the present

Next steps

This pilot study has demonstrated an applicable method for interviewing male survivors of intimate partner abuse, and evidenced a need for further research to understand how they are able to incorporate their experiences within an autobiographical narrative.

The PhD study will build upon these findings, interviewing a larger sample, to take a deeper look into how male victims can ‘position’ themselves within their narratives to coherently narrate their story. An additional follow up interview will also be considered to examine how the experience of the interview may impact upon participant’s narrative identity.

As a Social Work study further analysis will be directed towards practical insights to support the

Methodology

This study used a biographical narrative interview model, based upon the BNIM model (Wengraf, 2001) and the work of Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000). Four self identified male survivors of intimate partner violence were invited to tell their life story.

“Tell me about your life so far...”

They were then provided as little or as much time as they required to respond without interruption.

In the second part of the interview, the interviewer drew on the participants initial response to clarify and illicit further narrative detail.

The third and final section of the interview addressed areas of interest to the study that may not have been discussed by the participant so far. These included the involvement of police or professional support services; support from friends and family.

In-depth qualitative analysis of the transcripts examined the detail, coherence, and structure of the narratives, as well as themes of agency and the depiction of violence and abuse.

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