

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Domestic violence and abuse within female same-sex relationships

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Abstract

Domestic violence and abuse within female same-sex relationships is a relatively new research area. Although the vast majority of the published studies have examined this phenomenon in opposite-sex relationships, where the victims are usually women, the number of studies analyzing partner abuse within female same-sex couples has gradually increased. The main purpose of this chapter is to review and summarize what is known to date about the extent and nature of partner abuse within female same-sex couples.

Most studies on this topic have been conducted in the USA and have focused primarily on younger and midlife adults, rather than adolescents and older people. They have also focused on White females rather than females from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Different definitions of abuse and multiple measurement instruments have been used, which makes it difficult to make meaningful comparisons of abuse prevalence across studies. However, all the forms of partner abuse occur in female same-sex couples and they also tend to co-occur. Psychological abuse and middle or minor forms of violence are the most prevalent forms of domestic violence and abuse within female same-sex couples, while bi-directional violence seems to be a common pattern in female relationships.

As regards correlates, partner abuse in female same-sex relationships shares risk factors with opposite-sex partner abuse (e.g. previous partner abuse experience, family history of violence, relationship satisfaction, insecure attachment style, and alcohol use). However, there are unique or specific factors linked to partner abuse in female same-sex relationships that stem from the heterosexist context (i.e. sexual minority stressors) in which the women are immersed or that are characteristics of the relationship dynamics (i.e. fusion).

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Domestic violence and abuse within female same-sex relationships

Introduction

Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) within female same-sex relationships, which in certain contexts is called 'intimate partner violence and abuse' (Nicolson, 2019; Walker & Bowen, 2019), is a relatively new research area. It began to be studied in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the first books and studies on DVA in lesbian females appeared (e.g. Brand & Kidd, 1986; Lobel, 1986). Since then the number of studies analyzing DVA has increased considerably (Badenes-Ribera, Bonilla-Campos, Frias-Navarro, Pons-Salvador, & Monderde-i-Bort, 2016). The purpose of this chapter is thus to review and summarize the current body of scientific knowledge on DVA, including its limitations.

Characteristics of the studies

Most studies on DVA within female same-sex couples have been carried out in the United States of America (USA), although others were conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) (e.g. Donovan & Hester, 2014), Canada (e.g. Barrett & St. Pierre, 2013); China (e.g. Chong, Mak, & Kwong, 2013), Spain (e.g. Longares, Escartín, Barrientos, & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2018a) and Latin American countries (e.g. Barrientos, Escartín, Longares, & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2018).

Most of these studies have used cross-sectional and non-probabilistic sampling methods and small sample sizes, given the stigmatized nature of sexual minority identity, which makes it difficult to conduct studies with randomized samples. Overall, the samples have mainly been composed of volunteer participants contacted by telephone or e-mail, listservs, websites of organizations dedicated to men's or women's issues, universities, pride events, local libraries, or using snowball sampling. Few studies have used representative probability samples (e.g. Coston, 2017; Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; Halpern, Young, Waller,

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Martin, & Kupper, 2004; Messinger 2011; Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 1999; Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013).

Studies have primarily focused on younger and midlife adults rather than adolescents and older people and on White females rather than females from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Asian and Latin populations (Arlee, Cowperthwaite, & Ostermeyer, 2019; Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016). However, DVA also occurs in adolescents and older lesbian and bisexual females (e.g. Westwood, 2019; Whitton, Dyar, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2019) and in sexual minority females from racial minorities (e.g., Hill, Woodson, Ferguson, & Parks, 2012).

Definition and assessment of domestic violence and abuse

Researchers have used different definitions of domestic violence and partner abuse and different measurement instruments. Most studies have used the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2, Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), while others have used their own definition of DVA (e.g. Carvalho, Lewis, Derlega, Winstead & Viggiano, 2011): “Have you ever been a victim of domestic violence?” and “Have you ever been a perpetrator of domestic violence?”. They also used a checklist of abusive behaviors based on standardized instruments (e.g. Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991), lists compiled by other authors, which ask participants to report any “experience” with partner abuse that combines victimization and perpetration (e.g. Eaton et al., 2008), lists from battered women shelters (e.g. Turell, 2000), a community survey to evaluate the needs of LG people (e.g. Rose, 2003) or the authors’ own lists (e.g. Schilit, Lie, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991). Other authors have used a DVA measure adapted from Greenwood et al. (2002) (e.g. Kelly, Izienicki, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2011) or from the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women by Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, and Watts (2005) (e.g. Hellemans, Loeys, Buysse, Dewaele, & De Smet, 2015). Finally, other studies

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

linked violence to the existence of abusive inter-couple behaviors (e.g. Miller, Greene, Causby, White, & Lockart, 2001).

Few studies have included the evaluation of partner abuse behavior that is relevant/specific to sexual minority groups (e.g. Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Eaton et al., 2008, Scherzer, 1998; Turell, 2000). Such behaviors include outing or threatening to out (disclosing identity to family, friends, employer, and/or landlord), closeting (forcing concealment of identity), forcing the partner to show real and sexual affection in public, telling a bisexual partner repeatedly they should be lesbian, or telling a partner repeatedly they are not a real lesbian female and that nobody else would want them (Arlee et al., 2019; Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Messinger, 2017; Ristock, 2002), or threatening to make reports to authorities to jeopardize the partner's child custody arrangements, resulting in fear of loss of children. Children may be used to control partner females in this way (Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, & Fonseca, 2011; Head & Milton, 2014; Turrell, 2000). Such tactics may serve to "discredit them as a mother" during custody disputes in same-sex relationships where one mother has legal parental rights and the other does not (Bermea, van Eeden-Moorefield, & Khaw, 2018; Hardesty et al., 2011). These behaviors reflect the discriminatory context in which the diverse sexualities live (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Ristock, 2002).

Animal abuse in the context of abusive relationships has also received scarce attention (Taylor, Riggs, Donovan, Signal & Fraser, 2019) and greater attention has been directed to abuse victimization rather than perpetration or bi-directional abuse (Mason et al., 2014).

Many researchers have employed multiple time frames to assess DVA rates (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016), often asking participants about lifetime experiences (e.g. Carvaho et al., 2011) and otherwise, such as the past 6 months, year (e.g. Kelley et al., 2014), 5 years (e.g. Kelly et al., 2011) or during the current or most recent relationship (e.g. Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991).

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

There is therefore great variability of the proportion of DVA within female same-sex couples due to different sampling methods and research design.

Rates of domestic violence and abuse within female same-sex relationships

The evidence suggests that females in same-sex relationships tend to experience DVA at similar or somewhat higher rates than females in opposite-sex couples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Edwards, Sylaska, & Neal, 2015; Murray & Mobley, 2009; Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). For instance, Graham, Jensen, Givens, Bowen and Rizo (2016) analyzed the prevalence of partner abuse in a sample of US college students (i.e. CTS2) across four groups of participants: males reporting on a relationship with a female, females reporting on a relationship with a male, male–male relationships and female–female relationships. They found that females in same-sex relationships reported a higher prevalence of physical assault (45%); injuries (24%); psychological aggression (85%) and injury victimization (27%), and the highest frequency of overall victimization (89%) than the other three groups. They also found that people in same-sex relationships were more likely to perpetrate and experience partner violence resulting in injury than those in mixed-sex couples.

Other studies on DVA within female couples, also using CTS2, found a prevalence of 18% for sexual abuse (Peeper & Sand, 2015), 22.5-25.4% for physical abuse (Milletich, Gumienny, Kelley & D'Lima, 2014; Peeper & Sand, 2015) and 72.5% for psychological abuse (Peeper & Sand, 2015). In addition, the prevalence of partner victimization was 12.8% for sexual abuse, 20% for physical abuse and 67.5% for psychological abuse (Peeper & Sand, 2015).

Sutter et al. (2019) recently used the CTS2 (short-form) on a cisgender sample (i.e. individuals whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity (APA, 2020)) of US sexual minority females and found a prevalence of lifetime partner victimization of 25.3% for sexual abuse, 34% for physical abuse, 76% for psychological abuse, and 29.3% for suffering

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

an injury as a result of partner abuse. In terms of perpetration, the prevalence was 10.7% for sexual abuse, 26.7% for physical abuse, 72% for psychological abuse, and 21.3% for having injured a partner as a result of partner abuse. However, as Sutter et al. did not ask the participants to identify whether the violence reported occurred in a same-sex or opposite-sex relationships or to identify the sex of the victims' partners or perpetrators, so that the prevalence reported could be inflated by including violence by opposite-sex and same-sex partners (Murray & Mobley, 2009).

Domestic violence and abuse in female same-sex relationships from an intersectional frame

Some studies suggest that experiencing DVA may not be the same for people from different sexual, gender and racial identities (Barrett & St. Pierre, 2013; Hill et al., 2012; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). For instance, Whitfield, Coulter, Langenderfer-Magruder and Jacobson (2018) found that partner abuse in a sample of US of college students disproportionately affects students who have a minority sexual orientation, gender identity or racial/ethnic identity. In a sample of self-identified LGB and heterosexual individuals from the USA, Goldberg and Meyer (2013) found that regardless of sexual orientation Latinas were less likely and Black women were more likely to experience lifetime and 1-year partner abuse than White women. Whitton, Newcomb, Messinger, Byck, and Mustanski (2016), in sample of young LGBT people from the USA, found that racial-ethnic minorities were more likely to experience physical partner abuse than Whites and the prevalence of physical abuse remained stable with age. Likewise, Whitton et al. (2019), in a sample of young sexual and gender minority people assigned female at birth, found that racial minority young people had higher rates of most DVA types than White participants. In these cases, immigration status, limited language skills and lack of knowledge of the legal system

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

may be used by an abusive partner to threaten deportation or incarceration (Aerlee et al., 2019).

As regards females of different sexual identities, some studies found that bisexual females are at higher risk of DVA victimization than either heterosexual females or members of other sexual minority groups (Balsam & Hughes, 2013; Balsam & Szymanski 2005; Barrett & St. Pierre, 2013; Freedner, Freed, Yang, & Austin, 2002; Lewis, Millettich, Kelley, & Woody, 2012; Roberts, Austin, Corliss, Vandermorris, & Koenen, 2010). For instance, Walters et al. (2013), using data from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, estimated the lifetime prevalence of partner abuse victimization at 61% for bisexual females, 44% for lesbian females and 35% for heterosexual females. They also estimated that 49.3% of bisexual females compared to 29.4% of lesbian females and 24.3% of heterosexual females had experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner. Roberts et al. (2010) observed a higher prevalence of partner abuse victimization in bisexual females (20.2%) than in lesbian females (16.1 %). While Freedner et al. (2002), using an adolescent sample, found that bisexual females reported higher rates of abuse. Compared with lesbian females, bisexual females had 4.3 times higher odds of having been threatened with outing by a partner. Compared with heterosexual females, lesbian females had 2.4 times the odds of reporting that a partner had made them scared about their safety, and bisexual females had 2.0 times the odds of reporting sexual abuse by a partner. Goldberg and Meyer (2013) found a prevalence of lifetime partner violence of 31.9% among lesbian females, 52.0% among bisexual females, and 32.1% among females who had sex with other females; all three groups had greater odds of having a history of DVA than heterosexual women, but this was statistically significant only for bisexual women. Similarly, Messinger (2011), using data from the US National Violence Against Women Survey, found a prevalence of physical violence victimization of 25% among lesbian females, 42.9% among bisexual females and

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

36.4% among a combined sample of lesbian and bisexual females. Each of these studies found that bisexual females were more likely than lesbian females to have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes.

These findings suggest that the prevalence of DVA may be higher among lesbian and bisexual females than heterosexual females and that bisexual females experience more DVA than females belonging to other sexual identities. However, most of these studies did not examine the intersecting role of gender and/or sex when estimating prevalence rates of DVA victimization and perpetration (Badenes-Ribera, Frias-Navarro, Bonilla-Campos, Pons-Salvador, & Monterde-i-Bort, 2015; McKay, Lindquist & Misra, 2019). That is, they do not report on the sex of the victims' partners or perpetrators or identify whether the violence reported occurs in a same-sex versus opposite-sex relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Messinger, 2014). It is therefore not possible to draw conclusions from these data regarding the prevalence of same-sex victimization or perpetration of violence (Barret & St. Pierre, 2103). In these cases, particularly in bisexual women, but also in other sexual minority females, the prevalence of reported violence may be inflated by including violence perpetrated by opposite-sex and same-sex partners (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Murray & Mobley, 2009).

As Brown and Herman (2015) pointed out, in the studies that ask for the sex of the perpetrator of violence or whether the abuse occurred in same-sex relationships, the intimate partners of sexual minority females were not all females; some were males (Bernhard, 2000; Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Morris & Balsam, 2003; Carvalho et al., 2011; Messinger, 2011; Walters et al., 2013). For instance, Carvalho et al. (2011) found that 11.6% of a sample of self-identified lesbian females reported experiencing abuse in an opposite-sex relationship, 17.2% reported experiencing abuse in a same-sex relationship and 7.8% reported abuse in both types of relationships. Golberg and Meyer (2013) found that

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

among bisexual females who had experienced partner abuse, 95% of the most recent 1-year partner abuse incidents were perpetrated by males. Messinger (2011) also found that bisexual females were far more likely to be victimized by an opposite-sex abuser by verbal, controlling and physical partner violence (45.6%, 43.2% and 34.7%, respectively) and all the sexual violence they experienced was perpetrated by men. McLaughlin et al. (2001) found that 25% of a sample of lesbian and bisexual females reported experiencing abuse in an opposite-sex relationship and 34% in a same-sex relationship. Walter et al. (2013) noted that 67.4% of lesbian females reported only female perpetrators and 89.5% of bisexual females reported only male perpetrators of intimate partner physical violence, rape, and/or stalking. Hequembourg, Livingston and Parks (2013) found that nearly one third (28.8%) of the participants in a sample of self-identified lesbian and bisexual females reported between 1 and 4 over-lifetime male sexual partners, so that females and males both contribute to the prevalence of DVA among sexual minority females.

DVA should thus be analyzed separately for females of different sexual identities and consider the sex of the partner (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2014). In this regard a meta-analysis of the prevalence of violence in self-identified lesbian females in same-sex relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015) found that the pooled prevalence for any lifetime victimization 48%, for psychological abuse 43%, for physical abuse 18% and for sexual abuse 13%. For lifetime perpetration, the pooled prevalence for any abuse was 43%, for psychological abuse 27%, for physical abuse 12% and for sexual abuse 7%. For victimization in the current or most recent relationship, the pooled prevalence for any victimization was 15%, 11% for psychological abuse, 16% for physical abuse and 4% for sexual abuse.

In a sample of self-identified lesbian females in same-sex relationships in Spain and several Latin American countries, Barrientos et al. (2018) found that the prevalence of

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

psychological abuse victimization was 33.3% for Venezuelans, 17.4% for Mexicans, 8.8% for Spaniards and 5.5% for Chileans. Latin American countries thus show higher levels of victimization than Spain. Finally, in a sample of self-identified lesbian females in same-sex relationships in Spain, Longares et al. (2018a) examined victimization by psychological abuse by three different estimation methods of its prevalence. The first method found a dichotomous criterion of self-labelled victims with a total of 55% victimization. The second and third methods identified a coercive systematic behaviour control pattern over a period of time (Johnson, 1995; Kelly & Johnson 2008), while 37.1% reported occasional victimization and 18.6% reported continuous victimization.

Bi-directional partner abuse in female same-sex partners

Some studies suggest that bi-directional partner abuse may be a common partner violence pattern within same-sex relationships in general (e.g. Bartholomew, Regan, White, & Oram, 2008; Carvalho et al., 2011; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Frankland & Brown 2014; Kelly et al., 2011; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012; Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017) and within female same-sex relationships in particular (Balsam & Szymanski 2005, Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2015; Lewis, Mason, Winstead, & Kelley, 2017; Schilit, Lie, & Montagne, 1990). For instance, in a sample of lesbian and bisexual females Balsam and Szymanski (2005) found that 31% reported both partner abuse and victimization during their lifetime, while 10% reported only victimization and 7% reported only perpetration. In a sample of lesbian females Carvalho et al. (2011) found that 9% of the respondents reported they had been both victims and perpetrators of partner abuse. In a sample of LGBT people Kelly et al. (2011) found that a quarter (23.4%) reported having been both the victim and perpetrator of violence during the previous five years. Of the individuals who reported mutual partner violence, most (78.4%) indicated both physical and psychological violence between partners, 6.9% reported solely mutual psychological violence and 4.7% reported solely

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

mutual physical violence. Likewise, Lewis et al. (2015) found that 12% of samples of self-identified lesbian females identified themselves as both perpetrators and victims of physical violence in the past year, and Lewis et al. (2017) found that the paths for perpetration and victimization of physical violence were significant in both directions, but not for psychological aggression. Lie and Gentlewarrior (1991) found that two thirds of a sample of lesbian females reported both victimization and perpetration in a former same-sex relationship. In a sample of cisgender females identified as sexual minorities Sutter et al. (2019) found that psychological, physical and sexual partner abuse were bi-directional. In a sample of sexual and gender minority youth assigned-female-at-birth (FAB), including sexual minority females, transgender males and non-binary youth, Whitton et al. (2019) found high rates of bi-directionality: 86.2% for minor psychological partner abuse and 54–67% of the severe psychological partner abuse, minor and severe physical partner abuse, injury, and coercive control was bi-directional.

Correlates for domestic violence and abuse in female same-sex relationships shared with opposite-sex couples

Research suggests same-sex and opposite-sex couples share many DVA correlates (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Kaukinen, 2014). For instance, Kimmes et al. (2017), using meta-analysis, found that alcohol abuse, anger, psychological abuse perpetration and psychological abuse victimization are cross-sectionally related to physical partner abuse perpetration and victimization within female same-sex relationships.

Other DVA correlates identified in cross-sectional studies, mainly using data from US samples, are controlling behaviors, prior physical violence by an intimate partner (male or female), dependency, animal abuse, family history of violence, relationship satisfaction, insecure attachment style, depression, jealousy, low self-esteem, need to control and ending the relationship (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Kaukinen, 2014, Kimmes et al., 2017;

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Lockhart, White, Causby, & Isaac, 1994; Miller et al., 2001; Schilit et al., 1990; Taylor et al., 2019). For instance, Goldberg and Meyer (2013) found that self-identified lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual females who reported psychological distress were more likely to report physical and sexual relationship violence. Glass et al. (2008) found that constant jealousy or possessiveness of the abuser was predictive of participants' reporting threats or actual physical or sexual violence. In a sample of UK LGBT people, Donovan and Hester (2014) found that just over 4% reported ever having been in a relationship where their pet was abused and 1.5% reported this in the previous 12 months. Renzetti (1992) found that 38% of a sample of battered lesbian females reported their pet had been abused.

With regard to relationship satisfaction and DVA, in a sample of lesbian and bisexual females Balsam and Szymanski (2005) found that lower relationship quality is related to physical or sexual violence and psychological aggression in the previous year. Kelley, Lewis and Mason (2015) found that poorer relationship adjustment was related to higher levels of partner psychological aggression (i.e. emotional/verbal aggression and dominance/isolation) in a sample of self-identified lesbian females. Lewis, Milletich, Derlega and Padilla (2014) also found a strong negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological violence among self-identified lesbian females. Similarly, Matte and Lafontaine (2011), found that relationship satisfaction was inversely correlated with psychological violence perpetration, but was not correlated with psychological violence victimization in a sample of Canadian self-identified lesbian and bisexual females.

Insecure attachment styles (i.e. anxious or avoidant) has also been linked to psychological and physical violence perpetration and victimization in same-sex relationships (Craft, Serovich, McKenry, & Lim, 2008; Gabbay, & Lafontaine, 2017; Longares et al., 2018b; Matte & Lafontaine, 2011; McKenry, Serovich, Mason, & Mosack, 2006; Renzetti, 1992; Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). In female same-sex relationships, Matte and

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Lafontaine (2011) found that attachment anxiety was positively correlated with psychological violence perpetration and victimization.

Finally, a relation between alcohol and drug use and DVA was also observed in same-sex relationships (Bimbi, Palmadessa, & Parsons, 2008; Eaton et al., 2008; Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; Kelley et al., 2015; Lockhart et al., 1994; Renzetti, 1992). Both individual and partner alcohol use and drinking problems have been implicated in the risk of partner violence (Glass et al., 2008; Renzetti, 1988). For instance, in a sample of lesbian females Fortunata and Kohn (2003) compared batterers (defined as engaging in at least one act of physical violence in the past year) and nonbatterers and found that the former had higher rates of alcohol problems. Goldberg and Meyer (2013) found that females who reported daily or weekly binge drinking were more likely to report physical and sexual relationship violence. Kelly et al. (2011) found that both alcohol use and previous substance abuse treatment were associated with mutual partner violence (including physical and psychological aggression) in a sample of lesbian and bisexual females. In a sample of self-identified lesbian females Schilit et al. (1990) also found that the frequency of drinking was significantly related to both committing and being the victim of abusive acts. While several studies identified alcohol use as a predictor of partner abuse (Lewis et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2015; Mason, Lewis, Gargurevich, & Kelley, 2016).

A relation between discrepant drinking (i.e. different alcohol use between partners) and experiencing physical assault and psychological violence in the relationship was also found in samples of self-identified lesbian females in same-sex relationships in cross-sectional (Kelley et al., 2015) and longitudinal studies (Lewis, Winstead, Braitman, & Hitson, 2018). In this regard, Lewis et al. (2018) found that discrepant drinking was related to subsequent psychological, but not physical, aggression six months later. In turn, partner abuse in same-sex relationships predicted discrepant drinking.

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Sexual minority correlates for domestic violence and abuse in female same-sex relationships

Other potential psychosocial riskfactors for DVA that may be unique to, or particularly salient for, sexual minority females in same-sex relationships (e.g. internalized homophobia, outness, etc.) have been crosssectionally associated with partner abuse (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Graham et al., 2016; Kimmes et al., 2017; Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017).

Several studies, mainly using data from US samples, have documented an association between internalized homophobia and partner abuse in same-sex relationships (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Bartholomew et al., 2008; Carvalho et al., 2011; Edwards & Sylaska 2013; Kelley et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2014; Milletich et al., 2014; Pepper & Sand, 2015). For instance, using a meta-analysis methodology Badenes-Ribera, Sánchez-Meca and Longobardi (2019) found a positive association between internalized homophobia and: any partner violence perpetration ($r = .147$ 95% CI [.079, .214]), any partner abuse victimization ($r = .102$, 95% CI [.030, .173]), psychological partner abuse perpetration ($r = .145$, 95% CI [.073, .216]) and physical/sexual partner violence perpetration ($r = .166$, 95% CI [.109, .221]). Higher levels of internalized homophobia are linked to more partner abuse perpetration and victimization in same-sex couples. It is possible that people with negative feelings about themselves may project their negative self-concept through violent acts toward their same-sex partners, and in turn victims with negative feelings about themselves may believe that they deserve to be treated abusively and see the abuse as a natural consequence of their LGB identity (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015).

However, there are inconsistent results regarding the link between internalized homophobia and partner abuse victimization in female same-sex relationships (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). Some studies found a positive relationship between internalized

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

homophobia and physical and sexual partner abuse victimization among sexual minority females (Balsam & Szymanski 2005), but other studies did not (Carvalho et al., 2011; Pepper & Sand 2015). For instance, Kimmes et al. (2017) did not find a relationship between internalized homophobia and physical partner abuse victimization ($r = .11$, 95% CI [-.02, .24]; $k = 4$); however, it should be noted that the effect size was small and the confidence interval for the effect size suggests marginal statistical significance.

With regard to partner abuse perpetration in female same-sex relationships, Pepper and Sand (2015) found a positive association between internalized homophobia and sexual coercion perpetration. Kimmes et al. (2017) also found a positive relationship between internalized homophobia and physical partner abuse perpetration ($r = .09$, 95% CI [.00, .18]).

It is noteworthy that the association between internalized homophobia and partner abuse could be mediated by overall relationship quality and by the levels of rumination and fusion experienced by the partners (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2019; Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Lewis et al., 2014; Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017; Millettich et al., 2014). Internalized homophobia has been associated with the frequency of past-year psychological abuse in lesbian females' intimate relationships through its effect on rumination and relationship satisfaction (Lewis et al., 2014). In female same-sex relationships the link between internalized homophobia and past-year partner abuse, both as perpetration and victimization, has also been fully mediated by relationship quality. The experience of internalized homophobia could therefore drive to poorer perception of relationship quality, which in turn could drive to partner abuse (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Finally, fusion mediated the relationship between internalized homophobia and partner abuse perpetration in women's same-sex relationships (Millettich et al., 2014).

With regard to outness, several studies have shown an association between the participants' degree of outness and partner abuse within same-sex relationships, mainly in

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

data from US samples (Bartholomew et al., 2008; Carvalho et al., 2011; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Kelley et al., 2014), who found that being more “out” was associated with an increased risk for lifetime partner abuse victimization among LG people (Carvalho et al., 2011) and that lower levels of disclosure of one’s sexual orientation were related to an increased risk of physical partner abuse perpetration in current relationships among LGBTQ youth (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013). However, in female same-sex couples, Balsam and Szymanski (2005) did not find a relationship between outness and victimization or perpetration of violence in a sample of self-identified lesbian and bisexual females, but they did find that outness was related to some aspects of the quality of the relationship. Kimmes et al. (2017) did not find an association between the participant's degree of outness and physical partner abuse victimization ($r = .09$, 95% CI $[-.33, .48]$). As Balsam and Szymanski (2005) have pointed out, it might be that levels of outness influence the quality of the relationship and then the quality of the relationship influences victimization or perpetration of violence. Longares et al. (2018b) found that outness moderated the relationship between an insecure attachment style and the perpetration of psychological abuse in a sample of LGB people from Spanish-speaking countries.

Carvalho et al. (2011) found that the participants’ degree of stigma consciousness was associated positively with the perpetration and victimization of same-sex partner violence among LG people. However, Edwards and Sylaska (2013) did not find this association between both variables.

On the other hand, social constraints with friends (difficulty in talking to others about one’s minority sexual identity) did not predict female’s same-sex partner abuse, but it was indirectly associated with the frequency of past-year psychological aggression in female same-sex relationships through the intervening mechanisms of rumination and relationship satisfaction (Lewis et al., 2014).

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Finally, using meta-analytic methodology, Kimmes et al. (2017) found an association between being a victim of homophobic controlling behaviors and physical partner abuse in female same-sex relationships.

Discussion and Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the current body of knowledge on DVA within female same-sex couples. Comparing the DVA rates across studies is rather difficult due to differences in sample design, DVA conceptualization and the timeframe recalled and these differences led to large discrepancies in the prevalence estimates. Although exact prevalence rates are difficult to determine, the evidence suggests that females in same-sex relationships tend to experience partner abuse at similar or somewhat higher rates than females in opposite-sex couples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015; Edwards et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2019; Murray & Mobley, 2009; Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). In addition, female same-sex relationships also experienced all forms of partner abuse, with psychological abuse being the most prevalent form of victimization and perpetration of violence compared with physical and sexual abuse (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2016; Matte & Lafontaine, 2011, Lewis et al., 2012; Messinger, 2017), while the highest rates of abuse are for to milder or minor forms of violence (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Sutter et al., 2019; Whitton et al., 2019).

Regarding the difference in partner abuse by sexual identity, as Barret and St Pierre (2013) have pointed out, despite the growing body of research examining partner abuse in female same-sex couples, even less is known about the experiences of bisexual females. How the experiences of bisexual females are different from or similar to those of lesbian females remains underinvestigated, especially outside the USA, where the research is still focused on lesbian females (e.g. Barrientos et al., 2018). Although the evidence suggests that bisexual females are at a higher risk of partner abuse than lesbian and heterosexual females, the

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

prevalence of this violence has not been clearly determined, given that most studies that analyzed this phenomenon did not specifically ask for the sex of the perpetrator of the abuse or if the abuse occurred within same-sex relationships. Several studies have pointed out that bisexual females appear to be particularly likely to be victimized by their male partners (Hequembourg et al., 2013; Messinger, 2014). The evidence also suggests that there may be cultural differences in partner abuse within female same-sex relationships. Barrientos et al. (2018) showed that in Latin American countries self-identified lesbian females experience higher levels of partner abuse than in Spain. As these authors have pointed out, it is possible that this difference may be caused by the legal context of these countries. Spanish law recognizes LGBTI rights more fully than in many Latin American countries. These differences highlight the need for future cross-cultural studies to further analyze their possible causes.

Some studies also suggest the existence of bi-directional partner abuse within female same-sex relationships, which is consistent with the presence of reciprocal patterns of violence and control in male same-sex relationships (Bartholomew et al., 2008; Stanley, Bartholomew, Taylor, & Oram, 2006). The high rates of bi-directional violence among same-sex couples and low rates among heterosexual couples suggest that gender may be a crucial factor (Frankland & Brown, 2014). However, as Renzetti (1988, 1992) has pointed out, these studies did not differentiate between the desire to exert power over one's partner and self-defensive behavior. As Badenes-Ribera et al. (2016) found, the comparison of rates of partner abuse might not be able to clarify to what degree the relationship is based on the dynamics of control and domination, or what factors are influential in the use or experience of abuse. Measuring partner abuse without measuring the control context could thus cause an individual who acts in self-defense against partner abuse to be labeled as a "perpetrator" and the partner as a "victim". There is still a debate about the intent of partner abuse

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

perpetration, but conclusive supporting evidence is still lacking as to the intention of this bi-directionality (Messinger, 2014).

Some partner abuse correlates in female same-sex relationships are shared by females in opposite-sex relationships (e.g., substance use, dependence, incompatibility, stress, jealousy, etc). However, there are unique or specific factors linked to partner abuse in same-sex relationships, in particular in female same-sex couples. These correlates stem from the homophobic/biphobic context in which sexual minority females are immersed, or that are characteristics of the relationship dynamics that may be established between them (e.g. fusion). Sexual minority females thus experience dynamics unique to them and their relationships that cannot be understood through examining partner abuse in opposite-sex relationships and cannot be effectively addressed through existing partner abuse prevention programs developed to prevent abuse in opposite-sex relationships. This shows there is a need to develop and implement violence prevention programs in same-sex relationships.

However, because most of the studies that analyze risk factors of partner abuse have used exclusively cross-sectional data they cannot indicate the direction of the effects. This lack of longitudinal research limits the ability to identify risk factors and the consequences of partner abuse. As it is impossible to know the order of events between risk factors and partner abuse without temporal precedence, it is therefore imperative to the understanding of these associations that data are collected longitudinally to determine directionality as well as the temporal correlates of the events.

Conclusions

The prevalence of DVA in female same-sex couples has not been clearly determined due to across-study methodology differences. However, it is known that females in same-sex relationships experience all forms of DVA in a similar way to opposite-sex relationships and they share some DVA correlates. However, female same-sex couples have specific forms of

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

violence (e.g. threatening to out) and unique DVA risk factors related to sexual minority status (e.g. internalized homophobia) and their relationship (e.g. fusion). DVA in same-sex couples therefore cannot be completely understood by examining DVA in opposite-sex relationships. The research should include more nuanced exploration of the role sexual minority stress can play in increasing the risk of DVA within female same-sex intimate partnerships.

Critical findings

- All forms of DVA occur within female same-sex relationships.
- Psychological abuse and middle and minor forms of violence are the most prevalent forms of partner abuse.
- Bi-directional violence seems to be a common pattern.
- Partner abuse experience might not be the same for people from different sexual, gender and racial identities.
- Partner abuse victimization might be higher among lesbian and bisexual females than heterosexual females.
- Bisexual females might be at higher risk for partner abuse victimization than either heterosexual or lesbian females.
- Both female and male partners may contribute to the prevalence of partner abuse in sexual minority females.
- Many correlates related to partner abuse are shared by same-sex and opposite-sex couples.
- There are unique risk factors for partner abuse in sexual minority females: relationship dynamics, internalized homophobia, outness, stigma consciousness and being a victim of homophobic controlling behaviors.

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

Implications for practice, policy and research

- There is a need for research on DVA outside the USA and among adolescents and older females in same-sex relationships and females from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Researchers should ask for the sex of the victims' partners to identify whether the reported violence occurs in same-sex versus opposite-sex relationships. Research should include whether the experiences and DAV risk factors in female couples differs according to sexual identity.
- Cross-cultural studies should analyze the causes of differences in DVA prevalence in female couples, including the legal context of LGTB rights, along with cultural attitudes such as risk factors and barriers to help-seeking.
- Research should explore the role of sexual minority stress as a DVA risk factor within female same-sex relationships and outing as a vulnerability factor in disclosing partner violence.
- Patterns of bi-directional partner abuse, considering types of violence, intentionality and control context, as well as dynamics unique to female couples still have to be clarified in order to understand and develop violence prevention programs.

Abuse within female same-sex relationships

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Abuse within female same-sex relationships

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