

The Influence of Gender and Sexual Orientation on Police Decisions in Intimate Partner Violence Cases

Authors : Brenda Russell

Abstract : Police officers spend a great deal of time responding to domestic violence calls. Recent research has found that men and women in heterosexual and same-sex relationships are equally likely to initiate intimate partner violence (IPV) and likewise susceptible to victimization, yet police training tends to focus primarily on male perpetration and female victimization. Criminal justice studies have found that male perpetrators of IPV are blamed more than female perpetrators who commit the same offense. While previous research has examined officer's response in IPV cases with male and female heterosexual offenders, research has yet to investigate police response in same-sex relationships. This study examined officers' decisions to arrest, perceptions of blame, perceived danger to others, disrespect, and beliefs in prosecution, guilt and sentencing. Officers in the U.S. (N = 248) were recruited using word of mouth and access to police association websites where a link to an online study was made available. Officers were provided with one of 4 experimentally manipulated scenarios depicting a male or female perpetrator (heterosexual or same-sex) in a clear domestic assault situation. Officer age, experience with IPV and IPV training were examined as possible covariates. Training in IPV was not correlated to any dependent variable of interest. Age was correlated with perpetrator arrest and blame (.14 and .16, respectively) and years of experience was correlated to arrest, offering informal advice, and mediating the incident (.14 to -.17). A 2(perpetrator gender) X 2 (victim gender) factorial design was conducted. Results revealed that officers were more likely to provide informal advice and mediate in gay male relationships, and were less likely to arrest perpetrators in same-sex relationships. When officer age and years of experience with domestic violence were statistically controlled, effects for perpetrator arrest and providing informal advice were no longer significant. Officers perceived heterosexual male perpetrators as more dangerous, blameworthy, disrespectful, and believed they would receive significantly longer sentences than all other conditions. When officer age and experience were included as covariates in the analyses perpetrator blame was no longer statistically significant. Age, experience and training in IPV were not related to perceptions of victims. Police perceived victims as more truthful and believable when the perpetrator was a male. Police also believed victims of female perpetrators were more responsible for their own victimization. Victims were more likely to be perceived as a danger to their family when the perpetrator was female. Female perpetrators in same-sex relationships and heterosexual males were considered to experience more mental illness than heterosexual female or gay male perpetrators. These results replicate previous research suggesting male perpetrators are more blameworthy and responsible for their own victimization, yet expands upon previous research by identifying potential biases in police response to IPV in same-sex relationships. This study brings to the forefront the importance of evidence-based officer training in IPV and provides insight into the need for a gender inclusive approach as well as addressing the necessity of the practical applications for police.

Keywords : domestic violence, heterosexual, intimate partner violence, officer response, police officer, same-sex

Conference Title : ICCJ 2016 : International Conference on Criminal Justice

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : June 20-21, 2016