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To Stay Silent or to Blow the Whistle? Bystander's Intervening Acts when Witnessing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Abstract

Purpose: Social psychology has focused on an individual's reaction to emergencies and witnessing a crime, which has developed theories of bystander intervention and bystander apathy. The purpose of this study was to explore why people choose to intervene when they are a bystander to IPV and the psychological processes that underpin this. Decision making was explored drawing on literature from the whistleblowing field.

Design: Through a mixed methods epistemology, this study explored factors that explained intervening behaviour concerning intimate partner violence (IPV). 212 participants who had known someone who was a victim of IPV were recruited from the general population.

Findings: A logistic regression model indicated that conscientiousness and fairness were found to predict intervening behaviour. Being a child witness was found to predict non-intervening behaviour. Qualitative analysis revealed three types of bystander apathy: those who lacked capability as they were children; those who were indifferent and did not see it as their place to intervene; those who wanted to intervene but did not as they were frightened of exacerbating the situation.

Implications: IPV has significant physical and psychological effects on victims. However, the choice to intervene is complex and bystander intervention in this study was also associated in some cases with not only a continuation of the IPV behaviour towards the victim but also aggression and physical violence towards the bystander (whistleblower retaliation). Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are made for how to support bystanders and victims of IPV.

Originality: This study involved participants with real-life experience of being a bystander to IPV. The mixed methodology provided an insight into the psychological processes which

underpin bystander experiences of IPV and maps onto the literature in relation to whistleblowing.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Bystander, Apathy, Intervention, Whistleblowing.

Introduction

Domestic abuse includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse (Home Office, 2013) and can manifest in different forms including intimate partner violence (IPV) or 'partner violence', which involves a current or former intimate partner (Feder et al., 2009). The prevalence of IPV is difficult to determine due to inconsistencies in definitions, underreporting, and examination of different populations in different societies (Ali et al., 2021; Wong & Mellor, 2014). In the UK between 2018 and 2019, it was reported that 1.6 million women and 786,000 men, aged 16–74 years experienced domestic abuse (ONS, 2020). On average, every week in the UK two women are killed by a current or former partner (McLeod & Flood, 2018). IPV is a worldwide health problem resulting in physical injuries (sustained from physical and sexual abuse; WHO, 2013) and psychological harm such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse and suicide (Ali et al., 2021; Potter et al., 2021). Given these effects, it is important to understand how individuals in society can become active bystanders to prevent and intervene when witnessing violence (Pagliaro et al., 2020).

Bystander intervention consists of a five-step process that increases the likelihood of an individual intervening in a dangerous situation or emergency (Latané and Darley, 1970). The bystander should:

(1) notice the event

(2) interpret the event as requiring intervention

(3) take personal responsibility for the interpretation of the event

(4) decide what the best strategy is to help

(5) transform the intention to actual helping behaviour.

Barriers that decrease the likelihood of intervening behaviour include a diffusion of responsibility (failing to take personal responsibility due to the presence of others), not possessing the relevant skills to intervene, or deciding not to intervene due to personal and/or situational factors (Latané & Darley, 1970). Studies adopting fictional scenarios asking participants if they would likely intervene in response to IPV have found females with high levels of extraversion and a sense of responsibility reported an increased likelihood of engaging in helping behaviours regarding IPV (Banyard & Moynihan, 2011; Franklin et al., 2017). Ermer et al.(2021) also found that perceived harm to the victim and the bystander's relationship with the victim (e.g., friend) were all factors which influenced whether participants thought they should intervene. However, these studies relate to hypothetical scenarios and fail to capture the psychological processes which may underpin bystander intervention in real life IPV situations.

Whistleblowing

Psychological theories exploring the reporting of unlawful or immoral activity outside of partner relationships can be found in the whistleblowing literature. Whistleblowing is a deliberate non-obligatory act of disclosure of wrongdoings in an organization by members to a person or organization that may be able to act (Near & Miceli, 1995). Kang (2022) notes that whistleblowing consists of a process involving four elements: the whistleblower; the act or complaint; the receiver and the wrongdoer. It is for this reason that research has found that the likelihood of a person whistleblowing is influenced by multiple factors such as the

psychological features of the whistleblower, the nature of the wrong-doing and the channels through which whistleblowing can occur (King, 2022). This can include factors such as: morality; the situation; and person variables (Cassematis & Wortley, 2013; Hellmann et al.,2021; Gakhar & Mulla, 2021; Waytz et al.,2013; Dungan et al., 2015).

Personal Factors of the Whistleblower

Systematic Reviews have found mixed findings in relation to gender and whistleblowing (Nicholls et al, 2021) with some studies finding females are more likely to report misconduct than males (Keil et al; 2010) and others finding the opposite effect (Cheng et al., 2017). This is likely due to the moderating effect of system variables and failing to consider the gender of the: whistleblower; wrong-doer; and victim. Hence, in this study exploratory analysis will be undertaken to determine the potential influence of the gender of the bystander, victim and perpetrator as well as personal experience in decision making when witnessing IPV.

Additionally, prior research indicates that whistleblowing may be impacted by personality traits (Nicholls et al, 2021). Using the Big Five dimensions of personality, neuroticism has been found to be negatively correlated with whistleblowing and social responsibility (Digman, 1997; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001) whilst conscientiousness, openness, extraversion, and agreeableness are positively associated with whistleblowing behaviour (Banyard, 2008; Digman, 1997; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). However, it is also suggested that situational variables may overpower personality variables when determining whistleblowing behaviour (Gakhar & Mulla, 2021). Hence, in this study exploratory analysis will be undertaken in relation to the potential influence of personality on bystander decision making when witnessing IPV.

Systematic reviews have also found a link between morality and whistleblowing (Nicholls et al, 2021). According to moral foundations theory (Graham et al., 2009),

individuals consider five moral values (harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity) when deciding whether a certain behaviour is right or wrong. Harm refers to the extent to which individuals care about another's suffering. Fairness refers to fairness and justice. Loyalty refers to the value of the group an individual identifies with. The authority value refers to obedience and/or respect toward authority figures. Purity refers to feelings of disgust toward impure or unnatural things (Graham et al., 2009). Theoretical models suggest that morality is a central influence on whistleblowing (Cailleba & Petit, 2018; Dungan et al., 2015; Watts & Buckley, 2017). However, how this may apply to IPV and the potential impact of situational variables are unclear (Gakhar & Mulla, 2021). Hence, in this study exploratory analysis will be undertaken in relation to the potential influence of morality on bystander decision making when witnessing IPV.

Situation

According to Dungan et al's (2015) model of whistleblowing decisions, situational factors should also be considered. Studies using hypothetical scenarios found the decision to intervene may depend on the gender of the victim. Bates et al (2019) found that participants were more likely to report they would intervene in an act of IPV when the victim was female compared to male (Bates et al., 2019), whereas Arman (2020) found similar levels of helping behaviour for male victims in a supervision scenario. The characteristics of the perpetrator and bystander intervention have received little attention in research (Brewster & Tucker, 2016) and specifically this has not been explored in relation to real-life bystander intervention to IPV. Research using hypothetical scenarios has also found that bystander intervention was reported to be more probable when individuals had a personal experience of victimisation (Franklin et al 2017; Wee et al., 2016). Furthermore, research has also shown a positive correlation between personal experience and whistleblowing (Nicholls et al, 2021). Thus, the

current study sought to explore the effect of personal experience of victimisation on bystander decision making when witnessing IPV.

Aims

IPV causes significant psychological and physical effects on victims. Previous research in this field has suggested several factors which may contribute towards whether bystanders to IPV choose to intervene. However, these studies have been based on hypothetical scenarios and fail to capture the psychological processes which may underpin bystander intervention in real life IPV situations. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why bystanders to IPV choose to intervene. Based on the current bystander intervention and whistleblowing literature, the following hypotheses were investigated:

H1: There will be significant differences between bystander gender and the decision to intervene.

H2: There will be significant personality differences between those that decide to intervene and those that do not.

H3: There will be significant differences in moral values between those that decide to intervene and those that do not.

H4: Situational Factors such as gender and personal experience of IPV will influence a bystander's decision to intervene when witnessing IPV.

Methodology

Participants

An opportunity sampling method was used, in which participants were recruited online via social media including Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn. The sample consisted of N = 212 participants.

Design

The study used a mixed methods design. Participants completed demographic questions followed by the personality and morality measures and open questions in relation to their decision making.

Materials/ Measures

All participants completed the following measures:

The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John et al, 2008),

The BFI is a 44-item scale that measures an individual on the Big Five Factors (dimensions) of personality. The 5 dimensions consist of the following and showed good reliability (over α = .70, Cronbach, 1951):

- Extraversion (Cronbach's α = .82)
- Conscientiousness (Cronbach's α = .75)
- Neuroticism (Cronbach's α = .79)
- Agreeableness (Cronbach's α = .72)
- Openness (Cronbach's α = .70)

The questionnaire contained statements on a 5-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 5 =strongly agree) such as "I am someone who is full of energy." and "I am someone who is talkative".

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009)

The MFQ is a 32-item scale that measures an individual on moral values. The 5 values consist of the following and showed reasonable (α = .60 or is > .60, Taber, 2018) and good reliability (over α = .70, Cronbach, 1951):

- Harm (Cronbach's α = .71)
- Fairness (Cronbach's α = .60)
- Loyalty (Cronbach's α = .66)
- Authority (Cronbach's α = .73)
- Purity (Cronbach's α = .74)

The questionnaire contained two parts and included statements on a 5-point Likert (part 1; 0 = not at all relevant, 5 = extremely relevant) (part 2; 0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) such as '' whether or not someone suffered emotionally'' and '' It can never be right to kill a human being''. The MFQ has been shown to have a stable five factor structure across WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultures (Dogruyol, Alper & Yilmaz, 2019).

Additional Questions

Participants were asked to complete demographic questions regarding their gender, the gender of the perpetrator, gender of the victim, if they had been a victim of IPV (yes/no) and if the intervened when they witnessed IPV (yes/no). Participants were then asked a range of open-ended questions:

(1) why they intervened (or not)

(2) how they felt after they intervened (or not)

(3) what the perpetrator did after they intervened

(4) what the victim did after they intervened

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University Ethics Committee. The study was created and accessed electronically using a survey building tool (Qualtrics) and accessed using a QR

code in the study advert which forwarded participants to the information sheet and consent form. Contact details for services such as Victim Support and Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline were also provided for participants.

Findings

Quantitative analysis

A Chi-square analysis was conducted to investigate differences in gender (male = 1, female = 2) on intervening acts (yes = 1, no = 2). Transformation was conducted to give each participant an individual score for each of the personality and morality dimensions. Independent sample t-tests were then conducted to investigate differences in personality and morality on intervening acts. Chi-square analyses were also used to investigate differences in the victim's gender (male = 1, female = 2, perpetrator's gender (male = 1, female = 2), and personal victimisation (yes = 1, no = 2) on intervening acts.

A binary logistic regression was also conducted to create a bystander intervention model. Specifically, gender, personality, morality, gender of the victim, gender of the perpetrator, and personal victimisation of IPV were added to the model as potential predictors of intervening behaviour. A frequent theme in the data set was whether the bystander was a child witness. Hence this was also added to the model (child witness of IPV; no = 0, yes = 1) as a potential predictor of intervening behaviour.

Data was screened following Tabachnick & Fidell's (2001) procedures. There was no missing data, but boxplots revealed potential outliers. Thirteen outliers were identified, with one of these as a multivariate outlier, which was deleted. The remaining twelve outliers were retained after their scores adjusted using winsorisation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Exploratory analysis was also conducted regarding gender to see if there were any significant differences within the sample across the variables. Independent samples t-tests

revealed significance differences in extraversion (BFI) across males and females (t (210) = 1.43, p = .005). Specifically, males had higher levels of extraversion (M = 22.88, SD = 4.15) than females (M = 21.70, SD = 5.44). There was also a significant difference in harm (MFQ) across males and females (t (210) = -4.76, p = .005) in which females had higher levels of care towards others (M = 23.66, SD = 3.49) than males (M = 20.78, SD = 4.46). Significant chi-square analyses (X^2 (1) = 4.60, p = .032) revealed that female bystanders were 2.22 x more likely (odds ratio; *OR*) to be a victim of IPV, female bystanders were 18.06 x more likely (*OR*) to report that the victim was female (X^2 (1) = 48.88, p < .001), female bystanders were 6.90 x more likely (*OR*) to report that the perpetrator was male (X^2 (1) = 22.79, p <.001). Thus, gender was controlled for in the analysis to enhancing the internal validity of the study (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Results revealed that the model was significant (X^2 (15, N = 212) = 37.52, p = .001), suggesting that it could differentiate between those who intervened and those who did not. The model explained between 16.20% (Cox & Snell R square) and 23% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in the dependent variable and correctly classified 72.6% of cases. Conscientiousness, fairness, and child witness contributed to the model. The model indicated that every one-unit increase in conscientiousness, bystanders were .91 times more likely to intervene when they witnessed IPV. For every one-unit increase in fairness, bystanders were .85 times more likely to intervene when they witnessed IPV. Child bystanders were 9.72 times less likely to intervene when they witnessed IPV.

This suggests being high on conscientiousness and fairness was found to predict intervening behaviour and being a child witness was found to predict non-intervening behaviour.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis was also conducted to allow for an in-depth analysis of the data, capturing expressive values that would not be retrieved from a purely quantitative design. The study used an inductive approach, employing reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to find themes across the dataset using the six stages recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytic technique was used because it allowed for more clear and comprehensive findings to be drawn from the dataset.

Table 1 shows the three primary themes for why bystanders chose to intervene: 'Protection'; 'IPV is Wrong'; and 'They asked for Help'. Participants who stated they intervened to *protect* the victim from harm even though the victim did not want them to reported that the primary consequences of this were that the victim remained in the relationship, was angry with them, the abuse continued and the perpetrator engaged in aggression both towards the victim and themselves as a bystander. Participants who intervened due to believing *IPV was morally wrong* reported that the victims predominantly left the perpetrator and were thankful. However, the perpetrators were angry, threatening and engaged in verbal and physical abuse towards the bystander. Participants who intervened because *the victim asked for help* reported more positive consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator, characterised by them seeking help (e.g. counselling).

Table 1 – Thematic Analysis of the reasons Bystanders chose to intervene and the consequences of this.

Themes	Description	Supporting Quotes	Consequences
Protection	This theme related to people intervening even when they felt this was not what the victim wanted because they felt scared for their safety and a need	➢ *It was not my place but I was glad I advised* ➢ *Uncomfortable getting involved* ➢ *To stop him getting hurt again* ➢ *I felt scared for them* ➢ *I was worried for their*	*Victim* ➢ *I felt guilty and they ignored everyone's advice* ➢ *Got back together with partner* ➢ *They stayed and the relationship and abuse continued* ➢ *Left then changed her mind as she was worried about the*

	to protect them.	*safety*	*consequences* ➢ *Was angry and went with her partner* *Perpetrator* ➢ *Nothing* ➢ *Became rude* ➢ *Nothing they carried on* ➢ *Tried to get her to stay* ➢ *Got aggressive* ➢ *He got more violent* ➢ *Complained and bitched about me* ➢ *Blamed the victim and carried on* ➢ *Got angry with the bystander*
IPV is wrong	This theme was characterised by people who felt a sense of duty to report the behaviour because it was morally wrong.	➢ *It's the right thing to do* ➢ *Violent is wrong* ➢ *It's my responsibility* ➢ *It's serious* ➢ *I felt disgusted by it* ➢ *I Intervened so that the victim doesn't think that what has happened is normal.* ➢ *It is my duty* ➢ *I had to*	*Victim* ➢ *Thanked me* ➢ *Felt safer* ➢ *Left the perpetrator* *Perpetrator* ➢ *Agreed not to do it again* ➢ *Got angry and threatened me* ➢ *Got angry* ➢ *Denied it* ➢ *He continued the violence* ➢ *Got annoyed* ➢ *Started shouting at me* ➢ *Tried to attack me*
They asked me to help	This theme characterised people who wanted to help as the person had disclosed it to them and were seeking support.	➢ *They needed help* ➢ *I encouraged her to take action but did not want to talk with the perpetrator not to cause more trouble* ➢ *I care* ➢ *They were my friend and they needed help* ➢ *He doesn't like me because he knows she confides in me*	*Victim* ➢ *Got counselling* ➢ *They managed to get away from the abuser with help* ➢ *They left* ➢ *Said thank you* ➢ *Reported to police* ➢ *Went to a shelter* ➢ *Kept confiding in me* *Perpetrator* ➢ *Got counselling* ➢ *Stopped* ➢ *Got help*

Table 2 shows the results from the thematic analysis of why bystanders chose not to intervene. Three themes emerged: 'I was a child'; 'I was worried I would make things worse'; and 'Not my place'. Child witnesses reported they did not intervene due to feeling scared and afraid but also not knowing that IPV was wrong or what to do. They reported this made them experience negative emotions such as sadness, helplessness and guilt. Participants who stated they did not intervene due to a fear of worsening the situation also reported experiencing negative emotions of guilt and powerlessness. However, participants who did not intervene as they felt it was not their place reported feeling neutral emotions.

Table 2 – Thematic Analysis of the reasons Bystanders chose to not to intervene and the consequences of this.

Themes	Description	Supporting Quotes	Consequences
I was a child	This related to the participant being a child and feeling unable to act either through lack of knowledge the behaviour was wrong or through feeling disempowered.	➢ *I didn't understand what IPV was* ➢ *I didn't understand what was happening* ➢ *I was too young and didn't know what to do* ➢ *I felt scared* ➢ *I was afraid* ➢ *I felt frightened, now I am big and strong enough to protect them* ➢ *I understand that it's wrong now and I know how damaging it can be*	➢ *Sad* ➢ *Helpless* ➢ *Guilty* ➢ *Upset* ➢ *Disappointed with myself*
I was worried I would make things worse	This theme related to people not intervening because they thought it would worsen the situation.	➢ *They asked me not to* ➢ *I was worried about making it worse* ➢ *They didn't want me to* ➢ *Fear* ➢ *Afraid* ➢ *Scared* ➢ *I was told not to* ➢ *They didn't want to take any action*	➢ *Guilty I didn't do more* ➢ *Uneasy* ➢ *Disappointed* ➢ *Anxious* ➢ *Helpless* ➢ *Weak* ➢ *Powerless* ➢ *Overwhelmed*
Not my	This theme reflected people	➢ *It was a neighbour and they were in their house*	➢ *Did not feel guilty* ➢ *Fine*

place	feeling it was something that was occurring within a relationship and not their business.	➢ *I didn't know them well enough* ➢ *It wasn't my place to* ➢ *Not my place* ➢ *Didn't want to get involved* ➢ *I believe the decision to do something or not should be made by the person involved because only s/he knows his/her situation and his/herself the best.*	➢ *Nothing*

Discussion

The current study investigated the different factors influencing bystander decisions when witnessing IPV. Specifically, it investigated the impact of gender, personality, morality, situational factors (gender of victim & perpetrator), and personal victimisation on bystanders intervening acts. The study also aimed to gain a deeper psychological understanding of bystanders' decisions to intervene when they witnessed IPV through qualitative approaches. The hypotheses were partially upheld in that conscientiousness and fairness were found to contribute towards bystander intervention. However, no significant effects were found for gender and previous experience of IPV. Furthermore, the qualitative analyses revealed the complexities of bystander decision making.

Why do bystanders intervene?

According to Dungan et al's (2015) model of whistleblowing, those who favoured fairness reported greater likelihood to blow the whistle than those who favoured loyalty. This is consistent with the findings from the current study in relation to IPV. Specifically, the binary logistic regression revealed that bystanders with high levels of fairness were found to predict intervening acts, but not loyalty. In addition, the thematic analysis revealed 'IPV is wrong' to be a primary motivating factor for bystander intervention. This is consistent with the

whistleblowing literature which has shown a desire to correct wrongdoing in others is associated with intentions to blow the whistle (Nicholls et al, 2021).

It has been postulated that fairness is related to the motivation to seek avoidance of unfairness or unequal treatment of self and others (Zakharin & Bates, 2021) and when a lack of fairness is triggered this can be experienced by the person as anger and a motivation to act. In addition, fairness has been linked with empathic anger if the object of the perceived unfairness is another person. Hence, this would seem to provide a logical explanation as to why people scoring highly on fairness may be motivated to act to intervene as a bystander to IPV. Furthermore, the factor 'loyalty' refers to 'in-group loyalty' which is characterised by loyalty to the group and a feeling of treachery if a person is disloyal. In this study the notion of 'loyalty' was complex given 13% of the sample reported they were child bystanders to IPV in parental relationships. In addition, adult bystanders also reported a sense of loyalty to the victim not to intervene because 'they asked me not to'. Thus, the concept of 'loyalty' and an 'in-group' would appear complex given the nature of the potential relationship with the IPV victim and perpetrator. For example, the qualitative analyses revealed that loyalty to a person who 'asked for help' was associated with positive outcomes for both the victim and the perpetrator in terms of accessing help. This is an interesting finding and links with the whistleblowing literature that notes whistleblowing intentions can be associated with helping the wrongdoer (Nicholls et al, 2021). Future research would benefit from exploring the complex nature of 'loyalty' in child and friend bystanders of IPV and the outcomes this may have for help seeking for both victims and perpetrators of IPV.

This study also found that bystanders with high levels of conscientiousness (having a moral sense of right and wrong, to adhere to norms and rules) were found to predict intervening acts. This is consistent with other research which has shown that conscientiousness is negatively associated with justifying unethical behaviour (Simha &

Parboteeah, 2020). Furthermore, conscientiousness has also been associated with higher order moral aspects of personality and pro-social behaviour (McFerran et al, 2010), as well as doing the right thing not just for themselves but also for others (Moon, 2001). This was also consistent with the qualitative findings which indicated that bystanders intervened not only because they saw IPV as morally wrong but that they did this even when the victim did not want them to because they feared they may come to harm. Hence, it is possible that conscientiousness within bystander intervention may reflect a concern for individual conscience if they did not act because '*I was worried for their safety'*. This is also consistent with the whistleblowing literature which notes that individuals who have high levels of personal responsibility are more likely to engage in whistleblowing than those who displace this onto others (Nicholls et al, 2021). In addition, the perception of the wrongdoing as being 'severe' and 'intentional' has also been associated with whistleblowing intentions (Nicholls et al, 2021).

However, it should also be noted that a primary theme emerging from this study was that whilst intervening was reported to induce positive feelings in the bystander, intervening bystanders also experienced the perpetrator becoming aggressive towards them and in some cases the violence continued towards the victim. This is consistent with the literature in relation to whistleblowing which noted that whistleblowers are at risk of experiencing retribution known as whistleblower retaliation (Garrick & Buck, 2020). The impact of these behaviours on the bystander is unclear both in terms of psychological and emotional harm as well as their motivation to intervene in IPV behaviour in the future.

Why do bystanders not intervene?

The binary logistic regression further revealed that child witnesses of IPV were found to predict non-intervening acts. This was also supported in the thematic analysis whereby

participants reported feeling too frightened to intervene or did not know how because they were a child. According to Dungan et al (2015), individuals with greater occupational power and reduced threat of punishment are more likely to blow the whistle and violate group cohesion (solidarity of a group). Thus, it could be argued that child bystanders have less power and a greater threat of punishment, and hence they were less likely to violate group cohesion (family cohesion). For example, in this study participants reported they were 'scared' and 'too young' which replicates the findings of other research which has found that children who are exposed to domestic abuse are likely to experience fear (Mullender et al, 2002) may keep this a secret for fear of the consequences (Callaghan et al, 2017) and suffer from limited opportunities to choose, feel free and develop a sense of independence and competence (Katz et al, 2015). Furthermore, McLeod & Flood (2018) noted that perpetrators of domestic abuse may also systematically alienate the victim from the family unit by manipulating an alliance with the child to recruiting them into the abuse, thus using the child as part of coercive controlling tactics. Dallos and Vetere (2012) refer to the process by which children are drawn into the dynamics of the parental dyad as 'triangulation'. This study expanded on previous research by Mullender et al (2002) which highlighted that child bystanders to IPV may act in 3 ways (over-hearer; help-seeker; or intervener) whereby the psychological antecedents and consequences to decision making were noted.

Additionally, organisational support, encouragement (i.e., to report unethical behaviour), information about avenues for reporting unethical behaviour, as well as safety measures (i.e., to protect whilst-blowers from threat and/or retaliation) are strong predictors of whistleblowing (Vadera et al., 2009). In the current study, child witnesses reported that not only were they too young to know how to intervene they did not did not recognise the behaviour as constituting IPV. Thus, being a child witness of IPV is a barrier for bystander intervention due to having less power, a greater threat of punishment, lack of organisational

support, and a lack of knowledge about ways to report the violence as well as having no safety measures put in place to protect them. It should also be noted that a long term consequence for child bystanders who did not intervene related to how they would intervene now as adults because they both understand IPV is wrong and because they were older and 'more powerful'. This is also consistent with theories of whistleblowing that have found people are less likely to blow the whistle if they anticipate hostility, intimidation or suffering as a result of blowing the whistle (Nicholls et al, 2021) and the mechanisms to manage wrongdoing within that system are unclear or are anticipated to have a poor effect on initiating change.

Additionally, 'not my place' was a primary theme in non-interveners. According to the whistle-blowing literature, this may relate to a lack of internal locus of control (Chiu,2003). Internal locus of control theory (Rotter, 1966) refers to the extent to which individuals feel that they are in control of their lives including challenging events that may occur. For instance, those high in conscientiousness see themselves as being responsible for challenging unethical behaviour. Whereas those scoring lower in conscientiousness prefer to take less personal responsibility. Thus, bystanders who stated that intervening was 'not their place' may have a lack of conscientiousness in which they feel it is not their responsibility to intervene. This was supported by fact that non-intervening bystanders stated they felt indifferent to having not acted which is also consistent with the whistleblowing literature whereby moral disengagement acts as a barrier to reporting wrongdoing (Ion et al, 2016). However, it should also be noted that a consequence of bystander intervention in this study was that some victims continued the relationship with their abusive partners. Thus, it is possible that bystanders who chose not to intervene may have done so because they had previously intervened but the victim had continued with the relationship, thus the motivation to intervene in the future was reduced. This is consistent with research which indicates

hopelessness for change is a barrier to adopting whistleblowing (Nicholls et al, 2021). Barriers to blowing the whistle could have also been exacerbated if they had been exposed to aggression from the perpetrator through intervening previously which was a noted consequence in this study.

A primary theme blocking intervening behaviour also related to 'I was worried I would make things worse' which related to a fear they may worsen the situation if they intervened. This is also consistent with the whistleblowing literature which notes that fear of hurting someone may act as a barrier to whistleblowing (Nicholls et al, 2021). The reasons for why participants adhered to this request are unclear. Research shows that victims of IPV may prefer seeking informal support from friends/family rather than formal agencies for a number of reasons. These include fear in relation a number of factors such as: their partner will become more violent; fear they will not be believed; fear for the safety of others (e.g. family/friends/pets); fear of the legal system and losing children. This is noteworthy given the participants in this study that intervened reported they were subjected to aggression and violent victimisation from the perpetrator as a result and that the violence continued towards the victim. Thus, the fear of victims would appear to be a legitimate concern. This is consistent with the literature which shows people may fear blowing the whistle for fear of harm and reprisal (Kang, 2022). In addition, non-intervening bystanders reported feeling 'guilt', 'sad' and 'helpless'.

In summary, the non-intervening bystanders appeared to consist of three separate typologies.

1. Those who lacked capability as they were children
2. Those who were indifferent and did not see it as their place to intervene

3. Those who wanted to intervene, but did not as they were frightened of exacerbating the situation

Implications

IPV has significant physical and psychological effects on the victims. However, the choice to intervene is complex and bystander intervention was also associated in some cases with not only a continuation of the IPV behaviour towards the victim but also a risk of aggression and physical violence towards the bystander. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for how to support bystanders and victims of IPV.

- Better education could be provided to children in relation to IPV given child bystanders reported that they did not realise the behaviour they were exposed to constituted IPV and they did not know what to do or where they could access help. For example, the Alice Ruggles Trust Relationship Safety Resource is a package of teaching materials on stalking and coercive behaviour aimed at 14 – 16-year-olds. The key focus is raising awareness of the avenues that children can take to support their wellbeing and safety. Hence, a similar type of intervention could be designed for schools to teach children of all ages about IPV.
- Whilst changing core aspects of adult personality such as morality and conscientiousness is unlikely, the benefits of reporting IPV could be highlighted to the 'indifferent' bystander group. For example, media campaigns could educate people to the effects of ignoring IPV in order to appeal to their conscience. This could include providing people with simple effortless means by which they could report behaviour by using simple and free phone apps so as to also reduce the risk of personal harm and retaliation.

- Better support and protection could be provided to bystanders who intervene. This could include psychological and emotional support as well as practical advice on how they could be protected from exposure to physical aggression. This could also include increasing awareness for friends and family bystanders on how they could report information anonymously.
- It should be noted that efforts to increase reporting of IPV by bystanders also needs to be balanced with the reality that in some cases this may lead to an increase in IPV by the perpetrator and an inability for the victim to leave the relationship. Given this juxtaposition, any interventions aimed at targeting bystander intervention should also run alongside interventions to support and protect victims of IPV.

Limitations of the Study

70% of participants identified their ethnicity as 'White' with the remaining 30% of participants being spread across 12 other categories of ethnicity which could not be grouped on any sound theoretical basis. As a result it was not possible to conduct analysis based on differences in ethnicity. Furthermore, whilst the factors conscientiousness, fairness and child bystander significantly differentiated between those that intervened and those that did not, it only accounted for 23% of the variance. Therefore it would be helpful to establish additional factors which may influence the complexities of bystander intervention by expanding on the findings from the qualitative themes.

Future Research

A key direction for future research is to investigate the potential impact of factors such as ethnicity and culture on intervening behaviour. This would develop a deeper understanding of intervening behaviour concerning IPV. In addition, future research should also explore the

impact on bystanders who intervene, particularly for those who are then exposed to aggression by the perpetrator. In addition, the psychological processes through which the 'indifferent' bystanders could be motivated to report behaviour would also benefit from a deeper understanding.

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