

Victim opinions of police responses to reports of domestic violence and abuse in Greece

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Abstract There are no known studies of victim opinions of police responses to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) calls in Greece. This study investigates differences in female and male victim experiences after making a call to the Greek police about DVA. A sample consisting of 104 victims of DVA was recruited from five agencies offering counselling and support. Of this sample, 72% consented to participate and complete a structured questionnaire ($N = 75$). The study compared 58 female and 17 male victims of similar demographic characteristics. Results showed there was a significant bias towards female victims for the information, help, and advice given, satisfaction with the police interview and arrest but *not* for children and witnesses, satisfaction with the police report and outcome of the incident. Partial evidence is provided to support the notion that male victims in Greece are discriminated against, as they do not fulfil gender stereotypes expected by police officers.

Introduction

In September 2013, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in the UK published a report, *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*. The HMIC report found that, despite the progress made in policing domestic violence and abuse (DVA) over the last decade, not all police forces were ensuring that DVA is a priority in their county. It was often a poor relation to other policing activities. According to the HMIC report, there are 'fundamental weaknesses in the service provided to victims of domestic abuse by the police service' and urgent action was required to improve their ways of working with DVA to

make their services more effective (HMIC, 2015, p. 8).

For over three decades, it has been recognized that most victims of DVA do not call the police because of fear of discrimination and lack of protection from future acts of violence (Stanko, 1989). Flatley (2016) states that the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows that only one in seven women and men (14% and 13% respectively) report domestic violence in face-to-face interviews. Therefore, solely relying on police data means that many cases of domestic violence will not be recorded. Previous research found that less than half of all victims of violence at the hands of spouses or other family members report their abuse to the police (Grech and Burgess, 2011). The Crime

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Survey for England and Wales (Elkin, 2022) estimated that 1 in 5 adults aged 16 years and over (10.4 million) had experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime, since the age of 16 years. In the past year (ending 31 March 2022), 5.0% of adults (6.9% women and 3.0% men) aged 16 years and over had experienced domestic abuse. This equates to an estimated 2.4 million adults (1.7 million women and 699,000 men).

Bosick *et al.* (2012) expressed three major concerns about under-reporting: first, when DVA goes unreported, offenders go undetected and unpunished, thereby robbing the law of any deterrent effect it may have. Second, failure to report may mean that victims do not receive the mental and physical support they may need. Third, inaccurate information on the actual number of incidents may lead to the misallocation of funds for the management of intimate partner violence (IPV).

Most victims hope that the abuse will stop without legal intervention and are entrapped in the abusive relationship by financial dependence or fear of family breakdown, and a wish to 'save their relationship' (Browne and Herbert, 1997; Browne *et al.*, 2017; Davis and Smith, 1995). Furthermore, they often lack support from families, and/or police and professionals, to make a change (Browne and Herbert, 1997; Browne *et al.*, 2017; Davis and Smith, 1995). The lack of help and support is cited by police and professionals dealing with DVA as a reason for victims of both genders not reporting and staying in an abusive relationship (Anderson *et al.*, 2003; Kravvariti and Browne, 2023).

Victims' decision to seek police and legal intervention is influenced by several factors. Victims may call the police not necessarily to have their abuser arrested, but because they believe the presence of law enforcement allows them to muster some degree of control of their situation and send a message to the abuser that their behaviour is wrong, the victim has 'had enough' and wishes to record the abuse took place (Ford, 1991; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000; Leisenring, 2012; Smith, 2000). Other victims may not call the police because they fear that the abuse may increase in severity and frequency if the abuser is arrested (Johnson, 2007) or legal intervention may lead to the children being removed and taken into public care (Browne *et al.*, 2017; Felson *et al.*, 2002).

Even when victims call the police, they may do it for very different reasons. An interview study of 65 women who had suffered DVA and reported it to the police in the UK, found that approximately half the women wished their partner to be arrested, the other half just wished the violence to stop, and the police do nothing more than calm the abuser down and get help for the abuser (Hoyle and Sanders, 2000).

To date, few studies have considered male victims' perceptions of police responses. Typically studies that come across a minority of male victims exclude them from the analyses to investigate a homogeneous sample of female victims. For example, Johnson (2007) randomly selected 10 DVA incident reports each month for 13 months, yielding 130 incident reports for review. Of these, 109 (84%) cases concerned a female victim and 21 (16%) cases concerned a male victim. It was observed that women were more likely to use a weapon against their partner (28.6%) than men (8.3%) who most often use their hands/fist. Nevertheless, female victims were more likely to suffer more serious physical assaults compared with male victims.

Victim opinions of police responses

Victims' satisfaction with police response to domestic abuse incidents is influenced by several factors including the positive attitude of police officers (Stephens and Sinden, 2000) and prior positive contact with the police (Goldstein, 1979). Whether the police act in accordance with the victims' preferences seems to be a major and obvious factor for victim satisfaction as observed in several studies (Apsler, 2003; Buzawa and Austin, 1993; Chandek and Porter, 1998; Rajah *et al.*, 2006; Robinson and Strohshine, 2005).

A timely response to DVA victims' calls for assistance, the provision of information regarding shelters, and further protection through court orders, all increase the likelihood that victims will be satisfied with police response (Erez and Belknap, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Yegidis and Renzy, 1994). Victims being able to make statements about the abuse, having officers listen and understand the situation, and speaking with officers separate from the abuser, were all characteristics of positive and satisfying

police responses (Johnson, 2007; Robinson and Stroshine, 2005).

Several studies have demonstrated a strong association between women's dissatisfaction with police response and the willingness to call them again (Apsler *et al.*, 2003; Fleury-Steiner *et al.*, 2006; Johnson, 2007). Indeed, Leisenring (2012) found that 19 of her 40 female victim interviewees would 'hesitate' to use the criminal justice system' in the future, as in their view involvement of the police made matters worse. This observation highlights the need for the police to question and understand the victim's perspective.

Male victims experience even more barriers when they ask for help for DVA, possibly due to the misconception that DVA is only associated with female victims (Douglas *et al.*, 2012; Hines and Douglas, 2010; Tsui *et al.*, 2010). When men were asked about not reporting the abuse or seeking help from the police, they stated fear of ridicule, lack of support services for men, denial that men can be victims of DVA, and the shame and stigma associated with being a male victim (Barkhuizen, 2015; Drijber *et al.*, 2013; Shuler, 2010; Tsui, 2014).

The experience of DVA victims in Greece

There are no known studies of victim opinions of police responses to DVA calls for assistance in Greece of any kind. It has been noted that women from Albania or other countries who have an accent when they are speaking Greek may have difficulties reporting a crime to the police (Coordinator of the Gender Equality Office in Ioannina—26 April 2014). This includes DVA, as police officers 'usually ignore women or even make fun of them' when they come to report a case of domestic violence (Barkhuizen, 2015; Drijber *et al.*, 2013; Shuler, 2010; Tsui, 2014). Indeed, all women reporting domestic violence cases at a police station in Greece often receive inappropriate answers from police officers: 'OK, now go back to your family and try to make up with your husband', or 'OK, you made your report, you can go'. In practice, police officers rarely write an official report (Barkhuizen, 2015; Drijber *et al.*, 2013; Shuler, 2010; Tsui, 2014). Few observations of any kind have been made about male victims of DVA

in Greece. This is despite existing National Laws to criminalize DVA and protect victims in Greece.

Kravvariti and Browne (2023) described the Greek Law 3500 (2006), which defines the term 'domestic violence' as the commission of a series of punishable acts against a family member or members. Articles 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of this law and art. 299 and 311 of the Criminal Code identify the following penal offences of domestic violence: domestic physical violence and threat. Rape and sexual abuse. Manslaughter and fatal injury. Furthermore, the Law provides judicial guarantees for the protection of victims of DVA in the family home or in public care, such as residential care institutions (art. 15), introduces Penal mediation (art. 11–14), and describes the extra-judicial aid to victims by the police, hospitals, social services, and shelters (art. 21).

This Greek legislation established that violence occurring within the family is a criminal act and should be treated as an inherent offense. An inherent offense signifies that Public Authorities, from the moment they receive any sort of notification regarding such an offense (e.g., an anonymous written or oral statement, or an account from a neighbour, teacher, social worker, etc.), are mandated to investigate the incident and possibly proceed to an arrest, even if there is no formal report placed by the victim(s) (Chatzifotiou *et al.*, 2014).

Aims of the study

This study aims to investigate the opinions of female and male victims of DVA about police responses they received after making a DVA call for assistance to the Greek police and to explore the differences in female and male victim experiences from their responses to a structured questionnaire.

The following hypotheses were posed:

Null Hypothesis 1: Victim opinions on police responses to DVA cases will show no differences between female and male victims for help, information, and advice given by police officer(s) attending the incident.

Null Hypothesis 2: Victim opinions on police responses to DVA cases will show no

differences between female and male victims for victim satisfaction with the police interview, police report, and outcome of the incident.

Methods

Participants

Seven agencies offering counselling and support for DVA victims in Greece were approached to facilitate the completion of a questionnaire on victim experiences of police responses to DVA. Most of these agencies ($N = 5$) expressed no bias in working with DVA victims in terms of gender, age, or nationality. However, two Greek government agencies did not participate because the head of the organization expressed a viewpoint that their staff would be negatively biased towards male victims, and no men are accepted into the services they offer. Only female victims of any age or nationality were offered help. These two agencies were the Research Centre for Gender Equality, and the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality. The five participating agencies are listed in [Table 1](#).

All DVA victims attending these five agencies were offered counselling and support for DVA. The number of victims approached by the centre administrators was 104 and 29 refused to participate giving a 72% response rate. Therefore, the Greek victim sample consisted of 75 participants, of which 58 were female and 17 were male (see [Table 1](#)).

Procedure

After getting ethical approval from the University of Nottingham and Medical School Ethics Committee, DVA support organizations in Greece were asked

to help the researcher to identify participants who were victims of DVA. A cover e-mail/letter was sent to centre managers inviting them to circulate the information letter, the consent form, and a hard copy of the questionnaire to potential participants through their agency lead administrator. At the end of the data collection period, the completed questionnaire hard copies were collected by the researcher from each agency lead administrator with no contact with the participants. The questionnaire was distributed to and returned by victims during a 12-month period (1 December 2017 to 30 November 2018). All questionnaires had been collected by the researcher at the end of 31 March 2019.

Materials

A victim-orientated questionnaire was created by the researcher to provide relevant information on victim opinions of the police response they had experienced after reporting the last incident of DVA they had suffered. All participants completed the 60-item questionnaire, which had 10 questions on demographic information (D1–D10) and 50 questions on victim opinions split into eight sections; police interview (5 questions), weapons (4 questions), injuries and evidence (3 questions), children and witnesses (12 questions), arrest (2 questions), protective orders (4 questions), information provided (6 questions), police report and outcome (14 questions). At first, a pilot study was carried out using two Greek female DVA victims from UWAH to ensure that all questions and instructions were easily understood, and no changes were needed. The pilot study questionnaires were self-administered and completed by the two individual respondents in the presence of the researcher. The pilot study did not reveal any problems in the procedure

Table 1: Agencies in Greece dealing with DVA and number of provided questionnaires

1	Dimos Patreon Department of Social Support (DPDSS)	5 female victim questionnaires.
2	The National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA)	18 female victim questionnaires.
3	The Parental Equality Association (GONIS)	7 female and 2 male victim questionnaires.
4	The Association for Men and Fathers Dignity and Equal Parenting (SYGAPA)	15 male victim questionnaires.
5	United Women Associations of Heraklion (UWAH)	28 female victim questionnaires.

or the self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was back translated from English into the Greek language by an official translator to avoid any possible mistakes.

Treatment of data and analyses

After 75 questionnaires were completed and collected, the victim data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows Version 25 to carry out the appropriate statistical analyses, using crosstabulations of variables. Each of the 50 questions regarding police responses was answered 'Yes', 'No', or 'Don't Know'. Answers with 'Don't Know' were regarded as missing data and not entered into the analyses. Hence, the sample for each of the 50 police response questions varied according to the number of participants giving a definite answer 'Yes' or 'No'.

Because of performing several independent statistical tests simultaneously, the Bonferroni correction was used, as a multiple-comparison correction. Spurious positive associations that may occur by chance were avoided by lowering the significant p value (e.g., from $p < 0.05$ at a 95% level of confidence to $p < 0.001$ at a 99.9% level of confidence) to account for the number of comparisons being performed (Seigel and Casterlan, 1989).

The Bonferroni correction was calculated using the following link; <https://www.easycalculation.com/statistics/bonferroni-correction-calculator.php>.

To reach statistical power, the minimum sample size for any question needed to be 68, with a confidence level of 99.9%, a margin error of 5%, and the sample proportion of 80%. Responses to the questions were dichotomized for analyses. This was determined using the following link; <https://select-statistics.co.uk/calculators/sample-size-calculator-population-proportion/>

From the crosstabulation of variables, the chi-squared test or Fisher's exact test were used to infer significant differences in the police responses experienced by female ($n = 58$) and male victims ($n = 17$). In addition, Spearman's rho was applied to evaluate any significant similarities or contrasts between female and male victim opinions. A probability level at $p < 0.001$ was accepted, due to the large number of 50 statistical comparisons with multiple chi-square tests or Fisher's

exact tests. Any differences between females and males with a probability level of $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.002$, were regarded as non-significant 'trends' in the data.

Ethical issues

Voluntary participation. Participants received an 'information letter' stating that their decision to participate was their choice and that their decision would not have any negative consequence for any future services received from either the police or DVA support organizations. In addition, each participant was told that they could take as long as they wished to consent and complete the questionnaire and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage. The consent form acknowledged their voluntary participation and was kept by the agency's lead administrator.

Protection of participants. Efforts were made to ensure that participants were aware of the nature of this study to make an informed decision on whether it will be likely to cause them any distress. The researcher considered it unlikely that the content of the questions would result in any stress to participants. Moreover, participants were informed that they have the right to stop their participation at any time. All participants were provided with a verbal debriefing session by the support agency to discuss any topics that arose for them in completing the questionnaire or any queries about the research.

Confidentiality. Every effort was made to ensure the participants of the anonymity of their responses and the confidentiality of their participation to gain valid and honest responses. Participants were also notified that any report of the research findings would be an overall summary report with no identifying information of any kind and everyone's anonymity would be preserved.

Results

Demographic characteristics of female and male victim respondents

In total, 75 victims in a heterosexual relationship completed the questionnaire, 58 (77.3%) were

female victims and 17 (22.7%) were male victims. A statistical comparison of female and male victims on demographic variables showed no significant differences for sexuality, age, nationality, current relationship status, education, number of biological children, children living at home, and employment status. More women (72.4%) than men (52.9%) remained in a relationship with their abusive partner, but this was not significant. Most participants (86.7%) were of Greek Nationality. A similar percentage of female victims (46.6%) and male victims (41.2%) had further/higher education but there was a trend (chi-squared = 7.3, $p < 0.007$) for less women (51.7%) to be employed compared with men (88.2%). There was no significant difference in the age range of female and male DVA victims. It was found that 64% of the sample were between the age of 18 and 40 years with the remainder over 40 years. Regarding children, 49 (65.3%) participants had at least one child and 26 (34.7%) had no children. All children were biologically related to the DVA victim and for women with children ($n = 38$); all mothers lived with their children. For men with children ($n = 11$), seven (63.6%) lived with their children (Table 2).

Differences between female and male victims to police responses

Police interview . Of the five questions relating to the victim's experience of the initial police interview, statistical comparisons showed a larger number of female than male respondents were satisfied for every question. There was a trend for female victims to remember more relevant discussion than male victims in relation to 'concern for safety' (87.9% vs 52.9%) but there was no significant difference in police officers asking about 'previous history of abuse' (69% vs 52.9%). Questions relating to 'any abuse of the children' (86.5% vs 17.6%), 'threatening behaviour' (83.3% vs 8.2%), and 'forced sex' (94.6% vs 5.4%) did show that significantly more female victims were satisfied compared with male victims (Table 3; questions 1–5).

Weapons . For all four questions about weapons, police officers were significantly more concerned

about weapons used against women compared with being used against men (100% vs 20%) and this bias extended to weapons used against their children (92% vs 27%). The police officer asking about the possibility of perpetrators having access to weapons was also dramatically different for women compared with men (87.9% vs 1.9%). Police removed potential weapons from the homes of all female victims for the 50% claiming their existence, whereas male victims were rarely asked these questions by police officers (Table 3; questions 6–9).

Injuries and evidence . For all three questions asking about police recording the injuries to the victim, again showed significant differences, demonstrating more concern for women than men (98.3% vs 13.3%). Records in writing or on camera of the physical evidence of injury and property damage were significantly more likely to be reported by women rather than men (75.5% vs 13.3%) (Table 3; questions 10–12).

Children and witnesses . Women with children ($n = 38$) and men with children ($n = 11$) represented nearly two-thirds (65%) of both female and male victims who completed the questionnaire. Two questions were asked about witnesses and 10 questions were asked about the children caught up in the abusive relationship of the parents. Indeed, 42.9% of victims reported that the children were abused as well. More men (66.7%) claimed their partner was abusing the children than women (36.4%) but this was not a significant difference due to the reduced power of the small sample size of victims with children (Table 3; questions 13–24).

Indeed, Table 3 (questions 13–24) shows that there were no significant differences in police responses related to child and witness factors which suggest that women and men had similar experiences. Nevertheless, some interesting victim responses were found: four out of five participants claimed that their children had witnessed partner abuse. Nearly half (49%) reported their child(ren) encouraged them to call the police, although 55.8% said their children were fearful of police involvement, yet 65% claimed their children were pleased when the police arrived.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of female and male victims of DVA completing the questionnaire (N = 75)

Ques	Variable	Categories	Females n = 58		Males n = 17		Total Respondents		Statistics chi-squared value or Fisher's exact	Probability (2 tailed, df = 1)
			n	%	n	%	n	%		
D1	Gender	Female/male	58	77.3	17	22.7	75	100		
D2	Sexuality	Heterosexual	58	77.3	17	22.7	75	100		
D3	Age	18–40	37	63.8	11	64.7	48	64.0	0.005	p = 0.945 NS
		More than 40	21	36.2	6	35.3	27	36.0		
D4	Nationality	Greek	49	84.5	16	94.1	65	86.7	FE	p = 0.439 NS
		Other	9	15.5	1	5.9	10	13.3		
D5	Current relationship status	Married/Cohab Separated/Div	42	72.4	9	52.9	51	68.0	2.291	p = 0.130 NS
			16	27.6	8	47.1	24	32.0		
D6	Education	School Ed. Higher Ed.	27	46.6	7	41.2	34	45.3	0.153	p = 0.695 NS
			31	53.4	10	58.8	41	54.7		
D7	Number of children	No children 1 or more	20	34.5	6	35.3	26	34.7	0.004	p = 0.951 NS
			38	65.5	11	64.7	49	65.3		
D8	Children live with you	No Yes	20	34.5	10	58.8	30	40.0	3.24	p = 0.072 NS
			38	65.5	7	41.2	45	60.0		
D9	Children are Biological or Step/Adopted	Biological Step/Adopted	38	100.0	11	100.0	48	100.0	N/A	N/A
D10	Employment status	Employed Unemployed	30	51.7	15	88.2	45	60.0	7.302	p = 0.007 NST
			28	48.3	2	11.8	30	40.0		

Table 3: Differences between female and male victims' opinions on police responses to their request for help ($N = 75$ less the number of participants answering 'Don't Know')

Ques	Variable	Category		Female respondents		Male respondents		Total respondents		Statistic chi-squared value or Fisher's exact test	Probability (2 tailed, $df = 1$)
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Police interview											
1	Did you feel the officer showed concern for you and your safety?	No	7	12.1	8	47.1	15	20.0	FE	$p = 0.004$ NST	
		Yes	51	87.9	9	52.9	60	80.0			
2	Did the officer ask you about the history of abuse in the relationship?	No	18	31.0	8	47.1	26	34.7	1.49	$p = 0.222$ NS	
		Yes	40	69.0	9	52.9	49	65.3			
3	Did the officer ask you whether the abuser had ever been abusive to the children?	No	5	13.5	8	72.7	13	27.1	24.20	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	32	86.5	3	27.3	35	72.9			
4	Did the officer ask you specific information about any threats made against you?	No	9	16.7	13	76.5	22	31.0	21.62	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	45	83.3	4	8.2	49	69.0			
5	Did the officer ask you if your partner has ever forced you to have sex	No	3	5.4	13	81.3	16	22.2	41.47	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	53	94.6	3	5.4	56	77.8			
Weapons used											
6	Did the officer ask you if the abuser ever used weapons against you?	No	1	0	12	80.0	12	16.4	FE	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	58	100	3	20.0	61	83.6			
7	Did the officer ask you if the abuser ever used weapons against your children?	No	3	8.1	8	72.7	11	22.9	FE	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	34	91.9	3	27.3	37	77.1			
8	Did the officer ask if the abuser has access to weapons or guns in the home?	No	7	12.1	14	93.3	21	28.8	FE	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	51	87.9	1	1.9	52	71.2			
9	If you told the officer the abuser has access to weapons in the home, did the officer remove the weapons?	No	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	2.0	FE	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	50	100.0	0	0.0	52	98.0			
Your injuries and evidence											
10	Did the officer ask about all your injuries?	No	1	1.7	13	86.7	14	19.2	FE	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	57	98.3	2	13.3	59	80.8			
11	Did the officer take pictures of all your injuries or arrange to have pictures taken?	No	10	17.2	14	82.4	24	32.0	25.61	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	48	82.8	3	17.6	51	68.0			
12	Did the officer collect, or take pictures of all the physical evidence of damage to property and person?	No	12	24.5	13	86.7	25	39.1	18.65	$p < 0.0001$	
		Yes	37	75.5	2	13.3	39	60.9			
Children and witnesses											
13	Did any of your children also become a victim of physical abuse?	No	21	63.6	3	33.3	24	57.1	FE	$p = 0.139$ NS	
		Yes	12	36.4	6	66.7	18	42.9			
14	Did any of your children observe the abuse against you?	No	7	18.4	3	27.3	10	20.4	FE	$p = 0.673$ NS	
		Yes	31	81.6	8	72.7	39	79.6			

Table 3. Continued

Ques	Variable	Category	Female respondents		Male respondents		Total respondents		Statistic chi-squared value or Fisher's exact test	Probability (2 tailed, df = 1)
			n	%	n	%	n	%		
15	Have your children or some of them encouraged you to call the police?	No	20	52.6	5	45.5	25	51.0	0.175	$p = 0.675$ NS
		Yes	18	47.4	6	54.5	24	49.0		
16	Were your children pleased when the police arrived?	No	8	25.8	6	66.7	14	35.0	FE	$p = 0.044$ NST
		Yes	23	74.2	3	33.3	26	65.0	FE	
17	Were any of your children afraid of the police?	No	14	42.4	5	50.0	19	44.2	FE	$p = 0.728$ NS
		Yes	19	57.6	5	50.0	24	55.8	FE	
18	Were your children identified as safe by the police?	No	10	31.3	5	62.5	15	37.5	FE	$p = 0.126$ NS
		Yes	22	68.8	3	37.5	25	62.5	FE	
19	Did the officer get a statement from each of the children who are old enough to talk?	No	26	70.3	7	77.8	33	71.7	FE	$p = 1.000$ NS
		Yes	11	29.7	2	22.2	13	28.3		
20	Do you feel the officer interviewed your children with sensitivity?	No	7	21.2	6	75.0	13	31.7	8.603	$p = 0.007$ NST
		Yes	26	78.8	2	25.0	28	68.3		
21	Did the officer remove the children from the place that you were interviewed?	No	6	15.8	3	27.3	9	18.4	FE	$p = 0.04$ NST
		Yes	32	84.2	8	72.7	40	81.6		
22	If the children were at home when the police arrived did the officer take them to a safe place?	No	17	44.7	7	63.6	24	49.0	1.219	$p = 0.269$ NS
		Yes	21	55.3	4	36.4	25	51.0		
23	Did the officer ask you about the possibility of other witnesses?	No	12	20.7	8	47.1	20	26.7	FE	$p = 0.058$ NS
		Yes	46	79.3	9	52.9	55	75.3		
24	Did the police interview other possible witnesses or try to interview them?	No	8	24.2	4	36.4	12	27.3	FE	$p = 0.457$ NS
		Yes	25	75.8	7	63.6	32	72.7		
Arrest 25	Did the officer arrest the abuser?	No	0	0.0	1	92.3	12	16.9	FE	$p < 0.0001$
		Yes	58	100	1	7.7	59	83.1		
26	If the abuser left the scene, did the officer ask where the abuser is?	No	0	0.0	9	60.0	9	12.3	FE	$p < 0.0001$
		Yes	58	100	6	40.0	64	87.7		
Protective orders 27	Did the officer ask you if you have a protective order against the abuser?	No	20	34.5	13	76.5	33	44.0	9.406	$p = 0.002$ NST
		Yes	38	65.5	4	23.5	42	56.0		
28	If you have a protective order, did the officer ask to see the order?	No	18	31.6	13	76.5	31	41.9	10.841	$p = 0.002$ NST
		Yes	39	68.4	4	23.5	43	58.1		
29	If you didn't have a protective order, did the officer offer you an Emergency Protective Order?	No	20	34.5	10	62.5	30	40.5	4.084	$p = 0.043$ NST
		Yes	38	65.5	6	37.5	44	59.5		

Table 3. Continued

Ques	Variable	Category	Female respondents		Male respondents		Total respondents		Statistic chi-squared value or Fisher's exact test	Probability (2 tailed, df = 1)
			n	%	n	%	n	%		
30	Did the officer issue you an Emergency Protective Order?	No Yes	22 35	38.6 61.4	11 5	62.5 37.5	33 40	45.2 54.8	4.586	$p = 0.032$ NST
Information provided										
31	Did the officer give you verbal information on the services available to you?	No Yes	9 49	15.5 84.5	13 4	76.5 23.0	22 53	29.3 70.7	FE	$p < 0.0001$
32	Did the officer give you written information on the services available to you?	No Yes	7 51	12.1 87.7	11 6	64.7 35.3	18 57	24.0 76.0	FE	$p < 0.0001$
33	Did the officer give you the crime report number?	No Yes	0 58	0 100	3 14	17.6 82.4	3 72	4.0 96.0	FE	$p = 0.01$ NST
34	Did the officer ask you if you had any questions?	No Yes	8 50	13.8 86.3	13 4	76.5 23.5	21 54	28.0 72.0	FE	$p < 0.0001$
35	If you had questions, did the officer answer your questions to your satisfaction?	No Yes	16 42	27.6 72.4	13 4	76.5 23.5	29 46	38.7 61.3	13.247	$p < 0.0001$
36	Did the officer adequately explain to you what will happen next and when it will happen?	No Yes	26 32	44.8 55.2	15 2	88.2 11.8	41 34	54.7 45.3	9.996	$p = 0.002$ NST
Police report										
37	Did the officer write up a domestic violence crime report?	No Yes	0 58	0.0 100	9 8	52.9 47.1	9 66	12.0 88.0	FE	$p < 0.0001$
38	Did the police report accurately reflect the story you told to the officer?	No Yes	22 35	38.6 61.4	9 6	60.0 40.0	31 41	43.1 56.9	2.219	$p = 0.155$ NS
39	Did the police report accurately describe the history of abuse?	No Yes	35 23	60.3 39.7	11 6	64.7 35.3	46 29	61.3 38.7	0.105	$p = 0.745$ NS
40	If the abuser has a criminal history did the police attach a copy of the abuser's criminal history to the domestic violence report?	No Yes	7 22	24.1 75.9	12 4	75.0 25.0	19 26	42.2 57.8	10.934	$p = 0.002$ NST
41	If you told the officer about physical or emotional abuse to the children did the police report accurately describe that child abuse?	No Yes	3 35	7.9 92.1	3 7	30.0 70.0	6 42	12.5 87.5	FE	$p = 0.095$ NS
42	Did the police report accurately describe incidents of forced sex?	No Yes	11 44	20.0 80.0	14 0	100.0 0.0	25 44	36.2 63.8	30.912	$p < 0.0001$
43	Did the police report accurately describe all your injuries?	No Yes	18 36	33.3 66.7	11 5	68.8 31.3	29 41	41.4 58.6	6.380	$p = 0.012$ NST
44	Are all threats against you correctly quoted in the police report?	No Yes	21 37	36.2 63.8	11 3	78.6 21.4	32 40	44.4 55.6	FE	$p = 0.159$ NS

Table 3. Continued

Ques	Variable	Female respondents		Male respondents		Total respondents		Statistic chi-squared value or Fisher's exact test	Probability (2 tailed, df = 1)
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
45	Did the police report accurately record the statements of the children?	No	12	31.6	3	37.5	15	32.6	FE $p = 1.000$ NS
		Yes	26	68.4	5	62.5	31	67.4	
46	Did the police report contain the statements of the other witnesses?	No	12	50.0	5	38.5	17	45.9	0.452 $p = 0.501$ NS
		Yes	12	50.0	8	61.5	20	54.1	
47	Did the police report accurately list all the physical evidence available?	No	14	34.1	8	57.1	22	40.0	2.300 $p = 0.129$ NS
		Yes	27	65.9	6	42.9	33	60.0	
48	Overall, did the police report seem fair to you in the way it was written?	No	26	44.8	5	38.5	31	43.7	0.175 $p = 0.676$ NS
		Yes	32	55.2	8	61.5	40	56.3	
49	Overall, did the police report seem complete in covering the incident?	No	14	24.1	10	66.7	24	32.9	FE $p = 0.004$ NST
		Yes	44	75.9	5	33.3	49	67.1	
50	Did you feel that the recommended charges on the report are adequate to cover what happened to you?	No	39	67.2	10	58.8	49	65.3	0.411 $p = 0.521$ NS
		Yes	19	32.8	7	41.2	26	34.7	

On arrival, 81.6% of victims reported that the police interviewed them in the absence of the child(ren), being sensitive to the needs of the child and their safety (68.3% and 62.5% respectively). However, only 28.3% of victims observed a statement being taken from the child(ren) by the police officer. Three-quarters of victims involved other adult witnesses and 72.7% of these reported that the adult witness had been interviewed.

Arrest. All 58 female victims reported that their male partner was arrested and/or had been asked to provide information as to their whereabouts. In contrast only one male victim out of 13 respondents stated his abusive female partner had been arrested (7.7%) and 6 out of 15 (40%) men reported they had been asked about the location of their abusive female partner. Hence, the study found a significant bias towards male perpetrator arrest compared with female perpetrator arrest by Greek police, regarding allegations of domestic violence involving IPV (Table 3; questions 25 and 26).

Protective orders. Victims' reports on protective orders indicated a trend for a bias towards female victims for the four questions asked but none reached significance. Responses showed that protective restraining orders were more likely discussed with female victims than male victims (65.5% vs 23.5%) and emergency protection orders were issued to more women than men (61.4% vs 37.5%) (Table 3; questions 27–30).

Information provided. In terms of the information provided to victims by the police, again there was a bias towards female victims for all six questions (Table 2; questions 31–36) with four significant findings and two trends. Female victims reported receiving significantly more verbal and written information than male victims (84.5% vs 23.5% and 87.7% vs 35.3%, respectively). Compared with men, women also reported that they had a greater opportunity to ask questions (86.3% vs 23.5%) and were more likely to be satisfied (72.4% vs 23.5%) with the answers. In addition, there was a trend ($p < 0.002$) for more female victims than male victims to receive an explanation on what happens next (55.2% vs 11.8%) and be given a crime number

of the incident (100% vs 82.4%) (Table 3; questions 31–36).

Police report . All female victims indicated that a police report was written following the DVA incident. Only 47.1% of male victims stated the same, which was significant. Four out of five female victim reports accurately described incidents of forced sex, but no male victims reported such incidents. Male perpetrators were more likely to have a previous criminal record compared with female perpetrators (75.9% vs 25.0%), but this did not reach significance (Table 3; questions 37–50).

There were trends for more women compared with men to see the report as complete (75.9% vs 33.3%) and have their injuries accurately described (66.7% vs 31.3%). Hence, 5 of the 14 questions regarding the police report demonstrated differences between female and male victims.

The other nine aspects of the police report showed no significant differences between female and male victims. Over half (56.9%) of the victims found the police report accurately reflected the story they had told to the officer but less (38.7%) found the history of the DVA accurately described. Over half (55.6%) felt the quotes of threats they had received from the abuser were correctly recorded in the police report and the vast majority (87.5%) of the 49 parents in the sample noted that the abuse of their children had been accurately detailed. Of these, 67.4% of the children had given a statement that was included in the report. Over half (54.1%) of all victims had witness statements included in the police report.

Most victims found the police report to be fair to them in the way it was written (56.3%) and accurately list all the physical evidence available (60%). In terms of outcome, there was a low rate of satisfaction for both women (32.8%) and men (41.2%). It was felt that the recommended ‘charges’ in the police report were inadequate to cover what happened to them as DVA victims.

Discussion

This study found several differences in female ($n = 58$) and male victims ($n = 17$) experiences

after making a call to the Greek police about DVA, although female and male victim groups showed no significant differences on demographic variables, which validated their comparison.

Differences experienced by female and male victims

All five questions relating to the victim’s experience of the initial police interview showed that female victims reported more police interest and relevant police questions compared with male victims. Only previous history of abuse showed little difference, with concern for safety a trend and abuse of the children, threatening behaviour, and forced sex all significantly lower for male victims. This suggests that Greek police officers hold a stereotypical view that women are more vulnerable than men when interviewing DVA victims.

Police officers were also significantly more concerned about weapons used against women or their children and whether the perpetrator had access to weapons. Related to weapons, all four questions showed significant differences with a positive bias towards female victimization. This is somewhat surprising as research has shown female perpetrators are more likely to use weapons against their male partners (e.g., Cho and Wilke, 2010; Hamilton and Worthen, 2011; Hester, 2013; Millar and Brown, 2010). Similarly, police asking about and recording photos of injuries of the victim and his/her children again showed significantly more concern for women than men on all three questions. There is some justification for this bias towards female victims as research evidence shows women suffer more serious injuries compared with men (e.g., Finn *et al.*, 2004; Hester, 2013).

All the female victims reported that their male partner had been arrested. In contrast only 1 male victim in 13 respondents stated his abusive female partner had been arrested. Therefore, according to victim experiences, there was a significant bias towards male arrest compared with female arrest in Greece. This bias for men to be arrested more often than women after a DVA report is a common finding in the research literature (e.g., Andrews and Johnson, 2013; Cho and Wilke, 2010; Durfee and Messing, 2012; Finn and Stalans, 1997; Finn *et al.*,

2004; Hamilton and Worthen, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2013; Millar and Brown, 2010; Roark, 2016).

Regarding information provided to the victim by the police, including protection orders, again women reported receiving significantly more verbal advice and written information than men. Women had greater opportunity to ask questions and were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the answers. In addition, there was a trend for more women to receive an explanation of what happens next, and all women were the subject of a police report and given a crime number of the incident. Although, four out of five (82%) male victims got a crime number, less than half (47%) were the subject of a police crime report and those that saw a police report were less satisfied with how complete it was, compared with female victims. The fact that police in Greece do not file a 'mandatory' report on DVA incidents with all victims has been noted before by Chatzifotiou *et al.* (2014).

Regarding the children caught up in the abusive relationship of the parents, 42.9% of victims reported that the children were physically abused as well. Two-thirds of victim fathers (66.7%) claimed their female partner was also physically abusing the children. This compares to just over a third of victim mothers (36.4%) who claimed their male partner was also physically abusing the children. However, this difference was not significant. The overlap between DVA and physical child abuse is well documented (Browne and Hamilton, 1999; Browne *et al.*, 2017) and so, these findings come as no surprise, especially if hierarchical and reciprocal patterns of family violence are taken into consideration (Dixon *et al.* 2007; Dixon and Graham-Kevan, 2011). However, there were no significant differences in police responses related to child and witness factors which suggest that women and men had similar experiences in relation to police interviews about children and adult witnesses. Regarding the emotional abuse of children who witness DVA (Dorahy *et al.*, 2016; Prinz, 2016). Four out of five female and male victims claimed that their children had observed their parent's victimization. This confirms earlier research findings reported 33 years ago (Jaffe *et al.*, 1990).

Although not significant, this study found a trend for a higher number of female victims (48.3%) to be

unemployed compared with male victims (11.8%). This trend supports previous research findings in the UK and the USA (MacQueen and Norris, 2016; Roark, 2016), which found unemployed women are more likely to contact the police about DVA, as they had less resources at their disposal. It was observed that more women (72.4%) than men (52.9%) remained in a relationship with their abusive partner, but this again was not a significant difference. This observation has also been made in previous research on college students (Lo and Sporakowski, 1989). However, the opinion of Greek police is that women and men are just as likely to leave an abusive relationship (Kravvariti and Browne, 2023).

Based on the above findings of a bias towards female victims; Null Hypothesis 1 was rejected, as victims' opinions on police responses showed differences between women and men for the information, help, and advice given. Null Hypothesis 2 was partially rejected, as differences in victims' opinions existed between women and men for satisfaction with the police interview and arrest but *not* for children and witnesses, satisfaction with the police report, and outcome of the incident.

Limitations

Besides the small sample size due to the rarity of male victims, a further limitation of the study was that the time taken by the police to respond to the DVA incident after the victim had reported it was not questioned or recorded. This may have had an impact on duration of the incident and coloured the views and opinions of the victim about the police response. A second limitation was that information on the context, nature, and severity of the injuries sustained by the victim was not asked, as it may lead to secondary trauma. Third, the time lapsed from the DVA incident(s) until the victim completed the questionnaire was not measured. This relates to victim recall, as how long ago the DVA incident(s) occurred may have affected the recollection of events. Future work could include a follow-up of participants, through DVA support agencies, to see if they would consent to semi-structured qualitative interviews. These interviews might explore the context, nature, and severity of the DVA and the police response times as

well as confirming the findings of the present study. In addition, future studies could also include interviews with the police officers themselves to test for conscious and unconscious bias.

Conclusion

This study found profound differences in the experiences reported by female and male victims in relation to police responses to a DVA incident for the extent of information, help, and advice given. Hence, more women than men reported satisfaction with the police interview and procedures leading to the arrest of the perpetrator. However, there were no significant differences between male and female victims for the way police asked about children and witnesses, or victim satisfaction with the police report and outcome of the incident. The gender similarity in this police response to children and witnesses may relate to established procedures for safeguarding the child(ren). Indeed, 42.9% of victims with children reported that their children were physically abused as well and four out of five victims claimed their children had witnessed their DVA, which constitutes emotional abuse of the child.

Comparing female and male victims, with similar demographic characteristics; overall, there were 18 significant differences ($p < 0.001$) and 13 trends ($p < 0.002$ to $p < 0.05$) found for 31 out of 50 questions about the police interview. With female victims, the police officer was more inclined to ask about the use and availability of weapons, injuries, and evidence, and more likely to provide information and advice on arrest and protective orders. Hence, this study supports the notion that male victims of DVA in Greece are treated differently by police officers in some respects. This may be because they do not fulfil the gender stereotype expected by police officers. This suggests that more police training is required to ensure gender 'neutral' police responses when attending a domestic dispute and/or report of DVA.

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