Understanding Intimate Partner Violence: The Social Norms and Intervention Opportunities That Impact a Victim's Willingness to Disclose

Raphaela Fernandes, Isabelle Krukoski, and Ms. Pooja Ichplani

Florida State University, College of Communication and Information

Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an ill practice faced by numerous women but is still often overlooked by society, where every facet of a woman's well-being is at risk. IPV confrontation may look different in many instances; some may be more assertive while others may be more passive. While confrontation is a big part of this study, it is also important to realize the role of abuse **disclosure** and **support**. Intervening in situations of abuse may not always be an effective strategy owing to the safety of women, but some women may also not be aware of the situation they are in. Nonetheless, the availability of resources for these victims plays an essential part in supporting women experiencing IPV. One such resource is a woman's **social network**, which has a significant role in disclosure patterns. The social network these women find themselves in can ultimately impact their willingness to disclose. In this study, we link intervention and disclosure patterns to mental health and history of abuse. Our ongoing research process is situated in the Big Bend Area of Florida, and it utilizes a combination of in-depth interviews with survivors of IPV, surveys with women at risk, and anonymous online surveys with adult women to understand the likeliness of disclosure and related patterns. The study is anticipated to offer insights into the possibility of designing a culturally compatible program by leveraging the social network ties of such women for a more efficacious intervention.

Methods

Quantitative Surveys

The extent of our survey research included approximately 150 women at least 18 years of age who are currently living in the Big Bend area of Florida, are not pregnant and have ever been in an intimate/romantic relationship for at least three months.

The survey takes about 30 minutes on average and is administered on Qualtrics and Network Canvas using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

We asked these women about **the factors associated with the disclosure of IPV** such as their socio-demographics, mental health, social networks, normative beliefs, and willingness to disclose about relationship problems, including potential abuse.

The survey included multiple choice questions, some with a Likert (sliding) scale, adopted from the literature to ensure data validity.

For each significant relationship listed by these women, both romantic and platonic, we asked about the relationship type, strength, duration, involvement, and communication frequency, as well as their demographic information and their perceptions of IPV.

Qualitative Interviews

We conducted interpersonal interviews up to 90 minutes in length with several women at least 18 years of age living in the Big Bend Area of Florida who were not experiencing IPV at the time of the interview but had past experiences of intimate partner abuse.

In the interview, we asked these women about their early life, relationship history, their experiences with abuse and self-admission, and help-seeking.

We also used a **structured mapping of their interpersonal relationships** before/during abusive relationships and after separation. We noted every significant relationship mentioned in the interview and asked about the relationship type, strength, and involvement or help walking out of the relationship.

Methods

Literature Review

Evaluating texts about IPV that were written within the last 20 years, it was observed as a trend **that the legal system of abuse disclosure was not available to most women.**

Intimate partner violence was **an extremely normalized culture** explaining why women who do have access to legal help fear disclosing this information. For example, in Sub-Saharan African culture, it is extremely normalized for women to undergo IPV and therefore not receive support.

There is a negative correlation between lifetime IPV and mental health among women, and a negative correlation between history of abuse, including parental abuse, and mental health

Liang and colleagues created a **Help-seeking framework** where the problem is defined, then there is a decision to seek help, and lastly, a selection of support, which is seen along the journey these victims go through.
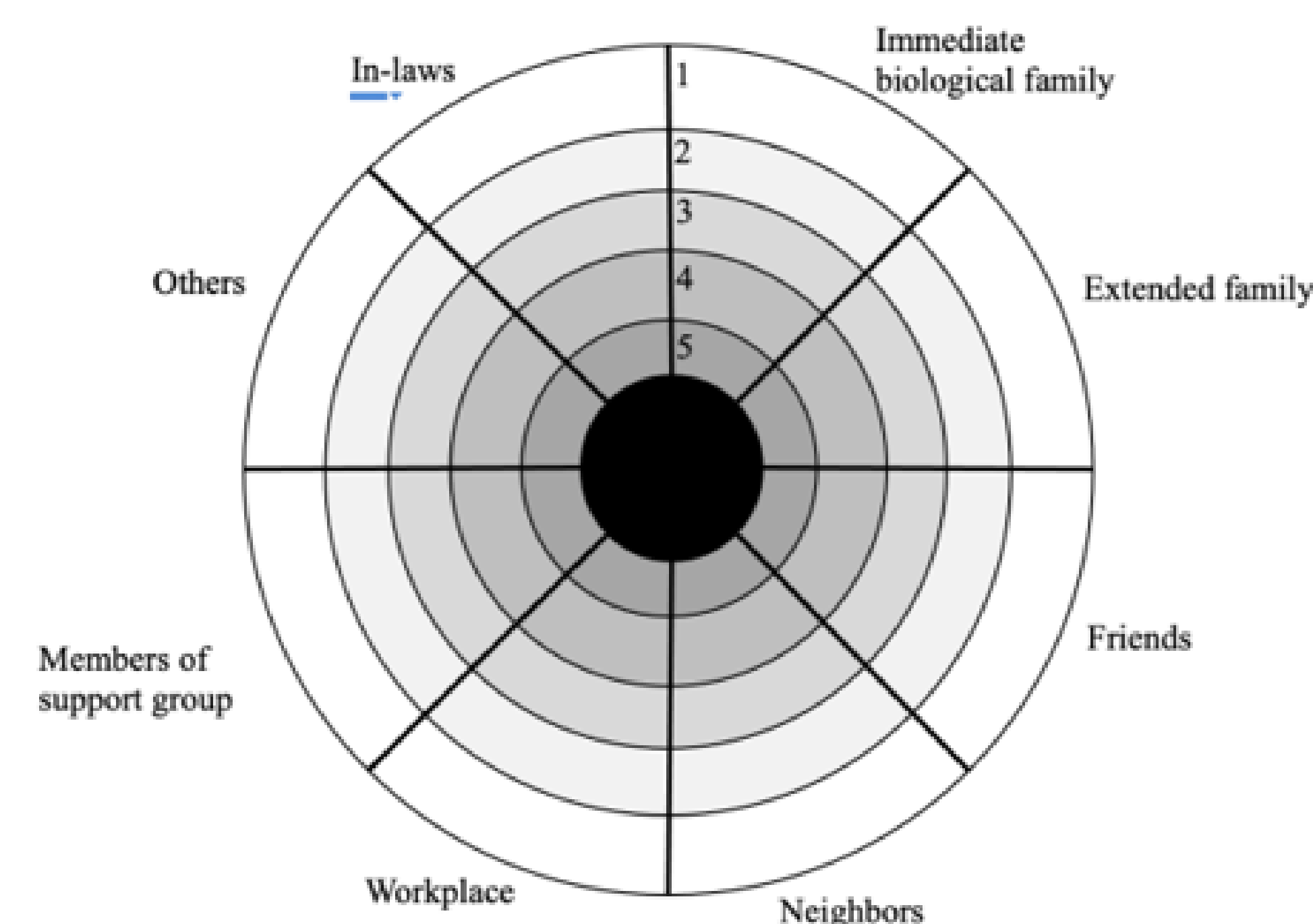
Results & Future Works

From our current findings and literature review, **we have been able to gather that**:

1. A women's average social network consisted of 3-4 INTs
2. Among our respondents, the majority of INTs were women
3. Few women reported their current partners as one of their INTs
4. Personal experiences of women are largely more significant than social stigma in determining their mental health and attitudes regarding abuse.

Going forward:

- Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS, qualitative data, using NVivo software, and network data from surveys using RStudio.
- The nuances of these women's experiences will be examined for **emerging themes** and how aspects like cultural significance and personal circumstances affect women who have experienced IPV.
- We will compare the social networks emerging from qualitative and quantitative interactions.
- Quantitative data may inform the development of **a primary prevention** against intimate partner violence

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